

12th May

Memory verse

Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: **behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.** Isaiah 40:15

Something to read

Sometimes when an important event happened a very long time ago we no longer know on exactly which day it took place. This is the case with the Battle of Edington (sometimes also known as the Battle of Ethandun or Ethandune) which took place in May 878AD. We know that the battle took place on a date between 6th and 12th May but not exactly which of those days.

Britain had been at the mercy of Viking invaders for some years and Alfred the Great, King of Wessex, was being defeated and eluded by them at every turn. No longer just bands of seasonal raiders, the Vikings now formed what the Saxons called a “Great Heathen Army” led by three brothers, Ivar the Boneless, Ubba, and Halfdan Ragnarsson. This army was not satisfied with attacking the coastal towns and going home with whatever goods and slaves it could capture. The Vikings now wanted to remain in Britain permanently, living on whatever they could plunder from the Saxons. Alfred made treaties with them, under the terms of which they received money in return for going home. Often they took the money – and remained, moving deeper into Wessex rather than leaving. Bribery never works does it? By 878 King Alfred of Wessex was reduced to wandering around in the wild Somerset marshes with a few followers.

It was the Battle of Edington that changed all this. Alfred rallied all the remaining fighting men of Somerset, Wiltshire and Hampshire to a muster (military gathering) at a place called Egbert's Stone (we no longer know exactly where that was) and this was a bigger fighting force than he had ever had before. They all moved off together the following day to Iley Oak (again it is not certain where it was exactly) and encountered the Viking army at Edington in Wiltshire – a place you *can* find on the map, although again it is not one hundred per cent certain this is where the battle took place.

Now Alfred and his men had their chance. The Vikings generally tried to occupy some kind of fortification and hold out against attack until the besiegers, running out of supplies and manpower, made terms – generally money for going away – which the Vikings accepted and then broke. This was a different kind of battle, open warfare, and Alfred and his men knew that they were fighting for the very existence of Wessex. His friend John Asser, who wrote his biography, explains:

Fighting ferociously, forming a dense shield-wall against the whole army of the Pagans, and striving long and bravely...at last he [Alfred] gained the victory. He overthrew the Pagans with great slaughter, and smiting the fugitives, he pursued them as far as the fortress.¹

It was only the remnants of the Viking force that occupied the fortress and Alfred and his men were able to starve them out and dictate conditions of peace. The tide had turned for Wessex.



¹ As quoted in Smyth, Alfred *The Medieval Life of Alfred*, (Cambridge,2002) pp. 26–27

Something to research

Alfred was King of Wessex but where exactly was Wessex? Find out which of our modern counties were part of Alfred's Kingdom. You might even be living there yourself!

Something to do

Today's story calls for some dressing up. You can make a Saxon or a Viking helmet like this:
You will need:

- Thin cardboard (e.g. cereal packet),
- Scissors,
- Pencil,
- A ruler,
- Glue and/or staples
- Silver or grey paint,
- Brown paper or something similar.

Cut 3 strips of card about 3cm wide, one should be about 65cm long and two about 40cm long. The longest strip is to make a band around your head just above your ears. Check the fit and then staple it or glue it firmly.

Now add one band across the top of head from ear to ear and another from front to back. Leave a few cms sticking down to make a nose guard at front as in the picture. Staple these together where they cross to make the helmet strong.

Now you can paint the helmet silver or grey so it looks like metal. If you have used the an inside out cereal box it may look grey already.

When the paint is dry, you can line the bands with brown paper so it looks like hardened leather.

Study the picture on the previous page closely and you may be able to make your helmet much more realistic than the one in these instructions by altering and extending the shape of the cardboard strip that goes across the top of the head from front to back. Experiment and see if you can incorporate the rivets, pattern and nose guard. Whatever you do don't be tempted to attach horns to Viking helmets. Real Vikings did **not wear helmets with horns**. That idea was invented in the nineteenth century and popularised by the operas of Richard Wagner whose Norse characters sported horned helmets!

You may also like to make a shield to go with your costume and helmet.

You will need:

- Stiff corrugated cardboard
- A pencil
- Scissors
- A plastic yoghurt pot or a foil pie case
- Two paper fasteners
- Glue and sticky tape
- Paints

If you want to make your shield even stronger you will also need some newspaper

Cut out a large circle of cardboard to be the basic shape of the shield with the diameter roughly the measurement from your knuckles to your elbow doubled. If you can glue two layers together the shield will be stronger.

Take the plastic pot/foil pie case, and draw a circle round it at the centre of your shield. Draw a

smaller circle inside that one and cut round it to make a hole in the middle of the shield. This will form a lip for the pot/pie case to sit on. Push it through and stick it in place with tape. This is the boss of the shield where your hand goes when it is in use.

Now glue a strip of stiff card to form a handgrip across the hole behind the 'boss'. To strengthen, push paper fasteners through from front; tape at back.

You can also cover the outside of the cardboard and pot with layers of newspaper. Glue the layers down on top of one another and finish with a layer of plain paper. Paint the shield either directly on to the cardboard or onto the paper. Use a simple bright design or pattern.



The rest of your outfit is easy! Some long trousers can be bound round in a criss-cross pattern with some tape or string (see left). An over sized t-shirt would make a good tunic especially if tied or belted at the waist and a cloak could be improvised out of any suitable piece of fabric – even a dark coloured towel or pillow case! If you can borrow a broach to fasten it, so much the better.

