

Edited by N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill

EDWARD THE ELDER

899-924



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Edward the Elder, son and successor of King Alfred, was one of the greatest architects of the English state and yet is one of the most neglected kings of English history. During his 24-year reign, Edward led a series of successful campaigns against the Vikings and by the time of his death controlled most of southern and midland England, with his influence also felt in Wales and the north. *Edward the Elder* is a timely reassessment of Edward's reign and helps to restore this ruler to his rightful place in English history.

The period of Edward's reign is notably lacking in primary materials for historians. By drawing upon sources as diverse as literature, archaeology, coins and textiles, this book brings together a rich variety of scholarship to offer new insights into the world of Edward the Elder. With this wealth of perspectives, *Edward the Elder* offers a broad picture of Edward's reign and his relation to the politics and culture of the Anglo-Saxon period.

Edward the Elder is an indispensable guide to this period for undergraduates, advanced historians and general readers alike.

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This volume is a collection of papers given at a conference at the University of Manchester, organised by the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies in 1999, to mark the eleventh centenary of Edward the Elder's accession.

The volume is dedicated as a memorial to the life and work of Eric John (1922–2000), who did so much to promote the study of Anglo-Saxon England during his long tenure of a post at the University of Manchester.

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EDWARD THE ELDER'S REPUTATION

An introduction

Nick Higham

Edward the Elder is perhaps the most neglected of English kings. He ruled an expanding realm for twenty-five years and arguably did as much as any other individual to construct a single, south-centred, Anglo-Saxon kingdom, yet posthumously his achievements have been all but forgotten. Tellingly, his reign has not been the subject of any sort of monographic account within the modern period (or at any other date) and the electronic searches carried out by the editors of this volume produced hardly any bibliographical references. By contrast, Edward's father, Alfred, was king of Wessex for just three years more, with pretensions to power and influence elsewhere sufficient to imagine himself 'king of the Anglo-Saxons' at the end of his reign (Sawyer 1968: 347, 348, 354, 355, 356; Keynes and Lapidge 1983: 227, n. 1; Keynes this volume), but directly ruler of a much smaller and less expansive realm. Yet Alfred has spawned a plethora of biographical and historical literature (including Plummer 1902; Duckett 1957; Keynes and Lapidge 1983; Smyth 1995; Abels 1998; Nelson 1997; Reuter forthcoming). Despite comparative obscurity in, for example, long periods of the Middle Ages, he has re-emerged over the last four centuries as the best-known and most revered king of the pre-Norman era. The posthumous contrast between father and son is a compelling one, therefore, but why has Edward's reputation so failed to match his undoubted achievements, while that of his father has grown into the historical monolith of the age?

One reason must undoubtedly be the comparative poverty of evidence – literary or otherwise – for Edward as a person and his reign in general. Only the A (Parker or Winchester) MS of the ASC (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 173; Whitelock 1979; Bately 1986; Swanton 1996) is (near) contemporary and in the nature of an official court account. There is little to place beside it. Had there been available a similar raft of biographical, philosophical and ecclesiastical writings as for Alfred, then his son might well have benefited from the same sort of 'spin' as his father (Scharer 1996) and been

treated very differently *post mortem*. Edward, however, had less need to patronise authors to laud himself than his father: after the initial struggle for the kingship with Æthelwold, his regime was not in much real danger. Furthermore, the hard work of instigating a cultural programme had already been done. As James Campbell opines (this volume), his reign is grossly under-represented in the surviving documentation, and Mechthild Gretsch's contribution would seem to support this view. So it is fair to say that his regime did not revert to the pre-Alfred, West Saxon norm as regards manuscript production, which was something close to prehistoric, but the output was both different in focus and since very largely lost.

One reason that Alfred captured the historical imagination from a comparatively early age was undoubtedly his unique record in reinvigorating learning – unique for a ninth-century Anglo-Saxon king that is – and this fact has resonated down the ages. Alfred was, for the nineteenth-century leisured classes, in John Niles's words: 'the type of English gentleman: warlike yet pious, undaunted in danger, yet deeply philosophical when the course of events permitted him to cultivate the life of the mind' (Niles 1997: 214). The Alfredian stereotype of philosopher king was one with which fledging empire-builders exiting from Victorian public schools could empathise. Edward had less obviously been re-worked by contemporary writers against this mirror of the enlightened prince. And of course those empire-builders were particularly interested in sea-borne power, and in this area, rightly or wrongly, the *ASC(A)* account of Alfred's shipbuilding in 896 contrasts with a total lack of any comparable record of activities during the reign of his son.

