

= Edward the Martyr =

Edward the Martyr (Old English : Eadweard ; c . 962 ? 18 March 978) was King of England from 975 until he was murdered in 978 . Edward was the eldest son of King Edgar the Peaceful but was not his father 's acknowledged heir . On Edgar 's death , the leadership of England was contested , with some supporting Edward 's claim to be king and others supporting his much younger half @-@ brother Æthelred the Unready , recognized as a legitimate son of Edgar . Edward was chosen as king and was crowned by his main clerical supporters , the archbishops Dunstan and Oswald of Worcester .

The great nobles of the kingdom , ealdormen Ælfhere and Æthelwine , quarrelled , and civil war almost broke out . In the so @-@ called anti @-@ monastic reaction , the nobles took advantage of Edward 's weakness to dispossess the Benedictine reformed monasteries of lands and other properties that King Edgar had granted to them .

Edward 's short reign was brought to an end by his murder at Corfe Castle in 978 in circumstances that are not altogether clear . His body was reburied with great ceremony at Shaftesbury Abbey early in 979 . In 1001 Edward 's remains were moved to a more prominent place in the abbey , probably with the blessing of his half @-@ brother King Æthelred . Edward was already reckoned a saint by this time .

A number of lives of Edward were written in the centuries following his death in which he was portrayed as a martyr , generally seen as a victim of the Queen Dowager Ælfthryth , mother of Æthelred . He is today recognized as a saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church , the Roman Catholic Church , and the Anglican Communion .

= = Ætheling (princes of succession) = =

Edward 's date of birth is unknown , but he was the eldest of Edgar 's three children . He was likely in his teens when he succeeded his father , who died at age 32 in 975 . Edward was known to be King Edgar 's son , but he was not the son of Queen Ælfthryth , the third wife of Edgar . This much and no more is known from contemporary charters .

Later sources of questionable reliability address the identity of Edward 's mother . The earliest such source is a life of Dunstan by Osbern of Canterbury , probably written in the 1080s . Osbern writes that Edward 's mother was a nun at Wilton Abbey whom the king seduced . When Eadmer wrote a life of Dunstan some decades later , he included an account of Edward 's parentage obtained from Nicholas of Worcester . This denied that Edward was the son of a liaison between Edgar and a nun , presenting him as the son of Æthelflæd , daughter of Ordmær , " ealdorman of the East Anglians " , whom Edgar had married in the years when he ruled Mercia (between 957 and Eadwig 's death in 959) . Additional accounts are offered by Goscelin in his life of Edgar 's daughter Saint Edith of Wilton and in the histories of John of Worcester and William of Malmesbury . Together these various accounts suggest that Edward 's mother was probably a noblewoman named Æthelflæd , surnamed Candida or Eneda ? " the White " or " White Duck " .

A charter of 966 describes Ælfthryth , whom Edgar had married in 964 , as the king 's " lawful wife " , and their eldest son Edmund as the legitimate son of the king . Edward is noted as the king 's son . Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester was a supporter of Ælfthryth and Æthelred , but Dunstan , the Archbishop of Canterbury appears to have supported Edward , and a genealogy created at his Glastonbury Abbey circa 969 gives Edward precedence over Edmund and Æthelred . Ælfthryth was the widow of Æthelwald , Ealdorman of East Anglia and perhaps Edgar 's third wife . Cyril Hart argues that the contradictions regarding the identity of Edward 's mother , and the fact that Edmund appears to have been regarded as the legitimate heir until his death in 971 , suggest that Edward was probably illegitimate . However , Barbara Yorke thinks that Æthelflæd was Edgar 's wife , but Ælfthryth was a consecrated queen when she gave birth to her sons , who were therefore considered more " legitimate " than Edward . Æthelwold denied that Edward was legitimate , but Yorke considers this " opportunist special pleading " .

