

WULFGAR AND THE DRAGON

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Foreword

I really enjoyed this short story, a worthy second instalment of *Wulfgar the Saxon*. As with the first book, this is a veritable history-tale whose authentic names and places help create the Saxon 'feel'. As well as the drama and excitement of dragon encounters, there are reflective and poignant moments too. I especially appreciate how the author has cleverly woven spiritual lessons into the narrative. My interest was piqued quickly and maintained until the end - perhaps we can hope for further Wulfgar adventures to come!

Philip Bell

CEO of Creation Ministries International UK
and author of *Evolution and the Christian Faith*

DEDICATION

To my newest loved ones
Hugh Jones and Grace Eastwood

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My grateful thanks are due to my husband whose enthusiasm and encouragement got the job done when I might have given up.

Wulfgar and the Dragon

Introduction

“Wulfgar and the *Dragon*?” I hear you say, “What is this? Surely dragons are mythical beasts!” Well, it has to be said that opinions differ on that point.¹ The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle mentions dragons and there is another word beginning with d that describes reptile-like beasts that everyone knows were real because we can still find their bones. I am definitely not the only person to be convinced they were around more recently than some people might tell you! It would certainly explain why you can read tales about dragons told by people all over the world – not to mention that some of those bones have been found to contain soft tissue and red blood cells² so they are not so *very* old after all ... If you still can't guess what I'm talking about I'm not giving the game away – you'll have to read the story.

¹https://creation.com/images/pds/tj/j24_1/j24_1_32-34.pdf

²Schweitzer, M.H., *et al.*, Analyses of soft tissue from *Tyrannosaurus rex* suggest the presence of protein, *Science* 316(5822):277-280, 2007

Wulfgar and the Dragon

Chapter One

Hund

This is the account of Wulfgar the carpenter, son of Waelwulf, descendant of Woden, son of Sceaf, son of Noah, the flood-borne, who desires to put on record events of the years of our Lord eight hundred and seventy eight and eight hundred and eighty so that whoever reads may know the goodness of God to his creatures, the nobility of our King Alfred, the bravery (God giving them strength) of the men of the village of Leofham, the courage of our Thane Pelhere and the wisdom of Morcant the Celt, a record of which I have made also in another place.³ I begin my account in April, the eight month, as some of our chroniclers count it, of the first year named above.

It was only thanks to Morcant the Celt's special pleading that the dog was not drowned with the rest of the hideous puppies that formed the wolfhound's litter. Thane Pelhere had been proud of the pair of massive Irish hunting dogs the king had given him. Only the most favoured of King Alfred's men received such a mark of royal gratitude. He was delighted when he understood that the bitch was about to produce a litter of puppies. When the puppies arrived, however, it was immediately obvious that something had gone wrong. From birth they were anything but royal and looked nothing like their wolfhound mother. They were not going to be of any use as dignified symbols that would enhance the thane's noble status nor could they be given away as marks of his special favour. Disgusted, he ordered them to be disposed of.

³See *Wulfgar the Saxon*

“Can’t she just keep one, my Thane?” asked the little Celt as we both attended on the thane in his hall. “It is cruel to take them all from her.”

“You are too soft hearted, Morcant,” replied the thane, “but if you want one of the ugly things, help yourself.”

“A righteous man takes care of his animals, my Thane,” said Morcant quietly but the thane seemed preoccupied and only grunted, more important worries now filled his mind.

“I will have to supply more men to the king for his defence-building work, Morcant,” he said. “It is going to be hard to spare them.”

“Indeed!” said Morcant, stooping down to examine the sleeping puppies. “We are going to be stretched. The king’s plans are wise, however, and no time can be lost in carrying them out.”

“If the king succeeds in building up all the old fortified towns and strongholds, in time he will cover Wessex with a network of strong forts well laid out and capable of being garrisoned at a moment’s notice. Then, we will at last be secure from Viking attack,” agreed the thane. “Almost any sacrifice would be worth making for that. With that security we can prosper. Without it we are always at the mercy of the Vikings. I don’t trust that Viking leader, Guthram, baptised or not! Suppose he goes back on his word? They’ve done that before, you know. If an army of his fellow Vikings arrive from overseas is he really going to fight *against* them? I don’t think so! No, he will invite them into the Danelaw where he rules and that will give them a base to work from. Then it will be the same old story: raids, destruction, war and Wessex in peril again. The king is right. We will have to strain every nerve to ensure we can defend ourselves and we must do it *now* while we have a respite.”

“Have you seen the king’s plans for extending the fortifications?” asked Morcant.

“Only in the most general way,” replied the thane. “He is concentrating on crossroads to make it easier for the fyrdmen that form his army to reach them – and merchants too so that trade can be made easier when the Vikings have been banished for ever. The king’s plans are practical, I understand, streets laid out straight and criss-crossed, good access for the fyrdmen and so on.”

“This of itself will bring prosperity to Wessex,” remarked Morcant thoughtfully.

