

**THE
AYLING STORY.**

K. G. Ayling

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Ayling
Story

A history of the Ayling Family Surname

by Kenneth Gordon Ayling

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Introduction

The Idea of enquiring into family history is not new. At some time or other everyone has wondered who his forebears were, and how their surname originated. Indeed many people have made an effort to trace their particular ancestors, and a few have taken the process further by researching the origins and history of the complete family clan.

In the case of Royalty, or the Nobility, the story of their evolution over the years has been carefully maintained for centuries, but even so there are many gaps in their family trees. However, it is true to say that for people whose roots lie in common stock there are very few published accounts dealing with their growth since the Middle ages or earlier.

The information which this book contains regarding the 'Ayling' family may not be unique in general terms, but it is probably the only record so far which deals in detail with the historical meaning of the name, and which traces the development of the family since early times. It is the result of a research programme extending over many years by a voluntary organisation called the 'Ayling Family Registry', which has examined all the available sources of information.

Since July 1837 national records have been kept in London of all Births, Marriages and Deaths which took place in England or Wales. Full details are stated on certificates which can be purchased, but from the basic information given by indexes it was possible to complete various lists covering all Ayling events right up to the present time.

Church registers are an extremely important source of information, extending over a period of more than four hundred years, but their quality varies a great deal, as can be imagined. For example, even the standard form of writing has changed considerably since 1600. The registers first began to be used by Parish Churches about 1540, but it was many years before they were available everywhere, and before they could be relied upon by researchers as being reasonably complete and accurate. Improvements in the registers were made in the middle of the 18th century, and then in 1812 books of a modern style were introduced.

The old original Parish registers used to be kept on the Church premises, but for safety's sake most of them have now been moved to Record Offices set up in County towns. There they can be inspected by the public in a properly controlled manner, but usually copies on microfilm are available instead of the originals, thus saving wear and tear on valuable old documents.

The Ayling Family Registry has examined the records for hundreds of Parishes where Ayling events might have taken place, and has listed all available details for baptisms, marriages and burials, that could be found. This work is still continuing, but the size of the problem is such that it will never be one hundred percent complete. Nevertheless, a very large proportion of all Ayling births and marriages have been traced, especially in the period from 1750 to 1875. Before that, it becomes increasingly doubtful whether further research is worth while, except in certain important and specific cases.

Another very valuable source of information is provided by the national Census. These have been carried out every ten years since 1801, and copies for 1881 and earlier can be inspected in Record Offices. The earliest most useful one is 1851, but 1841 is also available. The Ayling Family Registry has extracts for many towns and villages, which are a great help in building up the family-groups in existence at the time.

From the sixteenth century onwards, some Aylings made a will before they died, and where copies are available, extracts have been taken of appropriate details which might help in tracing the family concerned.

Street and business Directories were published at various dates from the early 1800's, and some of these can still be seen in Libraries, or Record Offices. Here again, extracts have been taken of all Ayling entries that have been found.

As regards the origin and meaning of the name Ayling, it was necessary to research back for some fifteen hundred years to the early Anglo-Saxon era, and also to the time of the Norman invasion in 1066. Fortunately, a number of books about early British history were available to refresh one's knowledge of those days. Thanks are gratefully extended to all those scholars whose accumulated works have provided such a magnificent fund of information for the benefit of later generations.

Many present-day Aylings have been contacted by the Ayling Family Registry, including members of large family groups in Australia, New Zealand, America and even in Argentina. All these good people have given information regarding births, marriages and deaths for themselves and their ancestors as far as possible. This has enabled family-trees to be duly registered, free of charge, and some of these are quite extensive; even so it would not be too difficult or expensive to extend some cases still further back into the past.

The book which follows is divided into three sections. First an account of how surnames came into use, and the name Ayling in particular.

Second, the life stories of two characters from the distant past, who may well be connected with the origins of the name. Third, an account of the development of the Ayling family from its early beginnings until the present day, and the towns and villages that were involved.

In conclusion, it is clear that the name 'Ayling' has ancient and noble origins, and it has flourished for very many years. May it long continue.

K.G. Ayling, 1983

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A descendant of John Ayling of 1478.

Note:

The Ayling Family Registry was originally set up by Mr K.Ayling to collate facts and information regarding the Ayling Family line. It is no longer in existence.

History & the Name

In the far distant primeval past human beings were extremely primitive. They moved around the world in small groups, hunting for food and defending themselves against their enemies. They could barely communicate with each other, and there was no question of names for anyone or anything.

But gradually, after the passage of many thousands of years, mankind became more intelligent and the people could converse in a simple manner. They learned how to make fire, and they produced rough tools to help them in their daily work. Civilisation began when men found they could maintain a constant supply of food by keeping farm animals and by growing their own cereals. Nomadic family groups came together to form small settlements, followed by larger townships, leading to cities, and finally to kingdoms and empires.

An Egyptian empire certainly existed five thousand years ago, and there were other groups in various stages of development all across the occupied world. Over the years, large movements of population took place, resulting in substantial increase in violence when separate racial groups met one another. The human brain had developed very considerably, and a full-scale vocabulary came into use. The art of drawing and counting was being mastered and early forms of writing were invented, so that information could be passed on from one generation to the next. The leaders in each section were given names or titles, and so were the gods and spirits.

Soon there were many empires that flourished and declined, including the Persians, and the Syrians, and various biblical groups. From their writings and other evidence it is clear that personal names were then in common use, especially among the upper classes. A large number of these names have continued, right up to the present time. Examples are Christopher and Peter from the Greeks, Claud (Claudius) and Paul (Paulus) from the Romans, and many names with biblical connections such as David, James, John, Matthew and Samuel.

Most of Europe was occupied by warrior tribes, that were tough, brave and extremely numerous. These Celtic races spread westwards from the Danube area about the 5th century B.C. and eventually reached Britain, where they mingled with the ancient people already there, people who had been capable of building the monument of Stonehenge in about 1500 B.C. Together they constructed defensive hill-top settlements, such as the Trundle (north of Chichester). Later, when iron tools became available, the people in Southern England were able to clear the more wooded areas at lower levels and along riverbanks. Farming became steadily more important and efficient.

At about the same time as the Romans first came to Britain, a Belgic tribe from Gaul (France), called the Atrebates, landed in the Isle of White area, and then spread eastwards. The Romans meanwhile conquered the whole country, except for the Celtic strongholds of Cornwall, Wales and Scotland. As a result the languages of those districts still have certain original features, and there are several personal names from the Celtic that are well known in Scottish history, such as Donald and Duncan.

In Sussex the local Belgic leader was called Cogidubnus, who became an ally of the

Romans, with the result that there was little friction between the two peoples. It is said that he lived like a king at the magnificent Roman palace, the ruins of which can still be seen at Fishbourne, near Chichester. No doubt he was responsible for the original foundation of the town of Chichester which was built astride the east-west line of communication along the coastal plain. The Romans named it *Noviomagus* (New market), and it has always been an important place.

The Romans occupied Britain for some four hundred years, with alternate periods of trouble and good-fortune, but in Sussex the situation was comparatively stable. The local people were engaged on extensive farming activity, and there was a marked growth in trade and employment, including the building of Stane Street, the Roman road that ran straight from Chichester to London, via Bignor and Pulborough. The Roman towns and the Roman leaders all had their own Latin names, but with very few exceptions none of them survived after the evacuation in the early part of the 5th century A.D. The remaining population simply carried on with their own original language, although Latin did continue in use on official documents, and in religion, for very many centuries.

The Roman villas were abandoned, the towns were deserted, and the roads started to decay. The natives reverted to their old ways, with the result that British civilisation came to a standstill, and the Dark Ages had begun.

From 400 A.D. onwards for several centuries there is very little definite information about events in Britain, yet it was during this period that the English nation and language was born. In an attempt to unravel the mysteries of the age, many scholars have examined all the available evidence and have been able to produce a probable history of the period. However, this is general in character, and relies very much upon various authorities who were writing at a much later date.

The first authority was a British ecclesiastic named Gildas who in about 550 A.D. wrote a religious document to demonstrate the evils of the day. In it he included some items of information about earlier historical events, but while his remarks may possibly be true, they do not inspire much factual confidence.

In 674 A.D. a Monastery was founded at Wearmouth in northern England, followed by a second one eight years later at Jarrow. One of the monks who was educated at Wearmouth was Bede (*Beda*), and in 691 he took Deacon's orders at Jarrow. He was the most learned man of his day and while living in studious seclusion he wrote many hymns, and lives of Saints. His most famous work was an ecclesiastical history of England, which was later translated into Anglo-Saxon by King Alfred. In general, the Venerable Bede repeated the comments of Gildas but added details regarding the various invading tribes of Angles and Saxons.

Nennius was a Welsh scholar of the 9th century, and he produced a composite collection of earlier works, including the ancient Britons and the Romans. His effort seems rather fictional in style, and he mentions King Arthur as a leader of the local natives against the Saxon invaders. He ascribes to Arthur a victory at Mons Badonicus around the year 500 A.D., after which there was comparative peace for forty to fifty years. The site of 'Mount Baden' is unknown, but it might be Badbury Rings in Dorset.

Finally there are several versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the earliest of

which was completed between 895 and 900 A.D., which incorporates most of the previous material. They are written in diary form, with yearly dates assigned to the various events, but there are not many early entries and the dates may not be reliable. Nevertheless, the Chronicle is a most important document, and is the main basis of Anglo-Saxon history right up to the Norman Conquest.

In southern England, there were repeated raids and migrations by Saxons from north Germany. These were men of aggressive and adventurous natures who had moved westward across Europe until they reached the North Sea around the mouths of the Rivers Elbe and Weser. They were courageous and loyal, but they were pagans and had deities named Tiw, Woden, Thor and Frig (words which still survive as days of the week).

