

# St Eadweard the Martyr – The Historical King

A talk given at St Eadweard's Monastery, Brookwood  
on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2005

By Eadmund Ærealdor

## Introduction

The first thing I must do is to acknowledge my unworthiness to give this talk. I am only an amateur historian, and although I have for long had a great interest in the relevant period of history, and founded a fellowship, þa Engliscan Gesiþas, to promote interest in and knowledge of it, I have not previously devoted myself to the study of King Eadweard, although I did once have the privilege of attending a conference at Oxford on the reign of his successor, Æþelræd. However I think that I can usefully add a little useful knowledge and perhaps come closer to the historical truth about the life and death of an English King, which I feel that his representation as a Saint may have slightly obscured.

The Orthodox Church stands unique among other churches that aspire to be the representatives of God on earth, because it looks at things *sub specie æternitatis*. Whereas the Roman Catholics, for example, review their list of Saints and prune it with an eye on present day fads, fancies and historical fashions, the Orthodox (quite rightly) maintain that if someone was considered worthy of Sainthood a thousand or fifteen hundred years ago, then he must still be considered worthy of it. Whereas a Western library is classified chronologically, and the subject matter is seen in terms of influences and development, to the Orthodox every author has a simultaneous existence. It is unimportant whether they wrote six hundred, twelve hundred or fifty years ago. This characteristic is one that I, who have devoted a large part of my life to the resurrection of the Englisc period, find particularly attractive. The Venerable Bede, for example, is not read as an irrelevant curiosity of an ancient time. His testimony is accorded the same weight (in fact probably slightly more so due to its age) as a present day theologian. However when applied to history rather than religion, this method can produce errors.

Perhaps I may be permitted to digress slightly at this point in order to clarify terms of reference, which would be clearer if you were reading this paper rather than listening to it. I intend during the talk to use the word Englisc – spelt E N G L I S C but pronounced similarly to its modern counterpart – to cover what is generally understood by the terms 'Old English' and 'Anglo-Saxon'. It is the word that the Englisc people used to describe themselves, and in my view brings them closer to us in time and makes us feel like their descendants, which is what most of us are in fact, and all of us are in culture.

While I am on the subject of language, may I also give an interpretation of two of the Englisc terms that I shall use.

- An Ealdormann was similar to the later earl – basically he was a nobleman in charge of a shire. His function was to govern it under the king's laws, defend it against enemies in time of war, and collect taxes, a proportion of which would be paid to the king.
- The Englisc word þegn means a servant, and was still used in that sense, as well as to describe a local officer. A þegn was most like the later knight. Typically he owned an estate, which would be the equivalent of the modern village, and also had his part to play in the administration of the king's law, organizing defence etc.
- Another word, more widely applicable than þegn, which came to be applied only to noblemen, was gesiþ. This can be understood as companion, but it really means more than that, and also implies the sworn sword-brother of the Heroic Code, which I shall mention particularly in a moment.

I shall use these terms, not deliberately to surround my subject in mystery, but because they were the terms in use at the time, and had a meaning specific to Englisc history. The organization of the Englisc state was subtly different before the Norman invasion, when Engliscmenn owned their own land and spoke their own language, and if I were to translate them, using the terms Earl, Knight and Companion instead, then you might easily begin to think that I was talking about Earls, Knights and Companions in the modern sense, and fall into the trap that many others have fallen into before, not discerning the very real difference between the two.

Although, as I have already stated, I am only an amateur historian, I was trained in the historical method by a remarkable man, James Frazer, or Shamus Frazer as he liked to be known, who had sat at the feet of such men as H. A. L. Fisher and David Mackie at Oxford. He showed me that history is not a study of ancient documents, but a study of real people, who lived and breathed in a particular place and time. One should always read a text or see a person in this context. Mary Tudor, to take a simple example, who is usually held up today as a monster of religious intolerance and cruelty, was in fact a modest girl, rejected by her father at an early age, who lived in fear of a violent death for much of her life. She was genuinely surprised at her popularity on first coming to the throne. She had been brought up to believe that her church was right, and had seen it destroyed by the wicked Protestants. She believed (erroneously of course) that if one was a heretic, it was necessary that one should be burned, because if one was punished in this way for one's heresy on earth, one's soul would go straight to heaven, instead of languishing in hell for eternity. According to her lights, far from torturing the poor misguided fools, she was actually doing them a favour. To describe her as a monster may put her in her place according to modern political correctness, but it does not advance our understanding of her as a person.

