

Tracing My Ancestry Back to the Earliest Days of England

By Burks Oakley II
19 July 2026

On 15 July 2026, my cousin Mark Eidem sent me a link to an article from the Smithsonian Magazine about “how England became England”:

Archaeologists Uncover the Real Story of How England Became England

New research is revealing how the Sceptered Isle transformed from a Roman backwater to a mighty country of its own

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/archaeologists-uncover-real-story-england-became-england-180984911/>

A summary of this article from Microsoft Copilot reads:

England’s transformation after Rome wasn’t the result of a single violent “Anglo-Saxon conquest,” but a centuries-long cultural and demographic blending – that’s the core takeaway from the Smithsonian article. Recent archaeological and genetic research shows that migration, intermarriage, and shared daily life reshaped Britain far more than war or elite domination.

I read through the article and I was quite pleased to see the following paragraph:

Emma of Normandy was just a teen in 1002 when she crossed the English Channel, married King Æthelred the Unready and became queen of the English. After Æthelred died in 1016 during a failed campaign to repel an invasion by Cnut the Great of Denmark, Emma married Cnut, the island’s new ruler. Eventually becoming queen of England, Denmark and Norway, Emma helped forge a dynasty that stretched across the North Sea. Harthacnut, her son with Cnut, and Edward the Confessor, her first son with Æthelred, served on the throne successively until 1066, the same year Emma’s great-nephew William the Conqueror also crossed the Channel from Normandy—taking the island and changing the world.

And the reason that I was pleased was that.....

Scroll down....

Go on to the next page....

Emma of Normandy was my 27th-great aunt!

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Emma Ælfgifu of Normandy

Emma Ælfgifu of Normandy is Burks Oakley, II's 27th great aunt!

My ancestral line back to Emma goes through my *Oakley-Darling-Lyon* ancestors:

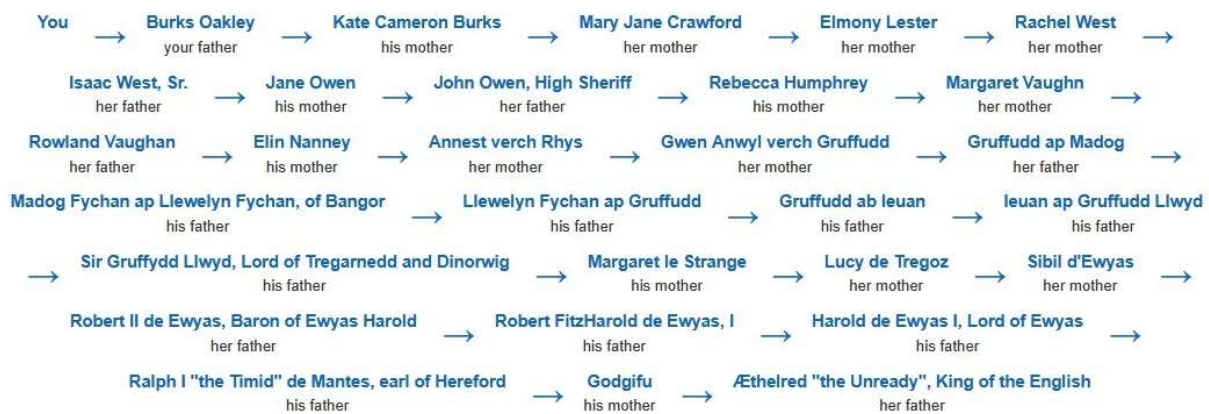


The section about Emma of Normandy also mentioned King Æthelred the Unready:

Emma of Normandy was just a teen in 1002 when she crossed the English Channel, married King Æthelred the Unready and became queen of the English. After Æthelred died in 1016 during a failed campaign to repel an invasion by Cnut the Great of Denmark, Emma married Cnut, the island’s new ruler. Eventually becoming queen of England, Denmark and Norway, Emma helped forge a dynasty that stretched across the North Sea. Harthacnut, her son with Cnut, and Edward the Confessor, her first son with Æthelred, served on the throne successively until 1066, the same year Emma’s great-nephew William the Conqueror also crossed the Channel from Normandy—taking the island and changing the world.

Of course, King Æthelred the Unready was my 27th-great grandfather:

Æthelred "the Unready", King of the English is your 27th great grandfather.



