**Royal Women to the Age of Bede – Political and Religious Power**

Royal women demonstrated political importance in two main ways. Firstly, they were half of the many political marriages that took place. It is not always known how willingly they took part in these but it is quite likely that some with ambitions would have seen it as a route to gaining some power of their own through their husband and if they were fortunate, through their sons. Secondly, there were those women who actually managed to gain some measure of power either through their position as wife or mother of a king or in their own right. This can be demonstrated by references in the narrative or their position at court shown by their land ownership which can be glimpsed whenever a charter granting them land or their granting land to someone else has survived, or by their attestation to charters alongside important churchmen and laymen.

Religious importance was also demonstrated in more than one way. Royal women were instrumental in the spread of Christianity but also, occasionally, important in the resistance to it; they founded religious houses, they were abbesses, by their saintly lives they provided an example to others and when they died were sometimes venerated as saints so that their tombs became places of pilgrimage and thus a posthumous source of income for their houses.

In this chapter the royal women are examined by kingdom in turn: Kent, Northumbria, Sussex, East Anglia, Essex, Mercia and Wessex. Some women had associations with two kingdoms being the daughter of the king of one and married to the king of another. The decision as to where to place them has been somewhat arbitrary but is normally with the kingdom where they had the greatest impact.

**Sources**

In Chapter One it was noted that the charters were an important source for this period and fifty-seven women are named in them dating from the period up to c.750. Of these, twenty-nine are almost certainly royal and others may well have been. There are also a few unnamed women and groups of nuns. These are all listed in Table 1.

Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* referred to thirty-eight notable women (plus the Anglo-Saxon-born Queen Balthild of the Franks, the unnamed Frankish queen, mother of Bertha, and Abbess Fara of Brie who were not royal women in Anglo‑Saxon realms). Of these thirty-eight only six (four queens, one wife of a king's son and one nun) are unnamed. Of the other thirty-two, fourteen were queens; of the other eighteen, five were kings' daughters and of the remaining thirteen, seven were abbesses. Of these, six were not specifically stated to be royal but they could well have been. Two of the remaining six women were closely related to the one abbess who is said to be royal; namely Hild; one of the others was the daughter of one of the other abbesses; two were nuns under Hild and one a nun under Æthelburh at Barking.

**Figure 5 Summary of Status of Women in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History***

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Named | Unnamed | Definitely Royal | Possibly Royal |
| Queen | 14 | 4 | 18 | 0 |
| King’s Daughter | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| King’s Son’s Wife | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Abbess | 7 | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| Nun | 3 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| Other | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 32 | 6 | 27 | 11 |

Bede mentioned thirteen abbesses and seven nuns. Three of the abbesses were former queens (Eanflæd, Æthelthryth and Seaxburh), three others and one of the nuns were daughters of kings (Ælfflæd, Æthelburh daughter of Anna, Sæthryth and Earcongota) and two other abbesses and one of the other nuns were related to royalty (Æbbe, Hild and Hereswith). The other five abbesses were Æthelhild, abbess of a house near Bardney, Æthelburh and Hildilid of Barking, Heiu of Hartlepool and Heriburg of Watton. One of the other nuns was Coenburg daughter of Heriburg and the others were Begu and Prioress Frigyth of Whitby and Torhtgyth and an unnamed one of Barking. Some or all of these may have been of royal blood but Bede did not say one way or the other. It is quite possible, for example, that the three Hs (Hildilid, Heiu and Heriburg) were related to Hild and Hereswith, the daughters of Hereric.

Overall, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* refers to fifty women of importance who are relevant to a study of Anglo-Saxon royalty (not including Matilda, queen of William I, for example) of whom only ten were mentioned by Bede. Of the fifty, twenty-nine were queens although three of them were not classified as such by the Chroniclers, and two others were unnamed. Three of these twenty-nine were also abbesses but only one is recorded as both queen and abbess in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: one of the others is recorded only as a queen and the other only as an abbess. There are six other abbesses of whom two are unnamed.

The ten women in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* who were also in Bede are (in chronological order) Æthelbert of Kent's sister Ricula, mother of Sæbert of the East Saxons (under 604); Æthelbert's widow who married his son Eadbald (616) which the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says was the heathen custom; Eanflæd, daughter of Edwin of Northumbria, for her baptism after her father's attempted assassination by Cwichelm of Wessex's agent (626); Edwin's widow, Æthelburh, fleeing to Kent after her husband's death at the hands of Cædwalla and Penda (633); Seaxburh, wife of Earconberht of Kent and daughter of Anna of East Anglia (639); her daughter, Earcongota, described as "a holy virgin and a remarkable person"; Æthelthryth, who founded a monastery at Ely (673) and died (679) and was buried there (963 ‑ refounding by Bishop Æthelwold for monks); Cyneburh, daughter of Penda of Mercia who married Alchfrith of Deira according to Bede although this fact was ignored by the Chroniclers; Osthryth who witnessed a charter of Æthelred of Mercia (her husband) of a gift to Medeshamstede (675) and was slain by the Southumbrians (Mercians) (697); and finally Hild, abbess of Whitby, when she "passed away" (680). Neither Æthelthryth nor Hild is said to have royal connections and they are only mentioned because of their religious importance. Æthelburh, Seaxburh and Earcongota were mentioned in E[[1]](#footnote-1) and not Ā. E was written at Peterborough[[2]](#footnote-2) in the twelfth century and the scribe may have had access to local East Anglian records which were included in the standard text. Osthryth's death was only mentioned in the Ā transcript where the mention of her being Ecgfrith's sister suggests it came either from Bede or a Northern Annal which is now lost.

The *Historia Brittonum* mentions one Kentish woman and four Northumbrian, two of the latter and the former not in Bede or the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The *Liber Vitae*[[3]](#footnote-3) has 198 women in the ninth-century list and thirty-four of these are from this period and identifiable with some certainty. The women in the *Liber Vitae* might be expected to be exclusively Northumbrian but just as the Northumbrian Bedecovered other kingdoms it is likely the *Liber Vitae* covered more than just Northumbria, particularly those kingdoms that had strong links. There are, therefore, women from several other royal families who were important enough to be included. The *Liber Vitae* has three very important things to tell about royal women in Anglo‑Saxon England. Firstly, the large number of queens and abbesses who had enough personal wealth to become benefactresses of important churches. Whether they made their benefactions through gifts, land grants or in their wills is not known but they must have been quite substantial in total. Indeed, the list gives the names of some very specific figures in early Northumbria who otherwise would be only known by passing references in the *Anglo‑Saxon Chronicle* and other histories. This record highlights at least one act of importance on the part of each of them or on their behalf. Secondly, the *Liber Vitae* confirms the fact that many queens after they were widowed became abbesses. Not only can some of them be identified specifically but the fact that the compiler found it impossible (or impractical) to separate them out (in contrast to the kings and abbots) suggests it was a common practice and suggests an abbess had a very high status equal to a queen if not higher. As Bede said in his *Life of St Cuthbert[[4]](#footnote-4)* on Ælfflæd becoming an abbess, this meant "adding to her royal rank the yet more noble adornment of a high degree of holiness." Thirdly, by placing the queens and abbesses in their own list in second place after the kings/dukes, before all the ecclesiastics (with the possible exception of the bishops but then if they were in their own list this would be seen as separate rather than more important than the kings or queens) shows they were seen as of very high status. Compared to the *Salzburg Liber*[[5]](#footnote-5) where the queens were listed with their husbands, as were the post-Conquest queens and noblewomen in the *Liber Vitae*, they clearly had a separate identity and importance. The number is also significant. Even allowing for some nuns and others there are far more queens and abbesses than would be expected on the basis of the number of kings and abbots. This also shows they were held in high regard and their patronage was important.

**The Royal Women**

**Kent**

**Renwein**

The earliest recorded Anglo‑Saxon diplomatic marriage took place in the first Anglo-Saxon kingdom, Kent, and involved the daughter of the first Anglo-Saxon king, Hengist. Its importance is that it marked the foundation of the first Anglo‑Saxon kingdom. As there are no contemporary records for Hengist any tales about him and his family must always carry a large health warning. That neither Bede nor the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* mentioned a marriage of his daughter must add to the suspicion. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* related that Hengist and his brother, Horsa, had been invited to this country by Vortigern but did not say much more about their relationship. Nevertheless, the sources that have a British bias did mention it and there may well be some basis in truth. She is in the *Historia Brittonum[[6]](#footnote-6)* which referred to a conversation between Hengist and Vortigern when Hengist suggested sending to Germany for more troops to help defend his patron. Vortigern agreed and Hengist sent for sixteen boats in which were not only the soldiers but also his daughter, "a beautiful and very handsome girl."[[7]](#footnote-7) He held a banquet for Vortigern at which he told his daughter to serve the wine. Vortigern fell in love with her and offered her father half his kingdom if he could have her hand. After consulting his elders Hengist asked for Kent and Vortigern agreed to this without consulting the ruler, Gwyrangon, who was expelled. Vortigern married the girl and loved her deeply. In the following chapter Hengist said to Vortigern that now he was his father he could act as his adviser and sent for his son and his cousin (Octha and Ebissa) with forty ships to help defend the Wall[[8]](#footnote-8) against the Irish.[[9]](#footnote-9) Hengist really knew how to take advantage of a marital alliance. The *Historia Brittonum* recorded the fight-back by Vortigern's son, Vortimer, which is absent from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,but when Vortimer died Vortigern allowed the Saxons to return to their lands because he was their friend on account of his wife (Chapter 45). Hengist tricked Vortigern and killed most of his nobles but allowed him to live for his daughter's sake because she was married to him (but also because he could be ransomed). Vortigern withdrew to Wales (Chapter 47) but his fortress was destroyed by fire sent from heaven with all his wives including, presumably, Hengist's daughter.

Also writing from the Celtic point of view, Geoffrey[[10]](#footnote-10) recorded this story. Geoffrey named her for the first time as Renwein. The outline of the story of how she served Vortigern at the banquet is much the same but Geoffrey went into more detail. For example, the *Historia Brittonum* referred to the need for an interpreter but Geoffrey actually recorded some of the dialogue that needed to be translated[[11]](#footnote-11) which suggests he might have had access to other sources than the *Historia Brittonum*. The part played by Renwein in the subsequent events was recorded in similar terms to the *Historia Brittonum* until the death of Vortimer where she was given the leading role. The *Historia Brittonum* merely recorded that soon after his victories Vortimer died. Geoffrey said that his stepmother was envious of his virtuous behaviour and decided to kill him. He said she:

collected all the information she could about noxious poisons and then, by the hands of one of his servants whom she had first corrupted with innumerable bribes, she gave Vortimer a poison to drink.[[12]](#footnote-12)

It had the desired result because Vortimer died soon after having just a short time to speak to his companions. Renwein's husband, Vortigern, was restored to the throne allowing her to persuade him to send for her father again from Germany. The story seems to be a mixture of those of Eadburh, wife of Beorhtric, and Ælfthryth, stepmother of Edward the Martyr, both of which Geoffrey would have known well. However, it also explained Vortimer's sudden death and Vortigern's restoration and so has a ring of truth about it. If so, it suggests Renwein was a powerful woman who had the wealth to obtain poison and bribe servants as well as influence her husband in major decisions.

Renwein also played a part in the trick that Hengist used to gain power over Vortigern on his return. The *Historia Brittonum* had merely said that Hengist decided on his own to conceal daggers about his men when he met with Vortigern and his men on the understanding that both sides would be unarmed. Geoffrey said that Vortigern was persuaded by his nobles to resist Hengist with arms and this decision was conveyed to Hengist by Renwein. It was for this reason that Hengist decided upon the stratagem of telling Vortigern that they had arrived thinking Vortimer was still alive and now they realised he was dead they would remain or stay at Vortigern's wish. This was why they met peacefully but also why Hengist told his men to hide daggers to attack the Britons at his command. Again the story is rather more plausible than that in the *Historia Brittonum* and Hengist comes out in a slightly better light. But again the role of Renwein had been decisive.

**Bertha**

The next royal woman recorded in Kent was Bertha, the wife of the first Christian Anglo‑Saxon king, Æthelbert. She was the first royal woman mentioned by Bede[[13]](#footnote-13) when he dealt with Augustine's mission to England in 597. Augustine came to Kent partly because it was the easiest part of England to reach, partly due to existing Kentish links with the Franks, and partly because Æthelbert was the most important king in England and if Augustine could gain Æthelbert’s protection his mission would have more chance of success. Bede also mentioned that Æthelbert already knew something of the Christian religion because his wife was a Christian.[[14]](#footnote-14) Bede did not actually say this was a consideration for Augustine when deciding to land in Kent but by mentioning it at all there is an implication that it was. Æthelbert had received Bertha in marriage from the king of the Franks on her parents’ condition that she should have the freedom to hold and practise her faith unhindered with her own bishop, Liudhard who was sent with her by her parents[[15]](#footnote-15) to help her in the faith. It is interesting that Bede said it was Bertha's "parents"[[16]](#footnote-16) who insisted on her maintaining her faith and not just her father. Presumably, her mother was an influence in religious matters to the same extent that some of her female descendants were to be as well.[[17]](#footnote-17) Bede did not say how long Æthelbert and Bertha had been married nor did he say whether she or Liudhard had made any serious attempt to convert Æthelbert or any of his court but if they really did marry before Charibert’s death in 567 (when Æthelbert was fifteen)[[18]](#footnote-18) they had been married for at least 30 years by the time of the mission. All Bede said was that Æthelbert knew something of the religion which implies Bertha and/or Liudhard had at least talked to him about it during 30 years of marriage. Bede did not seem to know of the letter from Gregory to Bertha[[19]](#footnote-19) from 601 in which he apparently chastised her for not making greater efforts to convert her husband but also compared her to St Helena suggesting she had been making some progress.[[20]](#footnote-20)

According to Bede, Æthelbert only agreed to meet Augustine in the open where his magic would have less effect. Æthelbert must have been aware that the Christian religion was practised by the Romano‑British in former days because there was a Christian church (St Martin's) left from that time to the east of Canterbury which he let his queen and her bishop use.[[21]](#footnote-21) It was at St Martin's that Augustine and his followers prayed and worshipped until they succeeded in converting Æthelbert and could start to spread the restored religion and rebuild old churches. Although Bertha on her own was not responsible for converting her husband to Christianity it was her parents' insistence that she be allowed to practise her faith and presumably her own persistence in following that faith for 30 years that helped persuade Augustine to establish his first church in Canterbury which, combined with the problems of establishing a church in London, was to lead to Canterbury becoming the head of the Church of England. It is possible that the *Berchtae*[[22]](#footnote-22) in the *Liber Vitae* who appears in the second column of queens and abbesses (number 35) is Bertha. Although the column appears to date from around 700 it is possible that Bertha was added as an afterthought. The name following her is Æbbe who is likely to be Abbess Æbbe of Minster-in-Thanet, the cousin of Ecgfrith and Aldfrith who were also great-grandchildren of Bertha like Æbbe. Æbbe’s entry onto the list might have prompted a scribe to check whether Bertha had been included in Ecgfrith’s initial list and finding her missing added her in but not knowing how to spell her name checked in the passage in Bede mentioned below which would explain the spelling.

Although most of Bede’s references to Bertha are to do with her part in the evangelising of Kent, his last reference to her was when Æthelbert died on 24th February 616 and was buried in St Martin's porch at the church of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul (later to be called St Augustine's) "where Bertha also lies."[[23]](#footnote-23) Unfortunately, this does not tell us whether or not Bertha died first. He might have said "Æthelbert was buried next to his queen" if she were already dead. Bede’s terminology might imply that she was buried there after Æthelbert. However, later in the chapter Bede tells us that Æthelbert's son, Eadbald, took his stepmother as his wife and returned to the pagan religion. Bede merely condemned this action without trying to explain it or specifying whether this referred to Bertha. Whoever she was, it is unlikely that Eadbald would have married his stepmother without good reason. One clue to this might be found in Procopius' *Gothic Wars.*[[24]](#footnote-24) In Book VIII Chapter XX the king of the Varni, Hermeglisclus, took as his second wife, the sister of Theudebert of the Franks[[25]](#footnote-25) (534‑548) in order to make an alliance with him and betrothed his son, Radigis, by his first wife to the sister of the king of the Angili of Brittia.[[26]](#footnote-26) However, when he realised he was dying he told his son to renounce his betrothed and marry his stepmother "just as our ancestral law permits us." If this were a custom among the continental Germanic tribes it might have come with them to England.[[27]](#footnote-27) Eadbald might have been marrying his stepmother to preserve an alliance, like Radigis, with the powerful Franks. It is just possible that the stepmother was Bertha but she would have been over sixty.[[28]](#footnote-28) However, if Bertha and Æthelbert had been married since they were teenagers it is likely Eadbald was their son. He could have been the issue of another wife when the pagan Æthelbert may have had multiple wives. Eadbald was probably born in the 580s, well before Æthelbert's conversion to Christianity. If it were Bertha, Bede might have mentioned her name. A later wife might also have been a Frankish princess. Another argument against it being Bertha was Eadbald’s apostasy. If Bertha had had any say in the matter she would have refused to marry him and would have objected most strongly to a reversion to paganism. In section II of his *Chronicle*, Henry added that after his marriage Eadbald was "punished by frequent fits of madness."[[29]](#footnote-29) Clearly Henry thought this divine retribution.

