

# Archæologia Cantiana.

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## THE PICTURE OF QUEEN EDIVA IN CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL.

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IN the possession of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury is an ancient panel, painted in oils, measuring 42 inches in height and 27 inches in width, and enclosed in a plain oak frame with a double moulding along the top, surmounted by an embattled cresting. An inscription upon a scroll at the foot of the picture shews that it purports to be a portrait of Queen Ediva, a great benefactress to the prior and convent of Christ Church, Canterbury, and the second (possibly third) consort of King Edward, son and successor of King Alfred.

Queen Ediva lived and died in the tenth century, but from the costume given her by the artist it is clear that the picture could not have been painted until five hundred years after the lady represented had passed away.

Nevertheless, it is an early specimen of the limner's art in England, and to Kentish people the portrait—albeit a fancy one—has a special interest from the fact that it represents the last Kentish lady who shared the throne of an English king.

Of the provenance of the picture not much is known. The inventories of Christ Church do not mention it. But it is not singular in that respect, since other pictures, known to have been in existence at the dates when these lists were made, are likewise omitted. Nor is any reference to it to be found in the works of Somner, Dart, or Gostling. Indeed the earliest I can find is in an *Historical Description of the*



CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL  
 Queen Editha, painted on panel

*Cathedral* published anonymously (the writer was J. Burnby) in 1772, in which the author says: "On the staircase leading to the library is a very ancient picture of Queen Edyve in her robes with her crown and sceptre. In the background is a view of Birchington, which is probably not of the same antiquity."

The latter statement I think is open to challenge for reasons that I will state later on, though there doubtless has been some repainting. The staircase mentioned above was a wooden one of two flights, which occupied almost the same site as the present stone steps, and was removed when the latter were erected in 1870. A few years after the date of Burnby's book, the Ediva portrait must have been moved into the library itself, since Hasted, who gives a good engraving of the picture in the fourth volume of his *History of Kent*, states that, when he saw it, it was "hanging over the door at the upper end of the room"—that is, in the old library, on the site of the Prior's Chapel, where the Howley-Harrison collection of books is now stored.

Here it remained until the year 1868, when, on the completion of the new library, adjoining the Chapter House, the picture was moved thither, and at the same time it was, I believe, enclosed in a mahogany case having a glazed front. Recently (1921), at the instigation of the Rev. Canon T. G. Gardiner, the Dean and Chapter have caused the picture to be placed in the north-eastern transept of the Cathedral, where it occupies a position on the sill of the east window of the Chapel of St. Martin.

The position chosen accords well with historical sentiment, for it was on the north side of St. Martin's altar that Queen Ediva's relics were deposited after the rebuilding of the eastern portion of the church in the last quarter of the twelfth century. Before the great fire of 1174, the relics of Queen Ediva reposed under a gilded shrine nearly in the middle of the southern transept. After that catastrophe they were deposited, temporarily, under the altar of the Holy Cross in the nave, but when the rebuilding of the choir was finished they were placed under the shrine

of Archbishop Living on the north side of St. Martin's altar.\* And indeed to this day the words *Edivy Regina*, scratched by a mediæval hand upon the ashlar of the north wall of the Chapel, may still be read.

Unfortunately the position chosen places the picture in a bad light, and in consequence its details, which are of a particularly interesting kind, are somewhat obscured.

If one may hazard a guess as to the provenance of the picture, I would suggest that it may possibly be one of a series of portraits which, according to John Pits,† were painted to commemorate the chief benefactors to Christ Church, sometime in the fifteenth century. Pits states that William Gillingham, a monk of Christ Church, wrote a book "concerning the affairs of the church, which was so acceptable to the prior and chapter that they ordered paintings of the persons celebrated by him to be hung on the walls of the church on the greater festivals in order that the people who were unable to read might obtain some knowledge of the history of the church." Brother Gillingham died—according to Causton's Obituary (Ch. Ch., Cant., MS. D. 12)—in 1409 "after serving for many years as penitentiary and reader in the cloister"; but as there were many benefactors to commemorate, the work of painting their several portraits may well have been spread over the greater part of the fifteenth century, and the *Ediva* portrait may have been one of the last to be taken in hand. At any rate there is a certain degree of portability about the picture, which would make it well adapted for the purpose mentioned by Pits.

