

= Battle of Brunanburh =

The Battle of Brunanburh was fought in 937 between Æthelstan , King of England , and an alliance of Olaf Guthfrithson , King of Dublin ; Constantine , King of Scotland ; and Owen , King of Strathclyde .

Following an unchallenged large @-@ scale invasion of Scotland by Æthelstan in 934 , possibly launched because of a peace treaty violation by Constantine , it became apparent that Æthelstan could only be defeated by an allied force of his enemies . Olaf led Constantine and Owen in the alliance .

In August 937 , Olaf and his army crossed the Irish Sea to join forces with Constantine and Owen , and the invaders were routed in the subsequent battle against Æthelstan . The poem Battle of Brunanburh in the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle recounted that there were " never yet as many people killed before this with sword 's edge ... since from the east Angles and Saxons came up over the broad sea " .

Æthelstan 's victory prevented the dissolution of England 's unity . The historian Æthelweard , perhaps writing sometime around 975 , said that " [t] he fields of Britain were consolidated into one , there was peace everywhere , and abundance of all things " . The battle has been called " the greatest single battle in Anglo @-@ Saxon history before Hastings " . The site of the battle is unknown , but scholars have proposed many possible locations .

= = Background = =

After Æthelstan defeated the Vikings at York in 927 , King Constantine of Scotland , King Hywel Dda of Deheubarth , Ealdred I of Bamburgh , and King Owen I of Strathclyde (or Morgan ap Owain of Gwent) accepted Æthelstan 's overlordship at Eamont , near Penrith . He became King of England , and there was peace until 934 .

Æthelstan invaded Scotland with a large force , both ground and naval , in 934 . Although the motivation for this invasion is uncertain , John of Worcester stated that the cause was Constantine 's violation of the peace treaty made in 927 . Æthelstan evidently travelled through Beverley , Ripon , and Chester @-@ le @-@ Street . The army harassed the Scots up to Kincardineshire , and the navy up to Caithness . Æthelstan 's force was never engaged .

Following Æthelstan 's invasion of Scotland , it became apparent that he could only be defeated by an allied force of his enemies . The leader of the alliance was Olaf Guthfrithson , King of Dublin . The other two members were Constantine II , King of Scotland ; and Owen , King of Strathclyde . (According to John of Worcester , Constantine was Olaf 's father @-@ in @-@ law .) Though they had all been enemies in living memory , historian Michael Livingston points out that " they had agreed to set aside whatever political , cultural , historical , and even religious differences they might have had in order to achieve one common purpose : to destroy Æthelstan " .

In August 937 , Olaf crossed the Irish Sea with his army to join forces with Constantine and Owen , and in Livingston 's opinion this suggests that the battle of Brunanburh occurred in early October of that year . According to Paul Cavill , the invading armies raided Mercia , from which Æthelstan obtained Saxon troops as he travelled north to meet them . However , Michael Wood notes that no source mentions any intrusion into Mercia . John of Worcester wrote that the invaders entered via the Humber , and is the only chronicle writer to mention this . Because of the lack of sources supporting the claim , along with other issues , philologist Paul Cavill argues John 's statement is not true . According to Symeon of Durham , Olaf had 615 ships , but this number is likely exaggerated .

Livingston theorises that the invading armies entered England in two waves : Constantine and Owen coming from the north , possibly engaging in some skirmishes with Æthelstan 's forces as they followed the Roman road across the Lancashire plains between Carlisle and Manchester , with Olaf 's forces joining them on the way . It is possible , Livingston speculates , that the battle site at Brunanburh was chosen in agreement with Æthelstan , on which " there would be one fight , and to the victor went England " .

= = Battle = =

Surviving documents that mention the battle include accounts from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the writings of Anglo-Norman historian William of Malmesbury, and the Annals of Clonmacnoise. In Snorri Sturluson's Egils saga, the antihero, mercenary, berserker and skald, Egill Skallagrimsson, served as a trusted warrior for Æthelstan.

