KING EADRED OF WESSEX

BY P A GOOLD

On St. Augustine's Day, 26 May 946[1] King Edmund of Wessex was stabbed to death at the royal vill of Puckleworth, in Gloucestershire, aged just 25. He had reigned as 'sole king of all England' for 6½ years. He left two sons, too young to inherit the throne, and title therefore passed to his younger brother Eadred.[2]

As is usual for the times, virtually nothing is known of Eadred's early days, and even his date of birth is uncertain, although he was under 23 when he came to the throne.[3] We do know that he was the third of five sons and, perhaps, nine daughters of Edward the Elder and his wife Eadgifu. The first mention of his name was when he was about the age of 17, when he appears as a witness to a charter (no. 11 in 'Charters of Shaftesbury Abbey') made by King Edmund, granting land at Liddington, near Swindon in Wiltshire. Eadred is described as "Ego Adred euisdem regis frater consignaui".

His story starts with his assumption to the throne, in May 946, followed by the ceremony of accession on Sunday, 16 August[4] of the same year, carried out by John of Worcester[5] in Kingston-upon-Thames. In Eadred's own words: "it came to pass on the death of King Edmund, who most royally governed the realms of the Anglo-Saxons, the Northumbrians, the Heathen, and the Britons, that in the same year I, Eadred, his uterine brother, was called by the choice of the witan[6], and by apostolic authority received catholic consecration as king and ruler of the fourfold realm".[7] (*cf* opening of the Grant to Wulfric at Appendix 2).

From the outset, this was clearly to be the reign of someone special. As Green notes, "we may trace [Dunstan's] hand in the solemn proclamation of the king's crowning. Eadred's election was the first national election where Briton, Dane and Englishman were alike represented: his coronation was the first national coronation, the first union of the primate of the north and the primate of the south in setting the crown on the head of one who was to rule from the Forth to the Channel". (*v Short History of the English People, pp 56/7*)

He inherited a kingdom that had only recently been welded into a single whole. Indeed, the kingdom of England had only really been created in 927 when Athelstan, the king of the West Saxons and Mercians, invaded and annexed Northumbria (both the Danish part known as Deira and such of the English part of Bernicia as was not in Scottish hands). However, England was far from being at peace. Only shortly after Edmund came to the throne in 940, he led an army into that part of Mercia which had for some time been under Danish control, and recovered the 'five burghs' of Lincoln, Leicester, Nottingham, Stamford and Derby.

However, although Eadred was given the title of King of Wessex, his claim was to a much larger area, and most of the references to Eadred are in the context of the problems he had with Northumbria, specifically that part of Northumbria called Deira which was periodically ruled by the Danes (sometimes also referred to at the time as Normans).

Indeed, Eadred was initially received as King of Northumbria without opposition. In the

Spring of 947[8] at Tanshelf[9], near Pontefract, a point near the crossing of the River Aire which was later to be commanded by Pontefract Castle, Archbishop Wulfstan of York and the northern magnates swore their fealties to Eadred and gave pledges for their obedience. He then went on into Scotland, the Scots being so terrified at his approach that they submitted without recourse to arms. He received the fealty of the King of the Scots[10], and donated two large bells to the metropolitan church of York.

Eadred had intended to rule Northumbria by ealdormen[11] and not to allow the Danes to set up an under-kingship. However, later the same year Eric (generally accepted to be the one known as 'Bloodaxe'[12]) of Norway was driven out of his own country and this was an ideal opportunity for the large number of Norsemen living in Northumbria to have their own leader from the Royal house.[13] Eric was adopted as King of Northumbria towards the end of the year and, the following Spring, Eadred began a series of campaigns against the Northumbrians. He ravaged the valley of the River Ouse, going as far as Ripon where the Minster, which had been built by St Wilfrid, was destroyed by fire.[14] After a series of skirmishes against the Norse Northumbrians, Eadred returned south and apparently went on towards York with part of his forces. He failed, however, to take York and whilst returning home his rearguard was overtaken in a surprise attack by forces from York, at Castleford, at the point on the Great North Road where there is a crossing with the River Aire. Much slaughter followed, and Eadred was so angry that he wanted to return to North Yorkshire and lay waste to it. Fearing the reprisals the Northumbrians again swore allegiance to Eadred and for two years the area was ruled by ealdormen.

