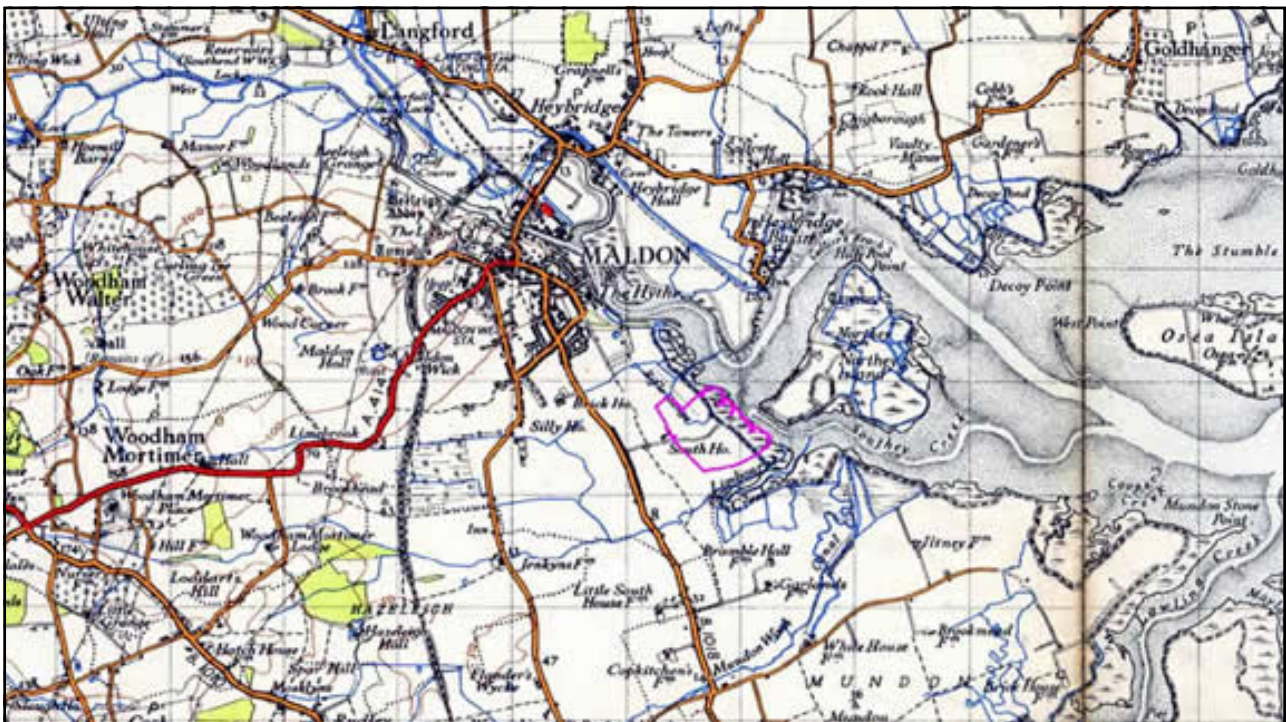


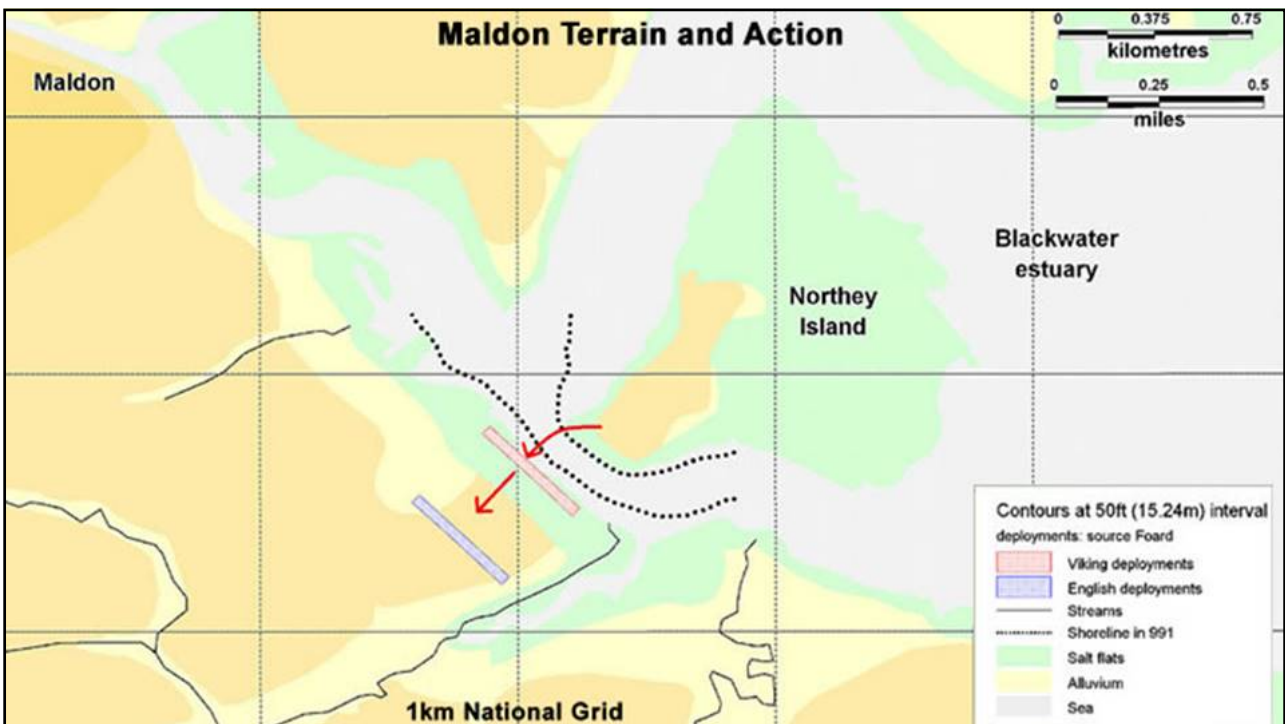
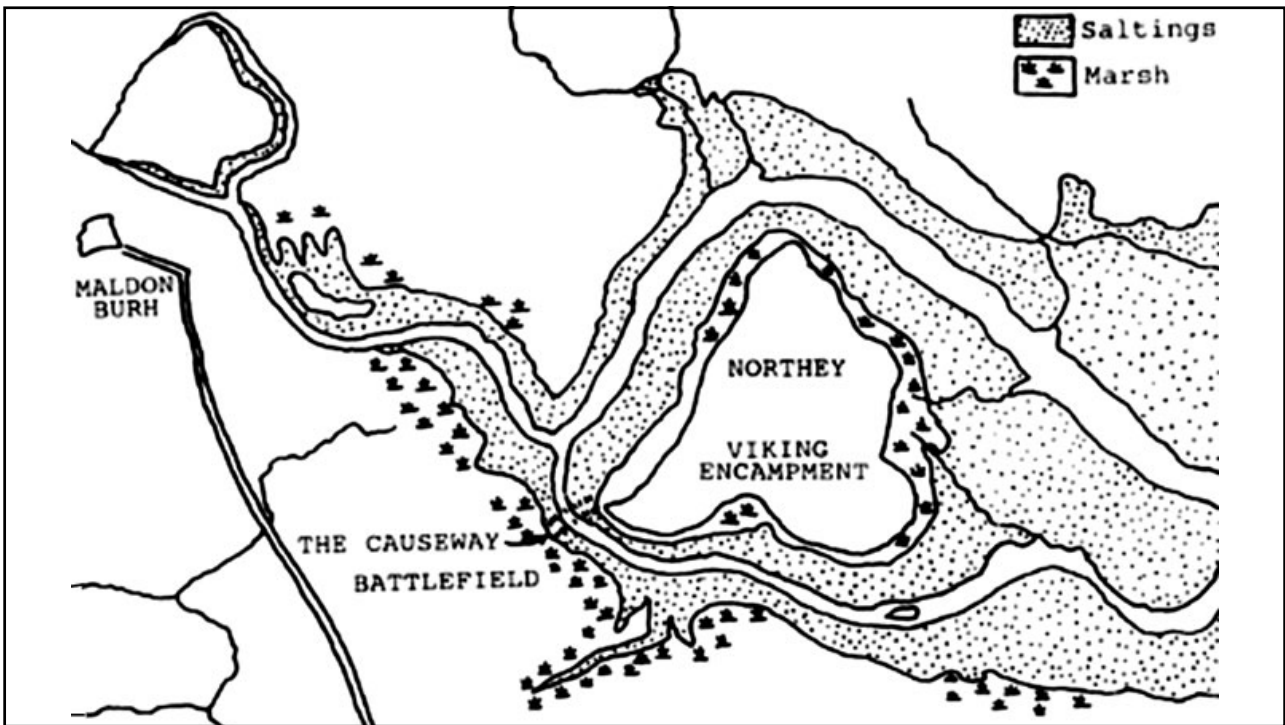
MILITARY
HISTORY
BATTLE OF MALDON
10?11 AUGUST 991



Introduction

- On 10 (or 11) August 991AD, the successful Viking raiders of nearby seaport cities beached their 93 boats at Northey Island near the mouth of the Blackwater River near Maldon in Essex.
- The island was accessible from the mainland by a causeway that could only be used at low tide, provided a natural base for the Vikings.
- Birhtnoth, the earl of Essex, leader of the English militia, set up a position at the land end of the easily defensible causeway to prevent the enemy from crossing to the mainland.







