

= Ely and Littleport riots of 1816 =

The Ely and Littleport riots of 1816 , also known as the Ely riots or Littleport riots , occurred between 22 and 24 May 1816 in Littleport , Cambridgeshire . The riots were caused by high unemployment and rising grain costs , much like the general unrest which spread throughout England following the Napoleonic Wars .

The Littleport riot broke out when a group of residents met at The Globe Inn . Fuelled by alcohol , they left the inn and began intimidating wealthier Littleport residents , demanding money and destroying property . The riot spread to Ely where magistrates attempted to calm the protests by ordering poor relief and fixing a minimum wage ; see printed bill (reproduced at right) . The following day , encouraged by Lord Liverpool 's government , a militia of the citizens of Ely , led by Sir Henry Bate Dudley and backed by the 1st The Royal Dragoons , rounded up the rioters . In the ensuing altercation at The George and Dragon in Littleport , a trooper was injured , one rioter was killed , and at least one went on the run .

Edward Christian , brother of Fletcher Christian , had been appointed Chief Justice of the Isle of Ely in 1800 by the Bishop of Ely . As the Chief Justice , Christian was entitled to try the rioters alone . The government , in this case via the Home Secretary , Lord Sidmouth , nevertheless appointed a Special Commission , consisting of Justice Abbott and Justice Burrough . The rioters were tried in the assizes at Ely during the week commencing June 1816 . 23 men and one woman were condemned , of which five were subsequently hanged . General unrest and riots such as that at Littleport may have been a factor in the government passing the Vagrancy Act of 1824 and subsequently the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 .

= = Background = =

In 1815 , the government increased taxation on imported wheat and grain to help pay for the costs of the Napoleonic Wars (1803 ? 1815) . Poor laws , such as the Speenhamland system , were designed to help alleviate financial distress of the poorer communities , but such systems helped to keep wages artificially low as the farmers knew labourers ' wages would be supplemented by the system . Basic commodities , like cereals and bread , became heavily over @-@ priced , creating widespread social unrest . The worst hit were the families of the men returning from the Battle of Waterloo (1815) who arrived home at a time when unemployment was already high . One reply to a questionnaire circulated by the Board of Agriculture in February , March , and April 1816 reported that " the state of the labouring poor is very deplorable , and arises entirely from the want of employment , which they are willing to seek , but the farmer cannot afford to furnish . "

In early 1816 , a quarter (28 pounds) of wheat cost 52 shillings (£ 179) , rising through 76 shillings (£ 262) in May to 103 shillings (£ 356) in December . Average wages for the period remained static at 8 ? 9 shillings (£ 28 ? £ 31) , per week . In 1815 , a pound of bread was quoted at over 4 shillings (£ 14) and predicted to rise to over 5 shillings (£ 17) .

= = Rioting = =

= = = Preceding events in the region = = =

There was rioting in the first months of 1816 in West Suffolk , Norfolk and Cambridgeshire . On 16 May riots broke out in Bury St Edmunds (known locally as Bury) and Brandon in West Suffolk and also in Hockwold , Feltwell and Norwich in Norfolk .

On the morning of 20 May , a meeting was held in Southery , Norfolk . The group , including a Thomas Sindall , marched through Denver to Downham Market to meet with the magistrates at their weekly meeting at The Crown public house . Sindall was the only person known to have been at both the riots at Downham Market and Littleport . He was killed by troopers at Littleport ? see below . The mob of 1 @, @ 500 , mainly men but some women , besieged The Crown until the magistrates

agreed to allow a deputation of eight rioters inside to make their pleas : to have work and two @-@ shillings (£ 7) per day . The magistrates acceded to these demands , but they had already called the yeoman cavalry from Upwell , who arrived at 5 pm . Backed by the troops , the Riot Act was then read in the market place by Reverend Dering , causing further tussles , which subsided after arrests started to be made .

At the Norfolk and Norwich Assizes in August , nine men and six women were sentenced to death . Thirteen of those sentences were commuted , and two of the Downham rioters , Daniel Harwood and Thomas Thody , were hanged on the afternoon of 31 August 1816 .

= = = Littleport = = =

Littleport is a large village in Cambridgeshire with a population in 1811 of 1 @, @ 847 . It is just under 11 miles (18 km) south @-@ south @-@ west of Downham Market and just over 4 miles (6 km) north @-@ north @-@ east of Ely .

On 22 May 1816 , a group of 56 residents met at The Globe Inn in Littleport to discuss the lack of work and rising grain costs . Fuelled by alcohol , the residents directed their anger at local farmer Henry Martin . He had been overseer of the poor in 1814 and was not well liked by the parishioners . One man went to get a horn from Burgess , the lighterman , and started blowing it outside The Globe Inn , gathering hundreds of villagers to join the first group , and the riot commenced .