The peace was a fragile one, however, and trouble arose again. The dates now become somewhat confused but it is clear that, before Eric, Northumbria was ruled by Olaf Cuaran, who had been expelled from Northumbria in 944 but returned there again with a strong fleet and ruled for four years. During the period 950–954, Northumbria claimed independence, firstly under King Olaf and then, from 952, under Eric again.

We also know that, in the year 952, Eardred had Archbishop Wulfstan[15] imprisoned in the stronghold at Judanburgh[16] because he had 'frequently been accused to the king'. Wulfstan was the real power behind the Northumbrian throne and, although he had originally sworn fealty to Eadred, Eric's return to the throne forced Eadred to act. He had many people put to death in the borough of Thetford, to avenge the death of Abbot Eadhel whom they had slain.

In the year 954, Eadred again resumed control of Norse Northumbria; the Council of Northumbrians abandoned their King Eric, swearing loyalty (again) to Eadred and making reparations for their actions[17]. No doubt shortly afterwards, King Eric, his son Haeric and brother Ragnald were murdered at Stainmore by Earl Maccus[18], betrayed by Earl Oswulf, who was the leader of the English Northumbrians[19]. Archbishop Wulfstan was restored to the Bishopric of Dorchester (a see which extended into the Eastern Danelaw), perhaps to appease the Northumbrians, but also keeping him well away from those who may have previously encouraged any seditious behaviour. As part of the 'new deal', Northumbria's right to a royal house was abolished and, perhaps also out of gratitude, southern Northumbria was given to Oswulf, the senior Englishman in the north, this being an addition to his own northern kingdom.

Even in those days, it was apparent that the continuing growth of the Church could prove unsettling, or even a positive challenge, to the throne. King Eadred seems to have tried to maintain a balance between the two interests and it is recorded that St Dunstan, the founder of Glastonbury monastery, had a pupil Æthelwold who wanted to go abroad to widen his experience. He was only dissuaded from leaving England following receipt of a commission, from Eadred, under pressure from his mother Eadgifu, to restore a decayed monastery at Abingdon.[20]

The year 954 also saw the grant of land in the south to Dunstan (see Appendix 3), further enhancing the area under the control of the church.

In 955, Eadred gave a large estate at Southwell, in the centre of Nottinghamshire, to Archbishop Osketel (*or Oscytel*). Osketel was obviously an old friend of the King who, with his councillors, had consented to Osketel's consecration as the diocesan bishop of Dorchester in 950. In 954 he was translated to York, and died as an archbishop on 1 November 971, having been a bishop for 22 years.

It will be apparent that Eadred was an active and aggressive leader, and his achievements are all the more remarkable given that he suffered ill-health throughout his short life. Even at the time he became king he had what, in the words of one writer, was "a loathsome disease [which] had brought on a premature old age. He was afflicted with a constant cough, he lost his teeth and hair, and he was so weak in his lower extremities that he was nicknamed 'Edredus debilis pedibus' (Eadred weak in the feet). The same source (*Comprehensive History of England, vol 1, p. 99*) records that some writers regarded Eadred as being as weak in the head as in the body, relying on Dunstan and his chancellor to sustain his position. Others share the writer's view that his mind was strong and resolute—indeed, as was that of his grandfather Alfred who himself was not blessed with good health. Some writers have hinted that Eadred had digestive problems, but this is not certain. William of Malmesbury (*Antiquities of Glastonbury*) said that Eadred was constantly ill, and could only swallow the juices of the food he masticated. Eadred's lack of teeth could, of course, account for this!

Nonetheless as king, Eadred was expected to 'lead from the front' both in his military capacity and as the senior administrator of the royal office. The later Anglo-Saxon kings had royal lands up and down the country, and moved from one to another to spread the burden of administering the Court's function. This was, perhaps, the reason for Eadred's presence at 'the royal manor at Frome' in 955, where he was to die. (*v* Page, *Life in Anglo-Saxon England, pp. 98–112* for a good account of the king's court and its structure).

