

TM  
HAIL CAESAR

# SHIELD WALL



The Dark Age Sagas - Volume I





Viking archers draw their Saxon opponents out of their settlement.



Romano-British cavalry thunder over a stream.



Saxon Ceorls take the fight to the enemy.



A black and white photograph of a statue of King Alfred the Great. The statue is a standing figure of a man with a beard, wearing a crown and a long tunic with a cape. He holds a sword aloft in his right hand and a large, round shield in his left hand. The statue is set on a rocky base.

# · HAIL CAESAR · SHIELD WALL

The Dark Age Sagas – Volume I

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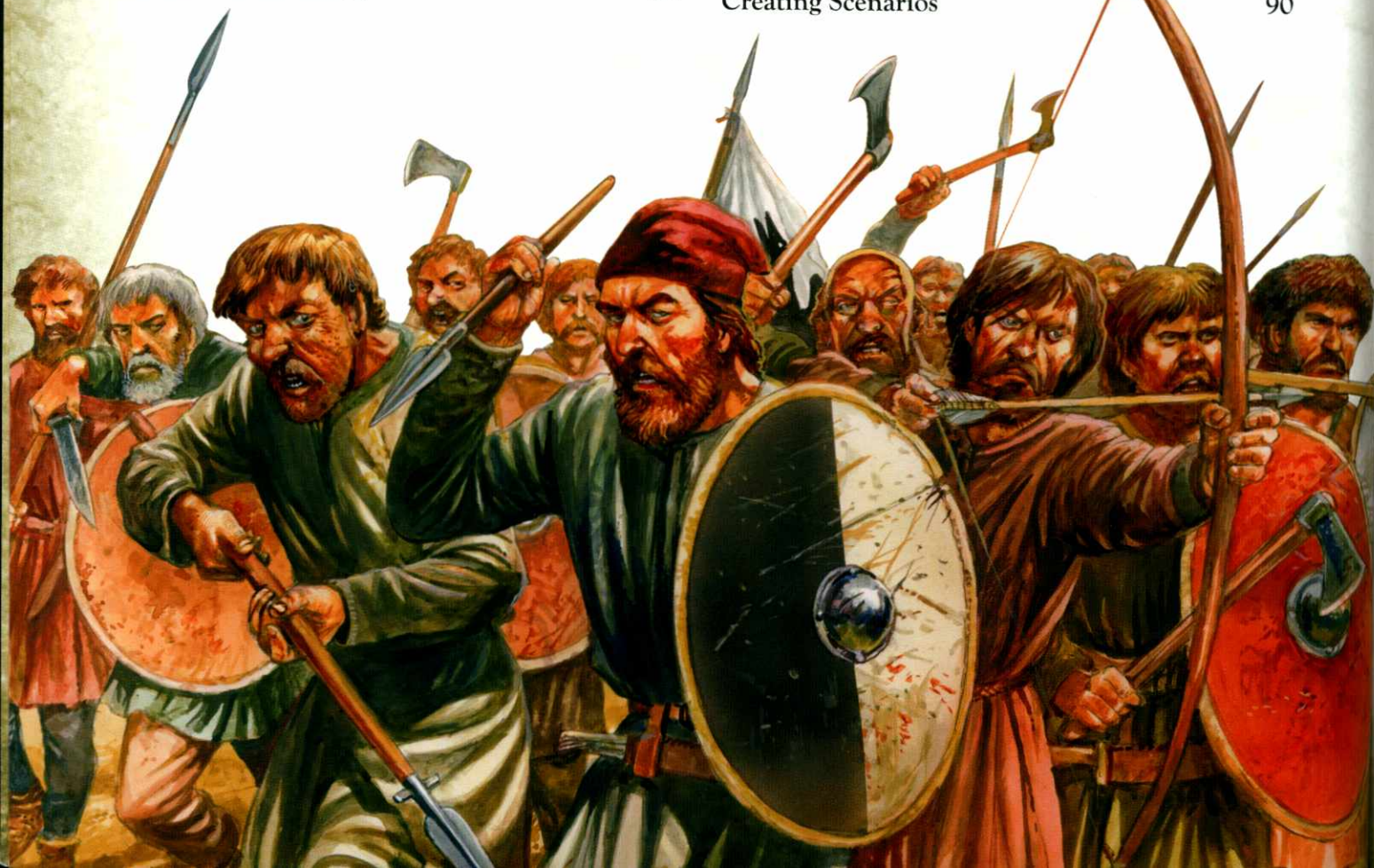
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Statue of King Alfred the Great  
in Winchester, England



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# FOREWORD



**S**hield Wall is a source book intended to facilitate wargames based in the British Dark Ages using Warlord Games *Hail Caesar* rules. It is not a 'stand-alone' set of rules in itself. It is also not intended to provide a rigid 'Dark Age games must be played this way', which would be against the whole spirit of the *Hail Caesar* system.

Treat the book as a tool kit. Use the ideas as you see fit; cherry pick what you like and ignore what you don't. The only right way to play wargames is the way that gives you and your friends the most enjoyment and satisfaction.

All else is completely irrelevant.

*John Lambshead*



# INTRODUCTION

The very name 'Dark Ages' is something of an anachronism among modern historians, who are more likely to employ a term such as 'Early Medieval'. Dark Ages, the phrase apparently originating with Petrarch in the early 14th century, implies a moral judgement of history that contrasts the 'dark' of Early Medieval civilisation sandwiched between the 'light' of Classical and Christian Western civilisations. Its usage is retained in this book solely for convenience to mark the period from the collapse of Roman civilisation in Britain in the early 5th century to the Norman takeover in the 11th century.

The word 'Saxon' is used to denote all Germanic migrants whatever their origin and those British that adopted Germanic culture. It appears that the classic British tribes of Saxons, Angles and Jutes to a significant degree came into being within Britain and may have been part of later 'origin myths'.

This is a wargaming book not an academic work of history. There has been a flood of new archaeological information in recent decades that has transformed our understanding of this defining period in British history. Most notably, the discovery that the Anglo-Saxon invasions are myth – at least as they were portrayed in my school history lessons – and that the creation of English ethnic identity in particular owes far

more to migration and cultural accretion within Britain, than genocide or expulsion.

History, like the workings of the physical universe, may not change but our understanding of both alters profoundly as new data and ideas are assimilated. Those wishing to dig deeper than the superficial summaries presented here will find a great deal of information available free on the internet or in many very readable and inexpensive books by professional historians – and only professional full time academics have a hope of keeping up with the debate or of intelligently interpreting the new information.

If you only read one book to further your understanding of this dramatic era, I recommend *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450-900*: (2003), by Dr Guy Halsall, who has a chair in history at the University of York and has actually played wargames.

For convenience, I have divided the British Dark Ages into three periods: (i) the post-Roman migration era, 400-600AD, (ii) the era of the Heptarchy, 600-800AD, and (iii) the Viking era, 800-1066AD. Each of these eras roughly represents a change in warfare, although the boundaries are, of course, artificially sharp.



Invaders! A Viking longship receives a warm welcome from the Saxons.



# END OF EMPIRE: 400 AD

## BRITAIN IN THE DOMINATE

The fall of the Western Roman Empire in the flatlands of Britain, the place that would one day be known as England, was more catastrophic, more complete and faster than in any other province. And when England emerged from the Dark Ages the inhabitants spoke a new language derived neither from Latin nor from native pre-Roman Brythonic Celtic.

Britannia in the Dominate, the Late Roman Empire, was quite different both economically and socially from the earlier Roman Principate. The economy was smaller with most goods being produced locally for a local market. Industry appears to have been largely located in small towns that tended to run in strips along the roads. Stone production in the quarries of the Kent Weald had ceased because large public buildings were rarely constructed so stone could be recycled from earlier works. But Britain was now a monetary economy using bronze coins distributed widely among ordinary people as tokens of exchange.

The taxation cycle of the Dominate is not fully understood, but it seems to follow this path: (i) the state paid the army and other officials in bullion in the form of coins, (ii) this bullion was converted locally into bronze coins (money or fiat currency) to purchase goods and services from the rest of the populace and (iii) production (mostly agricultural) was converted locally back into bullion to pay state taxes. Direct payment of taxes by produce probably was also important.

