Edward the Elder

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Edward the Elder (Old English: *Eadweard cyning*; c. 874 – 17 July 924) was King of the Anglo-Saxons from 899 until his death. He became king in 899 upon the death of his father, Alfred the Great. He captured the eastern Midlands and East Anglia from the Danes in 917 and became ruler of Mercia in 918 upon the death of Æthelflæd, his sister.

All but two of his charters give his title as "*Anglorum Saxonum rex*" ("king of the Anglo-Saxons"), a title first used by his father, Alfred.[1] According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* the Kings of Scotland and Strathclyde and the rulers of Northumbria "chose [Edward] as father and lord" in 920, a claim dismissed by most modern historians.[2] Edward's cognomen "the Elder" was first used in Wulfstan's *Life of St Æthelwold* (c. 996) to distinguish him from the later King Edward the Martyr.

Edward the Elder

Portrait miniature from a 13th century genealogical scroll depicting Edward

King of the Anglo-Saxons	
Reign	26 October 899 – 17 July 924
Coronation	8 June 900 Kingston upon Thames or Winchester
Predecessor	Alfred the Great
Successor	Æthelstan
Born	c. 874
Died	17 July 924 Farndon, Cheshire, England
Burial	New Minster, Winchester, later translated to Hyde Abbey
Spouse	Ecgwynn Ælfflæd Eadgifu
Issue	***See list***
Detail	Æthelstan, King of England Daughter, wife of Sitric Cáech Eadgifu Ælfweard, King of Wessex? Eadgyth Eadhild Ælfgifu of Wessex Eadflæd of Wessex Eadhild of Wessex Edwin of Wessex Edmund, King of England Eadred, King of England Saint Eadburh of Winchester
House	Wessex
Father	Alfred, King of Wessex
Mother	Ealhswith
Religion	Catholicism (pre-reformation)

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Background

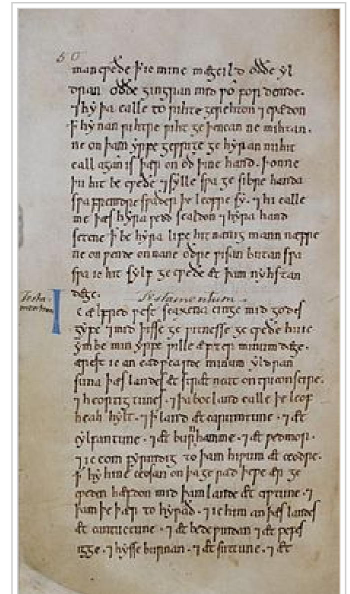
Mercia was the dominant kingdom in southern England in the eighth century and maintained its position until it suffered a decisive defeat by Wessex at the Battle of Ellandun in 825. Thereafter the two kingdoms became allies, which was to be an important factor in English resistance to the Vikings.[3] In 865 the Danish Viking Great Heathen Army landed in East Anglia and used this as a starting point for an invasion. The East Anglians were forced to buy peace and the following year the Vikings invaded Northumbria, where they appointed a puppet king in 867. They then moved on Mercia, where they spent the winter of 867–868. King Burgred of Mercia was joined by King Æthelred of Wessex and his brother, the future King Alfred, for a combined attack on the Vikings, who refused an engagement; in the end the Mercians bought peace with them. The following year, the Danes conquered East Anglia, and in 874 they expelled King Burgred and Ceolwulf became the last King of Mercia with their support. In 877 the Vikings partitioned Mercia, taking the eastern regions for themselves and allowing Ceolwulf to keep the western ones. The situation was transformed the following year when Alfred won a decisive victory over the Danes at the Battle of Edington. He was thus able to prevent the Vikings from taking Wessex and western Mercia, although they still occupied Northumbria, East Anglia and eastern Mercia.[4]

Childhood

Alfred the Great married his Mercian queen Ealhswith in 868. Her father was Æthelred Mucel, Ealdorman of the Gaini, and her mother, Eadburh, was a member of the Mercian royal family. Alfred and Ealhswith had five children who survived childhood. Their first child was Æthelflæd, who married Æthelred, Lord of the Mercians and ruled as Lady of the Mercians after his death. Edward was next, and the second daughter, Æthelgifu, became abbess of Shaftesbury. The third daughter, Ælfthryth, married Baldwin, Count of Flanders, and the youngest child, Æthelweard, was given a scholarly education, including learning Latin. This would usually suggest that he was intended for the church, but it is unlikely in Æthelweard's case as he had sons. There were also an unknown number of children who died young. Neither part of Edward's name, which means 'protector of wealth', had been used previously by the West Saxon royal house, and Barbara Yorke suggests that he may have been named after his maternal grandmother Eadburh, reflecting the West Saxon policy of strengthening links with Mercia.[5]

