HOKUGA 北海学園学術情報リポジトリ
学校法人北海学園
北海学園大学
北海商科大学

タイトル	The Family and Career of Harold II Godwineson, King of the English
著者	Williams, Ann
引用	北海学園大学人文論集, 36: 229-260
発行日	2007-03-31

Hokkai-Gakuen Organization of Knowledge Ubiquitous through Gaining Archives.

The Family and Career of Harold II Godwineson, King of the English*

アン・ウィリアムズ (Ann Williams)

About the year 1065, Queen Edith, wife of King Edward the Confessor, commissioned a history of her illustrious family. It was perhaps meant as a kind of collective biography, like the contemporaneous *Deeds of the dukes of Normandy* of William of Jumieges, but its original intention was frustrated by the downfall of Queen Edith's kindred in 1066, and it was subsequently completed as a *life* of her husband the king. When Edward was canonized in the mid-twelfth century, this *life* formed the basis of his hagiography; thus the posthumous fame of Edith's husband preserved the incomplete panegyric of her family. The work is now known as *The Life of King Edward who lies at Westminster* (*Vita Edwardi*), and the first part, probably written in 1065-6, describes the careers of Edith's father, Earl Godwine, and her brothers, especially Earl Harold and Earl Tostig.

The anonymous author of the *Vita Edwardi* shared the preconceptions of his eleventh-century contemporaries[1]. They had little interest in displaying individual quirks of character, preferring to describe their

---

* Dr. Ann Williams is a Fellow of Royal Historical Society. This paper was read at the Special Lecture of the Faculty of Humanities of Hokkai-Gakuen University, Sapporo, Japan, on 21 November 2006. She wishes to thank the Faculty of Humanities of Hokkai-Gakuen University for their generous assistances.

subjects in terms of how far they approached, or departed from, ideal models of kingship or sanctity. It is not to be expected, therefore, that much of the personality of Edith's most famous (though not her favourite) brother will emerge from this work. Harold and his brother Tostig are introduced in the following words:

> Both had the advantage of distinctly handsome and graceful persons, similar in strength, and both were equally brave. But the elder, Harold, was the taller, well-practised in endless fatigues and in doing without sleep or food, and endowed with a mildness of temper, and a more ready understanding... The fault of rashness or levity was not one that anybody could charge against him.

All this is fairly conventional. Something more seems to emerge when the author describes Harold's diplomatic abilities: 'he studied the character, policy and strength of the princes [of Frankia], not only through his servants, but also personally; and adroitly and through natural cunning... observed... what he could get from them'. The phrase 'natural cunning' is echoed in the account of Harold's pilgrimage to Rome, a notoriously hazardous journey, when the author tells us that 'he passed through all ambushes with watchful mockery'. His brother Tostig was not so lucky, for his party was attacked by bandits, from whom the earl only escaped through the self-sacrifice of one of his household. 'Natural cunning' and 'watchful mockery' are the nearest we are likely to get to Harold's character; that and the famous statement that he was 'too generous, alas, with his oaths'. There are, of course, no descriptions of his physical appearance, save that Wace, in his *Roman de Rou*, remarks that 'some-one who saw him said he had reddish hair'[2].

Though Harold's personality is largely hidden from us, the details of his family and his public career are remarkably well documented for the period. He was a Sussex man on his father's side, for his paternal grandfather was almost certainly Wulfnoth *cild*, a South Saxon thegn, who in 1009 was accused of some unspecified crime at an assembly of the royal fleet in Sandwich[3]. Since Wulfnoth then 'went away and enticed ships to him until he had twenty', and then 'ravaged along the south coast, doing all manner of damage', he was obviously a man of considerable local standing; the appellation *cild* was applied to men of high rank in the late Old English period[4]. On the eve of the Norman Conquest, Godwine's family possessed about a third of the taxable land in Sussex, much of which was probably their patrimony, inherited from Wulfnoth.

Of Harold's maternal grandfather we know only his name, Thorgils Sprakaleg. He had a daughter, Gytha, and two sons, Ulf and Elaf; they were probably Danes from Scania, which is now in Sweden, but in the eleventh century was part of the kingdom of Denmark. The family was very well-connected. In or before 1015 Ulf married Estrith, daughter of King Swein Forkbeard of Denmark, thus becoming the brother-in-law of Cnut, who was not only king of the English from 1017 to 1035, but also, by the 1020s, king of Denmark and Norway as well[5]. It was presumably Cnut who arranged the marriage between Godwine and Ulf's sister Gytha, probably in 1022 or 1023[6].

Godwine himself had been an earl since 1018, most likely of south-eastern England, but from 1023 he held the whole earldom of Wessex, the first to exercise such authority; it is from 1023 also that he attests Cnut's diplomas as senior earl[7]. Why Cnut should have shown Godwine such favour we do not know, but he clearly owed his fortune to the Danish king. The eldest children of the match were Swein,

Harold, Tostig and Edith. Swein was the eldest son and Harold the second son, but we do not know Edith's position relative to her eldest brothers; she may have been older than Harold, or even than Swein. Harold was thus either the second or the third child of his parents, which puts his birth around 1025 or 1026 at the earliest; it cannot have been much later than 1027, for he was made an earl in 1045[8]. Few of Godwine's wider kindred are recorded; perhaps the spectacular fall of the family in 1066 discouraged lesser members from claiming relationship. Late medieval tradition makes Godwine a brother of Ælfwig, abbot of the New Minster at Winchester from about 1063 to 1066, and since Ælfwig died at the Battle of Hastings, this may well be the case. Another of Godwine's kinsmen was Ælric (or Æthelric), a monk of Christ Church, Canterbury, who was actually elected archbishop in 1050, though King Edward frustrated the monks' choice[9]. Gytha's nephew Swein Estrithson, son of her brother Ulf, became king of Denmark in 1047 and reigned till 1076; his brother Beorn received an English earldom from Edward the Confessor[10]. Swein and Beorn were probably of an age with their cousins, the elder Godwinesons[11].

Godwine's family became the richest in England, but the stages whereby this wealth was acquired cannot now be reconstructed. By the time of Cnut's death in 1035, Godwine was the one of the most powerful layman in England, rivalled only by Earl Leofric of Mercia (c. 1023–57). Their influence is apparent in the succession-dispute which arose after Cnut's death. Even before his death, Cnut's 'northern empire' was breaking up. The Norwegians had already rebelled against him, and their king, Magnus, had designs on Denmark itself. He was opposed by Harthacnut, Cnut's son by Emma of Normandy, but in England Harthacnut was challenged by his half-brother, Harold I, Cnut's son by his first wife, Ælfgifu of Northampton[12]. Harold was

supported by Earl Leofric (who may have been related to Ælfgifu's family by marriage), the thegns of Mercia and Northumbria, and the royal fleet based at London[13]. Since Harthacnut was in Denmark, dealing with the Norwegian invasion, his rights in England were upheld by his Norman mother Emma, and, as the *Chronicle* says, 'Earl Godwine was their most loyal man'[14]. In fact it was Godwine's defection to Harold I's party that tipped the balance, and led to Harold's acceptance as king.