The cities of Britain were no longer flourishing classical centres of commerce with large populations. They were walled and part of the governmental structure, largely associated with taxation and security. Inside these walls were considerable areas of empty space partly filled with luxury villas. Inequality had grown massively and the same elite families that possessed the urban villas also owned the agricultural villa complexes clustered around the cities.

Further from the cities and towns, people lived in farm communities that were far less wealthy but at least partly Roman in their consumption despite their populations living in traditional British round houses. The British diocese in the first 50 years of the 4th century, particularly the south and east, was probably more recognisably part of *Romanitas* than in any other period of its history. For the local inhabitants there must have seemed no reason why this happy state of affairs might not persist forever, and yet it was all gone in a single generation.

## IMPLOSION

Britain was a notoriously unstable and rebellious member of the Roman Empire, partly because it was garrisoned by a large army detachment – always a temptation for an ambitious general to ‘reach for the purple’ – and partly because of its isolation.

In 350 AD, the army elevated the Roman General Magnentius to the purple and executed the Emperor

Constans. Magnentius quickly won the support of the Western aristocracy including those in Britain – possibly because his father was supposedly British – but that may simply be Constantian propaganda. However, Magnentius was defeated in battle by the army of Constantius II, the Constantine dynasty reclaiming Britannia.

Constantius sent the *Primicerius notariorum*, Paulus Catena (‘Paul the Chain’ in English!), to Britain to root out dissenters. Paulus embarked on a massive witch-hunt that even enmeshed the British *Vicarius* (governor of the four British provinces). This purge must have devastated the Romano-British elite families. A similar rebellion by Magnus Maximus in 383, ending in 388 with his defeat at the hands of Theodosius I, must also have caused considerable damage to both the economy and ruling class of the diocese of Britain. Backing the wrong horse in one of the Dominate’s many military coups would have been lethal both for individuals and their families.

In 359 Julian requisitioned substantial amounts of grain from Britain to feed the Rhine Army on its campaign against the Germans. This seems to have been an extraordinary demand because hundreds of new ships were built to convey the grain across the North Sea. We have no information how this exceptional demand was paid for or what the effects might have been on Britain, but it is not impossible that it triggered further instability contributing to the events in 367.

Barbarian raids from outside the province became an increasing threat from 340 onwards, leading to the great ‘Barbarian Conspiracy’ at the end of the 4th century when the British Roman Army disintegrated into bands of deserters and looters, probably bolstered by runaway slaves and *colonii* (tenant farmers, sharecroppers), provoking the last known campaign of the Roman army in Britain to restore order.

Northern Gaul fell out of Roman control in around 406, apparently leading to convulsion within the British army and the Romano-British elite. Three pretenders to the Imperial throne were raised in quick succession in Britain: Marcus, a military officer; Gratian, a Romano-British aristocrat; and Constantine III, supposedly an ordinary soldier with a ‘lucky’ name. Constantine appears to have led a significant portion of what was left of the Roman army in Britain across the Channel in a bid to take the Western throne. Note that this was a civil war between Romans, not the Romans versus barbarians theme of popular history. Indeed Roman warlords appeared



Romano-British Draco Standard Bearer



to be far more concerned with other Roman warlords than barbarians.

The infighting surrounding these three coups is likely to have further decimated the Romano-British aristocracy as the loser's supporters would have been eliminated each time and their property seized by the winner to pay his troops. In 409, a fourth coup in Britain resulted in the 'expulsion' of Roman, i.e. Constantine's, officials and Britain passed out of the Empire forever. Indeed, centralised authority in the province completely disappeared and no doubt the taxation cycle collapsed leading to a moneyless economy.

Archaeology records the shadows of decline. The luxury villas fell out of use, ceased to be repaired or were converted into more modest agricultural buildings. The mass production kilns of the New Forest and Oxfordshire stopped functioning by 380 and by 400 all pottery manufacture stopped. Iron production in the Kent Weald plunged by 350 and had disappeared by 410.

Repair and maintenance of amenities in the cities broke down: the Canterbury sewers fell into disuse from 350 onwards and by the early 5th century the great cities seem to have been abandoned. By 420, everything that made south and eastern Britain Roman – mass production, a monetary economy, villas, towns, cities – was no more.

Civilisation survived best on the periphery of the diocese in the military zones of the north and west, probably because (i) there were enough disciplined *Limitanei* (local

border troops) left to enforce order locally and maintain a structured society and (ii) more of the local people would be independent peasant farmers less dependent on *Romanitas* for survival. Garrison towns at places like Birdoswald on The Wall carried on until the 6th century before failing. In the west communities moved back into hill-forts at places like Cadbury and Tintagel and traded (tin?) with the Eastern Empire in return for elite Roman goods like wine. But they obtained pottery by raiding their ancestors' graves.

In the flatlands of the east and south, which had been the most Romanised part of the island, the results seem to have been catastrophic. In Canterbury, an early 5th century grave has been excavated. Romans did not bury their dead within city walls, so by this time Canterbury was clearly no longer a functioning Roman city. The grave is of what looks like a family: a man, woman, two small children and two dogs. The parents are seated, the mother with the children and the father with the dogs. They wear recognisably Roman objects. One child definitely died violently, its skull crushed by a blow.

In the nearby Richborough Saxon shore fort, the contents of a pay-chest (?) of bronze coins have been found. Money, a token of exchange, unlike bullion, is valueless without a state to underwrite it. The state had gone. It is possible that we are unduly influenced by the collapse of the structures used by the elite that leave artefacts for us to dig up, but nonetheless the impression is of something truly terrible – a collapse into violence, starvation and possibly plague.



Romano-British cavalry gallop through a forest.





“King Ceawlin of Wessex  
and his young son Cuthwine  
fought the Britons of the  
West Country at...Deorham.”

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

## THE ANGLO-SAXONS

Up until the mid to late 20th century we tended to take the literary evidence from late Saxon accounts at face value and accepted the concept of the Anglo-Saxon invasions. The model was of warbands led by fierce Saxon warrior kings storming ashore, climbing the city walls and putting the Romano-British to the sword *en masse*. The problem is that all the archaeological evidence points the other way. *Romanitas* collapsed in southeast Britain well before Germanic migration, and when the Saxons arrived they took the form of small groups of farming families who often settled on poorish land, presumably because it was unoccupied.

There is little evidence for social inequality at all in the first Saxon communities, which typically consisted of around 50 people, let alone warrior-kings. Some of the early culturally Saxon burials, when examined chemically, show that the people had been born in Britain and some of those born on the continent were, if anything, of low social class. In summary, it rather looks as if the transition from Romano-British to Anglo-Saxon in the flatlands was as much a matter of culture transformation as migration. Why the locals should have largely adopted the migrant culture, including their language, rather than the other way around remains a mystery.

The great invasions, the warrior-kings and their warbands, all seem to be a product of later Saxon nobility needing a heritage-narrative that would stand examination when compared to Frankish and Celtic nobility – who claimed to be descended from imperial Roman families. Much better to be descended from Odin via warrior-kings than trace your ancestry back to a subsistence farmer whose descendants got lucky.

Early 6th century ‘kingdoms’ were tiny; for example, the Hrothingas (the people of Hrotha) occupied an eight kilometre long valley of a tributary of the Thames. Such nascent kingdoms tended to spread along the droveways needed to move animals from one grazing site to another. By the 7th century these regions had agglutinated into real kingdoms large enough to involve tribute paid to a ruling warrior class. At this point warfare proper, as opposed to cattle raiding, occurs because all one ruling family needed to do to take over a neighbouring territory was to eliminate the rulers: from the perspective of the ruled, little changed.

It must have been a period of gobble or be gobbled and in this situation a multitude of little petty lordships could rapidly be converted into a handful of organised states recognisable as the kingdoms of the Heptarchy.

## THE BRITISH

In 500, a patchwork of British kingdoms speaking Brythonic Celtic covered most of central and western Britain. This included the old Roman military zone loosely extending from the Severn to the Humber as well as the less Romanised western areas, south of The Wall. These British kingdoms retained a certain amount of Roman culture, people were still capable of reading and writing educated Latin, and those in the West Country and South Wales maintained international trade links with the Byzantine Empire, exchanging tin for high status products – but how ‘Roman’ these British were after about 450 is highly debatable.

One of the strange unknowns is why these semi-organised British kingdoms failed to exploit the power vacuum caused by the collapse of Roman power to push into the agriculturally productive lowlands of southern, central and eastern Britain. How was a migration of Germanic farming families given the freedom, time and space to grow into organised kingdoms capable of dominating all of the flatlands. By 600, Wessex had reached the Bristol Channel, cutting the British West Country off from Wales.

