

Locating the site of the Battle of Brunanburh (937) v4

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Abstract

In this paper I argue that the Battle of Brunanburh (937) took place on the old Roman Road between Brough-on-Humber (Petuaria/Civitas Parisiorum) and South Cave in the East Riding of Yorkshire. This updated version has been triggered both by comments gratefully received from readers of previous drafts and because two alternative candidate sites not wholly inconsistent with my original proposal have come to my attention since version 3 was uploaded. So, whereas the original paper dismissed other proposals mainly by disregarding them, this revision now extends the argument to examine the claims of as many rival sites as I can identify, showing why they are to be discounted.

The basis of the positive argument for Brough lies in (a) understanding the military objectives (b) the evidence of the Annals and (c) the relevance of Beverley Minster. It is demonstrated that the place-name evidence is consistent with this site. It is suggested that the huge proportion of church dedications in the area to "All Saints" can be seen as further circumstantial evidence.

Preface

Following up my researches into the 12 famous battles of "king" Arthur, published in late 2017 ("[Arthur: Legend, Logic & Evidence](#)"), my attention turned to the process and timescale of the Anglo-Saxon take over of post-Roman Britain. Amongst other things this caused me to consider the Siege of Lindisfarne and the battles of Catterick, Daegsastan and Caer Greu. In a separate but parallel research study (yet to be published) I have also been considering the origins of the 'Kingdom' of Fife which brought my time focus as far forward as c700AD.

Although the Battle of Brunanburh was 350 years after Daegsastan, I had long been aware of the controversy surrounding it - and the fact that the site was unknown and the subject of considerable and very varied speculation. I came to the view that this would be an interesting end point to these lines of research and so decided to take it on. A flurry of further research based on a general approach which I have come to regard as 'normal', but which seems to be too largely eschewed by the usual suspects, has now produced what I hope and believe to be a definitive answer to a problem which has beset historians for a very long time.

Introduction

The Battle of Brunanburh took place in the year 937 between Æthelstan, King of Wessex and the combined forces of Constantine, king of Scots, Owain, King of Strathclyde and Olaf Guthfrithsson, who was king of the Dublin Vikings and heir to the kingdom of York. Æthelstan's momentous victory re-asserted his overlordship of all Britain (which had first been established by the 927 Treaty signed at Eamont Bridge) specifically giving him personal control of Northumbria.

[By the way: even Wikipedia is very careless with Old Norse names - Guthroth (*Guðrøðr*) and Guthfrith (*Guðfriðr*) are entirely separate names with separate meanings ("frith" means "peace", while "roth" means "glory"). The reader will find the crass conflation of these two names (which seems to originate in the Irish annals) endemic on the internet and even in print - but that does not make it right! In this paper I have referred throughout to King "Guthfrith" on the grounds that as this is the version in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle it is more likely to be correct.]

Sources:

Roger of Hovenden tells us that 615 ships sailed into the Humber. He implies that Æthelstan's army met the fleet.

Simeon of Durham (who tells us that in 934 Æthelstan had reached "Dunfoeder" (Dunottar) on land) describes the Battle of Brunanburh only briefly and uncontroversially; he agrees that the fleet sailed up the Humber. However he gives us the alternative name "Wendune".

Florence of Worcester (or was it John?) broadly supports the other reports above, also specifying the Humber, but he gives the year as 938.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

Peterborough MS and **Worcester MS** do not mention the battle, the **Canterbury MS** dismisses it in three lines but the **Winchester MS** includes an 83-line verse about it.

The various versions of this Chronicle mention the leaving point being on "Dingesmere", "Dyngesmere", "Dyngesmere" and "Dinnesmere". The battle site is named as "Brunanburh"

William of Malmesbury is not to be trusted in detail - he claims, for example, that Constantine fell in the battle whereas actually he lived on to abdicate in 942, becoming a monk.

William Ketill (writing in the early 12th century) is reported as recording that immediately before the battle of Brunanburh Æthelstan visited what is now Beverley Minster to invoke the assistance of St John of Beverley (see <https://beverleyminster.org.uk/visit-us-2/a-brief-history/>).

In thanksgiving for the subsequent victory, Æthelstan gave certain privileges and rights to the church at Beverley:

- he made it the Collegiate Church of St. John the Evangelist. A collegiate church was run by Canons who were expected to go out and preach to neighbouring communities; hence the church was a Minster.
- he gave it the right of sanctuary, a right which was to last until the Reformation.
- for the maintenance of the church he gave certain lands to the Canons and a tax of Thraves (sheaves of corn), on every ploughland in the East Riding of Yorkshire.

Grahame Hicks - a local historian from the Pocklington area - advises me that on his way to or from Beverley, Æthelstan actually saw the invading fleet. Unfortunately Grahame cannot now cite his source and such investigation as I have been able to do has not yielded it either, so while bearing this claim in mind it will need to be treated with some circumspection. I am fully confident that Grahame did not make it up.

Egil's saga is adduced by some writers who claim that the battle of Brunanburh may be identified with the Battle of Vin Heath described in that work. See https://sagadb.org/egils_saga.en for the English version, http://www.vsnrweb-publications.org.uk/Egla/Egils_saga.pdf in the Old Norse. (§50-55, Vin-Heath is mentioned in §52). This mis-association will be discussed below.

The Annals of Clonmacnoise too have been adduced. There are so many problems with this work that great care has to be taken in the attempt to wrest anything useful out of them. To be fair these are Irish Annals, compiled long after the events they record - so we should not expect great accuracy. So too we should not expect comprehensiveness regarding England and hence we should not be surprised by errors such as conflation.

The dating inconsistencies are such that I do not accept Michael Deakin's broad brush "about 9 years" approach. Here is a sample of these errors:

Annal date	Event	Accepted date	Error (years)
920	death of Edward the Elder	924	-4
922	death of Sihtriuc	927	-5
928	Æthelstan in Scotland	934	-6
929	death of Guthfrith	934	-5
931	battle: plain of Othlyn	?927	?+4
933	death of Æthelstan	939	-6
933	Olaf Cuaran in York	941	-8

Beyond dating errors, errors regarding individuals are gross. Thus we read that in 931 (the date of the battle) "Awley with all the Danes of Dublin.... departed and went overseas...", claiming that in the subsequent battle Olaf Guthfrithsson ("Awley mcGodfrey") was killed. In reality Olaf Guthfrithsson survived Brunanburgh to die the same year as Æthelstan. The confusion is further demonstrated by the annalist having conflated Olaf Guthfrithsson and Olaf Cuaran - as well as getting the date wrong, differently wrong.

