4 July 1807 Guiseppe Garibaldi, the hero of Italian unification, is born

see our feature on page 40

A modern imagining of Athelstan (reigned 924–39)

12 July 927

Athelstan lords it over the North

AT EAMONT BRIDGE in July 927 an event deeply significant in the development of an England united under one king took place. In the previous decades, the activities of Edward the Elder had extended the authority of the Wessex monarchs into Mercia as far as the Humber, beyond which Northumbria remained in the hands of the Danes.

Soon after his succession to Edward in 924, Athelstan married one of his sisters to Sihtric, the Norse king of York. But when the latter died in 927, Athelstan invaded Northumbria, seizing York and effectively putting himself in control of the whole country. At Eamont, near Penrith, he accepted oaths from the northern rulers of Cumbria and Bamburgh, under which they agreed to suppress idolatry, a reference to the practices of the Norsemen. King Constantine of Scotland also swore his allegiance, and a verse panegyric celebrated the new existence of an "England made whole". Henceforth, the coinage of Athelstan would carry the legend "king of all Britain", and he would be the first English king whose image would bear the crown.

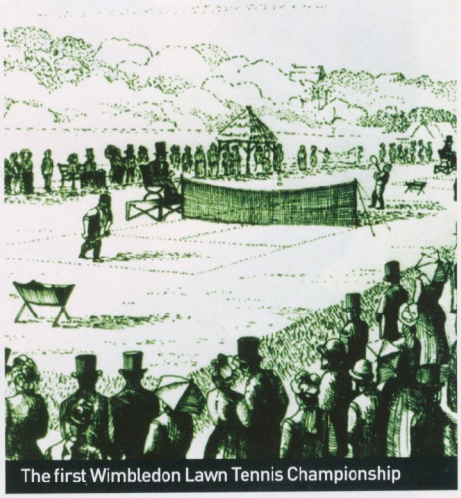
Athelstan would face further challenges ahead, but his status as the first true king of England, a cultured, literate ruler in the tradition of Alfred, remains unquestioned. *Jack Watkins*

9 July 1877

First Wimbledon tennis champion

WATCHED BY A crowd of around 200, local man Spencer Gore beat William Marshall to become Wimbledon's first men's lawn tennis champion (women were not allowed to compete there for another seven years). The final had originally been scheduled for the Monday, games having been suspended over the weekend so as not to clash with the Eton versus Harrow cricket match at Lords, but bad weather forced the match to be postponed for four days. More rain on Friday delayed the start for an hour but when the final eventually began, Gore, described as a 27-year-old six footer with a red beard, proved far too strong for Marshall and beat him 6-1, 6-2, 6-4 in just 48 minutes.

Despite his victory, Spencer Gore, who was also a keen cricketer and footballer, noted wit and accomplished banjo player, never really took to tennis, describing it as "a monotonous game compared with others". Even so, he returned to Wimbledon the following year to defend his title only to lose in straight sets in the final to Frank Hadow, a Ceylon tea planter and keen big game hunter who had entered the competition to pass the time while he was on holiday in England. *Julian Humphrys*



The first Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championship

HULTON ARCHIVE-GETTY IMAGES/MARY EVANS/

Switchboard workers taking emergency calls in 1936

1 July 1937

Introduction of the 999 service

IT WAS A HOUSE fire in Wimpole Street, London in 1935 which prompted calls for an overhaul of London's emergency telephone service. Five people died in the blaze and their deaths were attributed, in part, to delays caused when passers-by tried to report the emergency by telephone.

At the time, the telephone network was rapidly expanding and there was a huge increase in the number of people reporting emergencies by telephone. Unfortunately, operators could not distinguish emergency calls from ordinary calls. It was decided that 999 should be the number for emergency calls as it was easy to remember. Under the new system, when 999 was dialled, a buzzer sounded in the exchange and a red light flashed to attract the operator's attention.

The new service was introduced in London on 1 July 1937 and was an immediate success. The first 999 call was placed at 4.20 am on 8 July by a woman reporting a burglary at her house. As a result of the almost instantaneous service, the burglar was arrested within five minutes. The London 999 emergency service was the first of its kind in the world and by 1948 was used in all the major towns and cities of Britain. *Michelle Higgs*