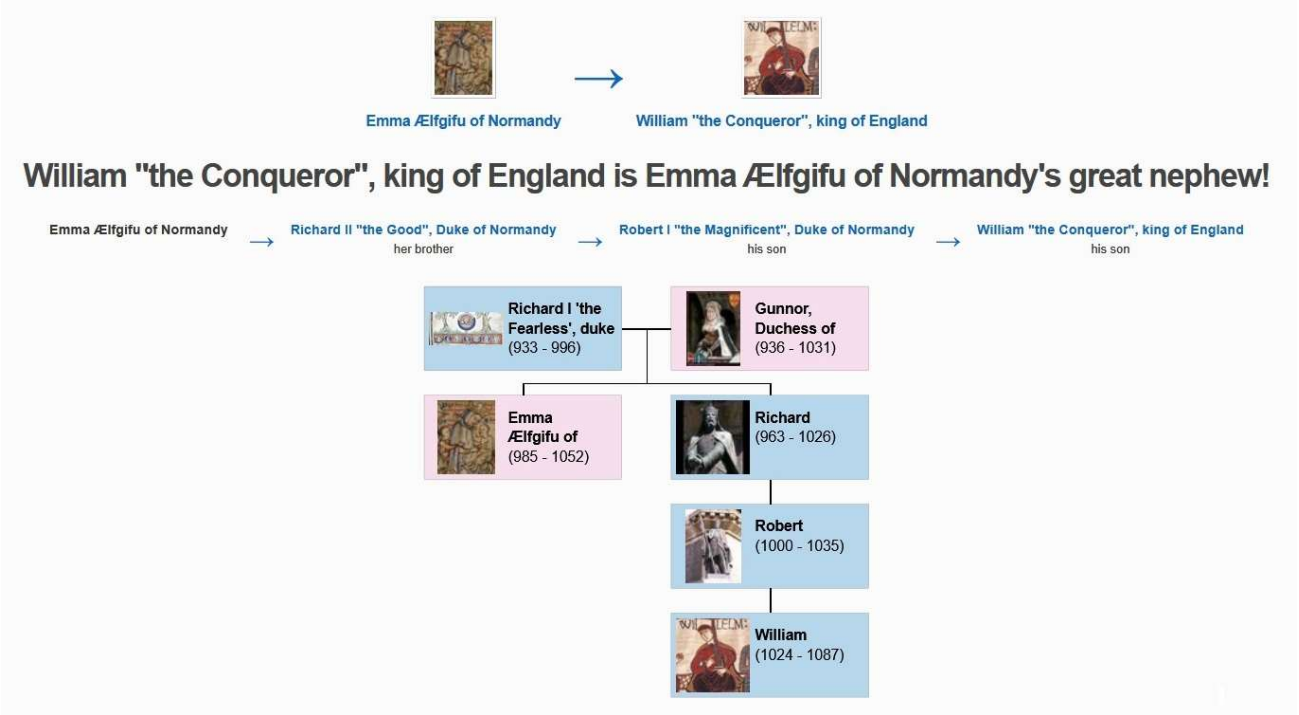
This ancestral line goes back through my **Burks-Crawford-Lester-West** line. Recall that the **West** family were Quakers from Wales, and a good part of my line back to King Æthelred the Unready (shown above) goes through my Welsh ancestors. For more about my Welsh ancestors, see:

<http://www.burksoakley.com/QuincyOakleyGenealogy/60-MyWelshQuakerAncestors.pdf>

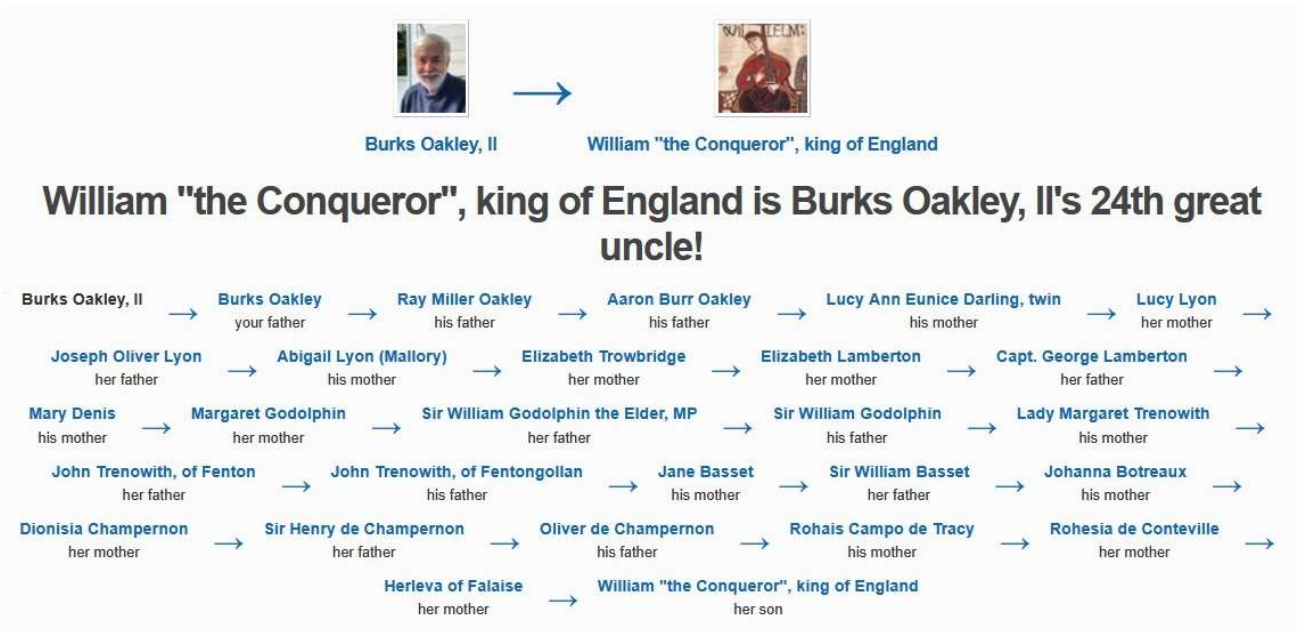
The section about Emma of Normandy also mentioned her great-nephew, William the Conqueror:

Emma of Normandy was just a teen in 1002 when she crossed the English Channel, married King Æthelred the Unready and became queen of the English. After Æthelred died in 1016 during a failed campaign to repel an invasion by Cnut the Great of Denmark, Emma married Cnut, the island's new ruler. Eventually becoming queen of England, Denmark and Norway, Emma helped forge a dynasty that stretched across the North Sea. Harthacnut, her son with Cnut, and Edward the Confessor, her first son with Æthelred, served on the throne successively until 1066, the same year Emma's great-nephew **William the Conqueror** also crossed the Channel from Normandy—taking the island and changing the world.

Here is a chart showing how Emma was related to William the Conqueror:



And, of course, William the Conqueror was my 24th-great uncle:



This ancestral line also goes back through my ***Oakley-Darling-Lyon*** ancestors. Note that this is my shortest ancestral line back to William the Conqueror – my guess is that I could find a direct line if I looked at enough of my ancestral lines. Recall that I have twelve ancestral lines back to King Edward I of England – see:

<http://www.burksoakley.com/QuincyOakleyGenealogy/50-MyLines-to-KingEdward.pdf>

At this point, I just had to see if I had a direct line back to William the Conqueror. And as luck would have it, the FIRST ancestor I examined was a direct descendant of William the Conqueror.

Lucy Ann Eunice Darling (1804-1884) was my second-great grandmother:



And Lucy was the 20th-great granddaughter of William the Conqueror:



If I have done the math correctly, William the Conqueror was my 24th-great grandfather on the line going back through Lucy Ann Eunice Darling. I have absolutely no idea why software on Geni.com didn't show this line instead of the one on the previous page.

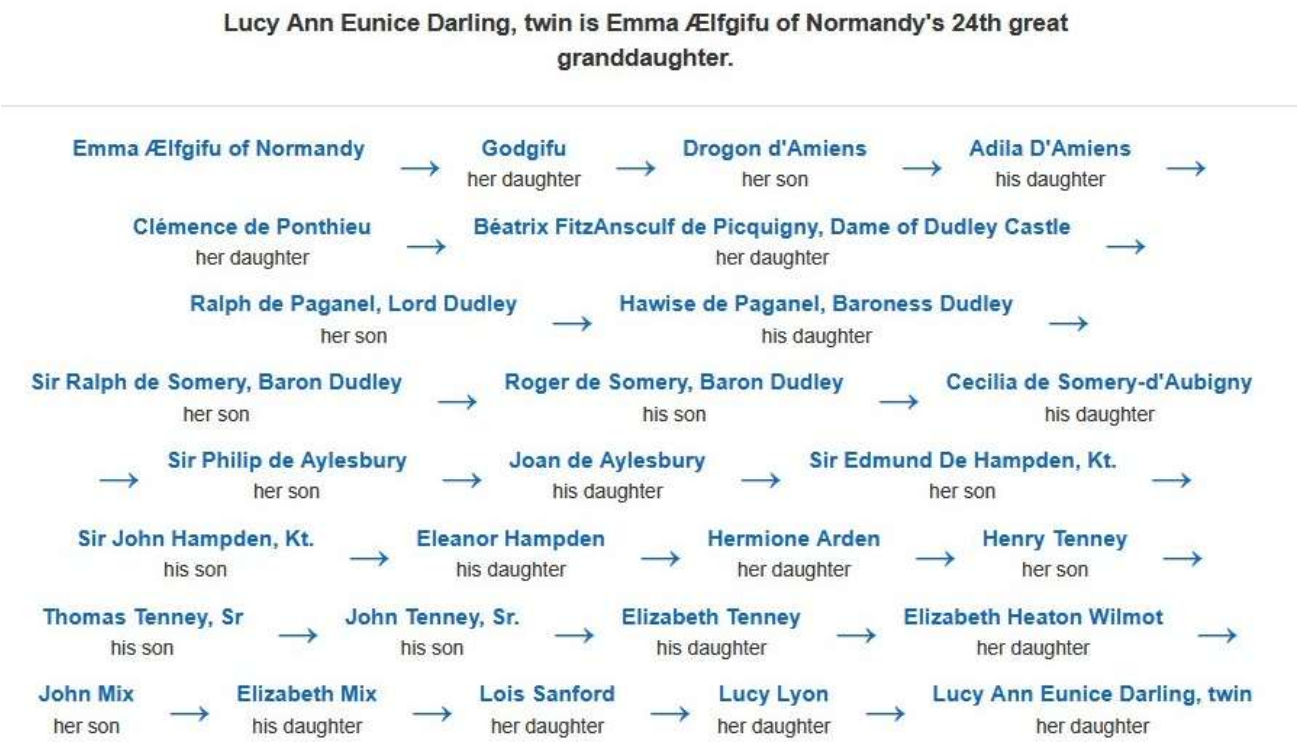
Of course, I had to go back and see if Lucy was descended from Emma of Normandy. And what do you think I found?

