



# The Battle of HASTINGS

JIM BRADBURY



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JIM BRADBURY

The  
History  
Press

*To my mother, Sarah Helena Joel*

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*1907-2002*

*and to all the many friends met and made at Pyke House, Battle*

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# PREFACE

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Writing a book on the battle of Hastings for a medieval historian is a bit like reviewing one's life. Among the souvenirs of the past, our home is decorated with such things as Bayeux Tapestry curtains and a Bayeux Tapestry cover on a dressing table. My wife Ann and I have spent many holidays in Normandy, from Bayeux and Rouen to Caen, Falaise, Fécamp, Alençon ... the Conqueror's footprints tread a wide path.

The project provides an opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to one's education and interests. These are many and various. They include my father who had an interest in history which probably stirred my earliest curiosity. At secondary school my interest in medieval history was first seriously sparked by Mr R.A. Dare, whom I can see now with his eyes closed and arms waving, carried away by some event from that era. At university I received much help and inspiration from Charles Duggan, who was my tutor, and Gerald Hodgett, who also taught me.

Interest turned to something more on the MA course I took as a mature student, married and with children, in London. The tutors on this course I viewed rather as friends, and their assistance was patient and changed my life. They were Christopher Holdsworth, Julian Brown, and above all Allen Brown, who went on to supervise my unfinished MPhil and PhD research. I recall an essay I wrote for Allen Brown in the early days of that course, on the battle of Hastings. I chose to praise the qualities of Harold rather than those of William as a general, for which temerity I suffered a certain amount of criticism.

Allen's help is almost impossible to record, it was so varied, from teaching to advice and especially on the various social occasions he supervised. I remember in particular the many evenings spent at the pub, the Marquess of Anglesey, where most – I think all – of my supervisions took place. There I gained much from the friendship of other medievalists, including such lifelong friends as Nick Hooper, Matt Bennett, Chris Harper-Bill and Richard Mortimer. No doubt the scene helps to explain the failure to complete the project (on warfare in Stephen's reign) on which I spent eight years of part-time research, though I think in the end it was not entirely without profit.

Hastings inevitably takes one to Battle. It is impossible in one book to acknowledge all the information, help, discussion, encouragement received there. Battle means Pyke House and the Anglo-Norman Studies conference, and here another debt to Allen Brown, who initiated the conference with help from Gillian Murton and who kept it going through the rest of his life. The friends made and met at Pyke House are myriad. It was the most congenial of all meeting places, thanks to the ministrations of, among others, old Hobby and, more particularly, Peter Birch and his aides, including especially that gourmet's delight, the catering head for many years, Yvonne Harris.

I have been to Pyke House times beyond counting: for the annual conference, to teach East Sussex County Council weekend courses, and to take student groups during the twenty odd years I taught at Borough Road and West London Institute. At the conferences one met virtually every historian who mattered for the Anglo-Norman period, including friends from Holland, Japan, France, Germany and the States. Outstanding among these was Warren Hollister, whose work on warfare I much admired before I met him, and who became a long-standing friend with his wife and companion at Battle and Edith.

Perhaps the first course I participated in at Pyke House was one on medieval warfare in general which Allen organised. One of the speakers was the great later medievalist whose life came to a tragic end, Charles Ross. Allen always believed in a good lunch-time session in the pub, and as a result

number of speakers and members of the audience were rather drowsy during the afternoon session not least himself. One afternoon Charles Ross was lecturing and noticed that Allen was gently snoring in the front row. When it came to question time, a difficult point was put to him and, with malicious glee, he retorted, 'ALLEN! [waking him up] what do you think about that?'

The lectures at the main conferences were most valuable and are of course recorded in the *Anglo-Norman Studies* journal, commencing in 1978 and continuing after Allen's death under the editorship of Marjorie Chibnall, Chris Harper-Bill, John Gillingham and Chris Lewis. But even more valuable, in my mind, have been the social occasions: the sherry parties at the abbey and above all the drinking sessions in The Chequers, the pub next door. Who could forget in that hostelry seeing Allen Brown and Raymonde Foreville replaying the battle of Hastings on the bar billiards table, or Cecily Clark selecting her horses for the day? Numerous interesting day-trips were organised during the conferences, and these too hold many happy memories.

Pyke House was also the venue for various student trips. The attraction, of course, was in the first place its position on 'the battlefield' of Hastings, the back garden being the best surviving slope of the hill. Here I spent many enjoyable weekends, often with students from other institutions, sharing the lecturing with friends such as Ann Williams, Chris Harper-Bill and Brian Golding, of what were then North London Poly and Strawberry Hill, and what is still Southampton University. My companion from West London on these trips was often Nick Kingwell, who would generously submerge his fifteenth-century interests to participate in these eleventh-century celebrations.

A memory that slips unbidden into one's mind is of waking in one of the pleasant bedrooms at Pyke House to open the curtains and watch the sun rising over 'the battlefield', of quietly going out to tramp through the dewy grass. I have always been an early riser and liked to walk into Battle to buy a *Guardian*, an *Observer*, or latterly the *Independent*. On many an early morning I would pass others out for their early morning constitutional, most memorably Brian Golding, the fanatical bar billiards player, whose pace at walking was twice that of any other person I have known. I accompanied him on an hour's walk one morning, but only once. On other occasions one remembers Ann Williams' or Christine Mahany's dogs diving into the muddy pools at the foot of the hill.

A lasting memory of Battle and Pyke House is of my friend Ian Peirce. Ian seems to have been at almost all these events: conferences, student weekends, East Sussex weekends. Sometimes indeed I shared with him the teaching of a course on the Norman Conquest. But always, usually without any recompense beyond a drink in The Chequers, Ian would perform for an audience, bringing his collection of medieval weapons, his own constructions of weapons and armour and his expertise on the subject for the benefit of all and sundry. Many, like myself, must have gained from the experience of being dressed as a Norman warrior, and I have embarrassing photos to prove it in many cases, from Simon Keynes and Marjorie Chibnall to Dominica Legge, who had to be rescued as she tottered down the hill under the weight of the armour.

In short, this for me is a book of many memories, nearly all pleasant. I should like also to thank all those involved at Sutton Publishing, at whose suggestion this book was written, in particular Roger Thorp and Jane Crompton, and for their patience and care in seeing it through; and Clare Bishop for all her hard work in editing and assembling in the final stages. For all the many other friends at Battle and elsewhere whose names I have failed to recall or mention, thanks too, and may we raise another glass in The Chequers one day soon.

Jim Bradburn  
Selsey 1999



# ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND: ALFRED TO THE CONFESSOR

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM

In April 1066 Halley's comet crossed the English heavens. It appeared in the north-west and was visible for a week or two. Many commentators noticed it, and it is represented pictorially in the Bayeux Tapestry, with a tail looking somewhat like a garden rake, 'the long-haired star' according to one who saw it, wondered at in the Tapestry by a group of pointing men. Recently we have been able to watch a comet (Hale-Bopp) crossing the night sky in a similar manner, and have perhaps experienced something of the wonder felt by men in 1066, though Halley's comet appears more regularly than Hale-Bopp, about every seventy-five years. Halley's comet appeared last in 1985-6, but its position in 1066 would have made it a good deal brighter, rather as Hale-Bopp looked in 1997. The slightly blurry object of Hale-Bopp, moving a little in the sky each night and plainly distinct from all the stars, will not appear again in our lifetime. It reminds one of the smallness of man and the shortness of life.