Polydore Virgil, in his *English History*, says that Eadred was "... chiefly a favourer of innocence, and on the other hand a sharp adversary to all hurtful persons; in the knowledge of the politic *[sic]* feats of war he was accounted [the] most cunning of all men, so that without weapons he kept the Scots in obeisance whom his brother Adelstan had before received into allegiance."[21]

Aelfric's biography of St Æthelwold of Winchester also refers to the King's drinking habits. At the time of Æthelwold's period in charge of Abingdon monastery, he invited King Eadred, his retinue and some Northumbrian guests to dine, and the King ordered in a good supply of mead. The story goes that the King ordered all the doors to be locked, so that no-one could leave. They all drank heavily throughout the day, the supply of mead hardly decreased, and the Northumbrians became 'swinishly intoxicated'. Eadred's visit to the monastery reflected the keen interest he and his mother had in the restoration of Abingdon, set among royal lands granted to Æthelwold specifically for the purpose of creating another Benedictine monastery along the lines initiated by Dunstan at Canterbury. Indeed, according to Aelfric Eadred personally measured out the footings before going on to dine with Æthelwold.

What is probably one of the oldest of the few documents still extant from Eadred's time is a Grant of land, to Eadred's pedisequus[22] Wulfric (this is translated at Appendix 2). The existence of this document supports the idea that it was customary for the new monarch to make grants on the day of the coronation, or shortly afterwards, no doubt to secure the loyalty of influential men at a time when the monarch's position would be sorely tested.

Indeed, it may be appropriate here to enlarge on the role of Dunstan, significant as this was not only to Eadred himself but also in the development of the Church in England at that time, which Eadred greatly encouraged as a benefactor. He was born at Baltonsborough,

near Glastonbury, about ten years after the death of King Alfred, probably in the year 909. His uncle was connected with the royal family, and his family were probably prominent local landowners, having close connections with the Royal Court at Cheddar. He was educated by the Irish pilgrims at Glastonbury until 923, when he followed his uncle to Canterbury and was commended by him to the care of King Athelstan. Soon after, his uncle Athelm died as archbishop of Canterbury. Athelstan's court attracted, and welcomed, visitors from overseas and Dunstan's development was very swift and well-rounded. In about 936, we find Bishop Ælfheah trying to persuade him to become a monk. Dunstan did not want this, preferring instead the comforts of married life, but an acute illness decided him towards the cloth and shortly after he was ordained as a priest.

Athelstan died in 939, and because of his closeness to the court he was appointed chief counsellor to the young King Edmund. The king became envious of Dunstan and exiled him abroad, changing his mind at the eleventh hour and instead giving him charge of the monastery at Glastonbury, where he was to remain as abbot for 22 years. Dunstan set about rebuilding the monastery and made it into a haven where he could train monks in accordance with the rules of St Benedict[23], laid down in the early 9th century, which prescribed most precisely the religious observances on an hour by hour and day by day basis. This set the seed for one of the most profound changes in the English church, a national network of monasteries operating under a strict code of conduct and observing a contemplative discipline.

Edmund's assassination in 946 brought Eadred to the throne and Abbot Dunstan retained his role as an adviser to the crown and, certainly in matters of religion, a steersman of the state. Because of Eadred's poor physical state, he relied very heavily on Dunstan's services. Indeed, he wanted to reward Dunstan by giving him a bishopric, but this would have meant Dunstan leaving Eadred and this he refused to do so long as Eadred lived. After Eadred's death, however, Dunstan was exiled by the young and petulant King Edwy (Eadwig). Four years later, he was dead and his successor Edgar promptly reinstated Dunstan to a position of favour. Dunstan was offered, and accepted, the Archbishopric of Canterbury, retaining this office from 960 to 988 and following in the footsteps of his uncle Athelm, who was Archbishop there from 923 to 925.

It is clear that women in 10th century England were often powerful figures in their own right, both in the Church and through their positions as land-holders. Eadred's mother, Eadgifu, certainly had significant political power during Eadred's reign, and Dunstan's earliest biographer (the anonymous clerk known simply as 'B') refers to Eadred's wish to offer the see of Crediton to Dunstan on Bishop Athelgar's death in 953. Dunstan refused on the basis that he wanted to stay at Glastonbury, so Eadred asked his mother to try to persuade Dunstan over dinner. He was adamant, however, and suggested Aelfwold[24]; the suggestion was reluctantly accepted and Aelfwold became Bishop of Crediton until 972.

Eadgifu was also involved in the case of a monk by the name of Æthelwold, who was a follower of Dunstan. He wished to go abroad to pursue his formal training but Eadgifu persuaded Eadred to dissuade the monk, instead offering him a small piece of land at Abingdon, the site of a former monastery. Æthelwold attracted a number of monks to his community and was made abbot there by order of the king, who gave him a large area of land. It was at Abingdon that English monastic life was first directly affected by the continental disciplines, principally of Flanders and Burgundy.

