

King Canute (Knut) was the first Viking king to rule over the whole of England. He is often remembered as an arrogant and boastful monarch yet this is not necessarily the truth.

**Early Life**

Born in the late 10th century, around 985 AD in Denmark, Canute was the son of Svein Forkbeard, King of Denmark. His brother, Harold, became king when their father died in 1014.

**Successful Viking Raider**

Despite there being little historical verification, it is widely believed that Canute was involved in a number of Viking raids on England. Historians agree that he was involved in an invasion of England in 1013 AD, lead by Forkbeard - his father. The Danish king and his son Canute, who were determined to conquer England, successfully defeated the army of King Aethelred, sending him fleeing to Normandy (this is not surprising considering the Vikings’ fearsome reputation). A short time later, Canute became King of Danelaw (the north and east of England) when his father died in 1014 AD. His kingdom later extended to the whole of England.

**Christian Viking**

Unlike his predecessors, King Canute was a Christian; he tried to repay for the murderous wrongdoings of his Viking forefathers by building churches and making many generous gifts. Clearly, none of these churches (built over a thousand years ago) remains although archaeologists have recently unearthed what they believe to be ruins of one of Canute’s churches in Canterbury, Kent.

**Myth**

Canute is often remembered as an arrogant king who boasted that he could stop the tide: such was the success of his reign that many people began to compare him with God. Legend has it that in order to prove that this was not true, he placed his throne by the shore and commanded the waves to go back. Of course, the waves did not stop but splashed over the king and his throne, thus proving that God held all power and he was just a humble king.

Historians are sceptical as to whether this actually happened: the first written account of the episode was made more than a hundred years after Canute’s death.

**Death**

Canute died around 1035 aged about 40 and was buried in Winchester. Unfortunately, he was quickly forgotten about as his sons were weak and did not remain kings for long. More recently, historians have pointed out that King Canute was one of the great successes of British history: he stopped the Viking raids and united the whole of England even if he was unable to stop the sea!

1. Why do you think that the date of Canute’s birth is written as *around 985 AD* and his death as *around 1035 aged about 40*?

2. Find and copy the phrase in paragraph 3 which means *proof that this happened.*

3. Explain why King Aethelred escaped to Normandy.

4. How was King Canute different to his ancestors?

5. Find the following section in paragraph 4:

*Clearly, none of these churches (built over a thousand years ago) remains.*

Why could this be?

6. Find and copy the word that tells us that historians do not believe that King Canute ordered the waves to stop.

7. Why is the first written account of King Canute and the waves unreliable?

8. Why do you think that King Canute is *often remembered as an arrogant and boastful monarch*?

1. Why do you think that the date of Canute’s birth is written as *around 985 AD* and his death as *around 1035 aged about 40*? No written records, info passed on orally – therefore not accurate.

2. Find and copy the phrase in paragraph 3 which means *proof that this happened.* historical verification

3. Explain why King Aethelred escaped to Normandy. To avoid be killed as the Vikings had a fearsome reputation.

4. How was King Canute different to his ancestors? He was a Christian

5. Find the following section in paragraph 4:

*Clearly, none of these churches (built over a thousand years ago) remains.*

Why could this be? Because they were built over a thousand years ago

6. Find and copy the word that tells us that historians do not believe that King Canute ordered the waves to stop. sceptical

7. Why is the first written account of King Canute and the waves unreliable? Written 100 years after the event – no one first hand accounts or reliable witnesses

8. Why do you think that King Canute is *often remembered as an arrogant and boastful monarch*? Because people believe the story about ordering the sea to stop, because he was the first king of the whole of England, because he sent King Aethelred fleeing to Normandy