Armed with spears and wooden shields, they came ashore in small groups, and fought their way into the district until small settlements were secured, usually near rivers and creeks. Over the centuries, the remaining Celtic natives were driven into the mountainous regions of Wales and Scotland, or else they fell in battle. There is no evidence that they intermingled with the Saxons, who brought their own families with them.

The first Anglo-Saxon leaders to be mentioned in old records were the brothers Hengist and Horsa who landed near the mouth of the Thames in 449 A.D., and whose family founded the Kingdom of Kent. Another important warrior was named Aelle (sometimes spelt *Aella*) who landed near Selsey in 477 A.D. with his three sons.

Aelle succeeded in taking over the whole of the south coast area, and much more besides. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle refers to Aelle as being King of Sussex (*South Saxons*), but his influence and power covered a much wider area and he was the first leader to be described by the title of Bretwalda or 'Ruler of all Britain'. This title should not be taken too literally, and the exact extent of Aelle's authority is unknown. Nevertheless, it is significant that he is mentioned as the first in a list of Bretwaldas, the last being the great King Egbert, of Wessex, who did indeed rule over the whole of England in the 9th century.

In the year 495 A.D., a prince named Cerdic landed in the Southampton area, and since by then the Aelle family must have been in a powerful position it is likely that the Cerdic family was related to them or at least allied with them. In any event Cerdic went on to found a dynasty which produced the long line of Anglo-Saxon kings, who ruled until the Norman Conquest some five hundred years later.

The Saxons brought their own language with them. It was Teutonic in origin and had many inflections, but it soon became established as the only language for the whole of England, although there were several different dialects. Modern English is directly descended from it, but over the years it was subject to several outside influences, arising especially from the Scandinavian and Norman-French invasions.

The Anglo-Saxon, or Old English alphabet had a character for 'ae' which was in frequent use, but subsequently it became either an 'a' or an 'e'. The alphabet also had a separate character to represent the sound 'th' which was not retained in later English. In appearance it was rather like a letter 'y' and sometimes it changed to this (thus Ye = *The*). The old letter 'c' could be sounded as a 'k', so for example Cyng = King. The letter 'g' was often sounded rather as the modern 'y', so Weg = *Way* (road), Stigel = *Stile* (step), Gea = *Ye* (Yes), and Geard = *Yard* (enclosure).

About two-thirds of all the place-names in England seem to have Anglo-Saxon origins of from the fifth to tenth centuries, but some are comparatively modern names which were given a Saxon appearance. Naturally, the oldest names occur where the Saxon tribes first established themselves, especially in Sussex and the eastern counties. Almost always they consist of two parts of which the first element is descriptive, or the name of a person, or a family. The second element is usually one of several Saxon words, which must now be considered separately.

The ending '-ham' is from the earliest Saxon periods, and this word developed later into the English 'home'. Thus words such as Longham, or Westham, explain themselves 'Ham' endings are common in South and East England - Fareham, Horsham, Chatham, Faversham.

A Saxon word belonging to a rather later period is 'tun' or 'ton', and this means an enclosure. It later became the English word 'town', but its original meaning was nothing as large or grand as the present word indicates. To some extent the ending '-ton' took over from '-ham', and it does occur in areas where '-ham' is rare, often towards the north and west - Tiverton, Taunton, Preston, Bolton.

Another Anglo-Saxon ending in common use is Wyrth (a farm) which appears in place names such as '-worth'. Others are Burg or *Burh* (a fortified place) which became '-bury' or '-borough', and Hyrst (a copse) which became '-hurst', and Wic (a farm-stead) which became '-wick' or '-wich'.

A special explanation is required for those common place names which end in '-chester' or '-cester'. This ending was originally derived from the Latin *Castra* (a camp), but the word had been taken over by the Saxons even before they invaded England. Chichester for example, was believed to have been called Cissa-cester, the town being named after the man who conquered it (Cissa, the son of King Aelle of Sussex).

One Anglo-Saxon ending of great importance has not been mentioned so far. It is '-ing', and it occurs at the end of a great many words in both old, and in current use. It can be used in several different ways, but in general it means to be 'connected with, or following on from'. It was very important in a patronymic sense - that is, the use of the suffix 'ing' indicated that it had been derived from the name of a father, or ancestor, or person of a higher authority. Thus the Anglo-Saxon 'cyning' was the son of a king, and 'aetheling' was the descendant of a noble. The followers of King Aelle would have been called 'Aelle-ings'.

Place names ending in '-ing' are very common in the South and East, and Sussex in particular. Hastings, for example, indicates that it was the place where the tribe of Haesta lived. Similarly, Reading comes from *Reada-ing* and Angmering from *Angenmaer-ing*. There is also Cocking (*Cocca*), Ferring (*Ferra*), Iping (*Ipa*), Didling (*Dyddel*), and many more.

It is very striking that '-ing' place names are most prevalent in West Sussex, where Aelle lived in 477 A.D. and from where he built up his kingdom. It is not possible to list all the towns and villages concerned, but a few examples will be of interest, and all of them were mentioned years later in the Domesday Book: - Wortling, Tarring, Harting, Tillington, Stedham, Pagham, Petworth and Pulborough. In addition the following villages are among those where the existing church has remains of Saxon work, although this would belong to the later Saxon era, after the pagan invaders had been converted to Christianity: - Cocking,

Sompting, Woolbeding, Singleton, Stoughton, and Burpham.

Personal names of Anglo-Saxon times can now be considered, and they, too, often consisted of two elements. Each separate part had a meaning of its own, but the combined word did not necessarily make a phrase of any consequence. Many experts have devoted a great deal of time to a study of these matters, and the following are possible explanations put forward for some of the more common Anglo-Saxon names.

‘Ead’ is an old word for Rich or Happy (Rich in mind). It combines with other words to give Edwin (Happy friend), also Edith, Edmund, Edward and Edgar, and there were two Angle-Saxon kings named Edred and Edwig (*Edwy*).

‘Beorht’ is a word meaning Bright and it combines with other words to produce names such as Egbert (the first great King of England) and the better known Albert, Herbert, Gilbert, Robert and Bertram.

It is clear that words with a pleasant or helpful meaning were popular among the Anglo-Saxons for use in names, and a good example is ‘Win’, meaning *Friend*. This has produced such names as Baldwin, Edwin, Godwin, Winston and Winifred.

‘Aelf’ was Anglo-Saxon for Elf, and in combination with ‘Ree’ (meaning *Counsel*) it gave the name Alfred, and the first famous King Alfred the Great. Later, the name lapsed completely, and was not revived until the 18th century.

Finally in this brief survey, the very important Anglo-Saxon word ‘Aethel’ must be mentioned. It appears to have six letters, but it should be remembered that ‘ae’ was a single character originally, and so was ‘th’. Names beginning with Athel and Ethel are obviously derived from it. ‘Th’ has sometimes been changed into a ‘y’ and so prefixes such as Ayl, Ayl and Ail are descended from the original ‘aethel’.

‘Aethel’ means Noble, in the sense of being noble in character, or noble in birth, and in consequence it was a word much favoured for the names of royalty or other persons of high rank. In a slightly different sense, it may have come to have a meaning somewhat similar to the modern ‘Prince’.

The brothers of King Alfred the Great had been Kings of England in their turn, and their names were Ethelbald, Ethelbert and Ethelred. Their father was called Ethelwulf. There was also a later king named Athelstan. Names of this type appear on many ancient Anglo-Saxon charters and other documents.

So far as modern names are concerned, great care is necessary in their interpretation, and even though a word may appear to have the ‘aethel’ connection, not all of them will have such an origin. For example Albert, Alice and Ethel are all considered to be ‘noble’, but not Aileen or Eileen (a form of *Helen*) nor Alan (of early Breton origin).

It is now convenient to consider the development of English surnames and the name ‘Ayling’ in particular. The Normans, during the 11th century, introduced many family names into England, but for a long while these were confined to the upper classes. The common folk did not have family names, but even so the ancient clan and tribe names persisted from very early times.

For a long while there was little need for surnames, because it was unlikely that the John who lived in one village would be confused with another John who lived in the neighbouring village. Contact between the two communities did not often occur, and in any

event the two men were probably of different ages and occupations. As the centuries moved by however, the population increased, and it became more difficult to distinguish one from another, especially when lists were prepared for purposes of taxation and the like.

Gradually, therefore, individual families began to assume a surname, partly as a means of identification or description, but also with a feeling of pride in their ancient origins.

Some people decided on simple descriptive names, such as Butcher, Baker, Farmer, Longfellow, Whitehead, Castle, Greenfield and many more obvious derivations. Others took over their father's name, such as Johnson, or Robertson, and others adopted their original clan or tribal names. Names ending in 'ing' were mostly in the latter class, as in the case of the Aylings.

The name 'Ayling' is very rare, and in the first place it is necessary to make quite clear that it has no connection with the words 'ailing' or 'ailment'. The verb, to ail (meaning to feel unwell) is an old word with an Anglo-Saxon origin, but it has an independent derivation, and has no link whatever with any surname.

The fact that 'Ayling' has the ending of 'ing' means that it is patronymic in form, and represents the descendants of some ancient ancestor of Saxon times. It only remains, therefore, to decide the origin and meaning of the first part of the name, the 'Ayl-'. There are two possibilities (both somewhat similar), both quite exciting and romantic, in some degree.

The first alternative refers back to King Aelle of Sussex, the Saxon warrior who landed near Selsey in 477 A.D. and who became the 'Ruler of all Britain'. His son, Cissa, had Chichester (*Cissa-cester*) named after him, and another son, Wlencing is said to have had Lancing (near Worthing) named after him. Also it seems certain that many of his followers were commemorated in a similar manner by villages and townships throughout West Sussex. King Aelle himself is thought to have been associated with Hayling Island, and this deserves consideration in more detail.