Edmund 's full brother Æthelred may have inherited his position as heir . On a charter to the New

Minster at Winchester , the names of Ælfthryth and her son Æthelred appear ahead of Edward 's name . When Edgar died on 8 July 975 , Æthelred was probably nine and Edward only a few years older .

= = Disputed succession = =

Edgar had been a strong ruler who had forced monastic reforms on a probably unwilling church and nobility , aided by the leading clerics of the day , Dunstan , Archbishop of Canterbury ; Oswald of Worcester , Archbishop of York ; and Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester . By endowing the reformed Benedictine monasteries with the lands required for their support , he had dispossessed many lesser nobles , and had rewritten leases and loans of land to the benefit of the monasteries . Secular clergy , many of whom would have been members of the nobility , had been expelled from the new monasteries . While Edgar lived , he strongly supported the reformers , but following his death , the discontents which these changes had provoked came into the open .

The leading figures had all been supporters of the reform , but they were no longer united . Relations between Archbishop Dunstan and Bishop Æthelwold may have been strained . Archbishop Oswald was at odds with Ealdorman Ælfhere , Ealdorman of Mercia , while Ælfhere and his kin were rivals for power with the affinity of Æthelwine , Ealdorman of East Anglia . Dunstan was said to have questioned Edgar 's marriage to Queen Dowager Ælfthryth and the legitimacy of their son Æthelred .

These leaders were divided as to whether Edward or Æthelred should succeed Edgar . Neither law nor precedent offered much guidance . The choice between the sons of Edward the Elder had divided his kingdom , and Edgar 's elder brother Eadwig had been forced to give over a large part of the kingdom to Edgar . The Queen Dowager certainly supported the claims of her son Æthelred , aided by Bishop Æthelwold ; and Dunstan supported Edward , aided by his fellow archbishop Oswald . It is likely that Ealdorman Ælfhere and his allies supported Æthelred and that Æthelwine and his allies supported Edward , although some historians suggest the opposite .

Later sources suggest that perceptions of legitimacy played a part in the arguments , as did the relative age of the two candidates . In time , Edward was anointed by Archbishops Dunstan and Oswald at Kingston upon Thames , most likely in 975 . There is evidence that the settlement involved a degree of compromise . Æthelred appears to have been given lands which normally belonged to the king 's sons , some of which had been granted by Edgar to Abingdon Abbey and which were forcibly repossessed for Æthelred by the leading nobles .

= = Edward 's reign = =

After recording Edward 's succession , the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle reports that a comet appeared , and that famine and " manifold disturbances " followed . The " manifold disturbances " , sometimes called the anti @-@ monastic reaction , appear to have started soon after Edgar 's death . During this time , the experienced Ealdorman Oslac of Northumbria , effective ruler of much of northern England , was exiled due to unknown circumstances . Oslac was followed as ealdorman by Thored , either Oslac 's son of that name or Thored Gunnar 's son mentioned by the Chronicle in 966 .

Edward , or rather those who were wielding power on his behalf , also appointed a number of new ealdormen to positions in Wessex . Little is known of two of these men , and it is difficult to determine which faction , if any , they belonged to . Edwin , probably ruling in Sussex , and perhaps also parts of Kent and Surrey , was buried at Abingdon , an abbey patronised by Ælfhere . Æthelmær , who oversaw Hampshire , held lands in Rutland , perhaps suggesting links to Æthelwine .

The third ealdorman , Æthelweard , today best known for his Latin history , ruled in the west . Æthelweard was a descendant of King Æthelred of Wessex and probably the brother of King Eadwig 's wife . He appears to have been a supporter of Edward rather than of either faction .

