

Ealhswith

Ealhswith or **Ealswitha** (died 5 December 902) was the wife of King **Alfred the Great**. Her father was a Mercian nobleman, Æthelred Mucil (or Mucel), Ealdorman of the Gairi, which is thought to be an old Mercian tribal group. Her mother was Eadburh, a member of the Mercian royal family, and according to the historian Cyril Hart she was a descendant of King **Cenwulf of Mercia**.^[1]

1 Life

She was married to Alfred in 868. His elder brother Æthelred was then king, and Alfred was regarded as heir apparent.^{[2][3]} The Danes occupied the Mercian town of Nottingham in that year, and the marriage was probably connected with an alliance between Wessex and Mercia.^[4] Alfred became king on his brother's death in 871.

Ealhswith is very obscure in contemporary sources. She did not witness any known charters, and Asser did not even mention her name in his life of King Alfred. In accordance with ninth century West Saxon custom, she was not given the title of queen. According to King Alfred, this was because of the infamous conduct of a former queen of Wessex called Eadburh, who had accidentally poisoned her husband.^[5]

Alfred left his wife three important symbolic estates in his will, Edington in Wiltshire, the site of one important victory over the Vikings, Lambourn in Berkshire, which was near another, and Wantage, his birthplace. These were all part of his bookland, and they stayed in royal possession after her death.^[3]

It was probably after Alfred's death in 899 that Ealhswith founded the convent of **St Mary's Abbey, Winchester**, known as the Nunnaminster. She died on 5 December 902, and was buried in her son Edward's new Benedictine abbey, the **New Minster, Winchester**. She is commemorated in two early tenth century manuscripts as "the true and dear lady of the English".^[3]

2 Children

Alfred and Ealhswith had five children who survived to adulthood.^[3]

- Æthelflæd (d. 918), Lady of the Mercians, married Æthelred, Lord of the Mercians

- Edward the Elder (d. 924), King of the Anglo-Saxons
- Æthelgifu, made abbess of her foundation at Shaftesbury by her father
- Ælfthryth, Countess of Flanders (d. 929), married Baldwin II, Count of Flanders
- Æthelweard (d. c.920)

3 See also

- House of Wessex family tree

4 References

- [1] Keynes & Lapidge, *Asser*, pp. 77; 240-41; Hart, *Æthelstan*, p. 116 n.
- [2] Keynes & Lapidge, *Asser*, p. 77
- [3] Costambeys, *Ealhswith*
- [4] Williams, *Ealhswith*
- [5] Keynes & Lapidge *Asser*, pp. 71-72, 235-236

5 Sources

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- Hart, Cyril (1973). "Athelstan 'Half King' and his family". *Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge University Press) **2**: 115–144. doi:10.1017/s0263675100000375. ISBN 0 521 20218 3.
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6 External links

- [Find-A-Grave profile for Queen Ealswitha](#)
- [St. Mary's Abbey](#)

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