English Heritage Battlefield Report: Stamford Bridge 1066

Stamford Bridge (25 September 1066)

Parish: Stamford Bridge

District: East Yorkshire

County: East Riding of Yorkshire

Grid Ref: SE 720551

Historical Context

1066 was a cataclysmic year for Saxon England. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Manuscript A) was terse in its summation:

> In this year came William and conquered England; and in this year Christ Church (Canterbury) was burned, and a comet appeared on 18 April.[1]

The year had hardly begun when political crisis threatened the stability of England. On 5 January 1066 Edward the Confessor died without issue, and the problem of the succession to the English throne came to the forefront of European affairs. There were four men who sought power in England: Harold Hardraada, King of Norway; Tostig (or Tosti), the banished Earl of Northumbria; Duke William of Normandy; and Harold Godwineson, Earl of Wessex. It was clear to contemporaries that the rivalry between these men would only be settled by war.

On the day of the Confessor's funeral Harold Godwineson, the most powerful man in the land, was crowned king of England in Westminster Abbey, a *coup d'état*[2] which was a direct challenge to the ambitions of William of Normandy. Although he protested to the English court, William knew that his sole chance of wresting the throne from Harold was by military action. This meant a seaborne invasion and while William assembled ships and men for this enterprise, Harold prepared to guard the south coast. The English king's strategic position was complicated by the threat from Scandinavia and from his own brother, Tostig.

In the autumn of 1065 Tostig was ousted from his Earldom of Northumbria by a local rebellion. Morcar, the brother of Earl Edwin of Mercia, was invited by the rebels to take Tostig's place, and, despite their support for Tostig, King Edward and Harold were eventually forced to accept Morcar as Earl of Northumbria. Tostig fled England to seek refuge with Count Baldwin V of Flanders, but in May 1066 he returned to promote his cause by force.

Leading a small fleet of ships Tostig attacked the Isle of Wight and then occupied Sandwich where he raised or impressed additional sailors and vessels. King Harold set out for Kent to intercept his brother but Tostig sailed north with 60 ships to the mouth of the Humber. While raiding in Lincolnshire his force was all but destroyed by an army under Edwin, Earl of Mercia, and Tostig, now accompanied by only 12 ships, withdrew to Scotland. To what extent William of Normandy was behind this attack is not known but it is clear that Tostig was casting wide for support and that he had already begun, successfully, to enlist Harold Hardrada, King of Norway, as his ally.[3]

By August 1066 Harold Godwineson was thus confronted not only by the armed hostility of his own brother, but also by the imminent prospect of two major invasions of his realm: by William of Normandy and the King of Norway. Hardrada was the first to strike and in September 1066 he arrived off the Tyne with a force of at least 300 ships[4]. There he was joined by Tostig and the sea power he had been able to assemble in Scotland.

The combined fleets sailed south ravaging Yorkshire coastal settlements as they went, and by 18 September Hardrada and Tostig had navigated the Humber and landed at Riccall on the River Ouse. Their immediate objective was York, some ten miles to the north.

An English force under earls Edwin and Morcar advanced from York to block Hardrada's approach and the two armies clashed at Gate Fulford on 20 September 1066. It was a long and extremely bloody encounter in which the balance of fortune fluctuated between Saxon and Viking as the day progressed. Finally the English army collapsed in rout and the road to York lay open. Hardrada and Tostig did not storm the city, but negotiated its surrender and an exchange of hostages which was possibly to take place at Stamford Bridge. Satisfied with the progress of his campaign Hardrada withdrew his troops to re-join his fleet at Ricall.

We do not know when Harold learnt of the Viking invasion of Northumbria, but within four days of the Battle of Fulford the king, with a newly raised army, had reached Tadcaster, just ten miles to the south-west of York. This epic march of 185 miles from London to Yorkshire in barely six days has become one of the heroic icons of English history, and it gave Harold an opportunity to bring Tostig and Hardrada to battle before they could reasonably expect to have to face armed opposition.

Resting the night of 24/25 September at Tadcaster the Saxon army set out for York early the next morning, but learning that the Vikings were now at Stamford Bridge Harold continued his march until he came upon the enemy.

