

***Kings
and Queens
of England***

Book 1

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Kings and Queens

written by **BRENDA RALPH LEWIS**

illustrated by **JOHN LEIGH-PEMBERTON**
and **PETER ROBINSON**

Ladybird Books Loughborough

Acknowledgment:

The photograph on page 35 (bottom left) is by John Moyes.

Revised edition

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The reigns of the Kings and Queens in this book cover more than six hundred years, from the accession of the Saxon King Alfred to the death of Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth.

Details of life at the time are included to give a fuller, richer picture of the years in which each monarch reigned.



Invading Vikings fight with Anglo-Saxons

Before the Kings and Queens

People have always had leaders and, eventually, leaders have always acquired titles. In time, the families of many of these leaders became *ruling or royal families*. In fact, the origin of the title, *king*, came from the Anglo-Saxon, *cyning*, meaning kin or family.

The first kings in Britain were really more like local chieftains ruling over tribes, living in clearings in the mass of forest that smothered most of the land. By the time the Romans invaded (43 AD), some tribes were very large, and historians described their chiefs as *Cunobelin, King of the Trinovantes* (Colchester)

or *Boadicea (Boudicca), Queen of the Iceni* (East Anglia).

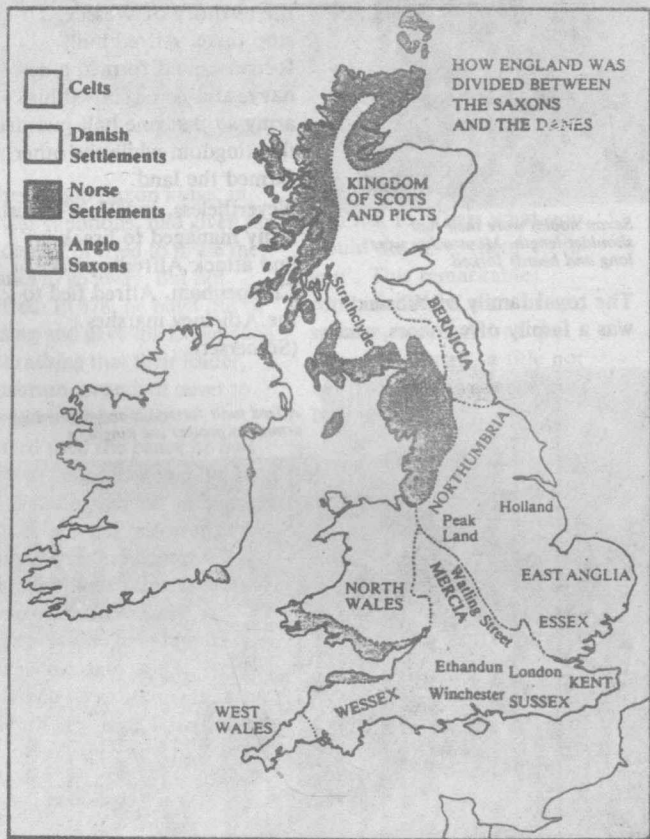
However, many centuries passed before there were kings of all England, and they arose from the vigorous, warlike invaders who first raided the coasts of Roman Britain in the 3rd century AD. They were the Anglo-Saxons, i.e. Angles, Jutes and Saxons from northern Germany and Denmark. After 426 AD, when the Romans had abandoned Britain, the Anglo-Saxons invaded in ever-increasing numbers. They drove the inhabitants westwards, towards Wales, and carved out their own kingdoms; Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex and East

Anglia, among them.

Then in the 8th century, history began to repeat itself. It became the turn of the Anglo-Saxons to face fierce foreign invaders: the Vikings from Scandinavia. Within a century, the Vikings

occupied vast areas of England, and only the Anglo-Saxon kings of Wessex remained to challenge them.

Because the challenge succeeded, this is where the story of the kings and queens of England begins.