The rioters began at Mingey 's shop , where stones were thrown through the windows , and then they invaded Mr Clarke 's property and threw his belongings into the street . Next , at Josiah Dewey 's place , the Reverend John Vachell and his wife arrived to try to calm the rioters . Vachell had been vicar of St George 's since 1795 and was also a magistrate ; he was an unpopular man , as he dealt harshly with even minor offences . He read or tried to read the Riot Act without effect , as the crowd " told him to go home . "

The rioters next visited the premises of disabled 90 @-@ year @-@ old Mr Sindall , throwing his furniture into the street ; his housekeeper , Mrs Hutt , was intimidated by a rioter wielding a butcher 's cleaver . After stopping at the place of Mr Little , " a nice old gentleman , " who gave the mob £ 2 (£ 138) , they continued to Robert Speechly 's and demolished his furniture . Next they broke into the house of Rebecca Waddelow looking for Harry Martin , her grandson . He had seen them coming and escaped out the back . Rebecca Cutlack was visiting at the time , and they robbed her and removed property worth between £ 100 and £ 200 (£ 6 @, @ 903 ? £ 13 @, @ 807) .

At about 11 pm , the rioters arrived at the house of the Reverend John Vachell , who , after threatening to shoot anyone who entered his house , was disarmed when three men rushed him . He fled on foot with his wife and two daughters towards Ely . After Vachell had left , the rioters destroyed his goods and chattels and stole some of his silverware . Vachell was later to sue the Hundred of Ely for the damages under the Riot Act . He received over £ 708 (£ 48 @, @ 875) , an award which was challenged in the press , as many people complained about the size of the resulting district levies used to pay for it . The rioters then stopped a post @-@ chaise returning with Hugh Robert Evans senior and Henry Martin from a Turnpike Trust meeting in Downham . They robbed Evans of 14 shillings (£ 48) before allowing them both to proceed . On reaching Ely , Evans alerted the magistrates who sent a carriage for Reverend Vachell , which collected him and his family walking towards Ely .

= = = Ely = = =

Ely , Cambridgeshire , is a city with an 1811 population of 4 @, @ 249 people . The city is nearly 15 miles (24 km) north @-@ north @-@ east of Cambridge and 67 miles (108 km) north @-@ north @-@ east of London . When Vachell arrived in Ely , he alerted fellow clergymen and magistrates Reverend William Metcalfe and Reverend Henry Law who dispatched Thomas Archer , as a messenger , to Bury , 26 miles (42 km) to the east .

The rioters in Littleton had in the interim stolen a wagon and horses from Henry Tansley and equipped it with fowling guns front and back . Most of the Littleton mob , armed with guns and pitch

@-@ forks , then began the march to Ely , arriving three @-@ quarters of a mile (1 @. @ 2 km) north of the city between 5 am and 6 am on 23 May . The Reverend William Metcalfe met them , read the Riot Act , and asked what the mob required . On being told that they wanted " the price of a stone of flour per day " and that " our children are starving , give us a living wage , " the Reverend agreed but stated that he would have to converse with the other magistrates . He asked everyone to return to Littleport , but they marched on . Metcalfe implored them to go to the market place and many did go there , where they were joined by Ely citizens . Recognising the needs of the rioters , the Ely magistrates , the Reverends William Metcalfe , Peploe Ward and Henry Law drafted a response , offering poor families two @-@ shillings per head per week and ordering farmers to pay two @-@ shillings (£ 7) per day wages . On hearing the proclamation , the mob cheered . The magistrates then " gave the men some beer , told them not to get drunk and tried to persuade them to go home " . Some took the advice , whilst others continued the rampage , intimidating shopkeepers , millers and bankers and stealing from some . However , most of the rioters , marching with their wagons and guns , left the city for Littleport before the arrival of the military from Bury .

Meanwhile , the magistrates delegated Henry Law to go to London to discuss the matter with Lord Sidmouth , the Home Secretary . On the way , Law stopped at the barracks of the Royston troop of volunteer yeomanry cavalry and requested they go to Ely . Law was unable to convince Sidmouth of the seriousness of the situation , and Sidmouth asked Reverend Sir Henry Bate Dudley to return with Law and report on the matter .

= = Restoring order = =

A detachment of 18 men of the 1st The Royal Dragoons , commanded by Captain Methuen , arrived in Ely from Bury on 23 May in the late afternoon . They marched through the streets as a show of force , remaining all night . The following afternoon , 24 May , the troops marched on Littleport , led by Sir Henry Bate Dudley and John Bacon , a Bow Street constable . They were followed by the Royston troop of volunteer yeomanry cavalry summoned earlier by Henry Law , and a militia of gentlemen and inhabitants of Ely .

Before arrival at the Ely Road , a small detachment of troops were ordered across the Hemp Field to enter the village from the east . The larger group then charged at a hard gallop down the Mill Street incline through to Main Street . The rioters were found making a stand in The George and Dragon near the west end of Station Road . The militia were called to the front when the rioters would not come out after being ordered to by Bate Dudley . Thomas South , shooting from a window , hit trooper Wallace in the forearm . The militia got the rioters out of the public house and assembled them in the street , surrounded by the troopers . Thomas Sindall attempted to take a musket from trooper William Porter but was not successful . Sindall ran away and when he did not stop after being called on to do so by Porter , he was shot through the back of the head . Thomas Sindall was killed ; he was the only person known to be at both Downham Market and Littleport . The result of this shooting was to subdue the rest of the rioters . Those captured were taken to Ely gaol and the rest of the rioters were rounded up .

The home secretary , Lord Sidmouth , had dispatched three troops of cavalry (100 men) , two six ? pounder cannons and three companies of the 69th (South Lincolnshire) Regiment of Foot under Major General Byng to help capture the leading rioters .

