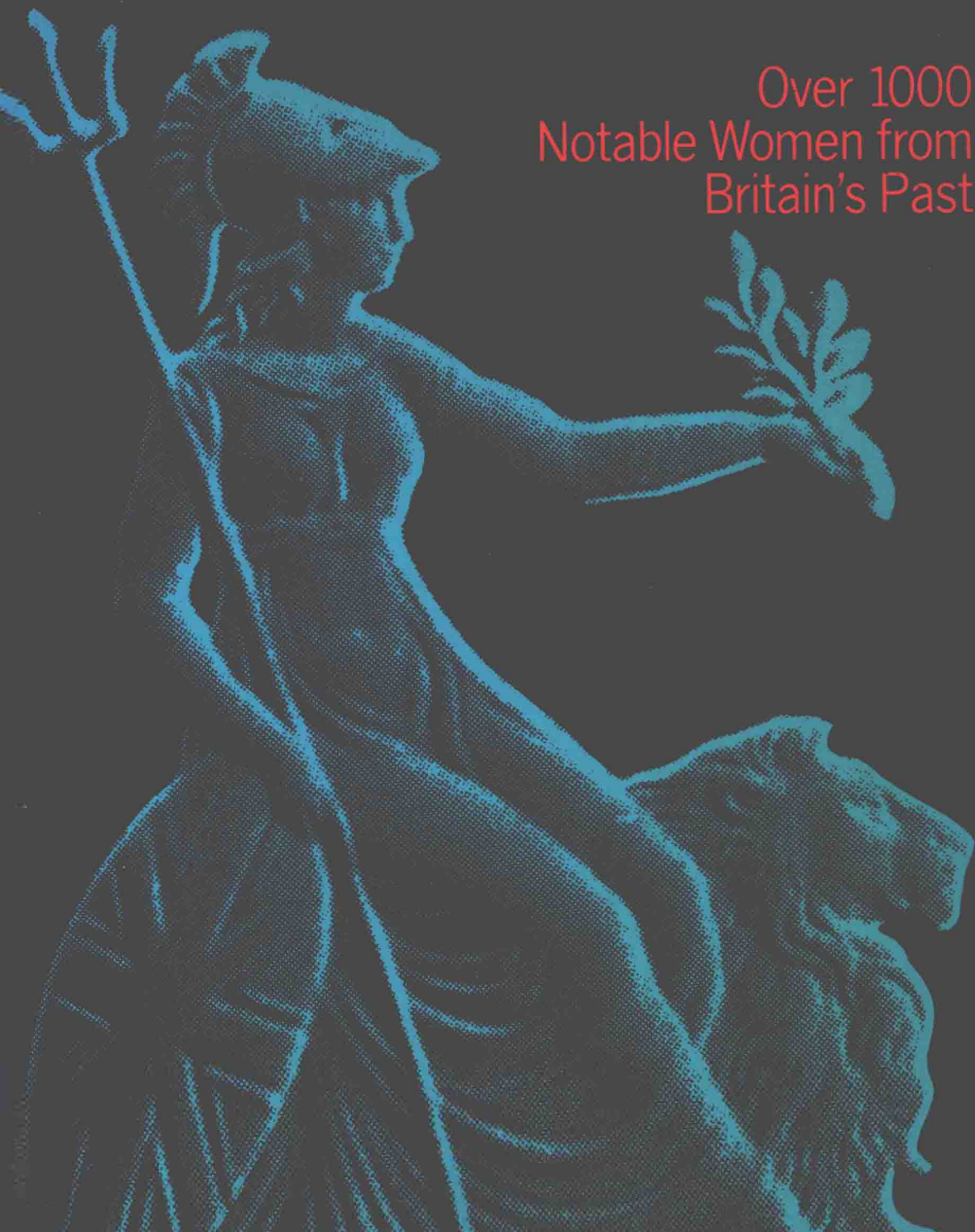


# The Europa Biographical Dictionary of **British Women**

Over 1000  
Notable Women from  
Britain's Past



THE EUROPA  
BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF  
**British Women**

OVER 1000 NOTABLE WOMEN FROM  
BRITAIN'S PAST

EDITED BY  
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Elizabeth Vallance

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# Introduction

Achievement or public recognition in some form must be the main qualification for inclusion in any biographical dictionary. A biographical dictionary of women from early times poses certain problems of selection, if only because wide public recognition was something few women have enjoyed. In compiling this book, the editors have tried to follow certain guidelines. First among the entries chosen are women whose place in history is recognized and who are therefore to some extent household names. For the rest, the bias has been towards women whose work has had some sort of public impact and who have therefore helped to widen women's horizons beyond the traditional confines of the home. These women, broadly speaking, fall into four categories:

1. Those who sought to expand women's involvement in public affairs—for example, the suffrage campaigners and suffragettes, the first women to enter the hitherto male world of the professions, and the 'feminist' writers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
2. Those who played a part in shaping history by virtue of their participation in a movement which allowed women greater scope than was usual at the time. Examples here include women who were prominent in the religious life of the early Middle Ages; women who devoted their lives to social reform, particularly in the nineteenth century; and women who played a part in the Civil War and other periods of social upheaval, thus gaining opportunities for self-expression which they would not have had in quieter times.
3. Those who influenced the course of events in a more informal way: women who were close to government, such as the wives of kings and politicians, mistresses, ladies-in-waiting and society hostesses. Also among this group are some of the philanthropists who believed that, while a woman's place was in the home, it was her duty to use her moral influence for the betterment of society at large.
4. Those who pursued traditional female occupations: actresses, singers, entertainers and writers and artists.

