archs were not yet chosen in strict order of heredity, there were several candidates for the succession. Among these was Harold, son of Earl Godwin and brother of Edward's wife Edith. By 1066 Edward was reconciled with the Godwin family, and on his deathbed he nominated Harold, the chief magnate of the kingdom, as his heir.

William felt cheated and prepared at once for an invasion of England. He insisted that Edward had promised him the throne and that, on a visit to Normandy in 1064, Harold had sworn an oath to support his accession; he claimed that Harold was thus both usurper and perjurer and so won papal approval for his expedition. In the careful preparations for invasion William showed himself at his best. It was an enterprise far beyond the resources of his duchy and so he recruited soldiers from all over northern France and Flanders. The prospect of laying hands on the wealth of England, its land and its silver, attracted thousands to his banner. Throughout the spring and summer of 1066 ships were built and military supplies assembled. But however meticulous his preparations, William cannot have expected anything like the rapid and overwhelming success he in fact achieved. It must have seemed likely that he was facing many years of hard campaigning against an enemy whose wealth and military resources were greater than his own. But an extraordinary series of lucky chances brought things to a swift and dramatic conclusion.

By August 1066 William's expeditionary force was ready. If he had sailed when he wanted to he would have found Harold and an English fleet waiting to receive him. If he had managed to defeat the English he would then have had to face another contender for the throne, Harold Hardrada, the King of Norway and a famous Viking warrior. But, as it happened, throughout August and most of September the wind was against William. Merely to

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*Edward the Confessor on his deathbed in 1066, from the Bayeux Tapestry. This famous tapestry, 50 feet long and 3 feet wide, tells the full story of the Norman Conquest in over seventy scenes. It also offers the Norman case for the legitimacy of William's conquest of England.*