

Robert, 1st Earl of Gloucester

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Robert Fitzroy, 1st Earl of Gloucester (before 1100 – 31 October 1147^[1]) (*alias* **Robert Rufus**, **Robert de Caen**, **Robert Consul**^{[2][3]}) was an illegitimate son of King Henry I of England. He was the half-brother of the Empress Matilda, and her chief military supporter during the civil war known as The Anarchy, in which she vied with Stephen of Blois for the throne of England.

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Early life

Robert was probably the eldest of Henry's many illegitimate children.^[1] He was born before his father's accession to the English throne, either during the reign of his grandfather William the Conqueror or his uncle William Rufus.^[4] He is sometimes and erroneously designated as a son of Nest, daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr, last king of Deheubarth, although his mother has been identified as a member of "the Gay or Gayt family of north Oxfordshire",^[5] possibly a daughter of Rainald Gay (fl. 1086) of Hampton Gay and Northbrook Gay in Oxfordshire. Rainald had known issue Robert Gaay of Hampton (died c. 1138) and Stephen Gay of Northbrook (died after 1154). A number of Oxfordshire women feature as the mothers of Robert's siblings.^{[5][6]}

He may have been a native of Caen^{[1][7]} or he may have been only Constable and Governor of that city, *jure uxoris*.^[2]

His father had contracted him in marriage to Mabel FitzHamon, daughter and heir of Robert Fitzhamon, but the marriage was not solemnized until June 1119 at Lisieux.^{[1][8]} His wife brought him the substantial honours of Gloucester in England and Glamorgan in Wales, and the honours of Sainte-Scholasse-sur-Sarthe and Évrecy in Normandy, as well as Creully. After

Robert of Caen

Earl of Gloucester



Effigy of Robert Consul, St James' Priory, Bristol.
1840 drawing

Spouse(s) Mabel FitzHamon

Issue

- Legitimate:*
 - William Fitz Robert, 2nd Earl of Gloucester
 - Roger of Worcester
 - Hamon of Gloucester
 - Mabel FitzRobert m. Aubrey de Vere
 - Maud of Gloucester, Countess of Chester
 - Philip of Gloucester
 - Richard FitzRobert Sire de Creully
- Illegitimate:*
 - Richard FitzRobert, Bishop of Bayeux d. 3 April 1142

the White Ship disaster late in 1120, and probably because of this marriage,^[9] in 1121 or 1122 his father created him Earl of Gloucester.^[10]

Family

Robert and his wife Mabel FitzHamon had seven children:^[11]

- William FitzRobert (111?–1183): succeeded his father as 2nd Earl of Gloucester
- Roger FitzRobert (died 1179): Bishop of Worcester
- Hamon FitzRobert (died 1159): killed at the siege of Toulouse.
- Philip FitzRobert (died after 1147): lord of Cricklade
- Matilda FitzRobert (died 1190): married in 1141 Ranulf de Gernon, 4th Earl of Chester.
- Mabel FitzRobert: married Aubrey de Vere
- Richard FitzRobert (1120/35-1175): succeeded his mother as Sire de Creully.

He also had four illegitimate children:

- Richard FitzRobert (died 1142): Bishop of Bayeux [mother: Isabel de Douvres, sister of Richard de Douvres, bishop of Bayeux (1107–1133)]
- Robert FitzRobert (died 1170): Castellan of Gloucester, married in 1147 Hawise de Reviere (daughter of Baldwin de Reviere, 1st Earl of Devon and his first wife Adalisa), had daughter Mabel FitzRobert (married firstly Jordan de Chambernon (<http://www.red1st.com/axholme/getperson.php?personID=11750052564&tree=Axholme>) and secondly William de Soliers)
- Mabel FitzRobert: married Gruffud, Lord of Senghenydd, son of Ifor Bach. This couple were ancestors of Franklin Pierce, 14th President of the U.S.A.^[12]
- Father of Thomas

Relationship with King Stephen

There is evidence in the contemporary source, the *Gesta Stephani*, that Robert was proposed by some as a candidate for the throne, but his illegitimacy ruled him out:

"Among others came Robert, Earl of Gloucester, son of King Henry, but a bastard, a man of proved talent and admirable wisdom. When he was advised, as the story went, to claim the throne on his father's death, deterred by sounder advice he by no means assented, saying it was fairer to yield it to his sister's son (the future Henry II of England), than presumptuously to arrogate it to himself."

