

= Coenred of Mercia =

Coenred (also spelled Cenred or C?nred fl . 675 ? 709) was king of Mercia from 704 to 709 . Mercia was an Anglo @-@ Saxon kingdom in the English Midlands . He was a son of the Mercian king Wulfhere , whose brother Æthelred succeeded to the throne in 675 on Wulfhere 's death . In 704 , Æthelred abdicated in favour of Coenred to become a monk .

Coenred 's reign is poorly documented , but a contemporary source records that he faced attacks from the Welsh . Coenred is not known to have married or had children , although later chronicles describe him as an ancestor of Wigstan , a 9th @-@ century Mercian king . In 709 , Coenred abdicated and went on pilgrimage to Rome , where he remained as a monk until his death . In the view of his contemporary , Bede , Coenred " who had ruled the kingdom of Mercia for some time and very nobly , with still greater nobility renounced the throne of his kingdom " . Æthelred 's son Ceolred succeeded Coenred as king of Mercia .

= = Mercia in the 7th century = =

By the 7th century , England was almost entirely divided into kingdoms ruled by the Anglo @-@ Saxons , who had come to Britain two hundred years earlier . The kingdom of Mercia occupied what is now the English Midlands . Neighbouring kingdoms included Northumbria to the north , East Anglia to the east , and Wessex , the kingdom of the West Saxons , to the south . Essex , the kingdom of the East Saxons , included London and lay between East Anglia and the kingdom of Kent . The earliest Mercian king for whom there is definite historical information is Penda of Mercia , Coenred 's paternal grandfather .

The main source for this period is Bede 's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (Ecclesiastical History of the English People) , completed in about 731 . Despite its focus on the history of the church , this work provides valuable information about the early Anglo @-@ Saxon kingdoms . Charters , which recorded royal grants of land to individuals and to religious houses , provide further information on Coenred 's reign , as does the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle , compiled in Wessex at the end of the 9th century . The Chronicle 's anonymous scribe appears to have incorporated much information recorded in earlier periods . Coenred is also mentioned in two 8th @-@ century hagiographies , those of Saint Wilfrid and Saint Guthlac .

= = Ancestry and reign = =

In 658 , Coenred 's father Wulfhere came to the throne of Mercia as the result of a coup , ending a three @-@ year period of Northumbrian control . Wulfhere was succeeded on his death (in 675) by his brother Æthelred , Coenred 's uncle , possibly because Coenred was too young to rule . Coenred 's mother Ermenilda became a nun sometime after Wulfhere 's death . Æthelred 's decisive victory over the Northumbrians at the Battle of the Trent in 679 , followed by the Picts ' destruction of the Northumbrian army at the Battle of Dun Nechtain in 685 , reduced Northumbrian power and influence . There is evidence of Mercian activity in the south @-@ east as well . Æthelred invaded Kent in 676 , and charters survive in which he confirmed land grants made by Swæfheard and Oswine , kings of west and east Kent . Another charter of Æthelred 's , dated between 693 and 704 , grants land to Waldhere , the bishop of London . However , Æthelred does not appear to have sought expansion further south . The growing strength of the West Saxons under Cædwalla and Ine would have limited Mercian opportunities in that direction .

The Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle records that in 702 Coenred succeeded to the kingdom of the Southumbrians and that in 704 he became king of Mercia . As the " Southumbrians " were those who lived south of the Humber , Mercia 's northern boundary , the two annals have proved difficult to interpret : Coenred and Æthelred may have ruled jointly for two years before Æthelred abdicated , or the chroniclers may have recorded the same event twice , once from a source that was two years in error . According to the 8th @-@ century life of St Guthlac , Æthelred appointed Coenred as his heir despite having at least one son of his own , Ceolred . Æthelred appears to have retained influence

during his nephew 's reign : the Life of St Wilfrid relates how he summoned Coenred and made him swear to support Wilfrid in his conflict with the church hierarchy .

