

## Alfred the Great

Alfred the Great, born in 849 AD, is one of the most celebrated figures in English history. As King of Wessex — an Anglo-Saxon kingdom in the south of England — he faced the enormous challenge of defending his people against the relentless Viking invasions that had already overwhelmed much of the country.

The crisis reached its peak in 878 AD, when the Danish Viking leader Guthrum launched a devastating surprise attack in midwinter, forcing Alfred to retreat into the Somerset marshes. This was perhaps the lowest point of his reign, yet Alfred used the time wisely — gathering loyal thanes (nobles), rebuilding his forces and planning a comeback. His army emerged to defeat Guthrum decisively at the Battle of Edington. The subsequent Treaty of Wedmore compelled Guthrum to accept Christian baptism and confine Danish settlement to the Danelaw, a region covering much of northern and eastern England.

Alfred's genius extended well beyond the battlefield. He fundamentally reorganised his military by dividing his fyrd (citizen army) into two rotating groups, ensuring that defences were always maintained. He constructed a network of burhs — strategically placed fortified towns — and developed a naval fleet to confront Viking ships at sea. He also reformed the legal system, creating a code of laws that emphasised justice and fairness.

Equally important was Alfred's commitment to learning. He personally translated Latin texts into Old English and established schools, believing an educated people made a stronger kingdom. Alfred died in 899 AD, leaving behind a transformed Wessex that would form the cornerstone of a unified English nation.

## Questions

1. In what year was Alfred born and which kingdom did he rule?
2. What term describes the Viking invasions that Alfred faced throughout his reign?
3. Who led the surprise Viking attack in 878 AD?
4. Where did Alfred retreat to after the midwinter attack?
5. What is the meaning of the word "thanes"?
6. What were the two things Guthrum was required to do under the Treaty of Wedmore?
7. What was the fyrd, and how did Alfred reorganise it?
8. What were burhs and what purpose did they serve?
9. What did Alfred do to promote education and learning?
10. The article says Alfred left behind a "transformed Wessex that would form the cornerstone of a unified English nation." What does this suggest about the longer-term importance of Alfred's reign?



Text D Quiz



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