In olden times the island was bigger than it is today, but over the centuries large sections were washed away by the sea, especially along the southern shore. The part now known as Eastoke must have been far more extensive fifteen hundred years ago. There were Roman buildings on both sides of the narrow channel which separated the island from the mainland, and in the centre of the island was a fortified place, or stronghold, now known as Tourner Bury. This was possibly of Roman construction, but may be even older.

The name 'Hayling' has the '-ing' ending, and is clearly of Saxon origin. The experts in such matters state that it has been derived from Haegling, or the place where followers or tribe of Haegel lived, and the island was referred to as Haeglinga in a document which has survived from 905 A.D. Since 'ae' is one character, and since 'g' is pronounced as a 'y', it is obvious that Haegel (or *Hayel*) could be a later version of Ayel or Aelle.

Following his landing on or near the Selsey peninsula, Aelle eventually ruled over the whole of Sussex. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states that in 491 A.D. he and his son Cissa "besieged Andredcester (the Roman fort of Anderida, Pevensey) and slew all the inhabitants; there was not even one Briton left there". But before these conquests, it is certain Aelle and his sea-faring tribe of Aelle-ings would have swarmed all over the sheltered waterways of Chichester harbour, and up the inlets leading to Emsworth, Bosham, and to Fishbourne. No doubt he would have come to the island, where he would have discovered

the old overgrown fortress of earlier times. He might very well have made his headquarters at this stronghold which he could easily defend, and here he might have settled his tribe, while he gathered his strength and his resources before setting out on his warlike campaigns.

Obviously, there is no proof of any of these suggestions, but they are reasonable deductions, and they are at least as valid as all the other fragments of history assigned to the 5th century A.D. King Aelle of Hayling Island may be hidden in the shadows of the past, but at least he is a romantic figure to all those who may claim to be descended from him.

It is quite probable, and by no means a flight of fancy, to imagine that the tribal name of Aelle-ing continued to be known and used in the West Sussex area for many, many centuries, and that when people in that area needed a surname for themselves, some of them chose to use the name of their ancient forbears. Indeed, it may have been an automatic and natural transmission, rather than a deliberate selection of a name.

Research has shown that the ancestors of present day Aylings invariably come from the border area of Sussex and Hampshire, from the 16th to the 18th Centuries, and even at the latter end of the 20th century most Aylings are still living in that district. Surely, it is not a mere coincidence that it is the same district as that over which the mighty King Aelle held sway fifteen hundred years ago!

The second alternative origin of 'Ayling' is the one favoured by several authorities, who claim that the prefix Ayl- is derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'Aethel', which has been referred to several times previously. It is said that a whole group of surnames has descended from this one word, in addition to the various Christian names which have already been mentioned. It is easy to understand that names beginning with athel or Ethel may have this origin, but it would also include such present names as Aylmer (*Noble/Famous*), and Aylward (*Noble/Guard*), and Aylwin (*Noble/Friend*).

The name Ayling is in this group, but is slightly different because the second element 'ing' is not a simple word in it's own right, but is a suffix indicating a follower or descendent. Thus 'Ayling' means the son of a noble person, or the descendent of someone of noble birth, and it could apply to a whole family or clan, and not merely to a single relation. This derivation of Ayling from 'Aethel-ing' gives rise to some important comments, as the term Atheling did not appear in Anglo-Saxon records until a fairly late date, and then it was mostly used to denote the rightful heir to the royal throne of England.

The Saxon King, Ethelred (The Unready) ruled over England from 978 A.D. onwards, but his power was severely curtailed by repeated raids and invasions from Denmark. From his first marriage he had several sons, including Edmund (Ironside). His second marriage was in 1002 to Emma, who was a sister of the Duke of Normandy (the grandfather of William the Conqueror). The eldest son of this second marriage was Edward (the Confessor), but he spent the first part of his life in Normandy.

When King Ethelred died on 23rd April 1016, he was succeeded by Edmund, but he too died soon afterwards, on 30th November 1016, and the throne of England was passed into the hands of the Danes in the person of King Canute and his sons. Edmund had only one surviving brother, (from Ethelred's first marriage) but he was driven out by Canute, and later killed. No doubt the same fate awaited Edmund's young son (the Atheling), but he was helped to escape to Hungary, where he lived in exile.

When the Danish era came to an end in 1042, Edward the Confessor (from Ethelred's second marriage) came to England from Normandy, and took over the Crown, thus restoring the Anglo-Saxon line of kings (even though he had a Norman mother). Edward did not have any children, or any surviving male relatives, so when he died in January 1066, the problem of succession was difficult. However, the throne was taken over by Harold, who was the powerful Earl of Wessex, and the brother of Edward's wife.

Meanwhile in Hungary, the exiled Atheling himself had children - a son Edgar, and a daughter Margaret, and these two were the only true descendants of the ancient Anglo-Saxon line. Edgar was always known as Edgar Atheling, but in January 1066 he was considered too young and inexperienced (he was only aged 15 or 16) to occupy the throne of England, so King Harold was accepted in his place.

After King Harold, and his brothers, were killed at the Battle of Hastings, the crown was then officially offered to Edgar Atheling in order to continue the struggle against William the Conqueror, but Edgar wisely swore loyalty to William, and retired from any full-scale conflict. Nevertheless, he did combine from time to time with those forces which continued in opposition to William. This was particularly so, during the years from 1068 to 1074, when he was mostly living in Scotland at the Court of King Malcolm. However, peace was eventually established between the two men, and thereafter Edgar Atheling was no trouble or threat to the Norman Kings of England. Indeed, he was honourably treated, as befitted the last direct heir of Anglo-Saxon royalty.

Edgar Atheling did remain at the scene of all-important events, but as a 'noble prince' rather than as an active politician. In this he was wiser than many other more militant figures among the Anglo-Saxons. At least he assured himself a long and interesting life, and he was well over 75 years of age before he died.

It is quite likely that Edgar's family and descendants were all known as Athelings, and although there is no documentary evidence, they could well have been the founders of the Ayling clan which thrived in the West Sussex area from the 15th century onwards. There was an Edward Atheling recorded as being in Surrey in 1176, but otherwise no early records of the name have yet been traced.

Edgar Atheling's sister married King Malcolm of Scotland, and she was a well-loved and respected Queen. Later she became Saint Margaret, and three of her children became Kings of Scotland during Edgar's lifetime. Her daughter Matilda married King Henry I of England and they founded the royal line which has continued through to the present day.

If indeed Edgar Atheling and his sister were among the early ancestors of the Aylings, then their present-day descendants can rightly claim that it was their forbears who provided the only important hereditary link between the ancient Anglo-Saxon kings and the Norman dynasty which followed. The fact that this has led on to the royal family of the 20th century may seem rather surprising to a present day Ayling, but at least it is in accordance with the 'noble' traditions attached to his family name.

Famous Ancestors:

The following brief life stories concern two Anglo-Saxon leaders in Southern England, who deserve to be better known, and who may well have been among the early ancestors of the Ayling family. They contain a considerable amount of detail, but while much of the content is fictional, they are both closely based upon the known historical events of the time.

- i) King Aelle
- ii) Edgar Atheling

King Aelle

476 A.D. - In the spring of this year, the leader of the Saxons who dwelt in the region of the River Weser in North West Germany called into council all the elders of the tribe. In the township by the river, Aelle accepted their allegiance, together with his three sons Cymen, Lencing and Cissa and his young daughter Elfreda. There was much distress among the people because of the harsh winter, and because of raids by neighbours who wrongly stole their cattle and the food they had diligently produced. So Aelle decreed that he would lead a battle group of his kinsman across the seas to a country called Albion by the Romans of old. He would obtain new and rich lands, as Hengist had done in 449, and settle all his people there. It was also decreed that a fleet should be built and stores assembled. Then a gathering of the tribe made supplications to the god Thor, and the heavens gave their sanctions to the wishes of the people.

May 477. - During the winter two fast warships had been completed, also a command vessel and two heavy transports. After these had been loaded with food and equipment, Aelle and his sons Cymen and Cissa went aboard with their escorts of fighting men. Then the boats moved down the river and out to sea, watched from a hilltop by all the people, including Lencing who remained behind to protect them.

Each evening the fleet pulled up onto a deserted shore, and camped quietly for the night. Later they were delayed for several days by a great storm, and had to wait in a sheltered inlet, but at last Aelle gave the order to turn away from the land and cross the wide channel towards the new country he had been told about. After many hours, everyone was weary, some were anxious and dismayed, but there was great excitement when green hills and white cliffs were seen. A camp was set up on the rocky shore, and guards were placed around.

June 477 (1st Week) - Cissa led a patrol along the beach, and climbed a steep ravine to the cliff-top where many cattle were grazing on the rolling hills of verdant grass. Inland were large forests, and in every clearing there were villages and farm buildings. This was the Kingdom of Kent, and strangers would not be welcome, so Cissa returned quickly to the safety of the camp on the seashore. Next morning Aelle departed before dawn, and thus avoided the large groups of soldiers who approached from both sides. For several days the fleet moved westwards along the shore, past flat and marshy land and desolate beaches, and past the hilly area where the tribe of Haesta lived - (Hastings).

June 477 (2nd Week) - The journey continued. There were more high white cliffs, and several places where rivers flowed into the sea. Cissa led another patrol inland, and reported that the land was now reasonably level, and was perfect for agriculture, so Aelle ordered the boats to proceed along the coast searching for a suitable place for a permanent camp. They passed round a large flat headland (Selsey Bill) and then went ashore near an inlet leading into sheltered inland water. Cymen was the first person to land, and so the place was named Cymenesora (probably near the Witterings).