The artist, whoever he may have been, was clearly an illuminator of books, and well skilled in the production of the full-page pictures which we call miniatures; and it is also plain that he exercised his art at a date when con-

\* Gervase, *Opera Historica*, R. S., I., 22, 23.

† Jo. Pitsens, *De Scriptoribus Anglicis*, Paris, 1619. I have been unable to trace the authority for Pits' statement.

ventional backgrounds of gold and diaper work had given place to natural scenery, a change of treatment which came about gradually, but did not attain complete ascendancy until the second half of the fifteenth century.

In the example before us the background consists entirely of natural scenery, and there is an attempt at perspective, though some of the details are treated in an exceedingly conventional manner, *e.g.*, the two forest trees, between which the Queen's head is placed, resemble in outline a couple of old-fashioned pen-wipers, but the treatment is quite in accordance with that adopted by miniaturists of the period.

The bright coloured robes of the Queen are set off against a background of dark green foliage, apparently intended to represent a wood—perhaps Thornden Wood in the parish of Swalecliffe, which the composer of the inscription supposed (but erroneously) to have formed part of Queen Ediva's gift. Amidst the gloomy recesses of this wood (on the dexter side of the picture) the figure of a man may be discerned. He wears a round hat with a broad turned-down brim and black band fastened to the crown by gilt studs; a jerkin of dark red material, having short sleeves reaching only to the elbows, and open in front, displaying an under jacket which has close-fitting sleeves reaching to the wrists; a baldric crossed upon the breast; and a belt, to which a long dagger or hunting knife is attached. In one hand he holds a long bow, and in the other an arrow. He appears to be resting on one knee, but the outline of the lower limbs is lost in the dark background. The man is doubtless intended to represent a forester, not improbably the forester of Thornden, an officer who is mentioned frequently in the monastic account rolls.

Above this figure is a house surrounded by a stout palisade of timber. It has a porch with a gabled roof, and a semi-circular headed doorway; and small windows set high up in the wall. Probably this is a conventional representation of the Manor House of Monkton in the Isle of Thanet, which manor, of all the lands conferred upon the

monks by Queen Ediva, was, perhaps, the one they prized most highly.\*

In the middle distance—beyond the confines of the wood—the artist has depicted a long row of houses, including a church with a spire. There is much variety about these buildings, and the treatment is quite in accordance with the methods of fifteenth-century painters. If the tradition that the view represents the village of Birchington be accepted, perhaps some allowance must be made for artistic exaggeration, since it is doubtful if Birchington in the fifteenth century could have made such a brave show of houses.†

In the picture this village, or town, appears to be built upon the edge of a cliff, and above the roofs of the houses are seen the masts and banners of ships, moored to quays beneath the cliff. On the open sea in the distance two three-masted ships and four smaller vessels ride at anchor.

It should be observed that the hulls and rigging of these ships are quite in accordance with the shape and method in vogue in the fifteenth century, and it is unlikely that so much fidelity of detail could have been achieved by an eighteenth-century “restorer.”

The peculiar treatment of the narrow strip of sky, in which swallow-like birds are flying from east to west, should be noticed. It is painted on a separate board laid horizontally with its upper edge projecting so as to form a sort of canopy to the rest of the picture.

Leaving these details, let us now turn to the central figure, of which they form merely the background. The Queen, to whom the artist has imparted both dignity and grace, bears in her right hand a light sceptre of elegant design, and with her left holds aside the long tasselled cordons attached to the jewelled clasps which fasten on her shoulders the crimson mantle. The mantle is lined and

\* Monkton Manor was of large extent and brought in much revenue to the monastery. In *Domesday* Monkton is reckoned as containing 31 carucates of arable land, with 89 villeins and 21 borderers.