Meanwhile the annals make no explicit reference to either of the two separate battles of 927 when Viking-Irish forces fought against Æthelstan. For this reason alone one would need to be very careful.

The one interesting item to take from these annals is the supposed place name for the battle: "the plains of othlyn". I do not accept that this could refer to "Brunanburh" (or any of the associated names) nor can it refer to Vin Heath. And so it is that I propose, tentatively(!) that this should be understood as the annalist's understanding of the name of the site of the 1st battle of 927 when Guthfrith was successful in establishing himself as King of York.

Context

Having driven Guthfrith out of Northumbria, in 927 Æthelstan was successful in corralling many other British kings to a summit at Eamont Bridge (by Penrith) where grudgingly they acknowledged his overlordship. However so much backsliding was in evidence that in 934 Æthelstan launched a massive punitive expedition against the Scots in particular - with a land army ravaging the land as far as Dunottar and his fleet staging raids along the East Coast from the Firth of Forth as far north as Caithness. Constantine, king of Scots, who had had to surrender a son as a hostage, nursed his wounds and his anger.

Pretext

When Guthfrith died in 934 his son Olaf (variously Anlaf) was the "rightful" heir to Northumbria as well as the Dublin to which he did succeed. Constantine, who was Olaf's father in law, not only wanted a reliable buffer kingdom between himself and Æthelstan, but after Æthelstan's raids, he wanted revenge. So this was no random raid - whether for revenge or merely for plunder. The purpose of the expedition, culminating at Brunanburgh, was to install Olaf in York as King of Northumbria and also thereby clip Æthelstan's wings.

Analysing the claims of the various sites which have been proposed.

Preamble: My starting premise is to believe Florence, Simeon and Roger when they say that the fleet sailed up the Humber. Here is why.

First of all Robert of Hovenden came from Howden - just 12 miles from Brough and, in general terms, on the river Humber. It is beyond insulting to suggest that he "got the river wrong". I am sure that he will have based his claims, inter alia, on local knowledge. Second Florence/John seems to have been a particularly reliable source in my other researches. Simeon is sometimes accused of following Florence unthinkingly - but in this case it cannot be so, for it is Simeon of the three who mentions Wendune. So clearly he had access to a source beyond these two. Based in Durham it is also ridiculous to propose that Simeon was somehow confused about which river it may have been. So it is no good for historians speculating about "which" river he may have 'meant'. Instead to make their proposition viable they need to mount a strong argument demonstrating why the Humber is impossible.

[Simeon is out of line with much modern supposition when he describes Malcolm III as "son of the king of the Cumbrians" which has led to all sorts of speculation of multiple Malcolms etc. But the reader should note that the Orkneyinga Saga says that following the death of Malcolm II it was Karl Hundisson (whom I identify as Crinan (see "[Scottish Clans: Legend, Logic & Evidence](#)" Vol II pp206-12) who "took power" in Scotland - not only that but Duncan I had been titular viceroy of Strathclyde from the age of 5 - so the situation in Scotland between 1034 and 1045 is actually a good deal more murky than those historians who prefer things simple may suppose and Simeon is broadly correct.]

As for William Ketill, the original documents are now lost - which is why all we have are reports of what he wrote. Thus we may be relaxed about the editorial phrase "on his way north", bearing also in mind that Beverley is not actually "on the way" to anywhere (with the possible exception of Hornsea) - *a fortiori* at that point in time. There may be those who might try to construe the report as applying to Æthelstan's 834 campaign in Scotland. A diversion of this sort would be relatively small in the context of a much longer journey when he was as yet nowhere near the scene of the action. But this sits ill with his securing "a victory". Given the Humber assertions above, I say this is not possible and so there is no need to consider this gymnastic argument. So too with Vin heath. It is vanishingly unlikely that this battle took place near enough to Beverley for this to be associated. [In my view Michael Wood's offerings (see below) are likely to be not far from the site of this battle.]

1. The Wirral and the Solway

The Wirral retains its position as the default supposed location for the battle - as it has for at least 120 years. The logic is simple: (a) it is easy to see how a combined Viking Irish/Scottish/Strathclyde fleet could have landed there and (b) placename people point to Thingwall as evidence for "Dingesmere" and to Broomborough as modern day Brunanburh. The Solway has also been proposed as a similarly suitable mustering point - this time with out the place name 'evidence'. On the other hand it is a long (100 mile) march over the Pennines to get to York, the capital Olaf wanted to rule from and neither the Mersey nor the Solway is the Humber! If one was going to land on the West coast then the Wirral adds a completely unnecessary two or three days onto the march due to having to negotiate the rivers. Morecambe Bay/Lunesmouth or Preston/Ribblesmouth would have been far more intelligent landing place - reducing the land journey by some 30 miles, making the journey easier using one of the Yorkshire Dales' routes and staying well clear of any possible skirmishing with Mercian forces. In short both the locations claimed are silly because even if this were the strategy there was a far better choice readily available.

2. Brinsworth and Skelbrooke

Some 30 years ago Professor Michael Wood proposed Brinsworth, (taking 'Brin' for Brunan) immediately the SW of Rotherham as Brunanburh. He cited the proximity of the Roman fort at Templeborough to provide the "burh" element. This does not work etymologically. "-worth" is a cognate of the Pictish "roth" and Gaelic "rath" meaning fortified place and the Welsh "bryn" means hill - so Brinsworth is a Brythonic name already including the idea of fortification - and the name has survived so there is no basis for assuming an Anglo-Saxon intermediate corruption to Brunanburh which would have to have been 'undone' subsequently.