THE SAXON KINGS

**Alfred the Great –
871-899 AD**



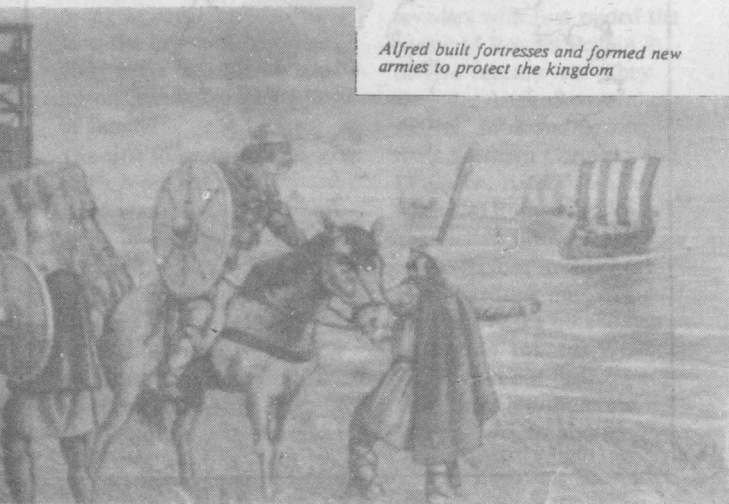
*Saxon nobles wore their hair
shoulder length. Moustaches were
long and beards forked*

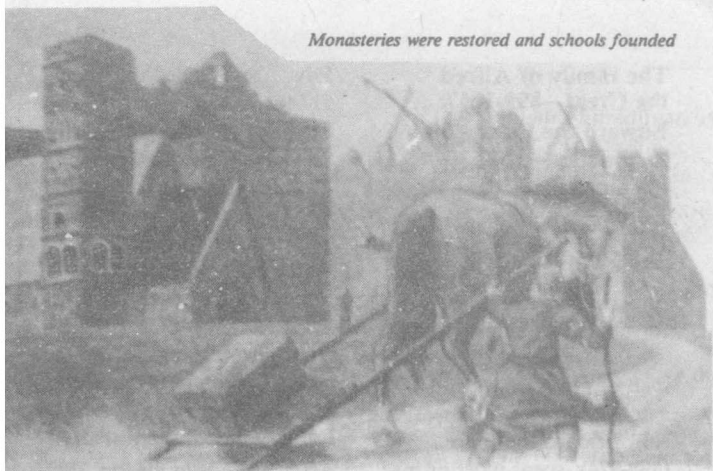
The royal family of Wessex
was a family of warriors, and

Alfred, the last of four brothers to rule the kingdom in the 9th century, fought the Danish Viking invaders nine times in 871, the year he came to the throne. At this time, the Danes occupied one half of England and had their greedy eyes on the other half: the territory of Wessex. To stop them, Alfred built fortresses and formed a new navy, and he organised his army so that one half guarded the kingdom while the other farmed the land.

Nevertheless, in 877, a Danish army managed to break in and attack Alfred's palace at Chippenham. Alfred fled to the Athelney marshes (Somerset).

*Alfred built fortresses and formed new
armies to protect the kingdom*





Other Anglo-Saxon kings, in similar situations, had given up in despair or tried to bribe the Danes to go away, but not Alfred. In 878, he burst out of hiding and gave the Danes such a thrashing that their leader, Guthrum, promised never to invade Wessex again.

Alfred used the peace he had won to concentrate on his work of founding schools to improve education, and restoring monasteries to invigorate religious life. Famous scholars came to Alfred's court at Winchester to help him to translate from Latin the first books to be written in the English language. Alfred also had the chance now to frame laws and so civilise his subjects.

The most important law was, 'Do not to others what you would not have them do to you'. This remarkable combination of warrior and scholar earned Alfred the title, 'the Great', a title not bestowed on any other king in England.



Alfred was a great scholar and translated books

**The family of Alfred
the Great – 899-1017:**

Edward the Elder – 899-924

Aethelstan – 924-939

Edmund the Elder – 939-946

Edred – 946-955

Edwy – 955-959

England was extremely fortunate that the first kings after Alfred were, like him, men of great ability and vigour. Alfred's successor, his son, Edward the Elder (899-924), spent most of his reign fighting to push back the frontiers of the Danelaw, as the Danish-occupied region of England was called.