Edward's reputation suffered consistently from comparison with his father's literary exploits in medieval commentaries. Like John of Worcester, William of Malmesbury (Mynors *et al.* 1998: 196–211) probably followed the now lost text compiled by Florence of Worcester, finding therein a contrasting vision of father and son. He painted Alfred not only as the quintessential warrior-king and hero, but also as a patron of learning and Christian culture, a founder of monasteries and champion of the church, a lawmaker and a peace-weaver. This treatment is, of course, founded on the *ASC* but it develops Alfred's role in ways which are quasi-hagiographical, offering a bible-inspired stereotype of the noble king in adversity triumphing over cruel, pagan barbarians. Edward suffers by comparison. William's account (ch. ii 125) opens with the comment that he was 'much inferior to his father in the cultivation of letters', even though he was 'incomparably more glorious in the power of his rule'. This reputation as a comparative illiterate was picked up by other influential medieval writers. Matthew Paris, for example, opened his account of the reign with very similar words (Luard 1872), as did Roger of Hovedon (Stubbs 1868), Roger of Wendover (Giles 1849), Ranulph Higden (Lumby 1876) and Richard of Cirencester (Mayor 1863) – and they were later followed by several modern historians. William's subsequent remark (ch. ii 126) that Edward brought up his own sons to be well-educated 'to

govern the state not like rustics but philosophers' proved insufficient to reverse the damage to his reputation that this unflattering comparison had already wrought.

To stay with William of Malmesbury for a moment, he knew of Edward's numerous victories and the expansion of his kingship from earlier accounts. Yet he was not prepared to allow Edward much credit even for this (ch. ii 125): 'All this might rightly be set to Edward's credit, but the chief prize of victory, in my judgement, is due to his father'. Other twelfth-century chroniclers were perhaps less dismissive, and there is general consensus that Edward was militarily successful. John of Worcester's *Chronicle*, for example, used such adjectives regarding Edward as 'invincible', 'victorious' and 'unconquered' and, under 924, remarked on the death of 'the most invincible king of the English who had ruled with the greatest glory over all the inhabitants of Britain'. But such epithets were to be all too common in this work (Darlington and McGurk 1995). Æthelstan was described thereafter as 'energetic and glorious' and a 'brave and glorious king' while Edmund was the 'glorious king of the English'.

It was simply not enough to have an unbeaten military record to establish with these authors a distinctive reputation in the late ninth or tenth centuries, because there was a series of successful and warlike kings on the English throne. Edward's achievements in this regard lacked the drama of Alfred's revival of the 'English' cause at its darkest hour and his battles did not individually enjoy the renown derived from the *ASC* accounts and several additional poems relating to Æthelstan's great victory at Brunanburh (Lapidge, 1981). In consequence, his reputation was damaged by being squeezed between those of his father and his son.

Nor did Edward benefit from the long-running and widespread interest among historians concerning his close female kin. Sir Francis Palgrave (1832: 571) remarked that Ælfwynn was: 'deposed by the power of her uncle Edward, and led as a captive into Wessex [where] she disappears from history'. This is certainly one perspective on events (Bailey, this volume), but Edward is in danger of being stereotyped once more, and this time as the archetypal wicked uncle, to be compared with Richard of York (Richard III), for example. Attention paid to his sister, Æthelflæd, further diverted renown from Edward himself. Successive medieval and modern writers were quite captivated by her. John of Worcester's 'Mercian' viewpoint may have led him to optimise the roles of Æthelflæd, her husband and her daughter. For others the 'lady of the Mercians' provided a useful precedent for other prominent women, from the Empress Matilda to Queen Victoria. To William of Malmesbury she was (ch. ii 125): 'a powerful accession to his [Edward's] party, the delight of his subjects, the dread of his enemies, a woman of an enlarged soul'. She refused to have sex again following the birth of one child because it was 'unbecoming the daughter of a king to give way to a delight which, after a time, produced such painful consequences'. If Æthelflæd was

suffering from post-traumatic stress, this was hardly Edward's responsibility, but again, his reputation was being squeezed out by regard for another, exceptional member of his close family.

Edward loses out additionally in consequence of decisions concerning style made by medieval writers. For example, Henry of Huntingdon in the 1120s used a version of the *ASC* which lacked information on Edward's military career, and this seriously skewed his vision of events (Greenway 1996). He offered a fulsome panegyric to Alfred on his death, then a briefer elegy to Æthelflæd (*O Elfeda potens, o terror virgo virorum, victrix naturae, nomine digna viri*). Edward's death, by contrast, evinced nothing more than a bald statement, while the author reverted to a more rhetorical style to incorporate a long poem celebrating Æthelstan's victory at Brunanburh. Henry's attitudes were, of course, largely determined by the source materials which he himself had available, but his own emphases meant that, once more, Edward's reputation was diminished by implicit comparisons with those around him conveyed by authors whose own value judgements they undoubtedly reflect.