Location and Description of the Battlefield

The village of Stamford Bridge lies on the River Derwent approximately seven miles to the east of York on the eastern edge of the Vale of York. Contemporary and later sources agree that a battle was fought there on Monday 25 September 1066, and the three versions (C, D, and E) of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which touch upon this period in any detail, all designate Stamford Bridge as the site of Harold's victory:

> Then Harold our king came upon the Norwegians by surprise and met them beyond York at Stamford Bridge with a large force of the English people; and that day there was a very fierce fight on both sides.[5]

The annals (c.1100-1125) ascribed to 'Florence of Worcester' specify that the battle was 'at a place called Stamford Bridge', and the Scandinavian sources presented in Snorri Sturlasson's collection of Sagas, the *Heimskringla* (written after 1220), state that Tostig and Hardrada waited with their army at Stamford Bridge. However, due to an understandable confusion concerning local topography, Sturlasson is less precise in identifying Stamford Bridge as the actual site of the battle.

In the eleventh century Stamford Bridge was undoubtedly an important way-point for travellers and a natural location for the Vikings to be re-provisioned by the subdued citizens of York and East Yorkshire, and for an exchange of hostages to take place. The name Stamford Bridge was used in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to identify the battle and this implies that a bridge or ford across the Derwent had been in existence for some time. Indeed, the crossing point probably dates from the Roman period since Roman roads approached Stamford Bridge from four directions, running north to south and east to west. An underwater survey of the Derwent at Stamford Bridge in 1964 found no evidence of a Roman bridge, but it did discover a natural stone ford to the north and south of the present weir.[6] The ford is formed by a bed of Keuper sand-stone which provides a natural, stable crossing point in as little as two feet of water and, to the north of the weir, stretching over 100 feet of the river bed. This undoubtedly explains the derivation of the name 'Stamford'.

The bridge of 'Stamford Bridge' has caused historians of the battle some difficulty with regard to its precise location. By 1066 the bridge may have succeeded the ford as the main passage across the Derwent, and version

'C' of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* implies that a bridge lay between the two armies:

> Then Harold, king of the English, came against them by surprise beyond the bridge, and there they joined battle, and went on fighting strenuously till late in the day.[7]

Indeed version 'C' goes on to make the bridge the focal point of the opening stage of the battle:

> There was one of the Norwegians there who withstood the English host so that they could not cross the bridge nor win victory. Then an Englishman shot an arrow, but it was no use, and then another came under the bridge and stabbed him under the corselet. Then Harold, king of the English, came over the bridge and his host with him....[8]

The Chronicle does not, however, provide any guidance as to the site of the bridge or as to its construction except that, if the story of the Viking defender is true, it must have been narrow for one man to defend it and made of wood for the Viking to be vulnerable from below.

The sites of the later medieval and modern bridges at Stamford Bridge are both below the weir, that is to the south-west. From an analysis of the historic road layout H G Ramm has argued convincingly that the Roman crossing, whether by bridge or ford, was some 160-200 feet above the weir, to the north-east, on the line of the Roman road from Durham via Thirsk to Brough.[9]

Colonel Burne, using the road layout as his evidence, argues that the Roman crossing was some 400 yards above the modern bridge (thus placing it at a point on the river approximately at the north-eastern end of the eighteenth-century cut) and that this must also have been the site of the bridge of 1066.[10] Ramm does not, however, believe that the bridge of 1066 was on this site, arguing instead that it may have been at the same location as the medieval bridge.

The later medieval bridge, made of timber, was demolished in 1727 but its site was recorded by William Etty in 1724 and F Brooks published a copy of the plan[11] in 1963 (See Map 3). The medieval bridge was located below the weir and the probable reason for the movement of the crossing point from the Roman site was the creation of a *stagnum* or pool to work the mills. The *stagnum* is represented today by the shallows below the eighteenth-century weir. In Henry III's reign there were seven mills on the *stagnum* and a charter[12] of 1254 implies that it lay immediately to the north of the bridge. Unfortunately, the construction of the mills, and hence the bridge, cannot be traced back beyond 1130-1135. There can therefore be no conclusive presumption that the site of the later medieval bridge is also the location of the 1066 crossing.

