

# Who was Wulfric Spot?

We do not know when Wulfric Spot was born, where he lived, nor can we even be certain when he died.

## Wulfric 'Spot'

The byname 'Spot' is first attested to in the 12th century, and means 'spot' as in 'spotty' or possibly 'small lump'. In contemporary charters he is known as 'Wulfric Wulfrun's son', and he was one of three known children of Wulfrun.

## Wulfric Spot's family

### Mother

Wulfrun, mother of Wulfric Spot is thought to have been the same Wulfrun that was captured by the Danes at Tamworth in 943. In 985 King Aethelred gave the estate of 'Hampton' to Wulfrun, on which she founded a minster, and which became known as *Wulfrun's tūn*, or Wolverhampton as it is now known.

### Grand-Father

Much of the estate that was endowed upon the minster at Wolverhampton had been granted in 942 by King Edmund to Wulfsige 'the black'. It is likely that this Wulfsige was the father of Wulfrun, since his estate at Abbots Bromley was passed onto Wulfrun and then onto Wulfric.

### Father

Who Wulfrun's husband was remains unknown. One suggestion is that he was a man named Wulfgeat who received lands from King Edgar in 963 which were later passed to Wulfrun and her minster at Wolverhampton. **Kinship** was often expressed in this

period, through names, thus we can see the *Wulf* element passed on from Wulfsige to Wulfrun to Wulfric and to Wulfisige's great-grandson Wulfheah.

This could lead us to speculate that Wulfric Spot's father was a man called Aelfheah, the *Aelf* element being passed to Aelfhelm whose first son bore the parental elements *Wulf* and *heah* (Wulfheah). Two of Wulfrun's children bore the element *Aelf* as did one of her grandchildren, Aelfgifu.

### Brother

Aelfhelm became ealdorman of Northumbria in the 990s, but was said to have been murdered in 1006 and his sons blinded. His third child Aelfgifu married King Cnut.

### Daughter

Wulfric himself evidently had no sons (or at least none that survived him), and the only child mentioned in the will is his '*wretched daughter*'. It is thought that she may have been disabled in some way, and was possibly living in a religious community such as the one in the former Mercian royal *burh* at Tamworth.

## Wulfric the man

From his will we know that Wulfric owned extensive property in Mercia and beyond. His will shows that he bequeathed land in Staffordshire as well as in Derbyshire, Warwickshire and Northumbria. We cannot always tell how big the bequests made were but we suspect that some of the bequests were small in size. Others, however, were considerably larger such as the grant of the land 'betwixt the Ribble and the Mersey' (line 4).

In the '*History of the Abbots*', the monks at Burton refer to Wulfric as a councilor and minister (or thegn) of noble lineage. He is describe in contemporary charters as a 'minister' or 'king's thegn', and many of these charters of King Aethelred also include Wulfric's brother Aelfhelm as a witness as well as Aelfelm's son, Wulfheah. Their prominence is perhaps highlighted by the fact that they are often amongst this first thegns to subscribe their names to these charters.

The importance of the family is attested to in the will which grants lands held in Tamworth by Wulfric to his daughter, land that was 'not to be subject to any service nor any man born' (line 9).

## Death of Wulfric Spot

That actual date of the death of Wulfric Spot is uncertain. We do, however, know that the monks of the Abbey he founded at Burton commemorated his death on 22 October and we can surmise that he may have died shortly after he made his will, that is, some time between 1002 when he is last recorded as a witness to a charter of King Aethelred, and 1004 when the charter which contains a copy of the will was confirmed by King Aethelred at his Christmas court in 1004. A tradition survived at Burton, and is recorded in the 'History of the Abbots' that Wulfric actually died on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1010, fighting the Danes at 'Ipswich' (The Battle of Ringmere). He is said to have been buried at Burton under a stone arch next to the lower door of the church, beside his wife Ealhswith.

## Dating the Will

The reference in the will to an estate at Dumbleton (Gloucs.) indicates that it was shown that the will was drawn up after Wulfric had acquired the estate from Archbishop Aelfric in 1002, and the will obviously existed before it was confirmed by King Aethelred at his Christmas court in 1004. This gives us a date for the will of 1002 x 1004.

The Christmas court was possibly held somewhere in Shropshire, and the importance of the occasion is highlighted by the witness list which includes all the royal princes, both the archbishops and several bishops and abbots. Also witnessing the will were three ealdormen and numerous thegns.

## Bequests

Most of the bequests in the will are of land both to the new abbey at Burton and to members of Wulfric's family. But there are also some more personal bequests, the will begins by granting large sums of money to the king, as well as:

*'two silver-hilted swords and four horses, two saddled and two unsaddled, and the weapons which are due them'* (lines 1-2).

### The Family:

The main beneficiary of the will was Wulfric's brother Aelfhelm and his family. Aelfhelm and his son Wulfheah were to share the estate of land:

*'between the Ribble and Mersey and on the Wirral'* (see line 4), *'on condition that when it is the shad [herring] season, each of them shall pay three thousand shad to the monastery at Burton'* (line 5).

Aelfhelm received Rolleston near to Burton, perhaps to encourage him to keep an eye on the abbey (this estate passed to the abbey after his death in 1008). Aelfhelm's son Wulfheah may have received an estate at Marchington for similar reasons. We know that his other son Ufegeat received *Northtun*:

*'in the hope that he may be a better friend and supporter of the monastery'* (lines 3-4).

His sister, Ælfhryth, apparently died before Wulfric, but he did make bequests to her daughter, Ealdgyth, and to Ealdgyth's husband, Morcar (lines 10-11) and one to their daughter (Wulfric's god-daughter). To the daughter went also *'the brooch which was her grandmother's'* (line 22), presumably Wulfrun's.

To his *'wretched'* daughter he granted:

*'the estate aet Elleforda and that aet Acclea, with all that now belongs there as long as her life lasts... she is to have the use of it as long as she can perform the services due from it... And I desire that Aelfhelm may be the protector of her...but she is to have the lordship'* (lines 7-9)

There are clear implications that Wulfric did not expect his daughter to have an heir and that she was in ill health.