Nor did Edward profit from the attentions of writers in neighbouring lands. Across the Channel he is far from being alone among English kings in being ignored by Frankish chroniclers. One seeks him in vain in the *History of the Normans* by Dudo of St Quentin (Christiansen 1998), despite Edward's contemporaneity with Rollo – who does feature in post-Conquest accounts of the reign (as *ASC(E)* 876). Edward similarly fails to appear in the cast list of the earliest *Life of King Edward the Confessor* (Barlow 1962), written in Flanders, although Æthelstan and his successors all appear.

Nor did non-English, insular authors pay Edward much attention. The *Annales Cambriae* note the deaths of Alfred (900), Bishop Asser (908) and Æthelflæd (917) but fail to mention Edward the Elder (Morris 1980: 90). The later Welsh *Chronicles of the Kings* followed this lead in making little of Edward. The Peniarth MS noted the deaths of *Ethelstan* (Guthrum) in 897–8 (following the *Annales Cambriae*, 898), Alfred in 898–9, Asser in 910 and Queen Æthelflæd in 918, again without reference to Edward (Jones 1952: 6). The *Brenhinedd y Saesson* was more forthcoming, naming Edward at the beginning of his reign and remarking on his strength and fecundity as well as his death and burial, but even so his presence is overshadowed by Alfred's and then Æthelstan's (Jones 1971: 22–30). More particularly, the Welsh had good reason to recall Æthelflæd, whose reputation (and active interventions) in the west clearly overshadowed the actions of her brother.

This tendency was of course compounded by Geoffrey of Monmouth's influential re-invention of insular history in the 1130s, which centred on the Britons and proposed a long deferred English assumption of power and authority in lowland Britain (Griscom 1929). Most early English kings were, of course, casualties of this process to some degree. Alfred survived as 'king' albeit only in the context of having putatively translated Welsh laws into English (III, 5). The *History of the Kings of Britain* ended with Æthelstan (xii, 19),

'who was the first among them [the English] to be crowned King' (Thorpe 1982: 284). Edward's reputation was obviously damaged by the vision of history offered by this 'prose-epic' and it must be remembered that Geoffrey exerted enormous influence over later writers from the twelfth century onwards.

Edward went entirely unmentioned in the *Chronicon Scotorum* (Hennessy 1866), the author of which clearly had more important things on his mind. The annal which the nineteenth-century editor mistakenly ascribed to 899 [*recte c. 905*], remarked that it was a rainy year in which bread failed. In 900 [*recte c. 906*]:

A large woman was cast ashore by the sea in Alba, viz., her length was nine score and twelve feet; six feet between her two paps; the length of her hair was 15 feet; the length of the fingers of her hands was 6 feet; the length of her nose was 7 feet; whiter than a swan, or the foam of the wave, was every part of her.

It is abundantly clear that Edward's reputation and the story of his deeds as offered by *ASC(A)* had not crossed over into the political consciousness of the Irish and Scottish élites.

Nor was Edward much praised by near contemporaries in England, or even by the first generation of Anglo-Norman writers. Setting aside the Parker Chronicle account, only Æthelweard dealt with Edward in any detail (Campbell 1962), and his chronicle certainly later influenced William of Malmesbury. This scion of the royal house gave him significantly more credit than earlier writers for the military leadership of Alfred's forces, but he wrote into similar roles two ealdormen and 'King Æthelred of the Mercians'. Given that he was ostensibly writing for one of Edward's descendants (his great-granddaughter Matilda, abbess of Essen), Æthelweard understandably passed over the early struggle for power between Edward and his own ancestor, Æthelwold, which was terminated only by Æthelwold's death at the Holme (*ASC(A)* 899–904). Thereafter he did dwell on Edward's successful wars against the Danes but only up to his victory at Wednesfield and even that was not specifically credited to him. Thereafter the account consists primarily of deaths among the English leadership, omitting reference to Edward's further military operations, his seizure of the Danelaw, his occupation of English Mercia and his putative overkingship elsewhere (but see Davidson, this volume). This partial account focuses, therefore, on the defensive and reactive period of Edward's kingship and ignores – presumably deliberately – both the early internecine struggles and, less understandably, his later triumphs. It treats Æthelred of the Mercians too as an equal partner to Edward, so compromising his reputation still further. Æthelweard's far more fulsome treatment of both Alfred and Æthelstan – whose victory in a 'great battle' at *Brunandun* overshadows Edward's achievements – again leaves Edward

damned by the faintness of his praise. One is left with the likelihood that this author felt a singular lack of empathy for Edward, whose triumph over Æthelwold had, after all, severely prejudiced his own prospects of the throne. The same message may be implicit in the length of his account of the successive reigns, with Alfred's coming in at over five times longer than Edward's, albeit Æthelstan's is even shorter still. Æthelweard's interest in West Saxon history clearly never recovered the heights it reached in his treatment of Egberht's several sons, among whom Æthelred was of course his own forebear.