Northey Island viewed across the saltings, looking east from the flood bank



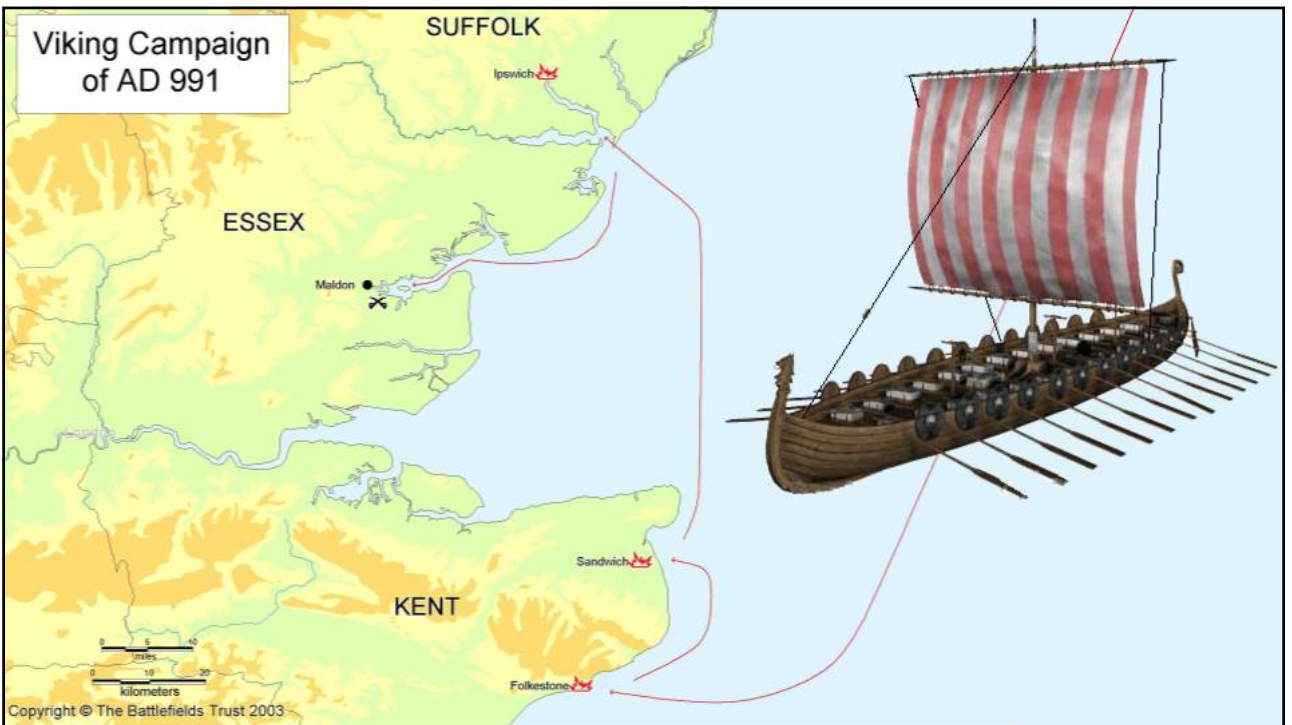
Battlefield from the Northwest



The channel at low tide











Order of Battle

English (Saxon) Forces

King: Æðelred II Unræd (not present)

Leader: Birhtnoth, the earl of Essex

Comitatus (*Heorðwerod*, loyal retainers)

Wulfstan, Ceola's son	Leofsunu of Sturmer
Ælfhere and Maccus, brave fighters	Dunnere
Birhthelm's son	Æscferth, Northumbrian hostage in Essex
Eadweard, Chamberlain of Birhtnoth	Eadweard the Long
Wulfmær, warrior, Birhtnoth's nephew	Æthelric, brother of Sibirh
Ælfnoth	Wistan, son of Thurstan
Wulfmær, Wulfstan's lad	Son of Wighelm
Ælfwine	Oswold and Eadwold, brothers
Offa and Offa's son	Sibirh
Godric, Godwine and Godwig (sons of Odda), deserters and horse thieves (Godric fled away on Earl Birhtnoth's horse)	Godric, son of Æthelgar, hero
	Birhtwold, an old retainer

Select Fyrd (farmers, peasants (ceorls))
600 to 6,000 men in total, say **3,000**

Scandinavian (Viking) Raiders

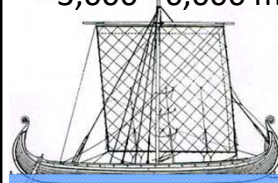
King of Denmark: Sweyn I Forkbeard

Battle leader: Olaf Tryggvason*

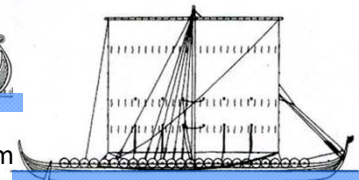
Sea-warriors (Vikings, *foends* (fiends))

Warriors and crews of 93 vessels

3,000 - 6,000 men in total, say **4,000**



Oseberg (c. AD 820)
30 oars, 21.5 m x 5.1 m



Hedeby I (c. AD 985)
52 oars, 30.9 m x 2.7 m

Note: Rival of Sweyn I for king of Denmark and Norway; became Olaf I of Norway shortly after Battle of Maldon.

Assumptions on Viking force size

- The poem states that the Vikings came in a large fleet of 93 ships. At that time, they used two basic types of ship:
 - The Oseberg seated 30 warrior/oarsmen
 - The Hedeby I seated 52 warrior/oarsmen + 6 reserves.
- The Viking force was therefore between 2,790 and 5,580. An average mix of boats would yield some **4,000 warriors**.
- The main cities burned and pillaged by the Vikings during their campaign thus far (Folkstone, Sandwich and Ipswich) had not had time to raise a Saxon Army of size to threaten the Vikings, so Viking casualties would have been relatively minor.