Two rioters were hidden in Lakenheath by a labourer who eventually betrayed them for £ 5 each (£ 345) . One rioter , William Gotobed , a bricklayer , escaped and was eventually pardoned a few years later . He returned to Littleport after seven years and then went to America . The rioting spread to nearby areas such as Little Downham , Cambridgeshire , although such areas were not as badly affected . It took until 10 June before the areas were finally cleared of trouble and all of the rioters had been captured .

= = Trial = =

The assizes for the 82 persons , 73 of whom were in prison and nine on bail , lasted from Monday 17 June 1816 through to the following Saturday .

= = = Special Commission = = =

Since 970 AD , and until 1837 the Bishop of Ely retained exclusive jurisdiction in civil and criminal matters , and was also keeper of the records (Custos rotulorum) . As part of this right , the Bishop appointed a Chief Justice of the Isle of Ely ; Edward Christian had held the post since 1800 . In these special assizes , the crown , via Lord Sidmouth , created a Special Commission . Sidmouth appointed two judges , Mr Justice Abbott and Mr Justice Burrough to preside over it . Christian , nevertheless , felt he should attend and indeed was in attendance throughout . After the trial Christian said , " It was suggested to me in London , ... that it would be more conducive to the great object of the Commission , ... if I declined my rotation of duty , and left the trial of all the prisoners to them [the appointed commissioners] . "

= = = Monday = = =

Shortly after 10 am , the three judges went to the courthouse , in the market place at that time , and the Special Commission was read . The judges then breakfasted at the bishop 's palace , after which a service was held in the cathedral and attended by 50 of the principal inhabitants of Ely . The sermon , preached by Henry Bate Dudley , was " that the law is not made for a righteous man , but for the lawless and disobedient " .

After the service , around 1 pm , the court reconvened ; the Grand Jury was sworn in , and Mr W. Dunn Gardner elected the foreman . Mr Gurney , Mr Bolland and Mr Richardson , were counsel for the crown , led by Mr William Hobhouse , treasury solicitor . For the defence , Mr Hunt was counsel for Jefferson , Wyebrow , Harley , Pricke , Cooper , Freeman and Jessop ; Mr Hart was counsel for John Easey , Joseph Easey , Benton , Layton , Atkin , Hobbs and another .

Mr Justice Abbott addressed the court :

Gentlemen of the Grand Jury , ? You have been called together at this unusual period , and with the present solemnities , in consequence of some very daring acts of outrage committed by various misguided individuals in this town and its immediate neighbourhood , which must still be fresh in your recollection . In contemplating the nature of these atrocities , it is impossible to consider without commendation , the conductors of those prompt and efficacious measures by which , after it had domineered for several days together , the spirit of tumult and devastation was finally subdued .

He then went on to direct the jury at length , commenting at one point that these disturbances " seem to have been the necessity of an advance in the wages of husbandry ; but the circumstances of some among the offenders do not correspond with the supposition of such an object " . He was probably referring to John Dennis , licensed victualler of Littleport . He outlined the three capital offences that would be presented , namely burglary , robbery from the person and stealing in a dwelling house . He defined burglary as breaking into a house at night with intent , robbery from the person as extortion by violence or threat thereof , and stealing in a dwelling house as an actual act of stealing , not just the threat . He reminded the jury that when offences are carried out by a mob , it is the whole mob that is guilty , not just the person doing the deed . He closed :

It is of the highest importance to the peace and safety , not only of this isle , but of the surrounding country , that all who are present on this solemn inquiry , and all who read the account of its proceedings (and there are few parts of the kingdom in which it will not be read) may be convinced by the awful lesson which may here be taught , that whatever wild or chimerical notions may prevail of the power of an armed multitude , the law is too strong for its assailants ; and that , however triumphant or destructive their sway for a few days , those who defy the law , will ultimately be compelled to submit either to its justice or its mercy .

The court adjourned until the following day .

= = = Tuesday = = =

On Tuesday 18 June the court opened at 9 am ; 12 defendants were charged with breaking into the house of Rebecca Waddelow in Littleport and stealing personal property and money . After hearing evidence , the judges held a discussion . Mr Justice Abbott informed the jury that a mistake had been made in the indictment , directing the jury to acquit . All 12 defendants were pronounced not guilty .

Seven defendants were then indicted for breaking into the house of Josiah Dewey in Littleport , stealing money and property and assaulting Dewey . Mr Gurney addressed the jury . Three witnesses testified . The jury recorded a verdict of guilty against Chevall , Easey , Jessop , South and Benton ; Dann and Torrington were acquitted . The court adjourned at 5 pm .

= = = Wednesday = = =

On Wednesday 19 June the court opened at 9 am ; the indictment on three of the defendants was read for forcibly entering the house of Robert Speechly in Littleport and stealing personal property . Mr Gurney addressed the jury , who later pronounced all defendants guilty .

Five defendants were then indicted for forcing their way in the house of Rev. John Vachell in Littleport , threatening him and stealing £ 2 . Mr Gurney addressed the jury . Two witnesses testified . A verdict of guilty was returned against Harley and Newell whilst Warner and Stibbard were acquitted .

