

Matilda of Flanders

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See also: Matilda of Flanders, Duchess of Brabant

Matilda of Flanders (French: *Mathilde de Flandre*; Dutch: *Mathilda van Vlaanderen*) (c. 1031 – 2 November 1083) was the wife of William the Conqueror and, as such, Queen consort of the Kingdom of England. She bore William nine children, including two kings, William II and Henry I.

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Marriage

Matilda, or Maud, was the daughter of Baldwin V, Count of Flanders and Adèle of France, herself daughter of Robert II of France.^[1] According to legend, when Duke William II of Normandy (later known as William the Conqueror) sent his representative to ask for Matilda's hand in marriage, she told the representative that she was far too high-born to consider marrying a bastard.^[a] After hearing this response, William rode from Normandy to Bruges, found Matilda on her way to church, dragged her off her horse by her long braids, threw her down in the street in front of her flabbergasted attendants and rode off. Another version of the story states that William rode to Matilda's father's house in Lille, threw her to the ground in her room (again, by her braids), and hit her (or violently battered her) before leaving. Naturally, Baldwin took offense at this but, before they could draw swords, Matilda settled the matter^[2] by refusing to marry anyone but William;^[3] even a papal ban by Pope Leo IX at the Council of Reims on the grounds of consanguinity did not dissuade her. William and Matilda were married after a delay in c. 1051-2.^[4] A papal dispensation was finally awarded in 1059 by Pope Nicholas II.^[5] Lanfranc, at the time prior of Bec Abbey, negotiated the arrangement in Rome and came only after William and Matilda agreed to found two churches as penance,^[6]

There were rumors that Matilda had been in love with the English ambassador to Flanders, a Saxon named Brihtric, who declined her advances. Whatever the truth of the matter, years later when she was acting as Regent for William in England, she used her authority to confiscate Brihtric's lands and throw him into prison, where he died.^[7]

Duchess of Normandy

When William was preparing to invade England, Matilda outfitted a ship, the *Mora*, out of her own money and gave it to him.^[8] This indicated that she must have owned rich lands in Normandy to be able to do so. Additionally, William entrusted Normandy to his wife during his absence. Matilda successfully guided the duchy through this period in the name of her fourteen-year-old son; no major uprisings or unrest occurred.^[9]

Matilda of Flanders



A Victorian romantic artist's impression of Matilda from "Queens of England" – 1894

Queen consort of England

Tenure	25 December 1066 – 2 November 1083
Coronation	11 May 1068
Spouse	William I of England
Issue	Robert II, Duke of Normandy Richard of Normandy Adeliza of Normandy Cecilia of Normandy William II of England Constance, Duchess of Brittany Adela, Countess of Blois Henry I of England
House	House of Flanders
Father	Baldwin V, Count of Flanders
Mother	Adela of France
Born	c. 1031
Died	2 November 1083 (aged c. 51)
Burial	I'Abbaye aux Dames Caen, Normandy

Even after William conquered England and became its king, it took her more than a year to visit her new kingdom.^[10] Even after she had been crowned queen, she would spend most of her time in Normandy, governing the duchy, supporting her brother's interests in Flanders, and sponsoring ecclesiastic houses there. She only had one of her children in England; Henry was born in Yorkshire when Matilda accompanied her husband in the Harrying of the North.^[11]

Queen

Matilda was crowned queen on May 11, 1068 in Westminster during the feast of Pentecost, in a ceremony presided over by the archbishop of York. Three new phrases were incorporated to cement the importance of English consorts, stating that the Queen was divinely placed by God, shares in royal power, and blesses her people by her power and virtue.^{[12][13]}

For many years it was thought that she had some involvement in the creation of the Bayeux Tapestry (commonly called *La Tapisserie de la Reine Mathilde* in French), but historians no longer believe that; it seems to have been commissioned by William's half-brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, and made by English artists in Kent.^[14]

Matilda bore William nine or ten children. William was believed to have been faithful to her and never produced a child outside of their marriage. Despite her royal duties, Matilda was deeply invested in her children's well-being. All were known for being remarkably educated. Her daughters were educated and taught to read Latin at Sainte-Trinité in Caen founded by Matilda and William in response to the recognition of their marriage.^[15] For her sons, she secured Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury of whom she was an ardent supporter. Both she and William approved of the Archbishop's desire to revitalize the Church.^[16]

She stood as godmother for Matilda of Scotland, who would become Queen of England after marrying Matilda's son Henry I. During the christening, the baby pulled Queen Matilda's headdress down on top of herself, which was seen as an omen that the younger Matilda would be queen some day as well.^[17]

Matilda fell ill during the summer of 1083 and passed away in November 1083. Her husband was present for her final confession.^[18] Without her presence, a distraught William became increasingly tyrannical until his death four years later in 1087.