Edward was aided during 917-918 by his sister Ethelfleda, Lady of English Mercia. Ethelfleda was a formidable warrior. Even the Danes were frightened when they saw her, armour-clad, sword in hand, leading her forces into battle. By 918, Ethelfleda and Edward controlled all England south of the River Mersey and the Humber, and most of the Danelaw had disappeared. After Ethelfleda died in 918, followed by Edward in 924, Edward's three sons continued where Ethelfleda and their father had left off.

Ethelfleda was a formidable warrior





Both Saxons and Danes went into battle on horseback although most of the fighting was done on foot

The eldest, the handsome and impressive King Aethelstan (924-939), pushed the Danes even further northwards, destroyed the new Danish kingdom of York, and formed England into roughly the area it occupies today. Aethelstan's brothers, Edmund

(939-946) and Edred (946-955) spent their years as kings strengthening the gains Aethelstan had made.

Their nephew, Edwy, who became king in 955 aged about 15 and died four years later, had little chance to make his mark upon the history of England. Edwy did however quarrel with Dunstan, Bishop of London, by leaving his coronation to visit his future bride and her mother. Dunstan, it seems, went after the teenage king and dragged him back to the coronation feast. Dunstan was later forced to leave England but soon returned, after English nobles tired of the feckless Edwy. They chose his younger brother, Edgar, as king instead in 959.

Edwy quarrels with the Bishop of London at the coronation feast



Edgar – 959-975

It was a brilliant choice, for King Edgar was a true heir of Alfred the Great. He was also the first king since Alfred who did not have to spend time and effort fighting wars. His uncles, Aethelstan, Edmund and Edred had seen to that.

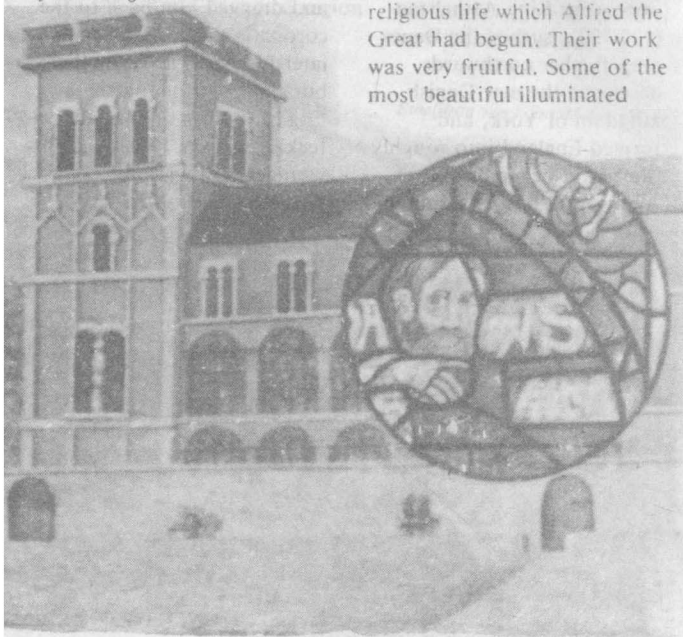
Together with Dunstan, the young King Edgar, who was only thirteen when he came to the throne, turned his

A Saxon abbey showing detail of a stained glass window



Illuminated manuscript

attention to furthering the education and revival of religious life which Alfred the Great had begun. Their work was very fruitful. Some of the most beautiful illuminated



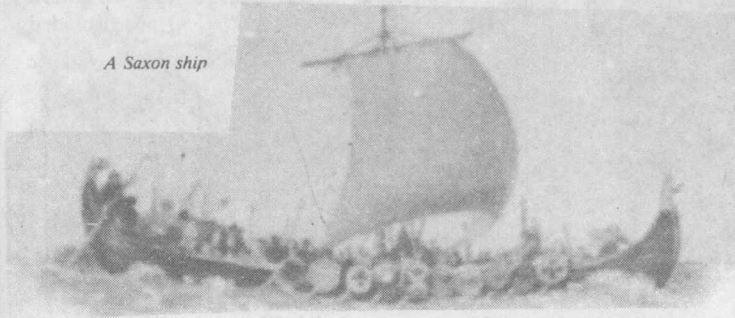


manuscripts ever produced in England date from Edgar's time, and so does the building of beautiful abbeys filled with stained-glass windows. This was a 'golden age' of learning and strict religious observance, when more scholarly books were translated into English and

monks began to lead worthier and more dedicated lives.