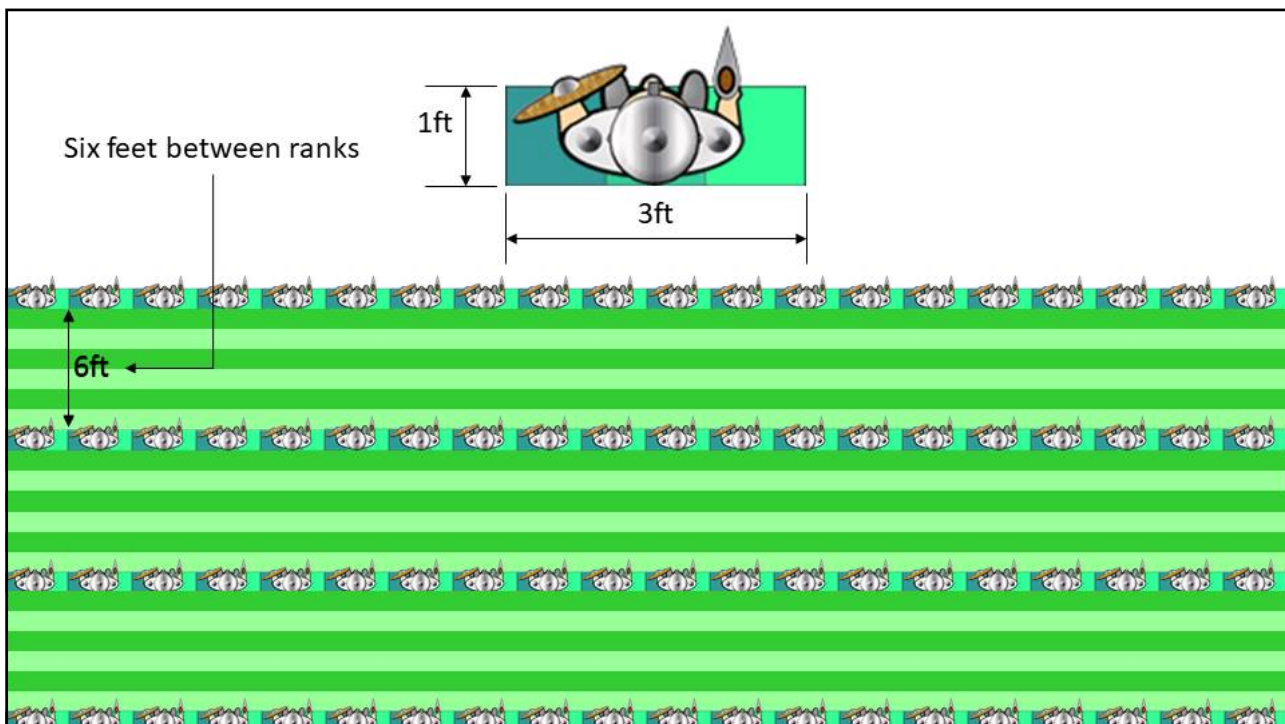
Assumptions on Saxon force size

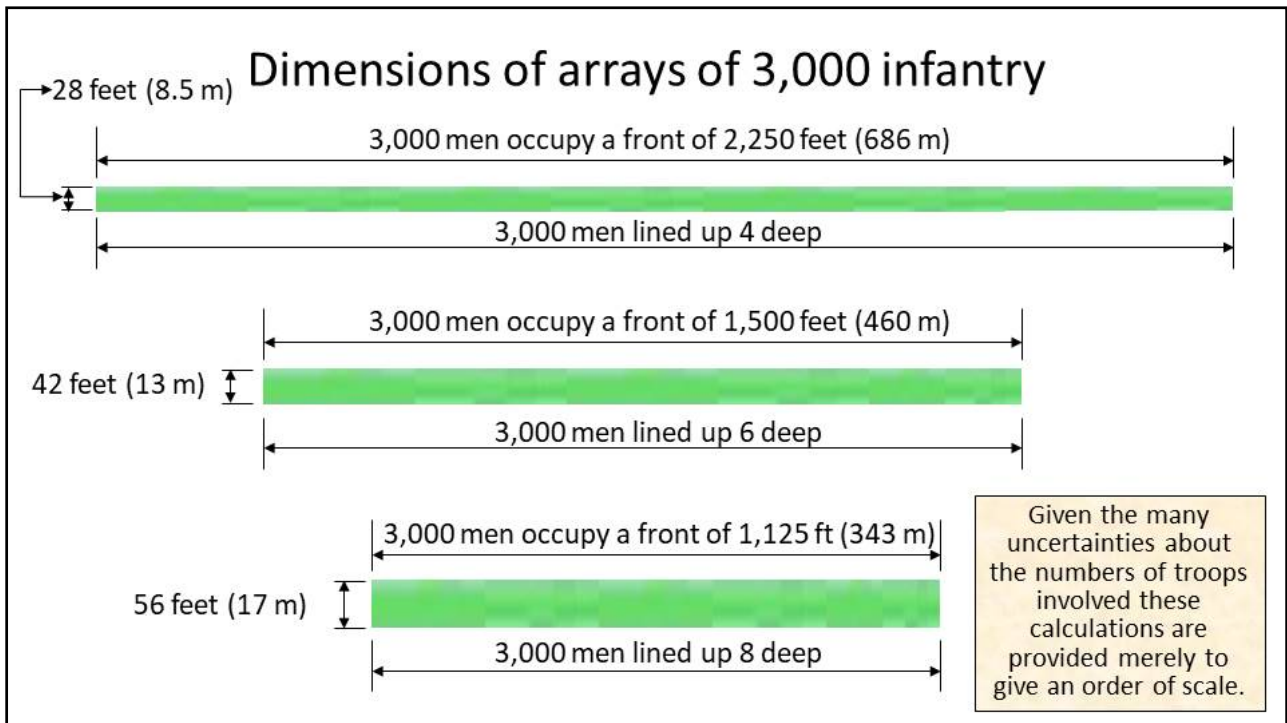
- Ealdorman Brihtnoth, raised the Essex 'fyrd' and advanced to meet the Viking army. This was not just the response of a local lord to protect his estates, but a regional commander raising the East Saxon military forces, possibly even more widely from East Anglia, under the fyrd system established earlier by king Alfred and his successors for the reconquest of the east and north of England from the Danes.
- As the fourth area attacked, time would have been available to gather a large force.
- The size of the Saxon army would have been equivalent to the Viking force, otherwise the smaller force would likely have avoided doing battle. Assume a Saxon army of **3,000 warriors**.

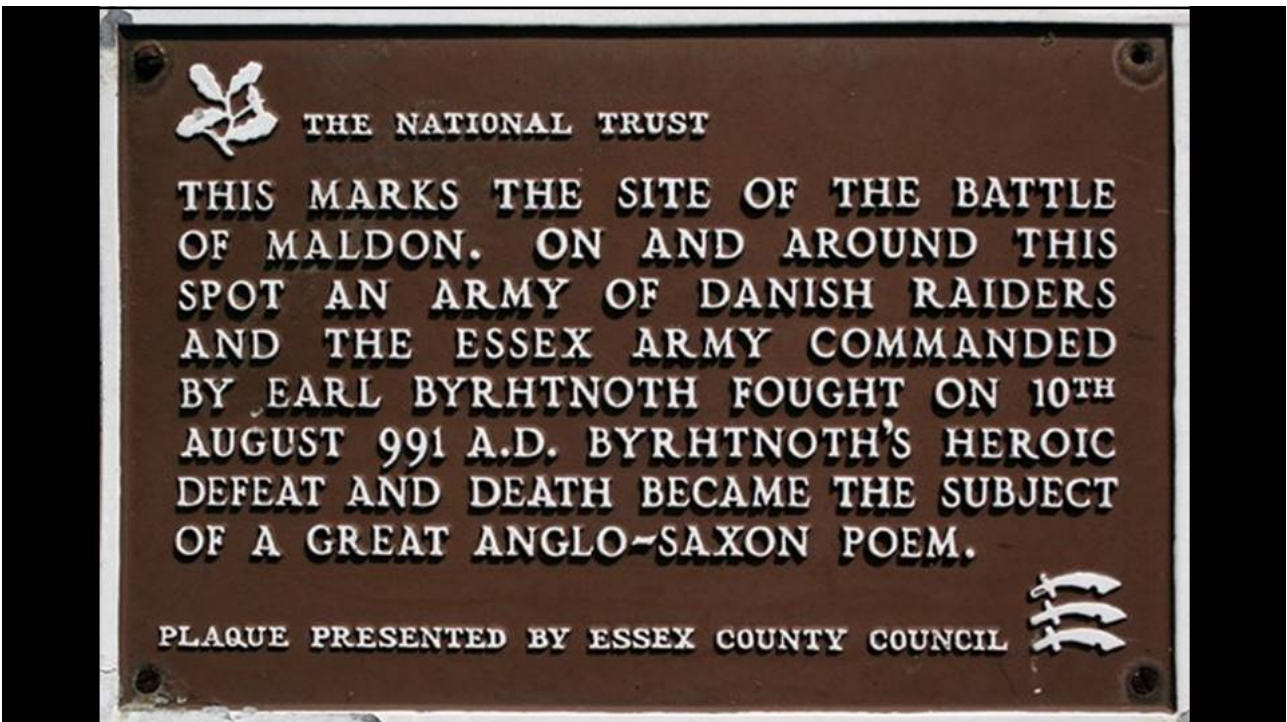
Calculation of formation size per Vegetius

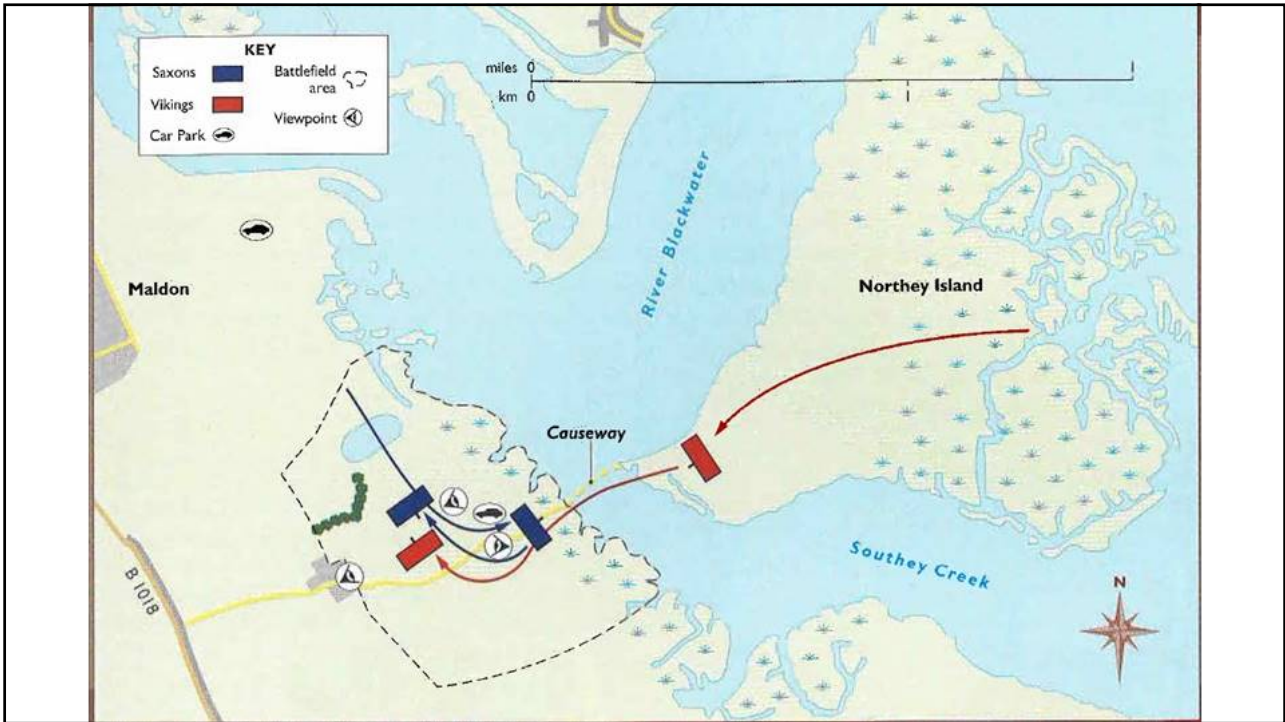
- The Roman military manual of Vegetius was known to have been in use in the late Anglo-Saxon period:

'In a mile of field, a single line will contain 1,666 infantry, since individual fighting men take up 3 ft. each. If you wish to draw up six lines in a mile of field, 9,996 infantry are needed. If you wish to deploy this number in three lines, it takes up two miles; but it is better to make additional lines than to thin the soldiers out. We said that 6 ft. ought to lie between each line in depth from the rear, and in fact each warrior occupies 1 ft. standing still. Therefore, if you draw up six lines, an army of 10,000 men will take up 42 ft. in depth and a mile in breadth.'