A girl's costume could be made using a head scarf, and an apron over almost any plain dress. An adult t-shirt could be adapted to make a dress for a small girl if you were prepared to cut it a bit and draw the whole thing in with a belt or cord. Again a broach or broaches would be handy, if you can borrow some, and should go at the bottom of the front shoulder straps of the apron to look like fastenings.

Unfortunately, Anglo Saxon and Viking warriors did not often have swords. This is sad because swords are quite easy to make out of cardboard. They *did* use throwing spears so if you can find something to make a long spear shaft you could attach a spearhead made of cardboard to it.²

Something to cook

Now that you have some Anglo-Saxon clothes how about an Anglo-Saxon meal? A basic food for ordinary people in the times of Alfred the Great was pottage. This was made of whatever vegetables and meat came to hand and was somewhere between a soup and a stew depending on how well off you were and what was available. It was cooked in a cauldron over an open fire but you can make yours in a large pot in the oven or a saucepan on the hob. Here is one way of making pottage but don't worry if you have not got the ingredients! What went into Anglo-Saxon pottage varied a lot. If making your own pottage is not practical even a tin of soup would be a good substitute, especially if you could add a few bit from the recipe list below. Quantities are variable – as they would have been in Anglo-Saxon times.



Pottage Ingredients:

Shredded cabbage or kale
leeks chopped fine
onions chopped or shredded
mixed chopped herbs fresh or dried
chicken beef or vegetable stock
a little porridge oats to thicken the pottage

Let your pottage simmer until all the ingredients are tender. Season to taste but remember that

² This page has some pictures of Anglo Saxon weapons which you might like to try to copy in cardboard and a good design for your shield: <https://www.dkfindout.com/uk/history/anglo-saxons/anglo-saxon-weapons>. It also gives the reason why swords were less common.

although salt was available, (but not cheap as it is today) pepper was an expensive luxury. You can eat your pottage with bread although it will not be like Anglo-Saxon bread I'm afraid. If you want to make Anglo-Saxon bread you will need some pea flour, rye flour, oat flour or barley flour which you mix with enough water to form a dough. If these are not available try wholemeal wheat flour. Very rich people might have had white flour. Then you can knead it, shape it into flat rounds and bake it on a griddle or ungreased frying pan (not too hot!), turning it over to cook both sides. These flat breads were a staple food and they are good with pottage.

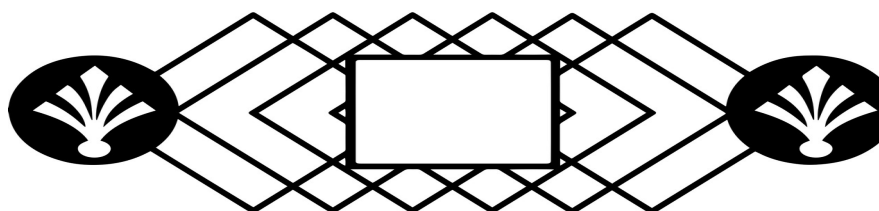
Advertisement!

When I read about the times of Alfred the Great, I found it all so exciting that I wrote a story about it, *Wulfgar and the Vikings*, which is as full of adventure as I could make it. The battle of Edington comes into the story. You can order it from any good Christian bookshop.³

When great grandma was a little girl...

Alfred the Great is not the only king we can think about today. King George VI was crowned on **12th May** 1937. This was the first coronation to be filmed.⁴

The interesting thing about this king's coronation is what had happened to his predecessor. Surely he had died, you might think. Well, no, Edward VIII was still alive. He had abdicated (given up) the throne because he wanted to marry an unsuitable lady. He had been king for such a short time that he had not been crowned and the plans for his coronation were used for the coronation of King George VI who was his younger brother. The two brothers were very different in their ideas and temperament. You can glimpse a little detail of this if you watch the old film of the coronation. Did you notice the entrance to Westminster Abbey? (starts at 10:12) If you were observant you might have thought "that's not Westminster Abbey surely!" It is usual for a temporary entrance or annexe to be built to the Abbey for coronations. Edward VIII had been keen to modernise as much of the ceremony as possible but George VI reverted to more a traditional pattern. However, there was not time to change the temporary entrance which was in an Art Deco style chosen by Edward VIII. George VI would have preferred something more traditional. Art Deco was a very up to date fashionable style at the time and must have looked very strange on the front of Westminster Abbey.⁵



George VI proved to be a capable leader during the Second World War which was less than three years in the future when he was crowned. He had not been expecting to become king and had always thought giving speeches would be beyond him because of his stammer. Now he was faced with the task of giving radio broadcasts to his war torn country. He rose to the challenge, practising for an hour every single day with a speech therapist. Radio broadcasts had to be given live then and there was no room for a mistake.

³ In case of difficulty you can buy direct from the publisher here:

<https://www.ritchiechristianmedia.co.uk/product/wulfgar-saxon-wulfgar-and-vikings>

⁴ You can watch the old film of the event here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcYG9CUXceU>

⁵ You can download an Art Deco colouring sheet here that will give you a good idea of the style: https://www.justcolor.net/art/art-deco/?image=art-deco_coloring-adult-art-deco-poster_3

A speaking exercise

The quality of broadcasting was not so good in those days as it is now so the king's enunciation had to be very clear and the pace quite slow so that people listening could work out what he was saying easily. If you listen to the broadcast

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/kinggeorgevfirstradioaddress.htm> you will be able to hear where the King pauses to prevent himself stammering.

Try reading this speech aloud yourself. It is printed below the video on the link above. Imagine the challenges the king is facing and try to express what he is striving to communicate using just your voice. Do not rush!