



WIRRAL ARCHAEOLOGY CIC

THE BATTLE OF HATFIELD AD633

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The Battle of Hatfield

Introduction

Penda of Mercia, the last Anglo-Saxon pagan king and Cadwallon ap Cadfan of Gwynedd meet Edwin of Northumbria at Haethfelth under the shadow of Sherwood Forest.

The Venerable Bede

The Venerable Bede tells us that Edwin, King of Deira and Bernicia, merged the two Kingdoms in 616 and became King of Northumbria. He had risen to this position with the help of King Raedwald of East Anglia whom Edwin acknowledged as Bretwalda.

Raedwald remained Bretwalda until his death a decade later, and Edwin was now the most powerful King in Anglo-Saxon England. When Edwin became King, he immediately incorporated the minor British Kingdom of Elmet into Northumbria and upon the death of Raedwald, the larger Kingdom of Lindsey became Northumbrian too.



The British Kingdoms circa 600 AD.

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Edwin

Edwin married the King of Kents sister, Æthelburg in early 626 but a condition imposed upon him, firstly demanded that he converted to Christianity, which he agreed to comply with, though it appears that he was somewhat reluctant. The marriage took place before Edwin's conversion and a source records the following. Edwin was the powerful King of Northumbria. He was a pagan but he had allowed a Roman missionary called Paulinus to preach within Northumbria. Edwin had married one Æthelburg, a Kentish princess She was a Christian and had a Kentish Bishop within her household who acted as her personal chaplain. She was due to have Edwin's baby but he was unsure about converting to Christianity and as to allowing his wife having the impending baby baptised.

A messenger arrived at Edwin's court. His name was Eomer. He arrived on Easter day and had been sent by one Cwichelm, the son of King Cynagils of Wessex. Eomer had been instructed to kill Edwin and once he had gained the King's confidence, he got close enough to him to carry out the attack. Edwin was severely wounded and was only saved from death by his loyal Thegn, Lilla, who threw himself onto the attacker. Lilla died saving his King. That same day, Edwin's queen gave birth to a daughter. Edwin dedicated the child to the church and she would be raised as a Christian and baptised. He then stated that he would become a Christian too if God gave him victory over Wessex, as Northumbria would now wage war against Cynagils and Cwichelm.

It appears that Wessex and Northumbria clashed in battle after this event at a place called 'Win Hill' in Derbyshire.

As usual, details of the battle are scarce. The Northumbrians occupied Win Hill and erected a wall of boulders around its top. The army of Wessex camped on a nearby hill, now called 'Lose' Hill. The shield-walls clashed in the area between the two hills but Edwin's army is said to have been forced back towards Win Hill and their camp. Edwin ordered a retreat and his army fled up the hill and took refuge behind the wall of boulders that they had built. As the men of Wessex climbed the hill the Northumbrians collapsed the wall causing the boulders to roll down the hill, killing many of the enemy. The forces of Wessex fled and Edwin had won a victory.



Win Hill, near Bamford in Derbyshire. Did Edwin defeat the forces of Wessex here?

Edwin converted to Christianity on the 12th of April 627.

After further fighting, Cwichelm and Cynagils would submit to Edwin and Northumberland would then become the most powerful of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms.

620

By the mid 620's Edwin was expanding into the west. He seized the Isle of Man and attacked Gwynedd and Anglesey. He also waged war against the Irish King Fíachnae mac Báetáin of the Dal nAraidi, High King of the Ulaid.

The records of this period are fragmentary and often confusing but it clear that the Northumbrians were campaigning in Ireland and there is a claim in some sources that Fiachnae mac Baitain actually laid siege to Bamburgh.

Edwin's Irish wars also set the Scots and Irish at each other's throats and in 629, Dal Riata Scots were defeated by the Irish Kingdom of Dal nAraidi at an unidentified location in north eastern Ireland at the battle of Fid Eoin. A secondary Dal Riathian force from Kintyre were also destroyed a short time later.

Whether Edwin's Northumbrian's were involved in this battle is unclear, but in 367, four years after Edwin's death a combined army of Scots, Picts and Northumbrians were defeated in Ireland at the battle of Moira or Magh Rath as it was known in Irish.

In mainland Britain, Penda, King of Mercia, a warlike pagan, desired to expand his Kingdom and his own power. The Mercia of Penda's time was much smaller than the one that would face the Viking invasions of the 9th century. Its territory stretched south from the Humber and was bordered on the East, by the Kingdom of East Anglia. It's western border roughly stretched along a line between where modern-day Sheffield and Derby now stand. To the south stretching to the Bristol channel and east to the coast was Wessex.

To the West, in what is now Wales, Cheshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire and all the way north to Cumbria and Westmorland to the borders with Strathclyde and Lothian were held by the Britons (Welsh). Bede disliked Penda, considering him to be a barbarian pagan, yet for all of Penda's warlike demeanour he would, if fact, be responsible for letting Christianity become established in Mercia and he would ensure that the Kingdom would rise to become the most powerful of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms. Bede stated that Penda was the most warlike of men and there is little doubt that he was indeed that. In 628, Penda defeated Wessex at the battle of Cirencester. A peace agreement was made and Mercia took control of the Severn valley.