One answer may be that the British kingdoms remained tiny and splintered while the Saxon kingdoms grew in size. For example, at the Battle of Deorham that split the British into Welsh and Cornish, Ceawlin of Wessex is recorded as fighting three British kings: Conmail, Condidan, and Farinmail. Incidentally, it is misleading to imagine that this was part of some sort of nationalistic or ethnic war between the English and the British. King Ceawlin appears to possess a Brythonic Celtic name, as do many of the early Wessex kings. But, however it happened, once powerful Saxon kingdoms developed in the lowlands, they would inevitably come to dominate Britain.

The Picts were essentially a confederation of British, Brythonic Celtic-speaking people living outside of the Roman Empire north of the wall. The name is derived from the writings of Eumenius, 297AD, and means ‘painted’. We don’t know what they called themselves.

The Gaels spoke Goidelic Celtic and came from Ireland. They migrated into Wales and the West Country in the post Roman period but disappeared into the British population except in south west Scotland where they became the dominant culture, forming the kingdom of Dál Riata, which eventually absorbed the Picts.



# STRATEGY, TACTICS & WEAPONS

## STRATEGY

The warbands operating in post-Roman Britain probably employed, or needed, little resembling a strategy, but it is worth considering why people fought as this will help us devise scenarios. The key motivation for battle was probably status and reputation. The nearest equivalent of this mind set in the modern western world probably is to be found in drug gangs where a perceived slight is met with violent retribution out of all proportion to the scale of the alleged offence. Similar ideology has been observed in culturally simple peoples and is described in Homer, probably reflecting the post-Mycenaean Greek Dark Ages.

The second reason for conflict was raiding, animals being the most likely prized booty although women and children are also a possible target. Post Roman economies showed a greater reliance on animal husbandry and animals probably represented wealth. Status, as much as material reward, was probably a driving force behind raiding. A third source of confrontation was armed promenades around a clan's claimed territory to demonstrate ownership.

As political units grew, attempts to kill a clan's ruling elite and immediate henchmen/relatives would become feasible. This might be part of an internal coup or a takeover bid by a rival clan.

By the time we get to the second phase, the kingdoms of the Heptarchy (the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms – see later), the main strategic issue facing a king's army would be logistics, the Achilles heel of all 'barbarians'. Warbands operating over short distances, mostly in friendly territory, have zero logistical requirements. Armies trekking through enemy territory the size of, say, Mercia, do.

A warrior needs about 3,500 calories per day to function at optimum health. This is equivalent to about two kilograms of bread or about a kilogram and a half of meat. Horses would need about ten kilograms of food per day. A man can carry about 45 kilograms for 25 kilometres a day. Allowing for other gear such as weapons, a warrior could carry enough food for 17 days. After that he lives off the land (i.e. loots) or starves. Looting requires an army to disperse to find food, inviting a counterattack and defeat in detail. And, of course, the enemy might have destroyed, hidden or just removed food from along the line of march.

Of course sufficient food had to be stockpiled before the army set out into enemy territory, implying organisational competence and an agricultural surplus. All in all, logistics probably limited army sizes far more than national manpower. The advantages are all with the defender and a good strategy was to wait for an attacking force in one's own heartlands where food was readily available to keep a sizable army in the field.

Another problem for one of the Heptarchy wanting to conquer a neighbour is the lack of a strategic target. There is no capital city in the modern sense or centre of industrial production to aim for. One might defeat the opposing army and kill the king, but the royal line will be large enough that a replacement will soon surface and a new army be summoned. It was far from unknown for a victorious invader to be ambushed when returning home, short of food and burdened with loot and wounded.

The long inconclusive war between Mercia and its Welsh allies, and Northumbria demonstrates just how difficult it was to achieve any lasting result. For this reason, successful kings of the larger states such as Wessex or Mercia tended to





reduce a smaller neighbour to a subservient but still largely independent condition, becoming high kings themselves like Agamemnon, King of Kings. Such a subservient relationship was transitory, as it depended on personal rather than national bonds, and might have to be reforged by a new campaign every generation.

The motivations behind the invasion of a neighbouring kingdom might involve: (i) status – increasing a king’s status inevitably protecting his position; (ii) keeping warriors busy – idle warriors might fill their time with feuding and plotting; (iii) carrying off portable loot – one’s warriors expected ‘presents’ from their king in reward for their loyalty; and (iv) reduction of a neighbouring king to a client, thus increasing one’s own status – see (i).

The Vikings were less curtailed by logistical problems because they arrived in ships, which have always been the most efficient means of transport. They also tended to attack places like monasteries that, amongst other things, stored food. Of course, once Viking armies operated continuously in Britain they acquired all the same logistical problems as everyone else, although it is noteworthy that Viking warbands tended to operate along coasts or navigable rivers.

## TACTICS

One of the most infuriating things about Dark Age authors is that they tell us next to nothing about battle tactics, or how the warriors actually fought. Partly this is because such battle-accounts are designed to show the learning of the writer, or to make some moral, religious or political point. It is also possible that no one described ‘what everyone knew’.

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it is likely that early armies, more properly warbands, fought mostly on foot in loose order. The small shield with its single central grip would have required plenty of room to swing both in attack and defence. Spears would have been held underarm for maximum flexibility and reach.

Most of the actual combat would have been carried out by aristocrats and those individual freemen whose personalities inclined them to aggression. The bulk of the warband would be there in a supporting role. They would encourage their side’s fighters like football supporters cheering on their team, provide a secure position to which those fighters could retreat when hard pressed, and defend themselves when attacked, but they would probably rarely initiate combat. Combat as described in Homer illustrates the general pattern.

Later on, as forces got bigger and the warriors better trained to operate together (or indeed trained at all), real armies would have begun to coalesce. The tactic of the infantry shieldwall develops where soldiers stand shoulder to shoulder in close array, each relying on their neighbours for protection much like a hoplite phalanx. This formation requires uniform weapons including bigger shields that were more securely affixed to the forearm, and uniform weapons training with spears held overhead where they wouldn’t strike the man behind on the backswing. Note that in tightly packed formations, warriors could well find it easier to strike diagonally at the side of a foe just down the line rather than at the opponent directly opposite.

The best equipped and most aggressive warriors would be in the front rank and the most reliable at the back. In



Troops and provisions – two pillars of a successful campaign in hostile territory.





Ferocious Berserkers lead the Viking charge on the Saxon battleline.

between were probably more lightly armed warriors throwing javelins over the heads of the front ranks. The use of a shieldwall implies a fair degree of organisation, even if these armies were not quite up to the standards of Spartan hoplites, Macedonian phalangites, or Roman legionaries. How deep a shieldwall might be is generally unknown although Snorri Sturluson in a later account refers to five rows of men.

Ancient armies were divided into four specialised unit types (five if you include artillery): light cavalry, heavy cavalry, light infantry and heavy infantry, all of which had specialised functions. This was not true of Dark Age armies where a warrior fought on foot or on horseback, in loose or close order, as circumstances dictated. Basic tactics seem to have been very similar for both infantry and cavalry, i.e. exchange missiles and then charge in a dense mass using melee weapons such as swords and spears. Missiles were only of harassment value and the battle would normally be resolved by close combat.

Horses were not armoured. The invention of the stirrup made it easier for a horsed warrior to make forceful downward strikes and so enhanced the ability of battle cavalry, but warriors on foot still possessed a significant advantage in melee. But it was far easier for mounted warriors to escape pursuit if their army was routed. The nobility dismounting and having their horses led off the

battlefield was a signal to the rest of the army that a battle would be fought 'to the death'. The importance of cavalry in Britain seems to have declined with the advent of the Viking era, when combat around fortified positions caused a shift towards heavy infantry.

In most accounts of battles of this era for which we have any information, armies seem to have consisted largely of infantry. Nevertheless, Saxon warriors did fight on horseback at least in some encounters, for example the Northumbrian defeat of the Picts in 672. The Pictish Aberlemno stone 2, now thought to be 9th century, depicts cavalymen with helmets, rounded shields and spears. Viking raiders might start as infantry but made every effort to acquire horses. British heroic poems such as the *Gododdin* do refer to British cavalry fighting Anglo-Saxon infantry, which suggests that at least British aristocrats favoured fighting on horseback.