† Birchington, though one of the seven non-corporate members of the Cinque Port of Dover, had dropped out of the assessment list in 1495, and therefore at that date was presumably a place of little importance.

trimmed with ermine and has a tippet of the same fur. The kirtle or under dress, which falls in ample folds towards the feet (which, however, are hidden by the scroll), has close-fitting sleeves reaching to the wrists, and is cut low at the neck, which is encircled by a necklace of pearls, having a lozenge-shaped pendant set with the same jewels.

It may be observed that the ermine spots on the kirtle are painted in a different manner from that displayed on the lining of the mantle. On the latter garment the spots are formed by two light strokes of the brush, while those on the kirtle look exactly like tadpoles swimming head downwards! evidently the work of a later hand.

Over the kirtle the Queen wears a purple surcoat embroidered with flowers and having long, close-fitting sleeves. This garment reaches to the knees, or a little lower, and is doubtless a form of the *Cote hardi*, or sideless garment, which was very popular with the ladies of the fifteenth century, though here, owing to subsequent repainting, its original form is obscured.\*

The Queen wears a regal crown over the wired linen veil or henin, which in this example does not assume the extravagant proportions sometimes shewn in others of the period. The hair—of which very little can be seen—is drawn back from the forehead and confined in two small cauls of embroidered stuff, set high up on either side of the head. This is worthy of notice, since it helps to date the picture, for the earlier fashion was to arrange the cauls lower down—covering the ears.†

At the foot of the picture is a scroll with the following inscription:—

Edyve the good queene and noble mother,  
To Ethelstan, Edmund, and Eldred,  
Kinges of England each after other;

\* *E.g.*, what looks like the fur trimming of a jacket is really the kirtle seen through the aperture in the sides of the *Cote hardi*.

† *E.g.*, compare the effigy of Lady Benedicta Vernon at Ludlow, d. 1451, with that of Lady Elizabeth Fitz-herbert at Norbury, Derbyshire, d. 1483, both figured in Mr. F. H. Crossley's *English Church Monuments*. London, Batsford, 1921.

To Christs church of Canterbury did give indeed,  
 Monketon and Thorndenne the monks there to feed,  
 Mepham, Cleeve, Cowling, Osterland,  
 East farleugh and Lenham as we beleeve  
 The year Domio MLXI of Christs incarnation.

From the character of the lettering it is evident that the inscription has been repainted; and from the impossible last line it is equally clear that the restorer blundered badly in his attempt to reproduce the original inscription. "The year Domino" is, of course, nonsense, and moreover the date is just one hundred years too late.

The real date, as recorded in the Monastic Registers, was A.D. 961, and it seems likely that it was expressed originally DCCCCLXI, but becoming partially obliterated in course of time, the D and the four C's were misread *Domino* when the repainting was done.\*

The inscription contains other errors in addition to the above, but for these perhaps the original scribe may be responsible. That he felt some uncertainty about the facts seems to be indicated by the saving clause "as we beleeve." Thus, Queen Ediva was not the mother of Athelstan but his stepmother, nor should Thornden (a wood of 486 acres lying in a detached part of the ville of Dunkirk) have been included in her gift, since it came to Christ Church by a grant from King Offa. On the other hand, the important manors of East Peckham and Aldington, which did form part of the Queen's gift, are omitted. Of the other manors mentioned in the inscription, it will be sufficient to say that Osterland is in the parish of Cliffe at Hoo, and that Lenham means the manor of East Lenham, since West Lenham belonged to the Abbot and Convent of St. Austin's.