Approaching from York to the west Harold may therefore have crossed the Derwent at Stamford Bridge at a point above or below the present weir, and it is not inconceivable that a portion, at least, of his army may also have crossed via the natural ford. The distance separating the possible bridge sites is little more than 300 yards. The exact location of the bridge is thus not of overriding importance to a discussion of the battlefield, since the size of the armies engaged would almost certainly have meant that troops would be active between and on both sides of the two possible sites.

Traditionally the scene of the principal fighting during the battle is located on 'Battle Flat', an area of higher, though level ground, to the south of the Roman road (A166) and immediately north-east of Minster Way. Battle Flat would have been a natural point at which an army falling back from the southern bank of the river could rally and prepare to give battle. The ground rises from the river, reaching a height at the northern edge of Battle Flat of just over 50 feet. Though not high enough to be fully defensible this would have presented the Viking army with the advantage of a slight 'military crest'. After initial 'skirmishing' on the northern river bank, and the possible 'defence' of the bridge, fighting became general on what is today 'Battle Flat' and from there would have spread to some extent both east and west.

Landscape Evolution

Two crescentic terminal moraines cross the Vale of York and their eastern arms lie a mile to the north and south, respectively, of Stamford Bridge. In prehistoric times the moraines acted as natural routes across the often waterlogged Vale of York. In 1066 Stamford Bridge nestled in a shallow valley between the arms of the moraines, with the Derwent flowing along the bottom of the valley.

The agricultural area around, above the flood plain of the River Derwent, is a rich one and would have been intensely farmed for grain in open fields with rigg and furrow; the 1855 O/S map, the 1845 railway map and SMR indicate rigg and furrow here and around nearby High Catton. The final conflict between the Saxons and Hadrada's men probably occurred on these arable fields.

The flood plain of the Derwent would have been left to meadow and pasture land. It seems logical that the river banks would have had willows and alders ('Ellers' are mentioned on the 1855 O/S map just east of Stamford town) along them whilst Primrose Hill Farm could mark the site of ancient woodland, although if there were blocks of woodland there in 1066 we have no record. There are no ancient woodlands recorded in the battlefield area.

Most of the tracks and roads across the landscape today do not obviously cut across the old field patterns and therefore are likely have been there in 1066. The Howl Gate Road east of High Catton and outside the battlefield area has ancient hedgerows along it and follows an obvious routeway along high ground.

Map evidence shows that there were extensive open fields lying between Catton and Stamford until at least the early 1600s although piecemeal enclosure had already begun by 1577. Beyond the open fields lay commons - mostly in Catton and not on Stamford battlefield. Most of the remaining open fields were enclosed c.1766, presumably by Parliamentary Enclosure Act. The farmsteads in the fields around Stamford Bridge and Catton all post-date the enclosures of the 1760's except Catton Park, on the site of the old park's lodge.

The Derwent is recorded as being navigable up to Stamford in the Middle Ages but a new weir in 1602 caused problems and a navigation ("The Cut") was made in the 1720s, by-passing the old ford area. Mills certainly existed in Stamford by c.1130 and by 1258 there were 7 on the Derwent belonging to the town.

Stamford Bridge has grown substantially over the last 25 years, principally south-eastwards over the battlefield area. The surviving battlefield area is still a relatively open landscape, with occasional (and diminishing) hedgerows. Trees enclose the north-eastern view and the disused railway embankment encloses the south-western view. Views to the south towards High Catton ridge are the most extensive.

The Battle: its sources and interpretation

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is the most important narrative source for the history of England between 1042-1066, and for this period it survives in four principal manuscripts: 'A', 'C', 'D', and 'E'. None of these manuscripts can be considered as an original text for they are all copies of texts that are now lost, and they were written in different religious houses. Version 'A' contains only brief, isolated entries and for 'contemporary' evidence for Stamford Bridge we are dependent upon 'C', 'D', and 'E'. Manuscript 'C' was probably compiled at Abingdon in the middle of the eleventh century, 'D' possibly at Worcester during the twelve century, and 'E' although transcribe at Peterborough during the twelve century is largely based for the period up to 1121 on a version compiled at Canterbury.