In 2017 Wood revised his view, offering instead Skelbrooke, some 15 miles NE of Brinsworth. The argument for this site is that it is close to Burghwalls and is on the Roman road.

These sites are not wholly inconsistent with the fleet having sailed up the Humber, but they are far enough away from any beachhead (even Skelbrooke would more than a day's march away (across country - not on the road) for uninjured soldiers) that it would not have been feasible for the losers to have run for their boats to escape. From a military point of view they are madness.

Imagine you are Olaf planning to take back the throne of York where you know you will have many supporters. When preparing to land you have a choice. You could say "Right, I am heading straight for York with a blitzkrieg attack. Once York is taken I'll be knee deep in reinforcements and will be in the best position to decide how to tackle Æthelstan who is bound to be less than pleased and so will want to have a go at me." Or, if Wood is right, you think "I've got a sizeable army; I can afford to ignore any attack from any Æthelstan supporters in Yorkshire - instead although I have no interest in Mercia I'll just strike south for the fun of it."

Olaf and Constantine were seasoned generals. They knew what they wanted and their primary objective was to secure York. Wood's proposals would be a distraction - and folly.

Which having been said I am sure these are fine locations for a battle - indeed the names attest just this - and armies do march on roads rather than across country. So I am relaxed about the idea that there will have been battles at one or both of these sites - but the battle of Brunanburh was not one of them.

3. Northallerton and Guisborough

Michael Deakin is perhaps the foremost amongst those favouring these locations - the first of which is still being advocated actively, the second Michael's new consideration. However we should note that Northallerton too has been advocated at least since the 1880s. The argument is based first on the idea that somehow the chroniclers were confused and wrote "Humber" when they meant "Tees". But no argument is adduced for this - it is pure baseless assertion. So this is a case that they have chosen the site and now apply a Procrustean approach to the facts. As for the placenames they rely on Brompton for Brunanburh and Winton for Wendune. In this scenario Dingsmere would be at Teesmouth - somewhere in the Middlesborough area. At this point we should recognise that, as with so many other battles, it is possible to play with place names to 'back up' pretty much any claim one might like to advance. Brompton/Winton is less attractive than Thingwall/Broomborough.

Those who favour this argument also claim to see support in Egil's Saga. How anyone can put this argument defeats me. It took me no more than an hour or so reading the relevant section of the saga to note that the Battle of Vin-heath took place **before** the death of Harald Fairhair - hence before 932. An hour or two more and it is clear that this battle which Æthelstan won followed hard on one which his forces had lost. In short Vin Heath (yet to be located) was the site of the battle (in 927 rather than 937) where Æthelstan regained control of Northumbria from Guthfrith Sihtriucsson. Any reader of the Saga will observe quickly that there are many facts wrong in the saga - thus, for

example the King of Scots is named as Olaf(!) Actually he was Causatin/Constantine.....
For a full and definitive refutation of the Vin-heath/Brunanburh equation see my separate paper on the matter on this site: https://www.academia.edu/39566274/Egils_Saga_Why_the_Battle_of_Vin-Heath_was_NOT_the_Battle_of_Brunanburh

So desperate does Michael seem to hang on to a Tees-based proposition (for which there is no basis) that he has recently flagged up the possibility of Roseberry Topping (from Othlyn, representing Wendune) and Guisborough (representing Brunanburh) being the places referred to. (see https://www.academia.edu/39980446/Was_Brunanburh_a_Lost_Name_for_Guisborough_in_Cleveland) They are about 15 miles NE of the Brompton/Winton site and about 5 miles from the Tees - making a retreat from the battle difficult, but just about feasible.

Viewed in isolation this pairing is a good deal more attractive than Brompton/Winton, but there is nothing to commend it from the annals. Just as we can see that Vin-heath is definitely not Brunanburh, so there is no reason to site the battle of Brunanburh at "Othlyn", however that name might be construed. What Michael does reinforce here is that if one is prepared to be cavalier with such records as we have then there are enormous numbers of places for whose names a just-about-plausible case can be made.

[Do I think that Roseberry/Guisborough is the site of the "plaines of othlyn"? Actually no. There is no evidence from the annals or from Egil's Saga that the first battle of 927 where Guthfrith overcame Æthelstan's forces (my hypothesised equation) was based on a sea-borne attack. A land army would have had to go many miles out of its way to get to Middlesborough. Ironically this battle is more likely to have taken place in the Northallerton area! Æthelstan's army is likely to have advanced north from York to meet the threat from a land-based army coming from Scotland. Please note, however, that I am not making any specific suggestion here. This encounter could have been anywhere from York to Scotch Corner or even farther north (or west).]

We should not overlook the Beverley scenario. Suppose (*à la* Deakin) that the battle took place in the Northallerton area: we may imagine Æthelstan's thinking... "Hmm, I think I'll take the cream of my army (as bodyguard - for I expect considerable local hostility) ride 20 miles out of my way in the wrong direction to pray at Beverley and then we'll easily manage the 50 miles on to Northallerton. Giving the vast army opposing me another week to organise and make progress will be no bother at all!". The whole idea is ridiculous - and even worse in the case of Roseberry/Guisborough. [The same argument applies even more to Michael Wood's propositions which would have required both a 50+ mile each way trip to Beverley including crossing the Humber/ Ouse.]

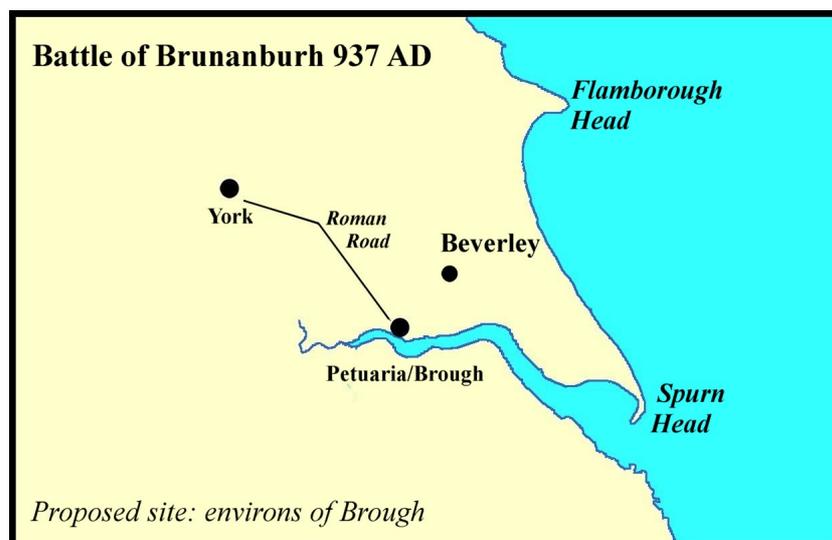
Homing in on the true site

So having examined what did not happen, we now need to consider what DID happen.