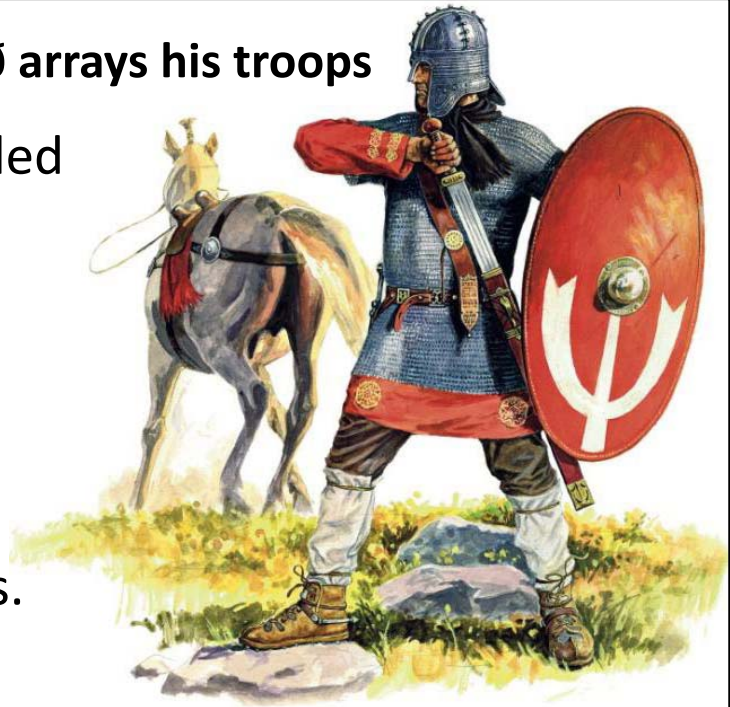


Byrhtnoð and his troops rush to the causeway



Byrhtnoð arrays his troops

- Then he commanded each young man To leave his horse, to drive it far off, and to go forth, with mind turned to strong hands and good thoughts.



The gallant stops hawking

Then Offa's kinsman first discovered that the great earl suffered no slackness; he let from his hand, then, loved one fly, hawk to the holt, and he stepped to battle.

So one could know that the lad wished not to weaken in war, when he seized weapons,



The gallant stops hawking

And as for him, Eadric would follow his prince, his lord to the fight; he bore forth, then, spear to the battle. He had good thought as long as he with hands could hold board [shield] and bright sword: his boast he performed when to the fight he came with his lord.



Byrhtnoð arrays the fyrd

Then Byrhtnoth began to array men there, rode and gave counsel, taught warriors how they must stand and that stead [6] hold, bade them their round-shields rightly hold fast with hands, not at all frightened.



Byrhtnoð joins his *Heorðwerod* (hearth-troop)

When he had fairly arrayed that folk, he dismounted among them where it most pleased him, where he knew his hearth-band most loyal.



Viking messenger (*Wicinga ar*)

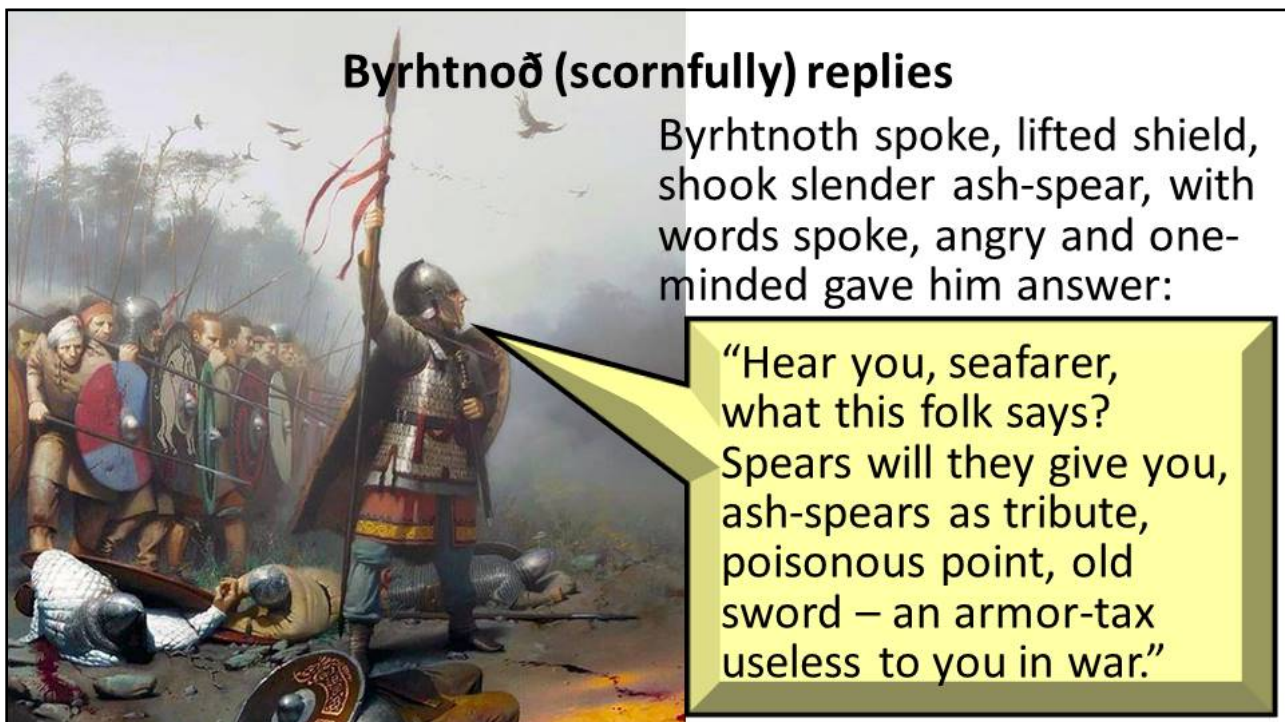
Then on the bank stood a Viking messenger, called out stoutly, spoke with words, boastfully [threateningly] brought the seafarers' errand to that land's earl where he stood on shore:

"Seamen sent me quickly to you, ordered me tell you to send rings at once, wealth for defense: better for all of you that you with tribute this spear-rush forgo than that we share so bitter a war."



Nor need we kill each other if you perform it;
for gold we will fasten a truce with you.

If you determine it, the mightiest here,
that you for your people ransom will pay –
give to the seamen at their own choosing
wealth for a truce and take peace from us –
we with that payment shall to our ships,
on ocean fare, hold peace with you.”