In 1066 most commentators in England felt that the appearance of the comet presaged change and perhaps evil. One chronicler, writing a little later, said that 'learned astrologers who investigate the secrets of science declared that this meant change in the kingdom'. A poet thought that it 'announced to the English fated destruction'. William of Poitiers addressed the dead Harold Godwinson: the comet was 'the presage of your ruin'.<sup>1</sup> Their minds were moulded by a recent history which had seen raids and conquest, changes of dynasty, disorder and instability. No wonder they were resigned to expecting further change, and pessimistic about its nature.<sup>2</sup>

By 1066 it is true that England was one of the most developed political units in western Europe, an age when the West itself was beginning to flex its muscles with regard to the wider world. The boundaries with neighbouring countries were not quite as they are now but, nevertheless, England was a geographical entity which we can recognise. By 1066 the kings of England had begun to establish some domination over the Scots and the Welsh, though it was far from complete or certain to survive. Scotland was itself developing as a kingdom, and the relationship with England was one of acknowledgement of power but nothing close to English conquest and control. Wales seemed more vulnerable, lacking the political unity which was emerging in Scotland. Ireland had escaped direct contact as direct as that in Scotland and Wales so far. However, Scandinavian settlements in Ireland and raids from there against England, were a constant reminder of the dangers of hostile elements on such a nearby island.

Across the Channel the political units also had a face which is familiar, but with a structure unlike that of the later nation states. The French kingdom, formed from the western section of the Carolingian Empire, was finding its feet. But the Capetian kings were struggling to maintain power within their own demesne lands, mostly around Paris.

Royal power was not unrecognised in the counties and duchies which we consider to be French, but those principalities were not far from being independent, the dukes and counts often having almost royal power. This was true of the duchy of Normandy, geographically bound to have connections with England. It was also true of the county of Flanders. Flanders was less tightly linked to France than was Normandy, though there were connections. Placed as it was on the borders of France and the German



Empire, Flanders looked in both directions. In the eleventh century Flanders seemed potential greater than Normandy, not least because of its rapidly growing towns. Flanders, like Normandy, was geographically near to England, and even more than Normandy had economic links with England through the growth of the Flemish cloth industry, which was already in evidence.

The English kings had been more successful by the eleventh century than their Capetian counterparts in establishing authority over the great magnates in the provinces. In the case of England this meant over the former kingdoms of Northumbria, East Anglia and Mercia. Historically, since the royal dynasty had come from the former kingdom of Wessex, which had in earlier centuries established authority over much of the south, the kings could usually rely on holding that area safely but the hold over the northern areas was less certain.

The Wessex kings had faced invasion from without as well as opposition from within. The success of Alfred the Great had been only partial, and Scandinavian settlement often provided a fifth column of support for any Scandinavian-based invader. Such invasions brought periods of severe instability. Ironically, although in many ways England was better unified and economically stronger by the eleventh century than it had been, it was also less politically stable.

These two threads, of economic and political advance on the one hand, and invasion and instability on the other, are our main themes in this chapter. The political instability encouraged hopes of success by invaders, while the economic success provided wealth, which gave a motive for making the attempt. The history of England from the ninth century onwards is marked by periods of crisis.

The most consistent cause for this was the threat from Scandinavia. The earliest Viking raids had been mainly by the Norse, but through the ninth century the chief danger came from the Danes. The Scandinavian threat was at the same time the spur towards unity and the threat of destruction to the kingdom of England. From the middle of the ninth century the scale of the raids increased, so that large fleets of several hundred ships came, carrying invaders rather than raiders.

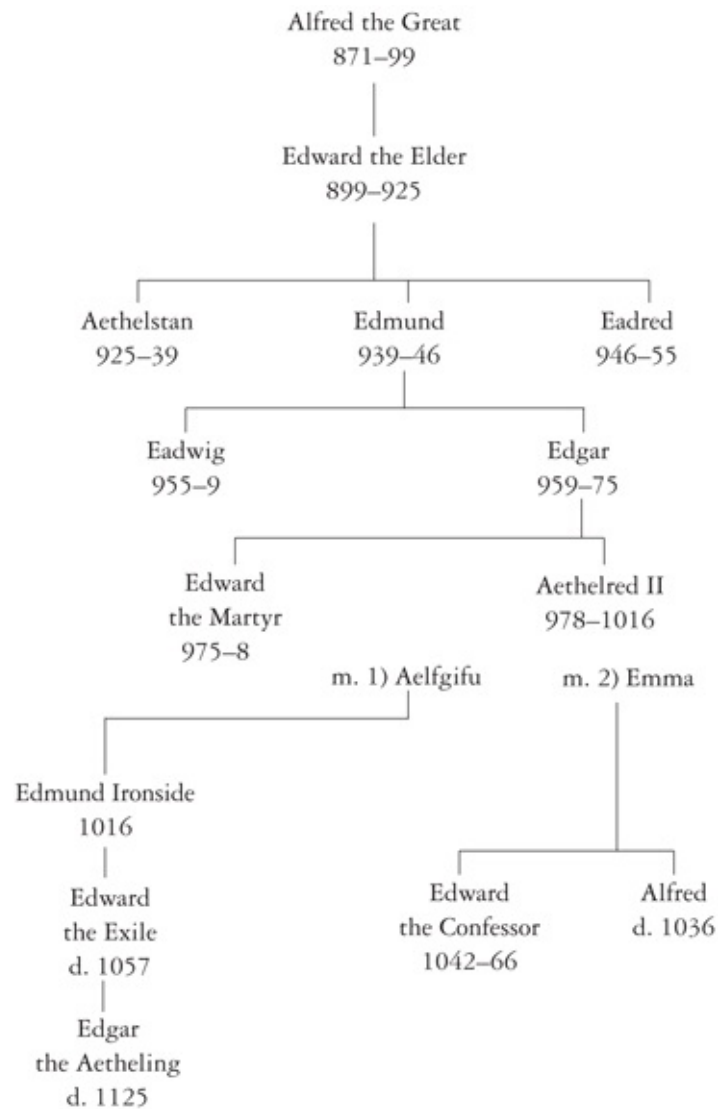
In the ten years from 865, East Anglia, Northumbria and half of Mercia had been overrun. The Vikings attacked and conquered the great northern and midland kingdoms – Northumbria, with its proud past achievements, and Mercia, which under Offa had dominated English affairs through much of the ninth century. As earldoms, these regions would have a continued importance, but after the Danish conquest they would never again be entirely independent and autonomous powers.

The Scandinavian invasion was also a threat to Christianity, by now well established in England. When the Viking attacks began the raiders were pagan and the wealth of the churches and monasteries became a lucrative target. Even by 1012 the Vikings could seize and kill Aelfheah, the Archbishop of Canterbury, when he refused to be ransomed: ‘they pelted him with bones, and with ox heads, and one of them struck him on the head with the back of an axe so that he sank down with the blow and his holy blood fell on the ground’.<sup>3</sup> It does not suggest much respect for organised Christianity. Sweyn Forkbeard and Cnut were committed Christians, but many of their followers were still pagan. Orkney notes that in the 1050s an Irish Viking leader made a gift of a 10-foot-high gold cross to Trondheim Church, but it was made from the proceeds looted during raids into Wales.