This suggestion cannot have led to any idea that he and Stephen were rivals for the Crown, as Geoffrey of Monmouth in 1136 referred to Robert as one of the 'pillars' of the new King's rule.

Mabel FitzRobert m. Gruffudd ap Ifor Bach
Robert FitzRobert d. 1170 m. Hawise de Reviere.

Father	King Henry I
Born	before 1100
Died	31 October 1147



Robartus Consull et Mabilia uxor eius ("Robert Consul and Mabel his wife"). They are shown holding churches or abbeys which they founded or were benefactors of, including Tewkesbury Abbey. The attributed arms shown quartered on his tabard and below are: Left: *Gules, three clarions or* (de Clare, Earl of Gloucester); Centre: *Gules, three clarions or* (de Clare, Earl of Gloucester) impaling *Azure, a lion rampant guardant or* (FitzHamon); Right: *Azure, a lion rampant or*. *Tewkesbury Abbey Founders Book* (c.1500-1525), Bodleian Library, Oxford

The capture of King Stephen at the Battle of Lincoln on 2 February 1141 gave the Empress Matilda the upper hand in her battle for the throne, but by alienating the citizens of London she failed to be crowned Queen. Her forces were defeated at the Rout of Winchester on 14 September 1141, and Robert of Gloucester was captured nearby at Stockbridge.

The two prisoners, King Stephen and Robert of Gloucester, were then exchanged, but by freeing Stephen, the Empress Matilda had given up her best chance of becoming queen. She later returned to France, where she died in 1167, though her son succeeded Stephen as King Henry II in 1154.

Robert of Gloucester died in 1147 at Bristol Castle, where he had previously imprisoned King Stephen, and was buried at St James' Priory, Bristol, which he had founded.

In popular culture

Robert of Gloucester is a figure in many of the novels by Ellis Peters in the Cadfael Chronicles (written between 1977 and 1994) where he is seen as a strong moderating force to his half-sister (see *Saint Peter's Fair*). His efforts to gain the crown for his sister by capturing King Stephen and her own actions in London are part of the plot in *The Pilgrim of Hate*. His capture by Stephen's wife Queen Mathilda is in the background of the plot of *An Excellent Mystery*. The exchange of the imprisoned Robert for the imprisoned Stephen is in the background of the plot of *The Raven in the Foregate*. Robert's travels to persuade his brother-in-law to aid Empress Maud militarily in England is in the background of the novel *The Rose Rent*. His return to England when Empress Maud is trapped in Oxford Castle figures in *The Hermit of Eyton Forest*. Robert's return to England with his young nephew Henry, years later the king succeeding Stephen, is in the background of the plot of *The Confession of Brother Haluin*, as the battles begin anew with Robert's military guidance. Robert's success in the Battle of Wilton (1143) leads to the death of a fictional character, part of the plot of *The Potter's Field*. In the last novel, he is a father who can disagree with then forgive his son Philip (see the last novel, *Brother Cadfael's Penance*). In that last novel, Brother Cadfael speculates on the possibly different path for England if the first son of old King Henry, the illegitimate Robert of Gloucester, had been recognised and accepted. In Wales of that era, a son was not illegitimate if recognized by his father, and to many in the novels, Robert of Gloucester seemed the best of the contenders to succeed his father.

Robert is also a central character in Sharon Penman's 1995 novel *When Christ and His Saints Slept*. He was also central in the struggle during *The Anarchy* as portrayed in Ken Follet's 1989 novel *The Pillars of the Earth* and in the 2010 mini-series of the same name.