Æthelflæd was probably born about a year after her parents' marriage, and Edward was brought up with his youngest sister, Ælfthryth. Yorke argues that he was therefore probably nearer in age to Ælfthryth than Æthelflæd. However, he led troops in battle in 893, and he must have been of marriagable age in that year as his oldest son Æthelstan was born about 894, so Edward was probably born in the mid-870s.[6] According to Asser in his *Life of King Alfred*, Edward and Ælfthryth were educated at court by male and female tutors, and read ecclesiastical and secular works in English, such as the Psalms

and Old English poems. They were taught the courtly qualities of gentleness and humility, and Asser wrote that they were obedient to their father and friendly to visitors. This is the only known case of an Anglo-Saxon prince and princess receiving the same upbringing.[7]



A page from the will of Alfred the Great, which left the bulk of his estate to Edward

Ætheling

As a son of a king, Edward was an ætheling, a prince of the royal house who was eligible for kingship. However, even though he had the advantage of being the eldest son of the reigning king, his accession was not assured, as he had cousins who had a strong claim to the throne. Æthelhelm and Æthelwold were sons of Æthelred, Alfred's older brother and predecessor as king. More is known about Edward's childhood than about that of other Anglo-Saxon princes, providing information about the training of a prince in a period of Carolingian influence, and Yorke suggest that this may have been due to Alfred's efforts to portray his son as the most throneworthy ætheling.[8]

Æthelhelm is only recorded in Alfred's will of the mid-880s, and probably died at some time in the next decade, but Æthelwold is listed above Edward in the only charter where he appears, probably indicating a higher status. Æthelwold may also have had an advantage because his mother Wulfthryth witnessed a charter as queen, whereas Edward's mother Ealhswith never had a higher status than king's wife. However, Alfred was in a position to give his own son considerable advantages. In his will, only left a handful of estates to his brother's sons, and the bulk of his property to Edward, including all his booklands in Kent. In a Kentish charter of 898 Edward witnessed as *rex Saxonum*, suggesting that Alfred may have followed the strategy adopted by his grandfather Egbert of strengthening his son's claim to succeed to the West Saxon throne by declaring him King of Kent.[9] Alfred also advanced men who could be depended on to support his plans for his succession, such as his brother-in-law, a Mercian ealdorman called Æthelwulf, his son-in-law Æthelred, and a relative called Osferth, who may have been Alfred's illegitimate son. Once Edward grew up Alfred was able to give him military commands and experience of royal business. Edward frequently witnessed Alfred's charters, suggesting that he often accompanied his father on royal peregrinations.[10]

In 893 Edward defeated the Vikings in the Battle of Farnham, although he was unable to follow up his victory as his troops period of service and expired and he had to release them. The situation was saved by the arrival of troops from London led by his brother-in-law, Æthelred. The English defeated renewed Viking attacks in 893 to 896, and in Richard Abels' view, the glory belonged to Æthelred and Edward.[11] Yorke argues that although Alfred packed the witan with members whose interests lay in the continuation of Alfred's line, that may not have been sufficient to ensure Edward's accession, if he had not displayed his fitness for kingship.[12] However, Janet Nelson suggests that there was conflict between Alfred and Edward in the 890s. She points out that the contemporary *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, produced under court auspices in the 890s, does not mention Edward's military successes. These are only known from the late tenth century chronicle of Æthelweard, such as his account of the Battle of Farnham, in which in Nelson's view "Edward's military prowess, and popularity with a following of young warriors, are highlighted". Towards the end of his life Alfred invested his young grandson Æthelstan in a ceremony which historians see as designation as eventual successor to the kingship. Nelson argues that while this may have been proposed by Edward to support the accession of his own son, on the other hand it may have been intended by Alfred as part of a scheme to divide the kingdom between his son and grandson. Æthelstan was sent to be brought up in Mercia Æthelflæd and Æthelred, but it is not known whether this was Alfred's idea or Edward's. Alfred's wife Ealhswith is ignored in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in her husband's lifetime, but emerges from obscurity when her son accedes. This may be because she supported her son against her husband.[13]

In about 893 Edward had married Ecgwynn, who bore him two children, the future King Æthelstan and a daughter who married Sitric, a Viking King of York. An opponent of Æthelstan claimed that his mother was a concubine of low birth, but the earliest life of the nobly born Saint Dunstan suggests that he was a relative of hers, and William of Malmesbury described her as an *illustris femina*. She may have died by 899, as around the time of Alfred's death Edward took Ælfflæd as his second wife. She was the daughter of Ealdorman Æthelhelm, probably of Wiltshire.[14]

Æthelwold's revolt

Alfred died on 26 October 899 and Edward succeeded to the throne, but Æthelwold immediately disputed the succession.[15] He seized the royal estates of Wimborne, symbolically important as the place where his father was buried, and Christchurch. Edward marched with his army to the nearby Iron Age hillfort at Badbury Rings. Æthelwold declared that he would live or die at Wimborne, but then left in the night and rode to Northumbria, where the Danes accepted him as king.[16] Edward was crowned on 8 June 900 at Kingston upon Thames or Winchester.[a]