The Viking conquest pushed the separate kingdoms and regions of the English into a greater degree of mutual alliance. History, race and religion gave a sense of common alienation from these attackers: ‘all the Angles and Saxons – those who had formerly been scattered everywhere and were not in captivity to the vikings – turned willingly to King Alfred, and submitted themselves to his lordship’.<sup>4</sup> So the Viking threat played a major role in bringing the unified kingdom of England into being.

The reign of Alfred the Great (871–99) was of fundamental importance in the unification process. After a century of Viking raids, the English kingdoms crumbled before the powerful Scandinavians.

thrust of the later ninth century. Alfred could not have expected his rise to kingship: he was the last of four sons of Aethelwulf to come to the throne. Though severely pressed, Alfred saved Wessex in a series of battles which culminated in the victory at Edington and the peace treaty at Wedmore.



Wessex dynasty Kings of England

Wessex was the only surviving Anglo-Saxon kingdom, and the nucleus for a national monarchy. The taking over of London by Alfred in 886 was a significant moment in the history of the nation. Alfred was also instrumental in the designing and implementing of a scheme of national defence through the system of urban strongholds known as burhs. Each burh had strong defensive walls and was maintained by a nationally organised arrangement for maintenance and garrisoning. He also reorganised the armed forces, establishing a rota system which meant that a permanent army was always in the field, and building a fleet of newly designed ships for naval defence.

Alfred's successors as kings of Wessex and England, his son Edward the Elder (899–924) and his grandson Aethelstan (924–39), increased the authority of the crown over the northern and midland areas. Already by the early tenth century, all England south of the Humber was in Edward the Elder's power. Even the Danes in Cambridge 'chose him as their lord and protector'.<sup>5</sup> He won a significant victory against the Vikings of Northumbria in 910 at Tettenhall. Aethelstan married the daughter of Sihtric, the Norse king of York, and on his father-in-law's death took over that city. The hold on the north was not secure, and would yet be lost to Scandinavian rule, but Aethelstan could truly see himself as king of England.

Edward the Elder and Aethelstan also extended the burghal system as they advanced their power and improved the administrative support of the monarchy, making themselves stronger and wealthier in the process. Over thirty burhs were developed, containing a sizeable proportion of the population. It is said that no one was more than 20 miles away from the protection of a burh. They also gave a safe focus for the increasing merchant communities engaging in continental as well as internal trade. By 918 Edward was in control of all England south of the Humber, while Aethelstan could call himself 'the king of all Britain', which his victory at Brunanburgh in 937 to some extent confirmed.

Edmund (939–46) succeeded his brother Aethelstan, but his assassination by one of his subjects, the church at Pucklechurch, Gloucestershire, in 946, brought a new period of crisis. For a time the Scandinavians re-established their power at York, and a threatening alliance was established with Viking settlers in Ireland. Recovery began with the efforts of the provincial rulers, the ealdormen rather than from any exertions by the monarchy, through such men as Aelfhere in Mercia, Aethelwold in East Anglia and Byrhtnoth in Essex. Thus Mercia was recovered in 942, and Northumbria in 944. The expulsion of Eric Bloodaxe from York in 954 finally brought the north under southern influence again.

The monarchy recovered through the efforts of Edgar (959–75). He was 'a man discerning, gentle, humble, kindly, generous, compassionate, strong in arms, warlike, royally defending the rights of his kingdom'; to his enemies 'a fierce and angry lion'.<sup>6</sup> A clearer picture emerges of the government of the land through shires and courts. It was the time of the great church leader Dunstan, who became Archbishop of Canterbury and oversaw important monastic reform and revival. On a famous occasion seven (possibly eight) 'kings' from various parts of the British Isles came to Edgar at Chester and, to symbolise his lordship over them, rowed him in a boat on the River Dee. It was Edgar who made an agreement with the king of Scots, which for the first time established an agreed boundary between their respective kingdoms.

Edgar also reformed the coinage, and by his time there is good evidence for such regular features of government as a writing office, the use of sealed writs, a council known as the witenagemot, and the writing down of laws. Under Aethelstan and Edgar, the ealdormen gained a broader power, often over the former kingdoms – Mercia, East Anglia and Northumbria. Their power has been seen as vice-regal. Beneath this was developing the organisation of shires, themselves subdivided into hundreds, probably for military reasons in the first place, but certainly also for the convenience of local administration under the monarchy. Edgar's reign has been called 'the high point in the history of the Anglo-Saxon state'.<sup>7</sup>

Edgar was only thirty-two when he died in 975. His son Edward (the Martyr, 975–8) succeeded him. Although he quickly made himself an unpopular king, his murder at Corfe in 978 was widely condemned and blamed upon his brother Aethelred, who thereby gained the throne. Edward was hurried to his grave, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: 'without any royal honours ... and no worse deed than this for the English people was committed since first they came to Britain'. Aethelred was very young, and is unlikely to have had any real part in the killing, but it is possible that his mother (Edward's stepmother) had, and men from Aethelred's household were implicated. The irritable and unlikeable Edward ironically has gone down in history as Edward the Martyr, though it is unlikely that he sought death or that piety was in any way involved. It was claimed that 'strife threw the kingdom into turmoil, moved shire against shire, family against family, prince against prince, ealdorman against ealdorman, drove bishop against the people and the folk against the pastorets set over them'.<sup>9</sup>

Natural phenomena, like the comet, were always noted and taken as presages of the future. In the

year of Aethelred's ascension the Anglo-Saxon chronicler reported that: 'a bloody cloud was often seen in the likeness of fire, and especially it was revealed at midnight, and it was formed in various shafts of light'. It was an inauspicious beginning to the unfortunate rule of Aethelred II (978–1016) though he was 'elegant in his manners, handsome in visage, glorious in appearance', it was to be a reign of almost unremitting disaster'. Work on his charters has shown something of how his government worked, but has done little to retrieve his reputation in general.<sup>10</sup> One charter read: 'since in our days we suffer the fires of war and the plundering of our riches, and from the cruel depredation of our enemies ... we live in perilous times'.

In 986 there was a 'great murrain'; in 1005 a 'great famine throughout England', the worst in living memory; in 1014 there was flooding from the sea which rose 'higher than it had ever done before' submerging whole villages. Of 987 it was said there were two diseases 'unknown to the English people in earlier times', a fever in men and a plague in livestock, called 'scitte' in English, and '*fluxus*' of the bowels in Latin, so that many men and almost all the beasts died. Ravaging and natural disasters seemed to match each other in their destruction.<sup>11</sup>

We know the king, through mistranslation, as Aethelred the Unready. The name Aethelred means noble or good counsel, and he was punningly nicknamed 'unraed', which means not unready but bad or evil or non-existent counsel, making him 'Good Counsel the Badly Counselling'; or perhaps 'Good Counsel who gives bad advice'.<sup>12</sup> The death of Edward immediately set that king's close followers against Aethelred. Aethelred's reign in many ways is representative of the whole dilemma for English kings in the pre-Conquest period: whether to concentrate most on the fight to maintain stability at home, or to focus on defence.

It was in this period that the Viking threat emerged once more, and on a greater scale than ever before. If one thinks how close England had come to submission when defended by the great King Alfred, it is less surprising that a threat greater than he faced should be too much for the less impressive Aethelred II. The major difference was that leading Scandinavian figures, including ruling monarchs, now became involved in the attacks on England. Conquest rather than raiding became a clear objective.

