

Anglo-Saxon Wars in Britain, 604-626 A.D.

604 Aethelfrith of Bernicia suddenly invades the sister kingdom of Deira, kills King Aelfric in battle, marries Aelfric's niece Acha, and unites under one rule what will later be named the kingdom of Northumbria. Shocked by this first serious assault of Angle upon Angle, Acha's brother Edwin, son of Aelle, flees west to the British kingdom of Gwynedd, where he is given sanctuary by King Iago despite the growing animosity of Iago's son Prince Cadfan.

613 Fearing a return by Edwin from exile, Aethelfrith strikes at Gwynedd, but nearby British kingdoms of Rhos, Powys, and Pengwern, despite the deaths in battle of Selyl Sarffgardau of Powys and Cadwal Crysbar of Rhos, rally to stop the invader at Chester. Furious at the rebuff, the pagan Aethelfrith massacres a thousand Christian monks come to convert the native Britons, then attacks again. At Bangor-is-y-Coed, the British coalition is reinforced in time by King Bledric from Dumnonia. Although Bledric dies in the fighting, Aethelfrith is forced to withdraw.

613-15 Blamed by Cadfan, soon to be King of Gwynedd, for the invasion and heavy British losses, Edwin flees to new sanctuary with King Raedwald of East Anglia. Although Raedwald resists Aethelfrith's demands to hand over Edwin, including a personal visit by the Bernician leader, Edwin secures his safety by marrying Cwenburga, daughter of King Ceorl of the rising kingdom of Mercia, and plots his revenge.

614 Meanwhile in the south taking advantage of Bledric's death, King Cynegils of Wessex and his son Cwichelm strike deep into the heart of Dumnonia. They are victorious over Bledric's successor Clemen at Bindon and severely weaken but do not destroy the British kingdom.

616 With assistance of Raedwald of East Anglia, Edwin suddenly returns to Deira and re-takes his kingdom. He then strikes north into Bernicia, confronts and kills Aethelfrith on the River Idle, and sweeps on to conquer the entire northeast. Aethelfrith's heir Eanfrith flees first to his mother's land of Gododdin, then into Pictish territory when Edwin keeps coming. Aethelfrith's sons by Acha, Oswald & Oswiu, fly even further to Dalriada in the far northwest where they convert to Christianity, help Dalriada invade Ireland, and bide their time for a return.

616-17 Meanwhile in Essex and Kent respectively, the deaths of kings Aethelbert and Saebert, who both had permitted Christian monks to proselytize, is followed by an angry pagan backlash. Aethelbert's son Eadwald ends the religious schism by converting to Christianity, but continuing turmoil in Essex weakens the kingdom.

617 Cynegils and Cwichelm of Wessex seize the opportunity to invade land claimed by Essex and kill new King Saeward and his brother Sexred in battle.

617-20 Flush with his victory in the north, Edwin strikes south to conquer the British kingdom of King Ceretic of Elmet. Ceretic is killed and his realm incorporated into Northumbria. Edwin then invades South

Rheged and sends King Llywarch Hen fleeing to Powys. In the far north, Edwin's rival Eanfrith takes a Pictish wife and sires Talorcan, later king of the Picts.

626 Under the influence of his new wife Ethelburga of Kent, Edwin converts to Christianity. That decision, gives opportunity for Prince Cwichelm of Wessex, a fervent pagan,



King Edwin of Northumbria

to send an assassin to kill Edwin and weaken the power of Northumbria. But Edwin survives and marches south to confront Wessex. With the secret encouragement of Penda, the new King of Meria, Cynegils and Cwichelm hasten north, meet

Edwin in battle on both Win Hill & Lose Hill, then retreat in great disarray after Edwin's overwhelming victory. Edwin is now secure as second King of Northumbria. He looks to make himself supreme in all the north.