We know next to nothing about Welsh Dark Age armies but later Welsh medieval armies consisted primarily of light infantry and cavalry suitable for warfare in the Welsh mountains. They used ambushes involving hit and run tactics and lots of missile weapons. Welsh close combat formations used long spears, which they used as heavy javelins when assaulting an enemy formation. If this first rush failed the Welsh infantry would fall back rather than fight toe to toe. However, Gwynedd at the end of the Dark Ages appears to





field sword and shield armed units that presumably functioned as heavy infantry.

There was an advantage in reaching the battlefield first in that a good position could be selected, forcing the late arriving side to fight at a disadvantage. Commonly, a hill would be chosen – or possibly a position with protected flanks. Attacks might be made at dawn when opponents were still unprepared, or had the rising sun shining in their eyes. Oswald of Northumbria is supposed to have defeated Cadwallon of Gwynedd by such a tactic. Charles the Bold became unstuck in 876 when his army became disordered in the dark attempting to get into position for a dawn attack. Other stratagems adopted by Dark Age armies included the feigned retreat, where the pursued turned on disorganised pursuers, or a trap where an overly aggressive opponent was manoeuvred into a position where he could be assaulted by a concealed force.

Viking forces often consisted of battle-hardened warriors used to working with each other and enjoying veteran leaders. They therefore seem able to have used tactical manoeuvres beyond the coordination skills of most armies of this period. For example, Vikings were masters of the flank attack concealed by manoeuvre behind terrain or from a fortified base. Indeed, they used fortification as part of a mobile battle strategy, luring attackers partly inside before hitting them from the flanks and rear. In general, Viking armies could use fluid tactics, such as tactical retreats, when under pressure.

Dark Age battles are often reported as lasting for hours, sometimes all day. Melee must have been extremely fatiguing and it seems doubtful that combat could continue for more than minutes at a time. One has the impression of one army (or at least a part of it) charging the opposing line in an attempt to break it. If unsuccessful they would back off to catch their breath and regroup for another try. This could happen a number of times, possibly with both sides charging the opposing shield wall. If neither side broke then one army might retreat off the field in good order leaving the other in possession. Normally part of one of the lines of men collapsed, whereupon the whole army could be put to flight as warriors poured into the gap to attack the flanks and rear. Most casualties would come from this pursuit stage.

## PSYCHOLOGY

Attempts to shore up the morale of one side, and unsettle that of the enemy would be made before battle commenced. This was a superstitious age and religious rites would be carried out to gain the support of god(s). Alcohol might be distributed among the troops. There might also be displays of martial skill by nobles between the drawn up armies or challenges to single combat. Finally warlords would ride along the lines of warriors exhorting them.

Dark Age commanders practiced leadership rather than generalship. Once the two armies lined up for battle there was little for a warlord to do other than lead by example. This might involve showing contempt for the enemy and a complete lack of fear before leading a charge into close combat. It is remarkable how many Dark Age kings or army commanders (often the same thing) died in battle. This not only reflects their front position in the ranks at the point of the thickest fighting, but also that they were at the back of a fleeing army when it broke.

Leadership was particularly important as warriors fought to uphold their status and to show loyalty to individual lords, not for abstract ideology or nationalism. Social relationships were personal, from one individual to another. This could mean that the death of a lord released his followers from their obligations to fight. The death of a king might easily cause an army to disintegrate, as his warriors had nothing left to fight for.

Duke William at Hastings is reported as riding along the Norman line with his helmet lifted to demonstrate that a rumour of his death was untrue. The Saxons 'lost' the battle when the last Godwinson brother not already held captive by William died.

Battle standards were totemic (quasi-religious/magical objects) in this period, for example the famous Norse Raven Banner, which was associated with Odin. Priests might also appear on the battlefield to shore up morale.



Romano-British Armoured Infantry



## OFFENSIVE WEAPONS

It is worth remembering that offensive weapons such as swords and spears are also defensive, being used to knock aside an opponent's strike.

### SPEARS & JAVELINS

These are included together because there is no discontinuity between a thrusting spear that could be used as a heavy javelin and a javelin that could be used for thrusting. The spear was the primary offensive melee weapon of the Dark Ages (and most other pre-gunpowder periods) because it: (i) was highly effective; (ii) usable by those with limited experience or training; (iii) had a long reach; and (iv) was cheap and easy to manufacture. It is so emblematic of Dark Age society that the man in an Anglo-Saxon family was known as the 'spear side' and battle was called a 'clash of spears'.

Spear heads of all shapes and sizes are known from this period. Most spears, but not all, would be used one handed in conjunction with a shield. Modern re-enactors have shown that the spear is best used with an underarm grip (like a sword) where the fighter is in loose order with plenty of room around him as a longer reach can be obtained and a wider variety of strikes attempted.

Javelins are the oldest ranged weapons used by man. The invention of the spear thrower was one of the great technical achievements of our species. As soon as infantry started wearing armour or carrying large shields, javelins became ever more important for delivering a weight of punch unobtainable by bows. They came in all sorts of shapes and sizes: the essential difference being that of weight. A heavier javelin has greater impact and penetrating power but less range than a lighter missile. You paid your money and you took your choice.

### SWORDS

The classic British Dark Age swords had a long, single handed, parallel-sided, double edged blade with a low point of balance and were used mainly for slashing attacks.

Essentially they were similar to the *spathae* of the late Roman Army. There seems to have been a shift with time towards lighter, tapering blades that were more optimised for thrusting. Pattern-welded swords in particular were expensive items, beautiful when polished, so were high-status items wielded only by the elite.

### AXES

Hollywood has made combat axes the iconic Dark Age weapon, but actually their use was rather restricted compared to the ubiquitous spear. Sixth century Franks made much use of the battle-axe and some have been found in southern England, but they dropped out of use until reintroduced by the Vikings in the late 8th century. Viking axes were designed to be used one-handed. The two-handed axe used by Vikings and English huscarls was a late innovation.

In the early part of the period, the Franks in particular are associated with the throwing axe (*francisca*). Essentially this served the same function as a heavy javelin. It seems to have been developed in the 5th century in Gaul and may have been a weapon of the Roman Army. Throwing axes have been found in southern England but their usage had stopped by the end of the 5th century.

### SEAX

Most adult freemen in the Dark Ages would carry a knife of some sort which would be used as a general purpose tool, and occasionally as a weapon, much like the modern bayonet. The early seax is short, narrow and one-edged. From the 7th century onwards, they become broader, longer and much heavier weapons to the point of being one-edged short-swords. Although the seax is associated with Saxons, it was a classic Germanic knife.

### BOWS

Saxon warriors do not seem to have used the bow much as a war weapon. If true this is unusual as other Germanic warriors on the continent such as the Ostrogoths and Franks most certainly did field bowmen. Vikings also used bows and a number of examples have been found at Hedeby, the



Roman-British infantry emerge from a forest clearing.



Viking trading town in southern Jutland. Bowmen are particularly associated with British warriors, especially those from South Wales. However, nothing about Dark Age history is straightforward and the Welsh word for 'bow' is derived from English.

## DEFENSIVE EQUIPMENT

### SHIELDS

The classic early Dark Age shield was round (or somewhat oval) and probably flat, although Pictish shields seem to have been rectangular. It was gripped in the centre with an extruded metal dome (boss) protecting the hand.

The shield was a weapon as much as a defence, as the metal boss could be used like a knuckle duster to punch an opponent. Later shields were larger and hence heavier and were carried flat along the arm by inserting the fore-arm through loops. Shields were probably used to display designs identifying individual warriors.

### HELMETS

The most useful armour for a warrior to own is a helmet of some sort, not necessarily metal. A helmet found at Benty Grange in Derbyshire was constructed of bone plates on a metal frame and even leather helmets are far from valueless. The head is an obvious target for a spear or sword strike and

also endangered by missile trajectories. The helmet was always the last armour to be discarded by ancient armies when for one reason or another they wished to lighten soldiers.

### ARMOUR

The use of metal armour by Dark Age warriors is problematical as it rarely shows up in grave-goods but is well attested on monuments and in manuscripts. Armour has many disadvantages, being expensive, heavy, hot and fatiguing to wear. It restricts movement and few warriors can have been sanguine about relying on body armour to turn a blow – far better to deflect an enemy's strike by use of a spear or shield – because even if the armour holds, the tissue underneath is likely to suffer some degree of trauma. The use of metal armour waxed and waned in the ancient world for reasons that are difficult for us to untangle. It is likely that aristocrats would wear metal armour, chainmail or lamellar, as a mark of status and rank – they also probably had servants or animals to carry the stuff on the march as well. But how often metal armour was employed by ordinary freemen warriors is debatable.