Coin of Edward the Elder

In 901, Æthelwold came with a fleet to Essex, and the following year he persuaded the East Anglian Danes to invade and harry English Mercia and northern Wessex. Edward retaliated by ravaging East Anglia, but when he retreated the men of Kent disobeyed the order to retire, and were intercepted by the Danish army. The two sides met at the Battle of the Holme (perhaps Holme in Huntingdonshire) on 13 December 902. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the Danes "kept the place of slaughter", meaning that they won the battle, but they suffered heavy losses, including Æthelwold and a King Eohric, possibly of the East Anglian Danes. Kentish losses included Sigehelm, ealdorman of Kent and father of Edward's third wife, Eadgifu. Æthelwold's death ended the threat to Edward's throne.[18]

King of the Anglo-Saxons

In London in 886 Alfred had received the formal submission of "all the English people that were not under subjection to the Danes", and thereafter he adopted the title "King of the Anglo-Saxons". This is seen by Simon Keynes as "the invention of a wholly new and distinctive polity", covering both West Saxons and Mercians, which was inherited by Edward with the support of Mercians at the West Saxon court, of whom the most important was Plegmund, Archbishop of Canterbury. In 903 Edward issued three charters at a meeting attended by the Mercian leaders and their daughter Ælfwynn. The charters all contain a statement that Æthelred and Æthelflæd "then held rulership and power over the race of the Mercians, under the aforesaid king".[19] This view of Edward's status is accepted by Martin Ryan, who states that Æthelred and Æthelflæd had "a considerable but ultimately

subordinate share of royal authority" in English Mercia.[20] Other historians disagree. Pauline Stafford describes Æthelflæd as "the last Mercian queen",[21] while in Charles Insley's view Mercia kept its independence until Æthelflæd's death in 918.[22] Michael Davidson contrasts the 903 charters with one of 901 in which the Mercian rulers were "by grace of God, holding, governing and defending the monarchy of the Mercians". Davidson comments that "the evidence for Mercian subordination is decidedly mixed. Ultimately, the ideology of the 'Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons' may have been less successful in achieving the absorption of Mercia and more something which I would see as a murky political coup."[23] The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was compiled at the West Saxon court from the 890s, and the entries for the late ninth and early tenth centuries are seen by historians as reflecting the West Saxon viewpoint; Davidson observes that "Alfred and Edward possessed skilled 'spin doctors'".[24] However, some versions of the *Chronicle* incorporate part of a lost *Mercian Register*, which gives a Mercian perspective and details of Æthelfæd's campaign against the Vikings.[20]

The standard of Anglo-Saxon learning declined severely in the ninth century, particularly in Wessex, and Mercian scholars such as Plegmund played a prominent part in the revival of learning initiated by Alfred. Mercians were prominent at the courts of Alfred and Edward, and the Mercian dialect and scholarship commanded West Saxon respect.[25] The only large scale embroideries which were certainly made in Anglo-Saxon England date to Edward's reign. They are a stole, a maniple and a possible girdle found in the tomb of St Cuthbert. They were donated by Æthelstan in 934, but inscriptions on the embroideries show that they were commissioned by Edward's second wife, Ælflæd, as a gift to Frithestan, Bishop of Winchester. They probably did not reach their intended destination because Æthelstan was on bad terms with Winchester.[26]

In the late ninth and early tenth centuries connection with the West Saxon royal house was seen as prestigious by continental rulers. In the mid-890s Alfred had married his daughter Ælfthryth to Baldwin II of Flanders, and in 919 Edward married his daughter Eadgifu to Charles the Simple, King of West Francia. In 925, after Edward's death, another daughter Eadgyth married Otto, the future King of Germany and (after Eadgyth's death) Holy Roman Emperor.[27]

Conquest of the southern Danelaw

No battles are recorded between the Anglo-Saxons and the Danish Vikings for several years after the Battle of the Holme, but in 906 Edward agreed peace with the East Anglian and Northumbrian Danes, suggesting that there had been conflict. According to one version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* he made peace "of necessity", suggesting he was forced to buy them off.[15] He encouraged Englishmen to purchase land in Danish territory, and two charters survive relating to estates in Bedfordshire and Derbyshire.[28] In 909, Edward sent an army to harass Northumbria. In the following year, the Northumbrian Vikings retaliated by raiding Mercia, but on their way home they were met by a combined Mercian and West Saxon army at the Battle of Tettenhall, where the Northumbrians suffered a disastrous defeat. From that point, they never ventured south of the River Humber, and Edward and his Mercian allies were able to concentrate on conquering the southern Danelaw in East Anglia and the Five Boroughs of Viking east Mercia: Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham and Stamford.[15] In 911 Æthelred, Lord of the Mercians, died, and Edward took control of the Mercian lands around London and Oxford. Æthelred was succeeded as ruler by his widow Æthelflæd as Lady of the Mercians, and she had probably been acting as ruler for several years as Æthelred seems to have been incapacitated in later life.[29]

