

**HISTORIC THOUGHTS FOR THE AUTUMN** – In 1120 peace was finally achieved with agreement of Louis VI of France when Henry's only legitimate son, William was created Duke of Normandy at the age of seventeen. Celebrations followed but without Henry who had left for home early in the evening from Barfleur, accompanied by the higher echelons of his court and on his own ship. William on the other hand took up the offer of Thomas FitzStephen, the proud owner of the White Ship, to sail the young Saxon and Norman lords' home later that evening claiming that with the White Ship's speed, they could catch up with Henry's ship.

Wine flowed with the celebrations. It is claimed that both the young lords and the crew became intoxicated. **On the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> November 1120** it was decided to set sail. Orderic Vitalis described the scene that ensued.

*At length he gave the signal to put to sea. Then the rowers made haste to take up their oars and, in high spirits because they knew nothing of what lay ahead, put the rest of the equipment ready and made the ship lean forward and race through the sea. As the drunken oarsmen were rowing with all their might, and the luckless helmsman paid scant attention to steering the ship through the sea, the port side of the White Ship struck violently against a huge rock, which was uncovered each day as the tide ebbed and covered once more at high tide. Two planks were shattered and, terrible to relate, the ship capsized without warning. Everyone cried out at once in their great peril, but the water pouring into the boat soon drowned their cries and all alike perished.*

A butcher from Rouen survived, Stephen of Blois had left the ship shortly before it was launched; it is estimated that 300 lords and crew drowned, Henry lost his son, England and Normandy lost their next ruler.

William's body was never recovered. It is recorded that Henry was devastated and never recovered from the tragedy. In 1121 he made a dedication to Reading Abbey 'for the salvation of my soul and that of king William my father and king William my brother and William my son and queen Matilda my mother and queen Matilda my wife and all my predecessors and successors'.

#### **POSTSCRIPT AND FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

Was the sinking of the White ship a mass murder? Victoria Chandler who taught at Georgia College is convinced it was and puts forward the question, who would have benefited. She eliminates Stephen but suggests Ranulf Meschin, nephew of Richard, Earl of Chester, and with other members of the family were present on the White Ship: Ranulf Meschin would claim total family inheritance with their deaths. He was on Henry's ship when they left Barfleur!

How different our history had William Atheling survived? Any thoughts dear member?

(Chandler Victoria. "The Wreck of the White Ship, A Mass Murder Revealed?", *The Final Argument. The imprint of violence on society in medieval and early modern Europe*, ed. Kagay, Donald J., and Villalon, I., J. Andrew (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998)  
Vitalis, Orderic, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. Chibnall, M. (Oxford, 1969-80)