**Emma and Eanswith**

The earliest evidence for one of Eadbald’s queens is the earliest charter with a royal woman in it. S6 is dated 618 and was a grant of land at Northbourne by Eadbald to St Augustine’s in Canterbury. The earliest manuscript is no older than the thirteenth century and it is generally believed to be an eleventh-century forgery. Why an eleventh-century forger should choose Eadbald as the grantor is unclear but the charter contains the name of Eadbald’s wife in the text as *regina mea Æmma* and in second place in the witness-list after Archbishop Lawrence: *+ Ego Emma Francorum regis filia*[[30]](#footnote-30) *et regis Eadbaldi copula uexillo adorande crucis armaui*. John’s genealogy said Emma was Eadbald's queen (also named by William) and that she was the daughter of the king of the Franks. Did he get this from this spurious charter or is it unlikely that he had access in Worcester to the St Augustine’s archive? It is possible that both John and the Canterbury scribe who forged/copied the charter may have had access to older material that has not survived to today. According to John, Eadbald and Emma had a daughter, Eanswith, not mentioned in any other early source, who was buried at Folkestone, presumably where she had been abbess.[[31]](#footnote-31)

**Æbbe and her family**

John also recorded Eadbald and Emma’s sons, Eormenred and Earconberht. He said Eormenred's queen was called Oslava (unnamed in any other early source) and she bore him four daughters: Eormenburh [Æbbe], Ermenberg [Eormenburh], Æthelthryth and Eormengyth,[[32]](#footnote-32) the last three named for the first time. It seems very odd that the first two should have such similar names and this does appear to be a mistake.[[33]](#footnote-33) Earconberht's queen, Seaxburh of East Anglia, had been mentioned by Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* but John’s genealogy added that she built a monastery on Sheppey for her husband. John confirmed what Bede had implied, that her daughter, Earcongota, had been a nun under her maternal aunt, Æthelburh, at Brie.

Simeon, somewhat surprisingly, opened his History with the legend of the two Kentish princes, Æthelred and Æthelbert, murdered by their cousin, Egbert. William had said that Egbert gave land for the monastery to the boys' mother but Simeon said that both their parents were already dead. Unlike John, he did not name their mother but her name (Oslava) implied she was a Northumbrian.[[34]](#footnote-34) The fact that the legend of her sons plays such a prominent part in Simeon’s work suggests that there was a Northumbrian connection and it could well have been through her. Simeon went into considerable detail about their story and then related the founding of the monastery to their memory.[[35]](#footnote-35) He assigned this to their sister ("on both their father's and their mother's side"),[[36]](#footnote-36) Eormenburh or Domneva,[[37]](#footnote-37) wife of Merewalh "king of the Mercians." Egbert invited her to his court and when she came he offered anything she wanted that was in his power to give. In true saintly manner she asked for land for a monastery whose bounds should be determined by her pet doe being allowed to wander. A large party sailed to Thanet and followed the doe making its course round a plot of land. Æbbe brought there her daughter, Mildrith,[[38]](#footnote-38) who had been educated in "ecclesiastical discipline" abroad,[[39]](#footnote-39) with seventy nuns consecrated by Archbishop Deusdedit. Æbbe ruled there for many years and when she died left the charge of the house to her "illustrious daughter" who performed a number of miracles and increased the honour of the foundation.

John mentioned Æbbe and Merewalh had three daughters, Mildburg, Mildrith and Mildgith.[[40]](#footnote-40) In Chapters 215 and 216 William only mentioned Mildrith and Mildburg. The former he said was a nun on the Isle of Thanet where she was buried, and later translated to St Augustine's in Canterbury[[41]](#footnote-41) where William said she attracted more visitors than all the other saints buried there. Mildburg was buried at Wenlock where a new monastery had been built and her recently discovered body was responsible for many miracles and cures. In Chapter 13, William accounted for the brevity and calamities of the reigns of Egbert and Hlothere because the former had murdered the two princes and the latter had ridiculed the notion of holding them up as martyrs. He conceded that Egbert did regret his action.

No fewer than nine charters relate to Abbess Æbbe. They are S1048, a grant of Edward the Confessor to St Augustine’s but which confirmed the original grant by Egbert (664-73) soon after 664,[[42]](#footnote-42) the incomplete S1648 dated 678, a grant by Egbert’s brother Hlothere (673-85), S10 dated 690 (with a confirmation of 691 by Æbbe’s brother-in-law, Æthelred of Mercia) and S11 undated but c.690, grants by Swæbheard (c.688-92), son of Sebbi of Essex and probably no near relative of Æbbe’s (unless by an unrecorded marriage), S13 dated 690 and S14 undated but also c.690, grants by Oswine (c.685-90) whose relationship with the other kings of Kent is unknown but who was probably another cousin of Æbbe’s, S15 dated 694, a grant by Wihtred (690-725) and his first wife, Cynegyth, examined below, S18 dated 697, a grant by Wihtred and his second wife, Æthelburh, also examined below, and S20 dated 699, a confirmation of privileges to the Kentish churches and monasteries made in the presence of four named abbesses (not in the witness-list), the third of whom, Æaba, might well be Æbbe. The three other abbesses in S20 were Hirminhilda, Irminburga, and Nerienda. The first could have been Wihtred’s aunt, Eormenhild, widow of Wulfhere of Mercia and abbess of Minster-in-Sheppey (679-99) and Ely (699-703), both in succession to her mother, Seaxburh of East Anglia. Irminburga is probably Æbbe’s sister, Eormenburh, second wife of Ecgfrith of Northumbria, called Iurminburg by the *Liber Vitae* and by Stephen, who became abbess after Ecgfrith’s death in 685. She was one of the eleven notable women mentioned by Stephen[[43]](#footnote-43) who said that she was a perfect abbess and an excellent mother of the community.[[44]](#footnote-44) Her house is unknown but was probably Lyminge in Kent before she succeeded her sister in Carlisle.

It is not known where Nerienda was abbess but there was a house in Kent at Folkestone which may have been founded by Eanswith. Nerienda’s name does not sound as though she were of Kentish royal blood but as not all the names of the royal family are recorded she may have been. She might have been related to the South Saxon royals, Nunna/Nothhelm and his sister Abbess Nothgyth.[[45]](#footnote-45) The land grants refer to land on the Isle of Thanet itself and nearby, for example at Sturry, between Canterbury and Thanet. Although the first and last may well be spurious at least the first one referred to a grant that is not disputed and the rest are probably genuine or based on genuine charters showing how important Æbbe was to five different kings of Kent as well as a king of Mercia.

Æbbe’s house was clearly well-endowed at the outset and must have been fairly wealthy with this amount of land but it did not stop with her. S17 dated 696 was a grant to her daughter, Mildrith, by her relative,[[46]](#footnote-46) Wihtred. If both this and S18 are genuine and their dates correct this implies there was a period of handover between mother and daughter, perhaps ruling jointly as Eanflæd and Ælfflæd did in Whitby. Mildrith was one of the five abbesses who witnessed S22, a grant of privileges and immunity by Wihtred to the Kentish churches with specific mention of St Peter’s Upmynster, Reculver, Minster-in-Thanet, Dover, Folkestone, Lyminge, Minster-in-Sheppey and Hoo. It might be expected that these churches and monasteries were represented at the council at *Baccancelde* (Bapchild) where the charter was issued in c.708.[[47]](#footnote-47) Many commentators have written about this charter and there seems to be a general consensus that it was a ninth-century concoction[[48]](#footnote-48) but preserving an otherwise unknown but genuine witness-list. Wihtred, Wærburh and their son, Alric, were followed by Archbishop Berhtwald of Canterbury, Wihtred’s two older sons, Æthelbert and Eadberht and Bishop Tobias of Rochester. The five abbesses came next and were presumably heads of five of the eight named houses. Mildrith was first, underlining her importance and the importance of Minster-in-Thanet. Æthelthryth was next and is presumably Mildrith’s aunt (Æbbe’s sister) who probably headed the royal foundation at Minster-in-Sheppey in succession to her cousin Eormenhild. Ætte, Wilnoth and Hereswyth[[49]](#footnote-49) followed but it is not known who headed which house although one could speculate Folkestone, Lyminge, and Hoo, all of which were women’s houses at the time and the first two had already been headed by royal women. Men’s houses and certainly mixed houses could have been headed by suitably senior women. Ætte and Wilnoth have names that alliterate well with other Kentish royals.

Mildrith, like her mother, was the beneficiary in five surviving charters. S17 has already been mentioned and the next was S1180 a quarter of a century later. It was a grant dated 11 July 724 from Wihtred’s son Æthelbert (her second cousin once removed) during his father’s lifetime and witnessed by him, of land on Romney Marsh. S26 was a grant of 14 October 727 by Wihtred’s second son, Eadberht who appears to have ruled jointly with his brothers. The last two, S86 and S87,[[50]](#footnote-50) were charters of Æthelbald of Mercia granting her and her community the tax on a ship, one at London, the other unspecified. They date from the first 20 years of Æthelbald’s reign.[[51]](#footnote-51) As overlord, Æthelbald was interested in his Kentish dependency but had a special interest in Mildrith as she was the daughter of his cousin Merewalh. By the 730s Mildrith would have been at least seventy and possibly older so she may well have died soon after. She was succeeded by Eadburh whom the Mildrith Legend said was her *proavia,*[[52]](#footnote-52) being the daughter of Æthelbert. Any such daughter of the Æthelbert who ruled 560-616 would have been well over 100. It is more likely she was the sister of the second Æthelbert, Wihtred’s son, who ruled 725-62. S91 was another grant from Æthelbald of ship tax on London, this time only half a ship, to Eadburh, dated 748. Eadburh died in 751 and was buried with Æthelburh at Lyminge.

Of Æbbe’s other daughters little is known of Mildgith. She may have been an abbess in Kent as well (Eastry?) but at some stage went to Northumbria (probably Carlisle), perhaps at the invitation of her aunt, Eormenburh, where she died according to the *Legend*. Mildburg,[[53]](#footnote-53) on the other hand, had stayed in Mercia and became abbess of their father’s foundation at Much Wenlock. Her appearances in the charters are fewer than her mother’s and sister’s in Kent but are still recorded. Her testament[[54]](#footnote-54) gives evidence for some charters now missing. The earliest was S1798 a grant from Abbot Æthelheah of *Icheanog* when she was still just a nun and dates to 675-90. S1799 was a grant from two men supposed to be her brothers Merchelm and Milfrid dating 674-704. Other versions say Merchelm was her uncle and Milfrid her nephew. S1800 was a grant from her cousin Ceolred of Mercia (709-16) and S1802 was a grant by Sigward, *comes* of Æthelbald dating 727-36. Much Wenlock is in Shropshire and the grants were all from Shropshire or neighbouring Herefordshire and Worcestershire. The other grant in the group, S1801, was to a nun called Feleburg by Coenred (704-709) who is otherwise unknown but may well have been a senior member of Mildburg’s community and possibly her successor.

Considering the interest shown in the story of the two murdered Kentish princes in Northumbria as typified by the prominence given to them by Simeon, it might be expected that these royal women and abbesses would make an appearance in the *Liber Vitae.* They are not all obviously there but considering the changes the list may have undergone it is possible to find candidates for most of them. As abbess of Minster-in-Thanet, Æbbe was probably wealthy enough to make benefactions to the foremost house of her mother's kingdom in memory of her brothers, herself and possibly her husband and could be the *Æbbe*, 36th in the list (or *Æbbino,* 78th). Her sister Eormenburh is there (as queen of Northumbria) as *Iurminburg*, in third place. Their other sisters Eangyth/Eormengyth and Æthelthryth may be *Eangyth*, (22nd) and one of the *Ethilthryths* in 96th, 98th and 107th. There are no women in the list beginning with M so a search for Æbbe’s daughters appears to be useless. However, if one of the later copyists had mistaken Ms for Hs there are three candidates for Mildburg, Mildrith and Mildgith in *Hildiburg, Hildithryth and Hildigith* (72nd, 59th and 147th). It is possible that Mildrith’s teacher in Chelles, Wulcume/Wilcoma[[55]](#footnote-55) was the *Uilcumae* in 17th or 41st place, the latter just five places behind Æbbe*.*

**Wihtred’s Queens**

There are five Kentish charters with women witnesses from the reign of Wihtred and the turn of the eighth century (he reigned 690‑725). Each of his three successive queens, Cynegyth, Æthelburh and Wærburh witnessed charters in second place; Æthelburh witnessed two of her three in third place after Bishop Berhtwald in first place with Wihtred second. The charters in question are S15 dated 694 witnessed by Cynegyth, S16 dated 696, S19 dated 697 and S21 dated 700 witnessed by Æthelburh and S22 undated, witnessed by Wærburh. In addition, S22[[56]](#footnote-56) had five abbesses as witnesses, some of whom were also royal, as examined above. These ten examples of female witnesses in Kent show that the idea of queens and abbesses as witnesses was well established by the end of the seventh century. It is possible that this was one of several innovations that the Kentish kingdom passed on to other Anglo‑Saxon kingdoms along with Christianity with all that that had entailed: literacy, writing, written charters with divine authority. Many of these ideas had been passed on from the Continent with which Kent had the closest ties of any Anglo‑Saxon kingdom. In two of the charters and one other to which the queen did not add her name in the witness-list, the grant was made jointly by the king and queen which shows the importance of the queen even more. S15 opens *In nomine Domini Dei saluatoris. Ego Uuihtredus rex Cantie una cum coniuge mea Kinigitha regina*, S16 *Beneficiis Dei et Domini nostri Iesu Christi nobis collatis non immemores, ego Wihtredus rex Cantie et coniunx mea Adelburga* and S18 *Ego Wihtredus rex Cantuariorum, consenciente regina Ædilburga*. The last of these, dated 697, was a grant to Abbess Æbbe as were the six examined above. S17[[57]](#footnote-57) was a grant from Wihtred to Abbess Mildrith at Minster-in-Thanet. The set of Minster charters were sent to and preserved at St Augustine’s and appear to be as authentic as any early ones.

**Northumbria**

**Bearnoch**

Four pre-Christian Northumbrian royal women are recorded. The northernmost of the two kingdoms that made up Northumbria, Bernicia, was the first to be founded, by Ida in 547. The name of his wife was recorded by the *Historia Brittonum*[[58]](#footnote-58) when it said Ida had twelve sons and one queen, Bearnoch. This is the only early record of her name. Under 547 John suggested that Ida had more than one queen and more than one concubine which could explain why he had so many children; twelve sons and an unknown number of daughters. Bearnoch’s name suggests a possible connection with the naming of her husband’s kingdom.

**Bebba and Acha**

The next Bernician royal woman to be mentioned was the first wife of Æthelfrith: Bebba for whom some of the earliest evidence of political authority being wielded by royal women is recorded, in Bede. He made two references to Bebba,[[59]](#footnote-59) both in connection with Bamburgh, the royal fortress named after her. The first was a reference to the martyred Oswald's hand and arm being preserved as relics in a silver casket in St Peter's church in Bamburgh. The second referred to Penda's invasion in c.651 when he reached the gates of the city but failed to take it. Bede did not say why the city took its name from Bebba but it was apparently both a religious centre of importance and a formidable stronghold. However, it was only in Chapter 63 of the *Historia Brittonum* that she was identified as the wife of Æthelfrith. It recorded that Æthelfrith gave her Din Guaire which was then named Bamburgh after her. The gift of an important stronghold to a queen by a king who was named "the Artful"[[60]](#footnote-60) in the *Historia Brittonum* suggests that she must have been a remarkable woman and it is tantalising to think what merited such a reward.

Bede implied the marriage between Æthelfrith of Bernicia and Acha of Deira (Edwin’s sister) by referring to Oswald being Edwin’s nephew[[61]](#footnote-61) but it was Geoffrey who recorded the story in more detail, if somewhat garbled. In part eight of his work when he came to the main section dealing with the Saxon Domination he referred to five Anglo‑Saxon women but none of them by name and none of them have quite the same importance as Renwein of Kent had had for him. The first two were the wives of Æthelfrith of Northumbria. Geoffrey said that Æthelfrith abandoned his first wife and took another. He had "conceived such a hatred for the wife he had dismissed that he banished her from the kingdom of the Northumbrians."[[62]](#footnote-62) She was pregnant at the time and went to the British Cadvan to ask for his help in restoring her to her rightful position which he was unable to do. She remained there and gave birth to a son, Edwin, who was brought up with Cadvan's own son, Cædwalla, born shortly after. Geoffrey seems to have confused a number of stories. Edwin was the brother of Æthelfrith's wife, Acha, not her son, and it was Edwin who was expelled not his mother. Acha was also Æthelfrith's second wife not his first and it is unlikely that he dismissed her as she became the mother of at least six of his sons, most of them born after he had conquered Deira. John said Acha was the mother of all of Æthelfrith's seven sons and one daughter. It is possible that Æthelfrith dismissed his first wife, Bebba, pregnant with her son, Eanfrith, in order to marry Acha and increase his claim to or consolidate his position on the Deiran throne and that when he expelled Edwin he also expelled Edwin’s mother (whose name is unknown). Bebba (whose name suggests she might have been a Briton) might well have taken refuge with a British or Pictish king and this could explain why her son later married a Pictish princess. Cadvan was probably Cadfan of Gwynedd but he did not become king until a decade later, although his son, Cædwalla was part of the alliance that deposed Edwin. When Edwin’s *nepos,[[63]](#footnote-63)* Hereric, was exiled by Æthelfrith he took refuge with the British king of Elmet, Cerdic, but was poisoned by his host in 614. It is possible that Edwin found refuge at a British court on his way to East Anglia and even that his mother had been a Celt. Edwin may have had to leave the British court when his mother died and thus ended up at Redwald's court some time later. Geoffrey said that Edwin stayed on good terms with Cædwalla until he demanded his own kingdom from him. One interpretation of the story is that when Æthelfrith decided to invade Deira in 604 he expelled all the male members of the ruling family including Edwin and Hereric and they took refuge where they could. At the same time he wanted to legitimize his claim to Deira by marrying the daughter of Ælle, Acha, but to do this felt it necessary to discard his first wife, Bebba, perhaps not realizing that after many years of marriage, she was expecting their son who was then raised at the court of a British or Pictish ruler. When Bede talked about the piety of Oswald he stressed the importance of Edwin being succeeded in both his kingdom and his religion by so worthy a man of his own blood.[[64]](#footnote-64) Not only, therefore, was the political marriage a source of gaining an alliance but it was also a way of joining rival houses to ensure their successors had the royal blood of both houses in their veins.