James Frazer also taught me to examine my sources as witnesses to the events that they had recorded, as if I were interrogating them in a court of law. Far from treating their testimonies as equal, I had to consider their bias in telling the story? Were they in fact in a position to see the events they described, or were

those events distorted by the distance of time, or maybe even obscured totally by the hills of ignorance and prejudice.

So I will take the liberty of re-examining King Eadweard, looking at him as he actually existed in history, and I will also examine the environment in which he lived, which was crucially different from that of our own day in certain important points. To consider a person outside his period in history is like considering a gemstone without its setting. Superficially a considerable amount of information may be gained, but eventually we are left knowing nothing about the things that most concern us.

The Englisc came to these shores as pagans, and it was only about a hundred years after they arrived here that the Christian missionaries came. The job they did was so complete and so thorough that within another hundred years England was superficially wholly Christian. I say superficially, because the missionaries were specifically instructed by Pope Gregory to adapt existing religious practices, where this was possible, to Christian purposes. Reference to pagan deities such as Woden and Þunor were now made only in historical documents, and sites such as groves and springs, which had hitherto been dedicated to them, were put to Christian uses, often becoming the sites of churches, which sprang up all over the country. Almost from the earliest law-codes (written down, of course, by Christian monks, as the pagan population had been mostly illiterate) there are prescriptions against the worship of pagan gods.

However, there is more to a religion than its gods, and there was a considerable body of customs and attitudes, which ultimately sprang from their pagan religion, which still informed the lives of the Christian Englisc. Many of these were radically different and a great deal of hard thinking was occasionally necessary to reconcile them. To us this apparent contradiction between belief and practice may seem bizarre – even hypocritical, and we need to develop a tolerance and understanding of the *mores* of the times in order to comprehend the motives and attitudes behind the deeds that were done in them.

### **The Heroic Code**

The most important part of the historical background to understand is the Heroic Code, which, although it may seem strange to us today, is nevertheless an inescapable part of our Englisc pagan past. The Code was not written down, of course, and therefore never possessed the same rigidity as a law-code. It was passed on by word of mouth. But, like good manners, it was something that everyone was supposed to know and observe, and this knowledge distinguished the warrior upper classes from the boorish and uneducated.

The person who was at the top of the tree in pagan times was the warrior. The Heroic Code says that every warrior should bind himself to a leader. The bond was a mutual contract, cemented by a solemn oath. The warrior received subsistence from the leader and occasionally valuable gifts as well, and in return he offered the leader his whole self with his complete and unquestioning loyalty. The ultimate expression of this loyalty was that if his leader were killed on the battlefield, he would fight on to certain death rather than betray him. This ideal is summed up in the immortal words of Bryhtwold in the poem

known as *The Battle of Maldon*, which I shall read first in the original language, to give you an idea of the power of Englisc poetry.

“Hige sceal þe heardra,	heorte þe cenre,
mod sceal þe mara,	þe ure mægen lytlað.
Her lið ure ealdor	eall forheawen,
god on greote;	a mæg gnornian
se ðe nu fram þis wigplegan	wendan þenceð.
Ic eom frod feores:	fram ic ne wille,
ac ic me be healfe	minum hlaforde
be swa leofan menn	licgan þence.”

I shall now read from Michael Alexander’s translation, because he has kept the alliteration and metre of the original, making it the nearest that one can come to appreciating Englisc verse without understanding the language:

“Courage shall grow keener,	clearer the will,
the heart fiercer,	as our force faileth.
Here our lord lies	levelled in the dust,
the man all marred:	he shall mourn to the end
who thinks to wend off	from this war-play now.
Though I am white with winters	I will not away,
for I think to lodge me	alongside my dear one,
Lay me down	by my lord’s right hand.”