Edward and Æthelflæd then began the construction of fortresses to guard against Viking attacks and protect territory captured from them. In November 911 he constructed a fort on the north bank of the River Lea at Hertford to guard against attack by the Danes of Bedford and Cambridge. In 912 he marched with his army to Maldon in Essex, and ordered the building of an earth fortification, and this together with another fort south of the Lea at Hertford protected London from attack, and encouraged many English living under Danish rule in Essex to submit to him instead. In 913 there was a pause in his activities, although Æthelflæd continued her fortress building in Mercia. In 914 a Viking army sailed from Brittany and ravaged the Severn estuary. It was defeated by a Mercian army, and Edward kept an army on the south side of the estuary which twice repelled attempts to invade Wessex. In the autumn the Vikings moved on to Ireland. In November 914 Edward built two forts at Buckingham, and many Danes at Bedford and Northampton submitted to him, while others left England with Earl Thurketil, reducing the number of Viking armies in the midlands. In 916 Edward built a fortress at Maldon as another defence against the Danes of Colchester.[30]

The decisive year in the war was 917. In April Edward built a fort at Towcester as a defence against the Danes of Northampton, and another at an unidentified place called Wigingamere. The Danes launched unsuccessful attacks on Towcester, Bedford and Wigingamere, while Æthelflæd captured Derby, showing the value of the English defensive measures, which was aided by disunity and a lack of coordination among the Viking armies. The Danes had built their own fortress at Tempsford, but at the end of the summer the English stormed it and killed the last Danish king of East Anglia. The English then took Colchester, although they did not try to hold it. The Danes retaliated by sending a large army to lay siege to Maldon, but the garrison held out until it was relieved and the retreating army was heavily defeated. Edward then returned to Towcester and reinforced its fort with a stone wall, and the Danes of nearby Northampton submitted to him. The armies of Cambridge and East Anglia also submitted, and by the end of the year the only Danish armies still holding out were those of four of the Five Boroughs, Leicester, Stamford, Nottingham, and Lincoln.[31]

In early 918, Æthelflæd secured the submission of Leicester without a fight, and the Danes of Northumbrian York offered her their allegiance, probably for protection against Norse (Norwegian) Vikings who had invaded Northumbria from Ireland, but she died on 12 June before she could take up the proposal. The same offer is not known to have been made to Edward, and the Norse Vikings took York in 919. Æthelflæd was succeeded by her daughter Ælfwynn, but the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* states that in December 918 she "was deprived of all authority in Mercia and taken into Wessex". Mercia then came under Edward's direct rule. Stamford had surrendered to Edward before Æthelflæd's death, and Nottingham did the same shortly afterwards. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 918, "all the people who had settled in Mercia, both Danish and English, submitted to him". This would mean that he ruled all England south of the Humber, but it is not clear whether Lincoln was an exception, as coins of Viking York in the early 920s were probably minted at Lincoln.[32] Some Danish jarls were allowed to keep their estates, although Edward probably also rewarded his supporters with land, and some he kept in his own hands. Coin evidence suggests that his authority was stronger in the East Midlands than in East Anglia.[33]

Coinage

The principal currency was the silver penny, some of which had a stylised portrait of the king. Royal coins had "EADVVEARD REX" on the obverse and the name of the moneyer of the reverse. The place of issue is not shown, but in Æthelstan's reign the location was shown, allowing the location of many moneyers of Edward's reign to be established. There were mints in Bath, Canterbury, Chester, Chichester, Derby, Exeter, Hereford, London, Oxford, Shaftesbury, Shrewsbury, Southampton, Stafford, Wallingford, Wareham, Winchester and probably other towns. No coins were struck in the name of Æthelred or Æthelflæd, but from around 910 mints in English Mercia produced coins with an unusual decorative design on the reverse. This

ceased before 920, and probably represents Æthelflæd's way of distinguishing her coinage from that of her brother. There was also a minor issue of coins in the name of Plegmund, Archbishop of Canterbury. There was a dramatic increase in the number of moneyers over Edward's reign, with less than 25 in the south in the first ten years rising to 67 in the last ten years, around 5 in English Mercia rising to 23, plus 27 in the re-conquered Danelaw.[34]

