

Anglo-Saxon Kings

The Anglo-Saxon era was often called 'the Dark Ages' because there was so little written information about the invasion years, but it was also a time of great change.

Many famous kings and important people shaped the period and laid the foundations for much of what we consider 'English' today, and here are some of them.

King Ethelbert

King Ethelbert (Aethelberht) of Kent ruled from about 590–615 AD. In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle he is listed as a Bretwalda or 'Britain ruler', meaning he ruled over other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms too. Ethelbert was a pagan and worshiped Woden (the Anglo-Saxon name for Odin) but he had a Christian wife and was the first Anglo-Saxon king to convert to Christianity. He was also the first Anglo-Saxon king to produce a written law code.

King Raedwald

King Raedwald of East Anglia ruled from around the year 600 AD to somewhere in the 620s. He was the first East Anglian king to become a Christian and was converted whilst visiting Kent, but he continued to support pagan beliefs and his subjects were allowed to follow either faith. He became a powerful leader and is also listed in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as an 'overlord' or Bretwalda. Some historians believe Raedwal could be the king that was buried at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk.

King Offa

King Offa, ruled from 757 to 796 AD. He was King of Mercia and overlord of Kent and Essex. He made the first English penny with a picture of himself on it and the words 'Offa Rex', which means King Offa in Latin.

He is famous for building Offa's Dyke - more than 140 miles of defensive earthwork following the border of Mercia and Wales.

Alfred the Great

Alfred the Great, King of Wessex, ruled from 871 to 899 AD. He is arguably the most famous Anglo-Saxon King. There are many stories about Alfred the Great. He loved books and as a child, according to one story, he learnt to read before his elder brothers in order to win a book of English poetry belonging to his mother. As a young king, he spent two years of his reign in the fens of Somerset, plotting attacks on the advancing Vikings. Whilst there, he took shelter with ordinary villagers and legend

says he was so busy planning raids that he burnt the cakes (bread) that he was supposed to be watching and was shouted at by the lady of the house. She had no idea she was shouting at the future king of the Anglo-Saxons.

What made Alfred Great?

Alfred the Great began his reign as King of Wessex and ended it as King of the Anglo-Saxons. He is the only English king ever to be called 'the Great' and this is because of the many things he achieved.

Alfred's great achievements:

- Alfred defeated the Vikings in the Battle of Edington in 878AD and made the powerful Viking leader Guthrum convert to Christianity.
- He established peace between the Saxons and the Vikings – England was divided into two and the area ruled by the Vikings was known as the Danelaw.
- He took back London from the Vikings
- He built forts and walled towns (burhs) and created an army to protect his people, even building ships and creating the first English navy to defend his kingdom against Viking sea attacks.
- He built monasteries, promoted learning for the sons of freemen and had books, which at the time were mostly written in Latin, translated into English so more people could read them.
- Alfred commissioned the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a written historical record of the Anglo-Saxons in Britain.

King Athelstan

King Athelstan was King of the Anglo-Saxons. He ruled from 924 to 939 AD. Aethelstan was the Grandson of King Alfred. He conquered the last remaining Viking kingdom in York in 927 AD. He forced the submission of Constantine, King of Scotland who ruled parts of Northumbria, making him the first Anglo-Saxon ruler of the whole of England. Ten years later, at the Battle of Brunanburh, he defeated an invasion by Constantine who attacked with the Strathclyde Britons and the Viking king of Dublin. Aethelstan established a single set of laws for the whole kingdom. He is considered by many historians to be the first true King of England.

King Aethelred II (Ethelred the Unready)

King Aethelred II (Ethelred the Unready) ruled from 978 to 1013 and from 1014 to 1016 AD. Aethelred was the longest reigning Anglo-Saxon king, although he was not very successful. His name means 'well advised', but as he had poor advice for most of the rule, he was called 'The Unready' as a pun. He began paying Danegeld to the

Vikings in 991 to make them go away, but they came back and Aethelred ordered the death of all Danes living in England. As a result, King Sweyn Forkbeard of Denmark invaded England and Aethelred was forced into exile in Normandy. He returned to rule briefly when Sweyn died.

King Edward the Confessor

King Edward the Confessor ruled from 1042 to 1066 AD. Edward came to the throne after 27 years of Danish Rule in England. His reign was peaceful and English trade prospered. He was a very religious man and spent hours in prayer. Edward founded Westminster Abbey. He died without an heir causing a fierce fight for the English Throne.

Harold Godwinson

Harold Godwinson – Sometimes called Harold II, ruled from January to October in 1066 AD. Harold was the last Anglo-Saxon King of England. He was named king when Edward the Confessor died without an heir. Months later, he was killed at the Battle of Hastings by invading Normans led by William the Conqueror, who believed he had a claim to the throne of England.