It is also exemplified in the behaviour of the Huscarls (professional soldiers whose duty was to protect a King or nobleman) of King Harold Godwinsson, who fought on to the last man after their leader was killed on Sandlake Field in the fight that came to be known as the Battle of Hastings.

There was also a duty to take vengeance: the only way at that time of punishing a man for a killing. If one’s lord were killed one was bound to avenge his death, and this duty persisted through generations, so that even after considerable legislation against it and the substitution of the system of Wergeld (literally Man-payment – a payment that could be made to compensate for a killing) the blood feud was a feature of Englisc life up to, and even after the Norman Conquest.

In a violent age it was accepted that people might get killed from time to time in open confrontations; but murder was a completely different matter and was regarded, if possible, as even more abhorrent than it is today. Even a suggestion of duplicity about the circumstances of a killing was considered dishonourable, and a slur upon the character of the killer. The heroic code required that one’s actions should be credit-worthy, and redound to one’s honour after one’s death, when one’s deeds came to be celebrated in heroic verse around the fire after the feast in the hall. The highest honour that could be accorded to a hero was the composition of a lay in his memory.

The Code also embodied a stoic resignation to destiny, which in pagan belief was dispensed by three wise sisters who sat at their looms, spinning the web of history. (These three sisters in fact lived on long after the old gods had been replaced, and their decomposing remains can be found, for example, in the Three Witches of Shakespeare’s *MacBeth*, and the three fairies who came to the baptism at the beginning of the story of *Sleeping Beauty*, collected by the

brothers Grimm in C19 Germany. This was, in fact, the one aspect of the Code that did not need any alteration by the Christian missionaries. The providence of God could be just as arbitrary as the decrees of Wyrð.

The Code gave rise to a number of impossible situations. A man slain by his close kin, for example, could not be avenged; for vengeance could only be taken on those outside the immediate family. The slayer was, as it were, marked like Cain, and the only course open to him was to flee to foreign parts and hope that his subsequent deeds might ameliorate this indelible stain on his character. This affected the retainers of the slain as well, for by their oath they had become his blood brothers and were also unable to exercise their duty of taking vengeance, and therefore considered themselves dishonoured. This is exemplified in the English heroic poem now known as *Beowulf*. In a passage of this poem Beowulf speaks of his lord's father, Hygelac, whose eldest son Herebeald was accidentally slain by Hæpcyn, the middle brother, while the two were at archery practice together. Beowulf compares his case to a man seeing his son hanging on the gallows, for such a one also could not be avenged.

<p>“Wæs þam yldestan mæges dædum syððan hyne Hæðcyn his frea-wine miste mercelses broðor oðerne, þæt was feoh-leas gefeoht, hreoðre hyge-meðe; æðeling unwrecen “Swa bið geomorlic to gebidanne, giong on galgan. sarigne sang, hrefne to hreoðre ...”.</p>	<p>ungedefelice morþor-bed streged, of horn-bogan, flane geswencte, ond his mæg ofscet, blodigan gare. fyrenum gesyngad, sceolde hwæðre swa þeah ealdres linnan. gomelum ceorle þæt his byre ride þonne he gyd wrece, þonne his sunu hangað</p>
---	---

Michael Alexander renders it thus:

<p>“A murderous bed was made by the act of a kinsman, a shaft from Hæpcyn's shot down the man that mistaking his aim, his own brother, A sin-fraught conflict unthinkable in the heart; and the ætheling lost “Grief such as this might feel if he saw riding the gallows. a song of sorrow, a sport for the raven.”</p>	<p>for the eldest contrary to right: horn-tipped bow should have become his lord; he struck his kinsman, with the blood-stained arrow-head. that could not be settled, yet thus it was, his life unavenged. a grey-headed man his son in youth Let him raise the lament then, while his son hangs there,</p>
--	--

This is not to say that the provisions of the Code were always carried out. The Englisc defence at Maldon failed partly because of the treachery of certain noblemen who galloped away from the battle at a crucial point, Godric even stealing Ealdormann Bryhtnoþ's horse to do so, thus causing alarm and despondency amongst the rest, who thought that Bryhtnoþ himself was leaving the field. Many of the fyrd (the normal volunteer foot-soldiers who made up the bulk of the Englisc army) also fled at Sandlake. However the Code still formed a heroic ideal to which all gave theoretical allegiance, however far their actual conduct might fall short of it.