Other early writers also used the lost texts upon which the Chronicle was based, most notably in the Latin annals ascribed to 'Florence of Worcester'. 'Florence', who was probably a monk, wrote the annals between

1100-1125 and undoubtedly had access to earlier sources. He was an accurate recorder of history and it is to be regretted that he provides no depth of information on the Battle of Stamford Bridge.

The only detailed source we possess is to be found in the collection of Norse sagas known as the *Heimskringla* which was compiled in the thirteenth century by the Icelandic historian Snorri Sturlasson. The *Heimskringla* weaves a rich tapestry of myth, fact and imagination into its account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge, while Sturlasson interprets the military events within a thoroughly thirteenth-century context. He was also ignorant of the topography of both the battlefield and East Yorkshire, seeming to believe that the geography of Hardrada's campaign was condensed into a very limited area with Stamford Bridge, Fulford and Riccall all located close to the walls of York. It is also apparent that Sturlasson could have confused events that occurred at the Battle of Hastings with those of Stamford Bridge. The strength of the Scandinavian verbal tradition can be plainly seen in the *Heimskringla*, but the warlike speeches and poetry which are put into the mouths of the participants do not extend our understanding of the battle very far. Thus attractive though the *Heimskringla* undoubtedly is as heroic literature and as exhilarating story-telling, it must be treated with caution as a record of the Battle of Stamford Bridge.

At the time of the Viking descent upon northern England, King Harold was almost certainly returning to London having been forced to disperse the sea and land forces guarding the south coast on 8 September 1066 for lack of provisions. His strategic problem rested on whether he could march north, defeat Hardrada, and then return south again before William of Normandy made landfall on the English coast. Manuscript 'C' of the Chronicle records Harold's bold response and states that the English king began his march north before the Battle of Fulford:

> Then King Harold in the south was informed when he disembarked that Harold, King of Norway, and Earl Tosti were come ashore near York. Then he went northwards day and night as quickly as he could assemble his force. Then before Harold could get there Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar assembled from their earldom as large a force as they could muster, and fought against the invaders and caused them heavy casualties, and many of the English host were killed and drowned and put to flight, and the Norwegians remained masters of the field (Fulford). And this fight was on the eve of St Matthew the Apostle (20 September), and that was a Wednesday.[13]

Harold did not arrive in time to assist Edwin and Morcar at Fulford but he made rapid progress northwards, gathering support from the local *fyrds* as he went. By Sunday 24 September Harold had reached Tadcaster:

> ... Harold, king of the English, came on the Sunday with all his force to Tadcaster, and there marshalled his troops, and then on Monday (25 September) went right on through York. And Harold, king of Norway, and Earl Tosti and their divisions were gone inland beyond York to Stamford Bridge, because they had been promised for certain that hostages would be brought to them there out of all the shire.[14]

As the *Heimskringla* relates Hardrada and Tostig were in confident mood after their triumph at Fulford:

> Now King Harald began his expedition to conquer York, and the army lay at Stamford Bridge, and because the king had won such a great victory against great chieftains and superior force, everyone was afraid, and did not think there was any hope of withstanding him. The townsfolk decided to send an offer to Harald, yielding themselves and the town to him, and on the Sunday King Harald went with his troop and all the army to York, and had a meeting outside the town, and all the great men agreed to submit to King Harald and gave him hostages, rich men's sons whom Tostig could pick out for the king, because he knew who were the worthiest men in the town. They went back in the evening to the ships with an undisputed success and were contented. It was decided that there should be a meeting in the

> morning in the town, when King Harald was to appoint governors of the place and give them offices and areas. And the same evening after sunset there came to the town from the south King Harold Godwinsson with a huge army and he rode into the town with the goodwill of all the citizens. The walls and gates were all guarded and no news of this was to come to the Norwegians. The army was in the town overnight.

