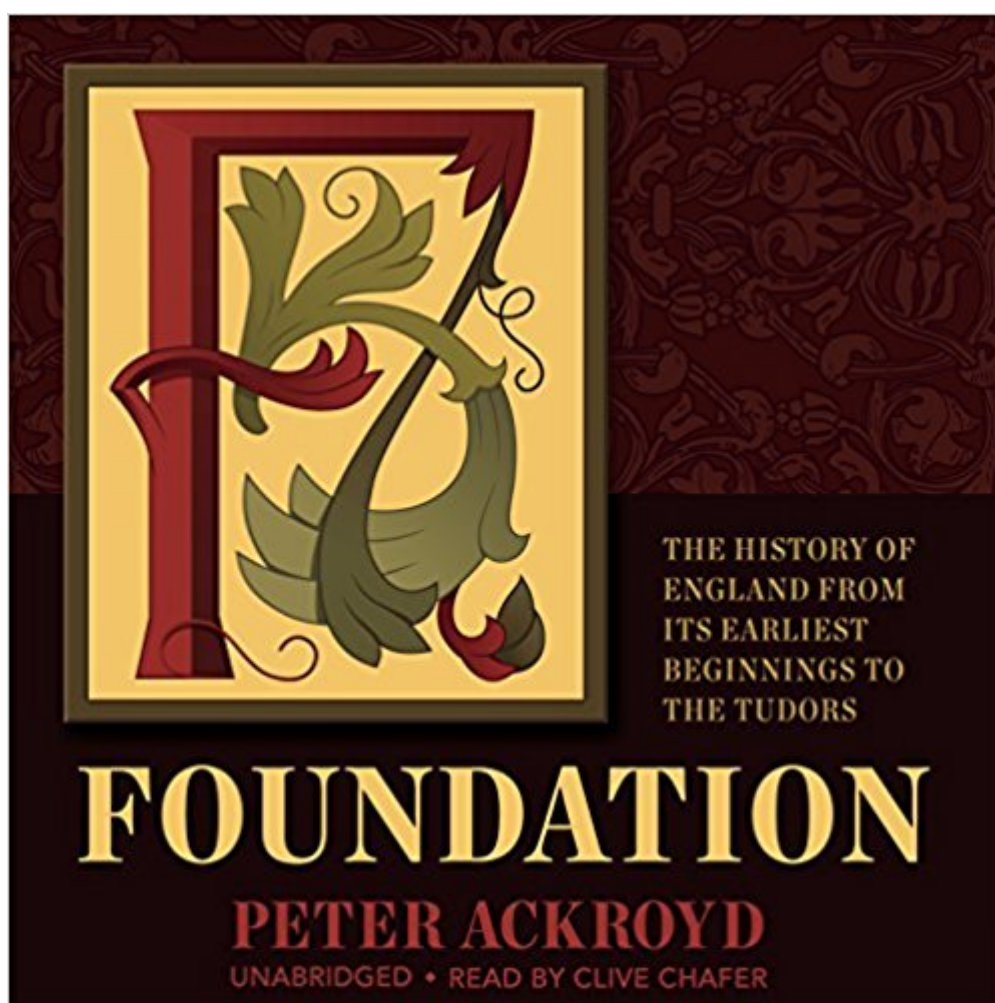


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# Foundation: The History Of England From Its Earliest Beginnings To The Tudors (History Of England Series, Book 1)



## Synopsis

[Read by Clive Chafer] In this massive bestseller in England, one of Britain's most popular and esteemed historians tells the epic story of the birth of the country. Peter Ackroyd, whose work has always been underpinned by a profound interest in and understanding of England's history, now tells the epic story of England itself. In *Foundation*, the chronicler of London and of its river, the Thames, takes us from the primeval forests of England's prehistory to the death of the first Tudor king, Henry VII, in 1509. He guides us from the building of Stonehenge to the founding of the two great glories of medieval England: common law and the cathedrals. He shows us glimpses of the country's most distant past - a Neolithic stirrup found in a grave, a Roman fort, a Saxon tomb, a medieval manor house - and describes in rich prose the successive waves of invaders who made England English, despite being themselves Roman, Viking, Saxon, or Norman French. With his extraordinary skill for evoking time and place and his acute eye for the telling detail, Ackroyd recounts the story of warring kings, civil strife, and foreign wars. But he also gives us a vivid sense of how England's early people lived: the homes they built, the clothes they wore, the food they ate, even the jokes they told. All are brought vividly to life through the narrative mastery of one of Britain's finest writers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** The first volume of Ackroyd's prospective six-tome history of England extends from Stonehenge to the extinction of the Plantagenet dynasty by Henry Tudor. The strongest impression Ackroyd acquired from his survey of land and time is that of the role that habit,