Footnotes

- David Crouch, 'Robert, first earl of Gloucester (b. before 1100, d. 1147)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 accessed 1 Oct 2010 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23716>)
- "Complete Peerage" Vol IV(1892), p38, "Gloucester", "Robert filius Regis" quoting Round "Consul is often used for Earl in the time of the first age of the Norman Kings" (<https://books.google.com/books?id=KbIKAAAAYAAJ&dq=editions%3ALCCN06022397&pg=PA38#v=onepage&q=gloucester&f=false>)
- The *Complete Peerage* claims only that he is "described" as consul, as are most Earls of his time.
- William of Malmesbury (<https://books.google.com/books?id=W2ANAAAIAAJ&pg=PA482#v=onepage&q=gloucester&f=false>)
- David Crouch, *Historical Research*, 1999
- C. Given-Wilson & A. Curteis. *The Royal Bastards of Medieval England* (London, 1984) (ISBN 0-415-02826-4), page 74
- Cawley, Charles, "*Henry I*", *Medlands*, Medieval Lands database, Foundation for Medieval Genealogy,
- "Complete Peerage", "Gloucester" (<https://books.google.com/books?id=KbIKAAAAYAAJ&dq=editions%3ALCCN06022397&pg=PA38#v=onepage&q=gloucester&f=false>)

9. "In the aftermath of the White Ship disaster of 1120, when his younger and legitimate half-brother, William, died, Robert shared in the largesse that the king distributed to reassert his political position. Robert was given the marriage of Mabel, the heir of Robert fitz Haimon, whose lands in the west country and Glamorgan had been in royal wardship since 1107. The marriage also brought Robert the Norman honours of Evrecy and St Scholasse-sur-Sarthe. Robert was raised to the rank of earl of Gloucester soon after, probably by the end of 1121." David Crouch, 'Robert, first earl of Gloucester (b. before 1100, d. 1147)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 accessed 1 Oct 2010 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23716>)
10. CP citing Round (<https://books.google.com/books?id=KbIKAAAAYAAJ&dq=editions%3ALCCN06022397&pg=PA38#v=onepage&q=gloucester&f=false>) for between May 1121 and the end of 1122, but see William of Malmesbury, ed Giles who cites 1119 (<http://knol.google.com/k/will-johnson/william-of-malmesbury-chronicle-of-the/4hmqk6fx4gu/554#view>)
11. Cawley, Charles. Cawley, Charles, *Medieval Lands: England, Earls Created 1067–1122*, *Chapter 11*, Medieval Lands database, Foundation for Medieval Genealogy,
12. Descent of Franklin Pierce from Henry I Beauclerc (<http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~pmcbride/rfc/lo dus14h1.htm>)

Sources

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- D. Crouch, "Robert of Gloucester's Mother and Sexual Politics in Norman Oxfordshire", *Historical Research*, 72 (1999) 323–332.
- D. Crouch, 'Robert, earl of Gloucester and the daughter of Zelophehad,' *Journal of Medieval History*, 11 (1985), 227–43.
- D. Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135–1154* (London, 2000).
- C. Given-Wilson & A. Curteis. *The Royal Bastards of Medieval England* (London, 1984)
- *The Personnel of the Norman Cathedrals during the Ducal Period, 911–1204*, ed. David S. Spear (London, 2006)
- *Earldom of Gloucester Charters*, ed. R.B. Patterson (Oxford, 1973)
- R.B. Patterson, 'William of Malmesbury's Robert of Gloucester: a re-evaluation of the *Historia Novella*,' *American Historical Review*, 70 (1965), 983–97.
- K. Thompson, 'Affairs of State: the illegitimate children of Henry I,' *Journal of Medieval History*, 29 (2003), 129–151.
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Preceded by New Creation	Earl of Gloucester 1121/2–1147	Succeeded by William Fitz Robert
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