This book is not meant to be a history of the role of women in society in biographical form, but the lives assembled here tend to exemplify certain trends and also mirror women's preoccupations at various times in relation to the social conditions in which they lived. The high proportion of nuns and noblewomen among the entries for the Middle Ages, for instance, is partly due to the nature of the surviving records, but it also reflects the influence that an able and independent woman could exert in the Church of the time as well as the scope of female involvement in a society where land ownership bestowed power to influence public affairs. In the eighteenth century women were expected to see the home as their principal domain. Yet at this time writing became an important outlet as well as a bridge between women's private and public worlds. Literary forms were changing: the emergence of the novel as a popular art form allowed women more varied means of self-expression.

The occupations for which women gained recognition in the Victorian age tended to be those of the leisured middle class, particularly writing and philanthropy. A real turning point came in the mid-nineteenth century when conscious and concerted efforts were made to improve the status of women before the law, in education and in the professions. Needless to say, the entries for the twentieth century are the most varied of all, including as they do women from practically all walks of life and from a wide range of professions, from medicine to landscape gardening.

*The Europa Biographical Dictionary of British Women* has been compiled by a team of six editors and eighty contributors. Pauline Stafford was the editor for the Anglo-Saxon period, Anne Crawford for the Middle Ages, Ann Hughes for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Tony Hayter for the eighteenth century, Frank Prochaska for the nineteenth century, and Elizabeth Vallance for the twentieth century. Alexandra Pringle was consultant editor for nineteenth-century literary women, and Jane Havell for literary women of the twentieth century.

The use of capital letters in personal names in the text of entries indicates that an entry is included in the appropriate alphabetical sequence elsewhere in the book.

London, October 1983

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# A

**Aberdeen, Ishbel Maria Gordon, Lady** (1857–1939), campaigner for women's rights. The youngest daughter of Lord Tweedmouth, she married John Gordon, Earl of Aberdeen and later Marquess of Aberdeen and Temair, in 1877. Her childhood brought her into contact with many great political and religious leaders including Gladstone, but her mother was the strongest influence on her, giving her a strong sense of social responsibility and deep religious convictions.

Her husband shared her interest in philanthropy and it was a very happy marriage; they had five children. They co-operated in a number of schemes, such as the Haddo House Association (the Onward and Upward Association), an educational and recreational project which started on their Aberdeenshire estates and spread throughout the Empire.

Lord Aberdeen's diplomatic activities enabled his wife to utilize her talents on a considerable scale, developing her interest in advancing the social and educational position of women. During his Governor-Generalship of Canada (1893–98) she founded the Victoria Order of Nurses (1898). While in Canada, she also became interested in the National Council of Women, and from 1893, when she became President of the International Council of Women, she was the acknowledged leader of the society, which worked to improve the social and economic lot of women and to promote peace. After the First World War, Lady Aberdeen persuaded the League of Nations to open all posts on its secretariat to women on equal terms. In Ireland, during her husband's term as Lord Lieutenant (1906–15), she made a great impact, founding the Women's National Health Association and campaigning for better conditions for Irish women. She was one of the first women to become a JP. Nonetheless she constantly emphasized the necessity for women not to neglect their domestic role, and herself took a major part in her children's upbringing and closely supervised her household. She and her husband wrote *We Two* (1925).

See also M. A. Sinclair, *A Bonnie Fechter*, 1952. J.R.

**Abington, Frances** (1737–1815), actress, reputed one of the finest contemporary performers in comedy.

Fanny Abington's career lasted half a century. She had a lowly and unsuccessful start on the London stage when it was dominated by Mrs PRITCHARD and Mrs CLIVE. She married her music-master, James Abington, and left London for the Dublin stage, where she was more successful. After several scandals, she separated from her husband.

Invited by Garrick to Drury Lane, she returned to London, where she lived under the protection of a minor landed gentleman. Mrs Clive had retired and Mrs Pritchard was dead, so Mrs Abington's success was assured. Garrick disliked her tantrums ('the worst of bad women') but admired her acting, and she remained at Drury Lane until after his retirement and death. From 1776 to 1782 she was with the Sheridan management at Covent Garden, where she was very highly paid. In 1790 she retired to nurse her dying protector. She returned briefly to Covent Garden, but she was now too stout to play the young comedy parts she had made her own, and retired finally in 1797.

Fanny Abington was known chiefly for her comic talent in coquette roles such as Miss Prue, Beatrice, and Lady Teazle (of which she was the first exponent); but she also played Shakespearian roles such as Portia, Desdemona, and Ophelia. She was a clever and ambitious woman who achieved a secure social position and became famous for her fine taste in clothes. She was painted by Zoffany, Cosway, Reynolds, and many others.

See also P. H. Highfill, K. A. Burnim, E. A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers and other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800*, vol. 1, 1973; *Theatrical Biography; or Memoirs of the Principal Performers of the Three Theatres Royal, 1772*. C.H.

**Achurch, Janet** (1864–1916), actress. She came from a theatrical family, her grandparents having managed the Theatre Royal, Manchester, and she first appeared in 1883 at the Olympic Theatre in the farce *Betsy Baker*. After playing in pantomime and touring in various plays, she joined F. R. Benson's company, where she had particular success as Desdemona, the Queen in *Hamlet*, Lady Macbeth, and other Shakespearean parts. She also appeared with Beerbohm Tree's company and

## Acton, Eliza

was at the Adelphi in *Harbour Lights*. In 1895 she played in America.