Boiled leather and padding armour appears to be shown in manuscripts and is likely to have been popular. It has the advantages of being cheaper and lighter than metal armour, but the morale advantage of metal helmets and armour was probably significant.



Viking Bondi and archers

“Thorolf was thus armed. He had a shield ample and stout, a right strong helmet on his head; he was girded with the sword that he called Long, a weapon large and good. In his hand he had a halberd, whereof the feather-formed blade was two ells long, ending in a four-edged spike; the blade was broad above, the socket both long and thick. The shaft stood just high enough for the hand to grasp the socket, and was remarkably thick. The socket fitted with iron prong on the shaft, which was also wound round with iron. Such weapons were called mail-piercers.”



*Egil's Saga*



## FORTIFICATIONS

Early Dark Age farms and even 'palaces' do not seem to be fortified, although mead halls as described in *Beowulf* by the very nature of their design might have been defensible against intruders. Towns were unwalled; Lundenwic was located outside the walls of Londinium and unfortified until the 9th century. The change seems to have been stimulated by Viking warfare techniques, which did make extensive use of fortifications. In 867, the combined armies of Mercia and Wessex were forced to make peace because they could not take the Viking fortifications at Nottingham.

A siege to starve out the defenders of a fortified site was often impossible, because with no logistic capabilities the besieger could well starve before the besieged. Harrying the land to force the defender to offer battle was a viable tactic in an enemy land. Otherwise the only recourse was a crude attempt to storm the fortification with battering rams, axes and clubs.

After Alfred the Great defeated the Vikings in 878, he reorganised the defence of Wessex around a series of fortified burhs, spaced so that all subjects were within one day's travel of a refuge. This modernised Wessex by copying Viking techniques. The burhs were continually garrisoned by a third of Alfred's warriors. This system was later extended into Mercia by the Wessex Royal Family. Like Viking fortifications, Wessex burhs were not just refuges but secure centres from which field armies could operate offensively.

Up until the second half of the 20th century, historians had a simple comprehensive model for the development of feudalism and the associated high-medieval, cavalry-weighted armies in Francia. Recent research has shown the reality to be

far more messy and complicated, but land usage reorganisation in the 8th century does seem to have resulted in wealth being concentrated in the hands of an elite class; wealth that could be used to pay for a retinue of well-equipped mounted professional soldiers.

Perhaps the key point of the Norman army that invaded England in the 11th century was that it was what we would call a combined-arms force, consisting of a balanced mix of battle cavalry, spear-armed infantry and missile troops. This gave Duke William a more diverse mix of tactical choices than those available to the primarily battle-line infantry armies still employed in the Anglo-Norse world, the famous feigned retreat as a device to break up the shield wall, for example. It is perhaps not too much of a stretch to suggest that at Hastings the last great Germanic warband-based army went down to a new military organisation that would dominate Europe until the invention of firearms.

## SUMMARY

In conclusion, warfare between 400 and 600 in Dark Age Britain involved skirmishes between warbands operating in loose formation with small tactically-flexible shields, and heavy missile weapons. After 600, true armies appear. They are bigger, and soldiers fight in close formation with large shields fixed tight to the forearm. Heavy throwing missiles disappear in favour of close combat weapons. The Vikings in the 9th century introduced a level of professionalism that changed the nature of warfare again, relying more on tactical manoeuvring from fortified bases. Finally in the 11th century the Normans crashed in with an early high-medieval, combined-arms army.

**"Three hundred and fifty longships came into the Thames and stormed Canterbury and London and put to flight Beorhtwulf, King of Mercia with his army, and then went south over the Thames to Surrey ... Aethelwulf and his son Aethelbald with the West Saxon army fought against them at Oak Field [Aclea], and there made the greatest slaughter of a heathen raiding-army that we have heard tell of up to the present day, and there took the victory."**

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*





# THE TRIBES OF BRITAIN 600-800 AD





# AFTER ROME: 400 - 600 AD

## SUB-ROMAN WARBANDS

The *Hail Caesar* rules are designed to represent battles between entire armies, or at least between fair sized bodies of troops organised into discrete, uniformly equipped fighting units representing hundreds of men apiece. The way that the units move, the manner in which orders are issued and the role of commanders all reflect this precept.

Unfortunately, this does not represent the sub-Roman period particularly well, or indeed at all. Armies would be tiny, consisting of a 'chief' (for want of a better name), his immediate henchmen, and such freemen farmers as he could 'persuade' to join whatever expedition he had in mind.

This period of British history may not lend itself well to the main *Hail Caesar* rules set but fortunately someone has come up with a solution: modify the rules into a skirmish game. However some *Hail Caesar* players may wish to ignore this section and jump straight to the Heptarchy section.

In his supplement *Rome's Dacian Wars*, author Craig Woodfield demonstrates that it is perfectly possible to fight smaller skirmish style games using *Hail Caesar*, albeit with the proviso that players must be willing to make suitable adjustments where necessary. We have found that this approach allows short, action-packed games to unfold within a very short space of time with only a handful of models and using a relatively small playing area.

Rick Priestley and Nigel Stillman have developed Craig's rules further and very kindly allowed me to use the fruits of their labour when preparing these *Hail Caesar - Dark Age*

skirmish rules. I'm therefore indebted to Craig, Rick and Nigel and wish to acknowledge their significant intellectual contribution to this section of the book. The rules adaptations that follow are inspired by and in part based upon those described in *Rome's Dacian Wars*.

It is worth recalling Craig's advice that by necessity adapting *Hail Caesar* to a skirmish scale requires compromise and so the rules are neither entirely comprehensive nor tight. There will inevitably be occasions when players will have to make a common-sense decision or simply roll a dice to decide how something should go.

In general, adaptation of the *Hail Caesar* rules for skirmish games largely involves taking stuff out! So that gives the first general rule: *If in doubt leave it out!*

Otherwise, unless changed by a rule-change below, use *Hail Caesar* mechanics.

## MODELS

Players will need a number of individually based models as each model becomes a unit in its own right and represents one man.

Obviously models must be firmly affixed to bases, if only to stop them falling over, but exact basing isn't critical. Players should feel no requirement to rebase: a ghastly task. Use whatever models you already have available whether fixed on rectangular or round bases, or whatever: just measure from nearest base edge to nearest base edge to assess range, etc.



No quarter given! The Romano-British take to the field.



## STATS AND SPECIAL RULES

Individual models basically have much the same range of stats in the skirmish game as entire units do in the full-sized game. Values are adjusted to represent single combatants where necessary – by mostly reducing attacks and stamina values to just 1 for most models on foot, for example.

Note that commanders work differently from the main *Hail Caesar* game. They are treated as fighting models and so have stats in the same way as other models. (See the Commanders and Leaders section of these rules.)

### DISORDERED, SHAKEN AND SHATTERED MODELS OR TEAMS

These rules function in just the same way as in the main game, although the terms used sound a little odd in a skirmish context. However, I have resisted the urge to rename these terms in the interests of clarity.

**Disordered:** The model is momentarily exhausted, demoralised or disoriented.

**Shaken:** The model is badly wounded – a man has suffered damaging hits equal to his stamina.

**Shattered:** Any model accumulating double its stamina value of damage at any time during hand-to-hand combat or as a result of shooting is considered to be dead, or at least incapacitated, and is removed from play.

Players will find it helpful to use counters placed by affected figures to mark 'wounds' and the above conditions.

## FACING AND PROXIMITY

Models are free to turn to face an enemy at any time during the course of play, for example, to shoot a weapon or face a charge, so there are no flanks or rear. This means that cavalry are able to counter-charge when attacked (assuming they are otherwise able to do so – for example if they are not already engaged in combat, shaken or disordered). In essence, every model's front stretches 360° all around.

The proximity rules are generally ignored in the skirmish game. Instead, each model has a zone-of-control extending out 1" from its base in all directions. A friendly model cannot move within the zone-of-control of an unengaged enemy model unless it is to 'charge' it, i.e. move adjacent and into combat. You can only move within 1" of an enemy model in order to engage it in hand-to-hand combat!