**Æthelburh**

Æthelfrith’s successor, Edwin of Deira, had at least two wives. Bede said his first wife was a daughter of Ceorl of Mercia[[65]](#footnote-65) (another political alliance) and John named her as Coenburg (he called her Quenburg) and said she was the daughter of Creoda of Mercia. It was Edwin’s second wife, Æthelburh, daughter of Æthelbert and (probably) Bertha of Kent[[66]](#footnote-66) who took up her parents’ mantle of spreading Christianity. Bede[[67]](#footnote-67) described how Edwin received the Christian faith, specifying that it came about through Edwin's alliance in 625 with the kings of Kent by his marriage to Æthelburh. In Chapter 48 William explained why Edwin wanted to marry Æthelburh:

...nor was there a single province of Britain which did not regard his will, and prepare to obey it, except Kent alone: for he had left these people free from incursions, because he had long meditated a marriage with Æthelburh.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Edwin was able to call himself overlord of all Britain (*Bretwalda*) except Kent and so wanted to make an alliance there to ensure the whole realm was peaceful. This was successful because:

these two kingdoms became so united by the ties of kindred, that there was no rivalry in their powers, no difference in their manners.[[69]](#footnote-69)

According to Bede, Edwin sent an embassy of nobles to Eadbald to request the hand of his sister. By this time Eadbald had recanted his apostasy and told Edwin's envoys that it was not possible for a Christian maiden to marry a heathen lest the Christian faith be profaned by association with a king wholly ignorant of the true God. Edwin gave Eadbald the same assurances that Æthelbert had had to give Bertha’s family: to let her and her attendants worship in accordance with Christian belief. Further, he agreed to let his advisers examine that faith and if it proved to be more holy than his own he would adopt it. Æthelburh herself would play an important role in this part of the mission as she would have the closest contact to the king. Eadbald sent his sister to Edwin with Paulinus as her chaplain having been consecrated bishop by Archbishop Justus before he left Kent to enable him to preach more effectively to the queen and her retinue and to take part in the discussions with Edwin's advisers.

Confirmation that Æthelburh would be expected to play her part in trying to convert her husband and his court was given by Bede[[70]](#footnote-70) in the form of a letter from Pope Boniface to her urging her to exert her influence to this end. The pope also wrote to Edwin direct and Bede gave the text of that letter.[[71]](#footnote-71) In it he mentioned the advantages that conversion had given to Eadbald and that Æthelburh "has been enlightened by the gift of eternal life through the regeneration of holy baptism."[[72]](#footnote-72) The date of the letters is not given but it can be assumed that Æthelburh had been queen for a short time only. That the pope was writing suggests that she had not yet been successful in converting Edwin but that he considered that she was capable of accomplishing it. He referred to the Northumbrians as *her* subjects[[73]](#footnote-73) and clearly believed she had a duty to convert, through conversation, as he had urged her mother to do in Kent, their king to save the people as well.[[74]](#footnote-74) He praised her[[75]](#footnote-75) for her good works and for avoiding the worship of idols and enticements of shrines and soothsaying[[76]](#footnote-76) but she should not hesitate to continue warning her husband of the perils of remaining outside the faith. Without being too specific he also hinted that she should use the marriage bed (or refusal thereof) as a tool (or weapon?) in her attempts at conversion. He says that those who are united in the marriage bed are also united when life has passed if they are united in faith.[[77]](#footnote-77) He reminded her that they were now one flesh and she should convert her husband so that they enjoyed the rights of marriage undefiled.[[78]](#footnote-78) He did not quite go as far as to suggest she imitated Lysistrata but he did emphasize that the marriage bed would be defiled. He even sent her a silver mirror and ivory comb adorned with gold as presents which were reminiscent of Lysistrata's exhortation to her followers to adorn themselves to inflame their husbands' passions but refuse them their marital rights until they agreed to their demands.[[79]](#footnote-79) Boniface also suggested she should spend considerable time lecturing Edwin on the merits of Christianity. Whether or not he knew the position of a queen of Northumbria fully he certainly considered she had influence over her husband, and for Bede to include the letter in full he clearly understood that the pope was not making a fool of himself to make this assumption.

Bede[[80]](#footnote-80) related the story of how Edwin was nearly assassinated by a poisoned dagger thrust at him by Eumer, an agent of Cwichelm of Wessex, on Easter Eve (19 April) 626. The same night, Æthelburh gave birth to a daughter, Eanflæd. Edwin was still not yet a convert to Christianity but Paulinus said that the queen had been delivered of the child safely because he (Paulinus) had prayed to Christ. Edwin said that if Paulinus's God should also heal his wounds and let him kill Cwichelm he would accept him as his God. As surety that he would keep his word, he gave his daughter to Paulinus to be consecrated with twelve others of her household on the feast of the Pentecost (8 June). Thus, the first Northumbrian to be baptised was the daughter of the king.[[81]](#footnote-81) When he had recovered, Edwin invaded Wessex and despite being victorious (though not in killing Cwichelm) still hesitated about becoming a Christian. In Section III of his history Henry said Æthelburh was also called *Tate* and was with her husband at Adgebrin (Yeavering) when Paulinus visited for thirty-six days baptising people all that time; so more than the thirteen in Bede.

There is another story told by Geoffrey involving a royal woman connected to Edwin, and attempted assassination. Cædwalla decided to have Edwin's adviser, the magician Pellitus, killed and sent his nephew, Brian, to York to try and accomplish it. Whilst waiting for alms disguised as a beggar he saw his sister, now in the service of Edwin's queen, coming out of the hall to fetch water for her mistress. She had been carried off by Edwin when he sacked Worcester. She pointed out Pellitus to her brother so that he could kill him, which he did. Although the queen is not an important figure in the story it does show that she had some high status servants. If this story has any basis in truth and is not just Geoffrey’s invention, Brian's sister would have been an important captive as the niece of Cædwalla so to have her remain at court to serve the queen rather than be ransomed could have been because the queen wanted to have a high status (Christian) servant in her retinue.

Bede recorded[[82]](#footnote-82) how Edwin had already determined to become a Christian thanks to a vision he had before he became king and was in exile at the court of Rædwald of East Anglia. It seems very strange if this is true that Edwin waited so long to convert and that Eadbald had to go to such lengths to ensure that his sister could continue to practise her faith. The truth is probably that Bede had conflicting reasons from different sources and in fact a number of factors were responsible for Edwin's conversion. Whatever they were, the king and queen's marriage-bed seems to have become fruitful as they had four children in their eight years of marriage (625-33); two sons, Ethelhun and Wuscfrea, and two daughters, Eanflæd and Æthelthryth. Bede recorded[[83]](#footnote-83) that when Edwin accepted baptism in 627 two of his sons by his first wife, Coenburg, Osfrith and Eadfrith, were also baptised. Perhaps they too were impressed by their stepmother. Later, three of Æthelburh's children were baptised by Paulinus but two of them, Ethelhun and Æthelthryth, died whilst still in their baptismal robes and were buried in York with full royal honours.

In 633[[84]](#footnote-84) Edwin was killed at the battle of *Haethfelth* by Penda of Mercia. His eldest son, Osfrith, was also killed and his next son, Eadfrith, deserted to Penda only to be murdered by him later. Edwin and Æthelburh's son was too young to succeed and she fled with him and her daughter, Eanflæd, and Osfrith’s son, to Kent, along with Paulinus, by ship according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, to seek asylum with her brother, Eadbald. This idea of the widow acting as her son's protector is echoed in Osfrith's widow (unnamed) later sending her infant son, Yffi, to Gaul to be brought up by her "friend" Dagobert (628‑39).[[85]](#footnote-85) She was afraid of both Eadbald and Oswald whose father, Æthelfrith, Edwin had killed to gain the Northumbrian throne. Bede does not say how Dagobert became her friend but it is possible she was a Frankish princess or noblewoman who had come via the Kentish court with its Frankish associations.

**Oswald and Oswiu’s queens**

The original list of queens in the *Liber Vitae* was probably drawn up towards the end of Ecgfrith’s reign, c.680 and the early names on both the king/duke list and the queen/abbess list were his relatives or near associates.[[86]](#footnote-86) The first six names in the queen/abbess list are in gold whereas the rest alternate with silver, and can be identified as his stepmother, mother, second wife, sister, grandmother and sister-in-law. The names may have been reordered some time after the original compilation in the late seventh century. It is likely that the later compiler found it too difficult to distinguish queens from abbesses so listed them together. Several queens became abbesses; so the coupling is appropriate. Edwin's queen, Æthelburh, later abbess of Lyminge (633-47) may be the fifth name in the list, *Oethilburg*. Oswald's queen was Cyneburh of Wessex but the first name like this is 27th in the list, *Cyniburg*, and is probably Alchfrith’s queen, daughter of Penda. It is not known whether Oswald’s queen outlived him nor if she became an abbess. It is feasible that she supported her son, Œthelwald, in his rebellion and so like him is absent from the *Liber Vitae*.

The *Historia Brittonum*’s Chapter 57 is largely a genealogy and concludes with Oswiu who had two wives, "one of whom was called Rieinmellt,[[87]](#footnote-87) daughter of Royth, son of Rhun, and the other was called Eanflæd, daughter of Edwin, son of Aelle." This is the only reference to Rieinmellt in the narrative sources. Royth and Rhun[[88]](#footnote-88) were apparently successive kings of Rheged and probably clients of Æthelfrith and Edwin, and the marriage was thus an important territorial alliance. Oswiu's queens, Riemmelth and Eanflæd, have pride of place at the beginning of the queen/abbess list in the *Liber Vitae*, *Rægnmæld* and *Eanfled*. It may have been Eanflæd who suggested her parents' names to her son for the lists of those worthy of remembrance.

**Eanflæd**

Bede[[89]](#footnote-89) told of history more or less repeating itself. Oswald’s successor, his brother, Oswiu, decided he should like to marry his cousin[[90]](#footnote-90) Eanflæd, presumably because she was not only Edwin's daughter but also Æthelbert's granddaughter. Oswiu sent a priest called Utta to Kent to bring Eanflæd back after he had been blessed by Aidan in c.642. Earconberht seems to have been happy to oblige. Eanflæd showed her influence over her husband in religious matters in at least two ways. Firstly, in 655,[[91]](#footnote-91) she persuaded him to grant land to her relative Trumhere,[[92]](#footnote-92) as first abbot, at Gilling on which to build a monastery where prayers would be offered for the soul of her cousin[[93]](#footnote-93) Oswin of Deira whom Oswiu had killed in 651. The second incident is even more telling. Eanflæd had been brought up by Paulinus and later at the Kentish court using the Roman rites introduced by Augustine but Oswiu had been instructed in the Celtic rites whilst in exile in Scotland during the reign of Eanflæd's father, Edwin. Bede said[[94]](#footnote-94) that this led to the court celebrating Easter twice with the queen and her attendants still fasting and keeping Palm Sunday whilst the king had ended Lent and was keeping Easter. For this reason Oswiu decided to hold a synod in 664, under the auspices of his cousin Hild at Whitby, to decide the issue. Whether or not the queen had any particular influence over the outcome (which was decided in her favour) is not clear but for her to remain steadfast to her customs to such an extent that Oswiu felt obliged to call the synod was a significant role in the first place.

Eanflæd used her connection with the Kentish royal family to great effect on one occasion. Stephen pointed out that Wilfred was fourteen when he made his way to Eanflæd having been recommended by nobles to whom he had ministered in his father's house and was presented to her. It was because he impressed her that she recommended him to Cudda on Lindisfarne. When Wilfred decided to go to Rome[[95]](#footnote-95) he went to Eanflæd for her help. She heartily approved of his desire to see the apostolic see and sent him to her cousin Earconberht of Kent (Eadbald's son and presumably Eanflæd’s youthful companion, during her exile) where he spent some time before Earconberht made him the travelling companion of Benedict Biscop. Without such a friend in such a high place, Wilfred might never have completely fulfilled his calling. He maintained the close connection with Eanflæd and it was no doubt through her that he obtained monks from Gilling for his new monastery at Ripon. The last notable woman mentioned by Stephen was Abbess Cynithrith, supposedly of Wilfred's community at Ripon. No other record of a woman’s house at Ripon exists and she may have been abbess at another Northumbrian house. She is also likely to be the *Cynithryth* in 47th place in the *Liber Vitae.* She was given the important task of guarding Wilfred's robes after his death in 709 and whilst she was washing them a man with a withered hand was miraculously cured when he put his hand in the water with the garments. It is not known who she was or whether she was of royal blood but is clearly only mentioned because of her association with this miracle. However, she must have been important to have been entrusted with the holy relic in the first place. Her name implies a possible connection to the royal families of either Mercia or Wessex.

**Hild**

Bede devoted the whole of Chapter 23 of Book IV to the life and death of Hild[[96]](#footnote-96) and thus marked her out as someone of importance. He also mentioned her in three other places. Hild died in 680 aged 66 so was born in 614. She spent half her life (up 647) in secular activity and half in religious activity. Hild was nobly born, the daughter of Hereric, the *nepos* of Edwin.[[97]](#footnote-97) Under 664 John (who said Hereswith married Æthelhere although and eighth-century genealogy said it was Æthilric)[[98]](#footnote-98) recorded the succession of Aldwulf and recorded the ancestry of his mother, Hereswith. He said her father's father was Eadfrith son of Edwin but this is chronologically impossible. That she was Hereric's daughter has already been stated but it is impossible that he should have been Edwin's grandson. It is likely that John discovered that Hereric's father was called Eadfrith and concluded he was the son of Edwin by that name but it is more likely that he was Edwin's uncle or possibly older brother.

Hild’s father was banished from Deira, presumably at the same time as Edwin when Æthelfrith invaded in 604. Although they must have been together in c.613 (Hild being born in 614) her parents separated at some point and it is not clear where her mother, Breguswith, went but Hereric ended up being poisoned whilst at the court of Cerdic.[[99]](#footnote-99) Bede related the dream Hild's mother had about looking for her husband after his disappearance. Hild is described as an infant and the reference in the dream to Breguswith having a jewel or necklace beneath her garments sending out a light to shine over the whole of Britain[[100]](#footnote-100) probably meant Hild was still a babe in arms (so between 614 and 616). Thus, when Edwin was restored in 616 he would have taken his kinsman's widow and baby into his care which is why Hild was baptised with him in 627 at the age of thirteen. At some time after 635, Oswald (Edwin's nephew through his sister, Acha, and thus Hild's cousin) seems to have made an alliance with Anna of East Anglia (635‑54) by marrying Hild's older sister, Hereswith, to Anna's brother, Æthilric. In or soon after 643[[101]](#footnote-101) Hereswith gave birth to the future Aldwulf[[102]](#footnote-102) and Æthilric presumably died not long afterwards. Anna had no sons and so might have wanted to adopt Aldwulf to be his eventual successor which left Hereswith free to go to Francia[[103]](#footnote-103) to become a nun. Bede did not explain why she wanted to go to there (perhaps she had relatives there) but he had already mentioned that there were not many monasteries in England which meant many people from Britain went to the land of the Franks to enter monastic life[[104]](#footnote-104) and daughters were often sent there for instruction; particularly Brie, Chelles and Andelys-sur-Seine.

In 647, at the age of thirty-three, Hild decided to serve God and went first to East Anglia where her "kinsman" was king. Bede did not say what he meant by kinsman but he could just have been referring to her sister having been married to Anna's brother. Alternatively, Bede could have meant that her mother, Breguswith, was an East Anglian princess. If Edwin's father, Ælle, had wanted to make an alliance with the powerful Rædwald just before his death in 599[[105]](#footnote-105) an obvious candidate would have been his nephew, Hereric, with a sister of Rædwald; thus it is not too far fetched to imagine that Breguswith[[106]](#footnote-106) was Rædwald's sister. This could explain why the young Edwin went into exile in East Anglia and it might be that Hereric was actually a prisoner or hostage in Elmet which helps to explain why he was poisoned and why his wife was not with him.

Hild decided to stay with the pious Anna before joining her sister in Francia as a nun. For some reason that Bede did not specify she remained in East Anglia for a year and did not join her sister in Francia. Perhaps she got on too well with Anna's daughters who were still there (Æthelthryth and Æthelburh). In 648 she was recalled to Northumbria by Bishop Aidan and was given land on the north bank of the Wear to found a monastery. After a year she transferred to Hartlepool which had been founded not long before by Heiu who Bede recorded was said to be the first woman in Northumbria to become a nun.[[107]](#footnote-107) Heiu did not remain a nun long but retired to *Kaelcacaestir* (Tadcaster?) which is why Hild was made abbess of her house. It is also possible that they were related[[108]](#footnote-108) and Heiu may have had some influence over Hild's calling. It would not be unusual for someone like Hild to be influenced by a relative in such a matter as will be shown later and the alliteration fits with Hild's father and sister. If Heiu was a member of the royal family this would explain why she was entrusted with founding the first nunnery in Northumbria. However, Hild must be credited with being the first successful abbess when she moved to her new monastery at Whitby (called Streanaeshalch[[109]](#footnote-109) by Bede).