The name of the battle appears in various forms in early sources: Brunanburh (in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle or the chronicle of John of Worcester, or in accounts derived from them), Brunandune (Aethelweard), Brunnanwerc or Bruneford or Weondune (Symeon of Durham and accounts derived from him), Brunefeld or Bruneford (William of Malmesbury and accounts derived from him), Duinbrunde (Scottish traditions), Brun (Welsh traditions), plaines of othlynn (Annals of Clonmacnoise), and Vinheithr (Egil's Saga), among others.

The main source of information about the battle is the praise poem Battle of Brunanburh in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. After travelling north through Mercia, Æthelstan, his brother Edmund, and the combined Saxon army from Wessex and Mercia met the invading armies and attacked them. In a battle that lasted all day, the Saxons fought the invaders and finally forced them to break up and flee. There was probably a prolonged period of hard fighting before the invaders were finally defeated. According to the poem, the Saxons "split the shield wall" and "hewed battle shields with the remnants of hammers ... [t] here lay many a warrior by spears destroyed; Northern men shot over shield, likewise Scottish as well, weary, war sated". Wood states that all large battles were described in this manner, so the description in the poem is not unique to Brunanburh. The invaders had attempted to take refuge in trenches fortified with timber, but the Saxons overran them. Æthelstan and his army pursued the invaders until the end of the day, slaying great numbers of enemy troops. The poem states that "they pursued the hostile people ... hew[ing] the fugitive grievously from behind with swords sharp from the grinding". Olaf fled and sailed back to Dublin with the remnants of his army, and Constantine escaped to Scotland; Owen's fate is not mentioned. The poem states that the Northmen "[d]eparted ... in nailed ships" and "sought Dublin over the deep water, leaving Dinges mere to return to Ireland, ashamed in spirit." In contrast, the poem records that Æthelstan and Edmund victoriously returned to Wessex, stating that "the brothers, both together, King and Prince, sought their home, West-Saxon land, exultant from battle."

It is universally agreed by scholars that the invaders were routed by the Saxons. According to the Chronicle, "countless of the army" died in the battle, and there were "never yet as many people killed before this with sword's edge ... since from the east Angles and Saxons came up over the broad sea". The Annals of Ulster describe the battle as "great, lamentable and horrible" and record that "several thousands of Norsemen ... fell". Among the casualties were five kings and seven earls from Olaf's army. The poem records that Constantine lost several friends and family members in the battle, including his son. The largest list of those killed in the battle is contained in the Annals of Clonmacnoise, which names several kings and princes. A large number of Saxons also died in the battle, including two of Æthelstan's cousins, Alfric and Athelwin.

= = Aftermath = =

Æthelstan's decisive victory prevented the dissolution of England's unity. Foot writes that "[e]xaggerating the importance of this victory is difficult". Livingston wrote that the battle was "the moment when Englishness came of age" and "one of the most significant battles in the long history not just of England but of the whole of the British isles". The battle has been called "the greatest single battle in Anglo-Saxon history before Hastings" by Alfred Smyth, but he also states that its consequences beyond Æthelstan's reign have been overstated. Alex Woolf describes it a "pyrrhic victory" for Æthelstan: the campaign seems to have ended in a stalemate, his power appears to have declined, and after he died Olaf acceded to the Kingdom of Northumbria without resistance. However, England was once again unified by the time Edmund I died in 946. The Norse lost all remaining territory in York and Northumbria in 954, when Eric Bloodaxe died.

Æthelweard , writing in the late 900s , said that the battle was " still called the ' great battle ' by the common people " and that " [t] he fields of Britain were consolidated into one , there was peace everywhere , and abundance of all things " .