In 1896 Janet Achurch produced Ibsen's *Little Eyolf* at the Avenue Theatre with herself as Rita and Mrs Patrick CAMPBELL as the Ratwife. Indeed, it is as one of the first actresses in England to play Ibsen that she is best remembered. In 1889 she took over management of the Novelty Theatre, appearing as Nora Helmer in the first English production of *A Doll's House*. She was also seen in Bernard Shaw's plays, including *Candida* and (as Lady Cecily Waynefflete) *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, both at the Strand (1900). Shaw called her 'the only tragic actress of genius we now possess' and described her acting in his dramatic criticism (collected as *Our Theatres in the Nineties*). She toured widely with her husband Charles Charrington and was the first English actress to appear in the Khedivial Theatre, Cairo. Heavy drinking affected her health and performing ability, and she retired in 1913.

B.H.C.

**Acton, Eliza** (1799–1859), poet and cookery writer. Eliza Acton was born in Battle, Sussex, the daughter of a brewer. She grew up in Suffolk but was taken abroad for her health. In Paris she became engaged to an officer in the French army, though she never married; her early verse, published in Ipswich by private subscription in 1826, hints at disappointment in love and the desire for revenge against an unfaithful lover. Further poems appeared in local publications, and in 1837 she presented verses to Queen Adelaide. Her last published poetry was *The Voice of the North* (1842) in honour of Queen Victoria.

Eliza Acton's subsequent poems were rejected by the publishers Messrs Longman, who suggested that a cookery book would be more commercial. She responded with *Modern Cookery for Private Families* (1845), which has remained one of the best cookery books in the English language. Dedicated to 'the Young Housekeepers of England', it is remarkable for its clarity, style, and attention to vital detail, and was innovatory in appending a summary of ingredients and giving 'the precise time to dress the whole'. Eliza Acton's literary talent is evident, and the work is informed with a sense of the quality of life; she is intolerant of people who serve 'trash' and of 'indifferent cooks who pride themselves on never doing anything by rule'. Living at

Bordyke House, Tonbridge, where she kept house for her mother, she tested all the recipes herself; many of them were her own, and she was justly upset at 'the unscrupulous manner in which large portions of my volume have been appropriated by contemporary authors', notably Mrs BEETON. *Modern Cookery* was reprinted several times within two years of its first appearance and, after complete revision, in 1855 in the light of Baron Liebig's work about the chemistry of food, continuing to be well for fifty years.

Moving to Hampstead in the 1840s, Acton contributed 'Household Hints and Receipts' to Mrs Loudon's *Ladies' Companion*, and in 1857 published *The English Bread Book*, an inspiring treatise on good bread. She refers to another work in progress but never published it. Pioneering in its advocacy of higher standards in English cooking, her work has inspired many later writers.

See also E. Ray (ed.), *The Best of Eliza Acton*, 1968.

C.B.

**Adams, Sarah Flower** (1805–48), poet and hymnologist. She was born at Harlow, Essex, the younger daughter of the radical journalist Benjamin Flower and his wife Eliza GOULD. Her health broke down on her father's death in 1829, and she went to the Isle of Wight to recuperate. Among the verses she wrote at this time were 'The Little Church of Yaverland' and 'The Royal Progress'. Between 1833 and 1836 she contributed various stories, poems and essays to *The Monthly Repository*, edited by W. J. Fox, under the pseudonym 'S.Y.'; she also contributed to the *Westminster Review*. Specimens of her unpublished poems written for the Anti-Corn Law League are to be found in Fox's *Lectures Addressed Chiefly to the Working Classes* (1846–49).

After her marriage in 1834 to William Bridges Adams, a noted railway engineer, Sarah Flower Adams began a career on the stage, making her first appearance at Richmond in 1837 as Lady Macbeth. But ill-health frustrated her ambitions, and she returned to writing. In November 1840 she wrote the hymn 'Nearer, My God, to Thee', which was set to music by her sister, Eliza FLOWER. It was published the following year in Fox's *Hymns and Anthems*, along with several other hymns by Sarah Flower Adams, all characterized by an intense devotional feeling, and was used in the services at the South Place Unitar-

ian Chapel, Finsbury. Only after her death did this hymn become a classic. In 1841 her 'Vivia Perpetua: A Dramatic Poem', on the subject of early Christian martyrdom, appeared; and in 1845 she published a religious catechism for children, *The Flock at the Fountain*. She did not recover from her sister's death in 1846; she died of consumption and was buried in the family vault in Foster Street cemetery, Harlow.

See also H. W. Stephenson, *The Author of My God, to Thee*, 1922, and *Unitarian Writers*, 1931. M.J.S.

**Adela of Blois** (1062?–1138), mother of King Stephen of England and later a Cluniac nun. She was a younger daughter of William the Conqueror by MATILDA OF FLANDERS. In about 1081 she married Earl Stephen of Meaux and Brie, who some ten years later succeeded his father as Count of Blois and Chartres. Adela proved the dominant partner in the relationship and, as her friend Bishop Hilbert of Mans observed, possessed 'all that is needed to guide the helm of the state'. Thus when her easy-going husband joined the First Crusade in 1096, she became his regent at home; and, on his ignominious return from the Holy Land, it was she who urged him to go back. In 1101 he did so, only to meet a violent death the following year.