Coenred 's sparsely documented reign is mentioned in the Life of Guthlac . The author , Felix , reports conflicts with the Britons : " in the days of Coenred King of the Mercians , [...] the Britons the implacable enemies of the Saxon race , were troubling the English with their attacks , their pillaging , and their devastations of the people [...] " To counter such attacks , Æthelbald , who came to the throne in 716 , was once thought to have built Wat 's Dyke , an earthwork barrier in northern Wales ; but this now seems unlikely , since an excavation of the Dyke in 1997 found charcoal from a hearth which was radiocarbon @-@ dated to some time between 411 and 561 .

Some surviving charters from Coenred 's reign reveal him to have been the overlord of the East Saxon rulers . Offa , an East Saxon king , made a grant in the territory of the Hwicce (to which he may have been connected by a marriage of his father , Sigeheard) which was later confirmed by Coenred . In the charter , Coenred refers to Offa as his underking . Coenred and his successor also confirmed grants to Waldhere , the Bishop of London , evidence that London was firmly under Mercian overlordship . Later Mercian kings treated London as their direct possession , rather than as a province ruled by an underking , but Coenred did not go that far . A grant of land in Herefordshire to a nun named Feleburg has survived , as have forged charters in Coenred 's name granting privileges to St Paul 's Cathedral , and to the Abbey of Evesham .

Mercia 's influence in Kent was limited both before and during Coenred 's reign . In a surviving letter (written in 704 or 705) , Waldhere , Bishop of London , tells Berhtwald , Archbishop of Canterbury , that Coenred had invited him to a council to be held " about the reconciliation of Ælfthryth " . Waldhere refused the invitation as he did not know Berhtwald 's opinion on the matter , which was evidently important , although no other reference to it has survived . The letter describes a council to be held at Brentford to mediate between the kings of the East and West Saxons . In the view of the historian Frank Stenton , the letter illuminates the " confused relations of the southern English at a moment when they had no common overlord " . The reduced prestige of both Coenred and his successor , Ceolred , may have stirred unrest among the Mercian nobility : Æthelbald was in exile during Ceolred 's reign , and the survival of a hostile account of Ceolred may indicate a more general dissatisfaction with the ruling line .

= = Abdication and succession = =

Coenred appears to have been a very religious king . Bede tells a story of a companion of Coenred 's whose sins led him to damnation despite Coenred 's pleas that he should repent and reform . In 709 Coenred abdicated in favour of his cousin Ceolred , son of Æthelred , in order to become a monk in Rome ; Bede 's story is cited by the medieval chronicler William of Malmesbury as the reason for Coenred 's decision , though this is probably guesswork . Coenred was accompanied by the East Saxon king Offa on his journey to Rome , and was made a monk there by Pope Constantine . The Liber Pontificalis , an early record of the lives of Popes , records the arrival of their party : " in his time , two kings of the Saxons came with many others to pray to the apostles ; just as they were hoping , their lives quickly came to an end . " A later source , the 11th @-@ century Vita Ecgwini , claims that Ecgwine accompanied Coenred and Offa to Rome , but historians have treated this with scepticism .

Historians have generally accepted Bede 's report of Coenred 's and Offa 's abdications , but Barbara Yorke has suggested that they may not have relinquished their thrones voluntarily . There are instances of kings being forcibly removed and placed in holy orders to make them ineligible for kingship ; one such was King Osred II of Northumbria , who was forced into a monastery . On the other hand , if Coenred went willingly , as Bede relates , then the apparently friendly relationship between Offa and Coenred , his overlord , makes it clear that the relationship between an overlord and his underking was not hostile in every case .

Coenred was tonsured in Rome , whence he was accompanied by Offa , son of Sighere , king of the East Saxons , and became a monk " at the threshold of the apostles " as Bede had it ; he stayed in Rome until his death , the date of which is unknown . He is not recorded as having a wife or

children . The Evesham Chronicle kept at Evesham Abbey , however , claim that he was an ancestor of Wigstan . They do not say whether this was through Wigstan 's father , Wigmund , son of Wiglaf of Mercia , or through his mother , Ælfflæd , daughter of Ceolwulf I of Mercia .