Models that are engaged in combat lose their zone-of-control. Once an enemy model is engaged in hand-to-hand combat with at least one friendly model, its zone-of-control is negated. It is then acceptable for a second friendly model to barge past, moving freely. A player might wish to do this, for example, so as to charge another enemy model behind the first or simply to move beyond it. See below for hand-to-hand fighting for how this affects multiple combats.



Soldiers, await your orders!

It can happen that a model begins its move within the zone-of-control of an unengaged enemy. In such a case the model must either charge that enemy or move out of the zone-of-control of the first enemy model without entering the zone-of-control of a second enemy model. A model may never leave an enemy zone-of-control and enter another in the same turn.

However, if a secondly friendly model engages the same enemy model in hand-to-hand fighting then – of course – the enemy's zone-of-control is negated because the enemy model is no longer unengaged. The first friendly model may now move as the player wishes, even barging past the enemy model as noted above.

It is possible that a friendly model may start the turn within the zones-of-control of two or more enemy models. In this case the friendly model must charge one of the enemy models unless it can move in such a way as to move away from all enemy-zones-of-control at the same time. It may not move deeper into a zone of control. In the last case, the model is trapped and the only move it can make is a charge – or it may do nothing.

Again, other friendly models charging may negate the enemy models' zones-of-control.

## SEQUENCE OF MOVES

Models can move in any sequence: it is not necessary that models making a move on their own initiative be moved first as in the main rules. In the skirmish game it is more convenient to move models in whatever sequence you wish, whether using their initiative or acting under orders.





A centurion orders his Limitanei warband to hold the line.

## COMMANDERS AND LEADERS

In the skirmish game both the Commander (the Chief!) and Leaders (his primary henchmen) can issue orders to other models. We imagine orders to be the equivalent of shouted instructions, exhortations and encouragement.

In the skirmish game both Commanders and Leaders are models that have regular stats and which move, fight and can be killed like any other individuals. The *Hail Caesar* rules for Commanders fighting and falling casualty are therefore not needed and are not used.

Warbands were held together by links of personal loyalty rather than by abstract patriotism or military discipline, so a sudden-death victory is achieved by killing the opposing commander. This takes precedence over any other scenario victory condition. Moving a commander off the table also is a sudden-death victory condition as his chaps are at liberty to

flee as well. It might be valuable in a campaign game to 'save' an endangered commander in this way but it should negatively impact his standing.

## ORDERS AND MOVES

Models or teams (more about teams later) can move in any sequence the player wishes regardless of whether they use initiative to move or an order.

In the skirmish game models or teams can always move once using their own initiative and regardless of how close the enemy might be – but note the zone-of-control rules above.

Commanders and leaders are able to give orders to friendly models or teams, exhorting them to move further and faster (two or three moves) in a comparable way to the main *Hail Caesar* game except that if the order is 'failed' the model still makes one move anyway (blunder results aside!).

Commanders can issue orders to friendly models or teams anywhere on the battlefield. Leaders can only issue orders to models and teams within 12". Note that the usual leadership penalty for distance applies.

Orders can be given by commanders/leaders either before or after they have moved themselves. Individual commanders/leaders are not allowed to split their move with order issuing. In other words, either finish moving your leader and then issue any orders, or finish issuing orders and then move him. Exception: a commander/leader can only issue a 'follow me' *before* he moves. A follow me order can only be issued to a 'team' of which the commander/leader is a part (see below for more about teams).

A commander/leader who fails to give an order can give no more orders that turn, as in the main game. Don't forget, even though the order has been failed, models or teams can still make one move.



Romano-British Cavalry Command



Commanders and leaders cannot be given orders – because they don't need them – as they can always make up to three moves if you wish.

The role of orders is less critical in the skirmish game than the full fat *Hail Caesar*. In fact, players don't have to give orders at all if they don't want to do so, because their models can always make one move using their own initiative.

## MOVING COMMANDERS/LEADERS

Both commanders and leaders can make up to three moves at a time as if they had passed an order giving them three moves. They do not need to test for this – it happens automatically – and they can make this move even after they have failed to give orders to other models.

Because commanders and leaders are also models they can be disordered just like other models, in which case they will be unable to move that turn. This does not affect their ability to issue orders (other than a 'follow me' order, of course).

## TEAMS

In the full *Hail Caesar* game a commander can give the same order to a group of models. This is the same in the skirmish game. A commander or leader can give the same order to several models at once so long as they are grouped together. In the skirmish game we call such grouped models a *team*. As in the main game, a team is not a permanent organisation, it just allows us to form our warriors into groups or bodies and move them all at once.

A team consists of any number of models forming a group with no model separated from the group by more than 1". It doesn't matter which models form a team – they can be different types and armed in different ways.

If you wish to give an order to a team all the models must be given the *same* order and all the models must continue to be

within 1" of at least one other model from the same team once any move is complete.

Leaders only have a maximum range of 12" for giving orders, as already noted, so models beyond this distance cannot be included in a team given an order by a leader, even if they are within 1" of other models that are within range.

## BLUNDERS

If a commander or leader attempts to give an order to an individual or team and rolls a blunder (a result of two 6s) then rather than use the blunder chart in the *Hail Caesar* rules the ordered model or team simply does not move at all – not even the one automatic move that it would otherwise make. A blunder simply means no move at all.

A blunder doesn't prevent the commander or leader who issued the order from moving normally.

## RALLY ORDERS

In the skirmish rules we dispense with the rally order altogether because damage to our troops now represents actual wounds inflicted upon individuals. To allow these to be 'recovered' would slow down our game as well as endowing our commanders with seemingly mystic healing abilities given that Dark Age medicine was somewhat on the primitive side – at about the same level as on a modern amateur rugby field.

## COMBAT IN GENERAL

Generally speaking, models shoot and fight just as they do in the main rules: rolling 'to hit', rolling for 'morale saves', and then accumulating any damage scored against the target's stamina value. Once a model has accumulated its stamina value as damage it is 'shaken' (often stamina is only 1) and it then suffers the same penalties and restrictions as in the main game.



"Strike now on their weak left flank!"





Ambush! Saxon archers loose a deadly volley.

As in the full rules, models can be obliged to take a break test if they suffer damage from shooting or if defeated in hand-to-hand fighting (assuming they have not been killed outright). If you do need to take a break test, use the troop type result corresponding to the troop type exactly as you would normally: mounted, infantry or skirmish. Even though we are playing a skirmish game so all the troops could be described as skirmishing, only use the 'skirmisher' result line for troops that are categorised as skirmishers.

Models that suffer *double* their stamina value in damage are killed and removed immediately without fighting back if they have not done so already. Because most models only have a stamina value of 1 or 2 this tends to happen more often, and much more quickly, than in a regular battle. This isn't any different to the normal *Hail Caesar* rules, but it is worth pointing out because its ramifications are more significant during a skirmish. For example, it means that 'heroic' individuals, with a stamina value of perhaps as high as 3, become extremely durable compared to ordinary warriors.

## SHOOTING

Models must shoot at the nearest enemy model. This is to stop players unrealistically focussing their shots on enemy commanders and leaders.

## HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING

We do not need to take account of supporting models. Support rules and rules that refer to supporting models don't apply during a skirmish. As with the proximity rule this removes a whole swathe of rules that we simply don't need.

## OPEN ORDER

Don't apply the -1 'to hit' modifier for troops fighting in Open Order because most of our models will be in Open Order most of the time. Instead we will allow certain bonuses for some kinds of troops in 'formation' as noted below.

## CHARGES

When a model charges into contact with an enemy it initiates an engagement in the usual way. Any additional attacking models can join in the engagement if they are able to charge into touch with the enemy model. In the first turn they will all fight using their 'clash' number of attacks and charge bonuses. I.e. all models in touch with an enemy fight.

## GANGING UP

In so far as possible, when a group of warriors charges an opposing group of warriors the intention is that they *divide as equally as possible* one-on-one. We only allow chargers to gang up against a single enemy model if the enemy has no unengaged friends within 1". A model cannot charge an enemy that is already engaged if it has an unengaged friend within 1", regardless of whether the charger can reach that friend or not.

Note that the ganging up rule may sometimes make it impossible for chargers to find opponents. By keeping friends close by, even behind, you can make it impossible for enemy warriors to gang up.