It must seem to us, looking from this great remove in time, that we have here something that is largely inimical to the Christian viewpoint, although great efforts were made, particularly in the years just after the conversion, to reconcile the two. One of the greatest examples of Englisc Christian poetry, *The Dream of the Rood*, is informed by the Code, and would not have been composed in that form if the Code did not exist. Death on the gallows was the ultimate disgrace for an Englisc man, and the Englisc must have found great difficulty in accepting that Christ had died by this means. They were only able to do so by considering a pagan precedent, for Woden had hanged himself in one of his manifestations, in order to achieve the wisdom of the runes. In the version influenced by the Heroic Code, Christ was a heroic warrior who actively sought crucifixion in order to take 'vengeance' on the greatest adversary of all: Death. Death did not come to him, he went out and sought Death, and of course ultimately vanquished it because it was his 'doom', just as it was Beowulf's doom to vanquish Grendel's monstrous mother beneath the waters of the lake.

The *Dream of the Rood* says:

Ongyrede hine þa geong hæleð,	þæt wæs God ælmihtig,
strang and stiðmod;	gestah he on gealgan heanne
modig on manigra gesyhðe,	þa he wolde manncynn lysan.

I will quote from Michael Alexander again:

Almighty God un-girded Him,	eager to mount the gallows,
unafraid in the sight of many:	He would set free mankind.

It may be possible for a present-day scholar to read the contemporary Christian literature and to ignore the Code. Even some contemporary scholars tried to do the same, and there were attempts to legislate against it as I have already indicated. King Ælfræd enshrined in Englisc law the famous reversal of the principles expounded by Christ on the mountain. Christ said that one should treat one's neighbour as oneself, or 'do as you would be done by' as the old saying has it. King Ælfræd said that one should *not* treat one's neighbour as one would *not* like to be treated oneself, thus making a solid basis for legislation. However even the undoubtedly Christian King Ælfræd would have admired the behaviour of the Huscarls of King Harold, and furthermore would have encouraged the ideal behind it. This was the accepted thing for a good warrior to do, and Kings relied on it for the continuance of their administration and the protection of their thrones.

The Code then remained, like a living backdrop behind the scene of life, which sometimes became more animated. Painted figures occasionally came alive and

moved forward to complicate even the most Christian life. Against this backdrop, the murder of King Eadweard, while still tragic, nevertheless seems to be slightly less bizarre than it might appear without taking the Code into account: the motives for the killing, and the circumstances surrounding it, become more obvious; but if anything less excusable.

### **The Nature of Kingship**

Our ideas of kingship have been largely shaped by the autocratic behaviour of dictators in our own time, and the behaviour of kings in the history of the later mediæval period starting with William the Bastard. The Englisc kings were not like that, for if they had been, they would not have continued to rule for very long.

Englisc Kings ruled on the basis of the consent of their Witan, or council of wise men. This was not a council or committee in the modern sense of the word. The word Witan is the plural of wita, which simply means 'a wise man' and individual Witan varied in composition depending on various factors such as geographical location and who the King specifically summoned to advise him, although there was a nucleus of great noblemen and bishops, which remained pretty much the same. The withered remains of the Witan still exist in the present day Privy Council.

Certain matters were left in the King's hands, but other things required the Witan's consent or at least consultation, and the King who ignored the wishes of his nobles could easily find himself dethroned, or forced into a position where he had to toe the line. A continual theme in the Englisc chronicle is 'The King and his Witan did so-and-so', or 'The King and his Witan made such-and-such a decision'. A less prominent, but discernable thread in Englisc history is the struggle by the King to enforce his own will and look after his own interests as against those of his nobility, culminating in the power struggle between Earl Godwin and Eadweard (the so-called Confessor) just before the Norman Conquest.