The new wave of threats opened with the raid of Olaf Tryggvason in 991. Aethelred himself did not take part in the main attempt to deal with this attack, when an army met the Danes at Maldon. A famous poem commemorates the event. The English leader, Ealdorman Byrhtnoth, seemed overconfidently to have allowed the Vikings to cross from Northey Island to the mainland, no doubt believing he would be able to defeat them in battle. He had miscalculated: the battle was lost and he was killed. Viking attacks increased in the eleventh century with the invasion of Sweyn Forkbeard, king of Denmark (983–1014), soon aided by his son Cnut. During the eleventh century there were at least five attempts at invasion, three of which succeeded.

Aethelred pursued a policy of attempted appeasement, paying tributes to the attackers. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records in 991: 'it was determined that tribute should first be paid to the Danish men because of the great terror they were causing along the coast', and it was even recognised as 'appeasement'.<sup>13</sup> Tribute was paid in that year of £10,000, and again, for example, in 994, 1002, 1006 and 1012.

Promises were made not to attack again in return for large sums of money. The promises were sometimes kept and sometimes ignored. In any case the hope of obtaining such easy reward for simply going away was not likely to have a deterrent effect. This was expressed by an Englishman as 'in return for gold we are ready to make a truce'. Over half a century some £250,000 was paid in tribute.

One has the vision of Viking leaders scrambling over each other in haste to get at the cash from wealthy but weak England. One tribute paid in order to buy time so that on the next occasion a solid fight might be made would have been one thing; but tribute followed by tribute followed by tribute, what became virtually an annual ritual, presented little hope of resolving or even lessening the problem. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* thought that these efforts caused ‘the oppression of the people, the waste of money, and the encouragement of the enemy’.<sup>15</sup>

England may have been wealthy in comparison to some states, but to Englishmen at the time life did not seem rosy. Taxes had to be imposed: the heregeld or army tax, later known as danegeld, first appearing in 1012. Money was levied both to support armed forces and to pay off the enemy. The heavy taxation which the tributes necessitated was resented, and royal reeves pressed demands which made them unpopular. Wulfstan said of them that ‘more have been robbers than righteous men’. Property might be seized without apparent just reason. One Englishman wrote ‘the Lord multiplies children, but early sickness takes them away’; and another spoke of the various ways in which death might strike: wolves, hunger, war, accident, hanging, and brawling. There was a desperate desire for more order. The general feeling of malaise in England, of ineffective defence, is reflected in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.<sup>17</sup>

In the eleventh century the English lacked that unity of purpose which had supported Alfred the Great and others in earlier crises. There were two significant factors. One was the attitude of the descendants of Scandinavian settlers in eastern England, who inevitably tended to feel sympathy towards new Scandinavian leaders who appeared on the scene.

Such latent hostility to the Wessex kings was worsened by Aethelred’s inconsistent conduct. One moment he was paying tribute to raiders, the next he was killing Danes settled in England. In 1002 occurred the famous slaughter of St Brice’s Day, when the king ordered ‘to be slain all the Danish men who were in England’. This is no doubt an exaggeration, and perhaps he had some cause for his action; possibly only recently arrived Danes were the victims, and it was said that he had heard of a plot against himself and his counsellors.<sup>18</sup> But his action did not remove the Danish settlements, and did not help to remove the ethnic division within the kingdom.

The second factor was the lack of cohesion among the English magnates. The eleventh century is dotted with tales of treachery and rebellion, of disputes between magnates and between magnates and the king. The English monarchy was in many ways an impressive development, but it had failed to ensure a submissive nobility. Under Aethelred one has, for example, the treachery of Eadric Streona of Mercia, described as ‘a man of low birth whose tongue had won for him riches and rank, ready of wit, smooth of speech, surpassing all men of that time both in malice and treachery, and in arrogance and cruelty’; and more succinctly as ‘perfidious ealdorman’.<sup>19</sup>

There was also the treachery of the ealdorman of Hampshire in 992, whose son was blinded by Aethelred in the following year, and the treachery of Wulfnoth of Sussex, who joined the Viking invaders in 1009. Thorkell the Tall was a double traitor, deserting Cnut for Aethelred, and then in 1015 going back to Cnut. It is true that some of the criticism of treachery comes from hostile partisan sources, and probably such men had a greater degree of accepted independence than we sometimes realise and did not see themselves as acting badly, only as making new alliances and agreements. Even so, such fickle loyalty undermined the stability of government.

One way Aethelred did attempt to solve his problems, which had enormous consequences, was to seek alliance with his neighbours across the Channel. In 991 he concluded a treaty with Richard I (942–96), duke of Normandy, and in 1002 he married as his second wife Emma, Richard I’s daughter.

who was also the sister of his successor Richard II (996–1026). (His first marriage was to Aelfifu of Northumbria.) The details of this policy we shall pursue further in the following chapter. Aethelred's efforts were always inadequate, and the most useful thing his Norman alliance brought was a place of refuge as his fortunes plummeted. In 1013 he sent his wife Emma back to her homeland along with their two sons, Edward (the Confessor) and Alfred, and he himself followed shortly.

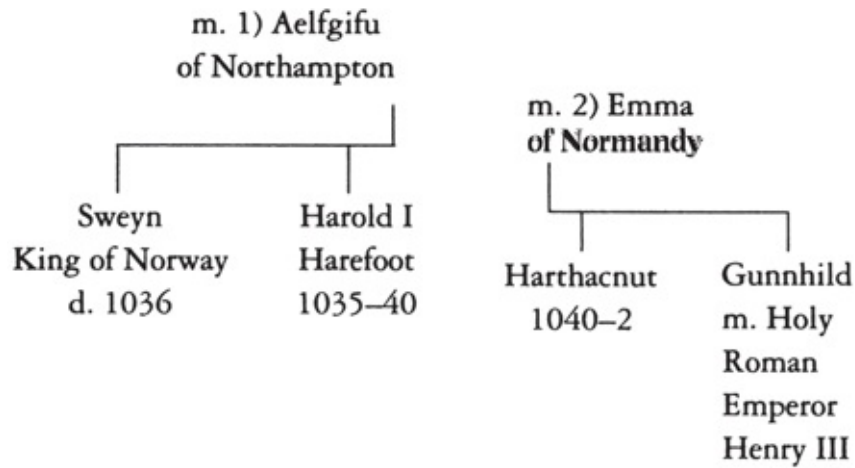
Sweyn Forkbeard was able to take London and claim the kingdom in 1013. In this year 'all the nation regarded him as full king'.<sup>20</sup> But his triumph was soon followed by his death, in February 1014. He planned for his son Harold to take over the Danish throne, and for Cnut to have England. Cnut's success did not seem certain, and he was forced to return to Denmark. This brief respite encouraged some of the English magnates to ask Aethelred to return, which he did. They were not over-enthusiastic, inviting him back only 'if he would govern them more justly than he did before'. Aethelred seems by this time to have been a spent force, a tired man. No doubt he thought he could leave things to his progeny: he had some thirteen children from his two marriages. He allowed power to pass to his son by his first marriage, Edmund Ironside.