> And on the Monday when King Harald Sigurdarson had eaten, and all his army had breakfasted, he ordered the signal for landing to be blown. He divided up the army who was to go or stay behind, had two men from each troop ashore whilst one remained, so he had two parts of the army. Earl Tostig got ready to go ashore with his troop with King Harald. But Olaf the king's son stayed behind to look after the ships, so did Eystein Moorcock, son of Porbrand Arnason, who was the best and dearest to King Harald of all his nobles. King Harald had promised him his daughter Maria when they got back to Norway. The weather was very hot and sunny, and they left their mailshirts behind and went ashore with shields and helmets and spears and wore their swords and many had bows and arrows.

The *Heimskringla* is confused as to whether the Viking army is making its way towards York or Stamford Bridge early on the morning of Monday 25 September 1066. More recent historians have also viewed this move as a problem since it appears to make little military sense, although we know that Hardrada was an experienced and competent commander. The march of some twelve miles away from the fleet at Riccall to Stamford Bridge reduced the strength of the Viking army by a third, and made the possibility of retreat to the ships practically impossible should an enemy attack materialise from the south. Professor Freeman speculated that Hardrada and Tostig only undertook this march because they were making for the ancient royal palace of the Northumbrian kings at Aldby some three miles beyond Stamford Bridge. Others have seen Harold Godwineson's manor of Catton as the Viking target. Yet having just destroyed the local forces ranged against him, the last eventuality Hardrada would be contemplating was a sudden descent by a large hostile army. Moreover, Stamford Bridge as a junction of ancient routes, both natural and man-made, was an ideal place for a rendezvous with hostages and supplies.

By early morning on 25 September King Harold had reached York and learning of the Viking plans he urged his tired army onwards to intercept the enemy. According to the *Heimskringla*, Hardrada and Tostig had barely reached Stamford Bridge when they became aware of Harold's approach:

> They were very happy, with no thought of any attack, and when they were getting near the town they saw [a great cloud of dust and under it] bright shields and shining mail. They saw that a great army was riding towards them and King Harald straight away halted his army, had Earl Tostig called to him, and asked him what army that might be that was coming towards them. The earl answered that it was most likely enemy, but it might be, he said, some friends of ours, who may wish to join us with friendship and offer us their help and loyalty. The king spoke, 'We must await quietly this army which is coming'. They did so and the army got bigger and bigger as it got nearer and they saw it clearly, and it was like looking at an ice-field. Then said the earl, 'My lord, let us take some shrewd plan; it is not to be hidden that those are enemies, and the king himself must be with such an army'. Then said King Harald, 'What is your advice?' Earl Tostig answered, 'The first thing to do is to turn back as quickly as possible to our ships for our men and our armour and then after offer such battle as we can; but another plan would be to take to our ships, and then the cavalry cannot overcome us'. The king said, 'We shall do something else. Put our fastest horses under three bold fellows: let them ride as fast as they can and tell the Norwegians of the danger; they will come straight away to help us. The English must sooner expect more fight from us than flight, and we shall fight bitterly a good time before we acknowledge we are beaten.' The earl said, 'You must decide in this, my lord, as in everything, and I was no more eager to flee than anyone else, [but had to say what I thought was our best plan.']

The *Heimskringla* states that as the Viking army neared Stamford Bridge it became aware of Harold's army approaching from the west along the north bank of the Derwent. Some historians, Colonel Burne amongst them, have assumed that Hardrada's men were already camped on both banks of the Derwent when the English troops came in sight, and that at least a portion of the Viking army fell back across the bridge, skirmishing, to join the main body on the southern bank. This may have been the case, but the dust cloud of an army approaching from the north-west would have would been more clearly visible from the higher ground of the moraine to the south of Stamford Bridge Hardrada may therefore have halted his army on the northern edge of Battle Flat, sending perhaps only a forlorn hope to contest the English progress across the bridge.

