

= Edwin of Northumbria =

Edwin (Old English : *ǣdwine* ; c . 586 ? 12 October 632 / 633) , also known as Eadwine or *Æduinus* , was the King of Deira and Bernicia ? which later became known as Northumbria ? from about 616 until his death . He converted to Christianity and was baptised in 627 ; after he fell at the Battle of Hatfield Chase , he was venerated as a saint .

Edwin was the son of *Ælle* king of Deira and seems to have had (at least) two siblings . His sister Acha was married to *Æthelfrith* , king of neighbouring Bernicia . An otherwise unknown sibling fathered Hereric , who in turn fathered Abbess Hilda of Whitby and Hereswith , wife to *Æthelric* , the brother of king Anna of East Anglia .

= = Early life and exile = =

The Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle reported that on *Ælle* 's death a certain " *Æthelric* " assumed power . The exact identity of *Æthelric* is uncertain . He may have been a brother of *Ælle* , an elder brother of Edwin , an otherwise unknown Deiran noble , or the father of *Æthelfrith* . *Æthelfrith* himself appears to have been king of " Northumbria " ? both Deira and Bernicia ? by no later than 604 . During the reign of *Æthelfrith* , Edwin was an exile . The location of his early exile as a child is not known , but late traditions , reported by Reginald of Durham and Geoffrey of Monmouth , place Edwin in the kingdom of Gwynedd , fostered by king Cadfan ap Iago , so allowing biblical parallels to be drawn from the struggle between Edwin and his supposed foster @-@ brother Cadwallon . By the 610s he was certainly in Mercia under the protection of king Cearl , whose daughter Cwenburg he married .

By around 616 , Edwin was in East Anglia under the protection of king Raedwald . Bede reports that *Æthelfrith* tried to have Raedwald murder his unwanted rival , and that Raedwald intended to do so until his wife persuaded him otherwise with Divine prompting . *Æthelfrith* faced Raedwald in battle by the River Idle in 616 , and *Æthelfrith* was defeated ; Raedwald installed Edwin as king of Northumbria . Raedwald 's son Raegenhere may have been killed at this battle , but the exact date or manner of Raedwald 's death are not known . He likely died between the years 616 ? 627 , and the efficacy of Edwin 's kingship ostensibly depended greatly on his fealty to Raedwald .

Edwin was installed as king of Northumbria , effectively confirming Raedwald as *bretwalda* : *Æthelfrith* 's sons went into exile in Irish *Dál Riata* and Pictland . That Edwin was able to take power not only in his native Deira but also in Bernicia may have been due to his support from Raedwald , to whom he may have remained subject during the early part of his reign . Edwin 's reign marks an interruption of the otherwise consistent domination of Northumbria by the Bernicians and has been seen as " contrary to the prevailing tendency " .

= = Edwin as king = =

With the death of *Æthelfrith* , and of the powerful *Æthelberht* of Kent the same year , Raedwald and his client Edwin were well placed to dominate England , and indeed Raedwald did so until his death a decade later . Edwin expelled Ceretic from the minor British kingdom of Elmet in either 616 or 626 . Elmet had probably been subject to Mercia and then to Edwin . The larger kingdom of Lindsey appears to have been taken over c . 625 , after the death of king Raedwald .

Edwin and Eadbald of Kent were allies at this time , and Edwin arranged to marry Eadbald 's sister *Æthelburg* . Bede notes that Eadbald would agree to marry his sister to Edwin only if he converted to Christianity . The marriage of Eadbald 's Merovingian mother Bertha had resulted in the conversion of Kent and *Æthelburg* 's would do the same in Northumbria .

Edwin 's expansion to the west may have begun early in his reign . There is firm evidence of a war waged in the early 620s between Edwin and Fiachnae mac Báetáin of the *Dál nAraidi* , king of the Ulaid in Ireland . A lost poem is known to have existed recounting Fiachnae 's campaigns against the Saxons , and the Irish annals report the siege , or the storming , of Bamburgh in Bernicia in 623 ? 624 . This should presumably be placed in the context of Edwin 's designs on the Isle of Man , a

target of Ulaid ambitions . Fiachnae 's death in 626 , at the hands of his namesake , Fiachnae mac Demmáin of the Dál Fiatach , and the second Fiachnae 's death a year later in battle against the Dál Riata probably eased the way for Edwin 's conquests in the Irish sea province .

The routine of kingship in Edwin 's time involved regular , probably annual , wars with neighbours to obtain tribute , submission , and slaves . By Edwin 's death , it is likely that these annual wars , unreported in the main , had extended the Northumbrian kingdoms from the Humber and the Mersey north to the Southern Uplands and the Cheviots .