This position also was not long to endure. In 1015 Cnut was ready to return to England and seek the throne, with support from Thorkell the Tall and Eadric Streona. Edmund Ironside had to abandon London, though he won a victory at Brentford. He was forced to move his base to the north, where he made alliance with Uhtred, earl of Northumbria. Northern support for southern kings was never very reliable throughout the eleventh century; indeed Northumbria could hardly be regarded as under southern rule, while what we would call Yorkshire and Northumberland were not united.<sup>22</sup> Cnut pursued his rival and attacked York. Uhtred was persuaded to submit to the Dane, which gave Cnut the upper hand, but did Uhtred little good for the severe Scandinavian had him killed. Cnut appointed his own man, Eric, who had served Sweyn Forkbeard, to be the new earl.

In April 1016 Aethelred died. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* summed up with some accuracy: 'he had held his kingdom with great toil and difficulties as long as his life lasted', but his death made little change to the situation, possibly if anything strengthening the hand of his more energetic son, Edmund.<sup>23</sup> The latter still had friends in the old base of the Wessex kings and in the south. He was accepted as king in both London and Wessex. A bruising and decisive battle was then fought between the rivals at Assandun (possibly Ashingdon in Essex), when Eadric again deserted the English. Both sides suffered heavy losses, but Cnut emerged as the victor.

It is clear that at this point Cnut had doubts about his ability to remove Edmund. He agreed a treaty whereby Edmund would keep Wessex, though Mercia and London would be his. But this settlement was too short-lived in the political maelstrom of the eleventh century, for Edmund died suddenly in November 1016. His sons for safety were sent abroad, to Sweden, later ending up in Hungary. His son by Emma, Edmund, died there, but Edward the Exile stayed at the Hungarian court and married a noblewoman called Agatha, the niece of the German Emperor, Henry II. We shall hear of him again in due course.

Cnut  
1016–35



Cnut's family

Edmund Ironside's death allowed Cnut (1016–35) to become the sole ruler of England. His father had claimed to be king, but the events of the previous few years show that the claim had never been truly substantiated. Now Cnut became in fact as well as in name the Scandinavian ruler of the English kingdom. An early act to cement his position was the surprising move to marry Aethelred's Norman widow, Emma. This was a wise act, since it gave him an additional claim to the throne, hopes of an alliance with Normandy, and it undermined thoughts in Normandy of giving aid to Aethelred and Emma's sons (Edward (the Confessor) and Alfred). These two were brought up at the Norman court but Duke Richard II seemed content to accept Cnut as king of England. Later Cnut's sister, Estrith, married Robert I, duke of Normandy, which for a time at least nullified the position of the exiled sons of Aethelred; though Robert was to repudiate her before his expedition to the Holy Land.

The initiative for the marriage to Cnut may have come from Emma who, at every turn of fortune, made efforts to keep herself at the centre of power. She had favoured her stepson Edmund Ironside but with his death transferred her ambitions to a match with the conqueror Cnut, whom she married in 1017. There seems to have been a tacit agreement that Cnut's existing wife, Aelfgifu, should not be thrown out, but that children by Emma should have preference as heirs. Although her sons by Aethelred were safely in Normandy, and in the long run her alliance with Cnut helped to bring one of them to the English throne, at the time it appears that Emma did not give priority to their hopes, and indeed rather abandoned them for the sake of retaining some personal status in England.

Cnut is justly known as Cnut the Great. His greatness lies perhaps less in his rule of England than in his European importance, controlling much of Scandinavia as well as England. He gained Norway by 1028, and also held parts of Sweden. In Britain he became ruler of the Isle of Man, and was recognised as lord of the Scottish king and of the Scottish islands, as well as of Scandinavian Ireland.

Cnut was a tough, even ruthless king in England. On occasion he had hostages mutilated: hands, ears and noses cut off. His recognition of Christianity may have been from genuine belief, but his actions and attitudes were aimed at political benefit. He did though make a journey to Rome in 1026 for the coronation of the German Emperor Conrad II, which seems to have taken the form of a pilgrimage. His political executions do not speak of a merciful or likeable man. But his laws support the wish to be a just king, and his success brought a stability which England had lacked since the death of Edgar. This had its benefits in the development of the Church and in economic growth.

Cnut used the English system of ealdormen over provinces, though with him we begin to call the jarls or earls. An initial act was to appoint earls over the main regions. He was aided by the death in 1016 of Ulfketel of East Anglia, and soon cleared the decks of magnates he distrusted, including, as we have seen, Uhtred of Northumbria and, late in the following year, Eadric Streona (the Acquisitor) of Mercia.<sup>24</sup> Cnut's new earls included the two men who had most aided him in gaining the kingdom: Eric who became earl of Northumbria, and Thorkell who was given East Anglia. England was in effect divided into four regions by 1017: Wessex, which the king kept directly under himself; Northumbria for Eric; Mercia for the soon to be disposed of Eadric; and East Anglia for Thorkell.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the reign further reorganisation was made, and some of Cnut's earls held sway over smaller districts. Later, an earl, Godwin, was also appointed over Wessex, a choice of great significance for the future. Godwin was probably of English descent, thought to be the son of the Sussex noble Wulfnoth Cild the thegn. Little is known about the family's history in this period, but they had presumably been helpful to Cnut during the period of conquest. Cnut trusted other English nobles, and Mercia in time went to Leofric, probably the son of one of Aethelred's ealdormen. Northumbria passed to Siward, who married the former Earl Uhtred's granddaughter.

Cnut was a harsher and tougher ruler than Aethelred, but he also had problems with his earls, which suggests that they continued to have more power and independence than was good for the kingdom as a whole. When Cnut returned to Denmark in 1019, Thorkell acted for him in England. But when Cnut returned in 1020, he quarrelled with the great earl, and Thorkell went into exile for three years having been outlawed in 1021. Later they were reconciled. Under Cnut at least, the great earls were kept in their place.

The return to some stability under Cnut benefited England's economy. The towns in the south grew, coinage was reformed. We hear of some industrial development, for example in salt, lead and tin. Cnut was often in London, which was increasingly looking like a capital. The period of Scandinavian rule, with the inevitable turn towards the north and east for trade and communications, showed the value of London's position.

Cnut died at Shaftesbury in 1035, and was buried in his acquired English kingdom, at Winchester. It is not certain that had he lived his empire would have survived. It was already breaking up. His Scandinavian lands were reduced, and even Denmark was proving difficult to retain. Cnut's death, and his marital arrangements – seemingly married twice at the same time – left an uncertain succession and a period of renewed trouble in England.

Cnut's first wife, Aelfgifu of Northampton, was to some extent sidelined when he married again, but she was still treated as a wife. She was mother to Sweyn and Harold Harefoot, and assisted in the government of Norway. The failure of the family in Norway gave an increased interest in the English succession. Emma, mother to Edward and Alfred by Aethelred, also gave Cnut a son in Harthacnut. Cnut seemed to have ensured that there would be no problem over having sufficient heirs for his various lands, yet within seven years all his sons were dead.

Cnut's intention was that his son by Emma, Harthacnut, should be his chief heir, and succeed him in both Denmark and England. Harthacnut had already been recognised as king in England during his father's lifetime. This recognition, together with Edmund Ironside's position before his father's death, seems to be following a continental practice in succession which is not normally found in England, but may cast an interesting light on some post-Conquest situations.