In the right-hand corner of the scroll are the letters I. P. F., which possibly may stand for *Ioannes Pictor Fecit*, but more probably, I think, indicate that the picture was

\* In Register J., f. 310, is the following entry: "Ediva regina alio nomine diota Edgiva, soilz: mater Edmundi et Eadredi regum dedit ecclesie Christi-dorobernie et monachis ibidem deo servientibus Meapham, Coulinges et Osterlonde, Leanham, Ealdintun et ad cibum monachorum Pekham, ferleghe et Monketon."



painted when the Convent was ruled by a prior John. If this be so, it is likely that the work was executed during the priorate of John Oxney, that is to say, between 1468 and 1471, a date which would accord well with the costume depicted.

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Since Queen Ediva cannot claim to be one of the familiar figures of English history, a brief historical notice of the lady may form a suitable appendix to the above description of her portrait.

Ediva, whose name (spelt also Eadgifu) means "blessed gift," was the only child of one Sigelm, ealdorman of the county of Kent, and the owner of lands in the Hundred of Hoo. The date of her birth is not known, but it must have been before A.D. 902, in which year her father settled on her all his lands. The circumstances were these: Sigelm in the year mentioned above received orders from King Edward to summon the Kentish fyrd, and as heretoga, or commander-in-chief of the county militia, to lead them against the Danes, who were ravaging the Midlands. Sigelm was an old campaigner. He had seen military service in the days of King Alfred, who calls him "his faithful chieftain" (*meus fidelis dux*),\* but on this occasion he seems to have had premonition that he might not return from the field of battle, and so, before setting out, he prepared for that eventuality by putting his worldly affairs in order, making his daughter heir to all his estate.

The event justified his forethought. Sigelm did not come back from the campaign: he was slain in battle at Holme in East Anglia. What happened will be described best by quoting the account given in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: "This year Ethelwald enticed the army in East Anglia to rebellion, so that they overran all the land of Mercia . . . King Edward went after them as soon as he could gather his army, and overran all their land between the Fosse and the Ouse quite to the fens northward. Then,

\* Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, No. 576.

being desirous of returning thence, he issued an order through the whole army that they should all go out at once. But the Kentish men remained behind, contrary to his order, though he sent seven messengers to them. Whereupon the army surrounded them and there they fought. There fell ealdormen Siwulf and Sigelm, Eadwold the King's thane, Abbot Kenwulf, Sigebrigt the son of Siwulf, Eadwald son of Acca, and many also with them . . . . On the Danish side were slain Eric, their King, and prince Ethelwald, who had enticed him to the war . . . and there was great carnage on both sides, but of the Danes there were more slain, though they remained masters of the field.”\*

It was probably a good many years after her father's death that Ediva became the wife of King Edward, but the date of the marriage is not recorded.”†

She was possibly his third wife, for though the Hyde-chronicler states positively that Æthelstan was illegitimate, Florence of Worcester says nothing about that, and calls his mother a woman of the highest rank (*femina illustrissima*).‡

On the whole, however, it is more probable that Ediva was Edward's second wife. It is certain that he had been married previously to Elfleda, the daughter of ealdorman Ethelm, by whom he had two sons and six daughters. The sons predeceased their father, but three of the daughters made royal marriages by wedding respectively the Emperor Otho I., Charles the Simple, King of France, and Siric, King of Northumbria.

By Ediva King Edward had two sons and two daughters. Edmund, the elder son, succeeded to the throne on the death of his half-brother Athelstan, A.D. 940, and six years later was assassinated in his own court. His brother Eadred succeeded him and reigned nine years, but succumbed at an

\* *A.S. Chr.*, Ingram's Ed., p. 126. Ingram gives the date of the battle of Holme as A.D. 905, but Dr. Plummer, in his critical edition of the *Chronicle*, gives good reasons for placing it three years earlier, viz., A.D. 902.

† Since Edmund, the eldest child of the marriage, was in his twenty-fifth year at the time of his death, which occurred A.D. 946, the marriage of his mother was probably about 920.

