

History

Enquiry: How “dark” were the Dark Ages?

Aethelflaed, Edward and Aethelstan

Mr Cooper



Keeping it in the family

Alfred spent much of his time as king strengthening and protecting Wessex from the Vikings. However, it was Alfred's children, Edward and Aethelflaed, and his grandson Aethelstan, who finally defeated the Vikings and united England.



Keeping it in the family

Alfred died in 899, leaving his son Edward to become king of Wessex. A few years earlier, Alfred's daughter, Aethelflaed, had married the lord of Mercia. So, after Alfred's death Edward and Aethelflaed worked closely together. In 911, when her husband died, Aethelflaed took charge of Mercia and became known as Lady of Mercia.



Taking the fight to the Vikings

Alfred managed to defend Wessex and parts of Mercia from Viking attacks. However, Edward and Aethelflaed started to launch attacks against the Vikings living in other parts of England. Working closely together for the next few years, they gradually took control of the area known as **the Danelaw**. They continued what Alfred had done by building **burhs** all over the country, and used them to launch attacks on Viking centres.



Taking the fight to the Vikings

In 917, Edward pushed the Vikings out of East Anglia. Around the same time, Aethelflaed defeated the Vikings at both Derby and Leicester. Together, the brother and sister had pushed the Vikings out of England all the way to the Humber river, leaving only the old kingdom of Northumbria in Viking hands.



Aethelstan, the first king of Britain

In 924, Edward died, leaving his son Aethelstan as king. Aethelstan had spent much of his childhood with his aunt, Aethelflaed, the Lady of Mercia. In 927, he led an army north and took back control of York from the Vikings. A few years later in 934, he won another major victory against Constantine, the Scottish king, at the Battle of Brunanburh.



Aethelstan, the first king of Britain

As a result, Aethelstan became known as “the King of the Whole of Britain”. We know this because he **minted** coins with this title on them. Aethelstan also cared about the people he ruled: he stopped the death penalty being used for people under the age of 15 because he thought it was cruel. He also introduced fines for any lord who let their people starve.



Glossary

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

A burh: A town surrounded by a wall to defend it against the Vikings.

To mint a coin: To make a coin.



Comprehension Questions

1. Who were Alfred's children?
2. Why was Aethelflaed known as the Lady of Mercia?
3. What did Edward and Aethelflaed do to the Vikings?
4. Why did Aethelstan become known as "the King of the Whole of Britain"?
5. What did Aethelstan do to make life better for people in England?