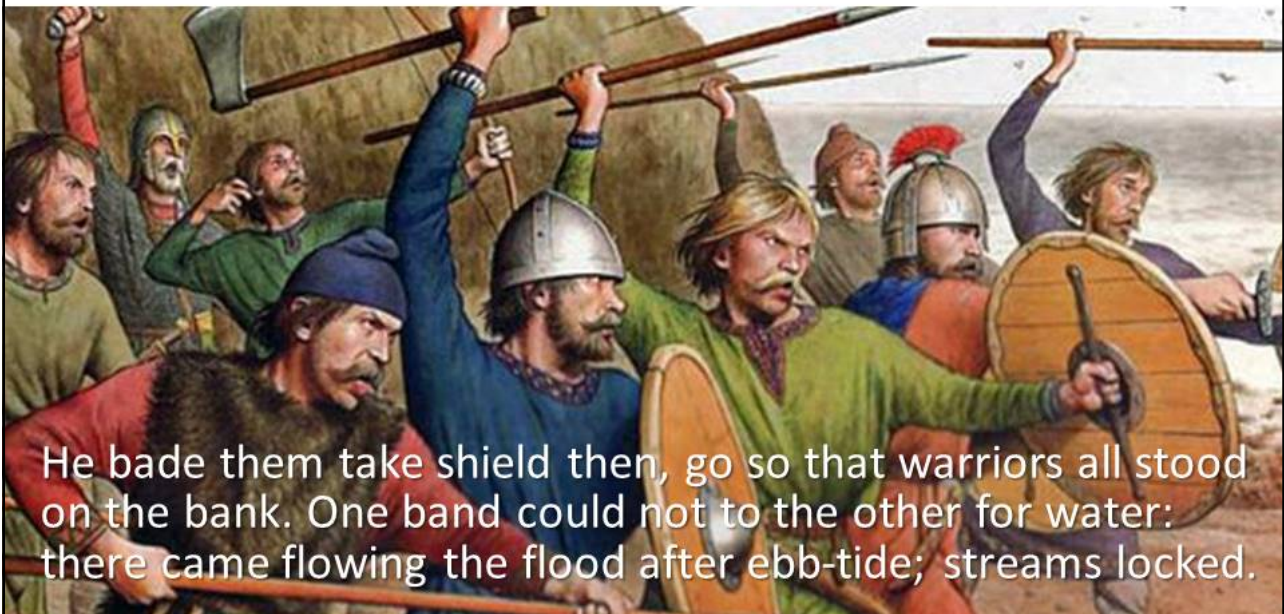
Byrhtnoð (scornfully) replies

Byrhtnoth spoke, lifted shield,
shook slender ash-spear, with
words spoke, angry and one-
minded gave him answer:

“Hear you, seafarer,
what this folk says?
Spears will they give you,
ash-spears as tribute,
poisonous point, old
sword – an armor-tax
useless to you in war.”

Seamen's messenger, bear word back again;
 tell your people much loathlier tale:
 that here stands a good [honourable] earl with his war-band,
 who will defend this homeland, Æthelred's land,
 land of my prince, folk and fold [earth, land].
 At battle, now, heathen must fall. Too shameful it seems
 that you, unfought, should go to ship
 bearing our wealth, now that thus far
 you have come into our land.
 Not so softly shall you carry off riches:
 point must, and edge, reconcile us first,
 grim battle-play, before we give tribute."

The standoff





Too long it seemed till they might
bear spears together.

With tumult [military array] they
stood along Pante's stream, the
van of the East-Saxons and the
ash-army [Vikings built ships of
ash wood];

nor might any bring harm to the
other, but those who through
flane-flight [flight of an arrow]
took death.

The flood went out. The seamen stood ready, many a Viking, eager for war.



Then bade men's protector to hold the bridge
 a war-hardened hero – he was called Wulfstan—
 who with his spear slew the first man
 who most boldly there on the bridge stepped.
 There with Wulfstan stood warriors unfrightened,
 Ælfere and Maccus, brave twain,
 who would not at the ford flight work,
 but fast against fiends defended themselves,
 the while they could wield weapons.



Viking Guile

Truly have you blocked us at the ford. Well done. Now would you that we land in your fair city...?

When they perceived and saw clearly that they found the bridge-wards there bitter, Those loathly strangers [loathed guests] began to use guile, asked for free landing, passage to shore, to fare over the ford leading foot-troops.



Byrhtnoð's pride:

Then the earl for his arrogance [*ofermod*] left too much land to a hostile people. Then over cold water Byrthelm's son began to call (men listened):

"Now you have room: come quickly to us, warriors to war. God alone knows who may master this battlefield."



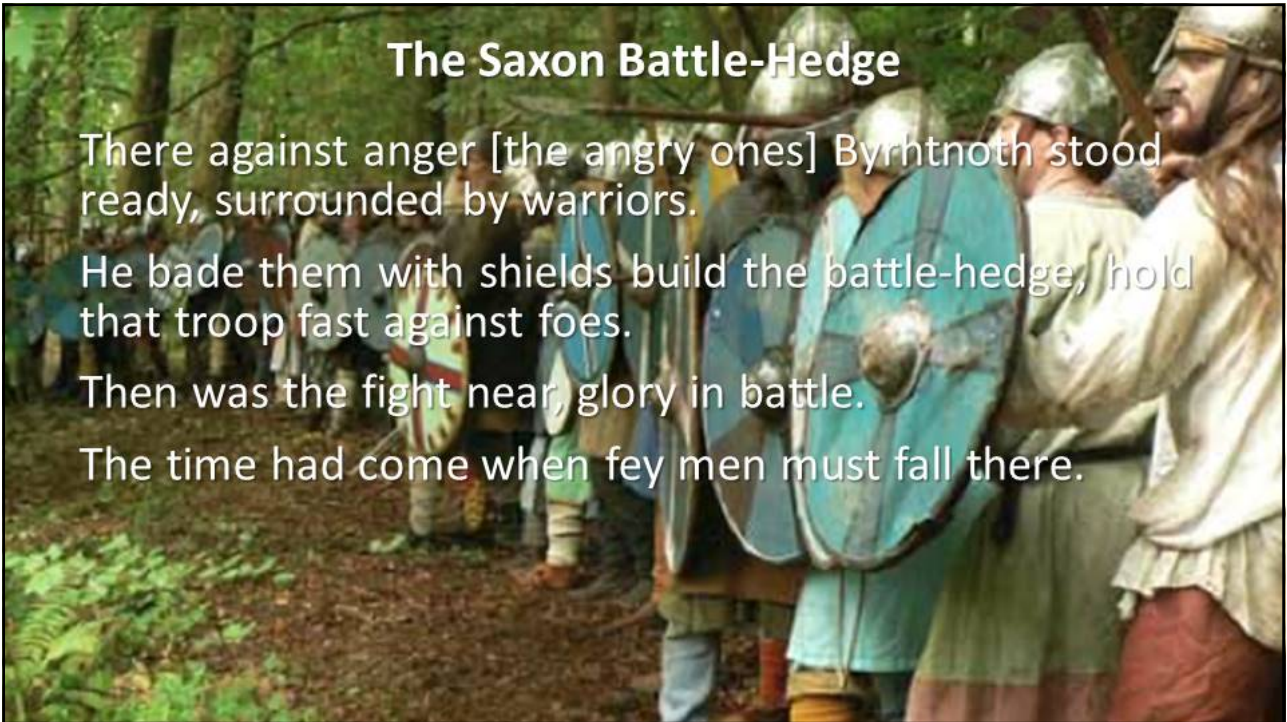
The Saxon Battle-Hedge

There against anger [the angry ones] Byrhtnoth stood ready, surrounded by warriors.

He bade them with shields build the battle-hedge, hold that troop fast against foes.

Then was the fight near, glory in battle.

The time had come when fey men must fall there.



Clamor was raised there.
Ravens circled, eagles, eager for carrion.
There was uproar on earth.

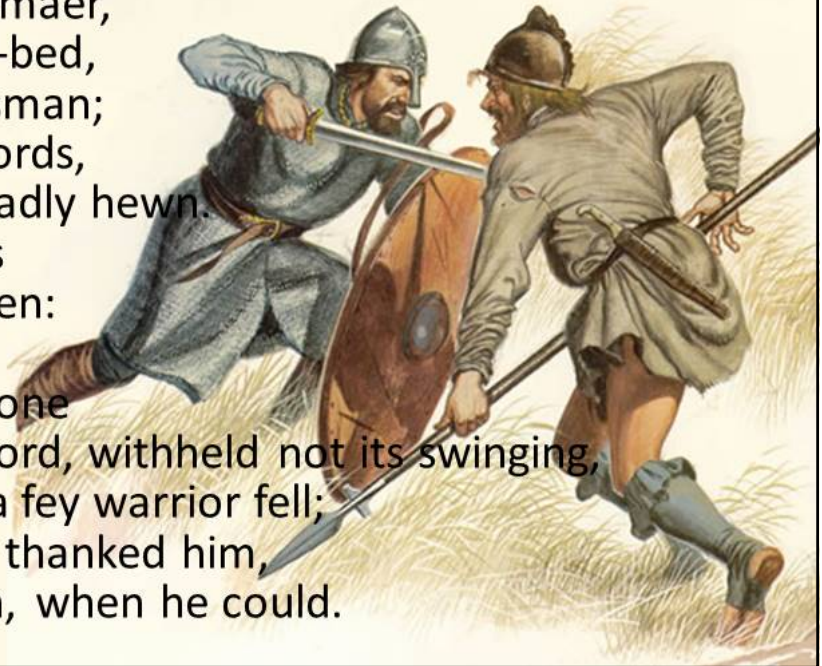
From hands then they released file-hard spears;
ground spears, grim ones, flew.
Bows were busy; shield took spear-point.
Bitter that battle-rush! Warriors fell;
on either hand young men lay.

Wounded was Wulfmaer,
 chose slaughter-bed,
 Byrhtnoth's kinsman;
 he was with swords,
 his sister-son, badly hewn.