We do not know why Godwine changed sides; only the external circumstances are recorded. In 1036, the exiled sons of Æthelred II decided to play their hand. The elder son, Edward, made an abortive raid on Southampton which was driven off, but Alfred, the younger, arrived in England with considerable force, and made his way towards Winchester, where his mother Emma was holding the city and the royal treasury for Harthacnut. Alfred was, however, intercepted by Earl Godwine, who handed him over to Harold I. The upshot was the murder of Alfred at Harold I's orders. Godwine's role in the death of 'the blameless aetheling' gained him the enmity both of Alfred's half-brother Harthacnut, who became king in 1040, and of his full brother, Edward the Confessor, who succeeded to Harthacnut in 1042-6[15]. By this time, however, Godwine's power was such that neither Harthacnut nor Edward was able to displace him. Indeed Edward's early years saw the extension and consolidation of Godwine's authority. In 1043 an earldom based on Hereford was created for his eldest son Swein, and in January 1045, the king married Edith, Godwine's eldest daughter. Later in the same year, he promoted her brother Harold to the earldom of East Anglia, and her cousin, Beorn Estrithson, to that of the east midlands. It is clear, however, that Edward's favour to Godwine was a matter of expediency rather than choice. Throughout the 1040s the

king was gradually building up a faction to form a counterweight to Godwine and his family. Its members were drawn from the Frenchmen and Normans whom Edward had known during his lengthy exile (1016-41) among his mother's kin. The most powerful was Robert of Jumieges, to whom in 1044 the king gave the bishopric of London[16].

Godwine's position was not helped by the behaviour of his eldest son, Swein, who seems to have been the black sheep of the family. It is said that he claimed to be the son, not of Godwine, but of Cnut himself, an allegation which his mother indignantly repudiated, assembling a bevy of West Saxon noblewomen to swear that Swein was her child by Godwine[17]. In 1046 Swein abducted the abbess of Leominster, and when he was refused permission to marry her, he left England rather than give her up. His lands and offices were distributed between his brother Harold and his cousin Beorn, who were none too pleased to see him when he reappeared, seeking reconciliation, in 1049. An open quarrel led to Swein's murder of Beorn, a crime for which he was exiled. He was eventually pardoned, apparently through the good offices of Ealdred, bishop of Worcester, and allowed to return to his lands and earldom in 1050.

By 1050, Edward evidently felt secure enough to oppose the ambitions of his most powerful earl. He bestowed the earldom of the murdered Beorn not on one of Godwine's younger sons but on his own nephew, Ralph, for whom he arranged an advantageous marriage. He also frustrated Godwine's interests in the appointment to the archbishopric of Canterbury. When Archbishop Eadsige, an adherent of Godwine, died in 1050, his monks and clergy elected the Christ Church monk Ælric, a kinsman of the earl, to the archbishopric[18]. But at a council held in London, in 1051, the king quashed the election in favour of his close friend, Robert of Jumieges, 'while all the clergy protested

with all their might against the wrong'[19]. Their complaints were ignored and Robert set out for Rome to receive his pallium.

Another complaint voiced by Godwine's supporters is that 'the *welisce men* (foreigners) then had built a castle in Herefordshire in Earl Swein's province, and had inflicted every possible injury and insult upon the king's men in those parts[20]'. This castle, probably at Hereford itself, is almost certainly 'Pentecost's castle', built by Osbern Pentecost, a Norman or Breton follower of the king[21]. At about the same time, another of the king's French followers, Robert fitzWymarc, erected a castle at Clavering, Essex, in Harold's earldom[22]. It may be that a third castle was projected at Dover, in Godwine's own earldom, for King Edward's one-time brother-in-law, Eustace of Boulogne[23]. The fullest account of what happened at Dover is given by the 'E' text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, (the 'E' text) kept at the time at St Augustine's, Canterbury, a house sympathetic to Godwine and his family. It runs as follows:

> Then Eustace came from overseas... and went to the king and told him what he wished, and then went homewards. When he came east to Canterbury, he and his men took refreshment there, and went to Dover. When he was some miles or more on this side of Dover, he put on his mail-shirt, and all his companions did likewise. So they went to Dover. When they got there, they wished to lodge where it suited their own convenience. Then one of Eustace's men came and wished to stay at the home of a householder (*husbunda*) against his will, and he wounded the householder, and the householder killed him. Then Eustace got upon his horse and his companions upon theirs, and went to the householder and killed him upon his own hearth[24]. And afterwards they went up towards the town and killed, within and

without, more than twenty men. And the townsmen (*burhmenn*) killed nineteen on the other side and wounded they did not know how many. And Eustace escaped with a few men, and went back to the king, and gave him a prejudiced account of how they had fared, and the king grew very angry with the townsmen. And the king sent for Earl Godwine and ordered him to carry war into Kent towards Dover... And the earl would not consent to this expedition because he was reluctant to injure his own province.

The *Chronicle* gives no hint of what the king and Eustace had discussed, but Eustace was clearly expecting trouble at Dover (men do not ride in full mail unless they must). The main fight between his followers and the *burhmenn* took place in the old Iron Age hillfort on the cliff, where, in the early eleventh century, a new minster-church had been built, possibly under the patronage of Godwine[25]. It may have been the king's intention that Eustace should take over this defensible site, perhaps to establish a castle there[26].

Eustace's brawl with the men of Dover took place in July, 1051. The king was then at Gloucester, and Earl Godwine and his sons gathered the men of their earldoms at Beverstone, a settlement attached to Godwine's manor of Berkeley, Gloucs. The king in turn ordered the levies of Earl Leofric and Earl Siward to come to him at Gloucester. The king's counsellors urged caution, saying that it would be a great piece of folly (*unrae*) if they joined battle, for in the two hosts was most of what was noblest in England, and they considered that they would be opening a way for our enemies to enter the country and to cause great ruin amongst us[27].

A council was called to meet at London at the autumn equinox (25 September); Godwine and Harold were summoned to attend but, per-

haps because of his past record, Swein was exiled immediately. During the late summer Godwine's support began to waver. The 'E' version of the *Chronicle* claims that his men were 'reluctant to have to stand against their royal lord (*cynehlaford*)', and when, at a council held at London in late September, 'the king asked for all those thegns that the earls had... they were all handed over to him'. The 'E' text is noticeably partisan to Godwine, and 'D' presents the earls as 'ready to do battle against the king', but in fact they did not, and even 'D' records the dwindling of Godwine's support during the month of September and the transfer of Harold's thegns, at least, to the king's allegiance. The *Vita Edwardi*'s statement that 'a man who could follow [Godwine] into exile counted himself fortunate' points in the same direction; most of his supporters confined themselves to encouraging messages promising their support if the earl wished to retrieve his position[28].

It is clear that Godwine's support was ebbing fast and it was at this point that Archbishop Robert publicly accused him of complicity in the murder of the king's brother, Alfred, in 1036. When Godwine was refused safe-conduct to attend the London meeting, he decided all was lost. He and Swein, with Gytha and the younger members of the family, rode for Bosham, where their ships were lying, and fled overseas to Bruges, where his third son, Tostig, had just celebrated his marriage with the count's half-sister, Judith[29]. Earl Harold, with his brother Leofwine, made for Bristol and took ship to Ireland, avoiding capture by the king's forces with the connivance of Ealdred, bishop of Worcester, who seems to have lost the king's favour as a consequence[30]. Edward repudiated his wife Edith, Godwine's daughter, and imprisoned her in the nunnery at Wherwell, where his half-sister was abbess[31]. The magnitude of the family's fall is underlined by the 'D' version of the *Chronicle*:

it would have seemed remarkable to everyone in England if anybody had told them that it could happen, because [Godwine] had been exalted so high, even to the point of ruling the king and all England, and his sons were earls and the king's favourites, and his daughter was married to the king.

