

# Vikings vs Anglo-Saxons

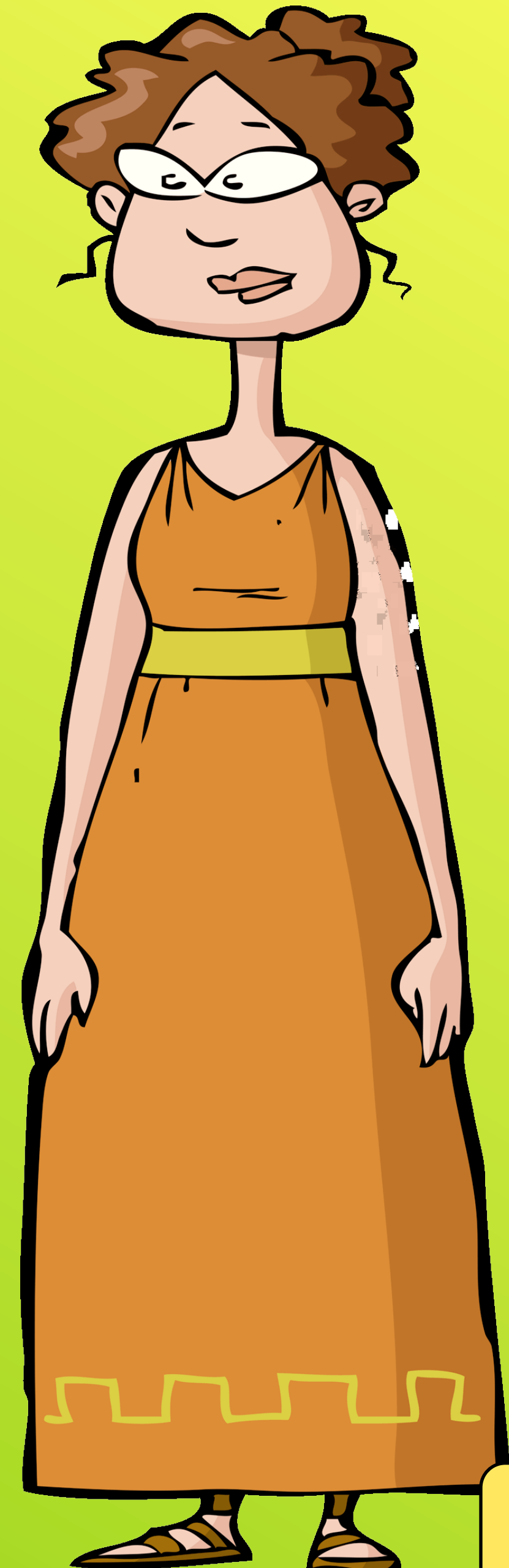
Learning Objective:

To find out why King Alfred was dubbed 'Alfred the Great'.



