William the Conqueror had three living sons at his death and two of them would rule England (see the family tree on page 155). Only Robert, the eldest son, would never be King of England.

**William II. 1087–1100**

William II, or ‘Rufus’ (the Red), was the second son of William the Conqueror. He ruled England for thirteen years. He was a strong king who crushed rebellions, including one led by his brother Robert, the Duke of Normandy, and fought against the Welsh and the Scots. His greatest wish was to rule Normandy as well as England and this he managed in the end by lending Robert money to go on the First Crusade. This Crusade was an attempt by Christian Europe to take Jerusalem and other parts of the Middle East recently captured by Islamic invaders (see Chapter 5).

William Rufus had a foul temper and did not seem to be very concerned about the Church, which was a real problem in a time of strong religious beliefs. When the most important man in the Church in England (the Archbishop of Canterbury) died, Rufus did not replace him for years, instead using the Church’s wealth himself. Only in 1093 did he finally appoint a replacement. The new archbishop, Anselm, did not get along well with William and the two argued over who was really in charge of the Church in England, the king or the Pope. Anselm left England in 1097 because of these arguments, and Rufus took the opportunity to seize more Church lands and money.

In 1100 William Rufus was killed. He had been hunting in the New Forest with several other men when he was hit by an arrow and died. Blame fell on a man called Walter Tyrrell who fled the scene, no doubt afraid of being charged with the King’s murder. It may have been a tragic accident; we will
never know for sure. However, William’s younger brother Henry, who had also been hunting at the time, moved very quickly to take the crown for himself. With his older brother Robert still involved in the First Crusade and unable to prevent him, Henry became Henry I, King of England.

**Henry I, 1100–35**

The youngest son of William the Conqueror was quite different from his brothers. He was not the great fighter they were, being happier to command from the back than the front. Henry could also be very cruel and ruthless, once having two of his granddaughters blinded because their father had done the same to hostages he was holding. Yet he also became known as ‘the Lion of Justice’ because of the work he did to spread royal justice throughout England, and he helped encourage learning.

Henry faced many problems during his 35-year rule.

- His brother Robert, Duke of Normandy, returned from the First Crusade and claimed he was the rightful King of England.
- His barons in France were not always very loyal.
- The King of France tried to take his lands in Normandy from him.
- He needed to heal the split with the Church caused by his brother.
- In 1120 his son was drowned when his ship (the White Ship) sank in the Channel, leaving only Henry’s daughter Matilda to take the throne after him.

So, how did Henry solve his problems? He dealt with his brother Robert by defeating him in battle and keeping him locked up as a prisoner for the rest of his life. His barons certainly caused him problems, but he crushed all rebellions against him. And, while his enemies in France cost Henry much time and money, he managed to hold on to Normandy.

Henry realised that he needed the support of the Church and brought Archbishop Anselm back from exile in 1100. (Being ‘in exile’ means being forced to leave your country.) He did much to encourage the growth of monasteries, places established for monks, in England and even made one...
The trouble with Matilda

Girls born to noble families in the Middle Ages were expected to be educated and prepared for marriage. They usually had a husband chosen for them by their parents for the economic or political advantage of the family while they were still babies, and they could be legally married from the age of twelve. These girls were usually educated at a nunnery, where they were taught not only to read and appreciate literature and music, but also the manners, speech and fashions that would be expected of them once they were married. They might also be sent into the care of an educated woman who would teach them to imitate her style and behaviour.

In spite of this, the belief held by men and many women was that a woman was unfit to hold any formal political power. This belief was to cause major problems concerning who should

What made a good king?

There were a number of ideas at the time about what made a good king:

- He should be a brave warrior, capable of leading his soldiers to victory in battle.
- He should support and protect the Church, as it was God who made him the king.
- He should be just and fair and listen to the views of the important men of his kingdom.
- He should make sure that he left an adult son to rule after him.

