



CHRISTOPH WERNER

# Richard of Cornwall

An Englishman on the German Throne  
Historical Tale

 tredition



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AN ENGLISHMAN ON THE GERMAN THRONE

Historical Tale

Editor Michael Leonard

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About the Author

Also by Christoph Werner

Books by Christoph Werner

# 1. YOUTH

These days, after the unfortunate event called Brexit, it seems a charming memory that once upon a time an Englishman was the king of the Germans, of the Holy Roman Empire. He wasn't, however, quite an Englishman in the true sense of the word, rather an Anglo-Norman whose ancestors had come to England almost 200 years earlier. And Normandy, in northern France, is where the Normans or Norsemen or Vikings, after numerous raids at the beginning of the 10th century, had finally settled and become part of the kingdom of France in 911.

William, Duke of Normandy, later called the Conqueror, set out from Normandy, crossed the Channel and fought against Anglo-Saxon King Harold at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Harold lost, was killed in that battle, which allowed William to make himself comfortable on the English throne. Not to do him an injustice, it must be added that he did not find a peaceful end. It is said, anecdotally, that when he laid siege to the castle of Mantes in France, setting it on fire, sparks flew in the air, causing William's horse to step on a hot cinder and stumble. The Conqueror fell forward on to the point of his saddle and did himself a nasty injury, probably burst his bladder. He died in agony. But worse was to come. He was a strong man and rather fat, and because his body began to swell as it rotted, he was too big to fit in the stone tomb that had been prepared for him. As the body was

forced in, it burst. The smell was so bad that the priests rushed through the funeral service and then bolted. Served him right, some of the Anglo-Saxons may have thought.

The military and political catastrophe of 1066 seemed to the people on the island to have been visited upon them by God because a comet, which had already announced the birth of Christ – today called Halley's comet – had appeared some months before. All this is depicted on the Bayeux tapestry, a medieval embroidery, remarkable as a work of art and important as a source for 11th century history. It is a band of linen 70 meters long and 49.5 cm wide representing 70 scenes from the Conquest.

The Anglo-Saxons mentioned above had nothing to do with today's Saxons around Dresden, who are quite *gemütlich* and little interested in conquest. Rather the Anglo-Saxons were descendants of three Germanic tribes, the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes, who lived in northern Germany and had come to England in the 5th century. This happened, so tradition has it, at the invitation of the Celtic-British warlord Vortigern, who wished for help defending his country against the Picts from Scotland and the Irish. But instead of returning to their homeland after having helped, as guests should do, they stayed in England, made war against the romanized Celts, whom they subjugated. Worse still, they founded seven kingdoms, among them Essex, Sussex and Wessex, that is East Saxony, South Saxony and West Saxony, to which were added East Anglia, Middle Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria, founded by the Angles, and lovely Kent, where the Jutes settled. All had brought their native tongues with them to England, where a

language now known as Old English developed, which is quite similar to the German of that age.

Interestingly enough, although Romans, Vikings and Normans had all conquered England, and in very ancient times the Celts had settled there, the Anglo-Saxons left the clearest traces in the gene pool of the English white population. Today 30 percent of their DNA is shared with the Germans, though it does not seem to show.

Let us make a jump to the main character of our tale, Richard. He was born in Winchester on 5 January 1209, as the second son of King John. When he was six years old, he was taken to Corfe Castle, that was in 1215. Richard was not of German descent, but an offspring of William the Conqueror.

Corfe Castle is located in the village of the same name on the Isle of Purbeck, actually a peninsula, in the county of Dorset in the very south of England. Richard's father, King John, whose father rather uncharitably had given him the nickname Lackland, i.e., without land, because he was not to inherit any larger estates, decided that his second son would be best housed at this awe-inspiring and safe castle.

Corfe Castle and many other castles in England after the Norman conquest were used as symbols of the new rule and at the same time as military bases, because the Anglo-Saxon population was not entirely happy with their new masters.

A French niece of King John, Eleanor, had been held captive in the castle together with twenty-two of her French knights. She escaped with her life while the knights were left to starve to death in the dungeon. Out of