**Can you remember what  
the Danelaw was?**

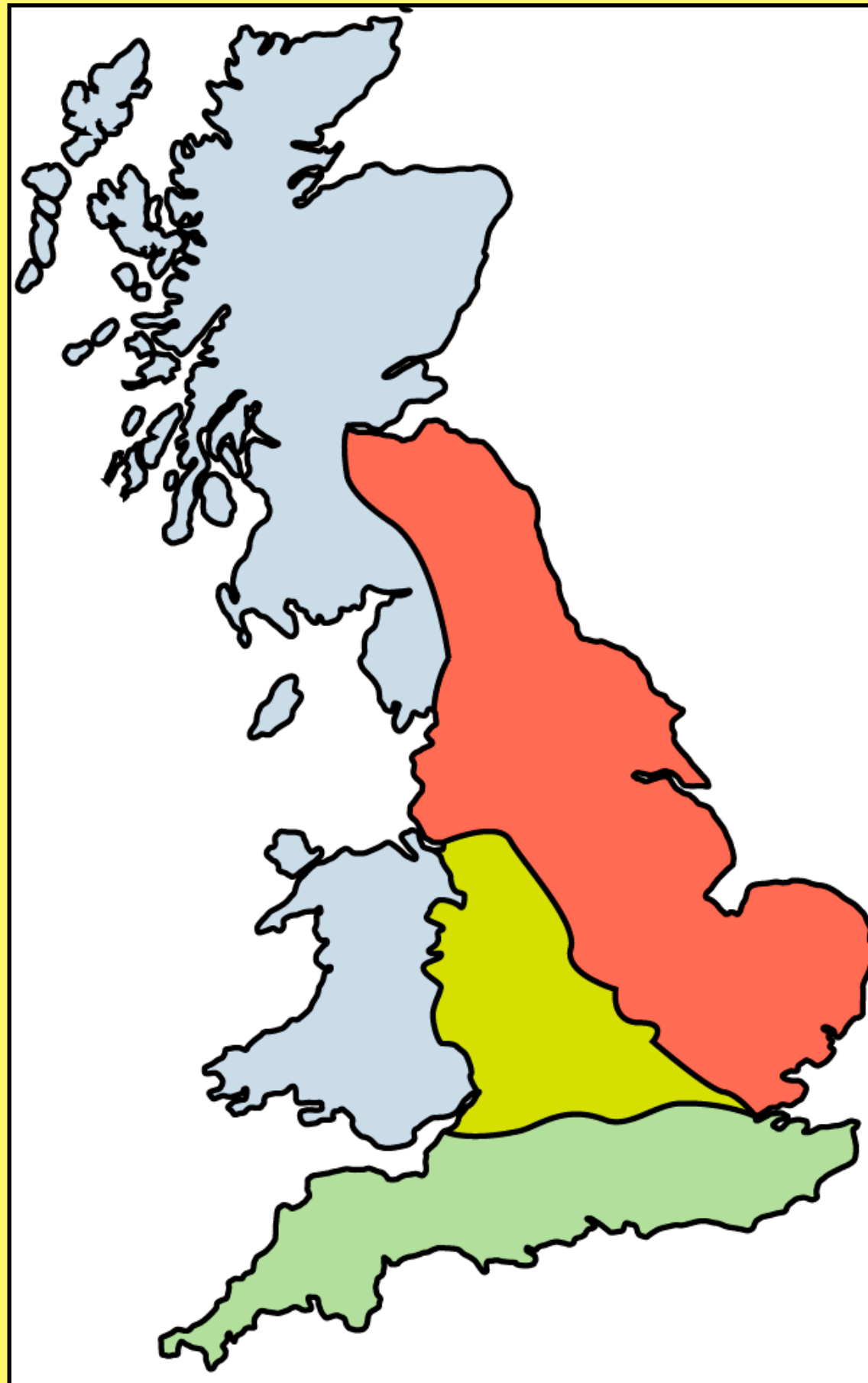
**Which part of England was  
under the control of the  
Danelaw after 886?**



After King Alfred defeated the Vikings, a peace was agreed between them. The Vikings would occupy the northeast of England while the southwest would remain Anglo-Saxon territory. The area of Viking occupation became known as the Danelaw.

Map of England 886

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
|  | Danelaw        |
|  | English Mercia |
|  | Wessex         |



King Alfred then became 'King of all England', uniting the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and creating a sense of unity. For the first time, the Anglo-Saxons were being referred to as 'Angelcynn' meaning 'English people'. Alfred was very popular with the people who were pleased that a peace had finally been reached.





King Alfred was known  
as  
'Alfred the Great'.  
In fact, he is the only king  
in British history to be  
dubbed 'Great'. What do  
you think he did to  
deserve this title?



**Alfred was born in 849 into the family that ruled Wessex. He was the youngest of five sons and a daughter born to King Ethelwulf. He grew up with the court, moving from place to place and learning how to fight in battles, hunt and be a good lord. Alfred was very keen on learning. His mother had an illuminated manuscript which she said she would give to the first of her sons who would learn to read it. Despite being the youngest, it was Alfred who won the beautiful book.**