June 477 (3rd Week) - A defensive camp was established within easy reach of the

boats, strong points were set up, and armed patrols were constantly maintained. Aelle warned his men to be prepared for battle, and sure enough three days later they were attacked by a force of natives, who made a lot of noise but who were ill-equipped and badly led, so they were easily put to flight.

June 477 (4th Week) - Aelle was worried because he felt sure that his forces were insufficient to repel a more determined attack, so Cissa led a strong patrol each day to penetrate deep into enemy country. Little was discovered at first but on the third day they came to a group of farm buildings and cottages on a small hill near an inland waterway. Cissa stormed into this hamlet, but found it empty, so he moved on to a high point nearby. He then saw that the inlet came to an end with a series of quays and warehouses, but across to the right was a frightening sight, for here there was a very large fortified town, with many houses, and surrounded by a wall of great strength. Outside there was a military encampment where hundreds of men were moving about. It was obvious that a large army was being gathered together from the surrounding countryside. Cissa withdrew at once, and reported back to Aelle and his commanders knew that they could not overcome such a large enemy force, so they made plans to leave by sea, at short notice. Patrols were substantially increased, by day and night, to give early warning of an enemy approach, and the ships were made ready.

July 477 (1st Week) - At this time, Aelle sent a small force in a fast boat to explore the inlets and waterways, and to look for an area that could be more easily defended. It was under the command of Bosa, a fleet captain, who was told he must return within two days. That evening a scout reported that there was great activity in the enemy camp, and the following morning three large army groups were seen moving southwards. One of these was approaching directly towards Aelle's position, but the first clash of patrols did not occur until mid-day. Then began a general withdrawal to the boats, section by section, and the rear guards were ordered to move rapidly about, to give the impression that a large force was present. The enemy only advanced with great caution, so everyone was aboard the boats and well out to sea before the British soldiers reached the beach. By great fortune, Bosa and his boat arrived back at this moment and announced that there was a suitable land to the west. Accordingly Aelle ordered the fleet to sail in the opposite direction until outside of the enemy. Later, he turned back westwards on the ebb tide, moved past the inlet, and landed on a sloping beach of small pebbles (Hayling Island). The whole area was deserted, and Aelle remained there for some days while reorganising his forces.

July 477 (2nd Week) - Bosa explained that three miles beyond the first inlet there was another one, and that these two waterways joined together about four miles inland, thus forming an island between them. This island was much wider in the south than in the north, and in the middle it narrowed to only about half a mile. The land was flat, and of good quality; it could be easily defended, because when the water was low it was surrounded by a great deal of soft mud. Aelle ordered his commanders to explore the whole area, and later they reported that the island was uninhabited except for a small number of hamlets. These had been overcome, and the prisoners brought back to work in the camp. Aelle discovered an ancient stronghold, left behind by the Romans (Tourner Bury), and here he made his headquarters. There were salt works nearby, and safe places to keep the boats. The defence

of the island was organised, and plans were made for the maintenance of a permanent camp.

July 477 (3rd Week) - At this time a large rally was held to honour the gods who had blessed Aelle and his men with a safe journey and a successful settlement in a new land. It was decreed that the island should be named Aellinga (*Hayling*) since it was the place where the followers of the great leader Aelle would reside. Small boat crews were organised, and Cymen in a fighting ship and Bosa in a transport left on a long journey back to Germany to collect as many reinforcements as possible. Aelle wished them fair weather and told them to avoid all other boats, and not to contact any natives on shore.

July 477 (4th Week) - Twenty men in two small boats were seen to land on the southern shore, and Aelle sent an armed force to bring them to him. Their leaders were named Diddel and Beppa, and they also came from north Germany. They had made a settlement further west along the British shore, but had been driven out with many losses by a large force of natives. They swore allegiance to Aelle, and were accepted with much rejoicing.

September 477 - In this month Cymen and Bosa returned from Germany with many ships and a great many men. They also brought large amounts of food and other supplies, especially seed for planting in the new land. Only once had they seen any enemy boats, but these had disappeared during the night. Lencing now had only a small defence force in Germany, to protect the women and children, and the elderly. These were ready to leave as soon as boats were again available. Aelle was greatly pleased, since he now had sufficient forces to combat any possible attack that might be made upon him. After two days of celebrations, Cymen and Bosa left once more for Germany.

December 477 - In this month, the last boats arrived, with the women and children. Great was the rejoicing, and a large gathering paid tribute to Aelle and his commanders. The journey had been an arduous one, because of bad weather and rough seas on several occasions. The crews and passengers had often been cold and wet, but now they had new huts that were prepared for them. The headquarters stronghold became also a small town, and a number of farm hamlets were established.

478 - Aelle and his son Cissa led strong raiding parties by boat to many different places on the mainland, where they surprised and harried the British, and drove the farmers from their fields. So great was the alarm they caused, that it was only in the larger villages and in the capital city that the enemy felt secure.

479 - In this year, Aelle and his son Cymen led two attack forces from the mainland, where they completely destroyed five large villages. Then they advanced on the main capital town both from the South and from the East, but halted within sight of the town walls. Those within the city saw that the attackers did not have many men, so they rushed forth to destroy them. At this very moment, Cissa arrived at the Western gates with a large army, and he attacked the town with great ferocity and courage. There was much slaughter, and the enemy was utterly defeated. Large numbers were driven northwards over the little hills into the wood which was called Andredesleag (Sussex Weald). Cissa took command of the town, and it was named Cissa-cester (Chichester).

480 - Aelle now controlled all the countryside for a great distance around Cissa-cester, and he moved his headquarters from Aellinga Island to the mainland. At a huge

gathering near the town, all of Aelle's followers and also the local tribal leaders, paid homage to Aelle and gave him the title of King of the Suf-sexe (South Saxons = Sussex).

483 - Aelle and his sons made journeys through the kingdom in many directions, and received the allegiance of all the local leaders, especially those to the East, where the followers of Wurth resided (Worthing). In this year also, many of Aelle's commanders settled their own families in the area. Bosa, the skilled captain of the boats made his home near an inlet from the sea, at Bosa-ham (Bosham). Cocca, the farmer, took over the fertile land near the hills and called it Cocca-ing (Cocking). Diddel and Beppa also created small farmsteads at Diddel-ing (Didling) and Beppa-tun (Bepton).

485 - Aelle gathered a large army and marched to the east, where he came upon a strong force of British encamped upon a hillside near a burna (stream). Here at Mearcraedesburne (believed to be near Shoreham) a fierce battle was fought, but at nightfall both sides withdrew. Although the result was indecisive, the authority of Aelle in the coastal area was never challenged again.

488 - During the summer, the people of Kent became without a leader, and Aesc succeeded to this kingdom, which had been formed years before by Hengist. When Aelle received this information, he set up a magnificent court, and made a royal progress across the Kingdom of Sussex to meet with the King of Kent on the borders of their lands. The two kings paid homage to each other with much ceremony, and agreed that never would they engage in aggression against each other. The leader of the people of Haesta (Hastings) was also present, but had no influence on events.

491 - King Aelle now sought to improve the eastern part of his kingdom where disobedience and treason had occurred. He and Cissa formed a large army, and marched along the coast, exacting due tribute as they passed. When they reached Andredescester (the Roman fort of Anderida, Pevensey) they besieged the rebels and natives who were enclosed therein, and attacked them continuously. Eventually all the inhabitants were killed - no one survived. After this the people of Haesta submitted to King Aelle - they acceded to the Kingdom of Sussex, and did no further ill.

495 - In this year two Saxon warriors, Cerdic and his son Creoda came to Britain with many men, and after a fight with the natives they established a settlement in the area (probably on the eastern side of Southampton Water).

496 - King Aelle and his court travelled westwards, together with many soldiers. He met with Cerdic, and the two men had great respect and friendship for each other. Cerdic had extended his influence greatly since his arrival, and he sought the help of King Aelle in forcing the native British still further to the west. Aelle was accompanied by his daughter Elfreda, and the young prince Creoda was with Cerdic.

497 - On 1st June, Elfreda, the daughter of the youngest child of King Aelle of Sussex, was married to Creoda, the eldest son of Cerdic who was now an established leader of the west Saxons. Thus was united the two most powerful communities in the south. At first, the South Saxons were dominant, but later on a Kingdom of Wessex was established which prospered greatly. The wedding was a cause of much celebration, and many noble men travelled great distances to be present.

508 - Aelle and Cissa led a strong army into the country of the West Saxons, and

combined with Cerdic who had very large forces. Together they swept forward beyond Hamtun (later *Suth-hamtun* = Southampton), and fought a British prince who was named Natanleod, and who was killed in the battle together with a great many of his followers. Afterwards the district was called Natanleag (believed to be Netley Marsh) and extended as far as Cerdicesford (believed to be Charford, by the River Avon on the borders of Hampshire and Wiltshire).

510 - The combined forces of Cerdic and Aelle again moved westwards, and won many battles against the natives. But then they were confronted by a very great King of the British who came from Wales and the West Country (this was the mythical King Arthur). At Mons Badonicus (Mount Baden, which may possibly be Bradbury Rings in Dorset) he occupied a very strong encampment. Although Cerdic and Aelle attacked the British prince repeatedly and with great valour, they were unable to overcome him, and eventually had to withdraw. Arthur followed them back to the boundaries of their kingdoms, and after that there was comparative peace in the land for over forty years.

517 - In this year, the great King Aelle, the first Bretwalda ('ruler of all Britain') became ill with a fever, and passed away on 24th June at his palace near Chichester, when the summer sun was at its highest in the heavens. His son Cissa succeeded to the Kingdom of Sussex, and ruled over that land, but he paid deference to the King of Wessex.

