

Saxon kings kept the overlordship gained by Egbert (d. 832).

ALFRED THE GREAT 871-901 The hero of this early period was Alfred, so justly called the Great, who is by common consent pronounced to be the most perfect character in history.

As a warrior, as a statesman, as a man, his character is flawless, and truly indeed did he fulfil his own ambition—

“This I have striven, to live worthily while I lived that I might leave to the men who come after me a remembrance of me in good works.”

By his victory at Ethandune (878), Alfred saved Wessex from the Danes: by the treaty of Wedmore he handed over to them the Midlands and the North, but only on condition of their receiving Christianity: by his foundation of the navy, by his organisation of an efficient army, by his building of forts, he strengthened the defences of the country and was able with little difficulty to beat off the attacks of fresh swarms of Danish invaders. But the saving of the country from the Danes was only one part of Alfred's work; by his laws, his administration of justice, his care for religion and education, and his encouragement of trade, he secured the prosperity of the people, for whom he worked with such perfect effacement of his own ambitions.

THE WEST SAXON KINGS By his warlike descendants, Edward, Athelstan, and Edgar, the Danes who had settled in England were deprived of their political independence, and the direct rule of the West Saxon kings was extended to the Forth. The Welsh of Cornwall were reduced to full submission, and all the princes of the Welsh and Scots acknowledged the supremacy of the descendants of Egbert. The high water mark of West Saxon greatness