The ideal Englisc king was in close touch with the wishes of his Witan, and was always careful either to carry the Witan with him, or, if a split became inevitable, to ensure that the most powerful men in the kingdom were on his side. The king who alienated a powerful part of his Witan was building up a store of trouble for himself.

### **The Historical Background**

King Eadgar, also known as St Eadgar the Peaceful, who succeeded to the throne on 1 October 959, was a strong and competent ruler. King Eadgar's coronation was deferred until Whit Sunday 973. There had been no set order for the Englisc coronation up until this time, and Archbishop, later to become Saint Dunstan, with his associates, produced at least two experimental drafts, taking into account West-Frankish and German models, before an order was finally approved. It became the basis for the order of coronation of Kings and Queens of England up to the present day, and formed the foundation on which King Charles I based his theory of the Divine right of Kings. In this order the emphasis of the ceremony is made, not on the coronation, but on the solemn anointing,

similar to the ordination of a priest. It is this concept that probably led to the coronation being postponed till 973, when Eadgar reached the age of thirty, below which one could not canonically be ordained to the priesthood.

This merging of the roles of secular and religious was probably an attempt by the Church to join forces with the King to increase royal power, for this would provide the stable circumstances in which the Church could flourish, and curb the ealdormenn and þegns who might aspire to be local tyrants and dominate the churches in their locality. However, the church also implicitly threatened bad, unjust and un-Christian kings with alienation from God's holy church and from participation in the holy body and blood of Christ.

King Eadgar, in spite of his support of the monastic party under St Dunstan and his later Sainthood, led a somewhat dissolute personal life. He had two lawful wives, in addition to other liaisons. By his first wife he had a son, the same Eadweard who is our subject today. In 964 he married as his second wife Ælfþryþ, daughter of Ordgar, ealdormann of Devon, who was the widow of Æþelwold, ealdormann of East Anglia. By her, Eadgar had two sons. The elder died in 970 or 971. The younger, a boy named Æþelræd, can barely have reached the age of ten in 975.

### **The Character of the King**

I am afraid that, as far we can ascertain, Eadweard (later to become Eadweard the Martyr) was not always the angelic and innocent figure that has often been depicted on icons and stained-glass windows. He had a quick and very violent temper, and childhood tantrums, far from being outgrown, had developed, by the time he reached his teenage years, into fits of black rage.

Although, as I have indicated, the Englisc reaction to happenings was not necessarily the same as ours, we have to accept that they had a society that was exceedingly civilized according to the standards of the world as it then was. Byzantium was probably the most advanced in manners, but the Englisc, by the time of which we are speaking, must have run them a close second. Their daily life was regulated to a minute pattern, and their behaviour towards one another was also regulated and precise. As far as manners are concerned, we tend only to look as far as the Mediæval period *after* the Norman Conquest, but the Englisc were in fact far more civilized than the Normans, whose so-called 'noblemen' were illiterate oafs by comparison. We have only to look at the Crusades (the first of which was directed by a schismatic Pope against England, using Norman greed to further his lust for power) to realize just how uncouth they were. Last year saw the 400th anniversary of the sack of Constantinople by Crusaders similar to those who had invaded England, when, amidst an orgy of plunder and looting, a whore was placed on the patriarch's throne. That incident, in spite of a recent apology by the Pope, has rankled the Orthodox for many years and while they may be able to forgive, they cannot forget it. And yet Constantinople was only eclipsed for fifty-seven years and re-emerged, albeit as a mere shadow of her former self. England sank entirely beneath the Norman bastard's yoke for five hundred years, and at the end of that time awoke to find her art treasures, her language and literature entirely lost, and had to create it all anew.