Adela's great force of character and determination could now be given free rein, and she devoted herself single-mindedly to the advancement of her children. Her three daughters were appropriately married off, and so was her eldest son William, who Adela apparently regarded as unfit to succeed his father. She ruled her husband's provinces until her second son, Theobald, was sufficiently schooled to take over in 1107. Stephen, her third son, was despatched to the English Court of her brother Henry I in 1113, and he subsequently secured his uncle's throne in 1135. Henry, her fourth son, became a Cluniac monk and ultimately a distinguished bishop of Winchester.

As she grew older and her sons reached maturity, Adela became progressively less interested in politics and more committed to religion. Her friends included such eminent churchmen as St Anselm (whom she chose, according to his biographer Eadmer, 'as after God the director and guardian of her life'), the canon lawyer Bishop Ivo of Chartres, and

Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny. She entertained Pope Paschal II at Chartres in 1107, and probably played a part in ending the dispute between the Papacy and her brother Henry I. In 1119 she gave shelter to the exiled Archbishop Thurstan of York; and it was probably under his influence that she determined to take the veil. Around 1122 she was received into the Cluniac priory of Marcigny-sur-Loire, where she remained until her death in March 1138.

Adela was clearly a remarkable woman, and also a formidable one, as is evident from the writings of Abbot Baudri of Bourgueil. Like the chronicler Hugh of Fleury (who dedicated his *Historia Ecclesiastica* to her) Baudri was one of Adela's protégés, and he was impressed not only by her intelligence and generosity as a patron but also by her courage (which, he declared, was equal to that of the Conqueror himself). A proud, self-willed woman who probably inspired fear rather than love, she pursued her ends—whether political or religious—with a ruthlessness which earned her the deep respect of her contemporaries.

See also R.H.C. Davis, *King Stephen*, 1967. K.R.D.

**Adelaide** (1792–1849), William IV's queen. She was born at Meiningen, the eldest child of George, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, and Princess Louise of Hohenlohe-Langenburg. In 1818 she married William, Duke of Clarence, the third son of George III. Although the match was arranged, and Clarence was twice Princess Adelaide's age, the marriage proved to be a happy one, though it failed to achieve its intended purpose of producing an heir to the throne; Adelaide's pregnancies ended with miscarriages or babies who died within a few months at most.

On 26 June 1830 Princess Adelaide's husband became king on the death of his brother George IV. The new queen's support for the Tories, and her opposition to parliamentary reform, made her unpopular during the Reform Bill crisis, and although she exerted less political influence than was generally believed, her attitude was one factor in William IV's conversion from being a supporter to an opponent of the Bill. The King's abrupt dismissal of Lord Melbourne's administration in November 1834 was also (incorrectly) attributed to her: *The Times* of 15 November declared, 'The Queen has done it all.'

## Adeliza

On William IV's death in 1837, Adelaide became Queen Dowager. She spent her remaining years travelling extensively in England and Europe in the interests of her health, and contributed some £20,000 a year to various charitable enterprises. In particular, she financed the building of the Collegiate Church of St Paul in Valletta, Malta. Her popularity long restored, she died at Bentley Priory, Stanmore, and was buried in St George's Chapel, Windsor.

Queen Adelaide was never completely anglicized and possessed neither great beauty nor great intelligence. Nevertheless her kind and modest personality succeeded in domesticating William IV and, so far as the presence of his numerous illegitimate children allowed, restored the image of a virtuous, ordered monarchical family. In maintaining a decorous court, and in setting an example of dedicated public service, she was the first 'Victorian' queen.

See also M. Sandars, *The Life and Times of Queen Adelaide*, 1915; M. Hopkirk, *Queen Adelaide*, 1946; G. Wakeford, *Three Consort Queens*, 1971.

M.J.S.

**Adeliza** (?–1151?), second queen of Henry I of England. She was the daughter of Duke Godfrey of Lower Lotharingia, and married Henry in 1121. She failed to provide him with the male heir he craved, and took no part in politics or war beyond receiving the newly-arrived Empress MATILDA at her castle of Arundel in 1139. But she did gain a considerable reputation as a literary patron.

K.R.D.

**Ady, Mrs Henry.** See CARTWRIGHT, JULIA.

**Æbbe** (fl. 664–81), abbess. Æbbe was the half-sister of Kings Oswald and Oswiu of Northumbria, the issue of a former or subsequent liaison of their mother, Acha. Little is known of her early life save that she married and, upon being widowed, entered the Church. A tradition exists that she founded a monastery by the River Derwent, on the site of a Roman fort given to her by King Oswiu; but more reliable evidence simply states that Æbbe founded a monastery at Coldingham, of which she subsequently became the abbess. Although she was honoured for her piety and her noble birth, and attracted novices like King Ecgrith's first wife, ÆTHELTHRYTH, she seems to have failed utterly to maintain disci-

pline in her foundation. Instead of praying and reading, the monks and nuns feasted, drank and gossiped; the nuns also spent their leisure hours making elaborate garments. All this led St Cuthbert, who came to visit the community some time between 661 and 664, to declare that monks and nuns should be excluded from each other's company.

It is not clear when Æbbe died. According to a vision experienced by one member of the community, Coldingham was to be destroyed after Æbbe's death as a punishment for all the sins committed there. A fire is recorded as having occurred at Coldingham in 679. However, Æbbe was still alive in 681, when she is said to have cured Ecgrith's second wife, IURMINBURG, of an illness during a visit that the royal couple made to Coldingham, by persuading Ecgrith to release Bishop Wilfrid of York from prison. After her death Æbbe's body was translated twice: once after the Viking invasions, and again in the eleventh century, when it was brought to Durham.