Because of the close relationship between Olaf and Constantine there was no need for Olaf to invade Northumbria overland. He was able to take his forces to Scotland where they would combine with the Scots (assisted also by those of Owain of Strathclyde). They could then sail down the east coast cutting out the need for a lengthy march through potentially hostile territory.

The Chronicles agree that the massed fleet entered the Humber estuary. The only practical point at which to disembark and to establish a beachhead was the old Roman Petuaria (now Brough) - whose importance is made clear from the fact that the Roman road from there to the north splits, going both to York and to Malton. It is also the only major crossing point of the Humber. The road distance from Petuaria to York is just short of 30 miles - 3 days comfortable march for a Roman legion - so it was also highly convenient. In discussions with local historians Goole has been suggested as an alternative. My view is that the existence of the road makes Brough far preferable -

and we shall see towards the end of this paper that my interpretation of the placename evidence supports this.



see:

<https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=11&lat=53.8836&lon=-0.7390&layers=6&b=1>

(York network) <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/rchme/york/vol1/pp1-4>

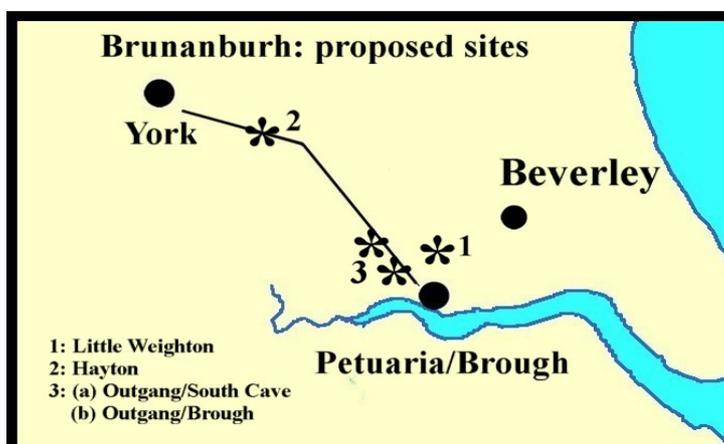
(East Yorkshire) <http://www.eylhs.org.uk/dl/124/the-romans-in-east-yorkshire> (facing page 1)

(Lincolnshire connection) <https://romanlincolnshire.wordpress.com/roman-roads/>

Æthelstan alerted

As soon as the fleet had sailed past Flamborough Head, Æthelstan's Sea Wake will have had a good guess as to where it was headed and word could have been got back to York within four hours (it's about 45 miles). Another excellent vantage point is at Hessle Cliff (5 miles to the east of Brough) and although there is no actual evidence of its formal use as a look-out station it seems unlikely that the fleet would not have been spotted from there and a messenger sent to York from there also.

Local sites which have been proposed



1. Little Weighton

When I embarked on this study I was unaware of any proposals remotely similar to my initial conclusion, so it came as something of a surprise to learn that in a lecture to Hull Literary and Philosophical Society in 1875, local historian CS Todd proposed that the name "Wendune" could be

seen in Little Weighton. [No explanation was given either for the supposed equivalence or to why Little Weighton was to be preferred to eg Market Weighton.] Thus Todd claimed that the battle took place between Brough and Little Weighton (the two villages are about 5 miles apart). Bizarrely although Todd claims that the invaders would have landed at Brough, he then claims that Æthelstan's forces would be arrayed from Little Weighton to Bentley ie a line stretching northeastwards towards Beverley - not at all deployed to face an army which had landed at Brough. He also seeks support in Egil's Saga, which on the one hand we have already demonstrated to be irrelevant and on the other hand shows how easy it is to claim that certain landmarks can be fitted into the area of one's choice! [See <https://archive.org/details/oldyorkshire01wheagoog/page/n96> for a version of his argument.]

I don't think Todd actually gave any thought to military considerations. Olaf was headed for York, so if he took the army towards Little Weighton he was headed in the wrong direction! One could see the point if the whole of Æthelstan's army had accompanied him to Beverley - but that too is illogical as it would leave the way open to Olaf to strike York unhindered. Moreover both armies would have been moving over rough terrain - and climbing up the Yorkshire Wolds to fight on the top of them! This is unrealistic.

Particularly given the lack of supporting argument as to why Wendune would mutate to Weighton I reject this argument and hence (with the other reasons above) the proposition.

2. Hayton

I was similarly surprised to learn that another site - this time on the road from Brough to York - was under active consideration. Pocklington local historian Grahame Hicks has been putting together the case for Hayton and has been kind enough to share much of his thinking with me. There is a Roman fort at Hayton which was still in use in Anglo-Saxon times, and nearby is Burnby which however, is on a burn, making the case for metathesis (Brun to Burn) harder to sustain - and this despite the Norse suffix. At the time of Domesday there was a significant landowner in the general local area called Brune - but unfortunately this is 150 years too late for Brunanburh.

When I started on my own search I had left myself open to any location on the Brough/York road, but subsequently came to the view that even Market Weighton, 10 miles from Brough, was too far away for the invading army to be able to retreat to their ships to escape. Hayton is further still.

Æthelstan's trip to Beverley is another stumbling block for the Hayton proposition. The battle lasted all day which means that the invading force would have had to have been encamped no farther away than Market Weighton itself. This in turn means that Æthelstan would have had to cross enemy lines both going and returning to pray there. But it is worse than that: It was Grahame who advised me about the claim that Æthelstan spotted the fleet on this journey. Unfortunately there is no line of sight to the Humber from the Beverley/Market Weighton road. [But if the journey had been between Beverley and South Cave, then at the very least the exceptional vantage point of High Hunsley beacon provides one ideal such opportunity.]