Five defendants were then indicted for stealing £ 50 from the house of Robert Edwards in Ely . Mr Gurney addressed the jury at length describing the events occurring in the town of Ely on the morning of the 23 May 1816 . Eight witnesses were called . The jury returned guilty verdicts against Dennis , Jefferson , and Rutter . Hopkin and Cammell were given not guilty verdicts .

= = = Thursday = = =

On Thursday morning 20 June two defendants were indicted for stealing silverware from the home of Rev. J. Vachell in Littleport and one was charged with receiving the stolen goods . Four witnesses called were Elizabeth Carter following which Mr Justice Burrough summed up . Lavender was pronounced guilty of the theft and Beamiss and Butcher received not guilty verdicts .

John Gaultrip was next , also indicted for stealing spoons at the vicarage . As the evidence was contradictory , Gaultrip was acquitted by the jury .

Next at the bar was William Beamiss indicted for highway robbery of Hugh Robert Evans , of Ely . Two witness were called . Mr Justice Abbott summed up and the jury returned a verdict of guilty on the prisoner Beamiss .

Then nine defendants were charged with threatening W. Cooper of Ely and stealing from him . Mr Gurney addressed the jury , explaining the circumstances of the disturbances carried out by the mob in Ely . Nine witnesses were called . Mr Justice Abbott spoke to the jury for a long time . The jury retired for fifteen minutes . On returning , it pronounced as guilty Dennis , Jessop , Atkin , Layton , Hobbs , Pricke , Cooper , and Jefferson . It acquitted Freeman .

Six defendants were then charged with stealing from George Stevens in Ely . Three witness were examined following which Dennis , Layton , Atkin , and Cammell were all pronounced guilty by the jury . Capital convictions against Aaron Chevall and William Beamiss , for robbing Henry Tansley of two £ 1 notes , were also returned by the jury . The court adjourned at 6 pm .

= = = Friday = = =

On Friday morning 21 June , seven prisoners were brought to the bar on a similar charge as on Tuesday (breaking into the house of Rebecca Waddelow in Littleport and stealing personal property and money) . The prisoners all pleaded not guilty . Mr Gurney addressed the jury explaining that these were the same persons indicted on Tuesday for the same offence . He explained to the jury that the earlier indictment incorrectly described the house to be the property of Rebecca Waddelow ,

leading to the prisoners ' acquittal . He also explained that in the original indictment , other persons had been charged , but as these other persons had since been convicted of capital offences , they had been removed from the indictment . The witness were all brought forward again and made their statements . They said much the same as previously , though this took much of the day . In summing up , Mr Abbott went on a length closing with " the duty which it belonged to them [the jury] to execute ? confident that , from experience which the court had now of them , their verdict would be such as good sense would dictate , and the public justice of the country require " . It took the jury five minutes to find Walker , Butcher and Crow guilty and Nicholas , Wilson and Jefferson not guilty .

Brought to the bar next was Henry Benson , a farmer who was out on bail , charged with inciting to riot . Benson was held in surety for £ 400 plus two other sureties for £ 200 each . He was to appear for trial at the next assizes . Richard Cooper the elder and Richard Cooper the younger were also bound over to the next assizes . Father and son , William Beamiss the elder and the younger , were then brought in and charged with assaulting and stealing from Robert Cheesewright the younger , of Littleport , in the Isle of Ely . Mr Gurney addressed the jury . Mr Burrough summed up and the jury gave their guilty verdict to both prisoners shortly after .

Next , between 20 and 30 prisoners were brought to the bar and " indicted for having committed various felonies and misdemeanour 's at Littleport on 22 , 23 , and 24 of May last " . A few were put to the next assizes and the remainder chose to be tried immediately . Mr Gurney addressed the jury explaining that his Majesty 's government was keen not to put to the jury more cases than was necessary . If the prisoners now at the bar offered a small surety and remained on good behaviour , there would be no more said . Mr Abbott spoke to the prisoners at length , finally demanding that each of them offer surety of £ 50 and find two more sureties each of £ 10 or one more each of £ 20 . Mr Abbott then thanked the jury for their services . The court adjourned .

= = = Sentences = = =

Saturday

On Saturday 22 June 1816 six men were acquitted ; 10 were discharged ; 36 were bailed ; 23 men and one woman were condemned of whom 18 men and the woman , Sarah Hobbs , had their sentences commuted . Of the 19 persons commuted , nine were sentenced to penal transportation . Seven of those nine sailed on the convict ship Sir William Bensley , which departed for New South Wales on 9 October 1816 , captained by Lew E Williams . Records exist for the following known to have sailed : James Newell , Richard Jessop , John Jefferson , Joseph Easey , Aaron Chevell , all of Littleport and all transported for life ; Richard Rutter of Littleport for 14 years ; John Easey of Littleport for seven years . Two others were also sentenced to transportation for seven years , Mark Benton and John Walker , both of Littleport . 10 , including Sarah Hobbs , were committed to Ely gaol for 12 months ; five were from Littleport and five , including Sarah Hobbs were from Ely .