534 - In March, Cynric the son of Creoda and Elfreda succeeded to the Kingdom of Wessex. He was the grandson, both of Cerdic and Aelle, and from him the long line of Saxon kings of Wessex and of England was descended.

Edgar Atheling

Background History - Ethelred the Unready, the Saxon King of England, died on 23rd April 1016 and was succeeded by Edmund (Ironside), his son by his first marriage, who continued the struggle against the Danish invaders. But on 30th November Edmund was assassinated and his brother Eadwig (Edwy) was driven out by a Dane, Canute, who thereupon took over the throne of England.

Edmund had an infant son, Edward Atheling, but was smuggled out of the country to a safe home in Hungary.

The Danes ruled England for twenty-six years, during which time Godwin, Earl of Wessex rose to a position of great power and influence in the country. He was a remarkable man who had come from a comparatively modest Sussex family. Also - in 1027 - Robert, Duke of Normandy had an illegitimate son William, who himself became Duke when only eight years old, and who was destined to play a leading part in English history.

At the end of the Danish era in 1042, Edward (the Confessor) came to England from Rouen and took over the throne. He was the last surviving son of Ethelred the Unready, by his second marriage, and thus was an Anglo-Saxon. But he also had Norman blood, because his mother was Emma, a sister of an earlier Duke of Normandy.

No one gave much thought to Edward Atheling in Hungary, and for the next eleven years it was Earl Godwin who was ever involved in English affairs. His children all obtained positions of authority, and his daughter Edith married the king. Godwin had five sons - the eldest Swein was always in trouble and died before his father - next was Harold, then Tostig, Gyrth and Leofwine. Without doubt this family was the most powerful in the land, but they did not always have things their own way. Once the whole group was outlawed, but returned in triumph a year later, when it became clear that the "nobility" preferred Godwin to some of the king's Norman friends.

In Hungary in 1047 Edward Atheling had a daughter Margaret, and in 1050 a son was born, named Edgar. These two were the only true descendants of the Anglo-Saxon royal house, but in 1052 William, Duke of Normandy, now aged 24, made a state visit to England, and it is said that King Edward nominated him as his successor.

Earl Godwin died in April 1053, and the Earldom of Wessex passed to Harold, who increasingly exerted the same influence as his father - in fact, the government of the country was largely in his hands.

In 1054 attempts were made to persuade Edward Atheling to come back to England, but without success. However, two years later, Harold himself visited Flanders and was able to negotiate his return. He arrived in 1057, but died before he reached the court of King Edward. Some thought this was suspicious, but there was no evidence of foul play, and his family remained in England.

Tostig (Harold's brother) had been made Earl of Northumbria, and although there was peace in that area for some years, Tostig was not popular in the north. However, the two brothers were brilliantly successful in a campaign against Wales in 1063.

1064 - Harold went on a state mission to the continent, but after sailing from Bosham

he was shipwrecked on the shores of France, where he was arrested. However, he was rescued by William, Duke of Normandy, and in return it is said that he promised to support William's claim to the throne of England. This may not be true, or the promise may have been made under duress.

1065 - While Tostig was at the King's court there was a rebellion in Northumbria, the local people asked for Morcar, the younger brother of Edwin, Earl of Mercia, to be their new Earl. Later when Edwin and Morcar marched southwards with their armed forces as far as Northampton, both the King and Harold had to agree to the appointment of Morcar. Thereupon Tostig went into exile with his family to Flanders, where he plotted against Harold and against his native England. The King was much distressed by these events, and his health deteriorated; he was unable to attend the consecration of his new Westminster Abbey on 28th December, and he died on the 5th January 1066.

January 1066 - King Edward did not have any children, and his last act was to nominate his wife's brother Harold, Earl of Wessex, as his successor, and this was in spite of any earlier promises to William, Duke of Normandy. The government did consider the prior claims of Edgar Atheling, but he was thought to be too young, so Harold was accepted. Edgar was present at the funeral of the old king, and at the coronation of Harold which took place the next day at Westminster.

March 1066 - King Harold married Ealdgyth, the sister of both Earl Edwin of Mercia and Earl Morcar of Northumbria. Afterwards Edgar travelled with the King, and the bishop of Worcester, to the north to seek support against potential enemies of the kingdom. These included not only the Duke of Normandy, and the King of Norway, but also Tostig supported by King Malcom of Scotland, with whom he was friendly.

May 1066 - Edgar Atheling was with the forces of King Harold when they moved into Kent to confront Tostig who had attacked with many ships. However, Tostig sailed away, moved northwards and landed near the Humber - but he was driven off by Earl Edwin, and likewise further north by Earl Morcar. Then he took refuge in Scotland.

1st Sept. 1066 - After months of waiting, along the south coast, King Harold had to disband many of his time-served defence forces and his fleet returned to London. Edgar Atheling had previously gone north to warn Earls Edwin and Morcar to remain alert.

5th Sept. 1066 - The Norwegians under King Hardrada threatened to invade the north of England. They had moved to the Orkneys and thence to the mouth of the Tyne, where they were joined by Tostig who came from Scotland. Edgar Atheling was with the Earls Edwin and Morcar as they prepared for action.

10th Sept. 1066 - Fast messengers brought news of the northern invasion to King Harold in London, and he made plans to move an army to Yorkshire. He left on the long march on 15th September.

Wednesday 20th Sept. 1066 - The combined forces of King Hardrada of Norway, and of Tostig had sailed up the River Ouse and after landing at Riccall had moved to York, ten miles to the north. On this day at Gate Fulford, two miles from the city, the invaders fought a bitter hand-to-hand battle against the army of Edwin and Morcar. The English were completely defeated, and when York surrendered to the invaders, Earls Edwin and Morcar withdrew their badly mauled forces. Edgar Atheling was sent south with a small

bodyguard to meet King Harold.

Sunday 24th Sept. 1066 - After receiving news from Edgar about the loss of York, King Harold pressed on with his army of five thousand men, and this afternoon he reached Tadcaster, nine miles south-west of York. In the evening he was told that the invaders had left York, and taken up a strong defensive position seven miles away at Stamford Bridge on the River Derwent.

Monday 25th Sept. 1066 - Leaving early in the morning, King Harold marched rapidly through the deserted town of York and completely surprised the Norwegians by the Derwent. The only bridge across the river was soon captured, and then Harold crossed over “and his forces went with him and there was great slaughter”. After both King Hardrada and Tostig were killed the routed invaders sued for peace, and the remnants of their army sailed away across the North Sea.

Tuesday 26th Sept. 1066 - King Harold began reorganising his forces, who were very weary after many exertions, and prepared to move southwards. Meanwhile in France, Duke William of Normandy had gathered together a large professional army with many ships and transports, and was waiting at St. Valerie at the mouth of the River Somme.

Thursday 28th Sept. 1066 - During the morning of this day William landed his forces at Pevensey Bay without opposition, after a night voyage across the Channel, and they set up a strong point within the ruins of the old Roman fort of Anderida (Pevensey).

Sunday 1st October 1066 - Some units of King Harold’s army were already on their way south, when in the evening of this day a messenger reached York to report that the Normans had landed in Sussex. The southward march now became of great urgency.

Monday 2nd October 1066 - Early today Harold left York with as many soldiers mounted on horseback as he could muster, and accompanied Edgar Atheling and other nobles. The rest of the army was to follow as fast as possible, including the forces of Earls Edwin and Morcar when they had been re-grouped.

Friday 6th October 1066 - Late today, King Harold reached London, and while he waited for his forces to arrive from the north, he organised reinforcements from the southern counties. Meanwhile Duke William had moved along the coast to Hastings, where his army built a castle of timber, protected by earthworks, and within easy reach of his fleet.

Thursday 12th October 1066 - A large English army left London and marched towards Hastings, under the chief command of King Harold, and the fleet sailed for the Channel to cut off the Norman line of retreat. A supply column followed behind the leading troops, and Edgar Atheling was with this section of the army.

Friday 13th October 1066 - Late today, after long marches, Harold’s forces reached a point nine miles from Hastings, and camped on a ridge seven hundred yards long with steep slopes on either side. They prepared to attack Hastings the following day.

Saturday 14th October 1066 - Norman patrols had reported the arrival of the English army, and very early today William moved out of Hastings. At 9a.m. he appeared unexpectedly on a hill opposite Harold’s position, just as he was about to break camp.

Morning - Harold rightly decided not to move from his strong position, and his forces were well equipped for a defensive battle, drawn up in long lines along the ridge. On the other hand, the Normans were more mobile, with archers in front of the infantry and

many mounted knights with cavalry roaming in the rear. Bretons were on the left, Normans in the centre, and French on the right. Many attacks were made by William's infantry who tried to get close quarters under covering fire from the archers.

Cavalry charges swept in whenever possible, but all were repulsed.

Afternoon - Similar attacks continued, with heavy casualties on both sides. The English had considerable success, and when the Bretons on the left collapsed in disorder, the whole Norman front fell back. However Duke William (who had several horses killed under him) succeeded in rallying his men, and his cavalry managed to cut off the English who had pursued them. During this period Harold's last two brothers were killed.

Evening - The English lines gradually contracted towards the centre, under continuous attack from one quarter or another. King Harold planned to hold on until nightfall, when he could withdraw into the forests of the Weald to regroup and meet reinforcements. However, suddenly a stray arrow struck the King and his death left the English army without a leader of any merit. The lines broke away, as the men sought shelter in the nearby woods.

Night - The situation was desperate but there was no great panic. One group of English inflicted a heavy defeat on a section of the Normans, and William himself was lucky to escape. The English eventually joined up with the rear-guard, and there was no pursuit by the Normans.

Sunday 15th October 1066 - William spent the day at the battlefield, and then returned to Hastings. King Harold was buried on the Sussex shore in unconsecrated ground. Edgar Atheling and the remaining commanders took the English forces back towards London.