Godwine, however, was not to be got rid of so easily. He received willing aid from his son's brother-in-law, Baldwin V of Flanders, while Harold collected a fleet in Ireland, with aid from Diarmid, king of Leinster. In 1052, the family returned in force, and compelled the king to receive them back, restore their lands and earldoms, and expel their chief enemies, notably Robert of Jumieges, archbishop of Canterbury. Only Swein did not return. From Bruges he set off on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, compelled either by family pressure or genuine remorse; perhaps the latter, as he is said to have walked barefoot all the way. As he was returning he died in Lycia on 29 September 1052, and was buried at Constantinople.

Six months later, Earl Godwine followed his eldest son to the grave. On Easter Sunday, 1053 (April 11), he was dining with the king at Winchester, when he suddenly sank towards the footstool, bereft of speech and all his strength. Then he was carried [by his sons, Harold, Tostig and Gyrth] to the king's private chamber, and they thought that it was about to pass off. But it was not so. On the contrary, he continued like this without speech or strength until the Thursday [April 15] and then lost his life. And he lies there in the Old Minster, Winchester[32]. It might be thought that Earl Godwine's death would give King Edward a second chance to diminish the family's standing, but in fact the king seems to have lost interest in public affairs after the humiliation of 1052. He occupied his later years in hunting, which he

greatly enjoyed, and in the building and endowment of his abbey at Westminster. After 1053, the governance of England was largely in the hands of Harold Godwineson.

Harold succeeded to his father's earldom of Wessex in 1053. He relinquished his former command in East Anglia to Ælfgar, son of Leofric of Mercia, but when Earl Siward of Northumbria died in 1055 his young son Waltheof was passed over as earl in favour of Tostig Godwineson. The next few years saw continuing rivalry between the family of Harold and that of the earls of Mercia. In 1055, Earl Ælfgar was exiled, without any explanation being given in any of the surviving sources[33].

Like Godwine and his sons, Ælfgar found help abroad, both in Ireland, where he hired warships, and also in Wales, where he allied with the most powerful of the Welsh rulers, Gruffudd ap Llewelyn, king of Gwynedd; either at this point or a little later, Gruffudd married Ælfgar's daughter Ealdgyth[34]. Together Gruffudd and Ælfgar invaded Herefordshire. They were met by Earl Ralph, King Edward's nephew, and his forces, but 'before any spear was thrown, the English army fled, because they were on horseback, and many were killed there - about four or five hundred men - and they killed none in return'[35]. It was Harold and the levies of Wessex who saved the day, though Hereford was sacked and its minster-church burnt; and it was Harold who rebuilt the fortifications and arranged the peace-terms, which included the restitution of Ælfgar to his East Anglian earldom. When Earl Leofric died in 1057, Ælfgar succeeded to Mercia, but East Anglia was given to Godwine's fourth son, Gyrth. Earl Ralph's death in the same year brought Harold the earldom based on Hereford, while the east midland earldom seems to have been divided, the northern shires going to Earl Tostig and the south to his younger brother Earl

Leofwine[36]. All three of Harold's surviving brothers now held English earldoms; only Mercia was not in their control. It is perhaps unsurprising that Earl Ælfgar was banished again, in 1058, though once more we do not know why, and was again restored 'by violence, through Gruffudd's help'. Ælfgar is not heard of after 1062 and probably died in that year; his son Edwin became earl of Mercia.

It was in the wars against Ælfgar's son-in-law, Gruffudd ap Llewelyn, that Harold made his name as a military commander. In his *Description of Wales*, composed around 1191, Gerald of Wales describes Harold as the greatest of the pre-Conquest kings to campaign against the Welsh; the others are King Offa of Mercia and King Æthelfrith of Northumbria[37]. In 1063 a joint land and sea expedition was launched against Gwynedd, Harold leading the fleet and Earl Tostig the land-army, and in the course of the fighting, King Gruffudd was killed by his own men; his half-brothers then allied with Harold[38]. It was perhaps about this time that Harold married Gruffudd's widow Ealdgyth, Earl Edwin's sister; whenever it took place, the marriage was clearly a political alliance, designed to reconcile Harold with the lords of Mercia[39].

In the summer of 1065, according to the 'C' *Chronicle*, 'Earl Harold ordered some building to be done in Wales, at Portskewet [Mon]... and there he got together many goods and thought of having King Edward there for hunting'. But on the 24 August a raid from South Wales destroyed the half-built hunting-lodge and the goods were carried away and the men working on it killed; 'and then after Michaelmas (29th September), all the thegns of Yorkshire went to York and killed there all Tostig's housecarls that they could find and took his treasure[40]'. Though widely regarded as a sign of local 'separatism' within an imperfectly united realm, the Northumbrian revolt was clearly directed

not against Edward, but against Tostig personally[41]. John of Worcester and the author of the *Vita Edwardi* give as the cause of the revolt the murders, attributed to Tostig and Queen Edith, of three leading northern magnates; John adds the unjust levy by Tostig of a 'huge tribute... on the whole of Northumbria'. The fact that the northerners demands included the renewal of 'the laws of Cnut' suggests that Tostig also tried to iron out the local differences between the Danelaw and the rest of England, recognized in royal legislation going back to Edgar and Æthelred II[42].

The primary stipulation of the northerners was the outlawry of Tostig, and the promotion of Morcar, Earl Ælfgar's younger son, to his place. Their choice of Morcar, rather than Earl Siward's son, Waltheof, is usually explained by the supposition that, as an outsider, he was a compromise candidate[43]. In fact Morcar probably had prior links with the earldom of Northumbria through his mother Ælfgifu; she seems to have been the daughter of Morcar, one of the chief men of the region in the time of Æthelred II, and Ealdgyth, one of whose uncles had been ealdorman of Northumbria under the same king[44]. What is quite plain is that King Edward was most unwilling to abandon Tostig, and that it was Harold who negotiated the agreement in which the king effectively gave way to the northerners' demands. The *Vita Edwardi* implies that Harold was the prime mover against his brother; indeed Tostig is said to have accused him of inciting the northerners against him[45]. There may have been some substance to this charge. Tostig's rule in Northumbria had clearly been a political disaster. One of Morcar's first acts was to displace Tostig's unpopular lieutenant, Copsi, from the subsidiary earldom north of the Tyne, and give his place to a native ruler, Osulf; and Earl Siward's son, Waltheof, was compensated by the earldom in the north midlands formerly held by Tostig himself.

It seems that Harold, who was perhaps already married to Morcar's sister Ealdgyth, was anxious to conciliate both the Northumbrians and the Mercians.

Tostig, however, was outraged at what he considered his brother's treachery. Getting no help from the king, he left England and took refuge with his brother-in-law, Baldwin of Flanders. The author of the *Vita Edwardi* sees this quarrel between Harold and Tostig as the cause of the downfall of them both. Why then did Harold risk such a damaging and potentially fatal rift? The answer may lie in the question of the succession to the English crown. Harold as clearly an able and ambitious man. The Bayeux Tapestry describes him as *dux Anglorum*, recalling the title *dux Francorum* born by Hugh the Great, count of Paris, whose son, Hugh Capet, supplanted the last of the Carolingian kings of France in 987[46]. If Harold had similar ambitions, then he required the full support both of the earls of Mercia and of the northern magnates to achieve his end, and the harsh rule of Tostig would have been extremely disadvantageous.