Manuscript 'C' of the Chronicle is clear that the proximity of the English army was a surprise to Hardrada, but it does not appear to have developed into a tactical reverse which significantly reduced the effectiveness of the Viking army:

> Then Harold, king of the English, came upon them unawares beyond the bridge. They joined battle and fierce fighting went on until late in the day; and there Harold, king of Norway, was slain and earl Tostig and countless numbers of men with them, both English and Norwegians. The Norwegians...[16]

At this point the original version of Manuscript 'C' ends at the foot of a folio, and the only detail of the fighting at Stamford Bridge provided in the whole of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* appears as an additional page written in the language and hand of the late twelfth century[17]:

> The Norwegians fled from the English, but there was one Norwegian who stood firm against the English forces, so that they could not cross the bridge nor clinch victory. An Englishman shot with an arrow but to no avail, and another went under the bridge and stabbed him through under the coat of mail. Then Harold, king of the English, crossed the bridge and his levies went forward with him; and there made great slaughter of both Norwegians and Flemings: and Harold let the king's son, who was called Mundus (the 'Elegant'), return to Norway with all the ships.[18]

This type of heroic incident, demonstrating as it does the personal valour and skill of an individual Norwegian, is meat and drink to the writers of sagas. Yet there is no mention of it in the *Heimskringla*. Moreover this late addition to the Chronicle, upon which the theme of action on the north bank of the river is based, sits uneasily alongside the original version of Manuscript 'C' which states that:

Then Harold, king of the English, came upon them unawares <u>beyond</u> the bridge.

This clearly implies that the battle proper began once the English were across the bridge and on to the southern bank. Yet it cannot be taken so far as to mean that the Viking host was surprised on the southern bank, merely that they were attacked before they were fully ready to give battle. If, as seems probable, the English troops could also take advantage of a ford or shallows to cross the river, it is possible that they fell upon Hardrada and Tostig with some speed. The defence of the Bridge is recorded by William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon and it is commemorated by the local custom of eating 'spear pies' formed in the shape of a boat at a feast held to celebrate the anniversary of the battle. Notwithstanding the importance of local tradition there must be some doubt as to whether the story of the defence of the bridge by a single Norwegian is anything more than a picturesque tale springing from poetic invention.

For the detail of the fighting on Battle Flat we are forced to rely upon the *Heimskringla* with all its anachronisms:

King Harald had his banner raised which they called 'Landwaster'. The standard-bearer was called

> Fridrek, and in another place Earl Tostig had his banner raised and they arranged the army under these banners. Then said King Harald, 'When the English ride at you, stick the bottom of the spear in the ground and do not have the point any higher than a man's waist, and those in the front row have their spears as well with the points towards the horses' chests as they come. But the archers will be our wings and rear. Let us stand fast and not lift our spears unless we advance.

The emphasis on the use of cavalry and on bodies of archers acting in concert in tactical formations is more a reflection of a thirteenth-century battle than one in 1066. While troops in an eleventh-century English or Norse army might ride to the battlefield they would almost certainly dismount to fight, and there would simply not be the prevalence of archers which Sturlasson suggests. It is also possible that the *Heimskringla's* account of Stamford Bridge is coloured to some extent by the greater surviving detail of the encounter at Hastings.

What does seem acceptable in Sturlasson's account is his division of the battle into three distinct phases:

> Now the English make an attack on the Norwegians and there was a hard encounter. The spears were fixed so that the horses could not get through, and now both sides fought with all their might and gradually casualties began. Now there was such difference in numbers that the English could pick out bands and surround them and go at them from all sides and now naturally there was a difference in the casualties on each side. The battle order was broken and scattered and many of King Harald's army fell, and when the king saw that the banner was hard pressed he gripped the hilt of his sword with both hands and hewed on both sides, did not await the banner but cleared a path in front of himself and killed many men. All men say the same thing, that never did they see a more valiant advance, and fighting with such proud valour.