In the event, Harthacnut, like all of his half-brothers except Harold, was out of the country. The twelfth century in Normandy, the sons of Aethelred and Emma, were given some hope from a recent breach between Cnut and the new Norman duke Robert I (1027–35). But Robert went to the Holy Land and then died



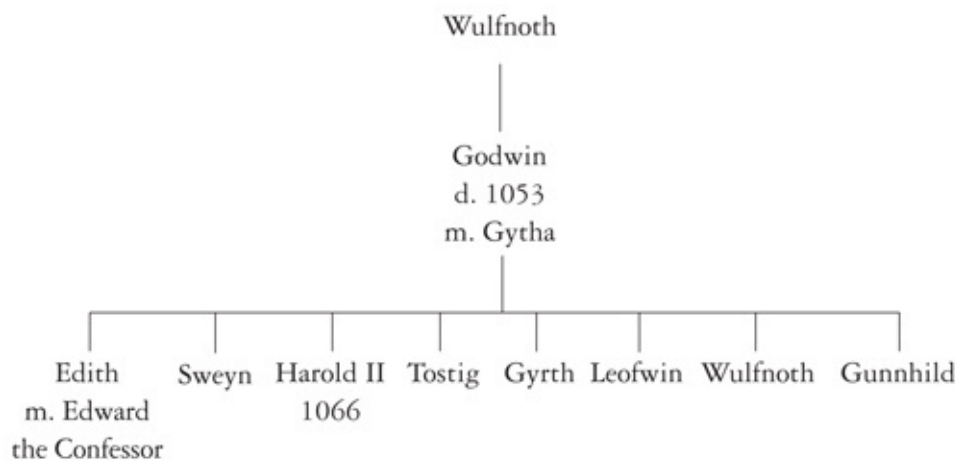
in 1035, so that Alfred and Edward were in no position to intervene in England. Meanwhile, Sweyn the son of Cnut and Aelfgifu, like Harthacnut, was occupied by Scandinavian troubles at the time.

Harthacnut had his father's blessing and the aid of his closest followers, his mother's encouragement, and the support of the two men who mattered most at the time: the Archbishop of Canterbury and Earl Godwin. Sweyn's brother, Harold Harefoot, did have northern support, from the earls of Mercia and Northumbria, perhaps chiefly in order to oppose southern interests; but they would not have had the capacity to displace Harthacnut had he been present.

However, Harthacnut's continued failure to come to England decided the issue. His support did not entirely die out, but it reduced. Most of those concerned realised that there must be a king in position and Harold Harefoot gradually gained supporters from the south. Emma seems to have toyed with ambitions for her older sons in Normandy and probably wrote to get them to come to England, no doubt in order to seek the succession.<sup>26</sup>

Edward did not come to England, but his younger brother Alfred did, probably buoyed with false hopes from his mother's encouragement. Unfortunately for him, by the time he arrived Earl Godwin had decided that his best bet was to accept Harold Harefoot, who, as Harold I, was established in power. What happened next is not certain, and Godwin's supporters claimed him innocent. The likelihood is that he cooperated with Harold I in the capture and murder of Alfred. Godwin took him to Guildford, where, after a day of feasting, Harold's men attacked at night and captured the young man. He was blinded and taken to Ely where he shortly died.

After all this effort to gain the throne, Harold I (Harefoot, 1035–40) had a brief and miserable reign. Emma had acted deviously over the succession, first favouring Harthacnut and taking control of the treasure at Winchester, then turning to her sons in Normandy. She even seems to be responsible for trying to undermine Harold by disinformation, spreading the tale that he was really the son of a servant, some said of a cobbler.<sup>27</sup>



Godwin's family.

When Harold Harefoot's success was certain, Emma chose to remove herself to the safety of Flanders. But like other political women of the medieval period, she had tasted too much power to go away quietly. In Bruges, after the death of Harold Harefoot, she met both her surviving son by Godwin, Aethelred, Edward (the Confessor), in 1038, and then her son by Cnut, Harthacnut. She seems to have achieved some alliance between them. The latter had agreed a settlement with Magnus of Norway in 1038, and belatedly in 1039 began to take action over his rights in England. He had brought a fleet of ten ships to Flanders, but in the event did not need any greater force to invade England because

Harold I's sudden death in March 1040.

Now Harthacnut (1040–2) was able to add England to Denmark and revive some semblance of his father's empire. He had raised a fleet of sixty ships, envisaging the need for invasion, and sailed with it to Sandwich, accompanied by the ever ambitious Emma. She gave assistance in his attempt to resolve the Norman threat. Through her Harthacnut had come to terms with his half-brother Edward who was also invited to return to England in 1041. Edward was to have an honoured place at court, and may even have been treated as Harthacnut's co-king or heir.<sup>28</sup> Harthacnut ruled harshly but effectively. In Worcester in 1041 there was opposition to heavy taxation. Two collectors were forced to take refuge in a room at the top of a church tower, but even that refuge failed them and they were murdered. Harthacnut sent a force which ravaged the shire, killing all males who came before it in a four-day orgy of revenge.

The long period of uncertainties with many twists of fortune and several sudden deaths reached a new resolution with Harthacnut himself succumbing to the grim reaper at Lambeth in June 1042, while over-indulging at a wedding feast: 'he was standing at his drink and he suddenly fell to the ground with fearful convulsions, and those who were near caught him, and he spoke no word afterwards'.<sup>29</sup>

## Notes

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## THE REIGN OF EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

Edward the Confessor (1042–66), who had probably been present at his predecessor's death, was to have a lengthy and relatively secure reign. The drawing of him in the manuscript of the *Encomium Emmae*, written by a cleric of St-Omer for Queen Emma, is the best likeness we have. In it he appears with trimmed hair in a fringe and a short, wavy beard with perhaps the hint of a moustache. While the *Vita*, written for his wife, Edith, he is described as 'a very proper figure of a man – of outstanding height, and distinguished by his milky white hair and beard, full face and rosy cheeks, thin white hands and long translucent fingers ... Pleasant, but always dignified, he walked with eyes downcast and most graciously affable to one and all'.<sup>1</sup> He could also be thought 'of passionate temper and a man of prompt and vigorous action', but Edward was no soldier. The medieval writer who said 'he defended his kingdom more by diplomacy than by war' had it right; but failure to act as a commander of men was a grave disadvantage in this period.<sup>2</sup>

We should be under no illusion but that the Scandinavian conquest and the frequent switches of dynasty during the first half of the eleventh century had greatly weakened the kingdom. There were no other surviving sons of either Aethelred II or Cnut, but there were too many with claims and interests in England for its good. For example, Sweyn Estrithsson was the grandson of Sweyn Forkbeard; he was to become king of Denmark, and was not keen to see the old Saxon dynasty replacing that of his own line in England. Meanwhile, Magnus of Norway still saw possibilities for his own expansion. Later he was succeeded by the famed adventurer Harold Hardrada, who also dreamed of bringing Scandinavian rule back to England. Nor was Edward's reign free from Viking raids of the old kind.

The northern earls, Leofric and Siward, accepted Edward, but cannot have been enthusiastic about his succession. The north had never been firmly under southern control, and would continue to offer threats to the peace of England under Edward. Nevertheless, given the difficult period before Edward's accession and the long-term weaknesses displayed by the troubles, the Confessor's reign was better than one might have expected. The view of Edward as 'a holy simpleton' is not easy to maintain.<sup>3</sup> At least some historians now are prepared to be more respectful to the Confessor.

He could expect renewed attacks from Scandinavia, hopes of reward from Normandy, which might be difficult to satisfy, and opposition from at least some of the English magnates. His new realm was divided between English and Scandinavian populations, and into politically powerful earldoms. His most powerful earl, Godwin of Wessex, had been implicated in the murder of his own brother, Alfred.

