

## *Tamworth's Famous Saxon Rulers*

**Penda King of Mercia, warlike and the last Pagan English King. He died in battle against the Northumbrians who took control of Mercia.**

Wulfhere son of Penda and the first Christian King of Mercia.

**Aethelred second son of Penda, succeeds his brother to the throne of Mercia.**

Offa as King of Mercia, he became the most powerful of all rulers, also known as King of all the English. He erected a palace in Tamworth so magnificent in style and furnishings, that it was declared to be 'the wonder of the age'. He fortified the town with a huge earthwork – a wall and a ditch – resting on the rivers Tame and Anker and encircling the town. Charters were granted by Offa from the palace at Tamworth. Offa spent Christmas at Tamworth in 781 AD. He had links with the famous King Charlemagne exchanging letters and gifts and established trading connections as far as Arabia. We will never know why he murdered so many of his relatives following his victory at the Battle of Seckington.

**Aethelflaed, the daughter of King Alfred the Great, has been described as 'our greatest woman-general', one of the most effective leaders we ever had, who commanded troops for eight years and ruled a country as well. She drove back the marauding Danes and seized Watling Street, a strategical highway as the southern boundary of the Danelagh (the border between the Danes and Anglo-Saxons). To strengthen her line of communication across England she established a chain of fortified posts, and in the early summer of 913 AD, with her Mercians, marched to Tamworth, and here, at the junction of its two rivers established a fortification. We know it today as Tamworth Castle. She became Queen of Mercia, although she never claimed to be queen for sound political and personal reasons and assumed the title 'Lady of the Mercians'. She died at Tamworth in 920 AD, an event which resulted in Mercia being merged into Wessex.**

Aethelstan nephew to Aethelflaed and also taught by her the arts of war and kingship, she taught him to read and gave him a jewelled dagger as a symbol of his rank. When he succeeded to the throne of Wessex, after the death of his father, Edward the Elder, he waged ceaseless war against the Danes and again made Tamworth a royal seat. Aethelstan was one of the greatest warriors, administrators and patrons of art to occupy the English throne in the early medieval period. Aethelstan became King of all Britain by clinching victory at the battle of Brunanburh. He died in 943AD.

**Editha, sister of Aethelstan, married Danish leader Sihtric in 925AD. Sihtric broke his Christian vows and relapsed into paganism, deserting Editha. Sihtric died during battle and Editha retired into a convent which she founded at Tamworth, close to the palace where she had reigned as a bride.**



*Replica Sword Pommel*

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Welcome to

# *Saxon Tamworth*



*The Ancient Capital of Mercia*

**Tamworth**  
Borough Council



[www.visittamworth.co.uk](http://www.visittamworth.co.uk)

## *The Ancient Capital of Mercia*

**The Anglo-Saxons came into Staffordshire in the late 6th century, as groups of settlers or tribes.**

The Mercians gradually conquered most of the other Midland tribes to become the most powerful Kingdom stretching from the Humber to the Thames. The three main powerful kingdoms were Mercia, Northumbria and Wessex.

Tamworth was the heartland of the Mercian Kingdom, which had a royal church at Repton, a religious centre at Lichfield and the King's main residence at Tamworth. Certainly the Mercian Kings spent more time at Tamworth than anywhere else. There is believed to have been a royal palace at Tamworth by the end of the 7th century, on the site close to St. Editha's Church. Originally it would have been a timber hall with chapel and somewhere for horses to be stabled. Evidence from signed charters shows that the Mercian Royal families stayed at Tamworth far more than their other palaces and were regularly here for festivals of Christmas and Easter between 751 and 857 A.D. The most well known Mercian Kings are Penda (625–655), Wulfhere (657–674), Aethelred (674–704), Aethelbald (716–757) and Offa (757–796).

Tamworth is also known to have been important within Mercia, because it had a water mill which ground grain for food for the settlement and its livestock. The mill is believed to be the earliest (post Roman) watermill found in Britain. It was powered by the River Anker and used mill stones traded to King Offa from the French King Charlemagne, in exchange for English woollen cloaks. Mercian power began to decline after the death of King Offa and by the 10th century it lost its independence, becoming part of the Kingdom of Wessex to create the Kingdom of England.

**See the magnificent Staffordshire Hoard replica items on display in Tamworth Castle**

## *The Staffordshire Hoard*

**Today, Mercia continues to herald its importance with the discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard, the largest discovery of Saxon gold ever.**

Found not far from the Capital of Mercia, and very close to the Old Roman Road of Watling Street a few miles to the west of Tamworth, the hoard appears to date from around 590 A.D. to 750 A.D. We may never know why it was buried or who it belonged to but it will hopefully, in time, unlock some of the secrets of the Saxon age, and Anglo-Saxon Tamworth.



## *Interesting Facts*

**Mercia (Mierce) meaning boundary or 'boundary folk' took their name from the belt of high land connecting the hills of Cannock Chase with the Forest of Arden.**

One of the new Anglo-Saxon tribes became known as the Tomsaetan, from its settlement in the Tame valley.

**Tamworth is not likely to have been urban in form until the time of Aethelstan in the 10th century, when it had a mint and would have been considered a town, only towns were allowed to have mints. The first penny minted originated from Tamworth and was the only effective currency in England up to the 14th Century.**

The Kings Ditch known as 'Offa's Dyke' constructed in the late 780's as a demonstration of Mercian power, this was not just an agreed boundary but a fortified barrier.

**Tamworth which was the only town in the county of Staffordshire at the time of the Danish invasions has two streets with Danish names, Aldergate (Ellergate) and Gungate (Gumpegate).**

A valuable item such as a sword, drinking cup or a piece of jewellery may also have an even greater symbolic value 'maddum'. This is the stored up history of the object which gives it its power, e.g. Excalibur.

**The sword was the warriors most important and trusted weapon, they were sometimes asked to swear mighty oaths on their sword, they believed that if the oath was broken then so would the sword at the crucial moment. Many of the Hoard pieces are believed to be from weapons of war, especially swords.**

There is a Saxon tradition of the bride being given her wedding ring on a sword, which meant that the warrior was pledging his loyalty to his word. Some swords have been found with small rings incorporated into the handle. Oaths were sworn on these rings, and rings were given as gifts, a tradition which provided for the influence for Lord of the Rings trilogy by J R Tolkien, who was a scholar of Anglo-Saxon.