**A book about Staughton April 2019**

"7 ic gean him 7 his wiue þæs landes æt Stoctune. wið an hund mancosa goldes.

And I grant to him and his wife the estate at Staughton for a hundred mancuses of gold."

Will of Ælfhelm Polga 989 A.D.

A mere sixty-eight wills survive from the Anglo-Saxon era; one was drawn up on 31 October 989 by Ælfhelm Polga, a thegn or loyal retainer of King Edgar, and amongst his bequests was his estate at Great Staughton.

Ælfhelm Polga's name appears as a witness in foundation documents of the mighty abbeys of East Anglia. Some of his duties are recorded in the chronicles of the abbeys with which he was associated, Ramsey, Ely and St Neots. The Liber Eliensis, the Book of Ely, refers to Ælfhelm Polga as “a certain knight possessed of much wealth,” and records his activities as a lawman in East Anglia. He owned lands throughout Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire, and further afield in Bedfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Hertfordshire, and part of his landholding included the village of Stoctune, or Great Staughton.

7 ic gean minre scæðe. for mire sawle into Hramesege. healfe þan abbode. 7 healue þam hirede.

And for my soul's sake I grant my long-ship to Ramsey, half for the abbot, and half for the community.

Ælfhelm Polga had an intimate connection with Ramsey Abbey, the most powerful religious house in the country at that time. It may seem odd to bequeath a long-ship to the Abbey but there was good reason. Firstly, Ramsey was virtually an island (the name means Isle of the Ram), and a ship would have been useful for access to the surrounding area. Ramsey was situated on the River Great Ouse, a key trade and communications route, from Bedford to the North Sea at King's Lynn. It was also a route that marauding Danes could exploit for their many raids into the region – indeed, East Anglia was for three centuries a stronghold of the Viking invaders.

Ælfhelm Polga has a further link with the local area when in 974, he appended his signature to the document recording the dedication of St Neots Priory, which attracted the great, the good and the powerful, not only from the eastern region but from religious houses and sees throughout the country. The ceremony of dedication was performed by Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester, in the presence of Æscwin, Bishop of Lincoln, Brithnoth, Abbot of Ely, Earl Ægelwin, and Ædric Pope.

Ælfhelm Polga spent his last days at West Wratting, an estate granted to him by King Edgar in 974. Less than a century later, the world of the Anglo-Saxons was destroyed forever by the northman from Normandy. The chronicler of the Abbey of Ely voiced his despair at this calamity: “What am I to say about England? What am I to say to future generations? Woe to you, England, you who in former times were sanctified by your angelic progeny, but are now utterly distraught with groans for your sins. You lost your native king and in war ….. became subject to a foreigner. Your sons were miserably slain ….and your councillors and leaders ….. overwhelmed, or put to death or deprived of their inheritance.”

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