

Ordgar, Ealdorman of Devon

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Ordgar (died 971) was Ealdorman of Devon in England. He was a great West Country landowner and apparently a close advisor^[1] of his son-in-law Edgar the Peaceful, king of England. His daughter Ælfthryth was King Edgar's third wife and was mother of King Æthelred the Unready (c.968-1016). Ordgar was created an Ealdorman by King Edgar in 964. He founded Tavistock Abbey in 961.^[2]

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Biography

Historical sources

Little is known about Ordgar other than what survives in three historical sources:

- His name appears as a witness on charters of King Edgar between 962 and 970.^[1]
- Digressions in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta pontificum Anglorum*^[3]
- More substantial references in Geoffrey Gaimar's *L'Estoire des Engles* regarding the love affairs and marriages of his daughter Ælfthryth.^[4]

Gaimar's account

According to Gaimar, Ordgar was the son of an ealdorman, and owned land in every parish from Exeter in Devon to Frome in Somerset. He married an unknown lady of royal birth, by whom he had a daughter Ælfthryth. The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography draws a conclusion that Ordgar was "clearly a figure of some importance" to have secured such a match.^[1] King Edgar determined on marrying Ælfthryth and to this end he sent Æthelwald, Ealdorman of East Anglia as his agent to woo her. On arrival Æthelwald found her in company with her father Ordgar, whom she completely controlled by her personality, playing at chess, which they had learned from the Danes.^[5] Æthelwald instead took Ælfthryth for his own wife and married her in about 956.^[5]

Æthelwald died in 962, and Dunstan suspected that he was murdered by his wife Ælfthryth who thereafter, according to Dunstan, seduced King Edgar and murdered his son Prince Edward the Martyr in order to pave the way for the crowning of her son Æthelred as king. It is however certain that, under whatever actual circumstances, Ælfthryth became King Edgar's third wife in 964 and in the same year her father Ordgar was created Ealdorman. The *ODNB* supposes that Ordgar from the time of his daughter's royal marriage until 970 was one of Edgar's closest advisors, by virtue of his being named as witness on almost all charters issued by King Edgar during the period.^[1]

Tavistock Abbey

Tavistock Abbey was founded in 961 by Ordgar and completed by his son Ordwulf^[6] in 981, when the charter of confirmation was granted by King Ethelred the Unready. It was endowed with lands in Devon, Dorset and Cornwall, and became one of the richest abbeys in the west of England.

Death and burial

Ordgar died in 971. According to William of Malmesbury, he was buried with his son at Tavistock, but according to Florence of Worcester, he was buried at Exeter.^[5]

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External links

- Ordgar 5 at Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England

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