Æthelweard's younger contemporary, Ælfric, seems to have taken this message to heart. He clearly benefited from the patronage of Æthelweard, and of his son and successor in the ealdormanry, Æthelmær, particularly after Æthelweard's death *c.* 998, being promoted to abbot of Eynsham in 1005. When he wished to recall three kings in England who were 'often victorious through God' he turned first to Alfred, 'who often fought against the Danes, until he won victory and protected his people'. Similarly he included Æthelstan, in tribute to Brunanburh, and lastly, and most improbably, Edgar, whose patronage of the reformers was arguably influential in his appearance in this context (Whitelock 1979: no. 239i). One might have expected to find Edward in this list and it may have been on account of Æthelweard's apparent partiality that he is passed over.

Edward's reign lay outside the remit of Eadmer of Canterbury, since he opened his account with those patrons of reform, Edgar and Dunstan (Bosanquet 1964). Nor was Orderic Vitalis tempted to offer an insular history for the pre-Conquest era, starting effectively in 1066 (Chibnall 1969–80). Even so, Æthelstan, Edgar, Edmund Ironside, Edward the Confessor and Edgar the Ætheling were all mentioned, at least in passing, making Edward the latest of a long run of kings whose existence apparently seemed irrelevant to his account.

Nor does Edward seem to have been the subject of special interest within the English royal family. His name was not to be reused until Edgar named his first-born son for his grandfather. Thereafter it appears each generation, but one must suspect that this had more to do with the cult of Edward the Martyr (died 978) than with the reputation of Edward the Elder. It was the name of that other famous royal martyr of the Viking age – St Edmund – that emerged as the most popular from Edward's time right down to the conquest. The revival in the thirteenth century of Edward as a name considered suitable for a potential heir to the throne reflects reverence for Edward the Confessor and has no bearing on the reputation of his distant ancestor, 'the Elder'.

It is difficult to know how popular the name was outside the royal family. In that context it does not feature in various versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles. It does occur, of course, in Domesday Book, but the name is far from being exceptional in its popularity even there (Keats-Rohan and

Thornton 1997; Keats-Rohan 1999), and young men may have been named for the Confessor.

For what then was Edward actively remembered? Medieval chroniclers at least remarked consistently on the expansion of his power to incorporate not just Wessex and Mercia, but also, in William of Malmesbury's words (ch. ii 125), 'the West and East Angles, and Northumbrians, who had already grown into one nation with the Danes', and also the Scots and Britons. Chroniclers were generally royalists, with an instinctive preference for central government and distaste for baronial pretensions, and Edward suited such prejudices well. They were equally impressed by his large family and the marriages into Europe's premier families that he and then Æthelstan arranged, which seemed to presage various marital alliances of, for example, the twelfth century, in which they or their patrons had interests. The story of a great council in or around 905 was frequently recycled, at which the 'magnificent' King Edward with Archbishop Plegmund created a whole raft of new bishops, and this story does at least reflect Edward's responsibility for the division of several southern dioceses (Rumble, this volume).

A few writers had political motives for writing up Edward's general demeanour and personality. For example, Peter of Langtoft, in Edward I's reign, diplomatically described this earlier Edward as 'molt fu fort et beals, et de graunt resoun' (very strong and handsome, and of great intelligence) (Wright 1866). Richard of Cirencester, writing under Edward III, termed him 'a gentle and pious man, amiable and affable to everyone, he evoked affection for himself in all' (Mayor 1863). He then went on to provide, in direct speech, a story about his putative second sight, by which his troops were enabled to pre-empt sea-borne attacks on England. Such politically inspired improvements to Edward were, however, limited to the period of the three kingships going under his name and had little value thereafter.

Briefer and more laconic statements abound. From the end of the Middle Ages it might be apposite to quote in full the well-connected Augustinian, John Capgrave, who dedicated his *Abbreviacion of Cronicles* to Edward IV in 1462/3 (Hingeston 1858). In this account Edward unusually overshadows Alfred, but not Æthelstan.

In these days regned in Englonde Edward the son onto Alured. His othir name was Senior. He mored his kyngdam in many thingis; mad newe borowes; thoo that were falle reysid hem ageyn. He conqwered the Scottis, the Walsch men; the kyngdammes of Est Ynglond, of Essex, and of Merce, he took fro the Danis. In his dayes deied a nobil lady cleped Ethelfled, dootir onto Edred, Kyng of Merce. Sche bilid many townes, Bronbury, Tamworth, Bronbruggen, Stafford and Warwick. This same Kyng is biried at Wynchester.