At the same time, Edward possessed an advantage which most had lacked during the century: he was indisputably king and, unlike his immediate predecessors, he came from the old house of Wessex. He was also wealthy. His own possessions were valued at about £5,000, with an additional £90,000 coming through his wife. This made him wealthier than any of his magnates, including Godwin, though royal landed wealth was unevenly distributed, and in some areas of the realm the king held very little.<sup>4</sup>

Edward's position was helped further by the death of Magnus, king of Norway and Denmark, in 1047. The Confessor's Norman mother and Norman upbringing – he had received an education at the ducal court and it is said was trained as a knight – gave him the probability of a good relationship with that emerging power.<sup>5</sup> His sister, Godgifu, had married from the Norman court into the French nobility, and this gave Edward a number of noble relatives on the continent. But in any case, in the

early years of the reign England could expect neither aid nor opposition from Normandy, which was undergoing much internal turmoil during the minority of William the Bastard.

Edward had to rely on his own wits, and had at least learned some tricks of survival and diplomacy from his years as a relatively insignificant figure at a foreign court. The exchange of status from pawn to king was rather sudden, but at least he had some experience of the game. Edward also received the blessing of the Church, and both the archbishops of York and Canterbury were present at his coronation on Easter Day 1043. The recognition of Europe was underlined by the presence at the ceremony of representatives from the German Emperor and the kings of France and Denmark.

As Edward's reign progressed, relations with Normandy did indeed prove generally amicable. Not surprisingly, he had forged bonds with Normans during his youth in the duchy, and a number of Normans were invited to his court. Indeed, several continentals had come to England with Edward in 1041. Among those in his household was the later Archbishop of Canterbury Robert of Jumièges, and Edward's nephew Ralph of Mantes, who was to become earl of Hereford. Some received lands and some received appointments in the Church. It became one of the points of dispute with his English earls, and especially with Godwin of Wessex.

The lands and wealth of the Godwin family made it outstandingly the strongest in England, worth about twice the income of any other family in the land. The author of the *Vita* gives a more restrained picture of the great earl than we expect, and it has a ring of truth about it. He thought Godwin 'the most cautious in counsel and the most active in war', with an 'equable temperament' and a penchant for hard work, eloquent, courteous and polite to all, treating inferiors kindly.<sup>6</sup> In 1019 Earl Godwin had married Gytha, sister of a Danish earl and related by marriage to Cnut. In 1045 the Godwin family held four of the six great earldoms in England. They had moved within a couple of generations from obscure if respectable origins to the fringes of royalty. The writer of the *Vita* saw Godwin as 'viceregal, second to the king'.<sup>7</sup>

To confirm the status of the family, Edward the Confessor took as his wife Edith, the eldest daughter of Earl Godwin and Countess Gytha. He was in his forties and she was about twenty-five. They married in January 1045, and Edith was crowned as queen. Edward's motives for taking her as wife are not clear. Some have thought that Godwin pressured the match, but Edward had already shown that he could act independently and had been tough with his mother. No one was in a position to make him marry. The liaison was clearly intended to seal an alliance between king and earl, and probably we need to look no further for its reason.

There would be problems with the marriage, but it endured for twenty-one years. That there was some affection in the match seems likely. There is a contemporary description of the couple, with Edith content to sit at his feet. The suggestion that it was never consummated seems unlikely though not impossible. Edward's pious nature, their failure to produce children, and his later alienation from her, all give the story some credibility, but the main evidence for it comes from later attempts to give Edward a saintly character.

It was then claimed that Edward spent 'all the days of his life in the purity of the flesh', and that he treated Edith as a daughter rather than a wife: 'she called him father and herself his child'. The tone of the *Vita*, written for Edith, is affectionate towards Edward and does not suggest a failed marriage, though it does say that in a vision the king was marked out by St Peter for 'a life of chastity', and that he 'lived his whole life dedicated to God in true innocence'.<sup>8</sup>

In 1043 Edward was seriously at odds with his own mother. Her behaviour had always been geared to her own profit rather than to his, and some think that he harboured resentment for her neglect of his interests in the past. The D writer of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* wrote 'she formerly had been ve

hard to the king her son, in that she did less for him than he wished both before he became king and afterwards as well'.<sup>9</sup>

Now suddenly Emma was accused of treason. The earls Leofric, Siward and Godwin were with the king at the time, and may have been implicated in her fall. Her protégé, Stigand, who was at the time Bishop of East Anglia, was deposed and his possessions seized. The accusation of treason was quietly forgotten, and later Stigand was restored. Possibly Emma had been involved in some conspiracy, or possibly Edward simply sought to show her who was now master.

The Godwin family was powerful, but not everything went as it wished. The oldest son, Sweyn, who had been given an earldom in the west midlands, brought about his own downfall by going off the rails in a spectacular manner when he kidnapped and seduced (or possibly raped) Eadgifu the abbess of Leominster. He found little support, even from his family, and fled to Bruges and then on to Denmark. He returned to England in 1049, landing at Bosham. He sought pardon from the king, coming to him at Sandwich. But he received little sympathy even from his brothers or from his cousin Beorn, and Edward banished him again.

When Beorn then changed his mind and agreed to meet Sweyn, he soon had reason to regret his decision. Sweyn made him captive and killed him when they got to Dartmouth, presumably because Beorn would not give the assistance Sweyn desired. Harold Godwinson disowned his brother's action and brought his cousin's body to Winchester for honourable burial. Sweyn was now declared *nithing*; an object of scorn and legally able to be killed by anyone. Even some of his own men and ships deserted him, and two of his ships were captured by the men of Hastings. He fled to Bruges, where Baldwin V (1035–67) demonstrated his hostility to Edward the Confessor by giving shelter to the fugitive. Perhaps through his father's intervention, and with the aid of Bishop Eadred of Worcester, Sweyn was pardoned by the king in 1050. It suggests that at this time Edward was prepared to go to almost any lengths to keep on good terms with the Godwin family.

A test of the powers of the king and Earl Godwin came when the archbishopric of Canterbury fell vacant on the death of Archbishop Eadsige in 1050. Godwin supported a relative, Aelric, for the post, but Edward favoured the Norman, Robert of Jumièges, already appointed Bishop of London with his backing. In 1051 Robert became archbishop and, in the conflicts which followed, was loyal to Edward against the Godwin family. The writer of the *Vita* suggests that English clerics also resented the appointment, and protested against it.<sup>10</sup> Other Normans were given bishoprics, at Dorchester and London, and other continentals won favour.

A second cause of conflict between the Wessex family and the king came over the king's favour to Eustace of Boulogne. Some historians suggest that Edward, now well established, brought on the break with the Godwins deliberately.<sup>11</sup> The political links between the powers in north-west Europe at the time form a vital background to events. Political alliances and hostilities between France, Scandinavia, Flanders, Normandy, Boulogne and England governed much that occurred.

In some ways Edward had reason to fear Flanders more than Normandy in the early period of his reign. He certainly paid heed to links with those who might help to counter the power of Flanders. In the clash between Baldwin V and the German Emperor, Edward sided with the Emperor. Edward kept connections with others who might be useful against Flanders, such as the counts of Ponthieu and Mantes, and not least with Eustace II, count of Boulogne, whose first wife was Edward's widow's sister Godgifu, and who visited Edward in England in 1051.