## OUTNUMBERED

If a model is outnumbered in a fight then it suffers a 'to hit' penalty of -1 when it strikes.



### SEQUENCE OF ATTACKS

In a skirmish game it is much more realistic – and exciting – to work out who strikes first rather than assume all blows are simultaneous. If the first warrior to strike inflicts damage then his enemy might be shaken, which means he suffers the appropriate penalty when fighting back. An opponent might even be killed outright, in which case there is no fighting back to worry about!

Roll a D6 for each model to decide which warrior strikes first. The highest score strikes first and the lowest last. If both roll the same then roll again until one gains ascendancy over the other. If one side has managed to gang-up on a single enemy roll a dice for each warrior and work out strikes in the sequence that results, from highest to lowest. But note that a chief always strikes first against a leader or other model, and a leader always strikes first against an ordinary model.

### DIVIDING ATTACKS

If a model has more than one attack and is facing more than one enemy it can divide its attacks between them in any way the player wishes. There is no need to divide equally or to concentrate against any single foe – you can do as you wish.

### KILLS

If a model has suffered damage equal to double its stamina in total then it is killed or destroyed. This is also the same as in the main rules, but it happens more often in a skirmish because of the low stamina values of the combatants.

### BREAK TESTS FOLLOWING COMBAT

The side that suffers the most damage during an engagement is defeated. If two, three or more models are fighting on one side then all are defeated if they suffer more damage than they inflict in total.

If a model is defeated during a combat engagement, a break test is taken and the results applied in the same way as for *Hail Caesar* units. Ignore references to supporting units on the results table, as these are not used in skirmish games.

If the defeated side has more than one model fighting in a ganged up combat, take a separate break test for each model. This means different results can apply to individual models, some perhaps standing to fight and others retreating or breaking and falling casualty.

Break tests are also required for shaken models following a draw. This is the same as for the main rules, but because most warriors have a stamina value of only 1 it happens more often in a skirmish.

### POST COMBAT MOVES

Defeated models may be forced to retreat as a result of a break test, and models that 'break' are assumed to be slain and are removed as casualties. Victors are allowed the usual follow-up moves assuming all of the enemies they were fighting have either retreated or been killed. Remember we don't allow models to move within the zone-of-control of an unengaged enemy to reach another enemy model; this applies during follow-up moves too, and allows retreating troops to take refuge behind friends.

### JOINING ONGOING COMBATS

If a combat goes on from turn to turn it is possible that additional models from either side will join in. Where this happens, always divide the fights into one-on-one engagements where possible, and divide any superfluous attackers as equally as you can between their enemies. Don't worry if this means moving models around a bit – it is a swirling melee after all.





## LIMITANEI Warband

This warband represents the descendants of Limitanei units left over in military locations like Hadrian's Wall. They are in the process of metamorphosis from disciplined military forces led by officers to warbands led by hereditary kings.

Limitanei Troop Values								
Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
Tribune: commander, equipped with sword, shield & metal armour	2	2	0	0	4+	3	14	Steady
Centurion: leader, equipped with spear, sword, shield & metal armour	2	2	0	0	4+	2	11	Steady
Auxiliary: equipped with spear, shield, metal armour & javelins/darts	2	2	1	0	5+	1	9	Steady
Cavalryman: equipped with sword, metal armour & javelins	2	1	1	0	5+	2	8	
Auxiliary Bowman: equipped with bow & metal armour	1	1	1	1	6+	1	6	
Militia: equipped with improvised weapons	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	Levy

### SPECIAL RULES

- **Steady:** Tribune, Centurion and Auxiliary ignore the first 6 for break tests each turn.
- **Levy:** Militia must roll 4+ to recover disorder at end of turn.



A Limitanei warband.



## SAXON WARBAND

This warband represents the culturally Germanic peoples of southern and eastern Britain. Leaders and Gesith would primarily be drawn from the chief's close kinsmen and most of the other warriors from his extended kin-group. The bulk of the warband would be made up of ceorls or lesser troops, Gesith being found only in small numbers.

Saxon Troop Values								
Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
Chief: commander, equipped with sword, shield & metal armour	4	2	0	0	4+	3	16	Brave
Gesith: leader, equipped with spear, shield & leather armour	3	2	0	0	5+	2	11	Brave
Ceorl: equipped with spear & shield	2	1	0	0	6+	1	6	Brave
Javelinman: equipped with javelins	2	1	1	0	0	1	5	
Farmer: equipped with improvised weapon	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	Levy



### SPECIAL RULES

- **Brave:** Chief, Gesith and Ceorl rally on a 4+ at the end of the command part of a turn.
- **Levy:** Farmers must roll 4+ to recover disorder at end of turn.

## ROMANO-BRITISH WARBAND

This army list is for the political units that evolved from the villa belt just inside the militarised zone in places like the eastern West Country. They might be based in an old city but more probably at a hill-fort.

Romano-British Troop Values								
Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
Dux: commander, equipped with sword, shield & metal armour	3	2	0	0	4+	3	15	Elite
German Foederatus: leader, equipped with sword, shield & metal armour	4	2	0	0	5+	2	12	Elite
Warrior: equipped with spear, shield & leather armour	2	1	0	0	6+	1	5	
Cavalryman: equipped with sword, leather armour & javelins	2	1	1	0	5+	1	8	Elite
Javelinman: equipped with javelins	2	1	1	0	0	1	5	Levy
Farmer: equipped with improvised weapon	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	Levy



### SPECIAL RULES

- **Elite:** Dux, Foederati and Cavalrymen recover from disorder on a 4+ at the start of the command turn.
- **Levy:** Farmers and Javelinmen must roll 4+ to recover disorder at end of turn.





Welsh-Cymry warriors.

## WELSH-CYMRY WARBAND

This list represents the part tribal, part Latin communities from the uplands within the empire; places like Cornwall, Wales and Cumberland.

Welsh-Cymry Troop Values

Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
Protictoris: commander, equipped with sword, shield, leather armour & javelins	3	2	0	0	5+	3	13	
Irish Foederatus: leader, equipped with spear, shield & javelins	4	2	1	0	5+	2	13	Wild Fighter
Warrior: equipped with spear, shield & leather armour	2	1	0	0	6+	1	5	
Light Cavalryman: equipped with javelins	1	1	1	0	6+	1	4	Skirmisher
Bowman: equipped with bow	1	1	1	1	0	1	6	Marksman
Slinger: equipped with sling	1	1	1	1	0	1	4	Levy

### SPECIAL RULES

- **Wild Fighter:** Irish Foederati can re-roll missed hand-to-hand combat attacks in their first round of combat in the game.
- **Skirmisher:** Light Cavalrymen use the skirmish line for break tests.
- **Marksman:** Bowmen can re-roll one missed shot every time they shoot.
- **Levy:** Slingers must roll 4+ to recover disorder at end of turn.





## IRISH WARBAND

This is really meant to be an army list for Dál Riata, but it could also be used for Irish migrants into places like the West Country and Welsh coasts facing Ireland, before they were absorbed into the British communities.

Irish Troop Values								
Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
Chief: commander, equipped with sword, shield, leather armour & javelins	4	2	0	0	5+	3	15	Wild Fighter
Warrior: leader, equipped with spear, shield & javelins	3	1	1	0	6+	2	10	Wild Fighter
Warrior: equipped with spear, shield & javelins	2	1	1	0	6+	1	7	Wild Fighter
Chariot: equipped with javelins & shield	3	2	1	0	5+	2	10	See note
Javelinman: equipped with javelins	2	1	1	0	0	1	5	
Slinger: equipped	1	1	1	1	0	1	4	Levy

### SPECIAL RULES

- **Wild Fighter:** Commanders, leaders and warriors can re-roll missed hand-to-hand combat attacks in their first round of combat in the game.
- **Levy:** Slingers must roll 4+ to recover disorder at end of turn.

**Note:** Very doubtful if chariots were still used but they are included here for 'colour'.



## PICTISH WARBAND

An army list for the only British community that was always outside the Empire, the Pictish Federation.

Pictish Troop Values								
Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
Chief: commander, equipped with sword, shield & leather armour	3	2	0	0	5+	3	13	
Warrior: leader, equipped with spear, shield & leather armour	2	1	0	0	5+	1	7	
Warrior: equipped with spear, shield & leather armour	2	1	0	0	5+	1	6	
Light Cavalryman: equipped with javelins	1	1	1	0	6+	1	5	Skirmisher
Medium Cavalryman: equipped with javelins, leather armour & sword	2	1	1	0	5+	2	8	
Crossbowman: equipped with crossbow	1	1	1	1	0	1	6	
Slinger: equipped with sling	1	1	1	1	0	1	4	Skirmisher

### SPECIAL RULES

- **Skirmisher:** Light Cavalrymen and Slingers use the skirmish line for break tests.