There is no doubt about the depth of Eadred's life-long affection for Dunstan, and it is said that the King entrusted Dunstan with all of his finest and most valuable treasures, including many title deeds and ancient treasures of previous kings. Indeed, this is the first recorded instance of the king's treasure, or gold-horde, being regarded as an institution of the state, rather than the king's personal property. And yet *Vita Dunstanii* records that, when the King became concerned about his impending death, he sent men to collect together all

his treasures so that he could dispose of them before his death. When Dunstan was returning with the items in his custody, somewhere on the high road near Shepton Mallet, he heard an angel say "Behold, now King Eadred has departed in peace".[25] Dunstan's horse was struck dead and, when he got back to the King, he found that he had died at the precise moment of the angel's announcement. Dunstan found the king's body virtually deserted, the courtiers having left to pay homage to his nephew Eadwig. Dunstan therefore carried out the funeral rites and arranged for the body to be laid at rest by the tombs of Edward the Elder and Alfred in Winchester.

Shortly before his death, Eadred made a Will (see Appendix 1) which is one of only two Anglo-Saxon Wills still in existence. He, like many of his predecessors, was concerned about the continuing threat to England from foreign invaders, and in his Will he left a large sum of money to be spent, if necessary, in purchasing peace from a heathen army.[26]

He died suddenly on the feast of St. Clements, 23 November 955 at Frome,[27] after ruling for $9\frac{1}{2}$ years (or 9 years and 6 weeks, according to another source). His body was taken to the Old Minster in Winchester, and having no children[28] he was succeeded by his nephew Eadwig (*Edwy*), the sixteen-year-old son of King Edmund. According to William of Malmesbury, Eadred devoted his life to God, 'endured with patience his frequent bodily pains, prolonged his prayers and made his palace altogether the school of virtue'. This last of the warrior kings of Wessex died 'accompanied with the utmost grief of men but joy of angels'.

The royal house of Wessex continued after Eadred's death, and the nation enjoyed a period of peace unheard of during the previous 200 years. Despite his short reign, we can now see Eadred as one of the creators of a significant change in the role of king. Before Eadred, English kings were merely leaders of groups of people, so that various kings could, and did, co-exist in different areas. With Eadred, the nation largely became unified[29] and the role of king became that of leader of a country, i.e., an area of land. His recognition of the king's property as being held as trustee for the state, and his support for Dunstan's reorganisation of the Church of England have all ensured for Eadred an important and lasting place in British history.

References

1 Some versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle say 948, but this is now generally reckoned to be inaccurate.
2 Also referred to as 'Eadred aetheling', 'aetheling' meaning 'prince', or 'noble'.
3 See *The Comprehensive History of England*, vol. 1, p. 99—the writer does not identify his source, unfortunately.
4 Florence gives this date, but a reign reckoned from this date would have lasted 9 years and 13 weeks, *vide* β text of the Chronicles, which says 9 years and 6 weeks.
5 Florence of Worcester says that the consecration was carried out by Odo, Archbishop of Canterbury, and this is reiterated by Polydore Virgil, although he may have simply obtained his information from Florence's book. This Odo is the same person as Oda, to whom Stenton refers in *Anglo-Saxon England*, (*pp. 365 ff*) and who died in 958. He was a second generation Viking immigrant. Presumably both he and John of Worcester officiated.
6 *Witan*, men of reputation, wise in law, (also known as *seniores*), who met in assembly known as the *witangemot*. Although the King had final authority, it was a precept that law remained the province of the community, so that the King gave voice, and effect, to the decisions of the witan.
7 J. M. Kemble, codex diplomaticus, 411.
8 Roger of Wendover gives 946, indicating that this probably took place during the first 3 months of 947.
9 Also known as Taddenesscylf, or Tadwine's Cliff.
10 Malcolm I, son of Donald II, who ruled from 942 to 954.

11 The higher of the two groups of Anglo-Saxon noble. Originally, perhaps, a descendant of the royal line, he was a royal officer having charge of a definite province or shire. See Loyn's *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest, pp. 220–231*, for further details of the evolution and function of nobility.

