

WHY IS KING ALFRED REGARDED AS 'GREAT'?

ALFRED THE GREAT was a pivotal and landmark figure in English history, proving to be a towering figure in both war and peace.

Born in 849, as the youngest son of King Ethelwulf, he was never expected to become king. But as his fathers and older brothers died – worn out in part by relentless battles – Alfred took on the mantle of national leader just as it seemed Wessex could fall to the invading Vikings.

Over the next 25 years Alfred turned the tide on the invaders, drew up secure borders with the Danelaw (the area occupied by the Vikings) and re-built the foundations of the Anglo-Saxon state, military and legal infrastructure. He also invested in re-invigorating scholarship and education as well as strengthening the Christian church. No wonder he was described by the Ealdorman Aethelweard as the 'Unshakeable pillar of the western people.'

His principal achievements include

- defeating in battle and then turning the tide on the pagan Viking invaders who threatened to take-over all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms
- stabilizing Wessex and establishing it as a base from which his son and grandson could then progressively unite England
- re-invigorating learning in England following the depredations of the Vikings
- establishing a strong administration
- promoting the use of the English language for government and scholarship
- publishing a new law code
- weaving England back into the political and cultural network of western Europe
- establishing an effective system of Royal administration

In many respects an essential core of Englishness was consolidated under the leadership and influence of King Alfred. His influence can still be seen today – especially in a city like Winchester!

A WORTHY TITLE

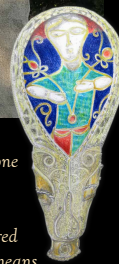
During the years 871 and 899, at a critical point in English history, Alfred proved to be a 'Great;

Military leader,
Statesman and administrator,
Law giver,
Educational pioneer
And
Patron Of The Church@

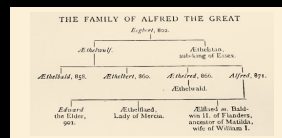
Victorian statue of Alfred, Winchester High Street. Photo: Joe Low



The 'Alfred Jewel', made of enamel, quartz and gold, is one of the most popular exhibits at the Ashmolean Museum. Dating from the reign of Alfred its Anglo Saxon inscription means "Alfred Ordered Me Made". The jewel was once attached to a rod and used for pointing to words when reading from a book. Illustration: Sophie Cunningham Dawe.



A coin depicting King Alfred discovered at New Minster by Professor Martin Biddle during his 1960s excavations. Photo: Winchester Museums.



Acknowledgements

Hyde900 wishes to express its admiration and appreciation of the work undertaken by Dr. Katie Tucker together with the support offered by the University of Winchester.

It also wishes to thank Winchester Museums Service, the Diocese of Winchester, the Revd. Canon Cliff Bannister, the congregation of St. Bartholomew and the community of Hyde. It is also grateful for the support of Chris Granlund and the BBC.