Precisely when Harold began to think of himself as a possible successor to Edward we cannot know. The marriage of Edward and Edith was clearly intended to produce heirs, although it was evidently unsuccessful; indeed Edward's repudiation of his wife in 1051 may have been as much because of her childlessness as her relationship to Godwine. It was not impossible that Edward, who by then was in his late forties, should have children by another wife, but in the interim it was natural for him to turn to his maternal kin, and offer the English crown to Duke William of Normandy[47]. The return of Godwine and the reinstatement of Edith in 1052 not only precluded any second marriage, but also made the Norman alliance impossible; too many of King Edward's Norman adherents were political opponents of the

Godwine family. In 1054, therefore, the king despatched Ealdred, bishop of Worcester, to Germany. His mission was to search for the king's nephew Edward, son of his half-brother Edmund Ironside, who had been carried as a child to Hungary, to save him from Cnut's assassins[48]. The Confessor's choice of Ealdred, an adherent of Harold, as envoy may be significant, though he was also one of the king's ablest negotiators. Harold himself, however, was at St Omer in November 1056, perhaps to meet the Æheling on his journey to England[49]. In the event Edward Æheling died in 1057, almost as soon as he set foot in the country. The 'D' *Chronicle*'s mysterious comment - 'we do not know for what reason it was brought about that he was not allowed to see the face of his kinsman, King Edward' - has been taken to imply foul play, but it is hard to see whose advantage would be served.

Edward Æheling's death left his son, Edgar, born about 1052, as the last male representative, apart from King Edward himself, of the West Saxon royal house[50]. It was highly unlikely that the king would live to see his great-nephew reach manhood. By 1057, he was in his mid-fifties and did not come of a long-lived family; his father, Æthelred II, was about 47 when he died, and his grandfather Edgar was in only his thirty-third year. Such considerations may underlie the events of 1064, when, according to the Norman sources, Harold visited Duke William in Normandy, and pledged support with an oath of fealty[51]. Edward's role in this affair is not unambiguous, and even if he did renew his promise to Duke William in 1064, he had already changed his mind once and was to change it again on his deathbed, when he appointed Harold as his heir[52].

Edward died on 5 January 1066, and buried next day, in the choir of his new church at Westminster, dedicated on 28 December 1065. The funeral was followed immediately by the consecration of Harold II

as king of the English, the first coronation to take place in Westminster Abbey. The ceremony was performed by Harold's friend, Ealdred of Worcester, now archbishop of York, and, as the *Chronicle* says, 'he met little quiet in it as long as he ruled the realm'[53].

It did not need the appearance of Halley's Comet on 24 April to presage trouble. In late April or early May, Earl Tostig made landfall on the Isle of Wight, a large part of which belonged to him, gathered men and supplies, and raided along the south coast to Sandwich. Harold in turn 'assembled a naval force and a land-force larger than any king had assembled before in this country, because he had been told as a fact that Duke William from Normandy, King Edward's kinsman, meant to come here and subdue the country'[54]. Tostig fled northwards and, driven from the Humber by Earl Morcar and his brother Earl Edwin, took refuge in Scotland, where he spent the summer at the court of Malcolm III Canmore.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1066 the English host stood to arms in the southern shires, whilst the fleet, under the king's command, patrolled the Channel from a base on the Isle of Wight. The east coast was entrusted to the guardianship of Ælfwold, abbot of St Benet's Holme, Norfolk. By 8 September, this combined land and sea-force had been maintained for nearly four months - a formidable feat for a medieval commander - and could be supported no longer. The land-army was stood down, and the fleet returned to London. As King Harold disembarked, he learnt that a huge Norwegian fleet, 300 ships strong, had arrived in the Humber. Tostig had received help from an unexpected direction. King Harold Sigurdson Hardrada ('hard-counsel'), king of Norway, was one of the most formidable warrior-kings of Scandinavia. His intervention in 1066 seems, despite the later saga-traditions, purely opportunistic; countries suffering from

political instability had always been regarded by Viking leaders as potential sources for the picking up of unconsidered trifles.

Hardrada made rendezvous with Tostig off the Northumbrian coast, and their joint fleets landed at Riccall and made for York. On 20 September they met the brother-earls, Morcar of Northumbria and Edwin of Mercia, at Gatefulford, and there, after a bitter struggle, the English were put to flight. York perforce opened its gates to the Vikings and its citizens made peace with Hardrada, 'arranging that they should all go southwards with him, and subdue this country'[55]. Hardrada and Tostig made camp at Stamfordbridge, to the east of the city.

Harold Godwineson received news of the first Norwegian landing at London, having left Sandwich on 8 September. 'Then', says the 'C' *Chronicle*, 'he went northwards day and night as quickly as he could assemble his force'. Harold's march from London to York is justly famous. Allowing some days for preparation and assembly of the nearest troops, he probably left London on or just before 18 September. On 24 September he and his host were at Tadcaster, nine miles south of York. On the next day, 25 September, he launched his troops 'right on through York' to Stamfordbridge, a distance of 16 miles. Only the 'C' *Chronicle* gives a contemporary description of the battle. The English-came against [the Norwegians] by surprise beyond the bridge, and there they joined battle, and went on fighting strenuously till late in the day. And there Harold, king of Norway, was killed, and Earl Tostig, and numberless men with them, both Norwegians and English, and the Norwegians fled from the English[56].

The description of the battle penned by the Icelandic historian Snorre Sturlusson in his *Heimskringla* ('The Disc of the World') is unhistorical, for Snorre (1179-1241) was not only writing in the thir-

teenth century, but was also, apparently, using descriptions of the battle of Hastings as the basis for his account. Nevertheless I cannot forebear to quote his famous description of the meeting between the two kings:

Twenty horsemen from the English king's company came riding up; one of the riders said, "Is Earl Tostig here in this army?" Tostig replied: "There's no denying it, you can find him here". Another rider then said, "Your brother King Harold sends you his greetings and this message to say you can have peace, and the whole of Northumbria as well. Rather than have you refuse to join him, he is prepared to give you one-third of all his kingdom." The earl answered, "If I accept this offer now, what will he offer King Harald Sigurdson for all his effort?" The rider replied, "Seven feet of English earth, or as much more as he may need, being so tall a man." Earl Tostig replied, "Go now and tell King Harold to make ready for battle. We are united in our aim; either to die now or conquer England." The horsemen rode back. King Harald Sigurdson said, "Who was that rider who spoke so well?" Tostig said "That was King Harold Godwineson." King Harold Sigurdson said to his men, "What a little man that was; but he stood proudly in his stirrups".

Harold Godwineson's victory over Harold Hardrada was one of the most decisive battles ever won by an English army over a Viking host. Of all King Harold Hardrada's vast host, only 24 ship-loads survived to return to Norway under his son, Olaf 'the Peaceable'. Harold Godwineson employed, as Michael Woods has said, 'classic Anglo-Saxon strategy, the long range advance by a mounted army to a pre-arranged rendezvous within striking distance of the enemy, and then the final advance at dawn, followed up by a massive assault by the heavily armed picked troops'[57]. In just such a way had Alfred won the

Battle of Edington in 878, forcing the host of Guthrum to sue for peace and leave Wessex. If Harold Godwineson had died of his wounds after Stamfordbridge, he would be remembered as one of the great warrior-kings of England, alongside Edmund Ironside, Æthelstan and Alfred himself.

As Harold and his men rested at York, celebrating their victory, news came that Duke William had landed at Pevensey, about the 28 September, and was ravaging along the south coast. Harold set out for the south. He reached London on or about 7 October and spent five days there gathering fresh troops. On 12 October he left with what men he had been able to raise, and his own elite bodyguard; his brothers Leofwine of the east midlands and Gyrth of East Anglia were with him. Harold has been charged with rashness for challenging Duke William so soon after the exhausting battle at Stamfordbridge, but he had little choice in the matter. Sussex was the heartland of his estates and his power, and he could not abandon it to the ravaging of the Norman army.