Like other kings, therefore, Edward's reputation was at the mercy of the contemporary needs of later writers and few found much to develop in his story. Alfred and Æthelstan were embraced far more fulsomely than was Edward by those keen to celebrate the English national character, the Achilles-like heroism of its Dark Ages' warriors and the imperial mission of its kings. The revival of interest in pre-Conquest England in and after the reformation created few opportunities for the resurrection of Edward's reputation. Few but not quite none. In 1740, Thomas Augustine Arne composed a masque entitled *Alfred* at the request of Frederick, Prince of Wales and son and heir of George II, and some sections have proved remarkably successful – including *Rule Britannia*. The masque was considered at the time to be an allegory of current politics, attacking George II and Walpole and supportive of the Prince of Wales, and this was conveyed via the metaphor of a generous characterisation of Edward in Alfred's England. However, its clear partisanship coupled with Frederick's responsibility for the deeply offensive *Historie du Prince Titi* just five years earlier and his premature death in 1751 collectively doomed this attempt to revive Edward's memory.

Edward has, of course, benefited from the modern phenomenon of Anglo-Saxonism and the even more recent professionalisation of history. Edward Freeman remarked on his prowess and the extent of his power (Freeman 1878) and John Richard Green attempted to wrest some real constitutional significance out of Edward's 'reconquest' (Green 1883), but it has been writers of the last decade or so who have done most to resurrect Edward. Otherwise his memory was to a large degree dependent on civic pride at those cities which looked back to him as a founding father, and in that respect, too, treatment has been decidedly patchy. Leyland noted Edward only in the context of the foundation of Hereford (Toulmin Smith 1906–10), which might perhaps raise a wry smile, given that Hereford goes unmentioned in *ASC*. To take two examples which were local to the conference at which this paper was presented: in his great three-part history of Cheshire, published in 1819, George Ormerod offered a narrative account of post-Alfredian government. However, Edward's role as a founder of burhs is dwarfed by that of Æthelflæd and her husband. Baines, in his history of Lancashire (1868: 15) similarly refers to the town of Manchester, 'repaired and garrisoned' by Edward, but his role is lost against a backdrop of pseudo-history which has 'Sir Tarquin, the Saxon giant chief', expelled 'from the castle of Manchester' and Woden-worship at Ordsall Rock. Baine's vision of Manchester has this industrial metropolis already large and well populated in King Edwin's reign and supposedly the residence of a West Saxon queen in 689. The Roman fort likewise exerted an enormous pull on the historical imagination locally, leaving Edward as just one figure in a long line of founding grandees stretching back to the first century AD, some of whom found expression in the murals and sculptures which grace Manchester's Victorian town hall.

Edward's reputation has suffered, therefore, from comparison with other members of his family and from the limitations of his known achievements. Alfred and Æthelstan shared – and in critical respects surpassed – his record of successful warfare, with far more set-piece, named battles to their credit than Edward. His sister's achievements as a founder of burhs and conqueror of the Danes were ranked beside his own and seemed the more noteworthy to later commentators on account of her sex. Her reputation certainly captured the Celtic vote over his own. Edward was apparently negligent as a patron of authors who might have glorified his name, *ASC(A)* only excepted. He had no Asser. While later historical writers with an interest in contemporary kings of the same name did something to refurbish his profile, there was little for them to work on and the effort rapidly dwindled. 'Valiant' and 'redoubtable' seemed apt terms to Germanist historians to describe him, but there was space only for one stereotypically heroic English king of the Viking Age, and Alfred easily ran away with that prize.

Edward Freeman (1878: 139) clearly recognised Edward's exceptional position, terming him 'the first king of the Anglo-Saxons who was Lord of all Britain', but his reign was covered in a mere six pages, compared to the thirty-four made over to Alfred. Many writers of histories were not, however, of equal stature to Freeman as historians. It may be apt to close this essay with the account of Edward's reign offered by one of his most influential contemporaries, Charles Dickens, who wrote his *A Child's History of England* initially for his own children but then serialised it in 1851–3. His vision has arguably been absorbed by more twentieth-century readers than that of any other Victorian writer. Dickens recognised that it was Edward who 'gradually extended his power over the whole of England, and so the Seven Kingdoms were united into one'. However, he could not resist resorting almost immediately to a panegyric on the Saxon race, in the past as well as the present, which led him inexorably back to Edward's predecessor, King Alfred:

under the Great Alfred, all the best points of the English-Saxon character were first encouraged, and in him first shown. It has been the greatest character among the nations of the earth ... I pause to think with admiration, of the noble king who, in his single person, possessed all the Saxon virtues. Whom misfortune could not subdue, whom prosperity could not spoil, whose perseverance nothing could shake.

This lengthy aside concerning Alfred brought Dickens comfortably to the end of the chapter and he began the next with reference to Æthelstan's triumphant rule. Edward's reign was compressed, therefore, between the achievements of his father and his eldest son, and diminished by the faintness of the praises accorded him.