The five condemned without commutation were all from Littleport . They were William Beamiss (42) the elder , shoemaker , for stealing from the persons of Henry Tansley and Robert Cheeseright , both of Littleport ; George Crow (23) , labourer , for stealing in the dwelling @-@ house of Rebecca Waddelow and Henry Martin , both of Littleport ; John Dennis (32) , a publican , for stealing from the persons of William Cooper , Robert Edwards , and George Stevens , all of Ely ; Isaac Harley junior (33) , labourer , for stealing from the person of the Reverend John Vachell , of Littleport ; and Thomas South the younger (22) , labourer , for stealing in the dwelling @-@ house of Josiah Dewey and Robert Speechley , both of Littleport .

= = = Execution = = =

On Friday 28 June 1816 at 9 am , the condemned men , William Beamiss , George Crow , John Dennis , Isaac Harley and Thomas South , were driven from the gaol at Ely market place in a black @-@ draped cart and two horses costing five @-@ pound five @-@ shillings (£ 362) accompanied by the bishop 's gaol chaplain , John Griffin , in a hired chaise and pair costing 13 shillings (£ 45) .

In submitting his expenses on 29 June , chief bailiff F. Bagge noted " We have no power of pressing a cart for the purpose , and ' tis a difficult matter to get one , people feel 's so much upon the occasion " .

The men arrived at the gallows at Parnell pits around 11 am , and were hanged after praying with the crowd for some time . Griffin was unofficially given the ropes , which cost one @-@ pound five @-@ shillings (£ 86) , after hanging , which he kept ; he left a collection to his housekeeper , who sold them as a cure for sore throats . Following the hanging , the bodies were placed in coffins and displayed in a cottage in Gaol Street , where many people came to visit . They were buried the next day in St Mary 's Church , Ely , with the vicar 's blessing . As a warning to others , a stone plaque (pictured) was installed on the west side of St Mary 's Church ; it concludes , " May their awful Fate be a warning to others " .

In 1816 , there were a total of 83 people executed in England : 80 men , including the five Littleport rioters , and three women .

= = Aftermath = =

A few days after the execution , the ten condemned prisoners who had had their sentences commuted to twelve months ' imprisonment were transported to the prison hulk *Justitia* , moored at Woolwich on the River Thames . Such ships were used as holding areas prior to convicts being transferred to a regular vessel for penal transportation to , at this time , Australia . Residents of Ely tried to hold meetings to complain at this apparent extension of the prisoners ' sentences . Despite , or because of , media attention ? newspapers of the time took sides depending whether they supported the government or not ? the prisoners were returned to Ely gaol ; it may all have been a simple mistake by the clerk of the assizes .

On 3 April 1816 , lieutenant @-@ colonel William Sorell was appointed lieutenant @-@ governor of Van Diemen 's Land , now Tasmania . He sailed on the *Sir William Bensley* , the same ship transporting the rioters sentenced to penal transportation . Leaving England on 9 October 1816 , the ship arrived in New South Wales 152 days later on 10 March 1817 . Soon after , Sorrel sailed to Hobart arriving on 8 April 1817 , where he distinguished himself as the third lieutenant @-@ governor .

The Reverend John Vachell stayed on as vicar of St George 's Littleport in title until 1830 ; he appointed a curate , George Britton Jermyn from 1817 . Some of the St George 's church registers were destroyed during the riots . The remaining registers start from 1754 (marriages) , 1756 (burials) , and 1783 (baptism) . General unrest and riots such as that at Littleport may have been a factor in the government passing the Vagrancy Act of 1824 . Due in part to some difficulties in enforcing the law and to continued public unease , the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 was created leading to the first modern police force .

= Æthelwold ætheling =

Æthelwold or Æthelwald (died 902 or 903) was the younger of two known sons of Æthelred I , King of Wessex from 865 to 871 . Because Æthelwold ætheling and his brother were still infants when their father the king died while fighting a Danish Viking invasion , the throne passed to the king 's younger brother (and Æthelwold 's uncle) Alfred the Great , who carried on the war against the Vikings and won a crucial victory at the Battle of Edington in 878 .

After Alfred 's death in 899 , Æthelwold disputed the throne with Alfred 's son , Edward the Elder . As senior ætheling (prince of the royal dynasty eligible for kingship) , Æthelwold had a strong claim to the throne . He attempted to raise an army to support his claim , but was unable to get sufficient support to meet Edward in battle and fled to Viking @-@ controlled Northumbria , where he was accepted as king . In 901 or 902 he sailed with a fleet to Essex , where he was also accepted as king .

The following year Æthelwold persuaded the East Anglian Danes to attack Edward 's territory in

Wessex and Mercia . Edward retaliated with a raid on East Anglia , and when he withdrew the men of Kent lingered and met the East Anglian Danes at the Battle of the Holme . The Danes were victorious but suffered heavy losses , including the death of Æthelwold , which ended the challenge to Edward 's rule .

= = Background = =

In the eighth century , Mercia was the most powerful kingdom in southern England , but in the early ninth Wessex became dominant . In the 820s King Egbert of Wessex conquered south @-@ east England (Kent , Surrey , Sussex and Essex) . His reign saw the beginning of Viking attacks , but Egbert and his son Æthelwulf , who succeeded in 839 , were able to resist them . Æthelwulf died in 858 , and he was followed by four sons in succession . King Æthelbald died in 860 , and King Æthelberht in 865 ; Æthelwold 's father , Æthelred , then succeeded to the throne . In the same year the Viking Great Heathen Army invaded England . Within five years they had conquered Northumbria and East Anglia , and forced Mercia to buy them off . In late 870 the Vikings invaded Wessex , and in early 871 they fought armies under Æthelred and Alfred in four battles in quick succession , the last two of which Wessex lost . Æthelred died shortly after Easter that year , leaving young sons . Primogeniture was not established in this period , and it was believed that kings should be adults , so he was succeeded by his younger brother Alfred .