The founding of the monastery here was described more fully by Bede[[110]](#footnote-110) when Oswiu gave his one-year-old daughter, Ælfflæd, to Hild[[111]](#footnote-111) whilst she was still at Hartlepool, after his victory over Penda in 655, and two years later gave her ten hides to found Whitby and Ælfflæd went with her as a pupil and later a teacher. Whitby was a double monastery with nuns and lay brethren all under the control of an abbess and five of Hild's pupils there were later to become bishops: Bosa (York 678 after Wilfred’s expulsion), Ætla (Dorchester c.680), Oftor (Worcester 691), John (Hexham 687 and York 705) and Wilfred II (York 718) as well as Tatfrid who was elected (Worcester 680) but died before he could be consecrated. So great was the esteem in which Hild was held, wrote Bede, that not only ordinary people but also kings and princes would come to seek her guidance.[[112]](#footnote-112) She also founded other monasteries such as Hackness. She was a patron of the arts as Bede[[113]](#footnote-113) said that she encouraged Caedmon to turn to the religious life and taught him the scriptures which he then turned into song. After 669 she established a link with Theodore’s school at Canterbury.[[114]](#footnote-114) Excavations confirm the presence of a *scriptorium*[[115]](#footnote-115)at Whitby.

However, the event that had the longest lasting consequences during her rule at Whitby was the synod held there in 664 to decide whether the Roman or the Celtic rites should be followed in the Northumbrian court. Bede[[116]](#footnote-116) gave the background to the dispute and said it was decided to settle it at Whitby where Hild was abbess. No doubt her close relationship to the king helped decide the venue but also her reputation for piety. Bede listed the supporters of each camp and included Hild and her followers on the Irish side. Apart from saying that Oswiu opened and closed the proceedings, Bede only gave the arguments made by Bishops Colman and Wilfred. No doubt the debates went on much longer and Bede only gave a summary of the arguments. As Hild was the host of the synod and Bede listed her amongst the Celtic supporters she presumably would have been one of the speakers. It is a shame Bede did not record her speech but as she was on the losing side he might have thought it less interesting to his readers and may not have had access to it anyway. Hild accepted the outcome and did not move back to the Irish churches in Scotland or Ireland as some did for she was still abbess sixteen years later when she died. The animosity with Wilfred did not stop and not only did one of her pupils replace him in York but she supported Theodore’s petition to Rome against his reinstatement and may even have persuaded Ebroin, Neustrian mayor of the palace to prevent Wilfrid from travelling through his territory.[[117]](#footnote-117) Bede recorded her death after a six-year illness with some of the first visions and miracles that were to lead to her being sanctified.

As one of Wilfred’s chief opponents, Hild does not figure very prominently in Stephen as it was his intention to celebrate Wilfred’s memory, not his opponents. However, Stephen would have been aware of Hild’s reputation so he could not ignore her altogether. He mentioned that the synod of Whitby was held in the presence of the holy mother and most pious nun, Hild, but failed to mention that she was one of Wilfred's chief opponents at the synod. He also referred to the appeal to Pope Agatho by Wilfred when representatives of Archbishop Theodore and Hild had been present to accuse him. Stephen did not report how much weight Hild's accusations had nor what she said but it was only in the year of her death (680) that Wilfred was able to return to England and was finally restored.

The family that contained Hild, Hereric, Hereswith and quite possibly Heiu might also have contained Heriburg, abbess of Watton near Beverley[[118]](#footnote-118) who had clearly been married before she became abbess as one of her nuns was her daughter Coenburg whom she intended should succeed her. It seems unlikely that they would have been in the position to do this unless Heriburg had been a member of a noble family and she could well have been one of the many missing queens or wives of princes. Another possible candidate for this family is Hildilid, abbess of Barking who was also mentioned by Bede.[[119]](#footnote-119)

**Ælfflæd**

The last members of the matrilineal dynasty starting with Ingoberga and stretching through Bertha, Æthelburh and Eanflæd, to have an influence on the religious life of England were Eanflæd's three daughters, Alchflæd, Osthryth and Ælfflæd. The story of Ælfflæd[[120]](#footnote-120) was similar to that of her mother. Just as Edwin promised in 626 to give Eanflæd to Paulinus to be consecrated to God should he be victorious over his enemy; so too in 655 did Oswiu offer his one-year-old daughter (with twelve pieces of land for monasteries) to God if he was victorious against his enemy, the pagan Penda.[[121]](#footnote-121) Oswiu was duly victorious at the battle of *Winwæd* and Ælfflæd was given to Hild at Hartlepool to be instructed in becoming a nun. She accompanied Hild two years later when she moved to Whitby where, when her father died in 670, she was joined by her mother. After Hild's death in 680 Eanflæd and Ælfflæd ruled Whitby jointly and were there in 685 when their son/brother, Ecgfrith, was defeated at the battle of *Nechtanesmere* by the Picts.[[122]](#footnote-122) They took in some of those who fled from Scotland such as Bishop Trumwine of Abercorn.[[123]](#footnote-123) Both Eanflæd and Ælfflæd appear in the *Liber Vitae*, in second and fourth places respectively. Ælfflæd died at Whitby in 714.

Ælfflæd also had an important role in Wilfred's life. After Ecgfrith's death in 685, Wilfred was finally reconciled with Archbishop Theodore (in 686‑7) and the archbishop wrote to three influential people to get their support in his reinstatement. These were Aldfrith (Ecgfrith's successor), Æthelred of Mercia and Ælfflæd. Although Aldfrith accepted Wilfred back they quarrelled after a few years and he was again banished. It was not till Aldfrith was on his deathbed in 704 that he repented and urged his successor to make peace with Wilfred. He made this plea in front of a number of witnesses but the only two that Stephen[[124]](#footnote-124) named were Ælfflæd and another abbess called Æthelburh (*Æthilburg*) who was possibly abbess of Hackness. The following year Osred called together his chief men plus three bishops and their abbots (all unnamed), Archbishop Berhtwald and Ælfflæd to consider Wilfred's case. Ælfflæd is described as "always the comforter and best counsellor of the whole province."[[125]](#footnote-125) There is no reason to question this description. As abbess of the house chosen for the famous synod and the late king's sister, she was in a good position to be an influential counsellor. She addressed the meeting, reporting what her brother had said on his deathbed and seems to have swayed the chief nobles led by Berhtfrith in favour of Wilfred. The bishops separated to discuss the arguments and after the archbishop had consulted both them and Ælfflæd, it was agreed to make peace with Wilfred and restore him to Ripon and Hexham. Nor was this the only time Ælfflæd had an influence over ecclesiastical appointments. She consulted Cuthbert on her brother Ecgfrith’s proposal to elevate him to the episcopate by summoning him to Coquet Island in 684.[[126]](#footnote-126) She remained close to him after he became bishop of Lindisfarne, was close to Bosa of York, and probably influenced the elevation of John of Beverley to Hexham in 687 and his later translation to York on Wilfred’s partial reinstatement.[[127]](#footnote-127) She arranged the removal of her grandfather, Edwin’s remains from the battlefield at Hatfield Chase some 50 years after his death to lie alongside Oswiu and Hild at Whitby and also promoted saints’ cults such as Cuthbert’s and Pope Gregory’s as Apostle of England, to which end her community produced a *Life of Gregory.*[[128]](#footnote-128) Her own learning is demonstrated in the florid Latin in a letter to Abbess Adolana of Pfalzel, commending a pupil (another abbess) on pilgrimage to Rome.[[129]](#footnote-129)

**Eormenburh**

Ecgfrith's queens were Æthelthryth, later abbess of Ely, discussed below, and Eormenburh. Stephen is the earliest surviving source to refer to Eormenburh. He said that after Ecgfrith's death, Eormenburh became a model abbess but before she became this lamb of God she was a very She‑wolf.[[130]](#footnote-130) She was possessed of a devil that drove her to jealousy of Wilfred and she denounced his wealth before the king and persuaded Ecgfrith in 678 to summon Archbishop Theodore and dismiss Wilfred; a political jealousy rather than a religious one. Stephen cast her as Jezebel to Wilfred's Elijah.[[131]](#footnote-131) Having obtained a papal judgement in his favour, Wilfred returned to England in 680 only to be thrown into prison and the queen added to his humiliation by taking away a reliquary of his and using it as a pendant which brought nothing but bad luck to her. The king and queen continued to enjoy life but the following year whilst visiting Ecgfrith’s aunt, Æbbe of Coldingham, the queen was taken very ill. On the advice of his aunt (whose speech is reported)[[132]](#footnote-132) Ecgfrith released Wilfred and the queen recovered. On Æbbe’s advice the relics were returned and the curse that had come with them was lifted. Wilfred left Northumbria but ended up in Wessex where he was not well received because Centwine's queen (unnamed) was Eormenburh's sister[[133]](#footnote-133) and she had enough influence to have him driven out (see below). Eormenburh was clearly a very influential woman whose influence not only was felt on her husband but on her brother‑in‑law as well hundreds of miles away. It is interesting to note, though, that after her husband's death she too retired to a monastery and was content to live in retirement.

**Sussex**

In describing Wilfred’s visit to Wessex Bede mentioned another important political/religious marriage in relation to Wilfred's mission to convert the South Saxons in the 680s.[[134]](#footnote-134) The king of the South Saxons at that time was Æthelwalh who had recently been baptised under the influence of Wulfhere. Bede took the trouble to mention that Æthelwalh's queen, Eaba, had previously been baptised in her own province of the Hwicce which implies that she had an influence on Æthelwalh's conversion, even if it does not help with expanding on how the Hwicce or South Saxons were converted. One charter of Nothhelm dated 714 (S42) from Sussex has a Queen Æthelthryth[[135]](#footnote-135) witnessing a charter in second place behind her husband, Æthelstan, the only other witness. Neither she nor her husband have their kingdom identified. They could be subrulers of Sussex or later rulers confirming the grant.

The only other South Saxon royal woman to appear in the charters was Nothhelm’s sister, Nothgyth. She was the beneficiary of S45, a grant of c.692 by her brother to found a minster.[[136]](#footnote-136) Although the manuscript is fourteenth-century, there is general agreement that it is a genuine record with a number of later endorsements including one by Nothgyth granting the land to the nunnery which was originally seen as a separate charter, S1172.

**East Anglia**

**Rædwald’s queen**

The earliest East Anglian queen known about was the wife of Rædwald although she was anonymous. William mentioned Rædwald and his queen twice in Chapters 47 and 97; the first royal woman he mentioned not in any surviving Anglo-Saxon source. In the earlier chapter, when Edwin was banished by Æthelfrith in c.604, he took refuge at Rædwald's court and when Æthelfrith demanded his surrender, Rædwald was:

determined by the advice of his wife not to violate, through intimidation of any one, the faith which he had pledged to his friend[[137]](#footnote-137)

and so attacked and defeated Æthelfrith. This queen clearly had an important influence over her very powerful husband. Taken with John’s statement that two of her sons succeeded (see below), this statement helps to build up a picture of an important woman. William started to record the history of East Anglia fully in Chapter 97 where he gave a further piece of information about Rædwald’s queen. William said that Rædwald was converted through the persuasion of Edwin although other writers suggested that Edwin was not converted himself until two years after Rædwald's death.[[138]](#footnote-138) Whoever was responsible for the conversion, Rædwald was persuaded later by his wife to abjure his faith.[[139]](#footnote-139) Rædwald was succeeded in c.624 by his son Eorpwald who was succeeded after a brief interregnum by his half‑brother, Sigeberht in 630. The latter had become a Christian and been expelled by his stepfather, Rædwald. If Sigeberht was the son of the same wife who persuaded Rædwald to abjure it is understandable why she insisted her own son be banished for becoming a Christian. However, it is also possible that Sigeberht was the son of a former wife of Rædwald and his banishment was because he was not the son of the latest, strongest queen. If so, this would also show that she had considerable power but why then was he able to return to become king? Either explanation has problems but what is clear is that Rædwald had at least one wife who had considerable power in the kingdom.

John gave an interesting insight when describing the relationship between Eorpwald and Sigeberht. They were half‑brothers on their mother's side.[[140]](#footnote-140) It is quite extraordinary that Sigeberht should have succeeded if he had none of the royal blood of the Uffingas in his veins and it suggests that his mother must have had the character of a Livia for him to be Tiberius to Rædwald's Augustus. It is just possible that John has misinterpreted his source. This might have said that Eorpwald and Sigeberht had the same mother and he thought this meant to imply that they did not have the same father.[[141]](#footnote-141) The expression is sometimes used, however, to suggest full brothers when their father had children by more than one wife and as he was once a pagan, Rædwald could well have had more than one wife. However, the use of the term half‑brother does imply that the relationship was very specific. It could be that their mother was herself of royal blood and this was why Sigeberht managed to succeed. However, some East Anglian kings do seem to have treated their step-children like their own children as the story of Anna and his step‑daughter implies, so it could well be that Sigeberht was brought up as a child by his step‑father as if he was his own son and possibly even adopted as such, and exiled, just as Augustus did with Tiberius.

**Anna’s daughters**

Anna’s queen is unnamed by any Anglo-Saxon source but she is called Sæwara in the eleventh-century life of St Botolph by the monk Folcard of St Bertin and abbot of Thorney.[[142]](#footnote-142) Anna had two daughters by her and one step‑daughter (presumably Sæwara’s daughter by a previous husband) mentioned by Bede[[143]](#footnote-143) once: Æthelburh, Seaxburh and Sæthryth; and a daughter, Æthelthryth, mentioned in several places.[[144]](#footnote-144) Another daughter, Wihtburh is mentioned in charters from the reigns of Æthelred (S1486: Ælfflæd’s will) and Cnut (S958). Wihtburh was mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* F when her uncorrupted body was found at Dereham in 798, fifty-five years after her burial but it was John, mentioning the same event, who specified she was the daughter of Anna.[[145]](#footnote-145) They were all renowned for their piety but two of them also made political marriages. The first was Anna's eldest daughter Seaxburh[[146]](#footnote-146) who married Earconberht of Kent (probably shortly after he became king in 640). Just as Hereswith went to Francia to become a nun, her East Anglian cousins also seem to have preferred this to founding new houses in England. Anna's stepdaughter, Sæthryth, was the first to enter monastic life,[[147]](#footnote-147) going to Faremoutiers-en-Brie where she ended up as abbess despite being a foreigner. Faremoutiers-en-Brie was founded by Abbess Fara[[148]](#footnote-148) (or Burgondofara) and its model of a double monastery headed by a nobly-born abbess was followed in England perhaps thanks to contacts such as this. Sæthryth’s niece, Seaxburh’s daughter, Earcongota, shared the family Christian zeal and was sent to Faremoutiers-en-Brie.[[149]](#footnote-149) She seems to have remained a nun there but became renowned for her piety and was venerated after her death for her miraculous deeds.[[150]](#footnote-150) Another of Anna's daughters, Æthelburh, was also there and succeeded her half-sister, Sæthryth, as abbess. Æthelburh was also renowned for her piety and also as a builder.[[151]](#footnote-151) Unfortunately, she died in 664 before completing the new church she was building and it was abandoned seven years later when her body was translated to a completed church and found to be free from corruption, as indeed her niece, Earcongota's, was. They were further examples of Anglo‑Saxon royal women whose chief contributions to their church was that after their death they were venerated as saints and attracted more followers to the church.

**Æthelthryth**

The other daughter of Anna mentioned by Bede was Æthelthryth.[[152]](#footnote-152) With her the co‑operation of the woman herself in the marriage alliance is shown to have had an importance. Æthelthryth cannot be described as a mere pawn in this game. Bede[[153]](#footnote-153) said that she had been married first to Tondberht,[[154]](#footnote-154) a prince of the South Gyrwas,[[155]](#footnote-155) but he had died shortly after the wedding[[156]](#footnote-156) and she was given to Ecgfrith of Northumbria. However, Æthelthryth was evidently an unwilling participant in this marriage and steadfastly refused to consummate it for twelve years when at last Ecgfrith agreed to divorce her. He had wanted to consummate the marriage as he tried to bribe Wilfred to persuade the queen to co‑operate,[[157]](#footnote-157) as she had such a high regard for the bishop, by offers of gifts of estates and wealth. In fact, Bede had it from Wilfred himself that Æthelthryth remained a virgin and if further proof were needed the uncorrupted state of her body when it was translated in 695, sixteen years after burial in 679 was proof enough for him. It is safe to conclude from this that this particular marriage alliance was not as successful as the two kings who arranged it would have liked but it must be remembered that priorities and strategies change, the balance of power shifts, and Ecgfrith may well have been happy to exchange an alliance with the East Angles for one with Kent. Stephen’s first reference to Æthelthryth[[158]](#footnote-158) was before their separation and he ascribed Ecgfrith's success in military matters to the support of such a holy woman and her influence over her husband especially in obedience to Wilfred. Once they were separated, however, Ecgfrith's fortunes declined. On a more practical level it was Æthelthryth who actually gave the estate at Hexham to Wilfred to allow him to found the monastery of St Andrew there.[[159]](#footnote-159) Stephen commented on its size and grandeur so Æthelthryth's donation must have been quite substantial showing she was a woman of wealth and power.

