



Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England - The Original Classic Edition

The Venerable Bede

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This book is a must read for anyone studying English history. It was completed by the monk Bede in 731 AD and contains a wealth of material he gathered from sources available at that time. He provided an overview of Roman emperors, and gives accounts of conflicts within the Roman empire and particularly within Britain. He provided a good account of Saxons and other invaders and their conflicts with the Romano-Britons. He also provided various sidelights including accounts of miracle cures using holy relics. Unfortunately, the material is often all too brief, and the original sources seem to have vanished in the dust. For example, the uprising (led by the warrior queen Boadicea) against the Romans in 61 A.D. is described by Bede in a single sentence in the Greater Chronicle (4021) when, writing of Nero, he states this emperor attempted nothing of a military kind, and even nearly lost Britain, where two of the finest towns were captured and sacked (he is somewhat in error as three towns were burned to the ground, and the entire Roman Ninth Legion was massacred).

Chapters are very short, e.g., less than a page. I originally became interested while looking for material on King Arthur. Bede noted in Chapter 11 that after Gratian died, in 407, in his place Constantine, a worthless soldier of the lowest rank, was elected in Britain solely on account of the promise of his name and with no other virtue to recommend him. This Constantine challenged the Romans in Gaul and was defeated and killed by the Roman officer Constantius.

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