November 1066 - William received reinforcements, then captured Dover without difficulty, and moved on to Canterbury (the Archbishop Stigand was in London). Here William fell ill for several weeks. The English government (the Witan) met, and decided that Edgar Atheling should be King. Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar had arrived with their depleted forces, and they promised their support, but did little to implement it. Nevertheless, the whole country apart from Kent remained under English control.

December 1066 - William left Canterbury, and at the approaches to London Bridge he inflicted a severe defeat on Edgar's forces, but he was unable to storm the bridge. Instead he moved rapidly westwards through Surrey and Berkshire to Wallingford, where he crossed the River Thames, and there received the allegiance of Archbishop Stigand. William now rushed eastwards towards London, and it was clear that he could not be stopped. At Berkhamstead, the English government agreed to submit and Edgar Atheling swore allegiance to the Duke, together with Earls Edwin and Morcar, and many leading citizens and churchmen. On Christmas Day, William was crowned King by Ealdred, Archbishop of York.

March 1067 - William went back to Normandy, taking all potential antagonists with him, including Edgar Atheling, and the Earls Edwin and Morcar. England was left under the oppressive control of two Regents, until William returned in December 1067.

1068 - Edgar, with his mother and sister, moved to Scotland to the Court of King Malcolm. The Earls Edwin and Morcar also left the English Court, for the north, but their threatened campaign in the northern counties, together with Edgar and King Malcolm, came to nothing when King William marched with an army as far as York.

1069 - Northumbria was again in revolt, and Edgar came south from Scotland once more. York was attacked, but soon the invaders were dispersed, since Edgar did not have the strength to maintain a serious threat. King Swein of Denmark (a nephew of the late King Harold's mother) sailed up the east coast of England with three hundred ships, and joined with Edgar. Once again York was attacked, and the Normans suffered their heaviest defeat, but the Danes were in no mood to press forward. King William marched north, and engaged in a deliberate war of devastation, from which the countryside did not recover for over a decade. However, the Danish fleet was allowed to remain in the Humber for the winter.

1070 - The Danes moved their headquarters to the Isle of Ely, but King William made peace with them, and they all returned to their own country. Meanwhile, Edgar Atheling was in Scotland, and his sister Margaret was married to King Malcolm.

1071 - Earls Edwin and Morcar fled from the English court. Edwin was killed on the way to Scotland, while Morcar was captured by King William and imprisoned in Normandy.

1072 - William attacked Scotland and reached the Tay. King Malcolm had to submit, and in the process agreed to dismiss Edgar Atheling from his court. Edgar went to Flanders and contacted King Philip of France.

1074 - With the help of King Philip, Edgar attempted many raids into Normandy, but with little effect. Nevertheless King William was anxious to eliminate any danger from this source, and when Edgar, then back in Scotland, sought a peaceful settlement, William received him honourably, as befitted the last direct heir of Anglo-Saxon royalty. He became a respected member of the English court, and never again caused any difficulty.

1081 - The Welsh border was now comparatively stable, and in this year, Edgar accompanied King William on a triumphal flag-waving expedition through South Wales to the far west at St. David's.

1086 - After the Court meeting at Gloucester at Christmas 1085, the King gave deep thought as to how the land was peopled and by whom. This resulted in The Domesday survey, and Edgar Atheling played a part in the organisation of this enormous task. At this time, also, King William gave permission to Edgar to go on an expedition to Apulia, a Norman province in southern Italy, together with two hundred knights and their retinue of armed followers.

9th Sept 1087 - King William died in Normandy. He had controlled that country for forty years and had been King of England for twenty-one years. A stern and sometimes cruel king, he held his possessions by military prowess, but he did bring order out of chaos and successfully carried England over from Saxon times into Norman. His eldest son Robert took over the Duchy of Normandy. His second son William Rufus became King of England, and Edgar Atheling attended his Coronation which took place immediately. A third son, Henry received no land, but gained considerable treasure.

Later years - As a respected member of the Court, Edgar was often in royal company. King William Rufus was frequently at odds with his clergy and with some of his barons, but Edgar never took sides, and managed to keep on good terms with everyone.

King Malcolm of Scotland had been forced to submit to William I back in 1072, and William II also made him do homage. However, when Malcolm died in 1093, Rufus befriended his widow, who was Edgar Atheling's sister, and he supported her sons in their

rule over Scotland, and her daughter was always welcome at the English court.

In 1095, Edgar was with King Rufus when he led an expedition into rebellious Wales, and in 1096 he helped him to deal with his old brother Robert of Normandy. The two brothers agreed that if either died childless the other would be the heir to the exclusion of their younger brother Henry. Then Robert mortgaged his Normandy estates to King Rufus in return for money to go on the 1st Crusade to Jerusalem.

Edgar went with Duke Robert, and they travelled to Constantinople via southern Italy and Albania. Their forces took part in several battles against the Turks and crossed the bleak Anatolian highlands to reach the outskirts of Antioch (north of Syria) by October 1097. There they stayed until the town was betrayed into the hands of the Crusaders in June 1098.

As a result of disagreements among their leaders, it was another year before the forces of the Crusaders reached Jerusalem, which was taken by storm on 15th July 1099, amid great slaughter. Duke Robert and Edgar Atheling distinguished themselves during this campaign, and when a new Christian state was set up it was the Duke's chaplain (Amulf) who became Patriarch.

Robert and Edgar set out on the return journey, and in the Norman province of Apulia (southern Italy) Robert married Sybil of Conversano, from a very wealthy family. Edgar continued on and reached the English Court in May 1100, where the news that Robert was returning brought consternation, since he would be able to re-establish himself in Normandy and repay the mortgage. Perhaps Prince Henry was especially concerned because he and Gilbert Clare, Earl of Tunbridge may have been plotting against the King.

In July, Edgar went with William Rufus to Winchester with a number of nobles for a few days hunting in the New Forest. Edgar stayed at the Castle, but on Sunday 29th the others moved on to a hunting lodge near Cadnam.

Among those with the King and his brother Henry, were Gilbert Clare and his brother Roger and his brother-in-law Walter Tirel of Poix in France

Late on Thursday 2nd August, a hunt was arranged in which the men would have been stationed in a line some way apart in trees on the edge of a clearing. When startled deer appeared, it is said that Tirel drew his bow and shot. His arrow missed, and seconds later the King fell dead, shot by an arrow straight to the heart.

Walter Tirel, always denied that he killed the King, and it may be true that he did not even see him. Moreover, if his arrow was deflected it is not likely that it had sufficient power to fly on and then kill instantly, But suspicion was attached to him, and apparently he was allowed, or even helped, to escape. In any event, he was able to cross the forest, and make his way safely back to France,

Meanwhile, at Winchester Castle, as darkness fell, Edgar Atheling was shocked by the sudden arrival of Prince Henry and a few followers. No doubt, Edgar and many others were dismayed by the news and perhaps even suspicious, but when Henry insisted that he should take over the crown immediately, there was no one prepared to argue against him.

Early next morning the King's body was brought to Winchester on a charcoal-burner's cart and a funeral was held. Then, with the status of king, Henry left hastily for London, to be followed later by Edgar and the other nobles.

In the Capital, Henry succeeded in consolidating his position, and so he was crowned at a Coronation ceremony held at Westminster Abbey on Sunday 5th August 1100. Edgar Atheling may well have been present and wisely he kept his thoughts to himself.

In November 1100 King Henry married Matilda, the daughter of Edgar's sister by the former King Malcolm of Scotland.

Thus was united not only the English and Scottish royal families, but also the ancient Anglo-Saxon line with the new Norman dynasty. While King Henry and his Court were busy elsewhere, Matilda spent many years at Westminster with her Uncle Edgar. She arranged the building of a stone bridge over the River Lea at Bow (London), founded a Leper Hospital at St. Giles, and the Holy Trinity Priory, Aldgate in 1108. Later she became a nun at Wilton, near Salisbury, and died in 1118.

Edgar had little love for King Henry, who was a strong and cunning leader but was also cruel, greedy and sensual with a great many children, only two of which were legitimate - William and another Matilda. Edgar retired from Court circles, and lived quietly with his family - usually on the Hampshire/Sussex border, which was within easy reach of Winchester, still an important centre of royal activity. He knew of the death of young William, who was drowned in 1120 while returning from Normandy to England, and of the marriage of Matilda to Geoffrey Plantagenet of Anjou in 1128 - a union which resulted in a long line of English kings from Henry II onwards.

Shortly afterwards, Edgar Atheling died. He had an exceptional long life for the times in which he lived, and he was present at a great many important events during an exciting period in English history. He was a wise man, with the fortunate ability of being able to influence the affairs of kings without becoming involved himself.

The Family

The origin of the name 'Ayling' has been dealt with fully in previous sections, and we have seen that it dates from the Anglo-Saxon period. It was no doubt derived from the warrior Aelle of 477 A.D., or from Edgar Atheling of 1100 A.D., or perhaps a mixture of both.

For some one thousand years from the time of King Aelle, there are no continuous records of any kind that relate to family history, and in those far-off days people were known only by their 'Christian' names. The Normans first introduced surnames, but they were mostly confined to the upper classes, and it was several centuries later before ordinary folk began to assume a second name, chiefly in order to avoid confusion among the growing population, and for official purposes on taxation lists and the like.

Most families adopted a simple descriptive name, such as Baker, Castle or Johnson, but some continued the hereditary names of their ancient clan or tribe, as happened with the Aelle-ings or the Athel-ings. The process was very gradual but it was virtually complete by the 16th century.