There to the Vikings
 requital was given:

I heard that

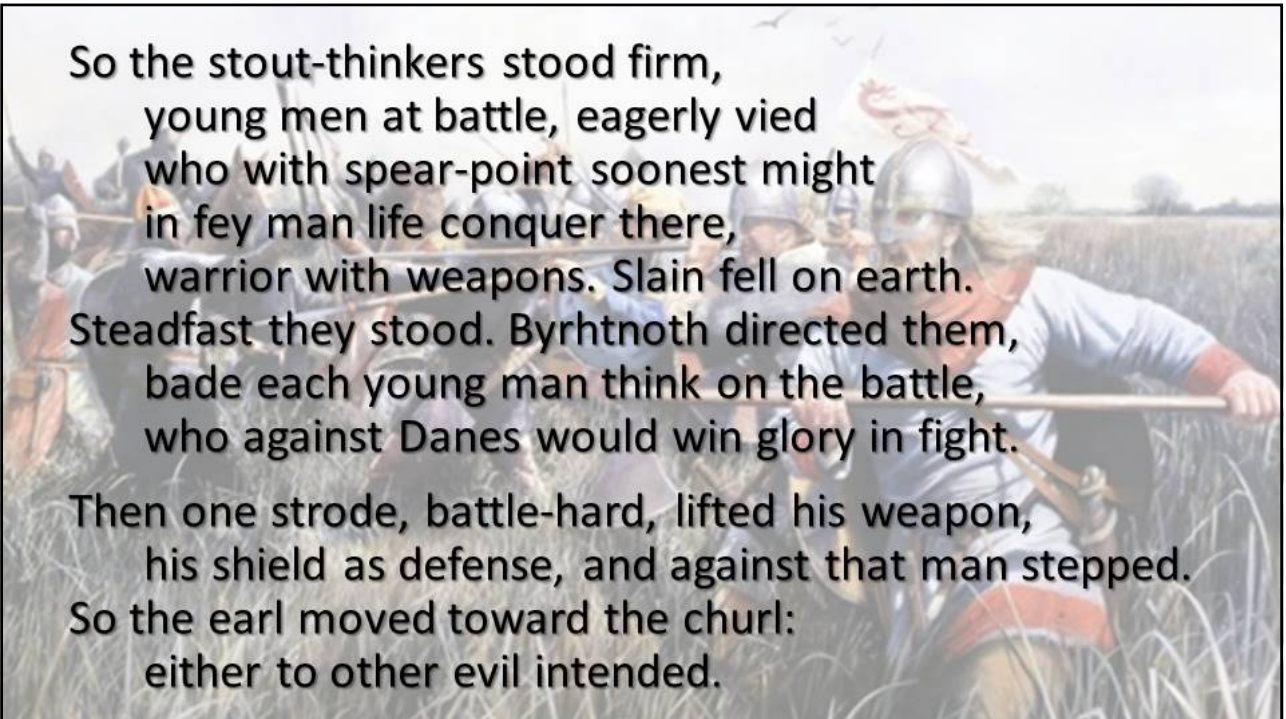
Eadweard slew one
 fiercely with sword, withheld not its swinging,
 that at his feet a fey warrior fell;
 for that his lord thanked him,
 his bower-thegn, when he could.



So the stout-thinkers stood firm,
 young men at battle, eagerly vied
 who with spear-point soonest might
 in fey man life conquer there,
 warrior with weapons. Slain fell on earth.

Steadfast they stood. Byrhtnoth directed them,
 bade each young man think on the battle,
 who against Danes would win glory in fight.

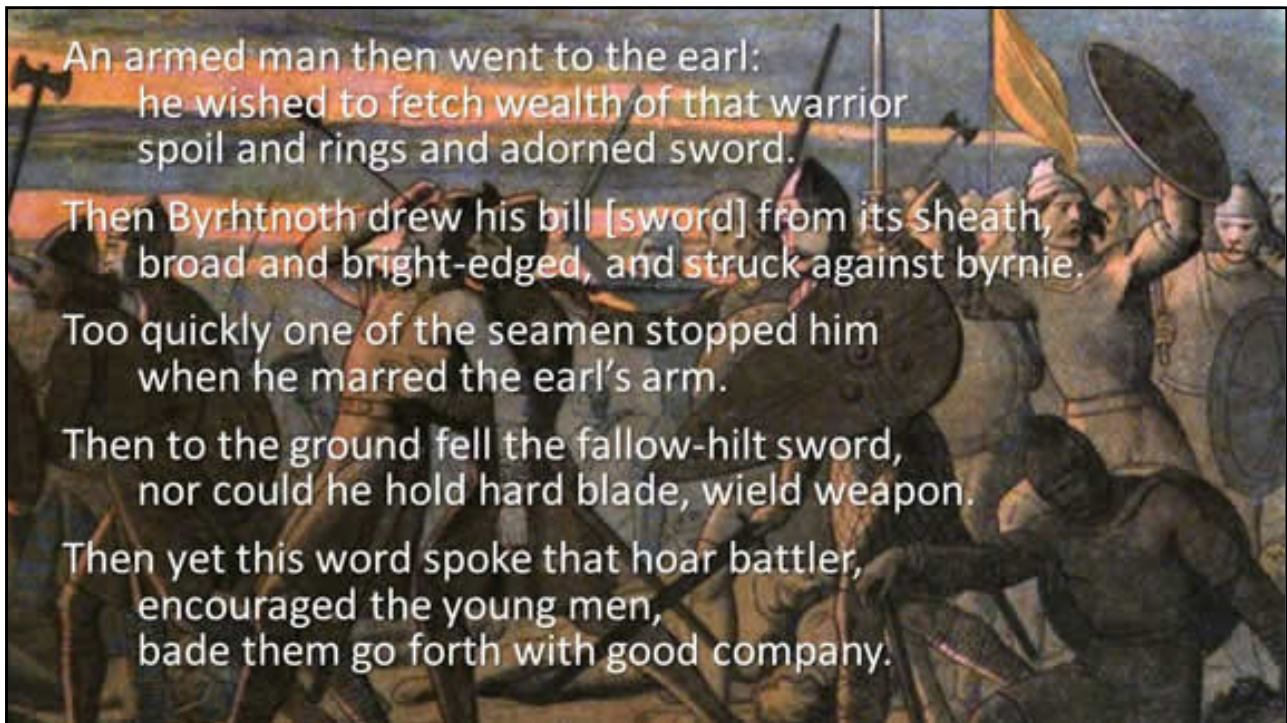
Then one strode, battle-hard, lifted his weapon,
 his shield as defense, and against that man stepped.
 So the earl moved toward the churl:
 either to other evil intended.



Then hurled the sea-warrior a southern spear [French-made]
 so that wounded was warrior's lord.
 He shoved then with shield so the shaft burst –
 the spear broke and sprang back.
 Enraged was that warrior: he with spear stung
 the proud Viking who gave him the wound.
 Wise was that fyrd-warrior: he let his spear wade
 through the youth's neck, hand guided it,
 so that it reached life in the ravager.
 Then he another speedily shot
 so that the byrnie burst; he was wounded in breast
 through the ring-locked mail;
 in him at heart stood poisoned point.

The earl was the blither: the brave man laughed then,
 said thanks to Metod [measurer; fate]
 for the day-work God gave him.
 Then a certain warrior let a hand-dart fly from his hand,
 so that it went forth through that noble,
 Æthelred's thegn.
 By his side stood an ungrown youth,
 a lad in the battle, who full valiantly
 drew from the man the bloody spear,
 Wulfstan's son, Wulfmaer the Young.
 He let tempered shaft fare back again:
 the point sank in so he on earth lay
 who had his lord so grievously reached.





He could not stand fast on foot any longer; but looked towards heaven:

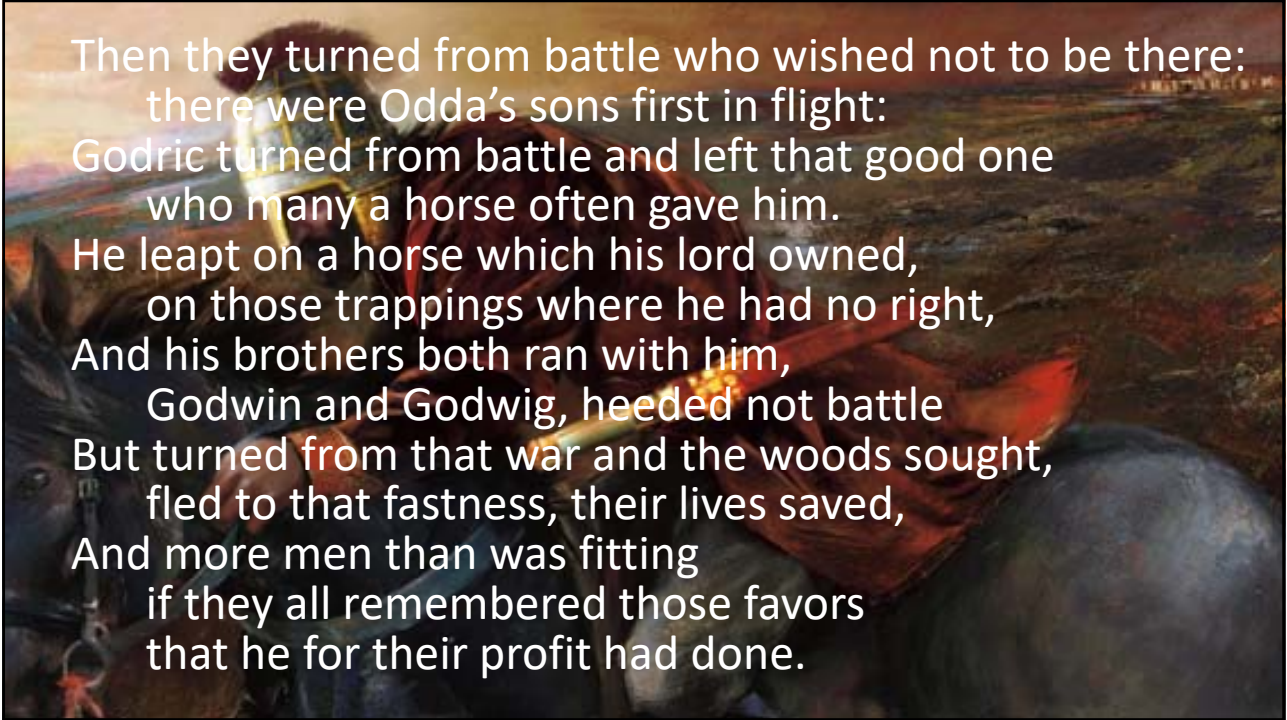
*"I thank thee, Wielder of peoples,
 for all those joys I had in the world.*