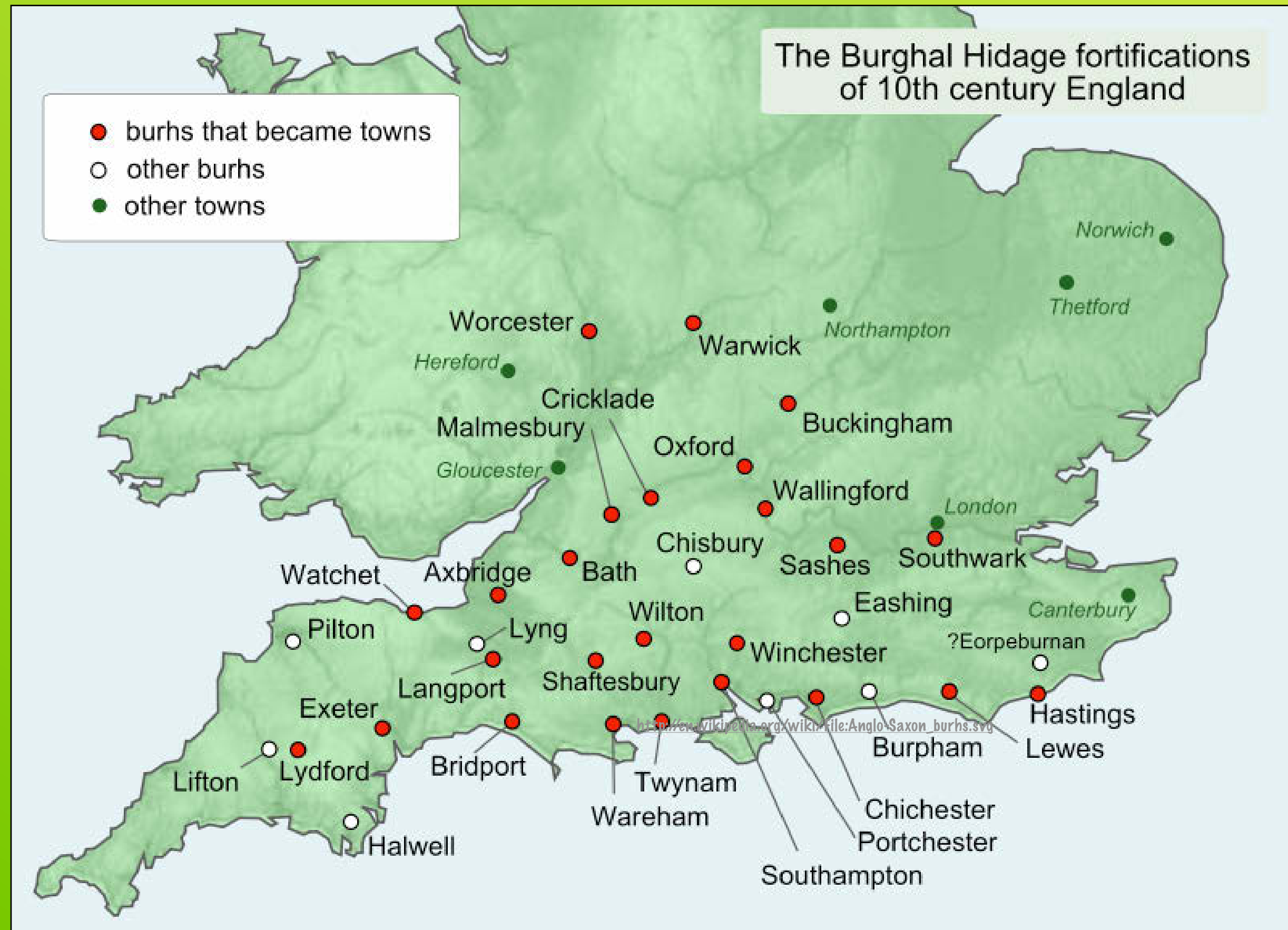


All of Alfred's older brothers had to battle the Vikings. While Alfred and his father were away in Rome in 855, Ethelbad was left in charge. His oldest brother, Athelstan, had already died in battle. When King Ethelwulf died in 858, Ethelbad became king. Ethelbad died in 860 and next to the throne was Ethelbert. Ethelbert died in 866, leaving Alfred's last remaining brother, Ethelred, as king. In such a turbulent time, the throne passed from brother to brother instead of father to son to ensure there was a strong king and not a young child on the throne.

Alfred was nineteen when Ethelred took him with him to battle the Vikings for the first time. By 871, they had fought five battles together. However, in April, Ethelred died from illness, leaving the throne to Alfred. He was now twenty two.



Even though Alfred arranged a peace treaty with the Vikings at Wedmore, the threat of a Viking invasion was never far away. During his reign, Alfred organised for forts and fortified towns, known as 'burhs' to be built. He was also the first English king to establish a fleet of fighting ships. He improved the ships, making them more like the Viking longboats but bigger.



The Anglo-Saxon army had always been different to the Viking army. Anglo-Saxon soldiers were usually farmers who were called to battle. Most couldn't stay away from their homes for too long without needing to go back and tend to the land. Alfred split the army into two groups. One group would go to battle for six months while the other farmed, then they would swap over.

This map shows the Anglo-Saxon burhs that became English towns and cities.





This picture shows Alfred translating 'Pastoral Care' by Pope Gregory the Great.

Once Alfred had made the country safer, he could turn his attention to the lives of the everyday people of the kingdom. When he had visited Rome as a child, he realised how much more educated the Italians were than the English. All of the works of the church were written in Latin, and Alfred translated lots of the great Latin works into the language of the ordinary people, 'Englisc'.

Alfred was a great advocate of learning and he set up a court school for his children and the children of nobles.





Alfred discussing his new laws with his councillors

**One of the most important changes King Alfred introduced were the new laws which had to be obeyed by all the subjects in his kingdom. This helped to unite the people that had so recently been split into different kingdoms. The laws were all written in English. Alfred was keen to get as many books written in English as possible. The best known of the books from his reign is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. This gives a year-by-year account of the history of England.**

Let's think back...

From what we have found out about Alfred so far, what did he do to earn the title 'Alfred the Great'?