It is clear too that Harold was trying to repeat the tactics which had brought him victory in the north. The rallying-point at which he was aiming was 'the hoary apple-tree', a landmark on Caldbec hill, just north of the present town of Battle. Thence he expected to launch an attack on Duke William in his newly-built castle at Hastings, seven miles to the south. Duke William's intelligence service was, however, better than that of Harold Hardrada. He got wind of King Harold's approach, and advanced to meet him. After a night march, Harold arrived at his rendezvous on October 14 find the Norman army, not at Hastings, but on Telham Ridge, just south of Battle[58]. The duke took Harold by surprise, 'before his army was drawn up in battle array'[59]. Harold deployed his men along the steep ridge of land on which the

town of Battle now stands, above a marshy valley which made it hard for the duke to launch his cavalry. Battle was joined at the third hour (about 9 am) and raged all day, until, as the light waned, the Norman cavalry broke through the English shield-wall and cut down the king[60]. Gyrth and Leofwine had already fallen, and the remnant of the English host fled into the thick woodland of the Sussex Weald.

William of Poitiers, Duke William's panegyrist, relates that the final struggle around the English standard, the White Dragon of Wessex, was so fierce that the English dead were unrecognizable; Harold's corpse was so mutilated that it was identified only 'not by his face but by certain indications', with his brothers lying beside him. William also says that the dead king's mother, Gytha, offered Duke William its weight in gold for her son's corpse[61]. What happened next is disputed. William of Poitiers says that the duke refused the ransom and entrusted the burial of the dead king to William Malet; another source even claims that the body was interred on the sea-cliffs near Hastings, wrapped in a cloak of royal purple[62].

William of Malmesbury, however, writing in 1125, says that Duke William accepted the ransom, and allowed Harold to be buried by the canons of Waltham Holy Cross, of which he was patron. The history of this community was written soon after 1177, by one of the canons who entered the church as a boy around 1124. It asserts that the corpse was identified by Harold's first wife, Edith Swanneck, 'by certain tokens known only to herself', and carried, with William's permission, to Waltham for burial. The anonymous author of the Chronicle says that he knew the sacristan Thurkil who could remember the arrival of the king's body, and had heard older men describe how 'they touched with their hands the marks of the wounds visible on the very bones'. The author himself, as a boy, had seen the translation of

King Harold's remains into the choir of the new church, built in the 1120s[63]. It is the remains of this twelfth-century church which stand today, though recent excavation has uncovered the foundations of earlier buildings, including the church built by Harold, which proved to be planned in the German style; we know from descriptions of its contents that it was magnificently furnished. Of the Romanesque church, only the nave now remains, but the bases of the choir walls and pillars can still be seen, enclosing the site of the high altar, before which stands a battered tomb. This is the place where one would expect a founder's burial, and tradition maintains - though there is no direct evidence - that it is the final resting-place of King Harold II Godwineson. His epitaph was composed by one of his admirers, John of Worcester:

'This king was warlike, vigorous and comely;
another Maccabeus, noble in bearing,
and if God had wished it, a great and true king'.

Vir hic bellicosus strenuus, decorus
Alter Machabeus statura procerus
Et si vellet Deus rex summus et verus[64].

Appendix

The author of the *Vita Edwardi* is lavish in his praise of the family of his patron and perhaps because of this adulation, and, latterly, the extravagant panegyric of Edward Augustus Freeman (in his great *History of the Norman Conquest of England*), Earl Godwine and his sons have come to be regarded as the evil genii of Edward's reign. T. J. Oleson wrote scathingly that 'the ambitions of this house, which stopped at nothing, explain the

turbulence of much of the Confessor's reign and the failure of the Anglo-Saxon monarchy to maintain itself against foreign powers' (*The witenagemot in the reign of Edward the Confessor*, p.1). Robin Fleming sees Edward in his latter years as 'a weak king, pushed and bullied by a family of highly competent and slightly unscrupulous earls' (*Kings and earls in Conquest England*, p.53). Frank Barlow, who takes a more positive view of the king's abilities ('a realist, Edward probably accepted... a situation which he could not greatly change') nevertheless observes that 'the rule of Edith, Harold and Tostig brought the country to ruin' (*Edward the Confessor*, pp.197, 189). These are the kind of judgements passed upon Æthelred II, though in this case with little contemporary support; even the 'C' text of the *Chronicle*, which is fairly hostile to Godwine's kin, includes a eulogy of Harold in its commemorative verse on Edward: 'a noble earl who all the time had loyally followed his lord's commands with words and deeds, neglecting nothing that met the needs of the people's king' (*ASC* 'C', 1065. The poem is in 'D' also, but not in 'E', the text most sympathetic to Godwine and his family).

〔Notes〕

1) He was certainly a Fleming and possibly the anglophile monk, Goscelin of Saint-Bertin

2) *Ço dist quil vit qu'alques fu ros*: Glyn S. Burgess (trans.), *Wace: The Roman de Rou* (St Helier, Jersey, 2002), line 6798, p.244-5; this is coupled with the statement that 'Harold was very arrogant' (*forment orgueillos*).

3) *ASC* 'F', 1009. It has been too readily assumed that Wulfnoth was guilty as charged, though John of Worcester believed that the allegation brought against him was unjust (*JnW* ii, pp.460-1). Stenton says Wulfnoth 'seduced the crews of twenty ships from their allegiance, and took to piracy along the south coast' (*ASE*, p.382); Allen Brown describes him as a 'turncoat' (*The Normans and the Norman Conquest*, p.66). His accuser was Brihtric, brother of Eadric Streona, ealdorman of Mercia, author of the downfall of other thegns and ealdormen, including the Northumbrian thegns Sigeferth and Morcar, who were murdered in 1015. Sigeferth's widow then married the ætheling Edmund Ironside, but the

connection may go back further, for Sigeferth was a beneficiary under the willl of Edmund's brother Æthelstan ætheling (d. 1014). Another of Æthelstan's bequests was to one Godwine son of Wulfnoth, who was to have the estate at Compton which had been his father's; both personal names and the place-name are common, but an estate at Compton, Sussex, is later associated with Earl Godwine's family. If Godwine and Wulfnoth were members of an 'æthelings' party', opposed to that of Eadric Streona, then Brihtric's accusation against Wulfnoth in 1009 takes on a more sinister aspect. Brihtric himself vanishes from sight after 1009 and may have been murdered (Keynes, *Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready'*, p.216). John of Worcester's identification of Godwine's father as a member of the same family and a nephew of Eadric Streona is chronologically impossible.

4) It was still used in the honorific sense in the late medieval border ballads ('Childe Maurice hunted the silver wood') and in Shakespeare's mysterious reference to Childe Roland of the Dark Tower. The literal meaning of *cild* is 'boy, young man, retainer' and (by extension) 'warrior'; it is of course Mod E 'child'. Compare Æthelnoth *cild* 'the Kentishmen', otherwise Æthelnoth 'the Kentishman' or Æthelnoth 'of Canterbury'.

5) Campbell, *Encomium*, p.85; Freeman, *NC* i (2nd edn, 1870), pp 748-51.

6) He had already given Elaf an English earldom in Gloucestershire (before 1018).

7) Except (in the first instance) for Kent; the third penny (the earl's share) of the revenues of Kent belonged to Archbishop Æthelnoth (1020-38), and passed to Godwine only in the time of his successor, Eadsige (Brooks, *Early history of the church of Canterbury*, pp.00-00).

8) Swein received an earldom in 1043, and was thus probably born in or before 1025; Tostig, the third son, was married in 1051, and was probably born not much before 1030. Edith, the eldest daughter, was of marriage-able age (that is, at least 14) in 1045 and therefore cannot have been born later than 1031.