In this first phase the English launch a fierce attack upon the Viking line and by weight of numbers succeed in breaking through the defence. As the Viking formation splinters Hardrada restores some equilibrium through his personal valour and example, but this part of the battle ends with his death:

> Now King Harald got a wound in the front of his throat so that blood straightway gushed from his mouth. That was his death-blow and he fell at once to the ground and when this happened the English attacked so strongly that all those who had stood near the king were killed. [There was a great shout from the English,] and when Earl Tostig learnt that the king was dead, he turned immediately towards where he saw the banner Landwaster and encouraged the men, bidding them bear the same banner before him, and there was another fierce fight, because all the Norwegians encouraged one another, and never wished to flee.

> Then King Harold Godwinsson had loud proclamation made, offered a truce to his brother Tostig and all the survivors, but they all shouted back and said they would take no truce, they said they would conquer their enemies or die round their king....

The second phase followed the Viking's rejection of Harold's offer of a truce and the affirmation by Hardrada's army of their loyalty to him after his death in battle:

> Now the battle began for a second time, with Earl Tostig leading the army....This battle was hard but not long, slaughter began and many Norwegians fell. [The earl fought valiantly, following the banner and before it finished he fell there with glory and a good reputation.]

It ended with Tostig's death and this might have signalled the end of formal resistance had it not been for the arrival of Viking reinforcements. It is a common assertion, supported by the *Heimskringla*, that Hardrada, once he was aware of the approach of Harold's army, sent messengers to summon reinforcements from the fleet at Ricall. Certainly they came from the fleet since Eystein Moorcock, who had been left behind with the ships, led

the reinforcements into battle. What is less certain is that the fleet was still at Riccall. G A Auden has argued that for the Viking fleet to remain at anchorage at Ricall entailed the unacceptable risk of Hardrada's communications with the open sea being severed, and that the fleet must therefore have moved to a new anchorage in more open water.[19] Had the larger ships of the fleet made for the Humber after the initial Viking landing, then this presents a further cogent reason for Hardrada to rendezvous with the hostages and supplies at Stamford Bridge.

Wherever the reinforcements began their march they arrived exhausted at the scene of battle, but were still able to give a good account of themselves during the third and final phase of the fighting at Stamford Bridge:

> And at the same time Eystein Moorcock arrived with the troops who had been at the ships and they were fully armed and the battle started up a third time and Eystein bore Landwaster, King Harald's banner. This battle was the bitterest of all these encounters, many English fell, and it was actually in the balance whether the English would fly. Eystein and his men were so enraged that they stormed on, and on the other hand they were tired out for they had a very long journey in chainmail and the weather was hot and sunny and they were almost worn out with fatigue so that they threw off their mailshirts, [and Porkell Hamarskald mentions this in his poem on Eystein Moorcock. They fought for a time, and went in to it so that they would get a quick decision, death or victory.] But the battle went as was to be expected, that those had the better part who had the bigger numbers. Eystein Moorcock fell there in that struggle which is since called 'Moorcock's attack'. There fell almost all the Norwegian leaders, and that was the ending of the day.

The *Heimskringla* has implied throughout its account that the English army outnumbered the combined forces of Hardrada and Tostig. Estimates of Harold's force rise as high as 60,000 men and for the Vikings to 25,000 with up to a further 5,000 arriving from the fleet as reinforcements. Both figures seem too high but we have no clear evidence as to the size of the forces engaged.

With the defeat of the Viking army we can return to the surer ground of Manuscript 'D' of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for an account of the pursuit:

> There was killed Harold Fairhair (Hardrada) and Earl Tosti, and the Norwegians who survived took to flight; and the English attacked them fiercely as they pursued them until some got to the ships. Some were drowned, and some burned, and some destroyed in various ways so that few survived and the English remained in command of the field. The king gave quarter to Olaf, son of the Norse king, and their bishop and the earl of Orkney and all those who survived on the ships, and they went up to our king and swore oaths that they would always keep peace and friendship with this country; and the king let them go home with twenty-four ships.[20]

In a remarkable campaign that must have tested his resolve and leadership to the limit Harold had vanquished the first of his deadly foes. A second, however, was about to land in Sussex.