*"Now have I, mild Measurer, most need
 that you grant to my spirit goodness,
 that my soul may journey now to thee,
 into thy wielding, Lord of the angels,
 depart in peace.*

*"I am entreating thee that no
 hell-scathers [troops of hell] harm it."*



**Then heathen men hewed him,
 and the men who had stood by him,
 Ælfnoth and Wulfmaer, both lay there,
 when close to their lord
 they their lives gave.**



Then they turned from battle who wished not to be there:
 there were Odda's sons first in flight:
 Godric turned from battle and left that good one
 who many a horse often gave him.
 He leapt on a horse which his lord owned,
 on those trappings where he had no right,
 And his brothers both ran with him,
 Godwin and Godwig, heeded not battle
 But turned from that war and the woods sought,
 fled to that fastness, their lives saved,
 And more men than was fitting
 if they all remembered those favors
 that he for their profit had done.

So Offa earlier that day had said to him in the
methel-stead, [speaking place, counsel chamber]
when he held moot, [meeting, assembly]
that many spoke boldly there
who after, at need, would not endure.

Then was the folk's prince fallen,
Æthelred's earl. All saw there,
his hearth-companions, that their lord lay. [lay slain]
Then valiant thegns went forth there,
men undaunted eagerly hastened:
they all wished, then, one of two things –
to leave life or loved one avenge.



So the son of Ælfric boldened them forth,
winter-young warrior words spoke,
Ælfwine spoke then, valiantly said:

“Remember the speeches we spoke at mead,
when we our boast on the bench raised,
heroes in hall about hard fight:
now I may test who is keen. [brave]

“I will make my nobility known to all,
that I was of great kin among Mercians;
my old-father [grandfather] Ealhhelm
was called, wise aldorman, [highest
nobleman] world-happy.

Nor among the people shall thegns
blame me that I from this fyrd
wish to flee, seek home, now that
my prince lies hewn at the fight.

That harm is most to me: he was
both my kin and my lord."

Then he went forth, mindful of battle,
with spear-point pierced one,
a seaman among the folk, that
he on fold lay, destroyed with his
weapon.

His friends he exhorted, friends
and companions, that they go forth.



Offa answered, shook ash-wood:

"Indeed, you, Ælfwine, have all thegns exhorted
at need [for their own good]. Now that our lord lies,
earl on earth, to all of us need is that each of us
embolden the other, warrior to war, the while
he weapon may have yet and hold, hard blade,
spear and good sword.

Us Godric has, Odda's craven son, betrayed altogether.
When he on horse rode, on proud steed,
too many men thought that it was our lord.

Therefore here on field the folk was divided,
shield-defense broken. Fail his beginning! [Let him fail]
since he so many men put to flight."

Leofsunu spoke and his linden raised,
shield for safety; to Offa he said:

“I vow it, that hence I will not flee a foot’s length,
but will advance, avenge in strife my lord-friend.
Steadfast heroes need not reproach me
with words around Sturmere, now my friend fell,
that I journeyed home lordless;
turned from the battle; but weapon must take me,
spear-point and iron.”
He went full angry, fought stoutly, flight he rejected.

Dunnere spoke then, brandished a dart,
the humble churl [yoeman, peasant] over all called,
bade that each man avenge Byrhtnoth:

“He may not flinch, who thinks to avenge
his lord among folk, nor for fear mourn.”

Then they went forth, recked nothing of fear.
Household retainers began to fight stoutly,
fierce spear-bearers, and prayed God
they might avenge their lord-friend,
and a fall [death, destruction] work on their foes.

The hostage began eagerly helping them;
 he was of brave kin among the
 Northumbrians, Ecglaf's son;
 Æscferth was name to him.

He flinched not at battle-play,
 but again and again shot forth arrow:
 sometimes he shot against shield,
 sometimes a man tore;
 ever and anon he inflicted some wound
 while he could weapons wield.



Then yet in the van stood
 Eadweard the Long,
 ready and eager, vaunting
 words spoke, that he
 would not flee a foot-
 space of land, bend at all
 back when his better lay
 slain.

He broke the shield-wall and
 fought with those warriors,
 until on those seamen his
 wealth-giver he worthily
 wreaked, before he with
 the slain lay.



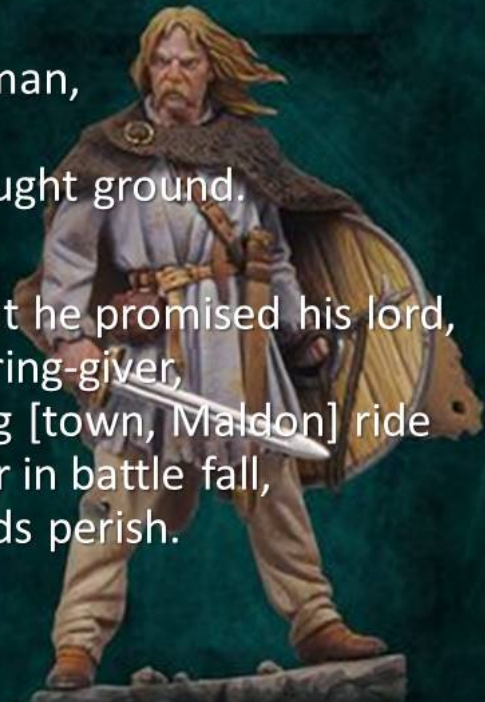
So did Ætheric, noble companion,
 eager and forth-yearning,
 fought earnestly, Sigebyrht's
 brother, and many others,
 clove *cellod* [unknown] shield,
 keenly defended them.
 Shield's rim burst,
 and the byrnie sang a terrible song.



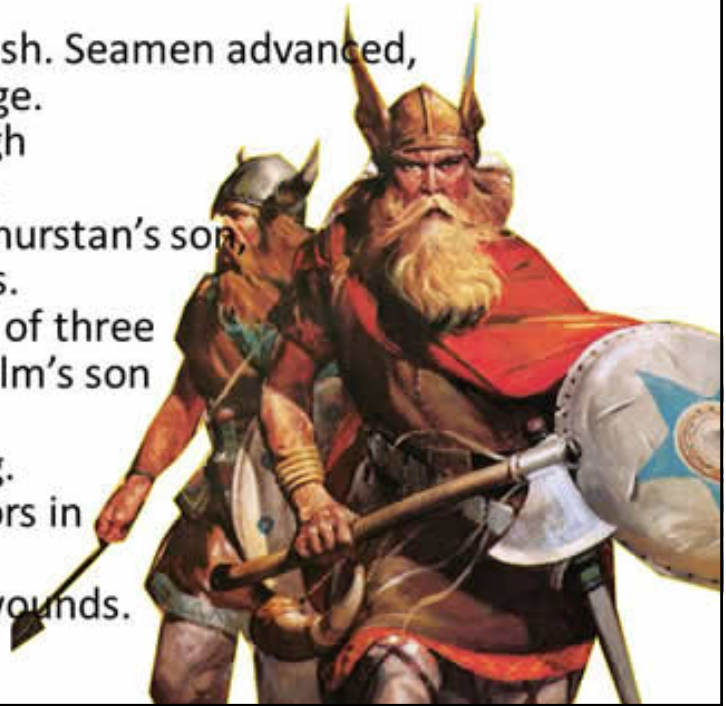
Then Offa at battle struck the seaman,
 that he on earth fell,
 and there Gadda's kinsman sought ground.

Quickly at fight Offa was hewn;
 he had, though, furthered what he promised his lord,
 as he boasted before with his ring-giver,
 that they should both into burg [town, Maldon] ride
 hale [hale and hearty] home or in battle fall,
 on the corpse-field with wounds perish.

