



King Alfred of England

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The life and times of the Anglo-Saxon king

King Alfred of England Details

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From Reader Review King Alfred of England for online ebook

Carol Bakker says

Alfred is a remarkable figure in the history of England. He is credited with founding the English monarchy, codifying laws, founding the University of Oxford, and inventing the lantern.

I found Abbott's book a bit of a slog. And there is that section on pp 34-36 where he evaluates the Indian, African and Caucasian races in a most discomfiting and cringe-worthy way. He wrote *there is no barbarism in the Caucasian race*, a statement wrong in 1849, which wrongness was amplified ninety years later with the gruesome infamy of Stalin and Hitler. Ouch.

I have a mental block when it comes to all the Ethels: Ethelstan, Ethelred, Ethelwulf, Ethelbert. Ethel means noble, and the appellation seems similar in style to Pharaoh. But I tend to surrender to confusion.

Much of his life, Alfred was fighting Danes who tried encroaching on Alfred's lands. Abbot writes: *The Danes, it is true, might be considered as the aggressors in this contest, and, as such, wholly in the wrong; but then, on the other hand, it was to be remembered that the ancestors of the Saxons had been guilty of precisely the same aggressions upon the Britons, who held the island before them; so that the Danes were, after all, only intruding upon intruders.*

The most intriguing story was Alfred's victory over the Dane chieftain, Guthrum. When Guthrum surrendered, Alfred offered him his liberty and friendship if he would leave Alfred's kingdom, vow never to return, give hostages, convert to Christianity and be baptized in the presence of the military leaders on both sides. Alfred stood as his godfather. They feasted together and parted friends. Guthrum kept the promises he made. If that's not a discussion starter...

Jer Wilcoxon says

What you have to understand is that this book was written between probably 1833 and 1879 (year of death for the author, Jacob Abbott). The earliest printing I've found for it was a Harper & Brothers copy published in 1902 (at UCLA Young research library) The history is poor, in my opinion, even for the time; though I suppose there were still historians living at that time who believed King Arthur was a real, historical personage. It uses the pseudo-histories of Bede, Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth, as a basis, as if they were true history. It's an interesting read if you haven't yet been introduced to the subject; but understand that it is not true history. It contains a few facts that certainly are true; but they are mired within layers of folk stories and myth. The style will seem stilted and antiquary to the modern reader. It's only real value is for finding out what people believed English history to be before, say, 1850.

Rob Roy says

This book was published in 1849, and meant as a history for what we now call young adults. I read it, because our modern histories of this period often mention some of the myths and stories surrounding Alfred, especially the burnt cakes, but never retell them. I figured this biography would do so, and I was not

disappointed. However, two other great discoveries came my way. Chapter two sets out to tell of the "Anglo-Saxon Race." This chapter is so racist that even David Duke would be taken aback. Yet, for those studying history, it clearly lays out the beliefs of the day. Secondly, assuming this book was written for the Middle School age group, there would be few of that age today who could follow this book. It clearly shows that the rigor of learning has lapsed over the years.

Natalya says

Boring account a powerful King. Writing was flat and dry.

Misfit says

Dry dry dry. I wanted to read about Alfred and not about all the Saxons who came before him.

Meagan says

This might be the worst book I have ever read. Abbott not only makes some incredibly racist and sexist statements, but he also writes in a style that seems fake, as if he's trying desperately to sound scholarly. I found the book quite jolting to my system, especially after reading Beowulf, which is brilliant.

Kathy says

Well-written. Gives plenty of context and background. Explains why he has been named and considered so "great." Of all the "Greats" throughout history (Peter, Alexander, Cyrus, etc.), I think Alfred really deserved the title.

Evan Hays says

Apart from the blatant 19th century racist attitudes about how Anglo-Saxons are supposedly better than other races, this book was satisfactory in its account of Alfred. I'll certainly take it for a free online book until I can get a hold of the Justin Pollard book.

Russell Hall says

Abbott is flawed by being inherently racist, believing that the Anglo Saxons and other Europeans were superior to others. He apparently skipped the history of the dark ages, to say nothing of the Roman Emperors. The rest of the story is a nice, narrative style history of an earlier ages. Modern Scholars no doubt will have more objective points of view, but given the rarity of books on this early and Great King of England, one

must read what one can find.

Alicia says

A truly moving account of one of England's greatest heroes - one that does full credit not only to the subject itself, but also to the author for splendidly recounting this history to the reader with accuracy, enthusiasm, and passion.

Rick Davis says

I'm usually a fan of the Jacob Abbott histories, but this one was unusually bad. The information is poor, with a few big errors, and the racist ideas inherent in the time period (early 1800s) are quite evident. As a brief review of the life of King Alfred, I wouldn't recommend this one.

Phil Syphe says

This is the most under-researched and off-topic history book I've read to date. Would've rated it one star but opted for two when considering the author was a nineteenth-century American writing about English history when he doubtless lacked much info that's available on Alfred nowadays.

But why attempt writing a biography of someone if research is so restricted? Even the book's title is erroneous, as Alfred was not King of England, he was King of Wessex. Alfred laid the foundations of a united England, but it was his grandson Æthelstan who became my country's first monarch.

Other errors include a reference to the four kingdoms of England during the 800s. The author gets three right but names the fourth as Essex when it was in fact East Anglia.

At one point Alfred is said to have died in 900. At another he's said to have died in 900 or 901. In truth, Alfred died in 899. Clearly the author was unsure of the date, so why state it as fact one minute, only to say it was either this year or that in the next minute? Anyway, he's got it wrong.

My biggest criticism is the huge amount of time spent detailing times and events that are off-topic. Apart from the first two paragraphs, Chapters 1-3 have nothing to do with Alfred, while Chapters 4 & 5 barely touch on the subject matter either, as this quote from the end of Chapter 5 illustrates:

>But we must end these digressions, which we have indulged thus far in order to give the reader some distinct conception of the ideas and habits of the times, and proceed, in the next chapter, to relate the events immediately connected with Alfred's accession to the throne.<

Mr Abbott, you should never have started these extensive digressions!

Chapter 1 is all about Roman Britain, which is an interesting topic in its own right, but it has no place here whatsoever.

Chapter 2 discusses the Anglo-Saxons. Granted, this is the stock from which Alfred sprung, thus a paragraph devoted to these years would've been fine, but not a full chapter.

Chapter 3 is about the Danes, which again is relevant, but only in relation to how Alfred the Great saved my country from becoming Daneland. We don't need a full chapter discussing events that have no relevance to the subject of the biography!

I gave up reading when reaching the final chapter, entitled "The Sequel", as it discusses events after Alfred's death. Not events concerning his family or how his grandson took what Alfred had started and became England's first king, all of which would've been an acceptable way to round off the book, but rather the author skips on a few decades, focusing on people and events leading up to the time of the conquest. Totally off-topic again, Mr Abbott!

The author's reasoning for this final chapter is that he feels the subsequent period of history wouldn't be of interest to general readers. This is quite an assumption.

The last chapter, like the first three, does not belong in this biography. The author should've either ended with Alfred's death, or finished with a summary of his son King Edward's fate, and give a nod of appreciation to his grandson Æthelstan for what he achieved.

Incredibly, Æthelstan - the first King of England - does not receive a single mention in the entire book! It amazes me how the author can justify ignoring Æthelstan yet wastes time devoting full chapters to subjects unrelated to Alfred, while heavily digressing off-topic for most other times.

Glad I didn't pay for this volume. It's freely available on several websites, though I recommend it to nobody wanting to learn about Alfred.

The only thing I learned in the whole book is that Alfred is credited for inventing the lantern.