See also B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 1969; B. Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Vita Cuthberti*, 1940; B. Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Eddius, Vita Wilfridi*, 1927. J.C.

**Ælflaed** (654–714), abbess. Ælflaed was the daughter of King Oswiu of Northumbria and his second wife, EANFLAED. A year after her birth, Oswiu placed her in a monastery at Hartlepool that was run by HILD, a distant cousin of her mother. In 657 the community was transferred to the new foundation Hild had built at Whitby. There Ælflaed was at first taught the traditions of the Celtic Church, for Hild was a protégée of the Irish bishop Aidan; later, after her father's famous decision at Whitby (664) in favour of the Roman and against the Celtic Church, she was educated accordingly. In 680 Hild died and Ælflaed succeeded her, for a time sharing the responsibility of running the abbey with her mother, who probably joined the community after Oswiu's death in 670.

During her career as abbess, Ælflaed gained a reputation for being 'the best comforter and counsellor in the land'. Her qualities were revealed by her invitation to Bishop Trumwine of Abercorn to come to Whitby after the Picts had expelled him from his see in 685; by the way she overcame her hostility to Bishop Wilfrid of York in order to persuade her family

to end their feud with him in 706; and by her helping a fellow-ecclesiastic on her travels abroad (she commended her to the abbess of Pfazel). She was a friend of St Cuthbert, whom she met twice (in 684 and 685), and encouraged the arts to flourish at Whitby; the earliest surviving *Life* of Pope Gregory the Great was composed there during the last ten years of Ælfflaed's life. She was buried, with her mother, alongside the bodies of her father and maternal grandfather, which she and Eanflaed had brought to Whitby. Translated in the twelfth century, Ælfflaed is commemorated on 8 February and 11 April.

See also B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 1969; B. Colgrave (ed. and trans.) *Vita Cuthberti*, 1940; B. Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *Eddius, Vita Wilfridi*, 1927. J.C.

**Ælfflaed** (fl. mid-9th century), princess and Queen of Mercia. Ælfflaed was the daughter of Ceolwulf, King of Mercia. The death of her uncle King Coenwulf ushered in a period of great uncertainty over the Mercian succession. Among the contenders for the throne was the family of King Wiglaf, who made good his claim in about 830. Wiglaf married his son Wigmund to Ælfflaed. Their son Wigstan's succession was opposed by another pretender, Beorhtfrith, who sought to strengthen his own claim by seeking marriage with the widowed Ælfflaed. The match was not made, Wigstan was murdered, and Ælfflaed disappears from history. Her obscure story illustrates how many royal women were wooed both as princesses and widows for the strength which their blood and connections could bring to claimants to the throne.

See also 'Life and Miracles of St Wistan', in W. D. Macray (ed.), *Chronicon Abbatiae de Evesham*, Rolls Series, 1863. P.A.S.

**Ælfflaed** (fl. early 10th century), Anglo-Saxon queen. Soon after his father's death, King Edward the Elder took Ælfflaed as his first legitimate wife; his earlier concubine Ecgwyna disappeared. Ælfflaed was daughter of an ealdorman, Æthelm, probably the same man as an ealdorman of Wiltshire known to have died in 897. Edward had had a cousin Æthelm with strong claims to the throne. If the two Æthelms are identical, Edward was marrying his cousin's daughter, a shrewd move to strengthen his hand against Æthelm's brother, who was

in rebellion in 900. Ælfflaed bore two sons, Ælfweard and Edwin, and six daughters. There is considerable doubt concerning her fate; she was probably repudiated by Edward in about 918 and sent to the nunnery of Wilton, where two of her daughters had taken the veil.

See also P. Stafford, 'Changes in the status of the king's wife in Wessex', in *Past and Present*, 1982. P.A.S.

**Ælfflaed** (before 939–c.1002), noblewoman and monastic benefactress. Ælfflaed was the younger daughter of the sonless Ælfgar, Ealdorman of Essex. She married Brihtnoth, the man who succeeded her father in his ealdormanry; the marriage constituted part of Brihtnoth's strategy to secure his position in eastern England. As her father's heiress, and as residuary legatee of her older sister Queen ÆTHELFLAED, Ælfflaed disposed of enormous properties in eastern England. Her will lists nearly forty manors, though in many cases she was confirming earlier bequests of her family. Following her father and sister, she endowed the family monastery and mausoleum at Stoke-by-Nayland, and her husband's favoured abbey and burial place, Ely, also received land. The capacity of women like Ælfflaed to inherit and dispose of land was the foundation of female influence in Anglo-Saxon England; its use for religious endowment is typical.

See also D. Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, 1930. P.A.S.

**Ælfifu** (fl. 956–58), Anglo-Saxon queen. The daughter of a great south-western noble line directly descended from the West Saxon royal family, Ælfifu married King Eadwig in 956. The King was attempting to strengthen his position and to reverse the policies of his uncle and predecessor. He and Ælfifu therefore incurred the enmity of Eadwig's grandmother, Queen EADGIFU, and of Abbot Dunstan, leaders of the rival faction; Ælfifu is alleged to have played a part in Dunstan's exile. Hence the unflattering picture of her and her mother as wantons, found in the partisan *Life of Dunstan*. The triumph of the King and his wife was brief. As support ebbed from Eadwig, Dunstan's party was able forcibly to separate the King and his wife on the grounds of consanguinity. Ælfifu was well provided for; her will survives, recording her great wealth



## Ælfifu of Northampton

and her return of large estates in Wessex to the royal family.