Thanks to Bede’s championship, Æthelthryth was Anna's most famous daughter. Like Hild, Bede considered Æthelthryth to be important enough to have a whole chapter[[160]](#footnote-160) dedicated to her life and death, and there are two other references to her plus an ingenious acrostic hymn to Virginity[[161]](#footnote-161) which follows Æthelthryth's mini‑biography and had been written by Bede many years before in honour of Æthelthryth. When she finally persuaded Ecgfrith to release her from their marriage to enter the monastic life she started by going to Coldingham where his Aunt Æbbe was abbess. Æbbe is an interesting case to contrast with Hild and Æthelthryth and Bede rather glossed over her. Her instruction of Æthelthryth was very efficient as her pupil was considered worthy to found her own monastery at Ely only a year after entering Coldingham. Bede told the dream of Adomnan[[162]](#footnote-162) whilst a monk there, warning of the destruction of the abbey by fire because the nuns were decadent, wearing fine clothes and adorning themselves in a way that attracted strange men. Æbbe was able to reform them whilst she was alive but after her death they reverted to their bad habits thus causing the monastery to be destroyed by God's wrath. Thus, despite her own worthiness Æbbe was not able to inspire the devotion in her followers that Hild and Æthelthryth were.

There are three *Ethilthryths* in the *Liber Vitae* in 96th, 98th and 107th places. Æthelthryth’s fame is such that it seems incongruous she is missing. Perhaps she was too famous to need to be included originally and possibly added later for completeness.[[163]](#footnote-163) Perhaps she was omitted because of the circumstances of her leaving her husband and returning to the kingdom of her birth. *Æbbe* in 36th place might be her teacher at Coldingham. Æbbe’s bones were mentioned as being translated to Durham in c.1030 along with those of Abbess Æthelgifu (18th or 23rd on the list are *Ethilgyths*) by Simeon.[[164]](#footnote-164) Stephen described Æbbe as very holy and discreet and showed she had an important influence on her nephew on at least one occasion as described above. Stephen[[165]](#footnote-165) mentioned another abbess called Æbbe who was the subject of one of Wilfred's healing miracles, but she was the wife of a reeve called Osfrith and otherwise unknown.

Æthelthryth must have been appalled by the nuns at Coldingham as she always wore wool at Ely and made a point of eating sparsely, taking cold baths and acting in real humility. She was gifted with prophecy and afflicted with illness which helped create an impressive reputation for holiness. She was only abbess for six years from 673 and when she died was buried in a wooden coffin with the ordinary nuns. She was succeeded in 679 (John recorded the precise date of Æthelthryth's death as the 23rd of June) as abbess by her eldest sister, Seaxburh, whose husband, Earconberht, had died in 664. Between Earconberht’s death and going to Ely, Seaxburh founded Minster-in-Sheppey but she might have also acted as regent for her son[[166]](#footnote-166) or even married and briefly succeeded Coenwalh of Wessex.[[167]](#footnote-167) In 695, sixteen years after Æthelthryth’s death, Seaxburh decided to translate her sister's body into a more fitting tomb. Miraculously, a marble coffin was found in a Roman ruin that was exactly the right shape and size and when Æthelthryth's body was exhumed it was not only free from corruption but a scar from an operation she had had two days before her death had totally healed. Her reputation as a saint was ensured and Ely became a pilgrimage centre because of it.

Bede also told how Æthelthryth’s reputation had a more tangible effect on the lives of those she had known. He related the story of Imma,[[168]](#footnote-168) a retainer of Ælfwine[[169]](#footnote-169) who was struck down in the battle in which his king was killed. Despite the fact that no‑one could successfully bind him he was taken prisoner. After various adventures he was eventually ransomed and the ransom was paid by Hlothere of Kent because Imma had once been a thegn of Æthelthryth and Hlothere was her nephew, being the son of Seaxburh. For Imma it was very useful to have saintly friends in high places. The lack of surviving Northumbrian and East Anglian charters means that any attestations that Æthelthryth may have made for her father, husbands or other relatives have not survived. However, her reputation was such that her house at Ely soon became known as St Æthelthryth’s and she is mentioned in more charters because of donations to her house than almost any other saint or any of her contemporary royal women. There are at least eighteen charters,[[170]](#footnote-170) more than half of them wills, dating from 956 to the 1050s compared to the odd mention for her fellow Elyite saints, her sisters and niece, Seaxburh, Wihtburh and Eormenhild,[[171]](#footnote-171) Mildrith[[172]](#footnote-172) at Thanet, Æthelburh[[173]](#footnote-173) at Barking and Osyth[[174]](#footnote-174) at Chich.

The twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*[[175]](#footnote-175)added Æthelthryth’s birthplace as Exning, Suffolk, that her first marriage took place in 652 and she received Ely from Tondberht as a dower gift. This is disputed by Thacker[[176]](#footnote-176) who supported the idea that Ely was an East Anglian royal estate of 600 hides which was the same size as the whole of Tondberht’s territory of the South Gyrwas. In discussing the Kentish saints (Chapter 214) William mentioned that Earconberht’s daughter, Eormenhild, was abbess of Ely after her mother, Seaxburh, and was buried there. Æthelthryth had started something of a family business at Ely.

**Ecgburh**

As Felix was writing in East Anglia where Guthlac ended up, what he said about Abbess Ecgburh[[177]](#footnote-177) is probably correct. She was head of a double monastery although Felix did not identify which one (perhaps Repton and then Ely?) He also said that she was the daughter of Aldwulf of East Anglia (664-713). This is the main source for a daughter for this particular king but there was no reason for Felix to make it up. She is another example of the royal abbess and played an important role in the "life" of the saint by providing him with a lead coffin and a fine linen cloth for his body to be wrapped in after his death. She also asked him about his successor at his hermitage and he answered her telling her about Cissa who was still a pagan at the time. Using various late sources such as the *Liber Eliensis* and a contemporary letter[[178]](#footnote-178) it has been deduced that Aldwulf had two other daughters, Æthelburh and Hwætburh who also became abbesses, of Hackness, their great-aunt’s foundation.

**Essex**

**Ricula**

Another royal woman connected to Æthelbert mentioned by Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was his sister, Ricula, who married the king of the East Saxons.[[179]](#footnote-179) Bede did not mention the marriage between Ricula and Sledda but merely the fact that Sæbert of the East Saxons was Æthelbert's nephew through his sister in the context of Sæbert being under Æthelbert's suzerainty and thus willing to accept the teachings of Augustine's mission. He did not specify that Ricula was an influence in this matter but by mentioning her he implied that she was an important character, perhaps because of her role in spreading the Faith to the East Saxons. This was one of the reasons he mentioned Bertha, Æthelburh, Alchflæd and others. The date of the marriage is not recorded anywhere but was likely to have been after Æthelbert became king. Sæbert succeeded in c.604 and would probably have been at least twenty meaning he would have been born in c.580 so Ricula’s marriage would have taken place some time before that; so before she became a Christian. This was a political marriage that had religious consequences.

**Sebbi’s queen**

An interesting counterpart to Æthelthryth's power to prevent Ecgfrith fulfilling one of his regal desires (to provide an heir) because of her desire to fulfil her religious calling (if this is really what happened) is found in the kingdom of the East Saxons. Another of the very few references to East Saxon queens is found in Bede.[[180]](#footnote-180) Sebbi’s wife (unfortunately unnamed nor otherwise identified) proved an obstacle to his desire to fulfil his religious calling. Sebbi was a very pious man and wished to devote himself to prayer and religious acts but his wife refused absolutely to give him a divorce which would allow him to abdicate and become a monk. It was only after he had ruled for thirty years and was struck down by a mortal illness and so could no longer rule effectively that his wife finally agreed to the divorce and he became a monk in London. If one queen of the East Saxons could exercise such power over someone who was clearly a successful ruler it is a great shame that there is so little information about the other queens of the East Saxons.

**Æthelburh of Barking**

Hildilid’s predecessor as abbess of Barking had been Æthelburh whom Bede mentioned several times.[[181]](#footnote-181) She was the sister of Bishop Earconwald[[182]](#footnote-182) who built monasteries for himself at Chertsey and for her at Barking. There is no royal connection mentioned in Bede but her family must have been nobly born and quite wealthy to afford to found two monasteries. Perhaps she was a member of the East Saxon royal family for whom the names of no royal princesses survive. She was a devout head of her monastery and like so many others her death was surrounded by miraculous happenings. John mentioned Æthelburh as the addressee of St Aldhelm's book *De Virginitate*.[[183]](#footnote-183) Bede had mentioned this work but not that Aldhelm had written it for Æthelburh. It should not seem strange that such a work should be dedicated to a woman nor that the woman should be an abbess but Aldhelm was working in Sherborne and Æthelburh was based at Barking so there were other abbesses nearer to hand that he could have dedicated it to. There is also no particular reason why he should have written such a work unless to honour a woman he especially admired. If she had done nothing else than inspire this work, it was a worthy memorial to Æthelburh. John, under 664, recorded the actual date of Æthelburh's death as the 11th of October 679. She was also a rare recipient of a grant in one of the few surviving charters referring to Essex, S1171.[[184]](#footnote-184) Undated but probably 686-8 (March), it was a grant from one *Hodilredus* (Æthelred) to *Hedilburg* (Æthelburh), abbess, for her minster called *Beddanhaam* (Barking) of 40 hides (*manentes*) at *Ricingahaam, Budinhaam*, Dagenham, *Angenlabeshaam* and *Widmundes felt* (Wyfields in Great Ilford), all probably in Essex. It is probably a contemporary seventh-century document although the bounds were added in the eighth century, presumably due to damage of the original or an attempt to enlarge them. The witness-list is a bit odd as Sebbi witnessed it twice. Also there were the grantor, Sebbi’s son, Æthelred (or Oethilred, sometimes called Sighere’s son), Æthelburh’s brother, Earconwald, two more of Sebbi’s sons, Sigeheard and Swæbheard (of Kent) and half a dozen assorted bishops and abbots. Although the witness-list was part of the later addition and a bit muddled there is no doubt that the charter records a genuine grant to Æthelburh.

**Eadburh**

Sebbi’s son, Swæfred, was one of the few East Saxon kings whose charters survive if only to a very small extent. Two of the three have only recently come to light from the Barking archive and are listed as S65a and S65b.[[185]](#footnote-185) The latter, dating to c.693-c.706, is all the more unusual in having a witness-list containing women’s names. After the king and Bishop Waldhere of London is Swæfred’s brother and co-ruler, Sigeheard and then an Eadburh *(+ signum manus Eadburge*) who is otherwise unrecorded unless she is the woman from whom Abberton near Colchester derives its name.[[186]](#footnote-186) Her high position in the list must mean she was of considerable importance and she may well have been Swæfred’s queen. She was followed by one Offa (possibly the future king), three otherwise unknown abbots (indeed, there are not three known abbeys in Essex at that date), eight people without title, of whom five end with "a" and might be female names and one, Cille, who could be either male or female,[[187]](#footnote-187) followed by a priest and a fourth abbot. The name Eadburh might imply she was a member of the Kentish royal house, a daughter of Earconberht, possibly, implying another diplomatic marriage.

**Mercia**

The last Anglo‑Saxon royal women mentioned by Geoffrey were in connection with Cædwalla who had formed an alliance with Penda in order to defeat Edwin which was apparently sealed with a marriage. Geoffrey said Cædwalla died in old age after reigning forty-eight years and was succeeded by his son, Cadwallader; his:

mother had been a sister of Penda, but only on her father's side, for she had had a different mother, a woman born from a noble family of the Gewissei. The famous Cadwallo had taken her to his bed later in life, after the treaty which he had made with her brother, and by her he had become the father of Cadwallader.[[188]](#footnote-188)

This recorded two marriages, one between Penda's father, Pybba, and a West Saxon (Gewissein) noblewoman (probably the daughter of Ceawlin) and a second between Penda's sister and Cædwalla. The former would have been an alliance between Creoda of Mercia and Ceawlin of Wessex around the year 575 when Ceawlin was at the height of his power and at the time Creoda first became king and is evidence that Creoda was probably a client king of Ceawlin’s. The latter between Mercia and Gwynedd might be dated just before Cædwalla and Penda’s 633 attack on Edwin.

**Cynewise, Cyneswith and Cyneburh**

Further evidence of a queen exercising power comes from Mercia when Oswiu's offers of gifts to Penda in 655 to try to persuade him to cease ravaging his country were refused and he ended up by fighting and killing him at the battle of *Winwæd*. Penda had left Mercia in the hands of his queen despite the fact he had at least four sons. Perhaps they were all fighting with him. The evidence comes from Bede with a reference to Oswiu's son, Ecgfrith, being held hostage at Queen Cynewise's court in the province of the Mercians.[[189]](#footnote-189) Despite her husband's defeat Cynewise released Ecgfrith to return to his father. Perhaps she used him as a bargaining tool to ensure that her eldest son, Peada, was given at least part of his father's kingdom to rule. John called Penda's queen Kineswith who might be a different queen from the Cynewise mentioned by Bede. Bede did not specify how many children she had but John made her the mother of Penda's five sons and two daughters. Not much is known about pagan marriage customs so whether it would be surprising for Penda to have only one queen is not known.

John (under 708) reported the story of why Offa of Essex joined Coenred of Mercia in becoming monks and joining Bishop Ecgwin of the Hwicce on their pilgrimage to Rome in 709. Offa is described as a youth and is said to have deeply loved a maiden (Cyneswith) and it was due to her exhortations and persuasions that he went on the journey and was tonsured and ended his life as a monk. There seems to be something wrong with the chronology as Coenred was Cyneswith's nephew. Penda died in 655 and even if Cyneswith had been a very late child she would have been in her mid fifties at the very least. If this story is true (and Cyneswith was not a granddaughter rather than daughter of Penda) she would probably have been quite a venerable nun and it is not surprising that she deflected the advances of the youthful Offa to a better cause. Besides, Offa was apparently already married as he had to leave his wife to go on the pilgrimage. It is likely that it was Cyneswith’s spiritual influence over Offa that was important, not her sexual power although her political connections would also have been useful. Bede had recorded this event (in 709)[[190]](#footnote-190) and remarked that Offa left his wife to do so but John said that both men left their wives. This is the only reference to a wife of Coenred and John may have misread Bede. It is still significant that one or both of these monarchs were prepared to leave their wives to become monks unlike Offa's kinsman Sebbi as examined above. At least one later example (Ine of Wessex) has some authority to suggest that his wife went with him but Offa and Coenred's wives either refused or were not considered sufficiently holy by their husbands to share in the pilgrimage.

Cyneswith was mentioned with her sister Cyneburh in three places in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E under years 656, 675 and 963. All three occasions refer to *Medeshamstede* (Peterborough) where E was written.[[191]](#footnote-191) The chronicler who added these statements would have had access to records held at Peterborough not available to Bede. The abbey was founded by Penda's eldest son, Peada, and then endowed by his next son, Wulfhere, who was advised by his brothers, Æthelred and Merewalh and his sisters, Cyneburh and Cyneswith who also witnessed the endowment. The second reference was to Æthelred's confirmation of the earlier grants by his brothers and their two sisters. The third reference was to Bishop Æthelwold’s refounding of the abbey and Abbot Ælfsige's exhumation of the bodies of Saints Cyneburh and Cyneswith from Castor and reburial at Peterborough. From this information it is possible to deduce that Cyneburh and Cyneswith were important enough figures at Wulfhere's court to be called on to witness his charters; they were wealthy enough to make their own grants to the abbey during Æthelred's reign and that they were holy enough for their relics to be venerated after their deaths and for them to be sanctified. The two grants are supposedly preserved in two charters, S68 dated 664 to Wulfhere’s reign and S72 dated 680 to Æthelred’s reign, which are almost universally considered to be forgeries[[192]](#footnote-192) but the witness-lists might preserve genuine elements. Cyneburh’s husband, Alchfrith, died in 664 so either she had divorced him before 656 and returned to Mercia or she returned there after 664 and the because of her 675 endowment her witnessing of the 656 charter was recorded in error in retrospect. However, they both refer to Cyneburh and Cyneswith, the former having them as witnesses, in sixth and seventh places after Wulfhere, Oswiu of Northumbria (his overlord/Bretwalda), Sighere (663‑88) and Sebbi (663‑93) of Essex and Æthelred. After them came Archbishop Deusdedit, four bishops and others. This indicates that the forgers thought the presence of Cyneburh and Cyneswith would add an air of authenticity or sanctity. As there are no other charters from Mercia from this period with royal nuns or abbesses in them they are an intriguing insight into some of the lost charters that might have had such names in them. The elder of the two sisters, Cyneburh, was wife of Alchfrith, sub-king of Deira (655-64) whilst his father was king of Northumbria before she became a nun so it is not surprising to see her name among the queens and abbesses in the *Liber Vitae* as *Cyniburg*, in 27th place.[[193]](#footnote-193) Cyneswith seems to have entered a convent at an early age and at some time became abbess of Castor and is not in the *Liber Vitae* but she does not seem to have had a Northumbrian connection apart from her sister. Wulfhere's queen, Eormenhild of Kent, did not appear in S68. It is possible that they were not married in 664 but he had been king for six years so would probably have had a wife by then. If the idea of women witnessing charters came from Kent it is surprising that Eormenhild was not there. However, it is very difficult to argue anything from a couple of spurious charters.