Grahame has nothing to say about Wendune, (Goodmanham is too far away and does not match topographically) but this should not be an obstacle should everything else fit. Unfortunately there are just too many problems for this site to be taken seriously as a candidate site for the battle even if the general thinking is along the right general lines.

3. The road from Brough to South Cave.

And so it is that we come to my own proposition which is both new and I hope definitive. I say that the battle took place on the road between Brough and South Cave (they are about 3 miles apart). With Æthelstan's army camped at South Cave it is just 8 miles to Beverley, making the journey

which is claimed very feasible. And he would have been able to spot the fleet on his journey. The remnants of the invading army could escape to their boats from anywhere in this area.

The problem here lies in the slight rise in the ground on which sits the road from Brantingham called The Outgang - for it is likely that one of the armies occupied this ridge - and I cannot decide which.

I am grateful to Dr David Bagchi who alerted me to the fact that at this time Brough was on the shoreline both to the south and to the west. [NB It may help understanding to note that much of present day Hull was salt marsh and there was no settlement there.] Looking at field boundaries etc. I think we may have a good stab at assessing the old riverbank - one marker point being where the Brantingham Beck becomes the Brantingham Drain a little to the south west of the end of The Outgang. I have not attempted to guess exactly where the sandbanks lay! However the existence of Brough itself and its counterpart across the river where the road to Lincoln continued demonstrates that some points have been quite stable since before Roman times - and so some maps implying vast areas of open water are exaggerations.[So also with the Ellerker Beck.] (see eg, <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=15&lat=53.7445&lon=-0.6019&layers=6&b=9>)

And so to the Placenames:

I hope that the reader will have noted that so far the argument for the general site of the battle has been placename free. To take the matter further, we need to bring these into consideration and, to be fair, I don't think that any arguments I adduce here are much stronger than the way place names have been discussed by others. My justification is that I am using them really only to assist in choosing between the two adjacent sites - and it will be for the reader to judge how fair this is.

In the original version of this paper I left unaddressed the matter of the names Brunanburgh, Dingesmere and Wendune as recorded in the chronicles. I did - and do - not want the argument to depend on linguistic acrobatics such as we have seen above. The fact is that the place names no longer exist in these forms and so any allocation is necessarily not conclusive; it remains in the realm of speculative assessment - which is so well demonstrated by the other sites which have been proposed for this battle. However a strong case can be made for each of these place names in the immediate neighbourhood of Brough - so that on an onomastic basis Brough holds its own at least as well as (I say better than) all the other locations which have been argued for.

1. Wendune

We noted above that Simeon of Durham offered the alternative name "Wendune". I think I can specify the place he meant here: Elloughton. Our principal reference is AH Smith (*AH Smith The place-names of the East Rising of Yorkshire and York* (vol XIV in English Place-Name Society series), CUP 193).

- ◆ First we must note that the earliest extant spelling of Elloughton (in Domesday Book) is "Elgendon" (variously Elgedon in 1185) - so we may start by noting that "-don" refers to a hill - and indeed Elloughton sits on a hill. [The top of the hill is just to the SW of the core of the modern village - ie the heart of the village is located sensibly in the lee of the hill - but today it has spread all over the hill.]
- ◆ Second we note the variant initial "H" - the name spelled "Helgeton" in 1200 and another variant in 1303. Of this Smith says "*The difficulty with this name is to decide whether the initial h is organic or not...*". The argument goes that upon this depends whether it should be construed as an adjective or as a personal name. I suspect that in practical terms this is a

false dichotomy; it represents the Old Norse "helge" - meaning "holy" (think of the German Christmas carol "Heilige Nacht" and the personal names "Helgi" and "Helga") - but we may set these aside because.....

- ◆ Third we should note the village Wensley (from which Wensleydale) which in origin is Woden's Leigh. On this basis we may reasonably parse "Wendune" as "Woden's Hill".
- ◆ I am grateful to Canon Caroline Pinchbeck of Market Weighton for drawing my attention to Goodmanham just a mile north east of Market Weighton which was a pagan centre, destroyed in the immediate aftermath of the conversion of Edwin King of Northumbria (627). The point is that while some such centres retained their name, others did not.

We may thus understand "Elloughton" in this way: When the Deiran Angles arrived then, just like the Parisi before them, they used Brough as their "capital". They added the hilltop at Elloughton (just half a mile away) as a place to worship Woden. Probably it was originally called Wodendune. With Christianisation, Woden became irrelevant to the people; Wodendune contracted in common parlance to Wendune (as with Wensley). At some stage a church was planted on Wendune and as part of a deliberate effort to expunge the last vestiges of pagan practice it was renamed Helgedun - Holy Hill - but although we do know that this was before 1086, today there are no records for the church from before that date. So given that Simeon used the old name Wendune we may suppose that the change, perhaps even the church there, dates to some time after 937. As the settlement grew the importance of the "hill" was overtaken by that of the "town" and Elgedun became Elgeton (1191 and thereafter) and eventually the Elloughton we know today.

2. Dingsmere

The Chronicle says that the remnants of the army left from "Dingsmere" (and variants). What should we make of the element Ding/Dyng? If we look to Anglo-Saxon we will not get very far. The primary meaning is "dung", while "dyng" does mean "storm". But while the retreating army could have been forced to retreat INTO a storm (or stormy sea), the chronicles say that this is where they left *from*.

However we know that the issue underlying the battle was the Viking attempt to wrest back from Æthelstan the control of Northumbria they had exercised for 50 years. So what if we turn to Old Norse and "Ding" was an Anglo-Saxon representation of the Old Norse "Þing" (ie "Thing" - a place of assembly or parliament)? We know that this would be a normal representation from Dingwall on the Cromarty Firth. "Things" were far from uncommon in the Danelaw as can be seen in the chapter on pages 76-96 by John Baker and Stuart Brookes at

https://www.academia.edu/33192134/THE_FULL_VOLUME_1_The_Assembly_Project_TAP_.A_Sanmark_F.Iversen_N.Mehler_S.Semple_Eds.2013.Debating_the_Thing_in_the_North.Journal_of_the_North_Atlantic_Special_Volume_5.Pp_124

So "Dingsmere" would be the place where those attending the thing hauled their boats ashore. This explanation of Dingsmere would be plausible even if there were no echo remaining on the ground.