The royal household moved regularly from one royal vill to the next , consuming the food renders given in tribute and the produce of the royal estates , dispensing justice , and ensuring that royal authority remained visible throughout the land . The royal sites in Edwin 's time included Yeavering in Bernicia , where traces of a timber amphitheatre have been found . This " Roman " feature makes Bede 's claim that Edwin was preceded by a standard @-@ bearer carrying a " tufa " (OE thuuf , this may have been a winged globe) appear to be more than antiquarian curiosity , although whether the model for this practice was Roman or Frankish is unknown . Other royal sites included Campodunum in Elmet (perhaps Barwick) , Sancton in Deira , and Goodmanham , the site where the pagan high priest Coifi destroyed the idols according to Bede . Edwin 's realm included the former Roman cities of York and Carlisle , and both appear to have been of some importance in the 7th century , although it is not clear whether urban life continued in this period .

= = Edwin 's conversion to Christianity = =

The account of Edwin 's conversion offered by Bede turns on two events . The first , during Edwin 's exile , tells how Edwin 's life was saved by Paulinus of York . The second , following his marriage to Æthelburg , was the attempted assassination at York , at Easter 626 , by an agent of Cwichelm of Wessex . Edwin 's decision to allow the baptism of his daughter Eanfled and his subsequent promise to adopt Christianity if his campaign against Cwichelm proved successful . Apart from these events , the general character of Bede 's account is one of an indecisive king , unwilling to take risks , unable to decide whether to convert or not .

Along with these events , the influence of Edwin 's half @-@ Merovingian Queen cannot be ignored , and the letters which Bede reproduces , sent by Pope Boniface V to Edwin and Athelburg , are unlikely to have been unique . Given that Kent was under Frankish influence , while Bede sees the mission as being " Roman " in origin , the Franks were equally interested in converting their fellow Germans and in extending their power and influence . Bede recounts Edwin 's baptism , and that of his chief men , on 12 April 627 . Edwin 's zeal , so Bede says , led to Raedwald 's son Eorpwald also converting .

Bede 's account of the conversion is oft @-@ cited . After Paulinus explains the tenets of Christianity , the king asks his counselors what they think of the new doctrine . Edwin 's priest Coifi responds that they may be worthwhile ; after all , he says , no one has been more respectful of and devoted to their gods than he , and he has seen no benefits from his dedication to them . Then , an unnamed counselor stands up and addresses the king , also seeing the benefit of the new faith . Coifi speaks again and announces that they should destroy the idols and temples they had hitherto worshiped . King Edwin agrees and embraces Christianity ; Coifi himself will set fire to the idols . declaring " I will do this myself , for now that the true God has granted me knowledge , who more suitably than I can set a public example , and destroy the idols that I worshipped in ignorance ? ? Bede goes on to describe the scene as Cofi " formally renounces his superstitions , and asked the king to give him arms and a stallion . " Armed with both a sword and spear , Cofi rides Edwin 's horse towards the idols , all within view of the crowd gathered to witness Edwin 's conversion . Upon reaching the temple , Cofi " cast a spear into it and profaned it . "

In an article titled " How Cofi Pierced Christ 's Side " , Julia Barrow examines Bede 's Latinate text and pays particular attention to the passage concerning Cofi 's attack upon the temple . Barrow notes that Bede 's use of lancea was " not the word medieval writers normally used for spear " , while ? hasta was the usual choice . " Barrow goes on to claim that lancea was likely used by Bede as a reference to the details of the crucifixion of Christ provided in the vulgate book of John ,

thus Cofi ? s desecration of the shrine is to be understood " as an inversion of the piercing of the temple of Christ ? s body . " All of these details support an understanding that Bede had great " warmth and admiration " for Edwin .

The brief speech by the unnamed counselor , a nobleman , has attracted much attention ; suggesting the " wisdom and hopefulness of the Christian message " , it has inspired poets such as William Wordsworth and was called " the most poetic simile in Bede " :

The present life man , O king , seems to me , in comparison with that time which is unknown to us , like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the room wherein you sit at supper in winter amid your officers and ministers , with a good fire in the midst whilst the storms of rain and snow prevail abroad ; the sparrow , I say , flying in at one door and immediately out another , whilst he is within is safe from the wintry but after a short space of fair weather he immediately vanishes out of your sight into the dark winter from which he has emerged . So this life of man appears for a short space but of what went before or what is to follow we are ignorant . If , therefore , this new doctrine contains something more certain , it seems justly to deserve to be followed .

Noteworthy is Bede ? s summation of the nature of Edwin ? s reign as King of Northumbria :

? It is told that at the time there was so much peace in Britannia , that whenever King Edwin ? s power extended , as is said proverbially right up to today , even if a woman with a recently born child wanted to walk across the whole island , from sea to sea , she could do so without anyone harming her . ?

Kershaw indicates that ? Bede ? s decision to couch Edwin ? s peace in proverbial terms offers ... a chilling insight into the levels of lawlessness accepted in eighth @-@ century England ? . Furthermore , a definition of ? peace ? is to be understood as ? freedom from robbery , rape , or violence ; security to travel at will and to literally ? go in peace . ? ?