Church

In 908, Plegmund conveyed the alms of the English king and people to the Pope, the first visit to Rome by an Archbishop of Canterbury for almost a century, and the journey may have been to seek papal approval for a proposed re-organisation of the West Saxon sees.[35] When Edward came to the throne Wessex had two dioceses, Winchester, held by Denewulf, and Sherborne, held by Asser.[36] In 908 Denewulf died and was replaced the following year by Frithestan; soon afterwards Winchester was divided into two sees, with the creation of the diocese of Ramsbury covering Wiltshire and Berkshire, while Winchester was left with Hampshire and Surrey. Forged charters date the division to 909, but this may not be correct. Asser died in the same year, and at some date between 909 and 918 Sherborne was divided into three sees, with Crediton covering Devon and Cornwall, and Wells covering Somerset, while Sherborne was left with Dorset.[37] The effect of the changes were to strengthen the status of Canterbury compared with Winchester and Sherborne, but the division may have been related to a change in the function of West Saxon bishops, to become agents of royal government in shires rather than provinces, assisting in defence and taking part in shire courts.[38]

At the beginning of Edward's reign his mother, Ealhswith, founded the abbey of St Mary for nuns, known as the Nunnaminster, in Winchester.[39] Edward's daughter Eadburh became a nun there, and she was venerated as a saint and the subject of a hagiography by Osbert of Clare in the twelfth century.[40] In 901 Edward started building a major monastery for men, probably in accordance of his father's wishes. The monastery was next to Winchester Cathedral, which became known as the Old Minster, while Edward's foundation was called the New Minster. It was much larger than the Old Minster, and was probably intended as a royal mausoleum.[41] It acquired relics of the Breton Saint Judoc, which probably arrived in England from Ponthieu in 901, and the body of one of Alfred's closest advisers, Grimbald, who died in the same year and who was soon venerated as a saint. Edward's mother died in 902, and he buried her and Alfred there, moving his father's body from the Old Minster. Burials in the early 920s included Edward himself, his brother Æthelweard, and his son Ælfweard. However, when Æthelstan became king in 924, he did not show any favour to his father's foundation, probably because Winchester sided against him when the throne was disputed after Edward's death. The only later royal burial at the New Minster was that of King Eadwig in 959.[42]

Edward's decision not to expand the Old Minster, but rather to overshadow it with a much larger building, suggests animosity towards Bishop Denewulf, and this was compounded by forcing the Old Minster to cede both land for the new site, and an estate of 70 hides at Beddington to provide an income for the New Minster. Edward was remembered by the New Minster as a benefactor, and at the Old Minster as *rex avidus* (greedy king).[43] Alan Thacker comments:

> Edward's method of endowing New Minster was of a piece with his ecclesiastical policy in general. Like his father he gave little to the church — indeed, judging by the dearth of charters for much of his reign he seems to have given away little at all...More than any other, Edward's kingship seems to epitomise the new hard-nosed monarchy of Wessex, determined to exploit all its resources, lay and ecclesiastical, for its own benefit.[44]

Patrick Wormald observes: "The thought occurs that neither Alfred nor Edward was greatly beloved at Winchester Cathedral; and one reason for Edward's moving his father's body into the new family shrine next door was that he was surer of sincere prayers there."[45]

Learning

English scholarship almost collapsed during the ninth century, and Alfred was responsible for its revival during his last decade. It is uncertain how far his programmes continued during his son's reign. English translations of works in Latin made during Alfred's reign continued to be copied, but few original works are known. The Anglo-Saxon script known as Anglo-Saxon Square miniscule reached maturity in the 930s, and its earliest phases date to Edward's reign. The main scholarly and scriptorial centres were the cathedral centres of Canterbury, Winchester and Worcester; monasteries did not make a significant contribution until Æthelstan's reign.[46]

Law and administration

The only surviving original charter from Edward's reign is a grant by Æthelred and Æthelflæd in 901, and is not a charter of Edward himself.[47] In the same year a meeting at Southampton was attended by his brother and sons, his household thegns and nearly all bishops, but no ealdormen. It was on this occasion that the king acquired land from the Bishop of Winchester for the foundation of the New Minster, Winchester. No charters survive for the period from 910 to the king's death in 924, much to the puzzlement and distress of historians. Charters were usually issued when the king made grants of land, and it is possible that Edward followed a policy of retaining property which came into his hands in order to help finance his campaigns against the Vikings.[48]

Clause 3 of the law code called *I Edward* provides that people convincingly charged with perjury shall not be allowed to clear themselves by oath, but only by ordeal. This is the start of the continuous history in England of trial by ordeal; it is probably mentioned in the laws of King Ine (688 to 726), but not in later codes such as those of Alfred.[49] The administrative and legal system in Edward's reign may have depended extensively on written records, almost none of which survive.[50] Edward was one of the few Anglo-Saxon kings to issue laws about bookland (landed vested in a charter which could be alienated by the holder, as opposed to folkland, which had to pass to heirs of the body). There was increasing confusion in the period as to what was really bookland, and Edward urged prompt settlement in bookland/folkland disputes, and laid down that jurisdiction belonged to the king and his offices.[51]

Later life

According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, there was a general submission of rulers in Britain to Edward in 920:

> Then [Edward] went from there into the Peak District to Bakewell and ordered a borough to be built in the neighbourhood and manned. And then the king of the Scots and all the people of the Scots, and Rægnald and the sons of Eadwulf and all who live in Northumbria, both English and

Danish, Norsemen and others, and also the king of the Strathclyde Welsh and all the Strathclyde Welsh, chose him as father and lord.[52]

Silver brooch imitating a coin of Edward the Elder, c. 920, found in Rome, Italy. British Museum.