Scroll down....

Keep scrolling....

Go on to the next page:

Lucy Ann Eunice Darling was Emma of Normandy’s 24th-great granddaughter:



So Lucy goes back to William the Conqueror and to Emma of Normandy. Would it be too much to ask to have Lucy be a direct descendant of King Æthelred the Unready?

Of course, I was not at all surprised when I found that she was indeed a direct descendant of Æthelred the Unready:



Let me summarize where I am with all of this. Mark Eidem sent me an article from Smithsonian Magazine about the early history of England, which emphasized the findings from modern methods of analyzing human DNA from the Middle Ages.

This article mentioned key people in the early history of England – Emma of Normandy, King Æthelred the Unready, and William the Conqueror. Using the

Geni.com website, I found that I have ancestral lines to all three of these people going back through my second-great grandmother, Lucy Ann Eunice Darling. Truly amazing!

Let me just address a few more points. I asked Google how Æthelred the Unready got his name:

Google

how did aethelred the unready get his name

X

🎤

🔍

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◆ AI Overview

King Æthelred II was called "the Unready" because his Old English epithet, *Unræd*, is a pun. In Old English, *Æthelred* means "noble counsel" or "well-advised", while *Unræd* means "no counsel," "ill-advised," or "bad plan". It was a mocking nickname meaning "well-advised, poorly-advised". [Wikipedia +6](#)

His disastrous rule during relentless Viking invasions led to this infamous reputation:

- **Terrible Advice:** He consistently surrounded himself with bad advisors and made disastrous decisions, such as ordering the St. Bryce's Day massacre of all Danish settlers in 1002. [YouTube · ASMR Historian +2](#)
- **Failed Bribes:** Instead of successfully fighting off invaders, he repeatedly paid the Vikings massive tributes (known as Danegeld), which only temporarily bought off raiders while emptying his kingdom's treasury. [YouTube · ASMR Historian +1](#)
- **Exile:** His poor leadership eventually allowed the Danish King Sweyn Forkbeard to invade and take the English throne in 1013, forcing Æthelred to flee into exile in Normandy. [Wikipedia +1](#)

I also asked Google how to pronounce Æthelred:

Google

how do you pronounce Æthelred

X

🎤

📷

🔍

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◆ AI Overview

Æthelred is pronounced as **ETH-ul-red** (rhymes with "treble-bed"). [🔗](#)

- **ETH** (like the word *eth* or the start of *ether*)
- **ul** (a quick, unstressed "uh" sound)
- **red** (like the color *red*)

In phonetic spelling, it is written as /'ɛθ.əl.rɛd/. It stems from Old English, where the "Æ" character makes a short "eh" sound, and the "þ" represents a "th" sound. [Wikipedia +2](#)

And with that, I'll bring this short narrative to a close.

[But make sure to look at the Addendum on the next page.]

Addendum:

I guess that I should have realized that Æthelred was the King of England, and as such, he was the seventh-great grandfather of King Edward I “Longshanks”:



And I have at least twelve separate ancestral lines back to King Edward I – see:

<http://www.burksoakley.com/QuincyOakleyGenealogy/50-MyLines-to-KingEdward.pdf>

Of course, this means that I have at least twelve separate ancestral lines back to Æthelred.