**Alchflæd**

Just as Ælfflæd's story was reminiscent of Eanfled's, so her sister, Alchflæd's was reminiscent of their grandmother, Æthelburh's. Bede[[194]](#footnote-194) said that Penda appointed his son, Peada, as king in 653 and Peada decided he should like Alchflæd as his queen. Oswiu's conditions were even stricter than Eadbald's as he insisted that Peada and his people should be baptised before he would permit him to marry his daughter. Peada took instruction and was duly baptised. It is not related how far Alchflæd played a part in the instruction, if at all, but Peada was apparently influenced by Oswiu's son Alchfrith who was his kinsman by virtue of being married to Peada’s sister, Cyneburh. Bede did not specify that Cyneburh converted to Christianity in order to marry Alchfrith but it is probable that as a good Christian, Oswiu would have insisted his son’s bride was also a Christian. Thus, she was in a good position to help instruct her brother in his conversion.

When Peada was assassinated at Easter 656, Bede said it was "by treachery, it is said, of his own wife."[[195]](#footnote-195) This is a tantalising glimpse into a very important political act in which a royal woman seems to have played a significant role but there are no more details. On Peada’s death Oswiu took over personal control of the whole of Mercia for two years. What probably happened was that Peada had decided to try and throw off his father‑in‑law's overlordship and in some way this was relayed to Oswiu by Alchflæd allowing Oswiu to pre-empt any move and have Peada killed. Nothing is known of Alchflæd's fate but it would be unlikely that she could have found another king willing to take her on as his wife. As a Christian she would have been more welcome in a nunnery. Whatever her fate she does not appear to be in the *Liber Vitae* unlike her sisters Ælfflæd (in 4th place) and possibly, Osthryth (125th)*.*

**Eormenhild**

It was under 675 that John recorded the first named woman who was not found elsewhere. She was Eormenhild,[[196]](#footnote-196) daughter of Earconberht and Seaxburh of Kent, sister of Earcongota and wife of Wulfhere of Mercia. John emphasized that she was the daughter of St Seaxburh, the sister of St Æthelthryth. Yet another addition to the saintly female royalty was Wulfhere's and Eormenhild’s daughter, St Wærburh[[197]](#footnote-197) who was described as a virgin of exemplary virtues though this should really be taken for granted. John said that she renounced the world on her father's death (675) and became a nun in her Aunt Æthelthryth's monastery (Ely) where she wrought many miracles. John went on to say that when her uncle, Æthelred, heard of these he made her abbess over several monasteries of virgins devoted to God and she lived among them according to the rule until she died at one of them called *Triccingeham* (Threekingham). According to her wishes her body was taken to the monastery called *Heanbirig* (Hanbury - presumably another of her houses) and was buried with great pomp and lay uncorrupted until disturbed by the Danes many years later. There are two particularly interesting points about Wærburh in this account by John. Firstly, that she renounced the world on her father's death. It was not a case of him dedicating a young daughter to the monastic life as some of the Northumbrian kings did. It appears that Wulfhere might have intended something else for her such as a diplomatic marriage or even a role as regent if his son, Coenred, should he be too young to rule when he succeeded to the throne.[[198]](#footnote-198) There is clearly no evidence for the latter suggestion but if she and her brother had been a rival to her uncle the best way for Æthelred to eliminate her would have been to pack her off to a nunnery. The second point is that she was abbess of several houses, apparently simultaneously. Other abbesses such as Hild are known to have ruled more than one house but usually in succession. There is a clear indication in Wærburh's case that she was abbess of Threekingham and Hanbury at the same time and probably others as well, possibly Ely, Weedon and Chester where her body was in William's day. That John found it necessary to say that she lived with the nuns implies that she had some other property where she could have lived. Did she inherit a royal palace from her father? Clearly her position as an abbess of the blood royal gave her an importance not noted elsewhere.

**Osthryth**

Another of Oswiu’s daughters, Osthryth, married Peada's brother and ultimate successor, Æthelred. The second brother, Wulfhere, managed to re‑establish Mercian independence in 658 with the help of his nobles and was succeeded in 675 by Æthelred. If Osthryth had been at all linked to her sister, Alchflæd's betrayal of her husband she would have found herself as quite an unpopular queen. She also spent some time promoting religious projects such as the donations she gave with Æthelred to Bardney Abbey in Lindsey. Like other members of her family she seems to have retained a strong loyalty to her father's family that was not entirely consistent with her position as queen of Mercia. Bede quoted two examples of this. Firstly, she wanted to get the bones of her saintly uncle, Oswald, for Bardney Abbey.[[199]](#footnote-199) This was not necessarily a good idea as the monks at Bardney did not apparently want the relics of the ruler of another kingdom that had generally been the enemy of Mercia and initially refused the cart bearing his bones entry into the abbey. Only after a miraculous shaft of light shone over them all night did the monks let them in. Osthryth seems to have lived at the abbey at times as she was there when Abbess Æthelhild[[200]](#footnote-200) of a neighbouring monastery, visited and collected some of the miraculous dust from the pavement where the bones had originally been washed. Bede referred[[201]](#footnote-201) to the translation being commended by Osthryth to Æthelhild. He mentioned that Æthelhild was the sister of Abbot Aldwine of Partney and Bishop Æthelwine of Lindsey. Such a distinguished family seems likely to have been at least noble if not royal, possibly connected to the local royal family about whom almost nothing is known.[[202]](#footnote-202) Osthryth ultimately contributed her own bones to Bardney as well.[[203]](#footnote-203)

Secondly, Bede mentioned when her husband, Æthelred, and brother, Ecgfrith, fought a battle near the River Trent in 679,[[204]](#footnote-204) Ælfwine, the 18-year old brother of Ecgfrith and Osthryth, was killed in the battle and Bede said his death was likely to cause more hatred. The mediator in the matter was Archbishop Theodore who persuaded Æthelred to pay Ecgfrith compensation for his brother's death. Bede mentioned that Æthelred's queen was Ælfwine's sister and implied that she had a part to play in persuading her husband to pay the compensation. The tendency for Osthryth to side with her father's family rather than her husband's might give a hint to the bleak entry in the Synopsis at the end of Bede's work which states that in 697 Osthryth was killed by her own people, the Mercian chieftains.[[205]](#footnote-205) There might have been an echo in this of revenge for Peada's assassination at the instigation of her sister, Alchflæd, or it might just be that she was interfering too much in politics. One of the reasons she may have spent time at Bardney Abbey was that she did not feel safe at court when her husband was on campaign. If so, her eventual fate seems to have justified this fear.

On the way to Wessex Wilfred had to pass through Mercia and as in Wessex a family connection made his stay impossible. This time it was Ecgfrith's sister (Osthryth but unnamed by Stephen)[[206]](#footnote-206) who persuaded her husband, Æthelred, to forbid his nephew, the reeve Berhtwald, to allow Wilfred to stay with him as he wished, lest they upset Ecgfrith.

Osthryth also appeared in charters. Eight complete charters[[207]](#footnote-207) of Æthelred survive from his 29-year reign (675-704) and Osthryth appeared in two of these as well as in two others. One of 680 (S72), a grant to St Peter’s *Medehamstede* (Peterborough), had her in both the Latin and English versions, as witness in fourth place in the midst of bishops and abbots[[208]](#footnote-208) although she did not appear in the other Peterborough charter already mentioned, S68. She appeared in another of 697-9 (S76), a grant to Bishop Oftfor for the re-establishment of a monastery at Fladbury, as a beneficiary insofar as Æthelred mentioned one of the reasons for the grant as being for the absolution of (his and) her crimes.[[209]](#footnote-209) But what crimes? Is this another clue to why she was assassinated? She was also a witness to the incomplete one from Peterborough of 675-92 (S1806). Bishop Ecgwine’s charter of 714 (S1251) establishing the house at Evesham referred back to Osthryth having received land at Fladbury from her father which her husband had used to endow a monastery (compare S76). These few snippets suggest that Osthryth was a wealthy landowner able to patronise religious houses and wield considerable influence. Jones[[210]](#footnote-210) suggested that the land had been Osthryth’s, from her sister, Alchflæd, widow of Æthelred’s brother, Peada, who might have been the Flæde after whom Fladbury was named.

**Wærburh**

After Osthryth’s murder in 697 there is no record of Æthelred remarrying;[[211]](#footnote-211) nor of whom his nephew and successor, Coenred (704‑709) married, although the story of his journey to Rome mentioned above shows he had been married. Coenred’s successor, Æthelred's son, Ceolred (709‑16) did apparently marry. Abbess Wærburh who died in 782 was described by Simeon as former queen of Mercia and by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as Ceolred's queen. However, to outlive him by 66 years she was probably very young when they were married and may not have witnessed charters. Only one survives from his reign anyway. Ceolred’s successor, Æthelbald (716‑57), may never have married and none of his surviving twenty-one charters with witnesses had a woman witness. He was distantly related to Ceolred and it is probable that none of the abbesses closely related to Ceolred would have been seen as important enough to Æthelbald to be charter witnesses. Stafford suggested that Æthelbald’s reluctance to take a legitimate wife as his queen may have been to avoid a son being a rival.[[212]](#footnote-212) She emphasized Offa’s desire to underline the legitimacy of their marriage to contrast the illegitimacy of Æthelbald’s liaisons with nuns. Offa wanted exactly the opposite to Æthelbald; to have a legitimate son who would continue his line.

**Pega**

Guthlac's mother, Tette, was a noblewoman and his father, Penwalh, a descendant of Icel through the noble kings of Mercia. The exact relationship is not given but he was probably a nephew of Penda.[[213]](#footnote-213) Tette is not mentioned again by name although there are a number of oblique references to Guthlac's relationship with his parents and how he was a well‑behaved child.

One of the women mentioned by Felix was as royal as Guthlac, his sister Pega.[[214]](#footnote-214) When he was dying in 714, Guthlac remembered the cloth which he had not used during his life and ordered Beccel to wrap him in it and place him in the coffin. He also gave him instructions to take to his sister, Pega, and it was after Guthlac's death that Pega became an important figure in his story. Guthlac explained that he had kept apart from his sister during their lives so that they might enjoy eternity together. He also gave instructions that she should be one of only two people to be told that he had daily visits from an angel. When Pega heard of her brother's death she fainted away but recovered the next day and came to his island where she spent three days praying over his body before burying it. She was also responsible for reburying his body in a monument above ground twelve months later. Although the cloth was as fresh as new she rewrapped his body in a cloth sent by the anchorite Ecgberht (the other person who was told about Guthlac's angelic visitations) and presumably retained the original cloth for the purposes of relics and miracles although this is not specified. However, like Cynithrith and Wilfred, she was responsible for assisting some of the healing miracles associated with her brother. One quoted by Felix was when she grated a piece of glutinous salt consecrated by Guthlac into holy water and used it to cure a blind man of his cataracts. Although Pega was clearly less important than her brother as a miracle worker she was important enough to be the instrument of his power. The sibling connection is important in her case but the fact that Felix notes in the beginning that their family was of royal origin shows that this fact was also important.

**Some Abbesses**

There are a number of other possible royal women from Mercia such as St Frideswide.[[215]](#footnote-215) Her father was supposedly King Didan of Lower Mercia about whom no contemporary records survive, and her mother was called Sæthryth, the same name as Anna's stepdaughter. S909, dated 1004, is a grant from Æthelred II to St Frideswide's Abbey in Oxford and refers to her as *beata*. She was supposedly the founding abbess c.710. She was being venerated at least as early as the late tenth century but the only surviving lives are much later and poor evidence for her life.

St Osyth[[216]](#footnote-216) was supposedly the daughter of Frithuwald of Surrey and Wilburga, another of Penda's many children, according to her hagiography. Another legend had Penda’s daughter, Cyneswith, courted by Sighere's son, Offa, in the first decade of the eighth century but Sighere had married Osyth so Cyneswith would have been Offa’s great-aunt and presumably considerably older than him. There may have been two Osyths (of Aylesbury and Chich) which would explain this anachronism.[[217]](#footnote-217) Hagerty traced her career from birth at Quarrendon in 649/51, upbringing at Aylesbury under her aunt Edith, marriage to Sighere of Essex aged 13 and foundation at Chich in c.665 and death in c.685. Bailey[[218]](#footnote-218) identified a sizeable "Frith" clan related to Osyth’s father, Frithuwold, including St Frideswide (Frithuswith) and Queen Frithogyth of Wessex.

Cuthswith[[219]](#footnote-219) was an abbess who appeared in a couple of charters (S53 and S1177) as well as the Würzburg manuscript of Jerome on Ecclesiastes but the evidence for these is either inconclusive or very late and outside the scope of this study. S53 is an almost certainly authentic grant in 693 from Oshere of the Hwicce to Cuthswith for founding a minster,[[220]](#footnote-220) probably at Inkberrow. S1177 dates to 705-9 and is a grant by Æthelheard and Æthelweard of the Hwicce to Cuthswith of land in Warwickshire. Her name suggests a possible link to the Mercian or West Saxon houses.

S95 is a grant of land near Inkberrow in c.730 from Æthelbald of Mercia to Cyneburh who might just be one of Cuthswith’s successors and whose name also suggests a royal Mercian or West Saxon link. She may be the abbess mentioned in S1782, a list of benefactions to Gloucester, where she is described as Osric’s sister. The same charter mentioned later abbesses called Eadburh and Eafe;[[221]](#footnote-221) the latter may be the *famula Dei* who was the beneficiary of a grant by Æthelbald (S1824) at Droitwich.

Oshere’s brother, Osric, issued a charter to an abbess called Bertana (S51) to found a house at Bath but there is little agreement over the authenticity of the grant or even the identity of the beneficiary. Her name does not suggest she was connected to any particular royal family.

Abbess Hrothwaru was mentioned in S1429 dated c.737 but referring back to a grant in the reign of Æthelred (675-704) and she was mentioned by the *Liber Vitae* in 33rd place as *Hrothuara* in a position consistent with the date of Æthelred’s reign. Whether she was a royal Mercian cannot be proven or why she should appear in the *Liber Vitae* if it is her.

Another woman mentioned by Guthlac was Abbess Ælfthryth of Repton[[222]](#footnote-222) under whom Guthlac received the mystic tonsure of St Peter. Nothing else is known about her although the monastery at Repton must have been important as it was in the heartland of Mercia and considered important enough by 757 to become the burial place of Æthelbald. It is very likely that it would have been entrusted to a royal abbess and Felix may not have been aware of her origins. Ælfthryth’s name suggests she may have been a sister or aunt of Æthelbald’s. Possibly she was *Aldthryth* in 57th place in the *Liber Vitae.* If so, she may have been a Northumbrian princess, sister to Aldfrith who had accompanied her half-sister, Osthryth to Mercia, perhaps.

**Wessex**

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* mentioned five important women from the period covered by Bede's history but who were not mentioned by Bede. Two of these were West Saxon queens, two of them were West Saxon princesses and the other one was a Mercian, Cyneswith, mentioned above. This suggests that the remoteness of Wessex from Bede's monastery at Jarrow meant that he was unable to obtain as much material from there as was available to the later chroniclers.

**Cyneburh**

Another example of religious-cum-political alliance is the marriage between Oswald of Northumbria and a daughter[[223]](#footnote-223) of Cynegils of the West Saxons in 635. The occasion was during the mission of Bishop Birinus to the West Saxons. Having converted Cynegils, the bishop was duly baptising him. Oswald was present and greeted Cynegils as he came to the font offering him an alliance and to take him as his godson and his daughter as his queen. There is no mention of pressure here from Oswald but Cynegils must have realised that an alliance with him would be useful against the growing power of their mutual enemy, Penda. Cynegils and Cwichelm had fought against Penda in 628 at Cirencester[[224]](#footnote-224) and Oswald had succeeded to Northumbria a year after Penda had ravaged the region with his ally Cædwalla.[[225]](#footnote-225) In 635 Penda defeated and killed Sigeberht and Egric of East Anglia.[[226]](#footnote-226) Whether Oswald was present to encourage the conversion or the marriage was not specified but the arrangement would presumably have needed Cynegils’s (or at the least his daughter's) conversion first. In this instance Cyneburh seems to have been a passive partner in the venture and this may be why Bede did not think her name worthy of mention.

**Coenwalh’s queens**

Penda’s sister was married to Coenwalh of the West Saxons.[[227]](#footnote-227) Coenwalh resisted the conversion by Birinus that his father Cynegils had so willingly undertaken in order (possibly) to cement his alliance with Oswald. This would have made it easier for Coenwalh to make an alliance with the pagan Penda. When Coenwalh succeeded in 642 he threw off the Christian faith and the sacraments. However, three years later he also threw off his queen. The reasons were not given by Bede except that he wanted to marry someone else. Perhaps the marriage had been childless. It is here that the alliance was seen as a two-way understanding. No doubt the cast-off queen protested vehemently to her brother who promptly invaded Coenwalh's kingdom and deposed him, sending him into exile at the court of Anna of East Anglia for three years.

**Seaxburh**

When Coenwalh was restored in 648 he was presumably already married to his new bride. The first West Saxon woman to appear in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was Queen Seaxburh who was listed as one of the rulers of Wessex in Ā's introduction under the year 494, as successor to her husband, Coenwalh; holding the kingdom for one year after him. This was repeated in both Ā and E under year 672 (with her successor, Æscwine, succeeding in 674). Bede had merely said that Coenwalh was succeeded by sub‑kings[[228]](#footnote-228) so he presumably was unaware of this extraordinary event or was unwilling to include it if he thought it unimportant or did not approve of the "natural" order being upset. It is quite possible that Seaxburh was of royal blood, though probably not West Saxon royal blood, but for a woman to succeed in the first place was remarkable and that she should succeed her husband (as opposed to her father which might have been less of a surprise) is even more so. As she only ruled for a year or so it is impossible to make a judgement on her as a ruler and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does not help. By saying that her successor followed in 674 implies that there may have been a short interregnum after her death but this may be explained by rounding say fourteen months to a year. In fact, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does not even say that she died. She may have abdicated or been deposed and retired to an abbey. What is known is that Coenwalh had an adult brother, Centwine, who eventually succeeded; so Seaxburh must have had some outstanding qualities to allow her to succeed in preference to the obvious heir even if it were for only a year or two.