This passage was regarded as a straightforward report by most historians until the late twentieth century,[53] and Frank Stenton observed that "each of the rulers named in this list had something definite to gain from an acknowledgement of Edward's overlordship".[54] Since the 1980s the 'submission' has been viewed with increasing scepticism, particularly as the passage in the *Chronicle* is the only evidence for it, unlike other submissions such as that of 927, for which there is independent support from literary sources and coins.[55] Alfred Smyth points out that Edward was not in a position to impose the same conditions on the Scots and the Northumbrians as he could on conquered Vikings, and argued that the *Chronicle* presented a treaty between kings as a submission to Wessex.[56] Pauline Stafford observes that the rulers had met at Bakewell on the border between Mercia and Northumbria, and that meetings on borders were generally considered to avoid any implication of submission by either side.[57] Davidson points out that the wording "chosen as father and lord" applied to conquered army groups and burhs, not relations with other kings. In his view:

> The idea that this meeting represented a 'submission', while it must remain a possiblity, does however seem unlikely. The textual context of the chronicler's passage makes his interpretation of the meeting suspect, and ultimately, Edward was in no position to force the subordination of, or dictate terms to, his fellow kings in Britain.[58]

Edward continued Æthelflæd's policy of founding burhs in the north-west, with ones at Thelwall and Manchester in 919, and *Cledematha* (Rhuddlan) at the mouth of the River Clwyd in North Wales in 921.[59]

No charters of Edward dated after 909 have survived, and nothing is known of his relations with the Mercians between 919 and the last year of his life, when he put down a Mercian and Welsh revolt at Chester. Mercia and the eastern Danelaw were organised into shires at an unknown date in the tenth century, ignoring traditional boundaries, and historians such as Sean Miller and David Griffiths suggest that Edward's imposition of direct control from 919 is a likely context for a change which ignored Mercian sensibilities. Resentment at the changes, at the imposition of rule by distant Wessex, and at fiscal demands by Edward's reeves, may have provoked the revolt at Chester. He died at the royal estate of Farndon, twelve miles south of Chester, on 24 July 924, shortly after putting down the revolt, and was buried in the New Minster, Winchester.[60]

Reputation

Post-conquest chroniclers had a high opinion of Edward. John of Worcester described him as "the most invincible King Edward the Elder", who was generally seen as "inferior to Alfred in book learning", but "equal to him in dignity and power, and superior to him in glory".[61]

Edward is also highly regarded by historians, and he is described by Keynes as "far more than the bellicose bit between Alfred and Æthelstan".[1] According to Nick Higham: "Edward the Elder is perhaps the most neglected of English kings. He ruled an expanding realm for twenty-five years and arguably did as much as any other individual to construct a single, south-centred, Anglo-Saxon kingdom, yet posthumously his achievements have been all but forgotten." In 1999 a conference on his reign was held at the University of Manchester, and the papers given on this occasion were published as a book in 2001. Prior to this conference, no monographs had been published on Edward's reign, whereas his father has been the subject of numerous biographies and other studies. A principal reason for the neglect is that very few primary sources for his reign survive, whereas there are many for Alfred. Edward has also suffered in historians' estimation by comparison with his highly regarded sister, Æthelflæd.[62]

In the view of F. T. Wainwright: "Without detracting from the achievements of Alfred, it is well to remember that it was Edward who reconquered the Danish Midlands and gave England nearly a century of respite from serious Danish attacks."[63] Higham summarises Edward's legacy as follows:

> Under Edward's leadership, the scale of alternative centres of power diminished markedly: the separate court of Mercia was dissolved; the Danish leaders were in large part brought to heel or expelled; the Welsh princes were constrained from aggression of the borders and even the West Saxon bishoprics divided. Late Anglo-Saxon England is often described as the most centralised polity in western Europe at the time, with its shires, its shire-reeves and its systems of regional courts and royal taxation. If so — and the matter remains debatable — much of that centrality derives from Edward's activities, and he has as good a claim as any other to be considered the architect of medieval England.[64]

Edward's cognomen *the Elder* was first used in Wulfstan's *Life of St Æthelwold* at the end of the tenth century, to distinguish him from King Edward the Martyr.[15]

Marriages and children

Edward had about fourteen children from three marriages.[b]

He first married Ecgwynn around 893.[73] Their children were:

- Æthelstan, King of England 924-939[15]
- A daughter, perhaps called Edith, married Sihtric Cáech, Viking King of York in 926, who died in 927. Possibly Saint Edith of Polesworth[70]