‡ *Liber De Hyda*, R.S., iii., 152, and Fl. Wig., R.S., i., 274.

early age to an incurable disease from which he had suffered all his life. By his will Eadred left to his mother his lands at Amesbury, Wantage and Basing, and all his freehold lands in Kent, Surrey and Sussex.\*

Of the daughters, Eadburga took the veil and died as a nun at Winchester. William of Malmesbury has a pretty story illustrative of the precocity of her religious instincts. He relates that when the child was scarcely three years old and still upon her nurse's lap, her father, to test her piety, offered her a book of the Gospels and a chalice and also a bracelet and necklace, whereupon she at once stretched out her hands for the chalice and book.† Elgiva, the younger daughter, whose beauty the same William extols, became the wife of Lewis, Prince of Aquitaine. King Edward died A.D. 925, but Queen Ediva survived him for upwards of 40 years. During her long widowhood she had many bereavements and some vicissitudes of fortune. Thus, in the short and unhappy reign of Edwy she fell into unmerited disgrace and was despoiled of all her possessions, but she outlived her undutiful grandson, and his brother, King Edgar, not only restored to the aged Queen Mother, or rather grandmother, her forfeited lands, but in addition gave her a grant of land at Meon in the county of Southampton.‡

The Chronicler of Hyde Abbey speaks very highly of her influence and character. "She was," he says, "the Mother of the whole English nation, the founder and fosterer of churches, the consoler and sustainer of the needy and oppressed."§ To the Convent of Abingdon she was a great benefactress, and, conjointly with her son King Eadred, to the nunnery of Ely.||

It was in the third year of the reign of King Eadgar, and with his consent, that Queen Ediva made to the Monks of Christ Church her noble gift. Solemnly with her own hand she placed on the high altar of the Cathedral Church

\* *Liber De Hyda*, R.S., ii., 157.

† Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, No. 1319.

‡ Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, No. 1346.

† *Gesta Regum*, R.S., i., 218.

§ *Liber De Hyda*, R.S., ii., 188.

the title deeds (*libros*) of eight Kentish manors, and, to obviate in the future any dispute as to her right to convey them, she caused a document to be drawn up which might serve as a record of her title to the said lands. This document has been preserved, and it contains so much that is of interest that I venture to give here a full translation of its contents\* :—

In the year of the Lord's incarnation DCCCCLXI I, Edgyua, queen, and mother of Kings Eadmund and Eadred, for the health of my soul grant to the church of Christ in Canterbury (*Dorobernia*) and to the monks serving God there, these lands, Meopeham, Culinges, Leanham, Pekkham, Fernlege, Munceetum, Ealdintun, free from the burden of all secular services except the three for the building of bridges, and fortifications and for military service. Now I have thought it worth while to make known to all men how I came by these lands, and especially to Odo the Archpriest, primate of all Britain, and to the family of Christ, that is to say, the monks in the city of Canterbury.

It happened at one time that my father Sigelm having need of thirty pounds, borrowed this sum of a certain nobleman (*principe*) named Goda, and gave him, as security, the land which is called Culinges. And Goda kept the land for seven years, and in the seventh year, when, throughout all Kent, preparation was being made for a military expedition, on which my father Sigelm had to go, he, as he was getting ready, remembered the thirty pounds which he owed to Goda, and at once repaid the money. Moreover, because he had neither son nor daughter but me only, he made me the heir of that land, and of all his lands, and gave me the title deeds (*libros*).

Then it fell out that my father was killed in battle. But when Goda heard that he was dead, he denied that the thirty pounds had been repaid, and for nearly six

\* Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, No. 1065.

years he kept the land which he had received as security from my father.