But I must not allow myself to become sidetracked. I was speaking of the English reaction to violent outbursts, which I think might actually have been more similar to the horror and shock that the Victorians would have displayed, than to our reactions in the present day. We have inherited the legacy of Freud and Jung, and are likely to make allowances for events in a person's life or upbringing that might cause him to behave in certain ways. The English, like the Victorians, had no such legacy, and an irrational outburst would have been attributed, if any outside cause were looked for, to a demon or the devil himself. The young King's outbursts were not completely irrational, and he had already offended a large number of the nobility by the intolerable violence of his speech and behaviour towards them. Even long after he had passed into veneration as a Saint, it was remembered that these outbursts of rage had alarmed all who knew him, and especially the members of his own household. On the eve of 18 March 978 one would not have supposed him to be a candidate for Sainthood at all.

### **The Succession**

King Eadgar died suddenly and completely unexpectedly on 8 July 975. It was the summer and few of his retainers were at court.

The Witan had an important role in the appointing of a new King. The rules of succession in English times are not completely clear – and in any case were not as firmly set as they have become today. The most orderly procedure was when the King's eldest son was named by his father as his heir, acclaimed by the nobility of the whole kingdom after his father's death, and then crowned and anointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury at a public ceremony. This did not always follow, however. The King was occasionally chosen for pragmatic reasons, based not on right, but on his probable ability to rule the Kingdom and secure the consent of the largest number of nobles. An example of this is no less a figure than King Ælfræd the Great, who was not the heir to the throne according to our present ideas, but was chosen by the Witan ahead of his extremely youthful nephew because he was of age and had proven competence in dealing with the Vikings, who were at that time a great threat to the country.

In view of the known character and propensities of Eadweard, a large number of nobles resolved to promote the election of Æthelræd, his younger brother. This resolution, as I have said, was not unknown. As long as the King was of the ruling house, we have seen that the Witan had previously made its choice based on other attributes than that of being the first-born.

Other nobles and counsellors having arrived, however, they were able to make their will prevail, and Eadweard was crowned King before the end of 975; but the disaffected party were not happy about the situation. There is evidence to suggest that the country was in fact on the brink of civil war, if not actually over the brink, in the months immediately after Eadgar's death.

Not much information has survived about King Eadweard's reign, although the evidence that has come down to us gives a vague impression of disorder. It is possible that the state of civil war, or at least armed hostility, persisted, and we can be certain of one thing: the endowment of monasteries, which King Eadgar

had encouraged, abruptly came to an end. Ælfhere, the ealdormann of Mercia, the most prominent nobleman at that time, was accused of destroying monasteries, and many persons with an hereditary title to monastic lands took advantage of the change in government to assert their claims.

This has been interpreted as an anti-monastic reaction, giving a motive for the murder of King Eadweard, who has been alleged to have a similar appreciation of the monastic ideal as his father; but there were other strong reasons to check the recent drift of land into monastic possession. The Englisc state was a far more organic thing than the modern one, suspended in a delicate balance. It could lurch alarmingly if tinkered with. The gift of further tracts of property to large monastic estates such as Ramsey or Ely would eventually have given the preponderance of land ownership within a shire to the religious interest, and furthermore an independent branch of it, out of the control of the local Bishop. This had the effect of weakening the local influence of the þegns of the shire, on whom the King's officers were compelled to rely for the maintenance of public order. A King in a weak or contested position, which Eadweard undoubtedly was, could not afford to have his authority further diluted. The Church relied on a strong monarchy for her continued well-being (it could even be argued, in the earlier periods, for her continued existence). The resentment of the large amounts of patronage acquired by Ramsey and Ely and other large monasteries has been attributed to resentment of the monastic ideal by many þegns and some ealdormenn. This is not necessarily so, and could be produced by other, less base motives: namely the wish to see Royal authority re-imposed and strengthened.

### **The Murder**

On the surface, in spite of the fierce disagreement between various noblemen who supported one half-brother against the other, relations between the two half-brothers Eadweard and Æþelræd themselves remained friendly. On the evening of 18 March 978, King Eadweard, having been hunting in the area, came to visit Ælfþryþ and Æþelræd informally at Corfe Castle in Dorset. Anyone visiting that site today cannot but be impressed by the castle perched on its dramatic hilltop. There would have been no castle there then, of course, only a wooden hall with a group of outbuildings, maybe within an earth rampart or perhaps only a simple fence of wooden boards. The account of what happened next is given to us by an anonymous monk, allegedly a member of the King's entourage at the time of the attack, in a *Life of St Oswald* written about the year AD 1000.