On his way home Eustace intended to pass through Dover. It may be that Edward meant to make a grant of Dover to Eustace. At any rate, when Eustace came there, apparently looking for somewhere to sleep, he was involved in a brawl with the townsmen. Eustace's men, according to one version of the

incident, 'killed a certain man of the town, and another of the townsmen killed their comrades, so that seven of his comrades were struck down. And great damage was done on either side with horses and with weapons.' Another version says that twenty men were killed.<sup>12</sup> Dover lay within the earldom of Godwin, and Edward ordered his earl to punish the town by ravaging. Godwin's sympathies clearly lay with the town and he refused. Edward called a council at Gloucester at which Robert of Jumièges put the case against Godwin and even accused him of plotting to kill the king.

The simmering resentment between earl and king now came to a head. Godwin assembled a force but found that opposition to a crowned king was not easy. The king, probably encouraged by the archbishop, wanted a trial of Godwin and his sons to be held in London, for the earlier killing of the king's brother Alfred, while the pardoned Sweyn Godwinson was outlawed once more.

Ralph of Mantes and many thegns rallied to the king's cause. A sarcastic message was sent to Godwin that he would be pardoned if he could restore to life Edward's murdered brother Alfred. The *Vita* suggests that it was Archbishop Robert who persuaded the king that Godwin would attack him 'once upon a time he had attacked his brother'.<sup>13</sup> Godwin's own people hesitated to use force against their monarch, showing that this incident had not been forgotten. The king also got the support of the northern earls, Leofric of Mercia and Siward of Northumbria.

Godwin backed down. When he received the message about Alfred he was dining. He 'pushed away the table in front of him', realising that his position was impossible.<sup>14</sup> He and his family fled that night, riding to his manor at Bosham, and sailing into exile. His sons Harold and Leofwin made for Bristol, and took ship for Ireland. Godwin himself and most of the family left for Flanders, where the count, Baldwin V, as we have seen was generally hostile to King Edward. The Godwin family had close connections with Flanders, and at about this time Godwin's son Tostig married Judith, half-sister to the count.

A royal council declared the whole family outlawed. Some of the Godwin lands were granted out to royal favourites, including Edward's nephew Earl Ralph, known as 'timid', and Archbishop Robert. Godwin's daughter, Queen Edith, was sent to a nunnery. Edward had attempted to throw off the hold of the Godwin family, but as a permanent move it proved more than he could manage.

Edward had shown sufficient strength to force the whole Godwin family into exile, but he lacked the power to keep them there. Within a year, in 1052, Godwin was able to return with a force partly supplied by the count of Flanders. Feeling in England had not been united against Godwin and his family. Some whispered against Godwin, 'the malice of evil men had shut up the merciful ears of the king', but others sympathised, and few were prepared to take arms against him. Harold meanwhile also with an armed force, had sailed from Ireland and finally joined up with his father on the south coast. The Godwins advanced on London, and two armies faced each other across the Thames. Stigand negotiated on behalf of the Godwins.

Now Godwin had his revenge, and forced the king's hand so that he 'outlawed all the Frenchmen who had promoted injustices and passed unjust judgements and given bad counsel'.<sup>16</sup> The earl was insistent that Archbishop Robert give up Canterbury and leave the country, along with a number of Edward's foreign courtiers. Robert went to Rome to protest, but finally returned to his abbey at Jumièges where he died. The archbishop was replaced at Canterbury by Stigand, bishop of Winchester at the heart of Godwin's Wessex. One writer thought that Stigand had 'deceived the innocent simplicity of King Edward'.<sup>17</sup> Leofric's son Aelfgar had been given East Anglia but now Harold Godwinson was able to recover it as his earldom.

The Godwins were restored in full: the father to Wessex, the sons to their earldoms, Edith to court

‘brought back to the king’s bedchamber’.<sup>18</sup> Only Sweyn was missing, and that was probably a blessing. He had set off for the Holy Land, no doubt seeking the divine pardon he richly needed. Harold was to die at Constantinople on his return.

At Easter 1053, Earl Godwin suffered a sudden stroke at dinner with the king, and ‘suddenly sank towards the foot-stool, bereft of speech and of all his strength’. He was carried by his sons to the royal chamber, dying a few days later ‘in wretched pain’. The death of Godwin did not lessen the family influence. Harold Godwinson ‘wielded his father’s powers even more actively, and walked in his ways, that is, in patience and mercy and with kindness to men of good will’.<sup>19</sup> Harold succeeded his father as earl of Wessex, and a younger brother succeeded Harold. When Siward of Northumbria died in 1055 that earldom also went to the Godwin family, to another of Godwin’s sons, Tostig. However, southern insertions in the northern earldoms were not popular, and Tostig found it difficult to establish himself. But it meant that only one earldom, Mercia, was not held by a Godwinson.

Edward the Confessor had some success as a British ruler. The Scottish king, Malcolm Canmore, came to his court and recognised English overlordship. He married Margaret, the daughter of Edward the Exile, who was the son of Edmund Ironside. There were also successful military expeditions against the Welsh, where Harold Godwinson, described as ‘strong and warlike’, laid the foundations for the later Norman advances with a raid into Wales first in 1055.

There is a story that when Edward met Gruffydd, the Welsh prince carried him on his shoulders as a mark of humility, and like the Scots king recognised his lordship.<sup>20</sup> But later Gruffydd raided into Mercia, and Harold, ‘the vigorous earl of the West Saxons’, was again sent with an army against him in 1063.<sup>21</sup> On the second invasion Harold and his brother Tostig led separate forces into Wales. Harold burned the Welsh prince’s palace and set fire to his ships. The Welsh submitted but Gruffydd escaped by sea. However, his own people murdered him in Snowdonia, and brought his head to Harold, who sent the gory trophy of his triumph on to Edward.

Gruffydd’s brothers swore fealty both to King Edward and to Harold. They divided up the brother’s lands between them. Harold ordered the construction of ‘a large building’ at Portskew (Monmouthshire) in 1065. It would be interesting to know exactly what sort of structure this was and whether it was fortified in any way. It was used to store food and drink, and as a base for the English. But the precarious position of the invaders was soon demonstrated when the Welsh prince Caradoc attacked the new building, killed the ‘labourers’ and took the stores. This suggests that it was unfinished.<sup>22</sup>

The unity of the Godwin family did not endure to the end of Edward’s reign. There was rebellion in Northumbria against Tostig at the end of 1065, partly caused by his attempts to tax the earldom with ‘a large tribute’, and for what some saw as his ‘iniquitous rule’, but it was mainly a chance to demonstrate the latent hostility towards him. It was also claimed that he robbed the church and took land. The comment of the *Vita* blames both earl and subjects: he ‘had repressed with the heavy yoke of his rule because of their misdeeds’.<sup>23</sup> In October, with Tostig at the king’s court, Northumbrian rebels led by thegns attacked his men in York, killing two hundred, including his Danish housecarls Amun and Ravenswart, and seizing his treasure.<sup>24</sup>

The Northumbrians invited Morcar, the younger son of Aelfgar, whose brother Edwin was earl of Mercia, to be their earl, and virtually everyone bar Tostig was prepared to accept the change.<sup>25</sup> It seems likely that his brother Harold thought that Tostig had brought the rebellion on his own head and believed that restoration was either not possible or not wise. He gave his brother no support. As a result, Tostig became enraged at his brother and did all in his power to oppose his interests; he even



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