In his monumental 2014 Durham University PhD thesis "Impact and change: assembly practices in the Northern Danelaw" Dr Tudor Skinner discusses the local government structure of Yorkshire taking as his starting points the Wapentakes and Hundreds of the Domesday Book. He suggests previous assembly sites at Cave and at Welton. The Welton site suits my purposes here - and if this were the site then the boats of those arriving by water would have been hauled ashore in the area now occupied by Brough aerodrome, marked "Dingsmere 2" on the map below.

However while Dr Skinner's analysis is clear, I am not sure that this site was in specific use by the Vikings (as the name Dingsmere would imply). There is no echo of the word "thing" at Welton. An Anglo-Saxon gemot would serve his purposes equally well - and, as the map implies, I think I have a better site in Brantingham - whence Dingsmere would be approximately the shore between

Brough and Brantingham Grange as marked on the map below.

Martin Taylor advised me to consider local government. He pointed out that Brough comes under the Hunsley Beacon division of Harthill Wapentake - but wait... Brantingham right next door is not included! It is an exclave of Howdenshire, as was Welton on the other side (see <https://www.crsbi.ac.uk/site/3021/>). The whole area has a chaotic history and so unlike other places one cannot be confident that the structure of local government has remained continuous. [Specifically I am sure that the Britons would have kept hold of High Hunsley beacon when they gave Deira (later approximately echoed by greater Howdenshire) to the Angles before 500 - so eg the High Hunsley wapentake is a much later formation.]

Dr Skinner dismisses Brantingham as a Thing site not only because it would be surplus to requirements if there were things so close by as Cave and Welton, but also because he is content with the explanation of the name proposed by Eckwall. So he takes it no further. Smith (p221) says:

"Eckwall (PN in *-ing* 147) takes the first element to be an OE pers. name *Brant*, for which there is some evidence in place-names. We may also suggest a connection to OE *brant* 'steep'....."

In the past I have been highly critical of place name people who have invented many an "Anglo-Saxon personal name" to explain place names - a process which is often nonsense (cf Workington and Distington in Cumberland, for example: thus Distington is supposed to be the town of the descendants of a man called Dust! - see my separate paper on this site:

[https://www.academia.edu/39516092/Delving_into_Placenames_An_examination_of_Workington_and_other_Anglo-Saxon_Placenames_with_the_element_Work-_Wark-_Wirk_etc\).](https://www.academia.edu/39516092/Delving_into_Placenames_An_examination_of_Workington_and_other_Anglo-Saxon_Placenames_with_the_element_Work-_Wark-_Wirk_etc).)

We now have the benefit of PASE, and we may note that there is no-one of import called "Brant". There is "Brandr" - but while it is common for a hard consonant to soften over time, the reverse process is at best extremely rare. However PASE does recognise some individuals called "Branting". The main problem with this that the earliest extant references we have to Brantingham are in Domesday Book where it is spelled variously "Brentigeha", "Bredingha" and "Brentingham". So I find Smith - and Eckwall - far from convincing. We should note that Eckwall later recanted - saying that the precursor of an "-ing" element could only really be regarded as a personal name if there was evidence of an earlier "-ingas" form - in this case there is no such evidence.

So I propose that Brantingham should be parsed **Bre - ting - ha**. "Bre"/"Brae" refers to its position on the lower braes/slopes of the Yorkshire Wolds (and this corresponds with the names of Thing sites in Shetland discussed by Dr Alexandra Sanmark in the previous chapter of the same publication as John Baker above). "Ting" says that a Thing was held there. "Ha" may be the (Anglo-Saxon) ham which developed on the site, but there is a hall there also - and there may have been a Viking one at the time - in which case the -ham too may be a subsequent Anglo-Saxon corruption/rationalisation.

Dr Sanmark says that a good place for a Thing is sheltered with ready access to clean water. Welton does fit, but so does Brantingham precisely. Any local will tell you that it is well sheltered and the Brantingham Beck (Beck itself is a Viking word) runs right through the village. We can go further - for in Brantingham there is a village Green - but it is not in the middle of the village! So I will tempt fate by proposing that the site where the Things were held was probably that occupied now by Holly Lodge and the Green immediately below it.

My own opinion is that my proposition about Brantingham is not inconsistent with Dr Skinner's. The history of this area has been so turbulent that I could well envisage a single Thing site at Brantingham being replaced by two - at Cave and at Welton - at some stage substantially before 1066, potentially even before 937 (eg when Æthelstan first asserted his own authority).

So I propose that - as shown on my map below - Dingesmere was the lagoon on the north bank of the Humber where boats were hauled up onto the shore when people came to attend things - The

Outgang road taking them directly from the shore to the assembly site. This is marked Dingesmere. If I am wrong about this then the only relevant Thing site would be Welton, in which case the ships would have been hauled ashore at Dingesmere 2.

3. Brunanburgh

And so we come to the name Brunanburh. My proposition is that this is a reference to Brough-on-Humber itself. [Frustratingly there is no hard naming evidence for post-Roman Brough prior to 1160.] I am grateful to Martin Taylor, Hull City Archivist for drawing my attention to old spellings of Broomfleet - just 2½ miles west of Brough. Broomfleet means "Brungar's stretch of the river bank". (AH Smith see above). Just beyond is Faxfleet - with a drain in between which probably represents the boundary between the two. To the east we might reasonably suppose that Brungar's lands may have extended as far as Brough, which it could have included.

The name Broomfleet has been represented in several different ways including Brungareflet (1150), Brunfleet and Brumfleet (1322) and Bromeffete (1543).