“I don’t know about that,” said the thane, a little grumpy now. “What I want to know is how we keep going here in Leofham in the short term. By the time we’ve supplied men, extra food rents, not to mention *church scot* to the monks, we are going to be hard pressed to have enough to survive. This year we will be quite well provided for if all goes well although it will be a bit hard in July for some families. But we have to try to look to the future. We must get the maximum sown and harrowed now and the minimum lost if we can. I’m glad the ploughing of the farrow is well under way and they have started sowing the barley and rye now.”

Morcant nodded, “Eanflæde and I will do all we can to help, my thane,” he said.

The thane was aghast, “No, no, no,” he said quickly, “not you. You are the king’s spiritual advisor and in any case we need you to copy out the holy books that were found on the Viking ship. You are a bit of an irregular it is true, Morcant, but King Alfred has made it quite plain that, as he understands it, Wessex needs three classes of people: the soldiers to fight to protect the kingdom, workers to grow the food needed, and clerics to pray. You may be a married man and outside the regular system of the church, but you are definitely in the last of those groups and the king would be horrified if you were taken from your holy labours to drive the plough.”

When the village had acquired a set of books forming the Word

of God from the loot found in a Viking longship, Morcant had been tasked with the job of copying and translating it into Anglo Saxon by the king himself.⁴

“We must all of us pray,” he said quietly.

“True, true,” said the thane and turned to me.

“Wulfgar, if the king calls for *you* I will send you,” he said. “A skilled carpenter would be useful to him in his grand building endeavours.”

And with that we were dismissed.

Some weeks later a lad with a message arrived outside my workshop hut.

“Ho, Wulfgar,” he called, “the thane sent this to Master Morcant but when I took it round to him he said it was for Swefred – is he with you?”

Young Swefred, son of Eanflæde and stepson of Morcant,⁵ was my helper now, trying to learn the craft as I myself had done from my own master, Beorthelm. Together we were repairing a cart that had seen better days. Swefred crawled out from under it and the lad pulled something wrapped in a rag from inside his jerkin. He handed the bundle to Swefred who gasped with pleasure.

“O! it’s the puppy!” he said in delight. “It’s big enough to leave its mother at last! Master Morcant said I could have it for my own so long as I trained it well.”

The little thing wriggled and struggled in his arms, trying to lick his face. It was easy to see that, although the wolfhound was its mother, its father must have been a completely different kind of animal. Its legs were short and stubby and its tail minute. All it

⁴See *Wulfgar and the Vikings*

⁵See *Wulfgar and the Vikings*

seemed to have inherited from its mother was the beginnings of a shaggy coat and clear bright eyes. Swefred set it down on the ground on its fat little legs and it capered round him joyfully.

“Oh, he is a funny little thing!” exclaimed Swefred in delight. “How could anyone think of drowning him?”

“What will you call him?” I asked.

“Just Hund, I think,” said Swefred. “Short and easy for him to remember.”

“Well, get him some water to drink, a few rags to make a bed and then tie him up somewhere,” I said. “We have work to do here.”

In May everyone in Leofham is kept working at full stretch. We were already short-handed through the King’s great building projects and so the ploughing of the fallow was still not finished. Spring crops were being sown and in the village gardens cabbages, onions, leeks and garlic were all requiring attention to say nothing of herbs and the flax and dye plants we needed for clothing. Our cows were in full milk and so there were cheeses to be made and the round of hedging, ditching and general repairs to buildings and tools never let up for a moment – the latter keeping me particularly busy. Even so, Swefred found time somehow to train Hund and care for him. You never saw him about the village now without the little dog at his heels.

But although Hund’s behaviour soon became exemplary, his appearance did not improve with age. I don’t know if you can imagine a huge, graceful wolfhound shorn of its elegant long limbs and somehow perched on legs belonging to a much less dignified animal, but poor Hund could not be described in any other way. A wolfhound is swift, brave and loyal. Although Hund was certainly loyal and perhaps would be brave when it came to the test, anyone could see he was not built for speed.

When Swefred did duty with the other children defending

the new sown crops from birds, Hund went with him. Swefred trained Hund to stay by him quietly until freed from this irksome duty by a word of command. Gradually Hund became capable of sitting immobile as a carving of a dog for long stretches of time. As pressure on our menfolk mounted that year I had to release Swefred more and more often for work on the land while I struggled on alone in the workshop. He and Hund were completely inseparable and Swefred began to train him to help with the animals, rounding up sheep or herding cows. The dog grew and learned quickly and Swefred had the knack of training him. A short whistle would have him racing off as fast as his little legs could carry him and a long one would see him return with all the speed he could command. He may not have been a true wolfhound but he certainly did his best.

“Hund is proving useful after all,” I said to Morcant as we sat together one evening outside the workshop.

“Yes,” said Morcant, “he may not look handsome but he makes up for it in other ways.”

We little knew just how useful Hund was going to be.