See also D. Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, 1930. P.A.S.

**Ælfifu of Northampton** (fl. 1014–37), noblewoman and king's wife. Ælfifu was the daughter of Ælfhelm, Ealdorman of York and member of a powerful north Mercian noble family. The family fell from royal favour in 1006, when Ælfhelm and his sons, suspected of treachery, were murdered and/or blinded. The resulting disaffection of the family made them obvious allies for enemies of King Æthelred, and in 1014 or 1016 the invading Danish leader Cnut (Canute) sought their friendship and married Ælfifu, though he did not make her his queen. Ælfifu bore him two sons, Swegn and Harold Harefoot. Stories of Harold's doubtful paternity, and even of his being smuggled into Ælfifu's bedchamber in a bedpan, reveal less of the truth than of the fierce propaganda surrounding the dispute over the throne between 1035 and 1037 and its later elaboration at the hands of post-Conquest writers.

In 1017 Cnut took a second wife, EMMA, but Ælfifu was not cast aside completely. In 1029 she and her son Swegn were sent as Cnut's regents to Norway, where they found little support; by 1033 their position was untenable and in 1035 they were forced to flee to Denmark. Memories of her rule were not sweet, and evil times in Norway were long synonymous with 'Ælfifu's days'; but this may simply derive from Norwegian dislike of Danish rule. Ælfifu had returned to England by 1037 to aid her son Harold in his attempt to gain the English throne; some of his known support in the Midlands probably came from her family. Her fate after his death in 1040 is unknown.

See also M. W. Campbell, 'Queen Emma and Ælfifu of Northampton, Canute the Great's women', in *Medieval Scandinavia* (Odense University), vol. 4, 1971. P.A.S.

**Ælfthryth** (before 950–c.1002), Queen of England. Ælfthryth was the daughter of Ordgar, a substantial landowner in south-west England. Her first marriage was to Æthelwold, Ealdorman of East Anglia and son of Athelstan Half-King. Æthelwold died in about 962, and by 965 she had contracted a second marriage to King Edgar. Later legends describe her

seduction of the King and Edgar's complicity in the murder of her first husband; their details bear the impress of twelfth-century romance, but gossip surrounding the marriage may have been current in the tenth century. Ælfthryth's later power, and especially her involvement in the bitter succession dispute which followed Edgar's death, attracted other accusations of witchcraft and adultery. Both gossip and accusations smack of political propaganda cast in the common anti-feminist mould.

Despite the gossip, Ælfthryth's marriage was clearly a political union. Her father was made ealdorman of south-west England about the time of the wedding, and her family helped extend Edgar's control of the area. She was the King's third wife, a fact which dominated her career. She dispossessed the family of Edgar's second wife of their abbey at Barking, but her main problem was posed by the existence of Edward, a young son by Edgar's first marriage. By 966 Ælfthryth had produced a son of her own, Edmund, and while he was still an infant she and her allies at court advanced his claims to the throne against those of his older half-brother. After Edmund's death in 971, at the age of five, the Queen's efforts were directed towards securing the throne for her younger son, Æthelred.

Ælfthryth became Edgar's queen in 965; at this date, the title emphasized the full legitimacy of her marriage and the formal position she enjoyed at court. She was the first tenth-century queen known to have been important during her husband's lifetime. In the monastic revival of Edgar's reign she was given responsibility for the English nunneries and played a part in ecclesiastical patronage at a date when the Church exercised great political influence. Her intercession was sought by those seeking royal favour and she seems to have struck up a close alliance with Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester. Æthelwold appears to have aided her in the foundation of her nunnery at Wherwell, and he may have been instrumental in securing her formal consecration as queen in 973. Ælfthryth is only the second English queen known to have been anointed, the earlier instance being the anointing of Judith on the continent.

Ælfthryth's anointing enhanced her status and may have been intended to strengthen her son's claim to the throne. Edgar's death in 975 precipitated a succession struggle in which Ælfthryth led the party supporting Æthelred.

The prince was little more than five years old, and the Queen's enemies cannot have relished the prospect of her regency. This and other factors swung the balance in favour of Edward, but his success was short-lived. In March 979 Edward was murdered while visiting his step-mother and half-brother at Corfe in Dorset; the deed was probably done at Ælfthryth's instigation. Æthelred became king, and from 979 to 985 Ælfthryth and Æthelwold of Winchester were dominant at court. Æthelred's coming of age, combined with his marriage in about 985, brought about her temporary eclipse, but she was restored to power in 993, perhaps when Æthelred's father-in-law was disgraced and his first marriage ended. Ælfthryth now secured control of her grandsons' upbringing, a role of crucial importance; her influence at court is suggested by the way in which petitioners habitually invoked her intercession. In her final years she may have retired to her nunnery at Wherwell.

See also P. Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers, family politics in the early middle ages', in D. Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women*, 1978.

P.A.S.

**Ælfwyn** (fl. 918), princess and ruler of Mercia, the only daughter of Æthelred and ÆTHELFLAED, Lord and Lady of the Mercians. Ælfwyn was chosen by a section of the Mercian nobility to rule the kingdom after her mother's death in 918. The choice of a woman to rule in her own right, not as the widow of a royal husband or regent for a young son, is virtually unique in early medieval Europe. It is a testimony to the greatness of her mother Æthelflaed, to the tradition of powerful queenship in Mercia, and to the Mercians' desire to remain independent of Wessex. Ælfwyn's authority was short-lived: in December 918 her uncle, the West Saxon king Edward the Elder, marched into Mercia, deprived Ælfwyn of her authority, and carried her back to Wessex and into obscurity.

