

King Eadwig

Reign 955-959

For Kingston Heritage Festival, and celebrating the theme of “edible”, we present the Coronation feast story - the most known story from Eadwig’s reign.

The Context: Seven Saxon kings, including the first 'Kings of England' are traditionally thought to have been crowned at Kingston Upon Thames. Before All Saints Church was built, the site was an important estate of the West Saxon Kings and host to Royal coronations.

We want to tell this significant heritage story by creating seven spectacular and unique embroidery panels depicting the Kings with rich imagery based on events from their reign, including King Eadwig.

Our King Eadwig panel is currently in production and will be available to view at All Saints in Spring 2022. We are grateful to a private donor for the sponsorship of this panel.



Visualisation of the seven embroideries by Jacky Puzey

Who was King Eadwig? Eadwig (sometimes known as Edwy) reigned for four years. He was 15 when he became King and was said to be young, wilful and an inexperienced King, whose lands and kingdom were fragmenting around him as he tried to appease various factions.


Theme: The key theme for this embroidery design is the battle for rival factions to control the young King. The embroidery panel design is a visual representation of the argument over the Coronation feast table, with rivals either side with equal access to power.

History: The Coronation feast story is the most known story from Eadwig’s reign, where a louche young King allegedly fled the feast table (and offended protocol and all the nobles/religious statesmen there present) to consort with his wife to be and possibly her mother. On the orders of Bishop Oda of Canterbury (who crowned the King), he was hauled back from the bedroom by the priest, Dunstan. However, this story comes from the Vitae of St Dunstan; Dunstan was exiled overseas by Eadwig immediately after the feast. (Indeed Dunstan was exiled and reinstated by many

Saxon Kings during their reigns; he was an extremely powerful operator, as well as later a Saint).

Dunstan's biographer casts Aethelgifu, Eadwig's chosen Queen, as the villain, along with her mother, but her will and other sources suggest that she and her mother were clever operators from another branch of the Royal Family; Aethelgifu survived the divorce from Eadwig imposed by Bishop Oda later, became good friends with Edgar (Eadwig's brother, King of Mercia and Eadwig's successor) and kept all her own lands and position as a noble woman.

Please find details of the design imagery below:



The crown dissolves into the embroidered background, showing the fragmentation of his rule and lands.

Dunstan grabbing the King to haul him back to the feast

Edwy's grip on power was tenuous as the dynamic imagery of the overall banner shows, for example the young King being pulled by his robes by Dunstan (later Saint).

Dunstan's robes also dissolve into the sea, to show his exile to Gaul as Aethelgifu/Edwy demanded. Dunstan is shown in a mitre with hint of dissolving halo behind it to suggest later sainthood and current religious authority.

Nobles silhouetted with a trace of Dunstan's robe colours, and Edgar waiting shadowy in the background, already about to become King of Mercia as Edwy's kingdom fragments.

Aethelgifu, Eadwig's chosen Queen, and shadow of her mother. Aethelgifu pushes away Dunstan, staring at him coldly. Aethelgifu's robes embroidery show Edwy's colours but also a hint of Dunstan's, as she later retained her prominent position as above.

At the bottom of the feast table, Bishop Oda gesticulates, ordering Dunstan and also referencing his later insistence on the divorce of Eadwig and Aethelgifu.

The River Thames runs out from under the table, with the borders of the divided Mercia and Wessex kingdoms either side as described in available sources, that the Thames formed the border between the brothers' kingdoms.