Edwin 's conversion and Eorpwald 's were reversed by their successors , and in the case of Northumbria the Roman Paulinus appears to have had very little impact . Indeed , by expelling British clergy from Elmet and elsewhere in Edwin 's realm , Paulinus may have weakened the Church rather than strengthening it . Very few Roman clergy were present in Paulinus 's time , only James the Deacon being known , so that the " conversion " can have been only superficial , extending little beyond the royal court . Paulinus 's decision to flee Northumbria at Edwin 's death , unlike his acolyte James who remained in Northumbria for many years afterwards until his death , suggests that the conversion was not popular , and the senior Italian cleric unloved .

= = Edwin as overlord = =

The first challenge to Edwin came soon after his marriage @-@ alliance with Kent , concluded at Canterbury in the summer of 625 . By offering his protection to lesser kings , such as the king of Wight , Edwin thwarted the ambitions of Cwichelm of Wessex . Cwichelm 's response was to send an assassin , as noted already . Edwin did not immediately respond to this insult , suggesting either that he felt unable to do so , or that Bede 's portrayal of him as a rather indecisive ruler is accurate . Following the failed assassination , as noted , Edwin committed himself to Christianity provided only that he was victorious against Cwichelm .

From about 627 onwards , Edwin was the most powerful king among the Anglo @-@ Saxons , ruling Bernicia , Deira and much of eastern Mercia , the Isle of Man , and Anglesey . His alliance with Kent , the subjection of Wessex , and his recent successes added to his power and authority . The imperium , as Bede calls it , that Edwin possessed was later equated with the idea of a Bretwalda , a later concept invented by West Saxon kings in the 9th century . Put simply , success confirmed Edwin 's overlordship , and failure would diminish it .

Edwin 's supposed foster @-@ brother Cadwallon ap Cadfan enters the record circa 629 , but Cadwallon was defeated and either submitted to Edwin 's authority or went into exile . With the defeat of Cadwallon , Edwin 's authority appears to have been unchallenged for a number of years , until Penda of Mercia and Cadwallon rose against him in 632 ? 633 .

Edwin faced Penda and Cadwallon at the Battle of Hatfield in the autumn of 632 or 633 and was defeated and killed . For a time his body was (allegedly) hidden in Sherwood Forest at a location

that became the village of Edwinstowe (trans . Edwin 's resting place) , his head being eventually buried at York and the rest of his body at Whitby . Of his two grown sons by Cwenburh of Mercia , Osfrith died at Hatfield , and Eadfrith was captured by Penda and killed some time afterwards .

After his death , Edwin 's Queen Æthelburg , along with Paulinus , returned to Kent , taking her son Uscfrea , daughter Eanfled , and Osfrith 's son Yffi into exile with her . Uscfrea and Yffi were sent to the court of Æthelburg 's kinsman Dagobert I , king of the Franks , but died soon afterwards . Eanfled , however , lived to marry her first cousin king Oswiu , son of Acha and Æthelfrith .

= = Death and legacy = =

Edwin 's realm was divided at his death . He was succeeded by Osric , son of Edwin 's paternal uncle Ælfric , in Deira , and by Eanfrith , son of Æthelfrith and Edwin 's sister Acha , in Bernicia . Both reverted to paganism , and both were killed by Cadwallon ; eventually Eanfrith 's brother Oswald defeated and killed Cadwallon and united Northumbria once more . Thereafter , with the exception of Oswine son of Osric , power in Northumbria was in the hands of the Idings , the descendants of Ida of Bernicia , until the middle of the 8th century .

After his death , Edwin came to be venerated as a saint by some , although his cult was eventually overshadowed by the ultimately more successful cult of Oswald , who was killed in 642 . They met their deaths in battle against similar foes , the pagan Mercians and the British , thus allowing both of them to be perceived as martyrs ; however , Bede 's treatment of Oswald clearly demonstrates that he regarded him as an unambiguously saintly figure , a status that he did not accord to Edwin .

Edwin 's renown comes largely from his treatment at some length by Bede , writing from an uncompromisingly English and Christian perspective , and rests on his belated conversion to Christianity . His united kingdom in the north did not outlast him , and his conversion to Christianity was renounced by his successors . When his kingship is compared with his pagan brother @-@ in @-@ law Æthelfrith , or to Æthelfrith 's sons Oswald and Oswiu , or to the resolutely pagan Penda of Mercia , Edwin appears to be something less than a key figure in Britain during the first half of the 7th century . Perhaps the most significant legacies of Edwin 's reign lay in his failures : the rise of Penda and of Mercia , and the return from Irish exile of the sons of Æthelfrith , which tied the kingdom of Northumbria into the Irish sea world for generations .