P.A.S.

**Æthelbertha.** See BERTHA.

**Æthelburh**, also known as Tate (fl. 614–33), Queen of Northumbria, the only daughter of King Æthelberht of Kent. Æthelburh was born in, or before, 614. Her mother, according to late sources, was Æthelberht's first wife, the Frankish princess BERTHA. After a Christian upbringing, presumably at the recently converted Kentish court, she was solicited in mar-

riage by King Edwin of Northumbria, sometime between 616, after Æthelberht's death, and 625. Her brother, King Eadbald, initially rejected the proposal on the grounds that Edwin was still a pagan. But the political advantages of the match were such that Eadbald changed his mind when he learned that Edwin would tolerate Æthelburh's beliefs and was even considering embracing Christianity himself. Eadbald doubtless hoped that it would not be long before Æthelburh, aided by her spiritual adviser Paulinus (who had earlier helped to evangelize Kent), secured Edwin's conversion. Edwin's failure to accept baptism until 627 was thus seen as a gross dereliction of conjugal duty on Æthelburh's part, and she was duly chastised by the Pope. In fact, the delay had little to do with her. As his willingness to have his daughter christened in 626 demonstrates, Edwin was perfectly prepared to accept Christianity, but simply dared not make public his beliefs too early, for fear of alienating his subjects. In 633 Edwin was killed and his enemies forced Æthelburh and her two surviving children to seek refuge in Kent. There, according to local tradition, her brother supplied her with an estate at Lyminge where she founded a monastery in which she spent the remainder of her days.

See also B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (eds), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 1969.

J.C.

**Æthelflaed** (c. 870–918), Lady of the Mercians. Æthelflaed was the eldest child of King Alfred and his Mercian wife EALHSWITH. Her father gave her in marriage to Æthelred, Lord of the Mercians, probably in the early 880s. Æthelred was by this date effectively ruler of Mercia, sometimes referred to as 'king'; Æthelflaed became Lady of the Mercians and her title, *Hlaefdige*, was a frequent Anglo-Saxon translation of 'queen'. She was heiress to a tradition of able Mercian queens dating back to the late eighth century. Her marriage sealed an alliance between Wessex and Mercia that was essential to Alfred's success in his struggle against the Vikings.

Æthelflaed took an active part in Mercian politics even before the long illness of her husband, and ruled Mercia from his death in 911 until 918. She and Æthelred made joint grants of land to Worcester Cathedral and translated thither the bones of St Oswald. According to Irish sources it was Æthelflaed,

## Æthelflaed of Damerham

not Æthelred, who granted land to the Irish Viking Ingimund in the Wirral in 902, and she who in 907 fortified Chester against the growing threat of Viking attack from Ireland. Between 910 and 915 she built a series of fortresses around Wirral and Mersey, on the Welsh border, and in north-west Mercia, paralleling the fortress building of her brother Edward the Elder in the south-east Midlands and Essex. Brother and sister were intent on combating further Viking invasion of England and on the conquest of those areas controlled by the Viking armies. In this joint enterprise Æthelflaed was responsible for the conquest of Derby and Leicester, two Viking bases, in 917 and 918. The co-ordinated plans of Edward and Æthelflaed to advance on Nottingham and Lincoln in 918 were upset by her death on 12 June.

Co-operation with her brother the king of Wessex had been part of Æthelflaed's wider commitment to the defence of Mercia against its traditional enemies, the Welsh kings, and against the Viking threat. If Æthelflaed planned to use Viking settlers in the Wirral against the Welsh, their growing numbers thwarted her hopes. In 916 she sent a punitive expedition into North Wales and took a Welsh queen hostage, but her increasing concern was with the threat posed by the Dublin Vikings to north-west Mercia. To deal with this, Æthelflaed became one of the architects and leaders of an alliance of the northern British rulers, extending to the Scottish kings and including the Danes at York, who submitted to her. In 918 this alliance brought about the defeat of the Norse Viking, Ragnald, at Corbridge.

Æthelflaed behaved as Queen of Mercia rather than a West Saxon princess; her extraordinary power as an independent female ruler was firmly based on Mercian traditions. However, her concern for Mercian defence did not conflict with the West Saxon alliance. Her brother Edward made no attempt to oust her, and may have helped her in the crucial period after Æthelred's death. Edward recognized local Mercian loyalties and sent his eldest and illegitimate son Athelstan to be fostered by Æthelflaed, perhaps as a potential heir since she had no sons. Irish sources speak of Æthelflaed's great fame, and the Anglo-Saxon poem *Judith*, celebrating the Biblical warrior queen, may have been written for her. If English sources preserve little of her memory, it is because they emanate largely from Wessex,

whose kings became rulers of all England and hardly wished to celebrate Mercian achievements.

See also F. T. Wainwright, 'Æthelflaed, Lady of the Mercians', in *Scandinavian England* (Odense University), 1975. P.A.S.