By 878 the Vikings had seized eastern Mercia and nearly conquered Wessex , and Alfred was reduced to being a fugitive in the Somerset marshes , but he fought back and won the Battle of Edington . This was followed by a period of peace , and in the late 880s Alfred concluded a treaty with Guthrum , king of the East Anglian Vikings , setting the boundary between Wessex and English Mercia on the one hand , and the Danelaw on the other . A further Viking assault in the mid 890s was unsuccessful .

= = Early life = =

Very little is known of Æthelwold 's immediate family . Æthelred was born in about 848 and died in 871 , so his sons must have been young children when he died . Æthelred 's wife was probably the Wulfthryth who witnessed a charter in 868 . Æthelwold and his older brother Æthelhelm are first recorded in King Alfred 's will in the 880s . Æthelhelm is not heard of again , and he probably died soon afterwards . The only other record of Æthelwold before Alfred 's death is as a witness to a charter that probably dates to the 890s .

After King Æthelred 's death in 871 , his sons ' supporters complained about Alfred keeping property that should have belonged to his nephews . Alfred justified his conduct in a preamble to his will , which probably dates to the 880s , One of Alfred 's biographers , Richard Abels , describes the text as " rather tendentious " , and another , Alfred Smyth , as " ambiguous and vague ? and deliberately so " . Patrick Wormald views the will as " one of the seminal documents of pre @-@ Conquest history , and like many such not easily understood . "

The dispute concerned property bequeathed in the will of Alfred 's father , Æthelwulf . This does not survive , but Alfred described some of its provisions in a preamble to his own will . Æthelwulf had left property jointly to three of his four surviving sons , Æthelbald , Æthelred and Alfred , stipulating that all of it was to be inherited by the brother who lived the longest . When Æthelred inherited the throne in 865 , Alfred asked for the property to be divided between them . Æthelred refused , offering instead to leave it to Alfred on his death , together with any further property he acquired , and Alfred agreed . The Viking invasion of Wessex , and the need to provide for their children , led to a revision of the terms . Under an agreement in late 870 or early 871 , the survivor was still to keep the property bequeathed jointly to the three brothers , but he would give his brother 's children any lands which he had received separately from his father , and any he had acquired later .

In the preamble to his will , Alfred stated :

When we now heard many disputes about the inheritance , I brought King Æthelwulf 's will to our assembly at Langandene , and it was read before all the councillors of the West Saxons . When it

had been read , I urged them all for love of me ? and gave them my pledge that I would never bear a grudge against any one of them because they declared what was right ? that none of them would hesitate , either for love or fear of me , to expound the common law , lest any man should say that I had treated my young kinsmen wrongfully , the older or the younger . And then they all pronounced what was right , and said that they could not conceive any juster title , nor could they find one in the will . " Now everything has come into your possession , and you may bequeath it or give it into the hand of kinsman or stranger , whichever you prefer . "

Historians have taken differing views of Æthelwulf 's will . The editors of Alfred 's will , Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge , suggest that Æthelwulf 's other surviving son , Æthelberht , was excluded from the arrangement because he was provided for separately in the eastern kingdom (the recently conquered south @-@ east England) , where he acted as king in 855 and 856 ; it was probably intended that he should establish a separate dynasty there . The bequest to the three brothers would only have covered part of Æthelwulf 's property . The transmission of folkland was governed by customary law , and another portion was reserved for the holder of the office of king . Keynes and Lapidge argue that Æthelwulf clearly intended that his personal property should be preserved intact , and it seems to have been considered desirable that this should be held by the reigning king , so it is likely that he intended the kingship of western Wessex to be inherited by the survivor of the three brothers . This plan was abandoned when Æthelbald died in 860 and the kingdom was reunited under Æthelberht , and Æthelred 's confirmation of the arrangement when he acceded in 865 recognised Alfred as heir apparent .

Ann Williams comments : " Æthelred virtually disinherits his children in favour of Alfred 's in the event of his own previous death , at least in respect of the lion 's share of the inheritance and therefore the kingship . This is in fact exactly what happened , and Æthelred 's sons were not pleased at the outcome . " In his *Life of Alfred* , written in 893 , Asser states three times that Alfred was Æthelred 's *secundarius* (heir apparent) , an emphasis that in Ryan Lavelle 's view " reflects sensitivity on the subject of Alfred 's succession " .