12 A bloodaxe is a dirk or dagger.

13 Unlike previous leaders, Eric did not come from Dublin but was the eldest of nine sons of Harold Fairhair, the first King of Norway. Inheriting the title following his father's death, he was apparently too brutal for the Norwegians, who drove him out and replaced him with his younger brother Haakon. For Vikings, it was important to have as many sons as possible, but they all had to be provided with a patrimony—hence, presumably, the need to conquer and annex other lands and peoples (*v The Vikings, by Jones, p. 184*).

14 It is likely that Eadred first ensured the removal of the relics of St Wilfrid to Canterbury, and probable that this was the purpose of the raid on the church in view of the importance of the relic cult in later Anglo-Saxon times. Perhaps also Eadred wished to demonstrate to Wulfstan that an English king was as much to be feared as any Viking leader. For an excellent exposition of this aspect, see the article *Relic-Cults as an instrument of royal policy c.900–c.1050*, by D. W. Rollason (Anglo-Saxon England 15). See also *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, by N. Brooks (p. 228), with further information on the translation of relics appearing on pp. 229/230.

15 Wulfstan was the last Archbishop of York chosen from the Northumbrians perhaps, as Whitlock suggests (*Beginnings of English History, p. 183*) because he was seen as favouring the kings of Northumbria rather than those of the West Saxon royal house. Subsequently, Archbishops of York were selected from, principally, the eastern counties, being men educated in the south. It became customary to twin the sees of York and Worcester, enabling the king to maintain closer control over the activities of the church.

16 Also known as *Jedburgh*, the location of this area is not now known.

17 This contrasts with Henry of Huntingdon's assertion that the Northumbrians dismissed Eric and voluntarily replaced Eadred on the throne.

18 This is probably the person named as Macon by Roger of Wendover.

19 Eric left behind his wife and sons, who returned to Norway to try to regain the wealth and power which Eric, seemingly, had abandoned when he came to England. (*v The Vikings, pp. 91 and 226/7, and England before the Norman Conquest pp. 253/4*).

20 Polydore Virgil's *English History*, p. 236 ". . .he restored the ancient abbey of Abingdon, being long since erected by king Ina, and now spoiled and defaced."

21 p. 235.

22 *Pedisequus*—a word of disputed meaning. From the Anglo-Saxon word *pedisseus* of *pedesessor*, it could be a follower of the footsteps, or sitter at the feet [of the king]. From the Latin, it could refer to someone so honoured that he could follow [the king] on foot or horseback. Whatever the definition, the *pedisequus* may well have come from the body of the king's priests and attendants at the Royal Chapel, probably being a forerunner of the present-day office of Chancellor.

23 Dunstan had spent two years at the reformed house of Blandinium in Ghent where the Benedictine code was strictly practiced.

24 Possibly a member of the religious community at Glastonbury.

25 William of Malmesbury, in *The Kings before the Norman Conquest* has "Now, king Edred sleeps in the Lord".

26 Although this procedure is commonly called 'Danegeld', in fact this term does not appear to have been used until after the Conquest in 1066. The proper term is 'heregeld'.

27 Historically, Frome was one of many places in southern England where the king and his council met in court. For further information see Stenton's *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 349 ff regarding the court of Athelstan.

28 Only one writer, Tyrrel, refers specifically to Eadred having children, and all modern commentators state positively that he did not. The edition used of William of Malmesbury's *The Kings before the Norman Conquest* refers to Tyrrel's book, without quoting its title, and quotes from it: 'this king did not, as many believe, die without issue; and that his two sons, Elfrid and Bertfrid, were witnesses to certain ancient charters cited by Speed'. This point is being investigated, but at present it must be regarded as of dubious validity.

29 He called himself 'King of the Anglo-Saxons' and 'Caesar of the whole of Britain'. *v Green's Short History of the English People, p. 57.*

Sources

As Chambers identifies, in the introduction to 'England before the Norman Conquest', the principal source of reference for most of the tenth century is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles. After 924, however, the Chronicles contain little more than the bare facts, in meagre form, and most of the additional detail in this article comes from peripheral sources of which many were written some time after the events described. For instance, the first life of Dunstan, by 'B', was probably written about 1000 AD, 12 years or so after Dunstan's death.

The Scandinavian Sagas also have some information of value.