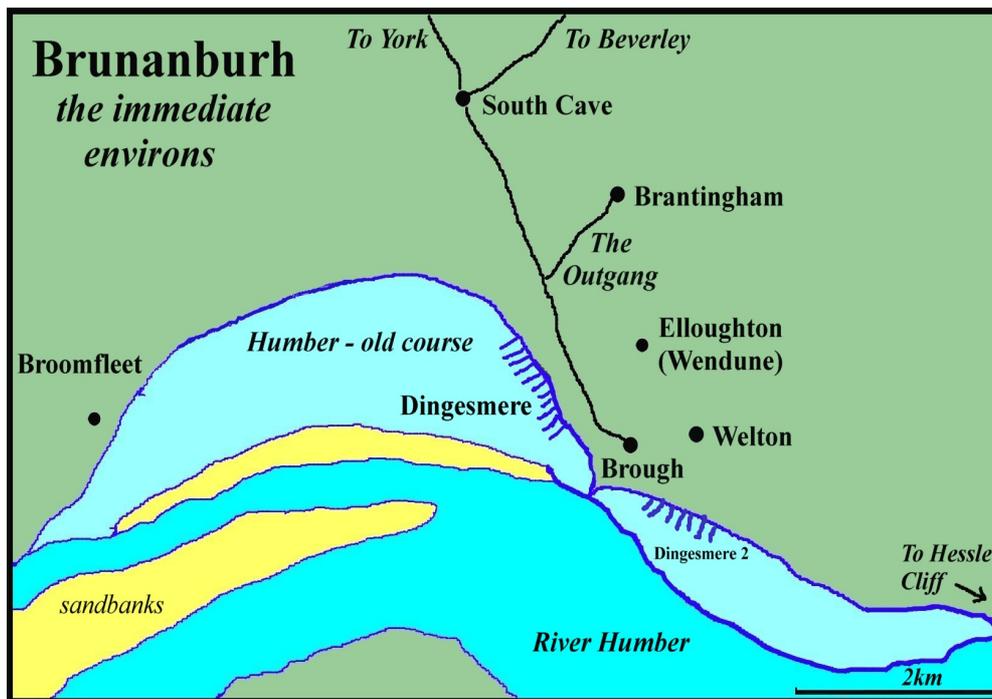
I am also grateful to place names expert Professor Gillian Fellowes-Jensen who has been in the Wirral camp. On the Wirral there is Bromborough. It is suggested that in this case the "Brom" element is a corruption of the Old Norse "Brunnr" meaning spring/well - but this may be a back-formation based on the assumption that in the first instance Bromburgh is a corruption of Brunanburh. The point is that Broomfleet is no more of a corruption than Bromborough which means that place name people are in a very weak position to argue for Bromborough but against Broomfleet (see also <http://wirralwide.blogspot.com/2011/07/origins-of-wirral-placenames.html>).

Bamburgh in Northumberland used to be called Dynguaroy, but was renamed Bebbanburgh by King Ida in honour of his wife Bearnoch whose pet name seems to have been Bebba. On that basis and given the variations noted above, I think it not unreasonable to consider that colloquially "Brungar's burgh" may have been Brunburgh/Brunanburgh. We should note that the Chronicler Roger of Hovenden (now Howden - just 10 miles away from Brough - writing in the later 1100s) spelled the name Brumanburgh (ie with an 'm').

However we need not get hung up on this particular Brungar. As we have seen in connection to Hayton above, in the Yorkshire entries in Domesday Book there is someone (or two people) called Brune - implying that this name was normal locally so that it is not impossible that someone (else) called Brune may have held Brough at the time of the battle (or shortly enough before for the name to have remained current).

All this does not prove that Brough-on-Humber was called Brunanburgh - but it cannot be dismissed - and it probably did have that name.

What all this does is to point to an older structure of local government - a relic of the old Deira - where a "greater Howdenshire" stretching from the River Derwent to the river Hull was a self-contained unit with its own "capital" at Brough (the Civitas Parisiorum) and the Viking assembly point at Brantingham.



The Events

So I suggest that the combined fleet did indeed establish its beachhead at Brough, spending the night there. Had Æthelstan's forces already been at Brough they would surely have engaged them as they were landing, so it is likely that he had camped in the Houghton Hall area - although if they were pressed they may have got as far as South Newbold, conceivably even South Cave. Although the two armies will have been aware of each other they were not close enough for any eg surprise night attack. Instead the Chronicles tell us that the battle raged all day - suggesting that both sides were quite fresh at the start.

As noted above, on the road from Brough to South Cave there is a slight ridge on which sits the "Outgang" road from Brantingham. [At this road end, but on the other side of the Roman Road there was a Roman villa complex.] If I am right about Brantingham, then it was the invading army which occupied The Outgang and the battle raged between there and South Cave (Google Earth can provide the reader with the clear understanding as to how flat the country is - ideal as an arena for battle). Had I been in charge of the invading army I would have sought to establish my front line there on landing - to give me good line of sight pretty well all the way to South Cove and it is close enough to the landing shore (see below) for this to have been perfectly feasible.

If I am wrong and the Thing was at Welton then it is more likely that it was Æthelstan's forces which were marshalled on the Outgang and the battle took place on the Brough golf course and the Brantingham Park rugby ground.

