

# William of Malmesbury

William of Malmesbury, a supporter of Robert, Duke of Gloucester, wrote this account of the battle of Lincoln in 1142.

King Stephen had gone away in peace from Lincolnshire before Christmas [1140], and had added to the honours of the earl of Chester and his brother. That earl had married the earl of Gloucester's daughter long since in King Henry's time. Meanwhile the citizens [Ce burgesses] of Lincoln, wishing to lay the king under a great obligation, informed him by messengers when he was staying at London that the two brothers had settled unsuspectingly in the city's castle. As they expected nothing less than the king's arrival, they could easily be surrounded. They themselves would see to it that the king got possession of the castle with the greatest secrecy. He, unwilling to miss any chance of increasing his power, hastened thither joyfully. And so the brothers were surrounded and besieged during the Christmas festival itself. This seemed unfair to many because, as I have said, he had left them before the festival without any suspicion of ill-will, and had not, in the traditional way, renounced his friendship with them, which is termed defiance. But the earl of Chester, though involved in critical danger, yet made good his escape from the close siege of the castle. By what device I do not determine, whether by the collusion of some of the besiegers, or because valour, when caught in a snare, will cast around for and commonly find a remedy. Then, not satisfied solely with his freedom, but being anxious also about the freedom of his brother and wife, whom he had left in the castle, he turned his mind in every direction. It seemed the wisest policy to beg aid from his father-in-law, though he had long since offended him for various reasons, chiefly because he seemed ambivalent in his loyalty. So he sent to him promising by the messengers a lasting fidelity to the empress if, from motives of pity rather than any deserts of his own, he would rescue from wrong those who were in danger and on the very brink of captivity.

The earl of Gloucester was not hard to persuade, for he could not bear the shame of the situation. At the same time, loathing delay because his noble country, for the sake of two persons, was being tormented by the plunder and slaughter of civil war, he preferred, if God should allow it, to hazard a final decision. He also hoped for the divine approval in his enterprise, because the king had wronged his son-in-law who was in no way at fault, was besieging his daughter, and had turned into a castle the church of the Blessed Mother of God at Lincoln. How greatly these things must have influenced the prince's mind! Would it not be better to die and fall with glory, rather than bear so signal an affront? So, for the sake of avenging God and his sister, and to free his relatives, he took the risk. The adherents of his party, most of them disinherited men inflamed to war by grief for what they had lost and conscious valour, followed him eagerly, though he cunningly concealed his purpose all the way from Gloucester to Lincoln, keeping the whole army in uncertainty, except for a very few, by taking an indirect route.

The time of decision came on the very day of the Purification of the most blessed Mary [2 Feb. 1141], beside the river that flowed between the two armies, named Trent, which was then so much swollen by a heavy fall of rain as well as water from its source that there was no possibility of fording it. Only then did the earl disclose his intention to his son-in-law, who had met him with a strong body of troops, and the rest of his followers, adding that he had long since made up his mind that nothing should ever compel him to retreat; he would die or be captured if he did not win the victory. All filled him with good hope, and so - wonderful to hear - he resolved to risk a battle at once, and swam across the racing current of the river mentioned above with all his men. So eager was the earl to make an end of the troubles, that he would sooner face the final danger than have the kingdom's misfortune prolonged. For the king on his side had broken off the siege and offered battle with spirit, accompanied by very many earls and an active body of knights. The royalists first attempted that prelude to the fight which is called jousting, for in this they were accomplished. But when they saw that the 'earlists', if the expression may be allowed, were fighting not with lances at a distance but with swords at close quarters and, charging with their banners in the van, were breaking through the king's line, then all the earls to a man sought safety in flight. [Ce adds There were six earls who had entered the battle on the king's side.] A few [Ce Many] barons, of notable loyalty and courage, thinking they should not abandon the king even at this desperate moment, were taken prisoners. The king himself, though he did not lack spirit in self-defence, was at length attacked on all sides by the earl of Gloucester's knights and fell to the ground on being struck by a stone. It is not known who dealt the blow. So, as all around him were captured or put to flight, he brought himself to yield for a time and be held a prisoner. Therefore the worthy earl of Gloucester gave orders that the king should be kept alive and, unharmed, not suffering even that he should be the victim of any insulting language. Behold, he mildly protected in humiliation him whom he had just been furiously assailing when exalted in majesty, so that, controlling emotions of anger and joy, he both showed kindness to a relative and had regard, even in the person of a captive, to the splendour of the crown. But the mass of the citizens [Ce burgesses] of Lincoln was in great part cut down, through the just anger of the victors and without causing any grief to the vanquished, since it was they who by their instigation had given rise to this calamity.

William of Malmesbury, Chronicle of the Kings of the English (c1128)

William Rufus had a red face, yellow hair, different coloured eyes... astonishing strength, though not very tall and his belly rather projecting... he had a stutter, especially when angry.

The day before the king died he dreamt that he went to heaven. He suddenly awoke. He commanded a light to be brought, and forbade his attendants to leave him.

The next day he went into the forest... He was attended by a few persons... Walter Tirel remained with him, while the others, were on the chase.

The sun was now declining, when the king, drawing his bow and letting fly an arrow, slightly wounded a stag which passed before him... The stag was still running... The king, followed it a long time with his eyes, holding up his hand to keep off the power of the sun's rays. At this instant Walter decided to kill another stag. Oh, gracious God! the arrow pierced the king's breast.

On receiving the wound the king uttered not a word; but breaking off the shaft of the arrow where it projected from his body... This accelerated his death. Walter immediately ran up, but as he found him senseless, he leapt upon his horse, and escaped with the utmost speed. Indeed there were none to pursue him: some helped his flight; others felt sorry for him.

The king's body was placed on a cart and conveyed to the cathedral at Winchester... blood dripped from the body all the way. Here he was buried within the tower. The next year, the tower fell down.

William Rufus died in 1100... aged forty years. He was a man much pitied by the clergy... he had a soul which they could not save... He was loved by his soldiers but hated by the people because he caused them to be plundered.

William of Malmesbury, *The Deeds of the Kings of the English* (c. 1140)

To be a member of the Cistercian order... is now believed to be the surest way to heaven... Certainly many of their regulations seem severe... they wear nothing made with furs or linen... They have two tunics with hoods, but no additional garments... they do not take more than one meal a day, except on Sunday. They never leave the cloister but for the purpose of labour, nor do they ever speak, either there or elsewhere, save only to the abbot or prior... While they look after the stranger and the sick, they inflict intolerable tortures on their own bodies, for the health of their souls.