In some places , the secular clergy who had been driven from the monasteries returned , driving the

regular clergy out in their turn . Bishop Æthelwold had been the main enemy of the seculars , and Archbishop Dunstan appears to have done little to aid his fellow reformer at this time . More generally , the magnates took the opportunity to undo many of Edgar 's grants to monasteries and to force the abbots to rewrite leases and loans to favour the local nobility . Ealdorman Ælfhere was the leader in this regard , attacking Oswald 's network of monasteries across Mercia . Ælfhere 's rival Æthelwine , while a staunch protector of his family monastery of Ramsey Abbey , treated Ely Abbey and other monasteries harshly . At some point during these disorders , Ælfhere and Æthelwine appear to have come close to open warfare . This may well have been related to Ælfhere 's ambitions in East Anglia and to attacks upon Ramsey Abbey . Æthelwine , supported by his kinsman Ealdorman Byrhtnoth of Essex and others unspecified , mustered an army and caused Ælfhere to back down .

Very few charters survive from Edward 's reign , perhaps as few as three , leaving Edward 's brief reign in obscurity . By contrast , numerous charters survived from the reigns of his father Edgar and half @-@ brother Æthelred . All of the surviving Edward charters concern the royal heartland of Wessex ; two deal with Crediton where Edward 's former tutor Sideman was bishop . During Edgar 's reign , dies for coins were cut only at Winchester and distributed from there to other mints across the kingdom . Edward 's reign permitted dies to be cut locally at York and at Lincoln . The general impression is of a reduction or breakdown of royal authority in the midlands and north . The machinery of government continued to function , as councils and synods met as customary during Edward 's reign , at Kirtlington in Oxfordshire after Easter 977 , and again at Calne in Wiltshire the following year . During the meeting at Calne , some councillors were killed and others injured by the collapse of the floor of their room .

= = Death = =

The version of the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle containing the most detailed account records that Edward was murdered in the evening of 18 March 978 , while visiting Ælfthryth and Æthelred , probably at or near the mound on which the ruins of Corfe Castle now stand . It adds that he was buried at Wareham " without any royal honours " . The compiler of this version of the Chronicle , manuscript E , called the Peterborough Chronicle , says :

" No worse deed for the English race was done than this was , since they first sought out the land of Britain . Men murdered him , but God exalted him . In life he was an earthly king ; after death he is now a heavenly saint . His earthly relatives would not avenge him , but his Heavenly Father has much avenged him . "

Other recensions of the Chronicle report less detail , the oldest text stating only that he was killed , while versions from the 1040s say that he was martyred .

Of other early sources , the life of Oswald of Worcester , attributed to Byrhtferth of Ramsey , adds that Edward was killed by Æthelred 's advisers , who attacked him when he was dismounting . It agrees that he was buried without ceremony at Wareham . Archbishop Wulfstan II alludes to the killing of Edward in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* , written not later than 1016 . A recent study translates his words as follows :

" And a very great betrayal of a lord it is also in the world , that a man betray his lord to death , or drive him living from the land , and both have come to pass in this land : Edward was betrayed , and then killed , and after that burned ... "

Later sources , further removed from events , such as the late 11th @-@ century *Passio S. Eadwardi* and John of Worcester , claim that Ælfthryth organised the killing of Edward , while Henry of Huntingdon wrote that she killed Edward herself .

Modern historians have offered a variety of interpretations of Edward 's killing . Three main theories have been proposed . Firstly , that Edward was killed , as the life of Oswald claims , by nobles in Æthelred 's service , either as a result of a personal quarrel , or to place their master on the throne . The life of Oswald portrays Edward as an unstable young man who , according to Frank Stenton : " had offended many important persons by his intolerable violence of speech and behavior . Long after he had passed into veneration as a saint it was remembered that his outbursts of rage had

alarmed all who knew him , and especially the members of his own household . " This may be a trope of hagiography .

In the second version , Ælfthryth was implicated , either beforehand by plotting the killing , or afterwards in allowing the killers to go free and unpunished .

A third alternative , noting that Edward in 978 was very close to ruling on his own , proposes that Ealdorman Ælfhere was behind the killing so as to preserve his own influence and to prevent Edward taking revenge for Ælfhere 's actions earlier in the reign . John notes this and interprets Ælfhere 's part in Edward 's reburial as being a penance for the assassination .

