

# King Alfred the Great (849 AD - 899 AD)

**King of the southern Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex, King Alfred is the only English monarch known as 'the Great'**



Alfred the Great Photo: Getty Images

By Joe Kavanagh The Telegraph UK

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-Born in Wantage, Berkshire, in 849, Alfred became King of Wessex at the tender age of 21. Crowned in 871, he reigned for 28 years

-Following the wishes of his father, Aethelwulf, he succeeded the kingship after his brothers, to prevent passing the crown to an under-age king when the country was under constant attack from Viking raids.

-Alfred was already battle-hardened when he came to the throne, having defeated the Danes at the Battle of Ashdown in 871. His army routed the invaders in a fierce uphill struggle but sustained heavy losses.

-In 878, the King Guthrum took Chippenham, Wiltshire, in a surprise assault. Using the town as a secure base, they struck out at Wessex and forced Alfred to retreat with the remains of his force.

-Copying the Danes' tactics, Alfred created a fortified base at Athelney, Somerset. From here, he summoned an army from Wiltshire, Somerset and Hampshire and encouraged his men to use guerrilla tactics against the invaders.

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-In 878 Alfred was victorious at the Battle of Edington, resulting in a treaty with the Danes. Peace was agreed on the condition that Guthrum was baptised and that his army would leave Wessex.

-Once peace was achieved, Alfred set about reorganising Southern England's defences. By building a network of well-defended settlements and a new navy of fast ships, he ensured that his kingdom was better-equipped to repel future invaders.

-Alfred died in 899 at the age of 50, and was interred in Winchester, the burial place of the West Saxon royal family.

# King Alfred the Great bones believed to be in box found in museum

The remains could be that of King Alfred the Great or his son Edward the Elder, scientists say



Alfred the Great, King of Wessex (871-899) and his statue in Winchester Photo: Alamy

By Nick Collins

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The first remains of King Alfred the Great may have been found at last after tests on a pelvic bone unearthed in Winchester revealed it belonged to either the Anglo-Saxon King or his son Edward.

But after a high-profile excavation of an unmarked grave where the Anglo-Saxon King was believed to be buried, the location of the bone was much more mundane - a storage box in the bowels of a local museum.

Archaeologists from the University of Winchester had initially analysed six skeletons excavated from a grave at St Bartholomew's Church, the historic site of Hyde Abbey, last March.

They believed that the remains belonged to Alfred and other members of his family, whose were known to have been interred at Hyde Abbey centuries after their death.

But when each skeleton was found to date from the 1300s - several hundred years after the death of Alfred in 899 - the researchers turned to a set of remains found in the late 1990s during a previous excavation of the same site.

# The search for King Alfred the Great

In a clip from the upcoming TV documentary, *The Search For Alfred The Great*, presenter Neil Oliver works with historians and scientists to establish whether human remains could be those of the ninth-century king

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In a dusty storage box filled with animal remains at Winchester's City Museum they found a fragment of human pelvic bone, including the right hip joint, which had been buried beneath the historic site of the high altar in 1999 but had never been examined.

Scientific analysis of the bone revealed it had belonged to a man aged 26-45, who died between 895 and 1017 AD - meaning it could conceivably belong either to Alfred or his son and successor Edward.

Although no DNA tests have been carried out, the bone is almost certainly from a member of the King's family because it predates Hyde Abbey itself, experts said.

Alfred, who died in 899, was initially buried at Winchester's old minster but was subsequently moved to another church to be alongside his wife and children, and all were later reinterred at Hyde Abbey after it was consecrated in 1110.

Dr Katie Tucker, who led the excavation, said: "The simplest explanation, given there was no Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Hyde Abbey, is that this bone comes from one of the members of the West Saxon royal family brought to the site.

"Given the age at death of the individual, and the probable male identity, the plausible candidates are King Alfred, King Edward the Elder, or the brother of King Edward, Aethelweard. All were buried in the Abbey.

"However, historical evidence indicates that only the coffins of Alfred and Edward were at the site of the High Altar. The discovery of the bone in a put due into the graves in front of the High Altar makes it far more likely that it comes from either Alfred or Edward."

Members of a local historical society, who were behind the search for the King's remains, are now calling for further excavations of the Hyde Abbey site in the hope that more bones may be uncovered.

The fact that only the pelvis has been found is likely the fault of 18th Century convicts, who disturbed a number of graves while building a prison, they said.

Edward Fennell, founder of the Hyde900 group, explained: "Almost certainly the royal graves were found in 1788 when they were building a prison on the site. The graves were destroyed and the bones were thrown around and buried hither and thither. That is why finding a random bone is not surprising - they were thrown around a significant part of the site."

King Alfred the Great is remembered as the medieval King who protected southern England from the Vikings, as well as introducing a host of social and educational reforms.

His son Edward later reclaimed vast swathes of land as he forced the Danes back into a corner of north-eastern England, constructing a series of forts as he went.

Dr Nick Thorpe, head of the department of archaeology at the University of Winchester, said he was "extremely excited" to be able to "plausibly link this human bone to one of these two crucial figures in English history.

Alfred or Edward has become the second English King to be unearthed in the space of two years, after the remains of Richard III were identified beneath a council car park in Leicester in 2012.