1 The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, trans. by G.N. Garmonsway, pub. 1972 by Dent (Everyman's University Library).
2 Anglo-Saxon England, vol. 2 in the series The Oxford History of England, by Sir Frank Stenton, 3rd edition, 1971, OUP.
3 The Times of Saint Dunstan, by J. Armitage Robinson, rep. 1969, Oxford.
4 Life in Anglo-Saxon England, by R. I. Page, 1970, Batsford.
5 Handbook of English Chronology, ed. Fryde, Greenway, Porter and Roy, 3rd edition, 1996, Royal Historical Society.
6 Anglo-Saxon Wills, ed. Dorothy Whitelock
7 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, in Florence of Worcester's version.
8 Flores Historium, by Roger of Wendover, 1841 edition, ed. By H. O. Coxe.
9 English Historical Documents, ed. David C. Douglas, vol. 1, c. 500–1042. Series edited by Dorothy Whitelock.
10 The Comprehensive History of England, Civil, Military, Religious, Intellectual and Social, vol. 1, nd., but probably 1920's. Blackie & Son.
11 The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon, ed. Thomas Forester, 1853. Reprinted in facsimile 1991 by Llanerch Press.
12 The Golden Legends of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton, 1470, tr. By him from the original by J. de Voragine, fl. 1270. 1900 edition from J. M. Dent & Co.
13 The Constitutional History of Medieval England, by J. E. A. Jolliffe. 2nd rev. ed. pub. 1948, Adam & Charles Black.
14 The Antiquities of Glastonbury, by William of Malmesbury. Trans. by F. Lomax, pub. 1908, Talbot, London. Reprinted in facsimile 1992 by JMF Books, Llanerch.
15 The Beginnings of English Society, by Dorothy Whitlock, pub. 1952, Penguin.
16 Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England, by Eric John. Pub. 1996, Manchester University Press.
17 Ancient England, by Nigel Blundell and Kate Farrington. Pub. 1996, Sunburst Books.
18 The Vikings, by Gwyn Jones. Pub. 1997, Folio Society.
19 England before the Norman Conquest, by R. W. Chambers. Pub. 1926, Longman, Green & Co.
20 Wanderings in Anglo-Saxon Britain, by A. Weigall. Pub. c. 1930, Hodder & Stoughton.
21 A Short History of the English People, by J. R. Green. New edition reprinted 1909, MacMillan & Co.
22 A History of England before the Norman Conquest, by Sir Charles Oman, 6th edition of 1924 pub. 1994, Bracken Books.
23 Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest, by H. R. Loyn. 2nd edition pub. 1991, Longman.
24 The Kings before the Norman Conquest, by William of Malmesbury, trans. by Joseph Stevenson, pub. by Seeleys of London, facsimile edition pub. 1989 by Llanerch Enterprises.
25 The Conversion of Europe: from paganism to Christianity 371–1386, by Richard Fletcher. Pub. 1997, Harper-Collins.
26 Anglo-Saxon England, vol. 15, 1986. An annual publication by Cambridge University Press.

27 The Early History of the Church of Canterbury, by Nicholas Brooks. Pub. 1984, Leicester University Press.
28 Anglo-Saxon Charters: an annotated list and bibliography, ed. P. H. Sawyer. Pub. 1968. Royal Historical Society.
29 English History, by Polydore Vergil, vol. 1, pub. 1846 by the Camden Society, reprinted 1996 in facsimile by Llanerch Press.
30 Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England, ed. J. Haslam, pub. 1984, Phillimore.

APPENDIX 1

Will of King Eadred*

In the name of the Lord. This is King Eadred's will; first, namely, that he grants to the place where he wishes his body to rest two gold crosses and two gold-hilted swords, and 400 pounds. Then he grants to the Old Minster at Winchester three estates, namely, Downton, Damarham and Calne.[1] Then he grants to the New Minister three estates, namely, Wherwell, Andover and Kingsclere,[2] and to the Nuns' Minster Shalbourne and Thatcham[4] and Bradford[1]. Then he grants to the Nuns' Minster at Winchester 30 pounds, and 30 to Wilton, and 30 to Shaftesbury.

