

History

Enquiry: How “dark” were the Dark Ages?

## **Alfred the Great**

Mr Cooper



# Alfred fights back

By the 870s it seemed that the Vikings were about to destroy all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Only Wessex survived and was being attacked on all sides by Viking armies. In 878, the king of Wessex, Alfred was forced to run away from the Vikings and hide on an island surrounded by marshes. However from here, Alfred managed to raise a big army from the surrounding area. Within a few weeks, his new army defeated the Vikings in several battles. As a result, the Vikings were forced to pull back from Wessex.



## Alfred strengthens Wessex

In order to protect his kingdom from the Vikings, Alfred took a number of steps. He built a network of towns surrounded by walls called **burhs** across his kingdom. The burhs were no more than 20km apart. This meant that if the Vikings attacked a burh, soldiers from another burh could be quickly sent to help fight back.



## Alfred strengthens Wessex

Alfred also started building ships, seeing how important they were to the Vikings. This helped him travel faster and raid the Vikings when the timing was right. Alfred also organised the armies in Wessex so that within a few years, he had around 27,000 soldiers. He became so confident that he captured the trading town of London in 886.



# The division of England

In 890, Alfred made a deal with Guthrum, the leader of the Vikings. This deal was called the **Treaty** of Wedmore. The two men agreed that England would be divided in two along an old Roman road called Watling Street.



# The division of England

To the north of this street, the Vikings would be in charge. This area became known as **the Danelaw**. To the south of the street, Alfred and the kings of Wessex would be in charge. We know this deal lasted a long time because there is a lot of evidence in the Danelaw of Viking settlement. For example, there are lots of places in the east and north of England with Viking names.



## A boost to learning

The Viking raids had caused serious damage to the Church in England. As a consequence, the Church was weaker and fewer people were receiving an education. Alfred decided to change this because he believed strongly in the importance of learning.



## A boost to learning

He translated lots of important books about Christianity from Latin, the language of the Church, into English. This way his people could understand them. He founded a school at his court and employed lots of wise monks from all over Europe to teach his friends and family. Because the Church was so happy about this, they started to write about how great he was.



# Glossary

A burh: A town surrounded by a wall to protect it from attacks.

A treaty: An agreement made between two leaders to end fighting.

The Danelaw: The area of England controlled by the Vikings.



# Comprehension Questions

1. Where did Alfred go after Wessex was invaded by the Vikings?
2. What did Alfred build all over Wessex and why?
3. How many soldiers were there in Alfred's army?
4. What deal did Alfred make with Guthrum?
5. What evidence is there that the Vikings settled in the Danelaw?

