

1066 - THE STORY OF THE TWO BATTLES

Stamford Bridge

&

Hastings

The death of Edward the Confessor gave rise to a succession struggle for the throne of England - one of the contestants being the notably unpleasant Norseman Harald Hardrada - who with Tostig the traitorous brother of our good King Harold Godwinson and about 15,000 warriors in 300 longships, - landed at Scarborough, burnt it down, beat the northern English army of the earls of Mercia and Northumbria, and captured York, exacting hostages and tribute and demanding support for an attempt on the throne.

Harold, who had been elected King by the Witmangot or parliament of nobles, was in the south, expecting an invasion by William Duke of Normandy. When he heard of the trouble in the north, he gathered his *huscarles* and as many *thegns* as he could and forced marched to the north, covering 185 miles in only four days - a pretty phenomenal performance!

On September 25, 1066 - when Corhampton Church was about forty years old and this Yew Tree a mere sapling - Harold of England caught the Norsemen by surprise at Stamford Bridge just north of York.

It's said by some sources that they had left their armour in their ships - anyway, they were slaughtered such that only 24 ships were needed to take away the survivors. The battlefield fifty years later was said to be quite white with the bones of the slain.

Both Tostig and Harald Hardrada were killed. Harold Godwinson accepted a truce with the Norsemen, imposing pledges not to attack again.

But William Duke of Normandy took the opportunity to invade England near Pevensey, landing on September 28 (three days after Stamford Bridge) with, it is said, 696 ships inferring a force of over 15,000 men and a lot of horses, though another source suggests only 7000 men. A tangled tale covers his claim to the throne - Edward the Confessor is said to have promised it and then changed his mind, while Harold is said to have promised to support William over the bones of a saint while visiting France. William was able to flaunt the papal banner which upset the English morale.

Harold's tired and battered troops had to march south, the interval of under three weeks between battles allowing William to get all his gear, horses, fodder and such ashore in comfort.

Harold was advised to wait and raise more troops but felt he had to show that he could defend his kingdom against all comers. His army was one of infantry only, the core being the full-time professional soldiers called *huscarles* backed by the peasant levies of the *fyrð* or Home Guard. Taking the high ground, Harold nearly won the day against a barrage of arrows and repeated assaults on the faithful shield wall of the English with their feared Danish battleaxes. But to no avail - a charge of knights on horseback turned the day, Harold was killed - tradition says by an arrow in the eye - but he was much mutilated and his corpse had to be identified by his wife Edith Swan Neck. What was left of his army melted away into the forest.

Although there was continued resistance to the Normans, eventually the great landowners succumbed and William was able to reward his knights with grants of land. England was a prosperous country, democratically run with a solid and fair tax gathering system, very attractive to William's supporters who contained pretty unsavoury people from as far away as Genoa. The Normans built stone castles all over the land - the Tower of London is one - to suppress the people. They stole our land, our money and our language.

For example, the Anglo-Saxons, grubbing in the fields, produce in their tongue, the COW the SHEEP and the PIG.

When they're brought to the Frenchman's table on bended knee, they become Boeuf (beef) Mouton (mutton) and Porc (Pork).

This event is known as 'THE CONQUEST' and it's the only one!

(roll on the battle of Trafalgar!!)

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