

British History Series: Episode 7 - British History 7. Birth of Scotland & Wales

Presented by Chris Green

Key Figures & Events

1. Sweyn Forkbeard

- Viking king of Denmark who invaded England in 1013, forcing King Ethelred the Unready to flee to Normandy.
- Proclaimed King of England on Christmas Day 1013 but died just six weeks later (fell off his horse or slain by St. Edmund's ghost, depending on the tale!).

2. Cnut (Canute)

- Sweyn's son; returned to England in 1015.
- Fought Edmund Ironside (Ethelred's son) in five battles. After Edmund's mysterious death (murdered on a privy!), Cnut became King of England (1016–1035).
- Ruled a North Sea Empire (England, Denmark, Norway).
- Legend: Famously *did not* try to hold back the waves—myth arose from a land dispute!

3. Ethelred the Unready

- Weak king who fled to Normandy twice.
- Married Emma of Normandy (political alliance). Died in 1016, leaving a fractured kingdom.

4. Edmund Ironside

- Ethelred's warrior son. Briefly co-ruled with Cnut after dividing England (Thames as boundary). Died suspiciously in 1016.

5. Emma of Normandy

- Queen to both Ethelred and Cnut. Prioritized power over her sons (Edward and Alfred sent to exile in Normandy).
- “Hard-faced mum” who backed Cnut's son, Harthacnut, over her own children.

6. Edward the Confessor

- Last king of the House of Wessex (1042–1066). Exiled in Normandy for decades, his reign set the stage for the Norman Conquest.

Key Moments

- **1013–1016:** Danish dominance. Sweyn's invasion, Ethelred's exile, Edmund's resistance, and Cnut's rise.
- **Cnut's Reign:** Divided England into four earldoms. Danes ruled Northumbria/East Anglia; English nobles (e.g., Godwin of Wessex, Leofric of Mercia) gained power.
- **1035–1042:** Chaos after Cnut's death. His sons (Harold Harefoot, Harthacnut) ruled briefly.
- **1042:** Edward the Confessor restored the House of Wessex—but Norman influence grew.

Did You Know?

- **Lady Godiva** was married to Leofric, Earl of Mercia! Her infamous ride through Coventry protested taxes.
 - **Edric Streona**, Ethelred's treacherous noble, was executed by Cnut for switching sides mid-battle.
 - **Anglo-Saxon noblewomen** were often "pawns" in political marriages or sent to nunneries.
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Why This Matters

The power struggles between Vikings, Anglo-Saxons, and Normans shaped England's future. Cnut's reign brought stability, but Edward the Confessor's death in 1066 would trigger the Norman Conquest—**next week's topic!**