



WIRRAL ARCHAEOLOGY CIC

THE BATTLE OF TETTENHALL

5TH OF AUGUST 910 AD

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The Battle of Tettenhall – 5th August 910AD

Introduction

The battle of Tettenhall (also called the battle of Wodnesfeld) was fought on the 5th August 910 AD, in an area which is now a suburb of modern-day Wolverhampton. It's a battle that is little known to most people yet it was one of the most significant battles ever fought between the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings.

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The Anglo-Saxons by virtue of their victory in this great battle, broke the power of the Viking Kingdom of York and yet in doing so, created a power vacuum in what was Northumbria, which would fester amongst the Hiberno-Norse Vikings of Dublin and which can be considered the catalyst for the epic clash between King Athelstan and Anlaf Guthfrithson, some 27 years later at the battle of Brunanburh.

Tettenhall

Tettenhall was a direct result of King Edward the Elder's ravaging of Northumbria in 909 AD. It is not known as to why the King of Wessex launched his attack against the Northumbrian Vikings but the Anglo-Saxon chronicles record that his army laid waste to the area for five weeks and that many Danes were slaughtered. Edward had agreed a treaty with the Danes of East Anglia and the Norse and Danish Vikings of the Kingdom of Viking York at Tiddingford in 906 and it is possible that the truce may have been broken by the Vikings. We know that Edward's combined army of the warriors of Wessex and Mercia went as far as Lindsey, in what is now Lincolnshire.

Lindsey had been a minor independent Anglo-Saxon Kingdom before being absorbed by Northumbria in the 7th century. By the early 10th century, it was part of the Viking realm of York. During Edward's campaign, the relics of Saint Oswald of Northumbria were recovered. Aethelflaed would deposit the relics in the new Minster in Gloucester which was renamed St. Oswald's Priory. The saint's head however was placed within the tomb of St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, at Durham Cathedral.

A few years prior to Edward's campaign in Northumbria, namely in 907, his sister, Aethelflaed, had defended the city of Chester against a Norse attack, possibly led by a Hiberno-Norse leader called Ingimund, whom she had permitted to settle in the north of the Wirral following the Norse expulsion from Dublin in 902 AD.

Despite Ingimund's treachery, Norse settlers of the Wirral were not expelled. What, if any, punitive measures were implemented against them, is unknown. Aethelflaed, the lady of Mercia and her husband, the Ealdorman Aethelred, ruled in Mercia, but it certainly true that Edward the Elder controlled Wessex, Mercia and East Anglia and that he was the de facto leader and King of the Anglo-Saxons.

910

In 910, the Viking Kingdom of York sought revenge for Edward's attack the previous year. It is believed that the Viking Kings of the Danelaw raised a fleet and took an army into the Bristol channel and then up the River Severn to Bridgenorth in what is now Shropshire.

The Vikings plundered the countryside and amassed a vast treasure. It is unclear as to what occurred next but the Vikings started to head north with the intent of returning to Northumbria. It is not known as to why they could not get back to their fleet on the River Severn, possibly an approaching Anglo-Saxon army had cut off their retreat to that fleet or it had been dispersed for some unknown region but whatever the cause, the combined armies of Wessex and Mercia cornered them at Tettenhall. Edward the Elder, Aethelflaed and Aethelred led the Anglo-Saxon army into battle.

As usual, for this period, there is very little material that relates the detail of the battle, but it was a largescale affair and a comprehensive victory for the Anglo-Saxons. The Anglo-Saxon chronicle states that thousands of Vikings were slaughtered and that three of their Kings perished in the battle, namely Eowils, Halfdan and Ingwaer. It is also possible that one Ingimund was killed in the battle but as to whether it was the same Ingimund of the Wirral, who had attacked Chester in 907, cannot be confirmed.

The Anglo-Saxon casualties are also unknown, but it must be assumed that they too, were considerable. Aethelred died a year after the battle after a long illness and there is some belief that he'd been severely wounded during the battle. The power of the Danelaw was broken.

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Aethelflaed died 8 years later and Edward the Elder ousted her daughter Aelfwyn and placed her in a nunnery. Mercia's autonomy now ended and Edward was now the ruler of both Wessex and Mercia. Unlike Brunanburh, there is no known war poem to celebrate the Anglo-Saxon victory at Tettenhall but the importance of the battle should be recognised in its own right as it laid the foundation of the nation of England and forged a unity between Wessex and Mercia which would be tested once again in the year of 937.