When Coenwalh went into exile at Anna’s court in 645 he would have missed meeting Anna’s daughter, Seaxburh, who had married Earconberht of Kent five years earlier. As already mentioned, it is just possible she was the same person who married Coenwalh and only became abbess back in Kent after her brief reign as queen of Wessex ended in 674. Unlikely, but just within the bounds of possibility. After all, both her mother and sister, Æthelthryth, had remarried.[[229]](#footnote-229)

**Eormengyth and Bugga**

Stephen’s reference to Centwine's queen is the only reference to Centwine even having a queen and she had enough influence over her husband to persuade him to expel an important prelate (see above) so it is surprising she is not mentioned elsewhere.[[230]](#footnote-230) Another piece of evidence suggesting Centwine was married is that he appears to have had a daughter, Abbess Bugga. Aldhelm[[231]](#footnote-231) addressed a poem to a church built by her although the location of the mixed community is unrecorded. A verse epitaph records that she was abbess for thirty-four years.[[232]](#footnote-232) Her house was one of the earliest known in Wessex and might have been at an important site like Glastonbury which was founded by Ine in or after 688 according to John[[233]](#footnote-233) when Bugga would have been in her thirties. She had connections with the missionaries in Germany[[234]](#footnote-234) as correspondence between her and Boniface survives.[[235]](#footnote-235) It is possible that there was more than one Bugga as one of Boniface’s correspondents may have been based in Kent rather than Wessex. Nevertheless, it is interesting to examine some of their correspondence. The first letter was from her mother as well. Mother and daughter complained, in their unpolished, rustic style,[[236]](#footnote-236) that they had few relatives and their house was poverty-struck. They hoped to go on pilgrimage to Rome.

In a letter of c.720 Bugga thanked Boniface for his letter, congratulated him on his success in Frisia in converting King Radbod, told him she was sending him a book he had requested, *The Sufferings of the Martyrs,* when she could get a copy, asked him for some selected passages from Holy Scripture, previously promised, requested masses for a recently departed relative and sent fifty shillings and an altar cloth in lieu of anything better.[[237]](#footnote-237) In a letter from Boniface to Bugga[[238]](#footnote-238) of c.725 he advised her about her pilgrimage to Rome. He would not encourage or discourage it but said she should only do it if she was dissatisfied with the monastic life at home just as Wihtburh had told him she had done in a recent letter. In his reply to Wihtburh he had said Bugga was contemplating the trip and she advised her to wait till the Saracen threat died down and she would write direct to Bugga when it had.[[239]](#footnote-239) In the same letter Boniface apologised for not having time to copy out the passages he had promised yet and thanked her for her gifts. This letter is good evidence of the pilgrimages made to Rome by women which is confirmed by that made by Frithogyth described below and the reference in a letter from Hild mentioned above.

Two further letters dating to c.735 from Boniface[[240]](#footnote-240) to an Abbess Eadburh survive which might also be to Bugga[[241]](#footnote-241) but are more likely to be to the abbess of Minster-in-Thanet who succeeded Mildrith in c.697, mentioned above, who was probably someone different. In a letter from King Æthelbert of Kent (725-62) to Boniface he referred to the *venerabilis abbatissa* Bugga resuming her position on her return from pilgrimage but this does not mean it is the same person, necessarily.[[242]](#footnote-242) Whether she was royal is impossible to tell but both refer to the gift of books from the abbess to Boniface, one thanking her for some books she had sent, the other requesting a copy of the epistles of St Peter in gold letters. Further evidence of the active involvement of English abbesses in the mission to Germany and the regard given to books produced in their houses.

**Cuthburh and Cwenburh**

The next West Saxon royal women to be mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* were the two sisters of Ine (688‑726), Cuthburh and Cwenburh. They were mentioned first in the introduction in Ā as being two of the four children of Cenred; the others being Ine and Ingeld. Their second mention was under 718 in which year their brother, Ingeld, died. A little more is told here about Cuthburh who founded the monastic community at Wimborne[[243]](#footnote-243) in c.705. She had been given in marriage to Aldfrith, king of Northumbria but they had separated. Clearly, Cuthburh had a similar story to Æthelthryth but having no Bede to tell it (or if she did it has been lost) it was confined to this brief entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. John recorded them under 718 as saints. Cuthburh appeared as *Cuthburg* in 6th place in the *Liber Vitae* and Cwenburh may be *Cuoenburg* in 34th place. Cuthburh also appeared with mention of Wimborne, in S1251a, a declaration by Aldhelm, bishop of Sherborne, in 705 that he has agreed to remain abbot of his three houses but they will be free to elect his successors.

**Cynethryth**

During the early period there were few surviving West Saxon charters but nevertheless there are signs of women being important in the witness-lists. None of the few surviving seventh-century charters have women in their lists although Cædwalla and his wife, Cynethryth, were co‑donors in the incomplete charter, S1610, a grant of land in Kent to Archbishop Theodore of 687.

**Æthelburh**

The strongest of the West Saxon kings at this period was Ine (for whom fifteen charters survive) whose long, apparently childless reign (688‑726) may have seen at least two queens. William said his last queen, Æthelburh, was also called Seaxburh but he may have been confusing two queens (as does the one charter that refers to her).[[244]](#footnote-244) She was the next West Saxon royal woman in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* mentioned under 722 as the destroyer of Taunton which her husband had built. At first sight this might seem to be an act of rebellion but the entry goes on to say that Ealdberht the Exile fled into Surrey and Sussex and Ine fought against the South Saxons. The end of Ine's reign and the opening of Æthelheard's were marked by a series of rebellions by representatives of another branch of the dynasty: Cynewulf in 721, Ealdberht in 722 and Oswald in 728.[[245]](#footnote-245) In 725 Ine fought the South Saxons and killed Ealdberht; E added "the prince whom he had banished." Æthelburh was the sister of Ine's successor, Æthelheard. As Ine had a very long reign (thirty-eight years) and Æthelheard reigned for some fourteen years after him it suggests that Æthelheard, and hence Æthelburh, was younger than Ine; probably a generation younger, meaning that Æthelburh was probably not Ine's first queen.[[246]](#footnote-246) Accepting this helps to explain the preceding events.

What seems to have happened is that Ine had no children by his earlier queen(s) and that his heir presumptive was his brother Ingeld. However, when Ingeld died in 718 Ine was in his fifties or sixties and there was a need to find another heir quickly. Ingeld's son, Eoppa, may have been unsuitable or dead with his son, Eafa, too young to succeed. The two candidates seem to have been Æthelheard and Cynewulf. Ine chose Æthelheard and cemented the alliance by marrying his sister. Cynewulf rebelled and was killed by Ine in 721 and his claim was taken over by (his brother?) Ealdberht who had already been exiled. Ealdberht may well have had an alliance with Nunna of Sussex, who was described as Ine's kinsman (and so possibly Ealdberht's as well, through an unknown marriage) when he fought alongside him in 710 against Geraint of Cornwall but who may have felt his support had gone unrewarded. In 722 Ine was in Sussex fighting Nunna so Ealdberht took the opportunity to attack Ine's fortress at Taunton and capture it. As Ine was away he had left his queen as regent and she led the army that retook Taunton but destroyed it in the process in what may well have been the decisive victory. Ealdberht escaped to Sussex and Ine followed to finish him off in 725. Although there is no proof that this interpretation of the events is correct they fit the recorded facts and make sense of an otherwise fragmentary account of the last few years of Ine's long reign. Whatever the true story, it is certain that Æthelburh played a major part in the events, firstly, by securing her brother's succession and secondly, as a military commander. Thus, here is the second example of a royal West Saxon woman taking on the role usually reserved for royal West Saxon men: Seaxburh had actually ruled and Æthelburh acted as warlord.

The charter in which Æthelburh was co-donor with Ine, albeit under her other name (S250),[[247]](#footnote-247) she also witnessed in second place (under her correct name),[[248]](#footnote-248) is dated 725 and has Baldred in third place and Æthelheard (described as the queen’s brother) fourth. However, most authorities consider the charter to be spurious and it may only be the witness-list that retains any authenticity. She also acted as a co‑donor with Ine in the same year in grants to Muchelney (S249)[[249]](#footnote-249) and Glastonbury (S251).[[250]](#footnote-250)

**Frithogyth**

Æthelheard's queen, Frithogyth witnessed all three of his surviving charters (S253, S254 and S255) between 729 and 739, in second, third and fourth places behind Æthelheard, his brother,[[251]](#footnote-251) Cuthred, or two bishops.[[252]](#footnote-252) The second charter, dated 737, has another woman witness, Abbess Æscburga, in sixth place (the order is unusual: two bishops, king, queen, abbot, abbess). Whether she was a member of the royal family or not is unknown but her name could indicate a family link. Frithogyth was co-donor with Æthelheard in the first two charters. The grant of 737 to Winchester was confirmed as by both monarchs in at least four later charters: S310 and S311 of 854, S443 of 938 and S521 of 947. She was also a donor on her own in the incomplete charter from Glastonbury (S1677) (undated but during Æthelheard’s reign) after 729. Frithogyth made one appearance in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* under 737 when she went to Rome with Bishop Forthere. The *Chronicle* does not specify why they went to Rome but it was probably on pilgrimage. This is the only example of a queen going on such a pilgrimage apparently without her husband. Although Frithogyth was clearly important in her own right she may also have been part of an alliance as her name could indicate a relationship to Forthere, Frithuwold of Surrey (her father?), *Frithhild* in the *Liber Vitae* and/or St Frideswide of Oxford who was probably called Frithoswith originally (see above).

**Conclusion**

It has been demonstrated that more than thirty royal women played an important political role in at least nine of the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms as partners in marriage (more than a dozen examples surviving, many of them kings’ daughters showing that kings had a preference to marry the highest status women they could), as charter witnesses (at least eleven royal women’s names can be found in the very patchy charter record for this early period), as donors of land (found in charters and possibly implied in the *Liber Vitae*) and even as rulers (Seaxburh and Cynewise as regent) or warlords (Æthelburh) and in other more subtle ways often difficult to interpret from the sources.

A matriachical network was created linking various kingdoms and influencing the spread of Christianity. Starting in Francia with Ingoberga's insistence that her daughter, Bertha, retained her Christianity clearly had a lasting effect. Bertha’s daughter, Æthelburh, took it to Northumbria and her daughter, Eanflæd, played a part in the triumph of Roman over Celtic rites. Eanflæd’s daughters, Alchflæd and Osthryth had a part in the spread of Christianity to Mercia. Bertha’s descendants also played an important role in the foundation of nunneries: her daughter, Æthelburh, was probably founding abbess of Lyminge, her granddaughters, Eanswith and Eanflæd, were the probable founding abbess of Folkestone and the second abbess of Whitby, her great-granddaughters, Earcongota, Eormenhild, Æbbe, Eormenburh, Eormengyth, Æthelthryth and Ælfflæd were early abbesses or founders of Ely, Minster-in-Sheppey, Minster-in-Thanet, Whitby, probably Carlisle, possibly Eastry as well as Faremoutiers-en-Brie. In the next generation, Eormenhild’s daughter, Wærburh, headed several houses including Hanbury and Ely, and Æbbe’s daughters, Mildrith, Mildburg and Mildgith were at Minster-in-Thanet, Much Wenlock and perhaps Eastry and Carlisle. Similar if smaller religious female dynasties appeared in Mercia, Wessex and East Anglia.

The interconnections between the kingdoms also produced close ties when the queens of two different kingdoms were related by blood. There must have been many unrecorded marriage alliances but among the recorded ones were: Kent with Essex, Deira, Bernicia, East Anglia and Mercia; Deira with Bernicia, Mercia and East Anglia; East Anglia with Bernicia; Mercia with Wessex and Bernicia; Wessex with Bernicia; and Sussex with the Hwicce. It must have been quite difficult for some seventh- and eighth-century rulers to remember quite which of their contemporaries they were not related to.

The English kingdoms underwent considerable changes during the rest of the eighth century, not least the rise to power of Mercia under Æthelbald, Offa and Coenwulf and the consequent diminishing of power in the other kingdoms. With no Bede to record the events they are more difficult to examine but the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and charters were still important and can help fill in the gaps. The queens of Mercia were particularly prominent as charter witnesses in this period. After Coenwulf, the balance of power shifted to Wessex under Egbert, Æthelwulf and his sons, especially Alfred. The period also marked the large-scale Danish settlements in Northern and Eastern England which also changed the political landscape. Chapter Three examines the last of the important Mercian royal women and the part she played in the reconquest of England from the Danes.