= = Location = =

The location of the battle is unknown . However , according to Michael Livingston , the case for a location in the Wirral has wide support among current historians . Charters from the 1200s suggest that Bromborough (a town on the Wirral Peninsula) was originally named Brunanburh (which could mean " Bruna 's fort ") . In his essay " The Place @-@ Name Debate " , Paul Cavill listed the steps by which this transition may have occurred . Evidence suggests that there were Scandinavian settlements in the area starting in the late 800s , and the town is also situated near the River Mersey , which was a commonly used route by Vikings sailing from Ireland . Additionally , the Chronicle states that the invaders escaped at Dingesmere , and Dingesmere could be interpreted as " mere of the Thing " . The word Thing (or þing , in Old Norse) might be a reference to the Viking Thing (or assembly) at Thingwall on the Wirral . In Old English , mere refers to a body of water , although the specific type of body varies depending on the context . In some cases , it refers to a wetland , and a large wetland is present in the area . Therefore , in their article " Revisiting Dingesmere " , Cavill , Harding , and Jesch propose that Dingesmere is a reference to a marshland or wetland near the Viking Thing at Thingwall on the Wirral Peninsula . Since the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle describes the battle as taking place " ymbe Brunanburh " (" around Brunanburh ") , numerous locations near Bromborough have been proposed , including the Brackenwood Golf Course in Bebington , Wirral (formerly within the Bromborough parish) .

Many other sites have been suggested ; historian Paul Hill identified over thirty possibilities . Michael Wood published a 2014 article suggesting a Yorkshire location ; philologist Andrew Breeze favours Durham , and Kevin Halloran argues for southern Scotland . Tim Clarkson discounts locations other than southern Scotland or northern England as a battle site , given the logistical capacity of the kingdoms of Alba and Strathclyde .

Other possibilities include :

Barnsdale , South Yorkshire : The civil parish of Burghwallis was recorded as " Burg " in the Domesday book , likely because of a Roman fort situated near the place where the Great North Road (Ermine Street) is met by the road from Templeborough . The site is overlooked by a hill called " Barnsdale Bar " , past which flows the River Went . Michael Wood has suggested this site , noting the similarity between Went and Symeon of Durham 's Wendun .

Brinsworth , South Yorkshire : Michael Wood suggests Tinsley Wood , near Brinsworth , as a possible site of the battle . He notes that there is a hill nearby , White Hill , and observes that the surrounding landscape is strikingly similar to the description of the battlefield contained in Egil 's Saga . There is an ancient Roman temple on White Hill , and Wood states that the name Symeon of Durham used for the place of the battle , Weondun , means " the hill where there had been a pagan Roman sanctuary or temple " . According to Wood , Frank Stenton believed that this piece of evidence could help in finding the location of the battle . There is also a Roman fort nearby , and burh means " fortified place " in Old English ; Wood suggests that this fort may have been Brunanburh .

Bromswold : According to Alfred Smyth , the original form of the name Bromswold , Bruneswald , could fit with Brunanburh and other variants of the name .

Burnley : In 1856 , Burnley Grammar School master and antiquary Thomas T. Wilkinson published a paper suggesting that the battle occurred on the moors above Burnley , noting that the town stands on the River Brun . His work was subsequently referenced and expanded by a number of local authors .

Burnswark , situated near Lockerbie in southern Scotland : Burnswark is a hill 280 metres (920 ft) tall , and is the site of two Roman military camps and many fortifications from the Iron Age . It was initially suggested as the site of the battle by George Neilson in 1899 and was the leading theory in the early 1900s , having obtained support from historians such as Charles Oman . Kevin Halloran

argues that the different forms used by various authors when naming the battle site associate it with a hill and fortifications , since burh (used by the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle poem) means " a fortified place " , and dune (used by Æthelweard and Symeon of Durham , in names such as Brunandune and We (o) ndune) means " a hill " . He also states that the name " Burnswark " could be related to Bruneswerce , another alternative name for the battle site used by Symeon of Durham and Geoffrey Gaimar .

Lanchester , County Durham : Andrew Breeze has argued for Lanchester , since the Roman fort of Longovicium overlooks the point where the road known as Dere Street crossed the River Browney .