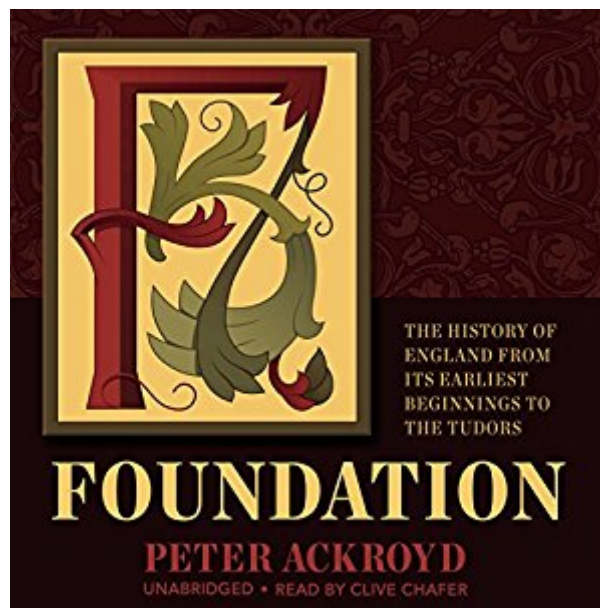


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Foundation: The History Of England From Its Earliest Beginnings To The Tudors: The History Of England, Book 1



Synopsis

In this massive best seller 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

"Foundation" is the eighth book by Peter Ackroyd perused by your humble reviewer. The reason I mention this fact is to manifest the great productivity evinced by Ackroyd one of Britain's most prolific authors. Ackroyd has written many works of fiction as well as such smash non-fictional tomes as "London"; "Charles Dickens" "Thames" and "Thomas More." Foundation was a publishing

sensation in England and promising to do well in the United States. It is the first volume of a proposed multivolumed history of Great Britain. Ackroyd presents all the major political events in the long pageant of British history culminating in the first Tudor King Henry VII. Volume II will begin with the reign of Henry VIII. Ackroyd:

- a. Succinctly summarizes the reigns of British monarchs. Especially interesting were the reigns of William the Conqueror who defeated Harold in 1066 establishing Norman power in England. The Plantagenet dynasty ruled England for centuries. Also of interest were the reigns of Henry II who had Archbishop Thomas a Becket murdered; Richard I the Lionheart and King John.
- b. Several battles are analyzed from Hastings to Agincourt to the dynastic War of the Roses in the calamitous 14th century.
- c. Many chapters report on the way people lived in the Medieval period including the daily schedule of a market town; the food which was eaten; trade and roads; religious beliefs and English law. The Black Death and the strong movement towards a centralized government in London are given attention by the author. Some of critics have attacked the book for being boring but this is wrong! The book is a popularly written account spotlighting the basic data needed by a literate person to buttress understanding of how England evolved over the centuries.

Peter Ackroyd is a prolific writer, principally known for his novels, and for TV programmes about London; but the question posed by this book is whether he is worth reading as an historian; and I am afraid the answer is no. 'Foundation' is intended as the first volume in a multi-volume History of England. It is highly 'readable' (which would please this year's judges of the Booker Prize); but the approach taken here is simplistic and superficial. Conclusions are repeatedly presented as fact. 'Foundation' is devoted to the period between the earliest origins and the advent of the Tudor dynasty, which inevitably means that the text is a summary; but Ackroyd presents us with little more than sketches, some of them highly misleading. I will take two examples. In dealing with the Anglo-Saxon invasions, he says that the invaders 'were all accommodated and according to the best genetic evidence, eventually made 5% of the people we now call English; in the Eastern regions it may have reached approximately 10%; but there is no hint of deliberate genocide'. Well, the Welsh historian Gildas did more than hint at it, and he wrote soon after the invasions. We are not told what Ackroyd's genetic evidence is, and there are no footnotes to take us to that evidence. In fact there have long been two views as to the numbers who came by sea from Germany at the end of the Roman period in Britain. The Anglo-Saxons may have arrived in massive numbers, or very few, though either way they eventually dominated England, politically and culturally. Ackroyd ignores that intense debate, as well as the literary, linguistic and archaeological

evidence on which the two views are based. The jury is still out, but this does not prevent Ackroyd from giving judgement.

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