Ælfþryþ and Æþelræd appeared at the doorway to welcome their visitor, and their gesiþas came out to greet him with ostentatious signs of respect. Two of them approached him, one on his left and the other on his right. The latter, while pretending to give him the kiss of peace, grasped his left shoulder with his right arm, at the same time getting a grip on the King's right forearm with his left hand. While Eadweard was pinioned in this fashion, the man on his left grasped his left arm and stabbed him with a knife. The King's horse, frightened, reared up and forced the King back onto the high cantle of the saddle. The gesiþ on the right was still gripping the King and his thigh was pressed across the cantle with

enormous force. His horse bolted, and his body was dragged along the ground by his left foot, which remained caught in the stirrup. (These facts were incidentally crucial to the later identification of the relics when they were eventually rediscovered last century). His body was subsequently buried without any special honour at Wareham.

This was murder of the most base and treacherous kind, and it shocked even those who would have tolerated any crime of open violence. We have to enquire who was the instigator of it?

Æþelræd himself has been exonerated from any part in the affair owing to his youth. There is also no evidence to support the allegation that any guilt lay with his mother, Ælfþryþ, who has been represented as the wicked stepmother, eliminating her stepson in order to procure the throne for the child of her own body. No such allegation was made at the time, when one would have expected it to arise if it were indeed true. The first we hear of it is more than a hundred years later in a life of St Dunstan by one Osbern, precentor of Canterbury in the time of the Norman Archbishop Lanfranc. Now although in the Orthodox context these two testimonies might appear to have equal weight, in the context of the court of history I do not think that it can be seen as just to accept the statement of a single witness a century removed from the events as being of equal weight to the silence of contemporaries. The modern craft of Historiography warns us to examine the situation and probable motives of the man making the statement, as well as the events about which it is made. Also it is a statement by a single schismatic – contradicting the silence of hundreds of Orthodox Christians.

As far as it is possible to ascertain, the crime was planned and carried out by Æþelræd's *gesipas*, in order that their young master might become king. One cannot help but wonder whether they were suborned by some other nobleman, and it is possible that a modern-style investigation, had it been possible to conduct it at the time, would be able to point a conclusive finger. However such speculations at this distance from the event, when the evidence has long been lost in the mists of time, are fruitless and the province of the Historical Novelist rather than the Historian.

It is a fact that nobody was ever called to account for the crime. We have already seen from the Heroic Code that the bond between retainer and lord was sacrosanct, the equivalent of that between close kin, and it was out of the question for one to take vengeance on the other. Vengeance was the only method of bringing home punishment for such an outrage on the perpetrator. The present system of courts and police simply did not exist then. There was no other possible redress.

Æþelræd, who was crowned a month after the murder, therefore began to reign in an unhappy atmosphere of suspicion. Although he was not personally guilty of it, the crime had been committed for his sake, and he never escaped from it. Æþelræd actually means 'Noble-Counsel'. When his reign began to fall apart, plagued by treachery and incompetence, folk began to call him by the nickname 'Unræd', which means 'of no counsel', and was a rather neat English joke of a type that is still made today (one is reminded of the present Prime

Minister who has had his name twisted into B Liar). Unræd, however, came to be read, after the language had been changed by the introduction of Norman French, as Unready, which is not an accurate translation and entirely loses the point.

### **The Rise to Sainthood**

A column of light appeared over Eadweard's grave at Wareham, and a spring broke out near the grave, which healed the afflictions of many who bathed in it. After a year Ælfhere, ealdormann of Mercia (the same ealdormann who had been accused of destroying monasteries in direct contravention of the King's wishes), had the body of the King translated to the house of nuns founded by King Ælfræd at Shaftesbury. The remains of King Eadweard were said to be whole and incorrupt at that time. At Shaftesbury the miracles around his tomb continued, and so many were associated with it that he came to be regarded as a Saint and Martyr. Thirty years after the murder, King Æþelræd himself ordered the general observation of his brother's festival. The sacred relics were again translated to an elaborate shrine in Shaftesbury Abbey church, owing to the miraculous levitation of his tomb (a gradual raising of the stone out of the ground, which was witnessed by many folk) by which St Eadweard made it known that he wished his body to be exhumed. The devotions and the miracles continued and the town of Shaftesbury became known as St Eadweard's borough.