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WHAT IS NOT KNOWN ABOUT THE REIGN OF EDWARD THE ELDER

James Campbell

A dozen pages of pedestrian annals, some scores of charters, two brief sets of laws, and maybe the Burghal Hidage compose the great bulk of our contemporary written evidence for Edward's reign. Its scale and scope are out of all proportion to those of his conquests and achievements. Either amazing things were done without the aid of written record, or we have lost a great deal.

A strong indication that we have lost a great deal comes from Chapter 81 of Asser's life of Alfred, in the passage in which Asser recounts the gifts which Alfred bestowed on him:

diluculo vigiliae Natalis Domini advocatus ad eum, tradidit mihi duas epistolas, in quibus erat multiplex supputatio omnium rerum, quae erant in duobus monasteriis cognominantur Cungresbyri et Banuwille, et mihi eodem die tradidit omnibus, quae in eis erant, et sericum pallium valde pretiosum et onus viri fortis de incenso.

(Stevenson 1904: 67–8)

Professors Keynes and Lapidge translate it as follows:

I was summoned to him at daybreak on Christmas Eve, and he presented me with two documents in which there was a lengthy list of everything which was in two monasteries named Congresbury and Banwell in English. On the same day he granted these two monasteries to me with all the things that were in them, as well as an extremely valuable silk cloak and a strong man's load of incense.

(Keynes and Lapidge 1983: 97)

The most important words are those which Asser uses to describe the document which a grateful king gave to an aspiring Welsh churchman on that Christmas Eve: *multiplex supputatio*. These words could indicate more, and something more precise, than just a 'lengthy list'. *Supputatio* seems generally

to have something to do with reckoning and may mean something like a 'reckoning' or 'account'. *Multiplex* seems to have a meaning more precise than just 'long'; 'having many folds' or 'having many parts' would be nearer the mark. Why quibble about such shades of meaning? Because this sentence is one of the few shreds of evidence to suggest that estate records or surveys were being kept in England in this period as they were on the Continent. One may just wonder whether a *multiplex supputatio* is not a polyptych. Although the term polyptych has become the settled one in modern usage, there were many contemporary synonyms; and the *multi* of Asser's term recalls *poly* (Fossier 1978: 15–16). However, it could be that what the king handed to Asser was a *brevis* of the kind set out in the early ninth-century *brevium exempla* (Boretius 1883: 128). These *breves* explicitly derived from some enquiry, and listed, for example, the treasures and vestments of a monastery, the animals, tools and workshops on the home farm, and the free and servile *manses*. A *brevis* was a record or survey, a reckoning-up under many heads, and that, I would suggest, is what *multiplex supputatio* probably means.

We have two later documents which fall fairly adequately into the pattern of the *breves* of *brevium exempla*. One relates to the re-establishment of the monastery of Medeshamstede in the tenth century, the other to the property of Bury St Edmunds in the eleventh (Robertson 1956: nos. xxxix, civ). In each a list of treasures and a list of books is followed by a list of estates, of a summary kind but such as to give the impression that it could have been derived from a more detailed and extensive survey. The possibility that estate surveys of a Carolingian complexion were made in Anglo-Saxon England is widened by two other documents in the collection published by Miss Robertson. One is a record of an inquiry into the rights and dues of the church at Taunton (Robertson 1956: 236–9). It probably dates between the Conquest and Domesday. That it is in English strongly suggests that its procedures have pre-Conquest precedents. It has a long list of witnesses; at a guess they were sworn. There is a comparable survey of a similar date for Lambourn (Robertson 1956: 240–41); this too is an English record of a witnessed inquiry. Particularly interesting in the Lambourn document is a reference to proclamation in the parish and in the hundred, giving the survey a public quality. These documents comprise a very large part of the direct evidence to suggest that England may have had a regime of survey and record comparable to that which was fundamental to Carolingian governance, principal characteristics of which were written record, sworn inquiry as intrinsic to survey, and a public quality. Indeed, fundamental to survey across much of the Continent from the eighth century or earlier to modern times is this public character, and it is this which makes the Lambourn evidence for proclamation so valuable. Of course the strongest evidence, presumptive or indirect though it has to be, for the importance of written survey as public record in late Anglo-Saxon England is Domesday Book.