Then he grants for the redemption of his soul and the benefit of his people 1600 pounds, to the end that they may redeem themselves from famine and from a heathen army if they need. The archbishop at Christ Church is to receive 400 pounds for the relief of the people of Kent and Surrey and Sussex and Berkshire; and if anything happens to the bishop, the money is to remain in the minster, by the witness of the councillors who are in the shire. And Ælfsige, bishop at the see of Winchester, is to receive 400 pounds, 200 for Hampshire, 100 for Wiltshire, and the other for Dorset; and if anything happen to him, let it remain, as it says above, in the witness of the councillors who are in the shire. And Abbot Dunstan is to receive 200 pounds, and to keep it at Glastonbury for the people of Somerset and Devon; and if anything happen to him, let it be as it is said here above. And Bishop Ælfsige is to receive the 200 pounds which is left over, and keep it at the see of Winchester, for whichever shire may need it. And Bishop Oscetel is to receive 400 pounds, and keep it at the see of Dorchester, for the Mercians, as it is said here above. And Bishop Wulfhelm[3] has that 400 pounds. And 2000 mancuses of gold are to be taken and minted into mancuses; and the archbishop is to receive one part, the second Bishop Ælfsige, the third Bishop Oscetel, and they are to distribute them throughout the bishopries, for the sake of God and the redemption of my soul.

Then I grant to my mother the land at Amesbury and Wantage[4] and Basing, and all the booklands which I have in Sussex and Surrey and Kent, and all those which she held before. And I grant to the archbishop 200 mancuses of gold, reckoning the hundred at a hundred and twenty; and to each of my diocesan bishops 120 mancuses of gold; and to each of my ealdormen 120 mancuses of gold; and to each appointed seneschal and each appointed keeper of the wardrobe, and each appointed butler, 80 mancuses of gold. And to each of my mass-priests whom I have put in charge of my relics 50 mancuses of gold and five pounds in pence; and to each of the other priests five pounds. And to every appointed steward 30 mancuses of gold, and to every man in priest's [orders] who has been employed (*or* associated, or attached (to the Court)) since I came to the throne, and to each of those who are in my household, in whatever office he is employed, unless he be little connected with the royal dwellings.

Then it is my wish that from each of these estates twelve almsmen shall be chosen, and if anything happen to any one of them, another is to be put in his place. And this is to

*taken from *English Historical Documents, vol. 1*

continue as long as Christianity shall last, for the praise of God and the redemption of my soul. And if anyone will not do this, the land is then to go the place where my body shall rest.

1. In Wiltshire. This is the first mention of the settlement of Calne. Since the middle of the 9th century, it was the site of a royal villa under the jurisdiction of a royal reeve (Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England, pp. 102/3).
2. In Hampshire.
3. Bishop of Wells.
4. In Berkshire.

NOTES

1. A mancus is both a weight of gold and also a coin. Very few of the coins now exist, and it is possible that they were only minted for special occasions.
2. It should not be forgotten that Anglo-Saxon Wills are quite unlike modern Wills, although aspects of the wording are superficially similar. Anglo-Saxon Wills followed very much the Germanic concept of Gift, where to legal acts are involved: the gift-contract, which is a promise to give property, and the gift-transfer, which is the actual completion of the gift. Such Gifts were generally made orally, before witnesses, and this was entirely sufficient in law.

   A Will, therefore, was only a record of a gift-contract or a gift-transfer that had already been made, and was probably only written down as a permanent statement for the avoidance of argument, particularly if witnesses had died.

   For this reason, several copies were often made of Wills, all equally valid. For the same reason, such copies as survive now generally do so because they evidence gifts of land to the Church, and were kept by the bishops or other senior officers in the dioceses concerned.

   Maitland, in his *The Constitutional History of England*, is helpful in our understanding of the legal processes in pre- and post-Conquest times. He states (pp 4 ff) that although the concept of a Will is Roman in origin, the construction and implications of early Wills are purely Anglo-Saxon and, indeed, the Wills that are still extant (58 pre-Conquest Wills still survive, according to Sawyer (*Anglo-Saxon Charters, pp. 414–431*) betray no knowledge of the Roman legal system in any way.

   Having said this, the earliest extant Will is dated 805 A.D., some 350 years or so after the Roman dominance of England effectively disappeared. It is possible, therefore, that the concept of Wills was re-introduced to England with the introduction of Christianity. When the Church was sufficiently developed, the likelihood of claims, or disputes, over land and alleged land grants would increase. What more logical, then that that the Church should resurrect the concept of Will-making to provide the documentary evidence it need of land-holding and land-usage?

Charters are an invaluable clue to how disposition of land were made in Anglo-Saxon times, and the most comprehensive index of those charters still extant and/or published is contained in *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an annotated list and bibliography*, edited by P. H. Sawyer and published by the Royal Historical Society in 1968.