**Æthelflaed of Damerham** (before 934–after 975), Queen of England and monastic benefactress. Æthelflaed's marriage to King Edmund as his second wife (c. 945) was closely associated with the appointment of her father, Ælfgar, as Ealdorman of Essex, which it was designed to secure. At court she had a strong rival for power in the person of the queen-mother, EADGIFU; and Edmund's death soon after the marriage, and apparently before the birth of children, ended any prospect of Æthelflaed becoming of political importance; a royal widow without sons had little influence. She went on to marry an ealdorman, Athelstan, whom she also outlived. As joint heir of her father's estate and owner of dower land from two marriages, Æthelflaed was an extensive property-owner in her own right. She bequeathed some twenty-five estates to the religious houses of eastern England, principally to Ely and Stoke-by-Nayland. Such munificence from childless heiresses brought much land to the Church in the early Middle Ages.

See also D. Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, 1930. P.A.S.

**Æthelthryth** (?–679), Queen of Northumbria and religious enthusiast, daughter of King Anna of East Anglia. Æthelthryth was born near Exning in Suffolk, probably no later than 640. In her youth she received many proposals of marriage but rejected them all, her only desire being to enter the Church. In 652, however, her parents forced her to marry an East Anglian sub-king, Tondberht, prince of the South Girvii. The match was short lived, for Tondberht died in 655, and Æthelthryth, who had allegedly succeeded in retaining her virginity, retired to the Isle of Ely, which Tondberht had given her as a morning-gift, intending to devote the rest of her life to God.

In 660, however, her family persuaded her to accept another marriage proposal, this time from King Oswiu of Northumbria's fifteen-year-old son Ecgrith. Despite the ties of matrimony, Æthelthryth tried to live as reli-



gious a life as possible in Northumbria, endeavouring, above all, to keep her virginity intact. Ecgfrith, whose need for an heir grew ever greater as time passed, eventually sought the help of Æthelthryth's protégé, Bishop Wilfrid of York, to whom the queen had once granted an estate at Hexham. Wilfrid promised to try and persuade Æthelthryth to consummate the marriage, but in fact advised the Queen to become a nun. After much cajoling on Æthelthryth's part, Ecgfrith reluctantly agreed to allow her to receive the veil from Wilfrid and to enter his aunt ÆBBE's foundation at Coldingham in 672.

This history of non-consummation may be true; or it may represent no more than an excuse used by Ecgfrith to justify a divorce. He is said to have changed his mind a year later, so that Æthelthryth was forced to flee from the monastery. A miraculous flood prevented Ecgfrith from following her, and she made her way, with two companions, to East Anglia, disguised as a pilgrim; they stopped at Altham, where she built a church, and at a place that became known as *Ætheldredestowe* after her staff took root there. She eventually reached Ely (673), where she built an abbey for her followers. As abbess, Æthelthryth led a life of great sanctity: wearing woollen garments, never linen; only taking baths before great festivals, after all the other nuns; and rarely eating more than once a day, except again on the days of great festivals or on occasions of extreme urgency. Her sister SEXBURGA joined the community sometime after 675, and in 679 they were visited by her old friend Wilfrid on his way to Rome. According to later traditions, Æthelthryth used this opportunity to ask the Bishop to secure privileges of recognition and immunity for her foundation from the Pope. If so, she did not live to see the results of her request. Not long after Wilfrid's departure she became ill with a tumour under her jaw and died. On her orders she was buried in a wooden coffin in the nuns' cemetery. Sixteen years later, however, Sexburga, who had succeeded her as abbess, translated her corpse, amid many miracles, to a new stone coffin. Her body was translated a second time in 1106.

See also B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 1969; E. O. Blake (ed.), *Liber Eliensis*, Camden Series 3, vol. 92, 1962.

J.C.

**Aguilar, Grace** (1816–47), writer. She was born in Hackney, London, into a family of Spanish-Jewish origin and, owing to her frail health, was educated at home. She travelled over much of England with her family when young, but lived mainly in Devonshire. She began writing early, much of her work concerning the history and religion of the Jewish people. These books include *The Jewish Faith* (1845), *The Women of Israel* (1845), and especially *The Spirit of Judaism* (1842), which emphasized the spirituality of the Old Testament while criticizing contemporary Judaism for excessive formalism. For although devout, Grace Aguilar was liberal in her thinking and advocated the adoption of a less rigorous orthodoxy. However, she became best known for her many novels of domestic life, only one of which, *Home Influence* 1847, was published in her lifetime. Her deteriorating health rendered her a semi-invalid, and she died while visiting her brother in Frankfurt and was buried in the Jewish cemetery there. Her life was outwardly uneventful and her books are domestic, sentimental, and pious, although not without charm, particularly two historical narratives, the *Scottish Days of Bruce* (1852) and *The Vale of Cedars* (1853), about Jews in Spain at the time of Ferdinand and Isabella. A branch of the New York Library is named after her.

B.H.C.

**Aikin, Lucy** (1781–1864), writer. Born in Warrington, she was the daughter of John Aikin, physician, scholar, and man of letters. She spent her early childhood in Yarmouth and then lived with her family in London from 1792 to 1797. They subsequently moved to Stoke Newington, where she lived until her father's death in 1822. Apart from a short period spent in Wimbledon, Lucy Aikin spent the rest of her life in Hampstead, where she was buried next to her great friend, the writer Joanna BAILLIE.

Lucy Aikin's literary career began when she was seventeen, but her first important publication was the verse *Epistles on Women*, which appeared in 1810. This was followed in 1814 by her only work of fiction, *Lorimer, A Tale*. But it was with her historical works that she gained a literary reputation: *Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth*, 1818; *Memoirs of the Court of James I*, 1822; *Memoirs of the Court of Charles I*, 1833; and *The Life of Addison*, 1843. She also wrote a life of her