By 973, Edgar's prestige was so great that, as tradition has it, he was rowed across the River Dee by six kings. This act of humility on their part showed how wholeheartedly they accepted Edgar as their overlord.

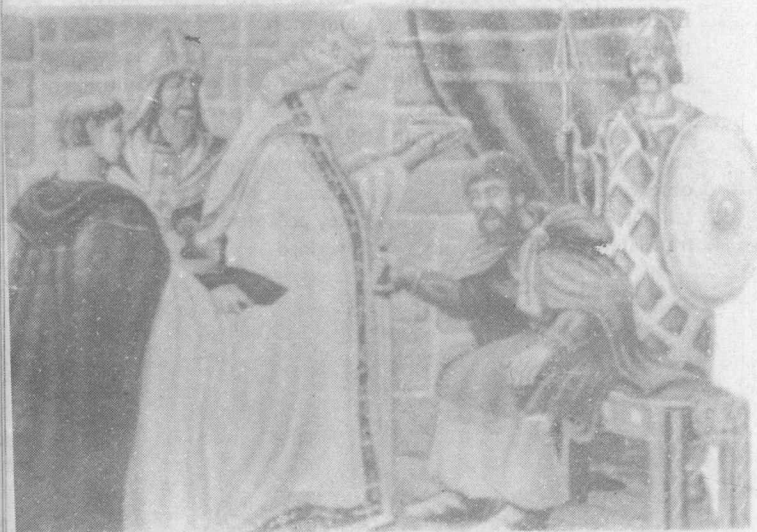
A Saxon ship





A Saxon tower built of stone. The windows were arches with a rounded top

That same year, Edgar was crowned in Bath Abbey in a coronation ceremony which, in its essentials, remains the same today. The most important part of it, the anointing of the monarch's head with holy oil, came to be seen as something which set kings and queens apart from ordinary folk. It established the idea that there was a special *magic* in kingship, a magic conferred directly by God.



The coronation of Edgar

**Edward the Martyr –
975-978**

**Aethelred the Unready –
978-1016**

Edmund Ironside – 1016

Tragically this 'golden age' ended abruptly with Edgar's death two years later in 975. From then onwards, a shadow fell across the Anglo-Saxon monarchy and deepened as time went on. Edgar's son and successor, Edward, was murdered in 978, aged 16. The culprit, apparently, was his stepmother, who wanted her own son, Aethelred, aged 10, to be king instead. She got her wish and brought disaster upon England.

Aethelred well deserved his nickname 'the Unready', meaning 'ill-advised'. Under his weak rule, England was swamped year after year by new Danish invaders who left a trail of slaughter, destruction, sorrow and terror behind them. In 1003, King

Sweyn of Denmark drove Aethelred into exile in Normandy, and was acclaimed king of England. After Sweyn died in 1014, the English nobles invited Aethelred to come back, as long as he ruled more competently. Sweyn however had a son, Canute, and he was not going to let England go that easily. In 1015, Canute brought a great invasion fleet to Kent and devastating warfare resumed. After King Aethelred died in April 1016, his son and successor, Edmund Ironside, carried on the struggle against the Danes. Edmund proved so mighty a warrior that Canute agreed to share England with him. It never happened. Edmund died suddenly in November 1016 (he may have been murdered) and Canute came into possession of all England.

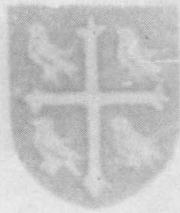
Shields of Saxon noblemen



Canute



Alfred the Great



Edmund Ironside