= = Reburial and early cult = =

Edward 's body lay at Wareham for a year before being disinterred . Ælfhere initiated the reinterment , perhaps as a gesture of reconciliation . According to the life of Oswald , Edward 's body was found to be incorrupt when it was disinterred (which was taken as a miraculous sign) . The body was taken to the Shaftesbury Abbey , a nunnery with royal connections which had been endowed by King Alfred the Great and where Edward and Æthelred 's grandmother Ælfifu had spent her latter years .

Edward 's remains were reburied with lavish public ceremony . Later versions , such as the *Passio S. Eadwardi* , have more complicated accounts . It said that Edward 's body was concealed in a marsh , where it was revealed by miraculous events . The *Passio* dates the reburial to 18 February .

In 1001 , Edward 's relics (for he was considered a saint , although never canonized) were translated to a more prominent place within the nunnery at Shaftesbury . The ceremonies are said to have been led by the then @-@ Bishop of Sherborne , Wulfsig III , accompanied by a senior cleric whom the *Passio* calls *Elsinus* , sometimes identified with Ælfsig , the abbot of the New Minster , Winchester . King Æthelred , preoccupied with the threat of a Danish invasion , did not attend in person , but he issued a charter to the Shaftesbury nuns late in 1001 granting them lands at Bradford on Avon , which is thought to be related . A 13th @-@ century calendar of saints gives the date of this translation as 20 June .

The rise of Edward 's cult has been interpreted in various ways . It is sometimes portrayed as a popular movement , or as the product of a political attack on King Æthelred by former supporters of Edward . Alternatively , Æthelred has been seen as one of the key forces in the promotion of Edward 's cult and that of their sister Eadgifu (Edith of Wilton) . He was thought to make the charter in 1001 granting land to Shaftesbury at the elevation of Edward 's relics , and some accounts suggest that Æthelred legislated the observation of Edward 's feast days across England in a law code of 1008 . It is unclear whether this innovation , seemingly drafted by Archbishop Wulfstan II , dates from Æthelred 's reign . It may instead have been promulgated by King Cnut . David Rollason has drawn attention to the increased importance of the cults of other murdered royal saints in this period . Among these are the cults of King Ecgbert of Kent 's nephews , whose lives form part of the Mildrith Legend , and those of the Mercian Saints Kenelm and Wigstan .

= = Later cult = =

During the sixteenth century and English Reformation , King Henry VIII led the dissolution of the monasteries and many holy places were demolished . Edward 's remains were hidden so as to avoid desecration .

In 1931 , the relics were recovered by Wilson @-@ Claridge during an archaeological excavation ; their identity was confirmed by Dr. T. E. A. Stowell , an osteologist . In 1970 , examinations performed on the relics suggested that the young man had died in the same manner as Edward . Wilson @-@ Claridge wanted the relics to go to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia . His brother , however , wanted them to be returned to Shaftesbury Abbey . For decades , the relics were kept in a bank vault in Woking , Surrey because of the unresolved dispute about which of two churches should have them .

In time , the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia was victorious and placed the relics in a

church in Brookwood Cemetery in Woking , with the enshrinement ceremony occurring in September 1984 . The St Edward Brotherhood of monks was organized there as well . The church is now named St Edward the Martyr Orthodox Church , and it is under the jurisdiction of a traditionalist Greek Orthodox community .

In the Orthodox Church , St Edward is ranked as a Passion @-@ bearer , a type of saint who accepts death out of love for Christ . Edward was never officially canonized , but he is also regarded as a saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church , the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion . His feast day is celebrated on 18 March , the day of his murder . The Orthodox Church commemorates him a second time each year on 3 September and commemorates the translation of his relics into Orthodox possession on 13 February .