The only early records are certain Charters, and other such documents, which have survived through the centuries, and occasionally the name Ayling occurs in some form or other. One of the earliest references is to 'Eadmund Aetheling' in 1006, and there was an 'Aedwardus Atheling' in 1176. In 1332, two Aylings were living in West Sussex, namely John Aylng of Chidham, and William Aillyng of Lodsworth.

During the 14th and 15th Centuries, English history is greatly concerned with rebellions and wars. Fighting with France went on almost continually, and internal strife led to the Wars of the Roses for thirty years from 1455. Life was hard for common people, and the frightful epidemic of the Black Death in 1348 made matters worse.

The workers were discontented and repressed, but feudalism was gradually disappearing. Commerce was expanding, and the country was developing into one English nation, rather than downtrodden natives ruled by oppressive Normans.

It became possible for some workers to buy themselves out of part of their servile duties. Afterwards these men often rented land of their own and became yeoman farmers. In the centuries that followed, virtually all of the Aylings were men of this class, and among the first of them, in about 1400, was Thomas Aillyng who occupied a farm at Woolavington (near Midhurst) and William Aillyng with property and land at Warningcamp (near Arundel).

In the year 1478 a certain John Aylng, and several other gentlemen were engaged in a court case against Robert and Isabel Tue regarding the ownership of Bodyton Manor and some fifty acres of lands and woods in the Parish of Woolbeding, near Midhurst. They were successful in their action, and it is certain that John Aylng was a person of some consequence in the district. It is not known how old he was in 1478, nor when he died, but it is reasonable to assume that he was closely related to other Aylings who were in the area some years later. Thus, he is regarded as the founder of the large group of Aylings who lived and worked in the district for over three hundred years.

The Aylings were agricultural workers, who obviously looked for the best land, and

for them there was nothing finer than the valley of the little River Rother in West Sussex, and within a few miles either side. This river rises near Liss in Hampshire, and enters Sussex at the village of Rogate. Then it flows eastwards past Terwick, Trotton, Chithurst and Iping to Stedham, then via Woolbeding to Midhurst. Here are the original homelands of the Ayling family, and the Stedham area in particular. Probably every Ayling now alive had his roots in the fertile valley of the River Rother.

During the 16th century there were important religious changes. King Henry VIII broke away from Rome in 1534/5 and was made Head of the Church of England. The monasteries were dissolved, and an English Bible was made available in every village church. Parish registers began to be kept and among the first was Stedham in 1539 and Woolbeding in 1547.

In 1540, a Statute of Wills was enacted, which for the first time enabled private persons to transfer property after their death in any way they wished, by means of a 'testament' made while still alive. The yeoman class made good use of these regulations, and out of thirty-three wills and administrations for Aylings up to 1600, most were in the general Stedham area. The very first known Ayling will was by John Aylyng of Terwick on 19th October 1546 who stated: -

“My bodye to be buryede in ye church yarde of Turwyke. I give and bequeth to the church at Turwyke six shillings to be put in a stock and with the profites thereof to mayntayn a taper before the Sacrament there forever.”

For, five years, 1553-1558, Queen Mary (a daughter of Henry VIII) tried to return the country to the Catholic faith, and there was a dreadful period of persecution and terror. But afterwards Queen Elizabeth (another daughter) restored the Anglican Church and held off the rival claims of the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots. Even the powerful naval strength of Spain under Philip II (a bigoted Catholic) was shattered when the Armada was routed in 1588.

Throughout the century the Ayling family in Stedham grew and prospered. John, the founder, had three sons (or perhaps they were grandsons). One named Richard, who died in 1545, was a tax collector for the Rape (district) of Chichester, and his son William has a particular claim to fame: -

William, who was born about 1520, was a yeoman farmer of considerable wealth, and in 1567 he purchased the Manor of Woolbeding from Henry, Earl of Arundel.

This was an ancient estate, going back to a De Wilebeding at the time of Domesday (1086). In return for his acquisition, William was required to “carry before the King a cross-bow *without* a string and an arrow bolt *without* feathers whenever the King comes in these parts, namely when he is going to cross to Hampshire, from the bridge called Wolversbridge near Midhurst to the bridge of Sheate in Hampshire”. William owned many properties in Woolbeding and Stedham, also at nearby Eastbourne and Heyshott, together with property at Arundel and at Alton in Hampshire. His wife Elizabeth, and his only son John, died before him but his other children and his brother Thomas were mentioned in his will, and also several cousins in Stedham. Woolbeding Manor passed to his eldest daughter 'Jone', then aged forty-two, and who married Edmond Gray of Heyshott in 1563 at Woolbeding. Edmond's father had been a successful wartime commander under the Earl of

Southampton and so had been “given” very good lands near Cowdray House, where the Earl lived. The Gray family remained the owners of the Manor until 1679 when Sir John Mill married Margaret Gray, a daughter of the house, after which the Mill family were in possession until 1791 when Sir Charles Mill sold the property to Lord Robert Spencer. Today, the Manor is occupied by the Sainsbury family, but how different the story might have been if only William Ayling, Yeoman, had been survived by male heirs.

Another son of John, the founder, was named Nicholas (1500-1571), who, in turn also had a son Nicholas II (1530-1573), who yet again had a son named Nicholas. This Nicholas III was born in 1586 and married Mabel Gray in 1586 at Woolbeding. It is almost certain that she was a member of the Gray family at Woolbeding Manor, and there are indications that she owned property in other districts.

By the end of the 16th century the Aylings had begun to spread a little further afield. They moved down the river, to the village of Selham, and they had an almost continuous presence in that area for two hundred and fifty years from 1585. It is recorded that in January 1647 William Ayling (Yeoman)- sold land near Selham for £175, a considerable sum in those days. There is also good evidence that Aylings were in Burpham, near Arundel, from a very early date.

In the 17th century, Kings James I and Charles I supported the Anglican Church, but were intolerant of Puritans. However, when civil war broke out in 1642 it was a Puritan Cromwell who was successful. A Royalist army did march into Sussex in 1643, along the Rother valley past the Ayling homesteads, but it was overcome by General Waller for Parliament, after much damage had been caused to Arundel and its castle.

Parliament then remained in general control of the area, but even so it was possible for Prince Charles (later King Charles II), after his defeat at the Battle of Worcester in 1651 to escape through West Sussex. In disguise he may well have travelled through the Rother valley. He crossed the River Arun at Houghton, north of Arundel, and eventually left for France from Shoreham harbour.

Charles II (1660-1685) secretly adhered to the Catholic faith, but it was his brother James II who for three dreadful years tried to force Catholicism upon the people. However James fled to France at Christmas 1688, and the crown passed to his daughter Mary and her powerful husband, the staunch Protestant, William, Prince of Orange and head of the Dutch people. Parliament enacted a purely Protestant line of succession, and the religious turmoils were virtually settled for good, although there were brief Jacobite rebellions in the following century.

The Ayling family was expanding quite rapidly. The main groups were still in the Rogate/Stedham area, but some were now living in many other places.

Near the town of Pulborough, the Rother joins forces with the larger River Arun, and together they flow southwards to Arundel and to the sea at Littlehampton. Along this new valley the Aylings were destined to settle in later years, but from 1629 onwards they were present in the Pulborough area continuously for well over three hundred years. Five miles to the north at Wisborough Green they were in evidence from 1611 onwards.

A few miles to the south of the River Rother, Aylings now appeared occasionally in villages near the northern slopes of the South Downs - such as Harting, Elsted, Treyford,

Bepton, Woolavington and Bignor.

Further afield, there were established Ayling families in Felpham near the modern Bognor Regis, from 1612, and at Fernhurst (five miles north of Midhurst) from 1653. And now for the first time the Aylings had spread a short distance into a neighbouring county, to Haslemere, which is in Surrey but only two miles north of Fernhurst. Most distant of all, an Ayling family became settled at Hamble, on Southampton Water, and at the nearby village of Hound; they were well-known fishermen and mariners and survived in an unbroken line from about 1680 for at least one hundred and fifty years.

During the 17th century, there is some evidence that a few Aylings were beginning to seek higher education. A certain John Ayling, who was born about 1635, went to Magdalen College, Oxford where he obtained his B.A. in 1659 and his M.A. in 1661.

At Stedham, the original family of Aylings still continued, and Nicholas III and his wife Maibel (Gray) had ten known children, mostly girls but including Thomas (1590) and Nicholas IV (1613).

The religious atmosphere of the times is clearly shown when we read that Robert (a brother of Nicholas V) and his wife Elizabeth were reported by the Churchwardens for not receiving Communion at Easter 1621.

Indeed a number of Aylings, or their servants, were taken to task for their Catholic views, or for not attending Church. One was charged with “spending the Sabbath dayes idly and lewdly”.

Thomas (1590) had at least five children, all baptised at Stedham the eldest being William and then there were Williams in each of the next three generations. Full details are known, and the family line continued to the present day, including a large group of Aylings living in South America (Buenos Aires) since 1900.

According to an existing Ayling family record “Nicholas Ayling built Ash House in 1626”. This could refer to either Nicholas III or Nicholas IV, but most likely the work was carried out as a joint family effort.

A small stream runs southward from the Tote Hill area; it passes across agricultural land through a deep wooded valley and joins the River Rother not far from Stedham. At a mid-way point the stream widens into a small lake, and here amid sloping lawns stands Ash House. It is built of local sandstone, and has survived the centuries virtually unharmed. There have been alterations, and some quite extensive additions, but these are all very much in keeping with the original. The surrounding woodlands, and farms, will have changed their character in over three hundred and fifty years, but otherwise the Ayling ancestors would surely recognise the old homestead where they lived and laboured so long ago. The Ayling family remained in occupation for two hundred years, until the estate was sold by a John Ayling in 1822.