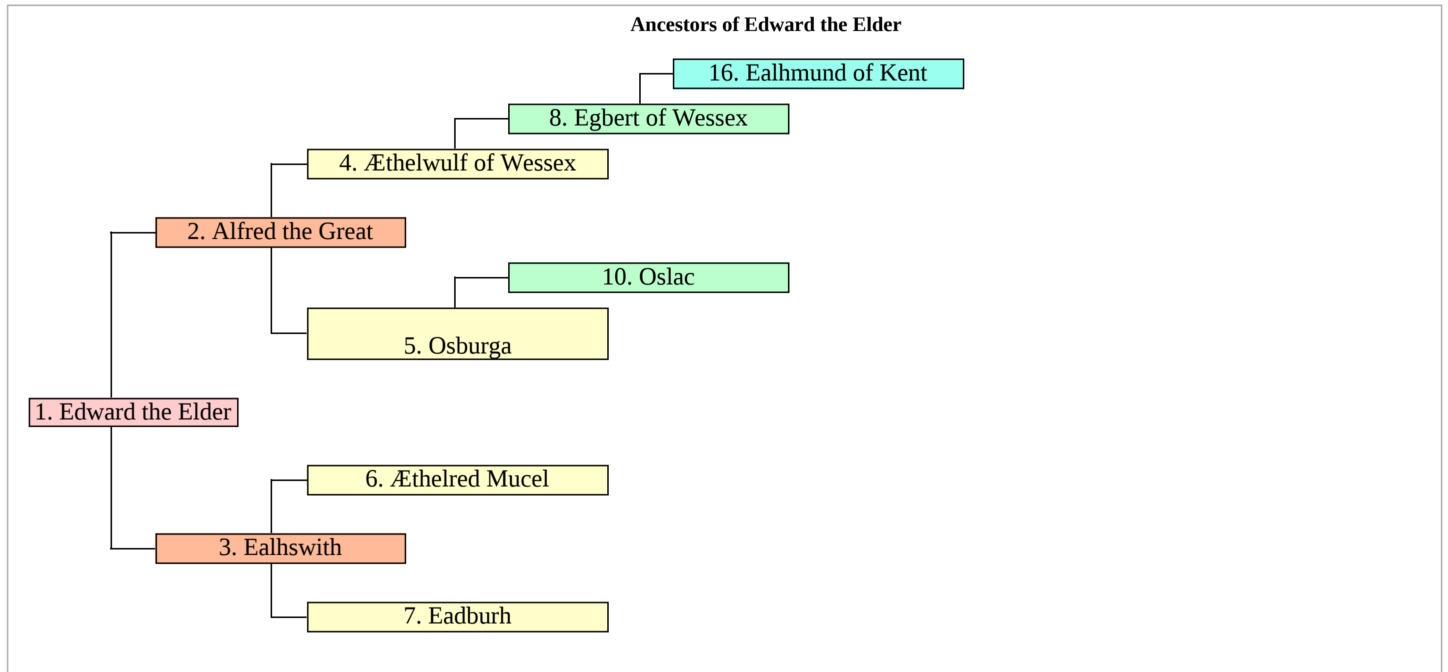
In c. 900, Edward married Ælfflæd, daughter of Ealdorman Æthelhelm, probably of Wiltshire.[74] Their children were:

- Ælfweard, died August 924, a month after his father; possibly King of Wessex for that month[75]
- Edwin, drowned at sea 933[76]
- Æthelhild, lay sister at Wilton Abbey[77]
- Eadgifu (died in or after 951), married Charles the Simple, King of the West Franks, c. 918[78]
- Eadflæd, nun at Wilton Abbey[77]
- Eadhild, married Hugh the Great, Duke of the Franks in 926[79]
- Eadgyth (died 946), in 929/30 married Otto I, future King of the East Franks, and (after Eadgyth's death) Holy Roman Emperor[80]
- Ælfgifu, married "a prince near the Alps", perhaps Louis, brother of King Rudolph II of Burgundy[81]

Edward married for a third time, about 919, Eadgifu, the daughter of Sigehelm, Ealdorman of Kent.[82] Their children were

- Edmund, King of England 939-946[65]
- Eadred, King of England 946-955[65]
- Eadburh (died c. 952), Benedictine nun at Nunnaminster, Winchester, and saint[83]
- Eadgifu, existence uncertain, possibly the same person as Ælfgifu[84]