1. From this point different versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* are usually referred to by their letters as explained in Chapter One. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Garmonsway 1972, p.xxxix. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Chapter One and Table 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Colgrave 1940, Chapter 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Karajan 1852 and Thompson 1923. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Morris 1980, Chapter 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Morris 1980, p.69: *puella pulchra facie atque decorosa valde*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Hadrian’s Wall. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The inhabitants of what is now Scotland. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Thorpe 1969, part four, the House of Constantine. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The exchange between Vortigern and Renwein was seen as the origin of a tradition of saying "was hail" and "drinc hail" by two companions at a banquet encouraging each other to drink. The translation used here is from Thorpe 1969. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Thorpe 1969, p.141. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *HE* I, 25, 45: *Bercta*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *HE* I, 25, 45: *uxorem habebat Christianam.* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. They were Charibert (reigned 561-7) and his wife Ingoberga. The authority for this is Gregory of Tours who mentioned the marriage twice in *The History of the Franks*, the second time being when he met Ingoberga shortly before her death in 589 and learnt she was survived only by a daughter, Bertha, who had married the son of a king of Kent. See Thorpe 1974, Prinz 1988, Yorke 2003, p.24 and Nelson 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *HE* I, 25, 45: *quam ea condicione a parentibus acceperat.* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Her daughter, Æthelburh and her descendants are examined below. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. According to the *Anglo‑Saxon Chronicle* Æthelbert was born in 552. For a similar discussion see Kirby 1991, p.34. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Norberg 1982, 9.35. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Nelson 2004 for other incidences of Gregory’s letters connected to this and other missions. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *HE* I, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Table 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *HE* II, 5, 90: *ubi et Berctæ regina condita est*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Dewing 1978. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Theudebert was cousin of Charibert, Bertha’s father. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Possibly Denmark, although the name might suggest Angles in Britain. The only known Anglian kingdom in Britain this early was Bernicia (Ida reigned 547-59) but it could be referring to a king of Kent again, perhaps Eormenric (534-60), Æthelbert’s father. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Kasten 2001 noted that widow remarriage was frowned on by the Church Fathers and Frankish Law had very specific rules about property on remarriage. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Based on Bede’s implication that the marriage was arranged by her parents. Nelson 2004 pointed out that *parentes* could simply mean family in which case it might have been an uncle who arranged Bertha’s marriage. If he had been one of her uncles, Chilperic of Soissons ("the Nero and Herod of his time" according to Gregory of Tours) it could have been as late as 584. However, a birth date of c.550-60 to match Æthelbert’s 552, would seem to be correct for Bertha. Her great-grandfather, Clovis, married Clotilda in 493. Bertha’s grandfather was born c.500 and her father in c.530 so a date of 555 would be about right. See Previté-Orton 1952, pp.151-4 and Wise and Egan 1967. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Translation from Forester 1853. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Although Emma does not appear in Merovingian sources, if her father were a Merovingian king the best chronological candidate is Childebert II of Austrasia (575-96) although it could have been Clothar II of Neustria (584-629). See Yorke 2003, p.25. If not a king, he could have been Erchinoald, mayor of the palace which would explain the name of her son, Earconberht and granddaughter, Earcongota. See Wood 1994, p.177, Ewig 2001, p.150 and Werner 1988 as cited by Yorke 2003, p.41 n.84. Earconberht called one of his sons by a Frankish name, Hlothere, which might suggest Clothar was their ancestor. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. For her and other abbesses see Table 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. She is sometimes identified with Eangyth who features in Boniface’s letters. See Witney 1982, appendix G, pp.245-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See Witney 1982, appendix G, pp.245-7 for a possible explanation and below for an identification of Ermenberg and Eormengith. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. She would have been born c.605-10 and so would have been the daughter of Æthelfrith of Bernicia and Acha of Deira and sister of Oswald (born 604) and Oswiu (born 612). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Hollis 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Translation from Stephenson 1858. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. This common name for her probably derived from Domina Æbbe. She is hereafter referred to as Æbbe. See Witney 1982. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See Swanton 1975, Rollason 1982 and Sharpe 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. With Abbess Wulcume or Wilcoma of Chelles according to various versions of the legend all of which date to the tenth or eleventh centuries. This was some 300 years after the event and there are at least eleven versions surviving. There is no one definitive version and John's is as good as any other. See Rollason 1982, pp.98-100, from the *Passio Beatorum Martyrum Ethelredi atque Ethelbricti* (Bodley 285 Text; BHL 2641-2) and pp.120-9, from the *Vita Deo dilectae virginis Mildrethae* of Goscelin of Canterbury (BHL 5960). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. All in the *Mildrith Legend*. See Rollason 1982 and Witney 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Sharpe 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. She is called Domneva. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Colgrave 1927 and Webb 1965, Chapter 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Colgrave 1927 Chapter 24, p.48: *perfecta abbatissa materque familias optima commutata est.* [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Names starting with N were unusual. For example, of the 3,124 names in the earliest part of the *Liber Vitae* only 3 start with N and of the more than 20,000 charter attestations there were only about 30, by about 11 people, whose names start with N. The Old English word *nergend, nerigend* or *neriend* means saviour (as in Christ) or protector; so perhaps Nerienda was a pseudonym for an abbess who had a reputation as a saviour or protector. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *concedo propinque mee Mildrythe abbatisse.* They were second cousins. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See Witney 1982, p.171. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. For example, Brooks 1984, pp.191-7, 289-90. He made the case for a forgery by Archbishop Wulfred based on the grammar in the charter and S90. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. The only recorded Hereswith was Hild of Whitby's sister who married Æthilric of East Anglia and divorced him in 646 to go to Francia. If she became an abbess in England and was still alive in 708 she would have been very old, perhaps in her 90s but this Hereswyth may have been related. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Offa confirmed the grant in the 760s to Mildrith’s successor, Sigeburga, in S143. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. These charters are difficult to date; the former being 29 October 716/7 but might be 733, the latter being 737 but might be 29 October 716/7. See Harrison 1973, p.63, Kelly 1992 and 1993-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. See Rollason 1982, p.79 from the Gotha Text. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. See Brown 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Printed in Finberg 1972a, pp.201-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. See note 39 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See Yorke 2003, Chapter One, for another analysis of S20 and S22, records of two Kent synods in 699 and 716 although she numbered S20 as S25. She suggests locations for the abbesses whose houses were unnamed and also discussed the *Mildrith Legend*. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. A forgery according to Rollason 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Morris 1980, Chapter 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. *HE III,* 6 and 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Morris 1980, p.79, Chapter 63: *Eadfered* ***Flesaurs*** *regnavit XII annis*. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. *HE III, 6, 139.* [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Thorpe 1969, p.243. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Hereric could not have been Edwin’s nephew as the chronology does not work. He is more likely to have been his cousin. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. *HE* III, 6, 139: *dignumque fuit ut tantus praecessor talem haberet de sua consanguinitate et religionis heredem et regni*. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. *HE* II, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. See Nelson 2004. There is no direct evidence and Æthelbert certainly married at least twice. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. *HE* II, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Stephenson 1865, p.39. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Stephenson 1865, p.39. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. *HE* II, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. *HE* II, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. *HE* II, 10, 101: *aeternitatis praemio per sacri baptismatis regenerationem inluminatam agnouimus.* [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. *HE* II, 11, 104: *uestri immo totius gentis subpositae.* [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. *HE* II, 11, 106: *in conuersatione coniugis uestri summissaeque uobis gentis dignatus fuerit operari*. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. *HE* II, 11, 104: *Dominae gloriosae.* [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. *HE* II, 11, 105: *ab idolorum etiam cultu seu fanorum auguriorumque inlecebris se diligenter abstineat.* [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. *HE* II, 11, 105: *ut uidelicet quos copulatio carnalis affectus unum quodammodo corpus exhibuisse monstratur, hos quoque unitas fidei etiam post huius uitae transitum in perpetua societate conseruet*. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. *HE* II, 11, 105: *ut perinde intermerato societatis foedere iura teneas maritalis consortii*. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. The women of fifth-century BC Athens acted in the name of peace rather than religion but the prayer Lysistrata made when sacrificing could just as easily have been penned by Boniface (with a few changes) as Aristophanes: "O holy Goddess of Persuasion, and thou O Lady of the Loving Cup, receive with favour this sacrifice from your servants the women of Greece." (Translation by Sommerstein, 1973). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. *HE* II, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Although British sources suggest she was baptized by King Rhun of Rheged. See Thacker 2004c. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. *HE* II, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. *HE* II, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. *HE* II, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. *HE* II, 20, 126: *in Galliam nutriendos regi Daegbercto, qui erat amicus illius*. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. See Table 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Her name means "Queen of the Lightning" which may be significant. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Rhun was the son of Urien of Rheged who ruled in the last decades of the sixth century and was mentioned by the *Historia Brittonum* as one of the kings who fought against Theoderic, one of Æthelfrith’s uncles. He was also mentioned in the Book of Taliesin. Also see note 81 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. *HE* III, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Her father, Edwin, was the brother of Oswiu’s mother, Acha. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. *HE* III, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. The exact relationship is unknown but he was presumably a Deiran royal. He was later (c.659-62) third bishop of the Mercians. See *HE* III, 24, 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Actually her second cousin being the grandson of Ælfric, younger brother of Eanfled’s grandfather Ælle. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. *HE* III, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. *HE* V, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. See also Savage 1897, Fell 1981, Cross 1982, Warin 1989 and Thacker 2004d. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Bede did not say whether it was through Hereric's mother or father that he was related to the king but he seems to have been part of the royal court. Also see footnote 63 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Sweet 1885. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Presumably Certic of Elmet who was expelled by Edwin on his restoration in 616 presumably for his part in the murder of his kinsman. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. *HE* IV, 23, 256: *ut omnes Brittaniae fines illius gratia splendoris impleret*. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Aldwulf died in 713 and it is unlikely that he would have been over 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. *HE* IV, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. She is supposed to have gone to Chelles but this house was founded by Queen Balthild some time between becoming queen in c.648 and her own retirement there in 664/5. It might be that Balthild’s was a refounding but in any event it seems Hereswith must have started somewhere else and ended up at Chelles. With no information to the contrary Bede thought she had started there as well. See Nelson 1978. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. *HE* III, 8, 142: *multi de Brittania monachicae conuersationis gratis Francorum uel Galliarum monasteria adire solebant*. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. See Miller 1979 who makes an overwhelming case for Ælle's dates being 569‑99. Kirby 1991 also came to a similar conclusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. John called Hild and Hereswith's mother Beorhtswith instead of Breguswith, as Bede called her. He also called Hereswith, a saint and queen of East Anglia. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. *HE* IV, 23, 253: *quae prima feminarum fertur in prouincia Nordanhymbrorum propositum uestemque sanctimonialis habitus.* [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Heiu may have been Hereric’s sister and thus Hild’s aunt. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Possibly a double site with Strensall near York. See Barnwell *et al.* 2003 and Thacker 2004d. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. *HE* III, 24*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Who was probably his second cousin if her paternal grandfather was the brother of Oswiu’s maternal grandfather. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. *HE* IV, 23, 254: *Tantae autem erat ipsa prudentiae, ut non solum mediocres quique in necessitatibus suis sed etiam reges et principes nonnumquam ab ea consilium quaererent et inuenirent*. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. *HE* IV, 24. See Blair

     1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Thacker 2004d. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. See Webster and Backhouse 1991, pp.141-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. *HE* III, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Thacker 2004d. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. *HE* V, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. *HE* IV, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. See Thacker 2004a. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. *HE* III, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. *HE* IV, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Perhaps another relative like Trumhere. See note 92 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Colgrave 1927, Chapter 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Colgrave 1927, Chapter 60, p.128: *semper totius provinciae consolatrix optimaque consiliatrix.* [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Thacker 2004a. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Thacker 2004a. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Colgrave 1940. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Thacker 2004a. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Colgrave 1927, Chapter 24, p.48: *Nam de lupa post occisionem regis agna Dei.* [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Colgrave 1927, Chapter 24, p.48: *quasi impiissima Gezabel prophetas Dei occidens et Heliam persequens*. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Colgrave 1927, Chapter 39, pp.78-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Colgrave 1927, Chapter 40, pp.80-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. *HE* IV, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. *+ Ego Edeldrid regina consensi.* [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. *tibi Nothgide sorori mee aliquam terre partem libenter dabo, ad construendum in ea monasterium basilicamque.* See Table 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Stephenson 1865, p.38. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. William seems to have misread Bede who said Edwin converted Rædwald's son, Eorpwald. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Stephenson 1865, pp.77-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. In the genealogical section of his appendix. Forester 1854, p.393. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. John referred to Edward the Confessor as Harthacnut's brother by the mother's side later in the Genealogy and they had different fathers, Æthelred and Cnut, sharing Emma as their mother. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Searle 1899, pp.282-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. *HE* III, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. *HE* IV. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. John failed to correct the suggestion that she had been buried in 743, nearly 90 years after Anna’s death. Æthelthryth had been born in c.630 so Wihtburh would probably have been well over a hundred in 743. 693 would have been more believable: 105 years not fifty-five; CV instead of LV. Or perhaps two Wihtburhs were muddled. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. *HE* III, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. *HE* III, 8, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. *HE* III, 8, 142 and Colgrave and Mynors 1969, pp.236-7 n.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. *HE* III, 8, 142-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. *HE* III, 8, 143: *opera uirtutum et signa miraculorum*. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. *HE* III, 8, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. See Caldecott 1987, Thompson and Stevens 1988, Fell 1994, Thompson 1996, Sleesby 1999 and Thacker 2004b. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. *HE* IV, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. If the marriage was arranged by Æthelthryth’s father, Anna, it must have been before 654, the year he was killed by Penda. Her marriage to Ecgfrith seems to have taken place in c.659, during the reign of her uncle, Æthelwald, who might have had less regard for her sensibilities than her father. If Tondberht had died soon after the marriage Æthelthryth would have been a widow for at least four years before her second wedding and might already have tried to settle down to a contemplative life. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. The only named member of this dynasty and one of the few references to this tribe which is also mentioned in the Tribal Hidage. There is a Tondburg in the *Liber Vitae* (129th) who could have been his sister. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Thacker 2004b said the unconsummated marriage lasted 3 years after which Æthelthryth remained a widow for 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. *HE* IV, 19, 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Colgrave 1927, Chapter 19, pp.40-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Colgrave 1927, Chapter 22, pp.44-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. *HE* IV, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Its twenty-seven lines start with the letters of the alphabet excluding J, U and W followed by AMEN. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. *HE* IV, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Gerchow 1988 suggested her absence, like Cuthbert’s was due to her rapid recognition as a saint after her death which put her name in another kind of book. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Stephenson 1860, Chapter 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Colgrave 1927, Chapter 37, pp.74-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Yorke 2003, p.26. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Fell 1994, p.27 and Yorke 2003, p.43 n.119. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. *HE* IV, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Brother of Ecgfrith and sub-king of Deira killed in 679. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. See Table 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. All in S958 and S1486. See above. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. S1048 dated c.1044, see above, and S1472 dated c.1045. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. S1531 dated c.1044. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. S1535 dated c.1046. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Blake 1962. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Thacker 2004b. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Colgrave 1956, Chapter 48, pp.146-9 and Chapter 50, pp.154-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. See Searle 1899 p.283. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. *HE* II, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. *HE* IV, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. *HE* IV, 6, 7 and 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Whose name might suggest a Frankish/Kentish connection. See note 30 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Hollis 2004 added an interesting insight into the literary activity in nunneries comparing the commission of Aldhelm’s *De Virginitate* at Barking with the commission for the life of St Edith at Wilton as well as the numerous copies of manuscripts produced in women’s houses for missionaries. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. At least 25 authorities have used this charter according to Kelly 1993-8 including Stenton 1970, pp.49-50 n. 8, 52, 102 and Whitelock 1979a, p.486. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Bascombe 1987. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Ekwall 1960. Domesday Book records it as *Edburgetuna* which means Eadburg’s manor. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Abbot Hean’s sister is Abbess Cille in S1179 and S241 but there is a Cille who witnessed S76 and S77 without title amongst otherwise all male lists. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Thorpe 1969, p.254. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. *HE* III, 24, 178: *Nam alius filius eius Ecgfrid eo tempore in prouincia Merciorum apud reginam Cynuise obses tenebatur.* [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. *HE* V, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Garmonsway 1972, p.xxxix. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Stenton 1933, pp.314-5 "a flagrant forgery" and "a late clumsy fabrication" but even he thought the list of possessions of the abbey to be genuine. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. There are also *Cyniburgs* in 56th and 92nd. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. *HE III, 21.* [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. *HE* III, 24, 180: *proditione ut dicunt, coniugis suae in ipso tempore fasti paschalis*. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. The source for Eormenhild and Wærburh and other Kentish and Mercian saints mentioned by John seems to have been the *Mildrith Legend.* See Rollason 1982. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. See Thacker 2004e. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Reminiscent of the story of Cwenthryth and Cenelm which is out of the scope of this work. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. *HE* III, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. She may be the *Ethelhild* who appears at the top of the second column (21st) of queens/abbesses in the *Liber Vitae*. Her house could have been Threekingham. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. *HE* III, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. See Stenton 1927, although he missed that the genealogy was a clumsy pastiche of the Mercian one. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Hill 1981, p.152 shows the resting-places of saints. In addition to Osthryth at Bardney, Eadburh was at Southwell, Mildburg at Wenlock, Edith at Polesworth, Osyth at Chich, Frideswide at Oxford, Æthelburh at Barking, Eadburh at Nunnaminster, Edith at Wilton, Ælfgifu at Shaftesbury, Mærwyn, Balthild and Æthelflæd at Romsey, and Cuthburh and Cwenburh at Wimborne. Some eleven of these fifteen saints were probably royal. See also Butler 1987. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. *HE* IV, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. *HE* V, 24, 355: *Osthryd regina a suis, id est Merciorum, primatibus interemta*. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Colgrave 1927, Chapter 40, pp.80-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. All are suspicious although five have some supporters as being authentic or based on authentic material. See Kelly 1993-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Archbishops Theodore of Canterbury and Wilfrid of York, Bishop Seaxwulf of Lichfield, then Osthryth, the papal legate Adrian, Bishops Putta of Rochester and Waldhere of London and Abbot Cuthbald of Peterborough. Stenton was suspicious of this charter but the comment on S6 above about the use of the queen’s name to add authenticity could also apply here. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. *pro absolutione criminum vel meorum vel conjugis quondam meæ Osthrythæ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Jones 1958, pp.63-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. He abdicated in 704 and became abbot of Bardney till his death in 716. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Stafford 2001. Boniface admonished him for not taking a lawful wife in a letter of c.746. See Tangl 1919, no.73 and Halsall 2000, no.32. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Guthlac was born during the reign of Penda's son, Æthelred, 675‑704. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Colgrave 1956, Chapters 50, 51 and 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Blair 1987 and 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. See Hohler 1966, Bethell 1970, Hagerty 1987, Bailey 1989a, Campana 1996 and Blair 2004b. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. See Yorke 2003, p.21 and Blair 2004b. Hagerty 1987 argued forcibly for there being just one Osyth. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Bailey 1989a. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Sims-Williams 1976 suggested the link with the Mercian royal family. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. *ad construendum monasterium Cutsuidæ abbatissæ.* [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. See Yorke 2003, p.45 n.165 and p.33 for the suggestion that these were respectively the second wife of Wulfhere and Eaba, widow of Æthelwalh of Sussex. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Colgrave 1927, Chapter 20, pp.84-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Unnamed by Bede but identified as Cyneburh by Simeon in his twelfth-century *Life of St Oswald*. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Ā and E. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, 633. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. *HE* III, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. *HE* III, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. *HE* IV, 12, 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. That the West Saxons considered female royal connections important can be seen in their opinion of the Wight royals. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and other sources referred to the nephews (or kinsmen) of Cerdic of Wessex joining him in a later phase of his invasion and particularly in the invasion of the Isle of Wight. However, their exact relationship had never been explained and William (in Chapter 16) said that when Cerdic died he left the Isle of Wight to his nephew, Wihtgar "for he was his sister's son" (in some manuscripts only) which suggests that blood relations on the female side could be as important as those on the male and such a relationship was no deterrent to succession. William underlined the bond by saying he "was as dear to his uncle by ties of kindred as by his skill in war." [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Witney 1982 speculated that Eormenburh was the daughter of Eormenred of Kent and that her sister who married Centwine was the Eangyth/Eormengyth in John's genealogy. See above. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Lapidge and Rosier 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Yorke 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Stephenson 1853, p.29. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Yorke 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Tangl 1919, no.15. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Fell 1984, p.111: *rustico stilo et inpolito sermone*. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Halsall 2000, no.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Tangl 1919, no.27. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Halsall 2000, no.15. See Fell 1984, pp.111-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Tangl 1919, nos30 & 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. In one letter she is called *Hæaburg cognomento Bugge* meaning Bugga was a diminutive but if it was a diminutive of Hæaburh it could also be of Eadburh or other names and suggests there was more than one Bugga. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Fell 1984, p.112. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. See Fletcher 1931 and Yorke 2003, Chapter 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. William mentioned Seaxburh, Coenwalh's queen, earlier in the chapter and so may be saying "Coenwalh's queen was called Seaxburh and Ine's first queen was also called Seaxburh." [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Kirby 1991, p.131, suggested Ealdberht might have been Ine’s son or nephew trying to assert his claim to the succession. However, if Cynewulf, Ealdberht and Oswald were brothers this might explain why they were able to rally a group of supporters for their rebellions as each asserted their claim one after the other. Oswald’s descent from Cynebald, brother of Ine’s grandfather, Ceolwald, is recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Ā, although with a missing generation. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. A genealogical study of the West Saxon royals is quite difficult due to conflicting pedigrees but it appears Ine was born as early as c.650 whereas Æthelburh and Æthelheard may have been born as late as 695/700. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. *Ego Ina regali a Domino fretus dignitate. cum consilio Sexburgæ regina*. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. *+ Ego Æthilburga regina consensi*. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. *Unde et ego Yny, rex Westsaxoni[e], una cum conjuge mea Ethelberga*. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. *unde ego. Ini. rex Westsaxonum. una cum conjuge Æthelburge*. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. According to Simeon. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Daniel of Winchester and Forthere of Sherborne. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)