Nicholas IV died in 1670 leaving possessions worth £207. This was quite a fair figure for the time, when a bed, complete with all linen including curtains, was valued at £5, when a horse was £3, and when a “hogshead of beare” was only £1 (about 50 gallons, or a quarter of a 1983 penny for a pint!).

Nicholas IV and his family were obviously quite well-to-do, and his sons all had substantial possessions. One, Thomas, had an estate valued at £593 when he died in 1711,

including lands at both Stedham and Rogate. Another son was named William (1649 1724), and he and his wife Margaret had nine children, some of whom moved away from the Stedham area. This included the four married daughters and a son Thomas who was born in 1689.

During the 18th century the English nation began a marked period of growth, which led to rivalry and wars with France and her allies. However, Britain went from strength to strength under such leaders as William Pitt (the Elder), General Wolfe of Canada and Clive of India.

The American colonies were lost in 1776, during the reign of George III, but in compensation Captain Cook made his famous voyage of discovery to Australia and the Pacific. In France there was a massive Revolution by a discontented people in 1783, which destroyed their Monarchy and the aristocracy. But France remained very powerful, and only England under William Pitt (the younger) stood against them. However, the British Navy under Admiral Nelson was supreme, and won the famous victories of Cape St. Vincent (1797), the Nile (1798), Copenhagen (1801) and finally Trafalgar (1805).

During the first half of the 18th century England was an agricultural country, and the yeoman farmers were at their peak of prosperity, but then a change gradually took place. A network of canals was built to provide cheap transport, the most successful one in West Sussex being From Midhurst to Petworth and Pulborough. Several Aylings are known to have been 'bargemen'.

Turnpike roads were built and the chief one in West Sussex was from Fernhurst in the north to Midhurst, thence to Cocking and Chichester. At least one Ayling was known to have been a tollhouse keeper.

Coalfields were opened up in South Wales and in the north. The steam engine was invented, and the spinning machine. Agriculture became more efficient, but required more capital and less workers. Many small farms disappeared, and the workers moved into industrial districts, where conditions were usually very bad. England became more wealthy, often at the expense of the lower classes, but their sufferings did lead eventually to social improvements and to the rise of Socialism and Trade Unions.

Relatively little industry came to the West Sussex homelands of the Aylings, but nevertheless by the end of the century there was a gradual drift away from the villages and farms towards larger towns, including Condon.

Whereas in the year 1500 there were only a few Ayling families in existence, it has been estimated that by 1750 there were fifty such families, scattered mostly among the numerous towns and villages of West Sussex. They ranged along the coastal plain from Worthing to Westbourne, and from Arundel along the Pother valley to Rogate and northwards to Kirdford and into Surrey. Many of these families have descendants who are alive today, and in some cases, the family trees are known. However, it is impossible to quote them in detail, merely to give a general indication where the main Ayling groups were situated.

Dealing first with Thomas of Stedham (1689). He married in June 1720 in his home village, and five children were born there. Then at the age of forty he moved to Cocking, on the Midhurst/Chichester road, where he was a yeoman farmer of some consequence and where five more children were born. When he died in 1759 he was taken back to Stedham

for burial, the last of his direct line to be so honoured

Thomas left a will in which all his surviving children were mentioned. The total value of his farm stock and personal possessions was £635. Ploughing had been done with oxen, and the Inventory included ten oxen with yokes £60.

The family home and farmhouse can easily be imagined from the fact that it consisted of a Hall, Best Chamber, Chamber over the Hall, Maid's Chamber and Men's Chamber. There was also a Kitchen, Bakehouse, and Milkhouse, as well as Beer Cellar, Ale Cellar and Brewhouse, so there was no shortage of food and drink!

One of his sons, William (1736), became a farmer at the neighbouring village of Heyshott, and he had nine children, two of whom moved to Bromley in Kent, and founded the family of Aylings who were (and still are) in the shoe trade in that town. There are also descendants in the United States, and yet another branch that boasts an Air Vice-Marshal in the R.A.F.

Another son of Thomas was Robert (1730), who carried on the farm and he had ten children, all baptised at Cocking. His eldest son was also Robert (1765), and in turn his six children were also baptised at Cocking. But then the link with farming and agriculture drew to a close. One son was a cornfactor in Chichester, and another (William - 1804) became a draper in Midhurst with descendants who were grocers, drapers, nurserymen, clergymen, engineers, and many other occupations - some now living in Africa, and in New Zealand.

All over West Sussex, other large family groups were being founded during the 18th century. At Arundel there was one which started about 1750, and another thirty years later at the nearby village of West Stoke. Both have very extensive family trees - indeed Thomas of S.Stoke (born 1761) had no less than sixty-five great grandchildren. One of them, Arthur, lived to be 100, the only known Ayling to reach his century.

A certain William Ayling, who was born in 1768, had his first children baptised at Aldingbourne, near Chichester but later the family moved to Broadwater.

There, for several generations a large number of his descendants were engaged in building trades, and took part in the expansion of the town of Worthing, especially in the area then known as New Town (now the Clifton Road district). One branch of this family emigrated to Australia and another to America.

At Bosham in 1777 Thomas Ayling married Anne Coombs, and they founded a family of fishermen and mariners with extensive connections, both in Sussex, and at Portsmouth. The naval town of Portsea, as it then was, grew rapidly in the 19th century, and there was a steady trickle of young Ayling men from families all over the area to join some branch of the sea-going services. Many marriages to local girls took place in the main churches of Portsmouth and Gosport, but there were no large established families of Aylings actually in Portsmouth for many years.

Across the harbour, however, at Rowner near Gosport another Thomas Ayling married Mary Penfold in 1721, and a large family developed in the area, with a branch at Weymouth in Dorset. One of the descendants of the latter was William Beck Ayling, who joined the Indian Civil Service, became a Judge in Madras, and was knighted in 1915 - the only Ayling known to have been so honoured.

Also at Rowner, Anthony Ayling (born about 1778) and his wife Ann Maria founded

a large farming family in the area. Doubtless there are descendants alive today, but most of the male lines seem to have died out.

At Kirdford, northeast of Petworth, there was a substantial Ayling community from early in the 18th century. James, who was born about 1744, had many children baptised in the local church, and descendants are alive today. One son, John and his wife Vashti had fifteen children and they lived in the Meon valley area in Hampshire, near Petersfield, with descendants in the Portsmouth district.

For centuries the Aylings have had close association with Petworth and Pulborough, two of the larger towns in their homeland area, and also to a lesser extent with Midhurst and Arundel. Some Aylings were also attracted to Chichester, the capital town of the county, but mostly for business reasons or for official purposes such as marriage licences, the proof of wills, etc. Many present-day Aylings can refer to ancestors who lived in or near one or other of these towns. In Petworth there was a family who worked as saddlers and harness makers for four generations or more, and at Fittleworth nearby was a large farming group founded by George (born 1786).

There were Ayling families from 1700 onwards in many villages in West Sussex, and it is not possible to list them all. However, mention can be made of South Bersted, Yapton, and Walberton all between Bognor and Arundel, of Boxgrove, East Dean and Graffham all to the north-east of Chichester, of Lodsworth, Tillington and Lurgashall all to the north of the Rother valley at Selham, and of Westbourne and Funtington both in the extreme west of the county.

Finally, at Ovington, near Alresford in Hampshire was the large family of George (born about 1730). Two of his sons were tailors, but most of his descendants for several generations were Carpenters. And at Privett (between Ovington and Petersfield) was the even larger family of William, born 1767 who was a wheelwright by trade, an occupation which lasted for at least four generations of his descendants, some of whom are now living in Lincolnshire.

In the 19th century, the strength of France was finally reduced when Napoleon was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, and Britain made steady progress. During the Victorian era the country became a major power, with an empire extending around the world - yet there were clouds on the horizon, especially in Central Europe where the German Empire was formed in 1871.

But conditions for ordinary folk were not always so good. The first half of the century was marked by agricultural depressions and unemployment, but things improved later on. The working classes obtained the vote in 1867. Education was extended in 1870, and became compulsory and free in 1891.

Large families were quite normal, and the total population increased steadily. In England and Wales it was about four million in the 15th century, but had increased to nine million by 1800 and to thirty-two million by 1900. Among the Aylings, as elsewhere, there was a steady flow of emigrants to various parts of the Empire, and to America.

During the 19th century, the Aylings mostly became established as middle-class citizens. Some became tradesmen and shopkeepers; others were builders and craftsmen of various kinds. A few did remain in agriculture but the farming tradition was gradually dying

away.

In the 20th century, there were two World Wars, and the Aylings played their part in both of them. Sixty-two young men gave their lives between 1914 and 1918, and some of them are listed on War Memorials in Worthing, Arundel, Rogate and Portsmouth. In the second war, the total was mercifully lower at fifteen.

The name Ayling is very rare, and in England only one person in every ten thousand has such a name. Nevertheless there are approximately two thousand, five hundred male Aylings alive today, aged between 1 and 100. This probably represents about five hundred separate family groups, compared with the fifty in 1750, but of course the families now are much smaller than they were over two hundred years ago.

During the last one hundred and fifty years the Aylings have become increasingly scattered, and there are quite large contingents in various overseas countries, notably America, Australia and New Zealand.

Even so, by far the largest part of them are still living in the original homelands of West Sussex, and in the Brighton area. Others are in East Hampshire and in Surrey. Many are living in numerous districts around London, both south and north, and there are some in Kent and in Essex. In short, they remain where their South Saxon ancestors first settled - in the southern counties of England. Apart from a few 'exiled' families they are not to be found elsewhere.

The ancestors of some modern families have been traced back a considerable way, and most extend to the middle of the 19th century (1850), but there are a number who know very little about their family history. It is hoped that the story here unfolded will have been of interest to all of them.

The original book 'The Ayling Story' has been transcribed into this PDF document by Phil Ayling.

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