The trouble with Matilda

Churchman, Roger, Bishop of Salisbury, his most important official. However, Henry did quarrel with Archbishop Anselm about who should appoint new bishops and abbots (the heads of monasteries). The Church, led by the Pope in Rome, claimed that it should be the Church, while Henry I believed that it should be kings who appointed these important men. He argued that they were not just Church leaders, but also great landholders in the Feudal System and, like Roger of Salisbury, could also be important government officials. In the end, a compromise was reached, that the king would choose a person for the position and the Church would then officially ‘elect’ this person. Outwardly the Church appeared to choose the bishop or abbot, but the king had the major say in the choice. This is how the Church and king were to work together for most of the Middle Ages.

Henry enjoyed much success during his rule. However, the problem of who would become the next ruler was to cause a great deal of trouble.
The sons of William I rule England and Normandy after Henry I. Henry had more than twenty children born outside his marriage, but only one surviving legitimate child, his daughter Matilda. Henry tried to go against the beliefs of his time by having Matilda inherit the crown from him. He tried hard to make his reluctant barons agree to this. He also arranged for Matilda, who had been married (at the age of thirteen) to the Holy Roman Emperor and then widowed, to marry sixteen-year-old Geoffrey Plantagenet, who would one day rule Anjou in France. Geoffrey did not prove very loyal either to Matilda or her father, and in fact Henry I died in 1135 while fighting against him in France.

Exercise 3.1

Write out the following paragraphs and fill in the blank spaces, using the information from the chapter:

William I left three sons when he died, ______________, ______________ and ______________. Only ______________ was never to rule England. William II was very successful at crushing ______________ and managed to rule ______________ when his brother Robert went on ______________. However, William II quarrelled with Archbishop ______________ and was killed while hunting in the ______________. ______________

Henry I sorted out the problem of Normandy by capturing and locking ______________ up. He made peace with Anselm, but they later ______________ over who should choose ______________ and abbots. However, he encouraged the building of ______________. Henry's biggest problem was who would follow him when his ______________ drowned. His daughter, ______________, was next in line.

Exercise 3.2

Write a few sentences about each of the following:

1. William II
2. Archbishop Anselm
3. Robert, Duke of Normandy
4. The White Ship
5. Roger, Bishop of Salisbury
6. Matilda
7. Geoffrey Plantagenet
Exercise 3.3

1 Write as a title 'William II' and then make two lists underneath, one headed 'Successful', the other 'Unsuccessful'. Using the ideas from page 33 on what made a good king, write down in your lists your assessment of William II during his rule.

2 Do the same thing as question 1 with Henry I.

3 Was William II or Henry I the more successful king? Use the lists from questions 1 and 2 either to hold a class debate, or to write a four-paragraph essay using the writing frame below:

Who was the more successful king, William II or Henry I?

I think that ____________ was the better king.

Both kings were successful in some ways. William II was a good ... He also ... Henry I was successful in ... He was also good in ...

However, both kings had their failures. William II was not very good at ... and Henry I was poor at ...

Although both kings had successes and failures, I believe that the more successful was _____________. This is because ...

How important was the Church?

As we have seen, the Church was much more than simply a stone building by the side of a village green. It was made up of thousands of people, both men and women, throughout Europe. Some of the men in the Church were the equals of barons and even kings. The Roman Catholic Church was the only church for the people of Europe and its ideas about the world were what people at that time believed.

One of the most important aspects of medieval Christian belief was the firm conviction that if one did anything to displease God, or indeed the Church, one ran the serious risk of going to Hell. Fear of Hell was a major factor in encouraging people to fall in line with the Church’s teachings and to obey the will of God. And because most people could not read, one easy way to remind them of the danger of going to Hell was to paint frightening pictures on the walls of churches. Turn the page and you will see a typical medieval depiction, full of burning fires and horned devils.

Look carefully at the picture on page 36. Imagine that you are standing in the middle of this scene. What might you hear, smell and feel?
A medieval vision of Hell; from the *Bedford Missal*, produced in 1423