He lay thegnly, his lord near.



Then there was shield's clash. Seamen advanced,
 burning with battle-rage.
 Spear often pierced through
 a fey one's soul-house.
 Forth then went Wistan, Thurstan's son,
 fought against warriors.
 He was in throng the bane of three
 of them, before Wighelm's son
 lay slain with him.
 There was a harsh meeting.
 They stood fast, warriors in
 conflict.
 Warriors fell, weary with wounds.
 The slain fell on earth.



Oswold and Eadwold all the while, both those brothers,
 strengthened the men, with words bade their kin-friends
 that they should endure at need, unweakly use weapons.



Byrhtwold spoke, raised his shield –
 he was an old retainer – shook his ash-spear;
 full boldly he taught warriors:

**“Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,
 mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægen lytlað.”**

“Thought must be the harder, heart be the keener,
 mind must be the greater, while our strength lessens.

“Here lies our prince all hewn, good one on grit.

“He may always mourn who from this war-play
 thinks now to turn.

“My life is old: I will not away; but I myself beside my lord,
 by so loved a man, think to lie.”

So Æthelgar’s son emboldened them all, Godric to battle.

Often he let spear, slaughter-spear,
 speed into those Vikings; so among folk he went first,
 hewed and humbled, **[crushed Vikings]**

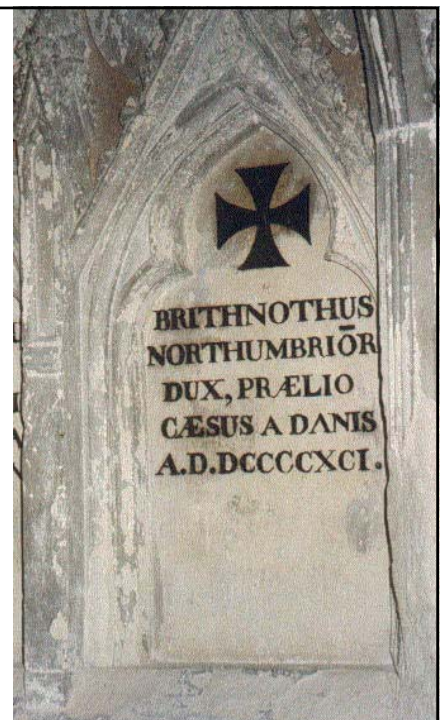
until he in fight fell.

(That was *not* the Godric who fled from battle.)

Closing segment missing!



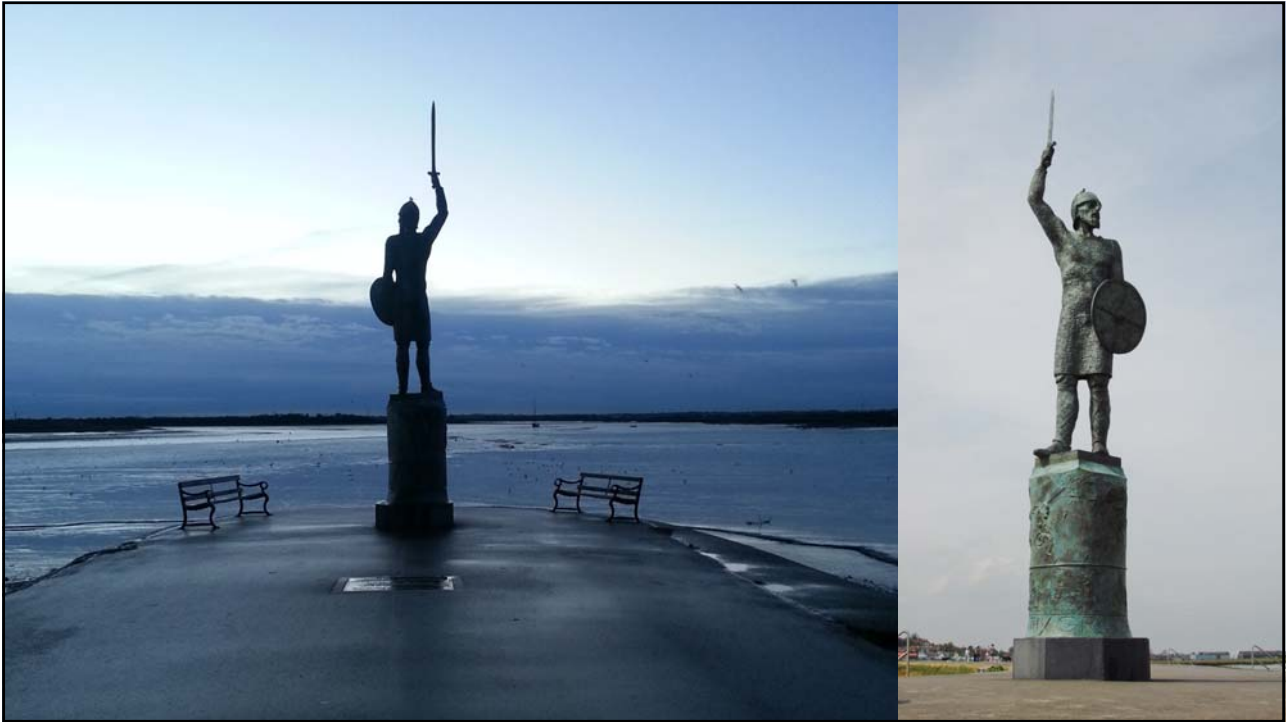
- The poem concludes on so heroic a note that what is in fact a military defeat is turned into a kind of moral victory.
- After the battle the Danes probably carried off Byrhtnoth's head as a battle-trophy, but his body was recovered by the monks of Ely and buried in their great abbey.

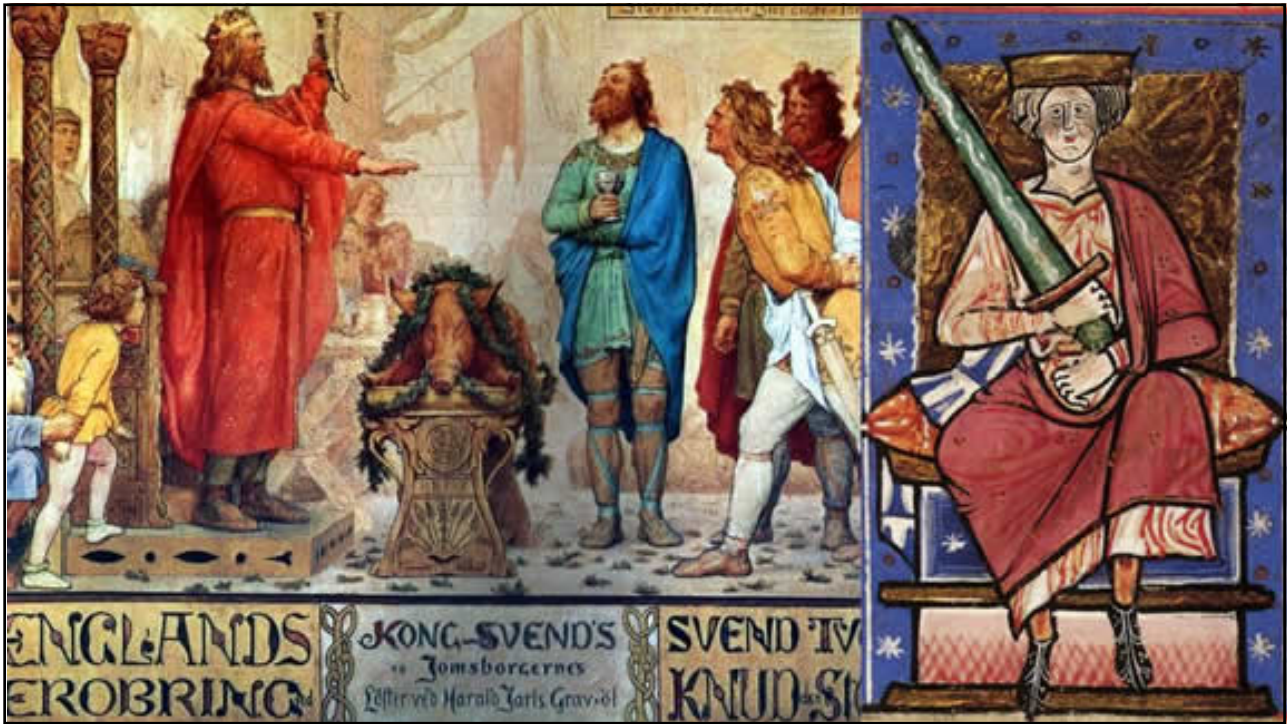


The beginning of the end

- The Battle of Maldon, the first major defeat of an English army for generations, was the beginning of the end for line of Alfred.
- Further defeats ensued, including the battles of Ringmere near Thetford.
- This phase of Anglo-Danish warfare eventually culminated in the kingdom-winning victory of Sweyn's son Cnut at the battle of *Assandun* in 1016.









Slutningene.

Det er alt, folkens.