

BOOK REVIEW

***Edward the Confessor – Last of the Royal Blood*, by Tom Licence**

It was Tom Licence's misfortune that *Edward the Confessor – Last of the Royal Blood* was launched in the first Covid lockdown year of 2020. Although it featured in some online talks, this professor of medieval history at the University of East Anglia missed the usual opportunities to bring this excellent biography to our attention.

Edward the Confessor offers a reassessment of the last Anglo-Saxon king which overturns the popular image of Edward as a saintly but ineffective ruler who had ascended to the throne reluctantly in 1042. In this readable and deeply researched biography, Licence portrays Edward, the first son of Emma of Normandy and Aethelred II, as ambitious, conscientious and effective in securing and defending the kingdom.

His ambition to be a strong king was amply demonstrated in autumn 1043 when he rushed to Winchester to seize the treasury away from his mother and reinforce his status as king of the English. He brooked little opposition and dispatched his generals to crush upstart kings. It was later in his life that he became the saintly patriarch but by then England was secure and his position had little challenge.

As to whether Edward had adopted William of Normandy as his successor, a claim made by the Conqueror to legitimize his invasion in 1066, Licence dismisses this. He argues that the childless king had adopted his great-nephew Edgar and declared him as 'aetheling' or 'throneworthy' by 1063-64 in order to be his successor. However, on Edward's death in early 1066, young Edgar was pushed aside and Harold became king in a betrayal of oaths he had made to the late king.

Edward was able to craft his own narrative because he believed he was entitled to rule. The image of England's redeemer after the turbulent Anglo-Danish period and an untainted Solomon to his people was developed by him to exploit the mystique of consecrated royalty and kingship in order that his people could believe in it and in him. As he was named after his uncle Edward the Martyr, the teenage king assassinated in 978, this Edward stamped his authority upon England in a highly individual and much-loved manner.

Edward the Confessor – Last of the Royal Blood is published by Yale University Press in its English Monarchs series with a list price of £12.99 but can be found online for less.