There is little need to rehearse the tale of the how the relics came to be lost during the Protestant 'reformation', or of their finding again in the twentieth century and their coming to this place. These things are matters of recent history and public record, which must be well known to you, and I have nothing significant to add to them.

### **Conclusion**

I have tried to stress two things in this talk. Firstly I have tried to show how knowledge of the conditions prevailing at the time is essential to understand the motives for actions committed in it. It is not good history to attribute our own ideas, coloured as they are by such things as Freudian theories totally unknown to the folk at the time, to explain actions that happened a thousand years ago, or to pass judgement upon them. A more recent example may make this clearer. At the time of the Zulu wars towards the end of the last century, it was not considered at all improper to take no prisoners, and bayoneting the enemy wounded as they lay on the battlefield was common practice. Yet within sixty years such conduct was considered to be against the rules of war. If the public perception can change so much in sixty years, how much more can it change in a thousand?

Secondly I have indicated that waters, originally fairly clear, have been muddied by later writers, who have re-interpreted the story in the light of their own time, either through ignorance of the true facts, or from a wish to embellish the story for their own ends. The wicked stepmother, for example, has been a character in so many stories, both fact and fable, throughout the ages that it must have seemed a heaven-sent opportunity to the Norman precentor of

Canterbury, looking to point a moral, which caused him to traduce an innocent woman, and give rise to a false interpretation which, with an improved sense of historiography, historians have only been able to rectify in the last sixty years or so. However I have to say that it has caused me some distress to note that in several websites and an old service to King Edward the Martyr that I have seen, Christians, some of them Orthodox, continue to accept all texts as of equal value, and to vilify the memory of Queen Ælfryþ. It may be, of course, that she was guilty; but where there is doubt, and there seems to be truly substantial doubt that she had any guilty part at all to play in this tragedy, then we of all people should surely take the charitable view and give her the benefit of it.

Would things have been any different if Eadweard had survived, and if the terrible and shocking murder had not occurred. The Vikings, whose raids were a constant background refrain in the following years were still out there, and would have made them anyway. The cast of the great and good in the kingdom was no different either, so whether they would have been met with any more resolute and successful defence is open to question. Maybe there was innate rottenness in the Kingdom that appeared so firm at the end of the reign of Eadgar, which would have appeared whatever king was on the throne. However it is fairly certain that the murder of the King destabilized the influence of the monarchy at a crucial time, and that this prepared the way for its eventual fall under a schismatic and brutal conqueror. I hope I have been able to present a balanced account and shed perhaps a little new light on the circumstances of it.

After the reign of Æþelræd Unræd, the Danes under Cnut, conquered England for a while; but this was simply the accession of an alien King, who was welcomed by a substantial portion of the English nobility. The Norman Conquest was completely different in kind, and resulted in the almost total annihilation of our native aristocracy, the suppression of our native language, the corruption of our Orthodox religion and the subjugation into slavery of our folk for five hundred years. At the end of that time, when England awoke once more, and escaped the foreign tyranny under which it had lain for so long, Archbishop Cranmer and others made an honest attempt to try and find that Orthodox religion, but by then it was lost, almost beyond hope of resurrection.

I can only hope and pray that the foundation of the Brotherhood of St Edward here at Brookwood will mark the beginning of the restoration of that great network of right-believing, spiritual powerhouses that existed before the Norman Conquest, spreading its protective shield of prayer over the country against the many demons that now beset us; for I believe that many of these demons are still here and making their depredations as a direct result of the schismatic Norman 'Crusade' in 1066.

Thank you for your attention. Dryhten Hælend Crist us ealle gehealde (May the Lord Jesus Christ keep us all).