9) It has been suggested that this Ælric is identical with Æthelric, bishop of Selsey from 1057 until his deposition by William I in 1070 and the idea is attractive; Æthelric of Selsey is also known to have been a monk of

Christ Church and it would account for his fall in 1070, for which no other explanation is available (Ian W. Walker, *Harold: the last Anglo-Saxon king* (Stroud, 1997), pp.203-4). But the name is a common one.

10) Ulf may have been briefly regent of Denmark under Cnut, but he fell out with his royal brother-in-law, and though they were eventually reconciled, Cnut had him murdered in 1030.

11) A third brother, Asbjorn, appears in England in 1069. The sons of Ulf carry their metronymic (their mother's name) rather than their patronymic because Estrith was of higher rank than her husband Ulf.

12) Cnut did not repudiate Ælfgifu when he married Emma, and by the late 1020s she was his regent in Norway, ruling for their son Swein. But the Danish contingent was expelled by Magnus and his supporters just before Cnut's death in 1035.

13) These are the famous *lithesmen*, paid from the annual *heregeld*.

14) *ASC* 'E' 1035.

15) *ASC* 'C' 1036.

16) Robert does not, however, attest as bishop until 1046.

17) *Hemingi Chartularium*, pp.275-6. This may be no more than a story (see Ann Williams, 'The spoliation of Worcester', *ANS* 19 (1997), pp.385-6, 399-400).

18) Brooks, *Early history of the church of Canterbury*, pp.295-303. Eadsige died on 29 October 1050.

19) Barlow (ed.), *Vita Edwardi*, pp.18-9.

20) *ASC* 'E', 1051.

21) His nephew, Alvred of Marlborough (Alvred is a name particularly favoured by Bretons) held land in Thornlaw hundred (possibly Pencombe), Herefords, and received much more from King William, including some comital land in Herefords held by Osbern Pentecost during the exile of Godwine and Harold (*GDB*, fo. 186, *Domesday Book: Herefordshire*, ed Frank and Caroline Thorne (Chichester, 1983), no. 19,6 and note). 'Pentecost's castle' has been identified with Ewias Harold, also held after 1066 by Alvred of Marlborough, but see C. P. Lewis, 'An introduction to the Herefordshire Domesday', in *The Herefordshire Domesday*, ed. Ann Williams and R. W. H. Erskine (London, 1988) p.11.

22) In 1052, the defeated 'Frenchmen (*Frencisce menn*) fled from London, 'some west to Pentecost's castle, and some north to Robert's castle' (*ASC* 'E' 1052); see R. Allen Brown, *Castles from the Air* (Cambridge, 1989) pp. 90-1.

23) *ASC* 'D', 1051. In 'D', which does not mention the castle at Hereford, Godwine demands that the king should give up to justice not only Eustace himself and his men but also 'the Frenchmen (*Frencyscan*) who were in the castle'. This may mean the castle at Hereford, but as it stands, it implies a fortification at Dover itself, and was taken in this sense by John of Worcester (*JnW* ii, pp.560-1: 'the castle on the cliff at Canterbury' (*sic, recte* Dover: *in Doruuernie*).

24) Thus they committed the capital crime of *hamsocn*, attack on a man in his own house.

25) Tim Tatton-Brown, 'Churches of the Canterbury diocese', in Blair (ed), *Minsters and parish churches*, p.110. See also S. 1472 (Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, pp.190-1), dated to the early 1040s, in which Godwine brokered an agreement between St Augustine's and Leofwine, priest of Dover (Ann Williams, 'The Anglo-Norman abbey' in Richard Gem (ed.), *St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury* (London, 1997) p.62). Harold, Godwine's heir, had some interest in the lands of the church (*GDB*, fo. 2).

26) The post-Conquest castle, like those at Hastings and Pevensey, incorporates the pre-Conquest church (A. J. Taylor, 'Evidence for a pre-Conquest origin for the chapels in Hastings and Pevensey castles' *Chateau Gaillard*, 3 (1969) 144-51). William of Poitiers records Earl Harold's promise, in 1064, to fortify a castle at Dover for the duke, and his account of the Norman attack of 1066 refers to a *castellum*, 'sited on a cliff whose natural steepness has been everywhere artificially scarped, rising like a wall sheer out of the sea as high as an arrow can be shot'; he adds, however, that the Conqueror spent eight days at Dover, 'adding those fortifications (*firmamenta*) which it lacked' (Foreville (ed.), *Gesta Guillielmi*, pp.104-5, 211-12). It was this castle which Eustace attempted to seize in 1067 (Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest*, pp.15-6).

27) *ASC* 'D' 1051.

28) *Vita Edwardi*, p.25

29) The 'D' *Chronicle* presents Tostig and Judith as already married when the family fled to Bruges in late September 1051 but the *Vita Edwardi* (Barlow (ed.), pp.24-5) makes Godwine arrive in Bruges just after his son's wedding-feast. The marriage adds an extra dimension to Edward's discussions with Eustace of Boulogne, an opponent of Baldwin (Heather Tanner, 'The expansion of the power and influence of the counts of Boulogne under Eustace II', *ANS*, 14 (1992) pp.251-86).

30) *ASC* 'D', 1051: 'the king sent Bishop Ealdred from London with a force and they were to intercept [Harold]... but they could not - or would not' (Vanessa J. King, 'Ealdred, archbishop of York: the Worcester years', *ANS* 18 (1996) pp.127, 134).

31) The *Vita Edwardi*, clearly unable to admit to the extent of the king's rejection, says she retired to Wilton, where she had been brought up.

32) *ASC*, 'C' 1053.

33) His exile may be connected with Tostig's appointment, for his wife Ælfgifu was the daughter of the Northumbrian magnate Morcar and Ealdgyth, niece of the Mercian nobleman Wulfric Spot (d. 1002) and his brother Ælfhelm, ealdorman of Northumbria from 993 to 1006 (S. 1536; Sawyer, *Charters of Burton*, pp.xli-xliii, 53-6; *ASC*, 1015). Ælfgifu's younger children were named Morcar and Ealdgyth, perhaps after her father and mother. Ealdorman Ælfhelm in turn was the father of Cnut's English wife, Ælfgifu of Northampton, and grandfather of King Harold I, whose relations with the Mercian earls we have already noticed. In these circumstances Ælfgar perhaps felt that his links with an influential Danelaw family made him a more suitable choice than a son of Godwine, unconnected with the area.

34) Kari Maund, 'The Welsh alliances of Earl Ælfgar of Mercia and his family', *ANS*, 11 (1989) pp.181-90. The daughter of Gruffudd and Ealdgyth was Nest, wife of Osbern fitzRichard of Richard's Castle.

35) *ASC* 'C', 1055.

36) There are no charters for the years 1055-8, and Gyrth first attests as earl in 1059, but he had held Norfolk during the temporary exile of Ælfgar in 1055 (Barlow, *Vita Edwardi*, p.33). For Ralph's east midland

earldom, see Williams, 'The king's nephew: the family and career of Ralph, earl of Hereford', pp.338-40; like Gyrth, Leofwine attests as earl from 1059. He held Herts, Middx and probably Bucks, but the evidence linking him with Kent, Surrey and Staffs is unreliable.

37) *Descriptio Cambriae*, ii, 7: 'he advanced into Wales on foot, at the head of his lightly clad I nfantry, lived on the country, and marched up and down and round and about the whole of Wales with such energy that he' left not one that pisseth against a wall' [I Samuel 25.22; I Kings 16.11] In commemoration of his success, and to his own undying memory, you will find a great number of inscribed stones put up in Wales to mark the many places where he won a victory [which] bear the inscription: HIC FUIT VICTOR HAROLDUS'. Gerald goes on to attribute the Norman success in Wales to the softening-up process pursued by the pre-Conquest English. John of Salisbury also commends Harold's tactics (*Policraticus* vi, 6, John Dickinson (ed.), *The Statesman's Book of John of Salisbury* (NY, 1963), pp.194-5).