Indication of Importance

Assessments of the importance of Stamford Bridge are inevitably linked to the outcome of the Battle of Hastings and to the fate of Saxon England. The strain imposed by the northern battle upon Harold's resources of time, energy, and manpower is seen as one of the major contributory factors in William's victory. So is the fact that the campaign in the north gave William two precious advantages; first, an unopposed landing, and second the opportunity to consolidate his position once ashore. At the same time the northern campaign demonstrated King Harold's abilities as a soldier of enterprise and courage, and as a leader of men. Perhaps, above all, the Battle of Stamford Bridge is important because it was the last Saxon victory, and because it

effectively severed the politics of England from those of Scandinavia.

Unfortunately the evidence for the course of the fighting at Stamford Bridge stems from a highly interesting, but anachronistic, thirteenth-century Scandinavian collection of sagas. It must be treated with caution. All we can say with any degree of certainty about the battle is that it took place at Stamford Bridge on 25 September 1066, that the English crossed the River Derwent, some at least by a bridge, to meet the army of Hardrada and Tostig which was deploying on the higher ground on the southern bank. In a battle which probably involved three clear phases and much hard fighting the Vikings were defeated and pursued to their ships. Casualties on both sides were heavy but particularly so for the Vikings.

Although urban development has spread to a significant portion of the battlefield, enough open ground remains on Battle Flat to represent the core of the fighting.

Battlefield Area

The battlefield area boundary defines the outer reasonable limit of the battle, taking into account the positions of the combatants at the outset of fighting and the focal area of the battle itself. It does not include areas over which fighting took place subsequent to the main battle. Wherever possible, the boundary has been drawn so that it is easily appreciated on the ground.

The battlefield area focuses on Battle Flat. To the rear of the Viking lines the battlefield area uses existing field boundaries between Burtonfields Hill Farm and the intersection of Minster Way with Millsike Beck. The Beck itself forms the southern boundary line, while the public footpath south of Burtonfield Hall forms an appropriate northern boundary. To the west, the boundary is formed by the current edge of the existing development. The crossing of the river has not been included within the battlefield area because it is densely built over. For illustrative purposes, however, the scope of the battle has been represented by a dashed line within modern Stamford Bridge.

Notes

1. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Manuscript A) trans. G N Garmonsway (London 1967) p196.

2. It is probable that Harold received Edward's death-bed nomination, but the speed with which the former acted to take the throne implies that he expected opposition, and that he had planned his reaction to the King's death in advance. In this process, of course, the claims to the throne of the senior member of the old royal house, Edgar, the son of Edward the atheling, then a youth, were set aside.

3. 'Heimskringla' ed. B Aöalbjarnarson (Reykjavik 1941) printed in A L Binns *East Yorkshire in the Sagas* (1966).

4. The size of the Viking fleet which invaded Northumbria varies considerably, from 300 to 1,000 ships, depending upon the source consulted. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Henry of Huntingdon, and William of Malmesbury give 300 ships, though 'Florence of Worcester' cites more than 500 large ships. For this period it is better to err on the side of caution.

5. 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (Manuscript D), printed in *English Historical Documents 1042-1189* ed. D C Douglas and G W Greenaway (2nd Edition, London 1981) pp145-146.

6. Ramm, H G 'The Derwent Crossing at Stamford Bridge'. *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* (1965) pp368-376.

7. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Manuscript C). Douglas, p149.

8. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Manuscript C). Douglas, p149.

9. Ramm, *op. cit.* pp368-371.

10. Burne, A H *More Battlefields of England* pp91-92 (London 1952).

11. Brooks, F *The Battle of Stamford Bridge* (1963).

12. *The Percy Chartulary*, 30 no. li (Surtees Society, 117, 1909).

13. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Manuscript C). Douglas, pp147-148.

14. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Manuscript C). Douglas, pp148-149.

15. Binns, *op. cit.*

16. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Manuscript A) trans. G N Garmonsway (London 1967) p198.

17. On this, *see* Dickens, B 'The Late Addition to ASC 1066 C', *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society*, v (1940) pp148-149.

18. Garmonsway, *op. cit.* p198.

19. Auden, G A 'The Strategy of Harold Hardrada in the Invasion of 1066', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, VI 1927 pp214-221.

20. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Manuscript D). Douglas, p146.