

King Arwald the last Jutish pagan ruler of the Isle of Wight.

From around 530AD, the Jutes, a people who had migrated from Northern Denmark, lived and ruled on the Isle of Wight. King after king was toppled until a man called Arwald found himself in control of the Island around the late 600s, presiding over approximately 300 families, which may have been around 1200 people.

Nearly all that is known of Arwald is from Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*.

Arwald was the last Jutish pagan King of the Isle of Wight (7th century) and last pagan king in Anglo-Saxon England until the Vikings in the 9th century. His name may have been "Arwald" or "Atwald" - Bede's script is often difficult to read. PASE has "Arwald".

During Arwald's reign England was divided into kingdoms controlled by tribal lords forever fighting each other.

Arwald was determined to preserve the Island's pagan way of life. It is no surprise to find out that in the Early Middle Ages, while the rest of England's inhabitants were being brutally converted to Roman Christianity at sword-point, the Wightwarrians, as they were known at the time remained independently pagan. They worshipped gods such as Woden and Thor.

The Jutes on the Island lived in clearings surrounded by forest, in small hamlets of several families in thatched and wooden-tiled homes. They ground corn by hand and wove their own clothing. They made everyday items from wood, clay and iron, and crafted sophisticated and beautiful jewellery.

Bede describes the invasion of the Isle of Wight by Caedwalla, a Wessex King, who, with merciless slaughter, endeavoured to destroy all the island's inhabitants and replace them with his own followers. Caedwalla had also vowed to give a quarter of the Isle of Wight to St. Wilfrid and the Church.



Rome's evangelising pope was taking advantage of any Anglo-Saxon barbarian with a desire to conquer new land and convert the people 'ignorant of the name and faith of God' to the ways of the Lord. One such powerful bishop was called Wilfred who befriended a man called Caedwalla, a barbarian king of Wessex, a warmonger with revenge on his mind mainly because, as a youth, he had been exiled from Wessex.

Caedwalla had later returned to kill the South Saxons and their king called Aethelwealh in what is now Sussex. It was written that he went through the English counties 'by merciless slaughter'. And slaughter he did.

But as Caedwalla looked across the Solent he set eyes on the last remaining pagan outpost, the Isle of Wight, he amassed his army and set sail.

How Saxon Warriors may have looked

Arwald must have put up a brave fight because his quarry, Caedwalla, was badly injured in the battle for the Island, but, alas, it was not enough. It has been written that Caedwalla destroyed all the inhabitants of the Island, killing Arwald (686AD) and forcing the remaining Islanders to renounce their beliefs and convert to Christianity. After the battle Arwald's two younger brothers escaped to the Great Ytene Forest (now called the New Forest). They were eventually betrayed and captured by Caedwalla. They were taken to a place where he "was in hiding with his wounds" at Stoneham, near Southampton. Shortly before they were put to the sword, they allegedly converted to Christianity by the intervention of Abbot Cynibert of Hreutford, being described by Bede as "the first fruits"

of the massacre because of this conversion. Thus canonised, their names are unknown, but they are called collectively "St. Arwald"- after their brother. Shortly after the brother's murder the injured Caedwalla made a pilgrimage to Rome to be baptised - only to die ten days later. Arwald's unnamed sister survived, as the wife of the king of Kent. She was a direct ancestor of Alfred the Great.

Further reading:

<http://waking-the-dragon.co.uk/publish/1wihtwara/prequil/index.html>

<http://fascinatingforgottenfacts.blogspot.com/2016/03/arwald-of-wihtwara-last-pagan-king-in.html>