

### TT 13 Day 46 (Greater or Lesser)

There have been some mocking discussions recently about whether our village should be re-named, and the funny thing is that the people who are talking about it live at the top of the High Street. The relevance of that is simply that in the event their part would be called 'Upper'. "Who", someone asked the other day, "would choose to live in Lower Woodford or Lesser Yermoaning? Or even the Lesser Antilles?" Well, the Guvnor replied, we wouldn't mind, but here is just fine.

But there is a point to be made and that is that most people would prefer to go down in history as Peter the Great or indeed Catherine the Great or, closer to home, Alfred the Great. Wouldn't you rather be a Greater Spotted Woodpecker than a Lesser one? If I were a dogfish, I'd be a Greater Spotted fish than an insignificant little one but as I am a dog, do I really want to be a Great Dane? We are back to Alfred who despatched the invading Danes (the Vikings) from Wessex back up to a small sanctuary in north east England and became a famous warrior king for doing so.

Before that, however, he was busy burning the cakes. Exhausted and lost in the woods after beating the Danes in a vicious pitched battle he stumbles upon a hut. The huntsman's wife invites him in, and not recognising him just assumes he is merely a soldier of Wessex and certainly not the King. She kindly offers him rest, and nourishment as she has just put some cakes in the embers of her fire to bake.

The housewife pops out to collect some more firewood and instructs the 'soldier' to keep an eye on the cakes while she is away lest they burn, but almost as soon as she is leaves, poor Alfred falls asleep. A few

minutes later the housewife returns, greeted by the smell of burning cakes and a sleeping soldier. "What sort of careless man are you, who neglects to attend to burning bread? Never have I seen so negligent a man – one who doesn't even know how to turn ash-baked bread – and yet when it is put in front of you, you'll no doubt rush to eat it!"

It is assumed that this story is apocryphal as the earliest script doesn't appear until 300 years after the event, but it sounds like a story that could be passed down as gossip about the king. Had it been made up years later, it would be strange to select it as it is not a tale of derring-do, nor is it one of any religious significance. Is it supposed to tell us all how humble a man Alfred the Great really was – a man of the people?

It is OK to be humble, but not insignificant. Buried alongside King Alfred just outside Winchester is a knight called Henry the Insignificant. That ranks alongside Alfred's sons Ethelweard, Ethelbald and Ethelred. The first speaks for himself – rather odd; the second must have been just that – hairless; the third, we know, was known as Ethelred the Unready. Poor chap, because 'unready' in those days really meant 'ill-advised,' but not many people know that. Henry, on the other hand, is well known as his effigy atop his tomb has him lying in full armour, sword by his side and helmet in hand – and a small dog weeing on his foot.

I have been known as Turbo the Hirsute which is, I think, a bit unimaginative. Besides, I won't be for long as I have been booked in to the 'Poodle Parlour' in Wilton for a thinning of my summer overcoat. I have never had one of these sessions but as this is the Toni & Guy of the dog world, I expect the Guvnor to fork out at least a hundred quid after which I shall be known as Turbo the Exquisite.