The special interest of Asser's statement is that it suggests that royal property (and we must, clearly, regard the monasteries at Congresbury and Banwell as such) was recorded by written techniques approximating to those used in the Carolingian world. It is not easy to believe that there would have been anything extra-special about these places: it is more likely that the provision of *multiplikes supputationes* for royal properties was normal and common. At the very least, the passage is a reminder of the extent to which Edward the Elder's kingdom and government may have been extensively and elaborately documented. We have one other document which specifically supports this possibility. This is a letter to the king from Denewulf, bishop of Winchester (S 1444; Whitelock 1979: no. 101). The bishop says that he has obtained the permission of the community to grant property to the king. It consists of 70 hides of land now completely stocked, though, when Denewulf first received it, it was quite without stock and stripped bare by heathen men. Now, of the cattle which had survived a severe winter there are 9 fully-grown oxen, and 114 full-grown pigs and 50 wethers, besides the sheep and pigs which the herdsmen have a right to have, 20 of which are full-grown. Additionally, there are 110 full-grown sheep and 7 bondsmen and 20 fitches and there is no more corn than was prepared for the bishop's farm and there (are) 90 sown acres. Surely these details are strongly suggestive of derivation from a written estate record, and, as perhaps we see in the case of the grant to Asser, the provision of a detailed inventory precedes the actual grant.

An indication of the power of Edward's government in matters other than warfare comes from his laws. I have in mind in particular clause 3 of the set of laws called I Edward (Liebermann 1903–16: i, 140–1). This states that men who have been convincingly charged with perjury shall not have the privilege of clearing themselves by oaths, but only by ordeal. It is with this solitary sentence that the continuous history of the ordeal in England begins. Professor Bartlett went into the matter somewhat (Bartlett 1986: 4–9), and investigation has since been taken further by Mr Wormald (Wormald 1999: esp. 373–4). The matter is, however, a very difficult and important one. Ordeal is only mentioned twice in previous laws, in nos. 37 and 62 of those of Ine, where the ordeal is of water and it is not quite certain that the references really are to ordeal for they depend on an emendation (Liebermann 1903–16: i, 104–5, 106–7).

Remarkably – and surprisingly – ordeal does not occur in the laws of Alfred. It is possible to construct a case for saying that somehow or other ordeal existed at the time of Alfred's laws, but that they do not mention them. However, this does not seem fully convincing: ordeal would seem to fit so well into the general temper of the laws and it had long been established in the Carolingian world. There is no possibility of putting the use of ordeal in the tenth century on a statistical basis. However, the laws of Edward's successors leave no doubt that ordeal was extremely important, above all

(apparently) because it provided a means of punishing offenders (or those who were thought to be offenders) who otherwise could avoid punishment by using influence and connection to have themselves cleared by oath. Yet again we cannot tell for certain and our evidence, though not so very weak, is undoubtedly thin. But it does look as if the introduction of ordeal as a major and long-enduring element in English justice was something that took place, or began to take place, either late in the reign of Alfred or during that of his son. The administration involved must have been very considerable: the provision of guidance on the procedures would itself have been a major operation. It is not easy to escape the conclusion that there must have been something in the nature of a capitulary on the subject. Similarly, it is hard to see how changes in coinage-management at this time could have been undertaken without the circulation of documents resembling the relevant parts of the Carolingian Edict of Pîtres (864).

One of the most impenetrable areas of Edwardian authority has to do with the creation of mood, the sustenance of morale. The subject is one which has been handled both directly and by implication in modern discussion of the *Chronicle*, and one whose dimensions have been changed by the demonstration, in particular by Professor Keynes, that there was considerable lay literacy in the tenth century (Keynes 1990: 226–57). In connection with the creation of morale and mood I wish to consider two sentences, one in Gaimar's *L'Estoire des Engles*, the other in the *Chronicle*, main version for 903. Gaimar was writing in French for a Norman family in Lincolnshire. Indeed this is the first work of English history written in French and is largely a translation of a version of the *Chronicle*. It contains an interesting statement about the *Chronicle*, particularly interesting should it be true. Gaimar says:

The clerks kept record. Chronicles it is called, a big book. The English went about collecting it. Now it is thus authenticated; so that at Winchester, in the cathedral, there is the true history of the kings, and their lives and their memorials. King Alfred had it in his possession. And had it bound with a chain. Who wished to read might well see it, but not remove it from its place.

(Bell 1960: liii–liv; Hardy and Martin 1888–9: ii, 76)

This passage has been twice commented upon by Professor Whitelock. In 1955 she was inclined to accept it, maintaining that there is evidence to suggest that in the mid-tenth century there was available at Winchester a copy of the *Chronicle* which was not the Parker version nor any of the surviving versions, which may still have been there in Gaimar's time (Whitelock 1955: 113). Ten years later, Professor Whitelock was much more doubtful of Gaimar's story (Whitelock, Douglas and Tucker 1965: xix–xx). It has, of course, to be admitted that in any case Gaimar is a late and by-no-means-always to be trusted source, but she puts two more specific arguments against

believing him. First that the text of the *Chronicle* which Gaimar used resembled an early version of D, and he does not have readings associated with A and G which seem to have been produced at Winchester. So, she implies, it is improbable the Gaimar was well informed about the chronicle at Winchester. She then suggests that what he says derives from ‘nothing stronger than a reminiscence of Alfred’s instructions regarding his translation of Gregory’s *Cura Pastoralis*’. These arguments are not strong. That Gaimar does not use a version of the *Chronicle* from Winchester does not mean that he did not know how a manuscript of the *Chronicle* was (or had been) treated there. The passage from the preface to the *Pastoral Care* is indeed relevant, but it may at least as easily support as question the authenticity of Gaimar’s curious statement. The passage concerned is a famous one, not least because of its reference to *æstels*. It says:

I intend to send a copy to each bishopric in my kingdom: and in each copy there will be an *æstel* worth fifty mancuses ... And in God’s name I command that no one shall take the *æstel* from the book, or the book from the church ... Therefore I wish that they [the *æstel* and the book] remain always in place, unless the bishop wishes to have the book with him, or it is on loan somewhere, or someone is copying it.

(Keynes and Lapidge 1983: 126)

It *might* be that Gaimar derived his account of the treatment of a manuscript of the *Chronicle* at Winchester from an imaginative interpretation of this passage. However, there is something rather roundabout in this argument and there is no evidence, so far as I know, of Gaimar’s having any knowledge of the Alfredian translation of the *Pastoral Care*. We could as well, or better, put the argument the other way round. The passage from the *Pastoral Care* preface establishes beyond doubt that it was intended that its manuscripts should be kept in churches; the implication would seem to be that access to them was in some degree open. Open may not have been very open – not with an *æstel* at hand worth fifty mancuses; but it seems a fair guess that at least a number of people, maybe just an élite, had access to this translation. If so, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the *Chronicle*, probably in association with the laws, as in versions A and G, was similarly available. Gaimar may well have lived for a time in Hampshire; he shows special knowledge of that county; Constance Fitzgibbon, for whom he wrote, may have come from there (Bell 1960: ix–x). Even if he had no direct information, and if indeed what he says about the *Chronicle* is merely a speculative deduction based on the preface to the *Pastoral Care*, it is not at all implausible. It could be that the *Chronicle* lay in major churches for clerics and literate aristocrats to read, the locale reinforcing the content. On such a hypothesis Edward’s followers, or some of them, were in an atmosphere in which knowledge of the past was a spur for the present; and tradition, true or fictitious, may have counted for a great deal.

One may be able to track one tradition accepted in the reign of Edward the Elder and possibly of some importance because of its military aspect. It seems to appear in a passage in the main *Chronicle* narrative for 903. The author is describing the campaign against Æthelwold. Edward harried the land between the Dykes and the Ouse, as far north as the Fens. When he wished to go back from there he had it announced over the whole army that they were all to set out together. Then the men of Kent lingered behind there against his command – and he had sent seven messengers to them (Plummer and Earle 1892: i, 94). Then the Danish army overtook them, and they fought there. Two ealdormen and four other distinguished people were killed. The deductions I draw from this passage are partly speculative, partly less so. The speculation derives from the assumption that a military principle, well known in later centuries, applied in the early tenth. It is that the force that forms the vanguard in advance forms the rearguard in withdrawal. That this principle was its existence in the eleventh century is demonstrated by the Domesday account of Herefordshire which says that the Welshmen of Archenfield form the vanguard in entering Wales and the rearguard in return (Thorn and Thorn 1983: 179b). If one assumes that the men of Kent were caught in 903 because they were a lagging rearguard, then one can go on to assume that they had formed the vanguard. The interesting thing here is that in the twelfth century it was said that the men of Kent should form the first rank of the army. Thus, in his *Policraticus* of c. 1170, John of Salisbury says that the men of Kent formed the first line, *acies*, the men of Wiltshire and of Cornwall the second (Webb 1909: ii, 47–8). One may note, in passing, that Kent is the first shire to be dealt with in Domesday: not entirely by coincidence, perhaps.

What may be deduced from minor indications such as the two which I have just been discussing? As I suggested, they take us, or may take us, just a little way into the world of opinion and morale. The possibility that the *Chronicle* (and probably with it the Alfredian laws) lay open for inspection (though doubtless not by all and sundry) gives at least a glimpse of how that considerably multiplied work may have been expected to make its impact. The 903 reference takes us into a world of military order and tradition. It reminds us that the ways and conventions of the armies of the West Saxon kings may then have been at least several generations old, and that the shire units, some of which, like Kent, were former kingdom units, in all probability had traditions older still. A strong reminder of the extent to which Kent was treated as a separate entity in this period is given by the Burghal Hidage. That its lines of fortresses, north and south, stop neatly on or near the western boundary of Kent surely does not mean that Kent was not fortified for defence, but rather it was separately organised.

The success of armies is largely based on morale and confidence. For Edward's armies knowledge of the *Chronicle*, with its tales of victory and military traditions (for example, of precedence among different shires and their