Smyth argues , however , that it is unlikely that Æthelwulf intended to divide his kingdom , or that the kingship of Wessex should be inherited by the surviving brother ; the joint property was probably provision for his youngest sons at a time when they appeared very unlikely to succeed to the kingship , with Æthelbald included as a residual beneficiary in case both of them died young . D. P. Kirby argues that it cannot be assumed that the disputed lands represented the greater part of the royal estates ; he believes that Æthelwulf did intend to divide his kingdom , but also that it is unlikely he intended the surviving son to inherit the kingship : " Such an arrangement would have led to fratricidal strife . With three older brothers , Alfred 's chances of reaching adulthood would , one feels , have been minimal . "

In his own will , Alfred left the bulk of his property to Edward , while Æthelhelm was left eight estates , and Æthelwold only three (at Godalming and Guildford in Surrey , and Steyning in Sussex) , all in the less important eastern part of the kingdom . The largest of these was Steyning , Æthelwulf 's original burial place ; in Patrick Wormald 's view , Alfred may have moved the body to Winchester because he was required to give the estate to Æthelwold under his agreement with Æthelred , and he did not want his nephew to have the prestige of owning his grandfather 's grave . Keynes and Lapidge comment : " If only to judge from the relatively small number of estates he received , Æthelwold in particular would have had cause to be aggrieved by this allocation of property , and his resentment is shown by his rebellion against Edward soon after Alfred 's death . " Smyth argues that the meeting of the king 's council , the *witan* , was bound to support him :

Alfred , by [c.885] in full control of Wessex and at the height of his power , was clearly bent on trying to settle the kingship on his son , Edward , to the exclusion of his brother Æthelred 's heirs . That kingship was never in Alfred 's gift , but clearly the greater amount of landed wealth he could entail on Edward , the stronger he made that son 's position in any future contest for the kingship . We must , therefore , treat anything he tells us of the terms of the disputed inheritance of his rival nephews with the utmost caution , if not scepticism . The support which Alfred tells us he received from the *witan* counts for little . As king , Alfred controlled immense patronage in relation to his thegns , who stood to benefit from backing their lord against claims which his nephews made on his

property . It is significant that the case ever came before the witan at all . That it did , suggests that Æthelhelm and Æthelwold were by then young men who commanded some independent support and sympathy in Wessex .

In Abels ' view , Æthelred 's sons attempted to shame Alfred into handing over the lands they claimed so as to strengthen their position in the inevitable battle that would break out over the succession when Alfred died , and the Langandene assembly was Alfred 's riposte .

Alfred also assisted his own son by promoting men who could be relied on to support him , and by giving him opportunities for command in battle once he was old enough . In the view of Barbara Yorke , the compilation of the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle , which magnified Alfred 's achievements , may have been partly intended to strengthen the case for the succession of his own descendants . However , Yorke also argues that Æthelwold 's position was not fatally undermined by Alfred 's will . His mother had witnessed a charter as regina , whereas Alfred followed West Saxon tradition in refusing to have his wife consecrated as queen , and Æthelwold 's status as the son of a queen may have given him an advantage over Edward . Æthelwold was still the senior ætheling , and the only surviving charter he witnessed shows both him and Edward as filius regis (son of a king) , but lists Æthelwold above Edward , implying that he ranked above him .

= = Æthelwold 's Revolt = =

After Alfred 's death in 899 , Æthelwold made a bid for the throne . Janet Nelson comments that " in the eyes of many Englishmen as well as Scandinavians this ætheling had claims stronger than Edward 's own . " According to the ' A ' version of the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle , Æthelwold abducted a nun from her convent without the permission of King Edward and against the command of the bishop . Her identity is not known , but it must have been intended to strengthen his claim , and in the view of the historian Pauline Stafford , the Chronicle 's account is biased in favour of Edward and may have been intended to delegitimise a politically important marriage . Æthelwold took her to the royal manors of Twynham (now Christchurch) and then Wimborne Minster , symbolically important as his father 's burial place , and declared that " he would live or die there " . Lavelle sees Wimborne as strategically significant , close to Roman roads to Dorchester and Salisbury , and at a crossing point of the rivers Allen and Stour ; it was the most southern point for control of access to western Wessex and Æthelwold may have intended a division of the kingdom .

However , when Edward 's army approached and camped at Badbury Rings , an Iron Age hill fort four miles west of Wimborne , Æthelwold was unable to gain sufficient support to meet them in battle . Leaving behind his consort , he fled to the Danes of Northumbria , who accepted him as king . Northumbrian coins were issued at this time in the name of a king called ' Alwaldus ' , who is thought to have been Æthelwold . Norse sagas record traditions of a Danish king Knútr , who briefly ruled Northumbria around 900 . He is said to have been at first repulsed by an English king called Adalbrigt north of Cleveland , but then to have defeated him at Scarborough . In 1987 , Smyth suggested that Adalbrigt may have been Æthelwold , but in 1995 Smyth put forward the alternative idea that the Northumbrian Danes may have accepted Æthelwold 's claim to be king of the West Saxons rather than taking him as their own king .

Æthelwold 's reign in Northumbria was short , in David Rollason 's view because Æthelwold saw it only as a base for gaining power in Wessex . In 901 or 902 he sailed with a fleet to Essex , where Rollason states that he was accepted as king by the local Vikings . However , David Dumville points out that in the next year Æthelwold persuaded the Danes in East Anglia to wage war against Edward , and Dumville argues that it is unlikely that there was an unknown separate Viking army in Essex . In his view Æthelwold was aiming to secure recognition in part of the kingdom of Wessex in order to strengthen his claim to the throne , and he succeeded in gaining the submission of the English rulers of Essex .