custom, and contingency plays in shaping history. He repeatedly repudiates a view of English history as a conscious progression toward, for example, Parliament. Similar institutions associated with England, such as Christianity and common law, arise as incremental accretions in Ackroyd's accounts. His treatment of 1066 is characteristic. He concedes the consequentiality of the Norman conquest while emphasizing the persistence of native modes of life, such as the vernacular language that eventually, albeit not for three centuries, with Chaucer, supplanted the invaders' French as the language of society and the governing elite. The battles for the crown supply most of Ackroyd's narrative, but while the Hundred Years' War and the Wars of the Roses rumble on, the peasants till the soil, quaff ale, and periodically raise pitchforks and torches. The hugely popular Ackroyd's ease of erudition ought not to be missed. --Gilbert Taylor --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"[In] Foundation, his rambling, affectionate new history of the remote English past...the history that interests him most is the kind touching on national memory and a sense of place, 'about longing and belonging,' in his memorable phrase...In a narrative that is relaxed, unpretentious, and accessible, if at times somewhat hasty, he skillfully digests the work of others without cutting very deep with his own analysis. The early chapters, on the times before William the Conqueror, play especially to his strengths, as he draws on the findings of modern archaeologists who have advanced our understanding of how ancient Britons lived and how the various migrations and invasions changed the nation." --New York Times Book Review "Ackroyd's trademark insight and wit, and the glorious interconnectedness of all things, permeate each page." --Observer (London) "Ackroyd brings delightful but revealing details of the lives of the people from the past into the present." --Sunday Express (London) "With Foundation, Ackroyd makes a compelling case to be the country's next great chronicler." --Time Out (London) "This is an extraordinary book...Peter Ackroyd is arguably the most talented and prolific writer working in Britain today." --Daily Express (London) "[Ackroyd] is a natural storyteller and a passionate historian, but his true skill lies in his acute eye for revealing interesting details." --San Francisco Book Review "Ackroyd paints a portrait of early England that is both historically rich and compellingly human." --Shelf Awareness "The strongest impression Ackroyd acquired from his survey of land and time is that of the role that habit, custom, and contingency plays in shaping history...The battles for the crown supply most of Ackroyd's narrative, but while the Hundred Years' War and the Wars of the Roses rumble on, the peasants till the soil, quaff ale, and periodically raise pitchforks and torches. The hugely popular Ackroyd's ease of

erudition ought not to be missed.” --Booklist (starred review) "Once again, Ackroyd exhibits his magic touch with the written word...Ackroyd's genius is in his focus on individual kings and on England alone, without Scotland, Ireland and Wales. He explains some myths, debunks others, and brings England's kings to life...Delightfully, with each king, Ackroyd summarizes their good and bad attributes along with delightful non sequiturs, such as the first use of the handkerchief. A true history of England tightly focused on the building blocks that made her.” --Kirkus Reviews "This popular history of England from prehistoric times through the reign of Henry VII, the first in a projected six-volume set, isn't a new story but it's a good one. The bulk of the book is a narrative about the kings, but the prolific Ackroyd discusses other kinds of history as well: there are chapters on how the English seasons passed, lost villages, crime and punishment, diet and health, etc...Ackroyd's judgments are unexceptionable.” --Library Journal

I am puzzled by the animosity displayed in some of the more condemnatory reviews of this book. Lack of footnotes, maps, genealogical charts, kings' lists? They couldn't detect these things before they read the book? The author evidently didn't intend this to be a weighty, scholarly tome, rather a readable, quite enjoyable survey of several thousand years of English history. If this was his intent, he was quite successful. He kept the narrative going quite smoothly without leaving any significant gaps. Actually, his technique of interspersing chapters on the doings of kings and noblemen with chapters on the lives of ordinary folk, kept the story from becoming ponderous, as is the work of so many other writers. Perhaps he does sometimes draw firm conclusions in places where scholars argue otherwise, or where the jury is still out. Frankly, I don't care. I'm not looking for rock-solid detail, backed by endless footnotes and cross-references. If I were, I'd turn elsewhere. Instead, I was interested in finding a coherent narrative that would help knit together the bits and pieces of English history of which I had already read. "Foundation" is that narrative. I'm looking forward to his work on the Tudors.

