

Alfred the Great

Alfred the Great was one of England's most remarkable rulers. Born in 849 AD, he became King of Wessex — a powerful Anglo-Saxon kingdom in southern England — at the age of 21. His reign was dominated by the struggle against Viking invaders from Scandinavia, who had been raiding and settling across much of England for decades.

In 878 AD, a large Viking force led by Guthrum launched a surprise attack during winter, forcing Alfred to flee into the marshes of Somerset. Rather than surrendering, Alfred used this time to regroup his forces. He built support among local nobles and warriors before launching a decisive counterattack. His army defeated Guthrum at the Battle of Edington, and the peace treaty that followed — the Treaty of Wedmore — required Guthrum to convert to Christianity and withdraw his forces to an area called the Danelaw in the north and east of England.

Alfred was not only a military leader. He reorganised his army and built a network of fortified towns called burhs to defend against future attacks. He established a navy to intercept Viking ships. He also introduced a fairer system of laws and was passionate about education, encouraging learning in English as well as Latin.

Alfred died in 899 AD. His vision and leadership transformed Wessex into the foundation upon which a unified England would eventually be built.

Questions

1. When was Alfred born and what kingdom did he rule?
2. Where were the Vikings from?
3. During which season did Guthrum launch his surprise attack?
4. Where did Alfred flee after the surprise attack?
5. What did Alfred do while hiding before he fought back?
6. What was the name of the peace treaty after the Battle of Edington?
7. What did the treaty require Guthrum to do?
8. What area were Viking settlers allowed to remain in?
9. Name two things Alfred did to strengthen and improve his kingdom.
10. Alfred is described as building the foundation for a unified England. What do you think this means?



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