Cadwallon ap Cadfan of Gwynedd had resisted Edwin of Northumbria's push to the west and his conquest of the Mevanian Islands, namely Anglesey and the Isle of Man. Cadwallon was forced to take refuge on the Puffin Island, then known as Glannauc.

630

In 630, Penda of Mercia, according to several sources besieged the Britons in the city of Exeter. Cadwallon arrived with a relief force. It's unclear as to what actually happened but it appears that the two sides came to a truce and then, that they became allies. This suggests that both sides saw that the real threat came from Edwin of Northumbria.

This is reflected by the fact that later on in that year of 630, Penda and Cadwallon defeated a Northumbrian army at the battle of Cefn Digoll, or long mountain. The battle was fought on the Long Mynd in Shropshire. The allied victory ended Northumbrian dominance in the area and was the catalyst for a Mercian/Gwynedd campaign against Edwin, which would result in the battle of Haethfelth (Hatfield) in 633.

The battle of Hatfield 12th of October 633.

The most likely site is Cuckney in north Nottinghamshire. A group called the Battle of Hatfield Investigation Society have been researching a site for several years and they have been recovering artefacts which are contemporary with the period.

The church of St. Mary in Norton Cuckney is believed to be the last resting place of many of those killed in the battle. Mass graves were discovered in 1950 and up to 800 skeletons are said to have been found. These remains were reinterred in the church's cemetery.



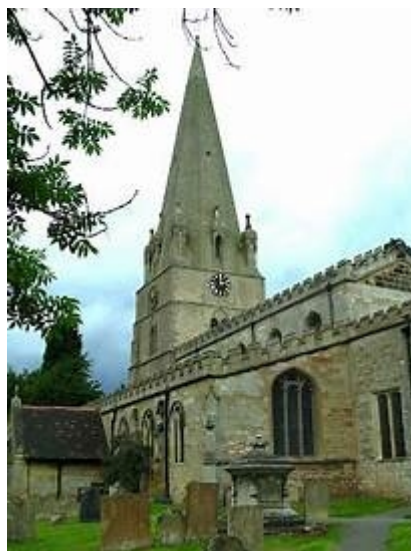
St. Mary's church Norton Cuckney. (Brian Griffiths WACIC)

Details of the actual battle are scant, but it was a clear victory for Penda and Cadwallon. Edwin was slain in the battle, with most of his army. Edwin's son Osfrith died too and another son, Eadfrith was captured. He would later be killed by Penda.



Edwin and his son perished in the shadows of Sherwood Forest

This defeat resulted in the temporary collapse of the Kingdom of Northumbria. King Edwin's corpse is believed to have been taken to what is now the village of Edwinstowe (Edwin's resting place) where he was buried.



St. Mary's church Edwinstowe.
The burial place of King Edwin?

Aftermath.

Edwin's death resulted in Northumbria splitting into its former two sub-kingdoms, Deira and Bernicia. Cadwallon ravaged these lands though it is not certain if Penda or the Mercians took part in this. Cadwallon defeated the King of Bernicia, Osric (Edwin's cousin) in battle. Osric perished in the battle. Bede states that Cadwallon ruled Bernicia for a year and that he did so like a savage tyrant even though he professed to being a Christian.

A new King, Oswald now ruled in Deira. He claimed the title as King of Northumbria. He met Cadwallon in battle at Heavenfield, outside of today's village of Chollerford on Hadrian's wall.



Heavenfield battlefield today.

In a fierce battle Cadwallon was defeated. He and his survivors fled south, pursued by Edwin's warriors. He was caught and killed at a place called Denisesburna, 10 miles to the south of the battlefield. Oswald himself would perish at the battle of Maserfeld in 644. The Northumbrians suffered a devastating defeat to the forces of Gwynedd and Mercia. Penda, King of Mercia and Cadwaladr ap Cadwallon slaughtered the Northumbrian host and Oswald was slain. His body was crucified on the battlefield, possibly nailed to a tree. Croesowald (Oswald's cross) is the Welsh name for the battle. Maes Cogwy. The most likely location is at Oswestry Hill fort.

Mercia was now the most powerful Kingdom in Britain and its pagan King; Penda was feared by all. In 664 the Northumbrians recovered the remains of their King Oswald. How they did this is uncertain. His remains are taken back to the North. He was later venerated and is now known as Saint Oswald. Oswald's skull is interred within the tomb of Saint Cuthbert in Durham Cathedral. Northumbria again splits into the two Kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira, each with their own King.

655 AD.**The battle of Winwaed. 15th of November. The death of Penda.**

The King of Benicia Oswui fought Penda and his allies from Wales and East Anglia at Winwaed. The likely location of the battle is just outside of modern- day Leeds. Benicia was victorious and Bede records that Penda's head was cut off. The east Anglian King, Aethelhere also perished.

The result of this battle ended Mercian dominance and Bernicia occupied northern Mercia. Penda's son, Peada (A Christian) managed to retain control over southern Mercia. Bernicia and Deria reunited as the Kingdom of Northumbria which now held the mantle of being the most powerful of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms. Northumbrian rule over Mercia, would, however, be a short-lived period and full Mercian rule was established within a few years. Penda was the last of the pagan Anglo-Saxon Kings. All the English Kingdoms were now Christian. Peace however, would not be forthcoming.