The most common are the Royal Charters, made by a king in favour of both lay and ecclesiastical beneficiaries, and comprise both outright gifts and those for a term of years. During Eadred's reign, Sawyer cites no less than 65 Royal Charters, although undoubtedly many more would have been executed, but subsequently lost. They are commonly written in Latin, the language of the law, but with the bounds of the land concerned being described in Anglo-Saxon.

Many of the charters are forgeries, and some are genuine but with interpolations, possibly spurious, in the hands of a person other than the original copyist.

Examples are shown below, and at Appendix 3, but for further examples in Latin/Anglo-Saxon see the books of Anglo-Saxon Charters being published in a continuing series by Oxford University Press complete with a detailed textual commentary.

APPENDIX 2

Grant[1] *by King Eadred to Wulfric,*[2] *of land in Warkton, Northamptonshire**

✠ The grace of God conceding, in the year of our Lord's incarnation 946, after the death of King Edmund who royally guided the government of kingdoms, of the Anglo-Saxons and Northumbrians, of the pagans and the Britons, for a space of seven years, it happened that Eadred, his uterine brother, chosen in his stead by the election of the nobles, was in the same year by the pontifical authority orthodoxly consecrated king and ruler to the sovereignty of the quadripartite rule. And then he, the king, constantly presented many gifts to many, in the king's residence which is called Kingston,[3] where also the consecration was performed. This Wulfric the pedisequus can for certain readily extol, whom the same king honourably gladdens with abundant generosity, conceding to him land of seven hides at Warkton to enjoy with perpetual right, limited by known bounds as is said below, acquired with great things and small, apart from bridge and fortress and service in battle.

✠ Moreover this grant in the year of our Lord's incarnation 946, and the first period in the temporal cycle in which he guided the government of the diadems of the Anglo-Saxons with the Northumbrians, and of the pagans with the Britons, was performed in this way, with these witnesses writing with him whose names follow below:

✠ King Eadred, with the archbishops and other prelates, granted this land with the triumphal sign of victory.

✠ Oda, archbishop
✠ Wulfstan, archbishop
✠ Theodred, bishop
✠ Ælfeah, bishop
✠ Wulfgar, bishop
✠ Cenwold, bishop
✠ Ælfric, bishop
✠ Wulfhelm, bishop
✠ Wulfsige, pontiff
✠ Alfred, pontiff
✠ Æthelgar, pontiff
✠ Æthelwold, pontiff
✠ Hywel, sub-king
✠ Morgan,
Cadmo.
✠ Æthelmund, ealdorman
✠ Ealhhelm, ealdorman
✠ Athelstan, ealdorman
✠ Eadric, ealdorman
✠ Oswulf, high-reeve
✠ Or, and Morcar, earl
✠ Grim, and Coll, earl
✠ Eadred, abbot
✠ Wigstan, abbott
✠ Dunstan, abbott
✠ Uhtred

May those who increase the royal benefaction receive an increase of the blessed reward of the Eternal King. Amen.

1. The manuscript of the Grant has been lost, and the above translation is from an appendix to an edition of Bede made in 1722 by J. Smith.
2. Wulfric's identity is not certain, but could possibly be Dunstan's brother whom he made provost at Glastonbury when he [Dunstan] was made abbot by King Edmund in 939.
3. Translation of *cinges tun*, an area having capital authority through a central court.

APPENDIX 3

Grant of land to Dunstan[1]

Kind Edred, the brother of Edmund, granted to Dunstan for the price of 50 golden solidi, Baddebiri, 26 hides, and close to the town of Twina, *i.e.*, Cristescirce (Christchurch) $\frac{1}{2}$ hide and fishing—rights. He restored Puckelscirce (Pucklechurch) too, and Dulting, which had

*taken from *English Historical Documents, vol. I*

been alienated either by some tyrant or the carelessness of the abbots. He also gave to Wilfric, his minister, Hortone 10 hides, who, with his lord's consent, bequeathed them to Glastonbury after his death. And Aelwine his heir, donning the monk's habit, carried out his will. Aelfred gave Camelartone 5 hides, with the consent of the king.

1. The above is taken verbatim from The Antiquities of Glastonbury, in the 1908 translation by Lomax, wherein it is dated 954.

Author: Paul Goold, [redacted].