



King Alfred &
*The Anglo-Saxon
Chronicle*



LYDE

NORTHUMBRIA

GWYNEDD

MERCIA

EAST ANGLIA

POWYS

ESSEX

DYFED

GWENT

KENT

WESSEX

SUSSEX

DUMNONIA

Chronology

- 835–50 widespread raiding, especially in the south
- 849 birth of Alfred of Wessex
- 851 first Viking winter quarters
- 851 350 ships attack from the Thames
- 865 Vikings settle in Kent, East Anglia; conquer York
- 866 Æthelred succeeds to the throne of Wessex
- 868 Æthelred and Alfred help defend Mercia
- 869 the York Vikings take East Anglia, killing Edmund
- 870–71 Æthelred and Alfred fight nine battles;
Æthelred killed, Alfred becomes King of Wessex
- 871 Alfred presumably pays off the Vikings
- 876 hostilities resume
- 878 his army decimated, Alfred mobilizes the
population and defeats the Vikings



Chronology

- 880–88 occasional raids
- 888 death of Guthrum, ruler of the Danelaw
- 892/3 renewed large-scale Viking attacks from Europe
- 893–96 renewed Danelaw-Norse hostilities
- 893 publication of Asser's *Vita Ælfredi*
- 899 death of King Alfred; succeeded by his son Edward the Elder

Innovations

- military (after 878)
 - construction of *burhs*
 - rotation of agricultural and military duty
 - expansion of hidal draft: military (1/5), burgal (1/1)
 - new ship-design
- educational/cultural (880s)
 - translation and distribution of essential texts
 - call to teach all freeborn men to read English
 - legal innovations
 - foundation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (892)

Translation

- religious

- “Handboc”

- Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*

- Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care*

- Augustine, *Soliloquies*

- Psalms 1–50

- Orosius, *Histories Against the Pagans*

- Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*

- ? *Martyrology*

- secular

- *Consolation of Philosophy*

- ? *Leechbook*

lost

commissioned by Alfred
Alfred’s own...?

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

- 892 probable year of first publication
- 893–96 first continuation of common stock
- 897–914 second continuation
- 915–20 third continuation

Surviving redactions:

- A (Parker): 60 BCE–1093 CE
 - B : 60 BCE–977 CE
 - C: 60 BCE–1066 CE
 - D: 60 BCE–1080 CE
 - E (Peterborough): 60 BCE–1154 CE
 - F: 60 BCE–1202 CE
 - G: fragmentary, 270 CE–1001 CE (based on A)
 - H: fragmentary, 1113 CE–1114 CE
- } < northern Chronicle
(York)

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

A721 Her Daniel ferde to Rome, & þy ilcan geare Ine ofslog Cynewulf.

A722 Her Eþelburg cuen towearp Tantun & Ine ær timbrede; & Aldbryht wręccea gewat on Suþrige & on Suþseaxe, & Ine gefeaht wiþ Suþseaxum.

A725 Her Wihtręd Cantwara cyning forþferde, þæs cyn is beforan, & Eadberht feng to Centrice, & Ine feaht wiþ Suþseaxan & þær ofslog Aldbryht.

A728 Her Ine ferde to Rome & þær his feorh gesealde, & feng Eþelheard to Wesseaxna rice & heold XIII gear. & þy geare gefuhton Eþelheard & Oswald se eþeling; & se Oswald was Eþelbalding, Eþelbald Cynebalding, Cynebald Cupwining, Cupwine Ceaulining.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

A871 [...] & þæs ofer Eastron gefor Eðered cyning, & he ricsode V gear, & his lic lip æt Winburnan. Þa feng Eðfred Eðelwulfing his broþur to Wesseaxna rice, & þæs ymb anne monaþ gefeaht Eðfred cyning wiþ alne þone here lytle werede æt Wiltune & hine longe on dæg gefliemde, & þa Deniscan ahton wælstowe gewald. & þæs geares wurdon VIII folcgefeoht gefohten wiþ þone here on þy cynerice be suþan Temese, & butan þam þe him Eðfred þæs cyninges broþur & anlipig aldormon & cyninges þegnas oft rade on ridon þe mon na ne rimde, & þæs geares wærun ofslægene VIII eorlas & an cyning; & þy geare namon Westseaxe friþ wiþ þone here. [...]

Poetry in the *Chronicle*

- *The Battle of Brunanburh*, ABCD937
- *The Capture of the Five Boroughs*, ABCD942
- *The Coronation of King Edgar*, ABC973
- *The Death of King Edgar*, ABCDE975
- *The Death of Alfred*, 1036
- *The Death of King Edward*, CD1065
- various entries with metric/alliterative qualities

Context and Purpose of the *Chronicle*

- begun in context of Alfred's educational programme (cf. ideology of Alfred's translated histories)
- begun at time of renewed Norse hostilities
- initial focus on house of Wessex:
 - opens with Alfred's (partly mythical) genealogy
 - Alfred's military trials and triumphs
 - Alfred's military reforms
- later entries focus on respective areas of composition

Standard edition of the *Chronicle*

Various eds, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*. Cambridge: Brewer, 1983–.

(The A-text is vol. 3 (1986), ed. by Janet Bately.)