I see some reviewers have expressed concern because this isn't truly a "scholarly" work. And, I agree. Any history without detailed footnotes probably doesn't fall in that category. However, this is a truly readable approach to a wide swath of English history that isn't for someone wanting to delve deeply into one of the book's various aspects. I opted to read it because I wanted to know a little more about the history of the Romans in Britain -- you'll notice I said "a little more." There are also certain other periods it touches on that I have more than a passing interest in, including Stonehenge and the Norman conquest, and I was happy to read what Mr. Ackroyd had to say about them.

However, what I really found fascinating is the alternating chapters in which he touches on various parts of everyday life for the vast majority of the people around whom the battles and politics were just a minor part of their lives. For instance, as schools debate whether to continue to teach cursive writing, I didn't realize it developed during the reign of King John when so much written material was generated by the government that the calligraphers couldn't keep up. It's those aspects of this book that kept me reading and enjoying it right up to the last page. My one complaint, since I read the Kindle version, is one I often have with Kindle editions. The illustrations were at the very end and they and the captions didn't track very well together. I hope in the future that's a problem that can be resolved. In the meantime, I'm anxious to move on to Ackroyd's next volume in this six volume series on the Tudors.

Truly enjoyed pouring through this just prior to a trip to the UK. Ackroyd does a lot more than just who beheaded who, offering up excellent chapters on daily life, food, drink, clothing, commerce, religion, farming, architecture, street layouts -- and, yeah, tons of political intrigue, double-crossing and other dastardly business. I can't recommend a better, more thorough background on the history of England. What a great, enjoyable read. Well done, sir.

Extremely readable. Full of information about the society and religion of the country through the ages from pre-conqueror to Henry VII. Cause and effect as well as those pulling the strings and attempting to rule the country. I enjoyed this and am currently reading the sequel from Henry VIII through Elizabeth I. A lot of this history you know but there are some of the lesser know events and peoples that made more of an impact that you know. I highly recommend for lovers of English history.

My one complaint deals with the Kindle version: the treatment of illustrations. They are all at the end, so I didn't know they were there and didn't miss them, until I finished the book and found a list of illustrations, sans illustrations. If they are in the print book, I want them. If they are not in Kindle, I want to know that before I buy. And I want them in the text as they come up. Some things matter enough to be done right, this is one of those. As it turns out, the illustrations are there, they are the last thing in the book and cannot be enlarged. Epic fail, . If you're going to present an edition this poorly, please use a disclaimer. Better yet, skip it.

A quick, rather thorough survey of all the early kings. Well written by my favorite English

author....but it beat us over the head with the obvious monumental waste and financial squandering by each and every king. Were there any good and concerned Christian English kings? Did anyone care a fig for the lives of the people of their realm? The constant fruitless struggle to regain France wasted generations of males who died for nothing time after time after time... and bankrupted the country. Why did they want France when they couldn't rule England with any compassion or enlightenment? Campaign after campaign came to nothing. The conquest mentality wasted the energy which could have been used to improve, uplift economically and culturally the English people who were their main responsibility. This was the story of what was...not what I think should have been, but it was highly depressing to see how uncaring, unaware and irresponsible each and every king was in a "Christian kingdom". Still, I would recommend for all Anglophiles. Might make you want to reconsider your historic loyalties like it did me.

This is an excellent history of England and I highly recommend it. Peter Ackroyd has the traits of a tremendous storyteller in creating a compelling narrative, making for a very enjoyable reading experience. I've read other histories covering the same ground where I felt I needed a flow chart to keep the people and events straight in my own mind, but not this history. There are two more volumes following this volume, and I am looking forward to reading those, also.

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