Genealogy



Notes

a. The twelfth-century chronicler Ralph of Diceto stated that the coronation took place at Kingston, and this is accepted by Simon Keynes, but Sarah Foot thinks that Winchester is more likely.[17]

b. The order in which Edward's children are listed is based on the family tree in Foot's *Æthelstan: the First King of England*, which shows sons of each wife before daughters. The daughters are listed in their birth order according to William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*.[65] The earliest primary sources do not distinguish whether Sihtric's wife was Æthelstan's full or half sister, and a tradition recorded at Bury in the early twelfth century makes her a daughter of Edward's second wife, Ælfflæd.[66] However, she is described as the daughter of Edward and Ecgwynn in William of Malmesbury's twelfth century Deeds of the English Kings, and Michael Wood's argument that this is partly based on a lost early life of Æthelstan has been generally accepted.[66][67] Modern historians follow William of Malmesbury's testimony in showing her as Æthelstan's full sister.[68][65][15] William of Malmesbury did not know her name, but some late sources name her as Edith or Eadgyth, an identification accepted by some historians.[15][68][69] She is also identified in late sources with saint Edith of Polesworth, a view accepted by Alan Thacker, but dismissed as "dubious" by Sarah Foot, who does however think that it is likely that she entered the cloister in widowhood.[70][71][72]

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2. Davidson 2001, pp. 200-209.
3. Keynes and Lapidge 1983, pp. 11–12.
4. Stenton 1971, pp. 245–257.
5. Yorke 2001, pp. 25–28.
6. Yorke 2001, pp. 25–26; Miller 2004.
7. Yorke 2001, pp. 27–28.
8. Yorke 2001, p. 25.
9. Yorke 2001, pp. 29–32; Keynes and Lapidge 1983, p. 321, n. 66; Æthelhelm, PASE.
10. Yorke 2001, pp. 31–35.
11. Abels 1998, pp. 294–304.
12. Yorke 2001, p. 37.
13. Nelson 1996, pp. 53–54, 63–66.
14. Yorke 2001, pp. 33–34.
15. Miller 2004.
16. Stenton 1971, p. 321; Lavelle 2009, pp. 53, 61.
17. Keynes 2001, p. 48; Foot 2011, p. 74.
18. Stenton 1971, pp. 321–322; Hart 1992, p. 512–515; Stafford 2004.
19. Keynes 2001, pp. 44–54.
20. Ryan 2013, p. 298.
21. Stafford 2001, p. 45.
22. Insley 2009, p. 330.
23. Davidson 2001, p. 205; Keynes 2001, p. 43.
24. Davidson 2001, pp. 203–204.
25. Gretsch 2001, p. 287.
26. Coatsworth 2001, pp. 292–296.
27. Sharp 2001, pp. 81–86.
28. Abrams 2001, p. 136.
29. Stenton 1971, p. 324, n. 1; Wainwright 1975, pp. 308–309; Bailey 2001, p. 113.
30. Miller 2004; Stenton 1971, pp. 324–327.
31. Miller 2004; Stenton 1971, pp. 327–329.
32. Miller 2004; Stenton 1971, pp. 329–331.
33. Abrams 2001, pp. 138–139.
34. Lyon 2001, pp. 67–73, 77.
35. Brooks 1984, pp. 210, 213.
36. Rumble 2001, pp. 230–231.
37. Yorke 2004b; Brooks 1984, pp. 212–213.
38. Rumble 2001, p. 243.
39. Rumble 2001, p. 231.
40. Thacker 2001, pp. 259–260.
41. Rumble 2001, pp. 231–234.
42. Miller 2001, pp. xxv–xxix; Thacker 2001, pp. 253–254.
43. Rumble 2001, pp. 234–237, 244; Thacker 2001, p. 254.
44. Thacker 2001, p. 254.
45. Wormald 2001, pp. 274–275.
46. Lapidge 1993, pp. 12–16.
47. Lapidge 1993, p. 13.
48. Keynes 2001, pp. 50–51, 55–56.
49. Campbell 2001, p. 14.
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51. Wormald 2001, pp. 264, 276.
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53. Davidson 2001, p. 201.
54. Stenton 1971, p. 334.
55. Davidson 2001, p. 206–207.
56. Smyth 1984, p. 199.
57. Stafford 1989, p. 33.
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59. Griffiths 2001, p. 168.
60. Miller 2004; Griffiths 2001, pp. 167, 182–183.
61. Keynes 2001, pp. 40–41.
62. Higham 2001a, pp. 1–4.
63. Wainwright 1975, p. 77.
64. Higham 2001b, p. 311.
65. Foot 2011, p. xv.
66. Thacker 2001, p. 257.
67. Foot 2011, pp. 241–258.
68. Williams 1991, pp. xxix,123.
69. Foot 2011, pp. xv,48 (tentatively).
70. Thacker 2001, pp. 257–258.
71. Foot 2011, p. 48.
72. Foot 2010, p. 243.
73. Foot 2011, p. 11.
74. Yorke 2001, p. 33.
75. Foot 2011, p. 17.
76. Foot 2011, p. 21.

77. Foot 2011, p. 45.
78. Foot 2011, p. 46; Stafford 2011.
79. Foot 2011, p. 18.
80. Stafford 2011.
81. Foot 2011, p. 51.
82. Stafford 2004.
83. Yorke 2004a; Thacker 2001, pp. 259–260.
84. Foot 2011, pp. 50–51; Stafford 2004.

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- Edward 2 at Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England
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