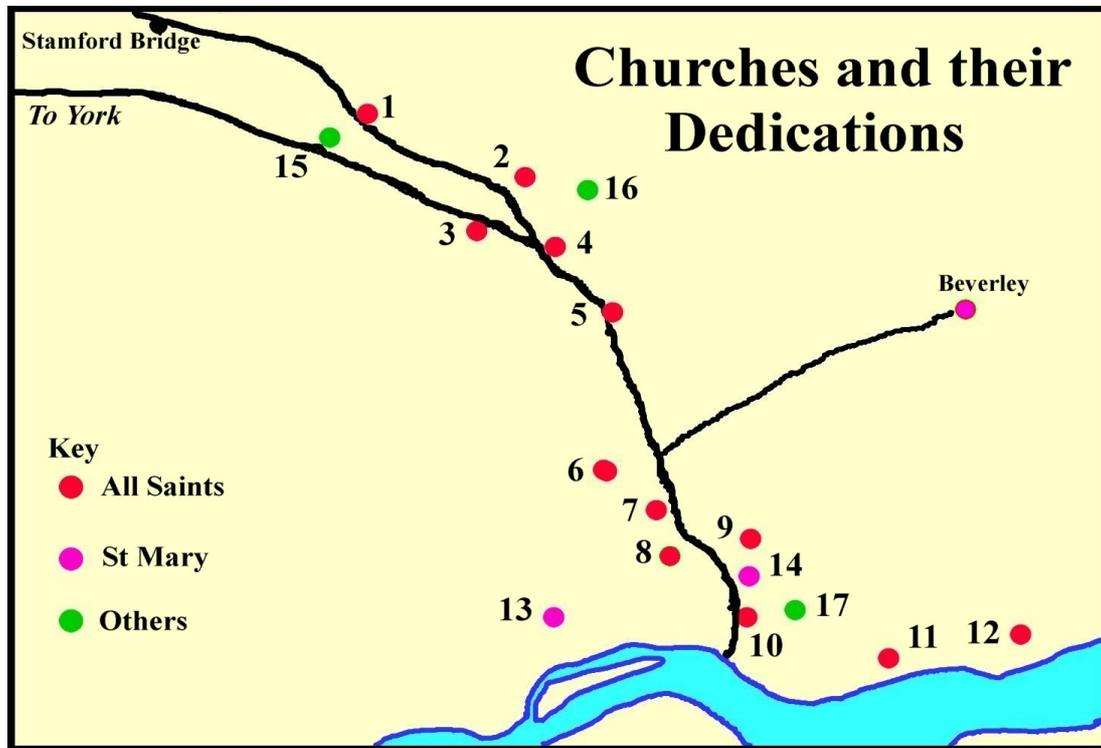
Only archaeological investigation could resolve this matter.

The Result

The battle was a decisive victory for Æthelstan who then able to reinforce his claim to be king of the whole of Britain. However such were the vicissitudes of the times that this decisiveness was not very long lasting.

Afterword: Church dedications

It was the Rev Mick Fryer of Brantingham who drew my attention to the large number of churches in the area dedicated to "All Saints". After looking into it the real number may be even greater than he has been aware of. I have been assiduous in contacting representatives of as many of these churches as possible, but sadly no lore has emerged as to why this should be the case or even when the dedications were made.



All Saints							
1	Pocklington	2	Londesborough	3	Shiptonthorpe	4	Market Weighton
5	Sancton	6	North Cave	7	South Cave	8	Ellerker
9	Brantingham	10	Brough	11	North Ferriby	12	Hessle
NB: Ellerker St Anne's formerly All Saints				Others			
St Mary's				15	Barmby Moor	St Catherine's	
Beverley				16	Goodmanham	All Hallows	
13	Broomfleet	14	Elloughton	17	Welton	St Helen's	

[In an earlier version I suggested there was an All Saints at Beverley - this was erroneous.]

Although on some maps the church at Goodmanham is shown as yet another "All Saints", I am given to understand that it is really "All Hallows". It is not clear to me whether this is a real or merely a semantic distinction - and from usage we can see that this lack of clarity is rife with locals also. This church can be dated to 627 (being associated with the conversion of King Edwin) but the date of the dedication is not at all clear - ie it does not need to have been contemporaneous.

It is interesting to note that the church where Æthelstan was crowned (in Kingston-Upon-Thames) was dedicated to.... All Saints. [Abutting it at that time (and from where the coronation stone was subsequently recovered) was another church/chapel dedicated to St Mary.] I am grateful to former All Saints K-U-T Archivist David Robinson for discussing this with me at some length. The fact is

that we cannot assert with any certainty that these churches had those dedications at the time of his coronation - no evidence survives from until a good deal after that era. So too, as we have noted, we have no reliable evidence dating the dedications in Yorkshire or showing any system for selecting a name or names for dedicatory purposes.

Because of their juxtaposition at Kingston I had been tempted to lump the All Saints dedications and the St Mary dedications together; but subsequent discussion with Professor Barbara English has led me to suppose an alternative explanation for St Mary's Beverley which need not concern us here - so we may set the Marys aside.

The evidence of Simeon of Durham implies that the renaming of Wendune post-dated the battle and the renaming not only fits with Æthelstan's *modus operandi*; it also fits with his coronation and his belief that Divine Intervention was responsible for his victory (cf his beneficence to Beverley). We may also note that these dedications are, in general terms, along the road from York to Brough - and on to Hessle. [Might we infer from this that excellent intelligence from Hessle Cliff was key to his mobilising in time?]

This does not necessarily mean that ALL the dedications were his work and/or derive from this time, but although I am disposed to the view that coincidence does exist, I find this concentration far beyond such a chance explanation.

This leads me to suppose that All Saints K-U-T was indeed so dedicated at the time of Æthelstan's coronation and that at least some, perhaps all, of the All Saints specified above were dedicated by Æthelstan and/or at his behest both as part of his thanksgiving for his military victory and as a visible assertion in the landscape of the basis of his authority to rule.

Conclusion

Identifying the site of Battle of Brunanburh as being on the road between Brough and South Cave fits all the known facts uniquely. The place name evidence available is consistent with this and at least as strong as for any of the other sites which have been proposed; even church dedications in the area are likely extra supporting evidence.

All alternative locations are so relatively poorly supported in several of these respects that the time is now right to reject them.

Afterword

I take this opportunity to invite the archaeological community to use this analysis as a focus for investigation to demonstrate its accuracy once and for all. It would be great if positive proof for this theory could be adduced.

However caution is urged on the reader: even yet we do not know exactly where the battle of Flodden was fought even though it was just 500 years ago and even though we do know the general area. At the time of Brunanburh, over 1000 years ago, metal and indeed all artefacts were much more rare and hence valuable, so we should expect that serious scavenging would have taken place as soon as the fighting had died down - in these circumstances it should not be a great surprise in the event of no evidence emerging. Absence of evidence would indeed not necessarily be evidence of absence.

Acknowledgements follow....

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[Apologies to anyone omitted -
this is inadvertent.]