But in the sixth year a certain neighbour of mine, named Brice Dyring, began to speak openly and urgently to the nobles and to the chief men and the wise men of the kingdom concerning the injury done to his neighbour by the said Goda. Now the nobles and the wise men were out for justice (*pro justitia invenerunt*), and they decided that it would be right and fair that I, his daughter and heir, should purge my father, that is to say, by making oath that my father had repaid the same thirty pounds. And this I did before the whole realm at Agelesford (Aylesford). But not even then was I able to get possession of my land, until my friends approached King Edward, and made requisition to him concerning the same land. And he, that is to say the King, took over the aforesaid land and suspended Goda from every honour that he held of the King, and so he freed the land. Not long afterwards it happened that the same Goda was impleaded in the King's court and being found guilty was sentenced to forfeit every honour he held of the King, and his life was declared to be at the King's mercy. But the King handed him over to me, together with the title deeds of all his lands, to deal with him according to his deserts. I, however, having the fear of God in my heart did not dare to render to him as his conduct against me deserved, and so I gave him back all his lands except two ploughlands at Osterland, but the title deeds of the lands I did not return to him, for I wished to prove what faith he would keep with me in return for the kindness I had shown to him in spite of all the injury he had done to me.

Now when my lord King Edward died, his son Athelstan succeeded to the throne, and the same Goda petitioned the King to ask me on his behalf on what terms I would restore to him the title deeds of his lands. And I willingly, for the love I had for King Athelstan,

handed over to him the title deeds of all his lands, except those relating to Osterland, which he, humbly and with good will, gave up. Moreover, on behalf of himself and all his relations, born and unborn, he and eleven of his compeers made oath that no complaint should be made concerning the aforesaid land. Now this was done at a place called Hamme near Laewes. And I, Edgyua, held the land with the title deeds of Osterlande in the days of the two Kings Athelstan and Eadmund my sons (*sic*).

But after the death of my son King Eadred, I was despoiled of all my lands and goods. For the two sons of the often named Goda, Leofstan and Leofric, took from me the two above named lands, viz., Culinges and Osterlande. And they came to the boy Eadwin, who then had recently been made king, and told him that he had a better right to those lands than I. Therefore I remained deprived of those lands and everything else until the time of King Eadgar, who, on hearing that I had been so badly treated, and despoiled, assembled the nobles and wisemen of England, for he understood that I had been despoiled of my goods and lands with great injustice. The same King Eadgar restored to me all my lands and possessions. Now I with his leave and consent, and in the sight of (*testimonio*) all his bishops and best men, have placed with my own hand upon the altar of Christ which is in Canterbury (*Dorobernia*) the title deeds of all my lands. If any man shall attempt to take away this my gift from the right of the aforesaid church, may Almighty God take from him His Kingdom.\*

Queen Ediva lived for several years after she made the above gift. She was certainly living in 966, for in that year she witnessed a charter of King Eadgar.

It is pleasant to record that in old age she could call herself "Ediva the happy one," since in several charters she

\* Here follows a confirmation of the above by Æthelred II., A. D. 978—1016.

signs *Ediva felix* or *Ediva evax*, thus testifying that she possessed a cheerful and happy temperament, which the trials of life—and she had many—could not disturb. The year of her death is unrecorded, but the day, according to one of the Christ Church obituaries, was the VIII *Kal: Septembris*, that is to say, August 25th. More than three hundred years after she must have passed away there still remained in the vestry of Christ Church two copes, which are described as the gift of Queen Ediva\* in an inventory made when Henry of Eastry was prior.

One may venture to hope that the more prominent position given to her picture, and, possibly, the publication of this little memoir, may do something to revive the memory of the Good Queen Ediva.

I desire to convey to my friend the Rev. Canon T. G. Gardiner my sincere thanks for the photograph from which the frontispiece to this article is taken. Canon Gardiner has also caused an enlargement equal in size to the original painting to be made, and this now hangs in the library in the place formerly occupied by the ancient picture. The photograph is from the studio of Mr. Charlton of Mercery Lane, Canterbury.

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\* A.D. 1321. *Due cape Edive Regine de rubeo samieto brudato.* (*Inventories of Christ Church, Cant.*, Legg and Hope, p. 53.)