



WIRRAL ARCHAEOLOGY

INGIMUND'S ATTACK ON CHESTER 907 AD.

ENEMY AT THE GATES.

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Ingimund's attack on Chester 907 AD.

Introduction

In 907 AD, Ingimund, a Hiberno-Norse chieftain, who had been allowed to settle on the north Wirral coast by Aethelflaed, sometime in 902, led an attack on the city of Chester.

Fragmentary Sources

As is commonplace for the period, contemporary records and reliable evidence are lacking. The following account is based upon the fragmentary sources contained within the 'Annals of Ireland, Three fragments. First published in 1860, the Three fragments gives a short account of Ingimund's attack on Chester. According to the Mercian register and entry was made in 907, that the city of Chester had been restored by Aethelflaed, which effectively means that the City's defences had been rebuilt and that it was now a burh. No explanation is given as to why Aethelflaed had deemed this necessary so we cannot make assumptions but it may have been because the City's strategic position as port was deemed important enough to ensure that it was defensible or, equally it was a key western position on the so called 'Mercian Wall' that stretched eastwards to the border with the Danelaw, namely Danish Mercia and which protected the strategic positions facing north, into what was called the Viking Kingdom of York.

Anglo Saxon England 907AD. Consisting of Wessex and English Mercia.



The English controlled land was at considerable risk from Viking held lands to both the North and the East. To East of the English controlled territory, the northern sector was called the five boroughs which consisted of the towns of Nottingham, Stamford, Derby, Leicester and Lincoln. The southern section consisted of the Danish burhs at Northampton, Cambridge, Huntingdon and Bedford, whilst to the far east was the Danish Kingdom of East Anglia.

Ingimund's attack on the city

The three fragments recall that in 902, that Ingimund asked Aethelflaed for land for his people and that he was weary of war. She gave him land near Chester(North Wirral) where he settled for a time. A few years later, he looked about him and saw the city full of wealth and the lands about it, and decided to possess them. He said to his followers (described as Norsemen, Danes and Irishmen). "Let us beseech and implore them first, and if we do not get them willingly in this way let us contest them by force". In the meantime, Queen Aethelflaed, having received warning of Ingimund's intentions, poured men into Chester to resist the intended attack.

When Ingimund's plea for Chester to be handed over without resorting to violence having predictably failed, the Norsemen and Danes gathered to attack the city, whose defenders were advised by the Queen on their tactics. The best fighters, she said, should go out of the city to meet the attackers, leaving a body of cavalry concealed inside the city gates, and after engaging the attackers in battle, should (The best fighters) appear to flee within the walls. When the greater part of the attackers pursued them inside the gates, the gates should be closed and the Danes and Norwegians who were inside, cut down. The plan seems risky and hard to implement. How do you close gates if a horde is charging through them? Why would you have cavalry deployed behind city gates? Could large numbers of archers archers have been concealed on the walls and could they have cut down a large number of attackers, so many that, the vanguard was able to get within the city walls whilst a large part of the attacking force pulled back because of the high casualty rate?

We don't know, but apparently the tactic worked and the attackers who were locked within the city walls were summarily slaughtered.

The three fragments continue stating 'The besiegers left outside renewed their attack, undeterred. They made hurdles mounted on poles and attacked the walls under their protection. The defenders threw boulders down on them to crush the hurdles. Then the defenders boiled all the water and ale in the town in cauldrons which was then thrown over the attackers, scalding the skins from them, the Norsemen, to defend themselves, stretched hides over their hurdles. The English inside then let loose all the bees in their hives so that (The Norsemen) could not move their legs or hands from the great number of bees stinging them'.

'After this, understandably, they left the city and abandoned it. The entry ends however with the alarming sentence ' It was not long after that (before they came) to wage war battle again'.

And that is all we know about Ingimund's attack on Chester.

It is debatable as to what was the catalyst was that led to the attack.

We don't even know as to why Aethelflaed permitted Ingimund to settle on the Wirral.

Both sides must have recognised the importance of Chester which controlled access to the rivers Dee and the Mersey as well as guarding an easy approach into the heartlands of Mercia. Had Aethelflaed originally allowed them to settle on the Wirral in order that they would provide revenue from increased trade with the Viking controlled western seaboard? Had Ingimund agreed to act as a protector against hostile Viking raiders? We just do not know as to what the original arrangements were but there must have been some agreed treaty.

What does appear likely, is the attack on Chester must have required a reasonably sized force, a force that was too large to have been formed by the Hiberno-Norse settlers, who would likely have numbered in the hundreds rather than in thousands.

Did Ingimund seek allies amongst other Viking factions. It appears likely.

We don't know if any punitive actions were taken against the Wirral Norse, but they were still on the Wirral in 937, when the battle of Brunanburh was fought. If as some believe, that the battle was fought on the Wirral, what was their role or were they just caught up in an event in which they had no control? Again we do not know but it appears that they had lived on the Wirral for 30 years after the attack on Chester, and that, to our knowledge, that there had been no further violent confrontations.

What happened to Ingimund after the attack on Chester. It's anybody's guess, however there is a possibility that he met his end at the battle of Tettenhall which was fought near modern day Wolverhampton on the 5th of August 910 AD. A Norse chieftain, called Ingimund was reportedly killed at Tettenhall along with thousands of Vikings including two of their Kings.

Tettenhall was a highly important battle because it broke the power of the Viking Kingdom of York and Northumbria.