38) *ASC* 'D', 'E', 1063.

39) Harold's lands in north Mercia may have been Ealdgyth's dowry (Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p.243 and note 6; Williams, 'Land and power in the eleventh century: the estates of Harold Godwineson', p.176). He was of course already married to Edith (Eadgyth) 'Swanneck', the mother of his older children. Their union was presumably a 'handfast match' (*more Danico*), like the first marriage of Cnut to Ælfgifu of Northampton, who remained his wife even after his marriage with Emma of Normandy; since such unions were not recognised by the Church, re-marriage, even in the lifetime of the first spouse, was perfectly possible.

40) *ASC*, 'C', 'D', 1065. John of Worcester dates the massacre to 3 October.

41) It is of interest that when the northeners rose against William I in 1069-70, they chose as king, not Swein of Denmark, nor one of their own number, but the last West Saxon ætheling, Edgar (Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest*, pp.32-3).

42) *JnW* ii, pp.598-9; *ASC* 'D', 'E', 1065. The heriots 'among the Danes'

are noticeably lighter than those in Wessex, Mercia and East Anglia (II Cnut, 71).

43) Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, p.236; Kapelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North*, p.101. Earl Siward held both northern and southern Northumbria after the murder of Earl Eadulf of Bamburgh in 1041; he married the dead earl's niece Ælfflæd, mother of Waltheof.

44) See note 33 above.

45) Barlow (ed.), *Vita Edwardi*, pp.51-5. The *Vita Edwardi* gives details which are in no other source (see Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, pp.233-9); the account in the 'C' *Chronicle* differs from that in the 'D' and 'E' texts, and both from the fuller version of John of Worcester.

46) Rosamund McKitterick, *The Frankish kingdoms under the Carolingians, 751-987* (London, 1983) pp.314-5.

47) The offer of the English succession was made either via Robert of Jumieges (as the Norman historians allege) or directly, when (as the 'D' *Chronicle* asserts) William visited England in the autumn of 1051.

48) *ASC* 'C' and 'D' record the embassy, but not the purpose, which is supplied by John of Worcester (*JnW* ii, pp.574-7).

49) Philip Grierson, 'A visit of Earl Harold to Flanders in 1056', *EHR*, 51 (1936) 90-7.

50) Edgar was the same age as William of Normandy's eldest son, Robert Curthose, born about 1052 (Nicholas Hooper, 'Edgar the Ætheling: Anglo-Saxon prince, rebel and crusader', *ASE*, 14 (1985) 29). He may not have been brought to England until 1058 (King, 'Ealdred, archbishop of York: the Worcester years', pp.127-8, 130).

51) Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, pp.220-9.

52) *ASC* 'C', 'D', 1065, 'E' 1066, *JnW* ii, pp.600-1; Barlow (ed.), *Vita Edwardi*, p.79; Foreville (ed.), *Gesta Guillielmi*, pp.172-4.

53) *ASC* 'C', 'D', 1065.

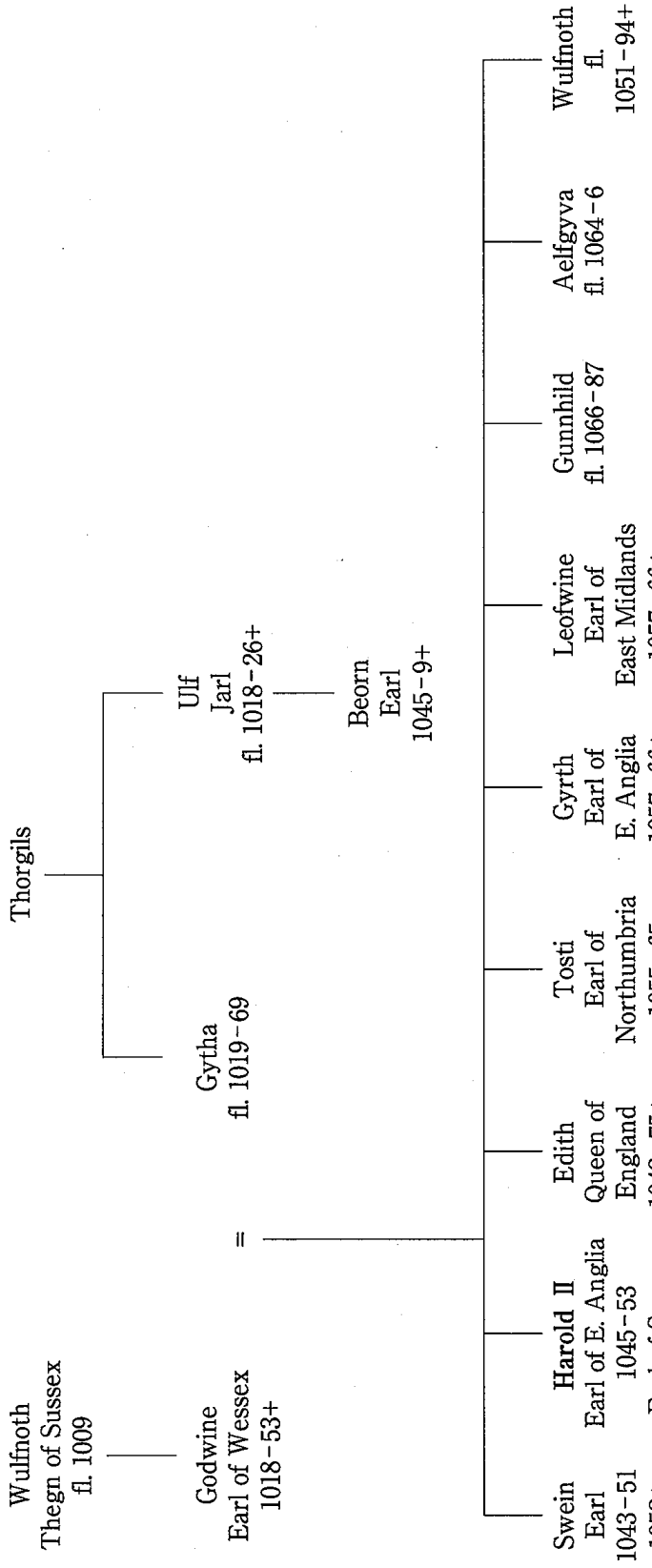
54) *ASC* 'C', 1066

55) *ASC* 'C', 1066

56) *ASC* 'C' 1066. The 'C' text of the *Chronicle* gives the only contemporary account of the battle of Stamfordbridge.