Contrary to the belief that she was buried at St. Stephen's, also called l'Abbaye-aux-Hommes in Caen, Normandy, where William was eventually buried, she is entombed at l'Abbaye aux Dames, which is the Sainte-Trinité church, also in Caen. Of particular interest is the 11th century slab, a sleek black stone decorated with her epitaph, marking her grave at the rear of the church. It is of special note since the grave marker for William was replaced as recently as the beginning of the 19th century.

Height

Reputed to be 4'2" (127 cm) tall, Matilda was England's smallest queen, according to the *Guinness Book of Records*. However, in 1819 and 1959, Matilda's incomplete skeleton was examined in France, and her bones were measured to determine her height. The 1819 estimate was under five feet, while the 1959 estimate was 5' (152 cm) tall. A reputed height of 4' 2" (127 cm) appeared at some point after 1959 in the non-scientific literature, misrepresenting the 1959 measurement.^[19]

Family and children

Matilda and William had four sons and at least five daughters.^[20] The birth order of the boys is clear, but no source gives the relative order of birth of the daughters.^[20]

1. Robert Born between 1051–1054, died 10 February 1134.^[21] Duke of Normandy, married Sybil of Conversano,



Matilda of Flanders, queen consort of England and wife of William the Conqueror, by Carle Elshoecht (1850)

- daughter of Geoffrey of Conversano.^[22]
2. Richard Born c.1054, died around 1075.^[21]
 3. William Rufus Born between 1056 and 1060, died 2 August 1100.^[21] King of England, killed in the New Forest.
 4. Henry Born late 1068, died 1 December 1135.^[21] King of England, married Edith of Scotland, daughter of Malcolm III of Scotland. His second wife was Adeliza of Louvain.^[23]
 5. Agatha, betrothed to Harold II of England, Alfonso VI of Castile, and possibly Herbert I, Count of Maine, but died unmarried.^{[b][24]}
 6. Adeliza (or Adelida,^[25] Adelaide^[23]) Died before 1113, reportedly betrothed to Harold II of England, probably a nun of St Léger at Préaux.^[25]
 7. Cecilia (or Cecily) Born c.1056, died 1127. Abbess of Holy Trinity, Caen.^[24]
 8. Matilda^[25] Born around 1061, died perhaps about 1086.^[23]
 9. Constance died 1090, married Alan IV Fergent, Duke of Brittany.^[24]
 10. Adela died 1137, married Stephen, Count of Blois.^[24]

There is no evidence of any illegitimate children born to William.^[26]

Ancestry

Notes

- a. ^ Matilda's principal attribute was her descent from Charlemagne and her many royal ancestors, her closest being Robert II of France. She was the niece of King Henry I of France, William's suzerain, and at his death in 1060, first cousin to his successor King Philip I of France. A member of the aristocracy she was closely related to most of the royal families of Europe. A marriage to a member of the (Carolingian) royal family was a means of upward mobility for a soldier or nobleman like William. Her descent from Alfred the Great also proved a legitimizing factor as queen of England. See: Hilton, *Queen Consort* (Pegasus, 2010), p. 17; Régine Le Jan, 'Continuity and Change in the Tenth-Century Nobility', *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002), pp. 56, n. 14, 57; A. Wareham, *Lords and Communities in Early Medieval East Anglia* (Boydell Press, 2005), p. 3.
- b. ^ It is not certain Adeliza and Agatha were not the same daughter, but if they were different daughters William of Jumièges seems to bear the responsibility for confusing the two. None of the daughter's ages are known according to Orderic Vitalis. See Douglas, *William the Conqueror* (1964), 395; Ordericus Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy*, trans. Thomas Forester, Vol II (Henry G. Bohn, London, 1854), pp. 181–82 & 182 n. 1.

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15. ^ Lisa Hilton, *Queen Consort* (NY: Pegasus Books, LLC, 2010), p. 29, ISBN 978-1-60598-105-5
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French nobility		
Preceded by Adela of France	Duchess of the Normans 1053 – 2 November 1083	Vacant Title next held by Sybilla of Conversano
Royal titles		
Vacant Title last held by Edith of Mercia	Queen consort of the English 25 December 1066 – 2 November 1083	Vacant Title next held by Matilda of Scotland

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