

899 to 901: The Will of King Alfred, and the Witan of 901

Introduction

Evidence of Aemstel's status and development in Anglo-Saxon times is scarce¹, but there are various pieces of documented evidence which suggest that by the end of the 10th century Aemstel was of some consequence.

By means of his will, which was written in 899, shortly before his death², King Alfred the Great divided most of his lands between his sons, daughters, nephews and a cousin. He is one of the very few royal wills from Anglo-Saxon times to have survived, and in 1788 Rev. Owen Manning, a scholar of Anglo-Saxon, published a translation into English under the title *The Will of King Alfred*, which can be found in full on the [hullbivut.org](http://hullbivut.org/website) website. This was re-published in 1828 under the title *The Will of King Alfred*, reprinted from the Oxford edition of 1788, with a preface and additional notes³ by W. Prynne of Chancery Lane. The 1828 version can also be found in full on line, via the archive.org website.

The lands that Alfred bequeathed to his younger son, Ethelward (c.890 to 902), a scholar who did not marry or have descendants of his own, were described as recorded in the quote below. Owen Manning's conclusions regarding the place names are then reproduced after the quote from the will.

What the will says

The will states that Ethelward was to receive "... the land at Eaderingtune and that at Dene, and at Meore, and at Ambesbury, and at Deone, and at Blunemyre, and at Ofte, and at Crusen, and at Whitchurch, and at Axamouth, and at Braunscoumbe, and at Columure, and at Teyford, and at Mylertun, and at Exanmyre, and at Sufeswyrth, and at Lintun, and the lands that thereto belong, which are all that I in Wesel district have, except Treowshire⁴.

What the will means

The final phrase confirms that all of the estates granted to Ethelward lay in the south west (Wesel district), but not in Cornwall (Treowshire).

In the same order as they are listed above, Owen Manning's translation provides footnotes with his best interpretation of where the various place names referred to were. Bearing in mind that spellings and county boundaries have changed since 1788, tentative 21st century equivalents of his suggestions are also given, with some further comments.

Eaderingtune = Adrington, Somerset according to Manning. In the absence of anywhere now called Adrington, this may be a reference to Edrington, half way between Bridgwater and Glastonbury, in the heart of the Somerset Levels, which had been King Alfred's stronghold at one time.

¹ Several historians primarily wrote for this area the 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'. Aemstel is not mentioned after 901, when Cornish the shire, was listed in the column.

² The 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' actually gives the date of Alfred's death as 910, but most scholars now find the evidence for 899 to be rather stronger.