The East Anglian Danes joined Æthelwold in a raid on Mercia , reaching as far as the fortified burh at Cricklade on the border with Wessex . He then crossed the Thames into Wessex itself to raid Braydon . Edward retaliated by ravaging Danish East Anglia , but he withdrew without engaging Æthelwold in battle . The men of Kent lingered , although according to the Anglo @-@ Saxon

Chronicle Edward sent seven messengers to recall them . The Danes caught up with the men of Kent to fight the Battle of the Holme . Its location is unknown but may be Holme in Cambridgeshire . The Danes were victorious but suffered heavy losses . Æthelwold was among the leaders on the Danish side who were killed , together with Eohric , the Viking King of East Anglia , two holds (Danish noblemen) , Ysopa and Osetel , and Beorhtsige , son of the ætheling Beornoth , who was probably a kinsmen of the former king of Mercia , Burgred . Kentish losses included their two ealdormen , Sigewulf and Sigehelm , and an Abbot Cenwulf .

The achievement of the Kentish contingent put Edward 's failure to engage the Danes with his whole army in a poor light . In Cyril Hart 's view : " Undoubtedly there were recriminations , which appear to have continued to threaten Edward 's authority for some considerable period , especially in Kent ; witness the Wessex chronicler 's anxiety to find excuses for Edward 's failure to support the Kentish contingent . " Edward was later to marry Sigehelm 's daughter , Eadgifu , and Hart thinks that this may have been designed to placate his Kentish subjects .

The various texts of the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle give different versions of the revolt . Hart states : " The oldest and more authoritative is preserved in the ' B ' text of the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle (supported in its essentials by the Latin East Anglian Chronicle) ; the official version in the ' A ' text is clearly a late revision , intended to justify King Edward 's position and to reinforce his authority . " ' B ' describes Æthelwold as an ætheling , indicating the legitimacy of his claim for the kingship , a description omitted in ' A ' . ' A ' says that he took possession of Wimborne and Tynham without the permission of the king and his councillors , ' B ' against their will . ' B ' says that Æthelwold " rode away by night " from Wimborne ; ' A ' reads " stole away " . According to ' B ' , the Northumbrian Danes accepted Æthelwold as their king , and gave allegiance to him , but this is omitted in ' A ' . However , none of the texts describe him as an ætheling after his flight to Northumbria , showing that his actions were no longer thought to have a claim to legitimacy . In the view of Scott Thompson Smith , the dispute was over property as well as kingship , and the Chronicle presents Edward as the successful protector of family property against outside interests .

= = Legacy = =

According to the historian Martin Ryan :

What is striking about Æthelwold 's " rebellion " is the level and range of support he was able to draw on : he could call on allies from Wessex , Northumbria , East Anglia and , probably , Mercia and Essex . For a time Æthelwold had a claim to be the most powerful ruler in England . Edward 's apparent reluctance to engage him in battle may have been well founded .

In the view of James Campbell , the bias in the sources has led historians to see Æthelwold 's rebellion as a " somewhat odd episode " , but he had a justifiable claim to the kingship , and he was nearly successful ; if he had not been killed at the Holme , he might have united England with much less warfare than ultimately proved to be necessary . " Had it not been for the chances of battle and war Æthelwold might very well have been regarded as one of the greatest figures in our island 's story " . Lavelle argues that " it is important to acknowledge the audacity of Æthelwold 's actions " and that he " well deserves to be ranked amongst the ' Nearly Men ' of early Medieval Europe " . The twelfth @-@ century Annals of St Neots called him " king of the pagans " .

It is not known whether he had any descendants , but the chronicler Æthelweard was a great @-@ great @-@ grandson of King Æthelred , and this may have been through Æthelwold . Shashi Jayakumar suggests the rivalry between King Eadwig and his younger brother Edgar in the 950s dates back to the conflict which resulted in the Battle of the Holme . Eadwig 's wife , Ælfgifu , was probably Æthelweard 's sister , and one of Eadwig 's supporters , Byrhtnoth , may have been descended from the Mercian royal family through the ætheling Beorhtnoth , whose son Byrhtsige died fighting on Æthelwold 's side at the Holme . Opponents of Eadwig included his grandmother , Eadgifu , and Eadwig confiscated her property . In Jayakumar 's view : " The emergence of Ælfgifu , descendant of the ætheling Æthelwold , did not just threaten Edgar 's position , it represented a revanche to a line and lineage with royal claims of its own ... The ancestors of Byrhtnoth and Æthelweard had in all likelihood fought together with Æthelwold on the Danish side at the Battle of

the Holme , the opposite side to that which Eadgifu 's father Sigehelm had fought for . " The marriage between Eadwig and Ælfifu was dissolved on the grounds of consanguinity , and Edgar succeeded to the throne when Eadwig died without leaving children . In the view of Nick Higham , Æthelweard shows a " lack of empathy " for Edward in his chronicle , which Higham attributes to Edward 's victory over Æthelweard 's ancestor . Æthelweard was Ealdorman of the Western Provinces in the late tenth century , showing that Æthelred 's descendants held on to land and power in the century after his death . Æthelweard 's grandson , Æthelnoth , was an eleventh @-@ century Archbishop of Canterbury .