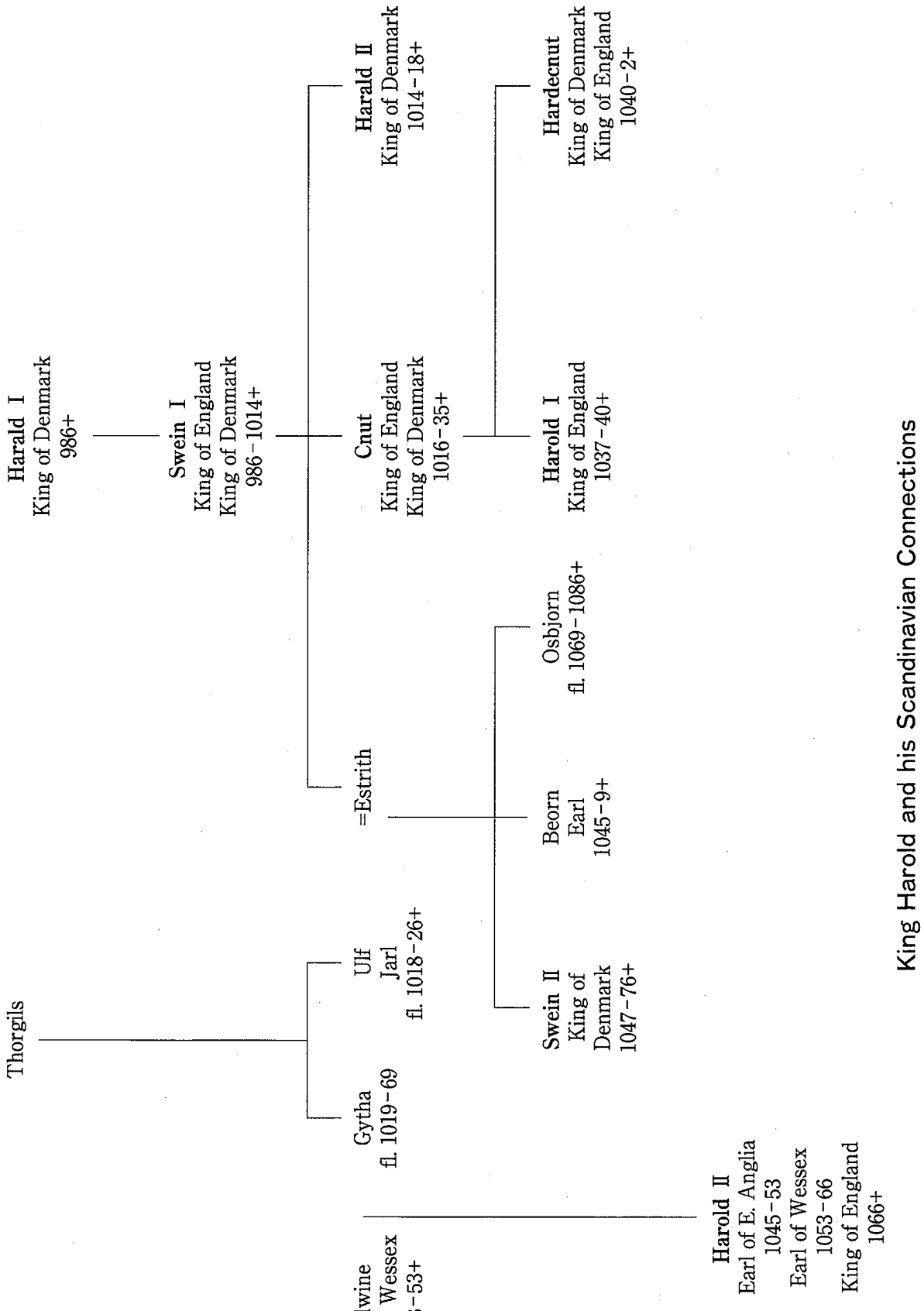
57) *In search of the Dark Ages*, p.218.

58) William of Jumieges, *GND*, chapter 14.
59) *ASC* 'D', 1066.
60) *Bayeux Tapestry*; *JnW* ii, pp.604-5.
61) William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillielmi*, pp.207-8.
62) *Carmen de Hastingi Proelio*, pp.36-7.
63) *The Waltham Chronicle*, pp.50-57.
64) John of Worcester, *Chronicula*, ff 90-90v.

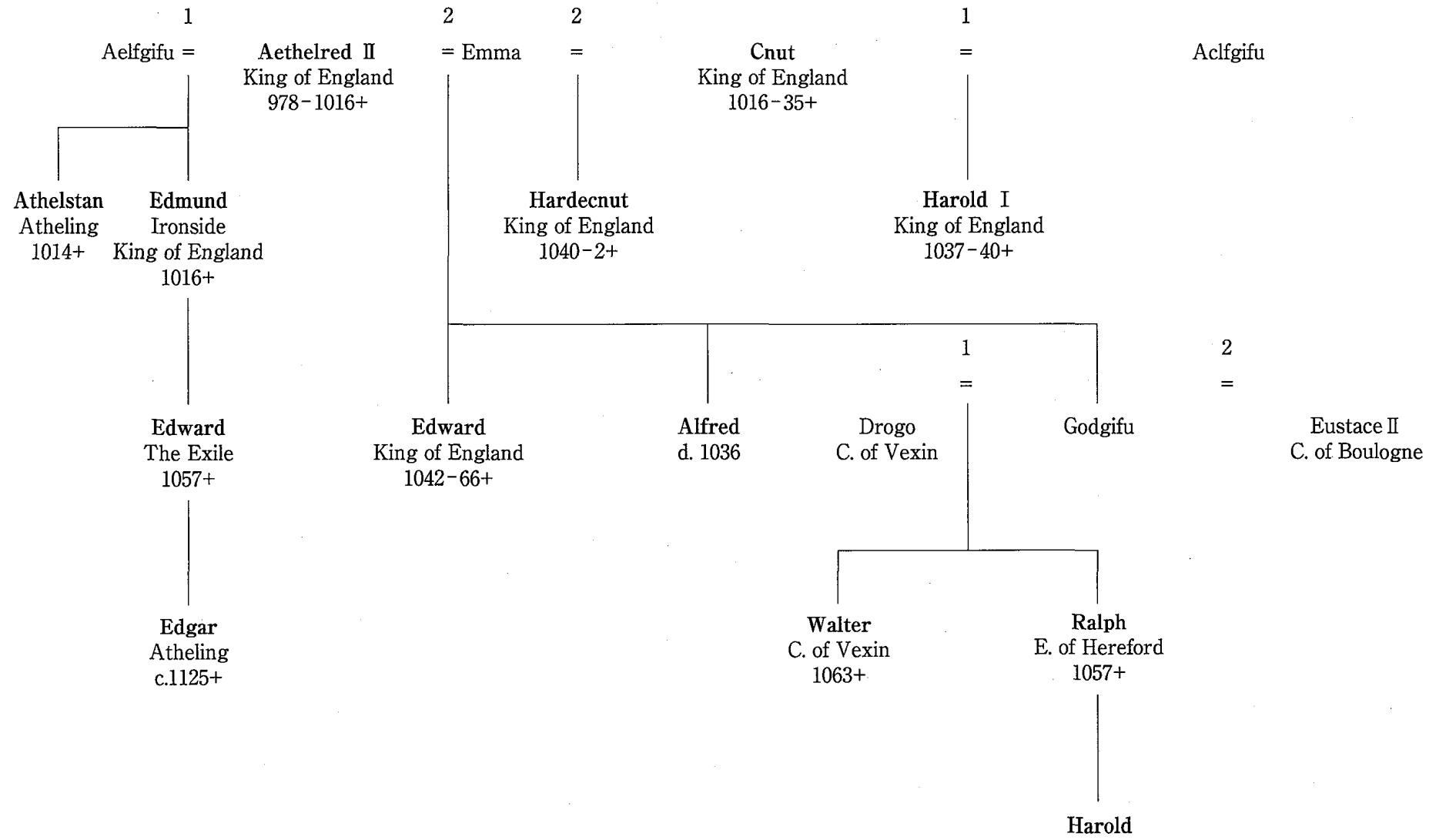


See p. xiv

The Godwine Family



King Harold and his Scandinavian Connections



The English Succession **1016-66**
(Names in bold signify a claim to the throne)