## SUGGESTED SCENARIOS

The following scenarios are suggested for the warband skirmish game. They are played for six turns or until some sudden death victory condition is achieved.

### PROGRESSION

Your warband is making a progression along the banks of a river that delineates your territory from that of the shower beyond in order to 'show the flag' to the peasantry, when you encounter a warband belonging to the aforesaid shower engaged in precisely the same thing. One thing leads to another and before long you are engaged in combat over who owns an old Roman bridge over the river. At the end of the game, victory goes to whichever side has the most models on the bridge.

Note that it needn't be a river or a bridge. Any delineated terrain feature will suffice, such as a defensive dyke, or a Roman villa or 'chester'.

### COUP D'ÉTAT

You are the exiled younger son of a cousin of the old king and your position and right to inherit has been usurped by your uncle's nephew who has seized the throne. You have done a deal with the clan who live in the next valley who will supply a warband to help you assassinate the nephew and resume your rightful place - in exchange for certain territorial concessions which, of course, you have no intention of honouring.

You achieve victory by killing the nephew. Your opponent wins by killing you. At that point, the game ends. The two

pretenders may not leave the battlefield. Nominate one model (not the commander and not a foederatus) on each side to represent the claimants. Terrain can be anything you like but a village or feasting hall would be appropriate.

### RAID

The kingdom at the end of the drover trail has acquired a golden effigy of Odin/ Conan/The Virgin Mary (delete as applicable) which has greatly enhanced the status of the king, and in doing so reduced your own reputation (all things are relative). You are resolved to acquire said idol to redress the balance.

The idol is held in a temple/church. Your warband attacks at dawn, expecting only to knock a few clerics on the head, but someone somewhere has leaked (you will deal with them later). The building is, in fact, guarded by a warband. You win by carrying the idol off the table. It is quite small and may be picked up by an adjacent model, who will drop the idol if killed. Your opponent wins by retaining the idol.

### TAKE BACK WHAT YOU SAID

The king in the next valley has been overheard declaring that you are no true king because your family is not descended from Odin/Magnentius/Conan but from his grandfather's pigman. Such an insult strikes right at the heart of your power and can only be repaid in blood.

Your commander must kill your opponent's commander to win and visa versa: the challenge has been issued. Any other result is a draw.



Vikings defend a recently seized settlement.





Charge! Romano-British cavalry attack.

## SKIRMISH RULES SUMMARY

- A model represents a single man.
- Models can turn to face any direction at any time.
- Unengaged models have a 1" zone of control.
- A model may not move within the zone of control of an unengaged enemy model unless it intends to charge it.
- A model may not move out of one enemy zone-of-control and into another.
- Models can make one move without orders.
- Commander and leader models can make up to three moves without orders.
- Apart from commanders and leaders, models or teams can be issued orders to move two or three times. If an order is failed, models or teams can still make one move unless the order is blundered.
- If an order is blundered a model or teams cannot move that turn – there is no other effect.
- Commanders can give orders regardless of distance and the usual leadership penalty applies for distance, but leaders can only give orders to models or teams within 12".
- Commanders and leaders can give orders either before or after they have moved, but not both.
- Models or teams, including commanders and leaders, can move in any sequence regardless of whether they are using an order to move or not.
- Models within 1" can be teamed together for purposes of being given orders at the same time.
- The 'open order' modifier does not apply to shooting or hand-to-hand fighting.
- Shooters must target the nearest enemy model.
- In hand-to-hand fighting, all models adjacent to an enemy model fight.
- In hand-to-hand fighting, roll a dice for each combatant to determine the order of striking.
- In hand-to-hand fighting 'flanking' modifiers do not apply.
- In hand-to-hand fighting, models that are outnumbered 2:1 or more suffer a -1 'to hit' penalty.
- In hand-to-hand fighting, if a model has multiple attacks and is facing two or more enemies it can divide its attacks as desired.
- A Sudden Death Victory is achieved by killing the opposing commander.





# HEPTARCHY: 600-800 AD

“The Mercians, under King Penda, made war on the East Angles; who, finding themselves inferior in martial affairs to their enemy, entreated Sigebert to go with them to battle, to encourage the soldiers... [Sigebert] would carry nothing in his hand but a wand, and was killed with King Ecgric; and the pagans pressing on, all their army was either slaughtered or scattered.”

Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*



Henry of Huntingdon, in his 12th century work the *Historia Anglorum*, invented the term Heptarchy to describe the period when Britain was divided into a number of small Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms – Heptarchy meaning that there were seven Saxon states, usually deemed to be East Anglia, Mercia, Northumbria, Wessex, Essex, Sussex and Kent. Modern historians regard this as rather too neat. We know of about 35 Anglo-Saxon kingdoms at various times, but the term still suffices for that stage in the political development of Britain between (i) when hierarchical social structures evolved into recognisable kingdoms and (ii) the disruption caused by the Viking invasions that led to the formation of the modern British nations.



## SAXON VERSUS CELT

By 600, ethnogenesis within Britain had consolidated identity of the inhabitants into two groups. The south and east were populated by culturally Germanic populations who later considered themselves to be Saxons, Angles or Jutes. They spoke west German dialects and appeared to have conserved little from Romanitas apart from military symbolism, notably in things like belt buckles and broaches, and they were primarily pagan.

The uplands of the north, west and southwest spoke Brythonic Celtic but also wrote in polished Latin, and in the



case of the elite may well have still spoken the language. They were still Christian, the Roman state religion. The gradual conversion of the Saxon kingdoms to Christianity did not work to create any particular bond. For one reason, the two churches (Celtic and Roman) displayed a fair degree of mutual antagonism so a Christian Celtic kingdom was quite happy to ally with Saxon pagans against Saxon Christians if demanded by *realpolitik*.

The various Saxon and Celtic kingdoms squabbled incessantly with their immediate neighbours and this

period should in no way be seen as a clash of cultures. A Saxon state was as likely to ally with a Celtic kingdom against a Saxon neighbour as visa versa. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms essentially gained the upper hand for reasons that are unclear, penning the Celts into the periphery of the island. Britain, throughout history, has been a story of two zones – the productive lowlands of the south and midlands, and the uplands – the flatlands dominating. In many ways it still is.

Troops of two Saxon kingdoms clash.







Saxon ships take to the sea.

## WESSEX

Whomsoever controls the productive flatlands of the south and east of Britain *ipso facto* has hegemony over all the British Isles – and Wessex controlled the flatlands south of the River Thames and River Avon. Wessex, the West Saxons, originated as an Anglo-Saxon farming cluster in the Upper Thames Valley between the Chiltern Hills, the Cotswolds, and the Berkshire Downs, during the late 6th century.

Wessex's original name seems to have been the Kingdom of the Gewisse, meaning something like 'The Reliable' in Old English, and some of its first 6th and 7th century kings are recorded with Brythonic Celtic names: the name of the legendary first King, Cerdic, is a variant of the Celtic Caraticos. It was possibly the Gewisse who fought a British army at the famous (but shrouded in mythology) Battle of Mons Badonicus, because the kingdom gradually spread into the West Country, presumably by gobbling up various British states, eventually completing the conquest of Dumnomia (Devon & Cornwall) in the 9th century.

Wessex also spread south, taking the kingdoms of Sussex, Kent and the Isle of Wight away from Mercia in the 9th century and ending the period of Mercian hegemony at the Battle of Elunden in around 825.

## MERCIA

Mercia controlled the lowlands to the north of the rivers Thames and Avon, the modern English Midlands. The name is derived from the Old English word for 'border people' possibly referring to the Welsh Marches. The origins of Mercia are obscure, but the kingdom was later centred on the Trent Valley with a royal seat at Tamworth, with the religious centre nearby at Lichfield: the famous Staffordshire Hoard was found buried in this area.

Mercia's first recorded king, Penda, defeated Cynegils and Cwichelm of Wessex, at the Battle of Cirencester in 628. This brought the minor kingdom of the Hwicce in the Severn Valley under Mercian control and sealed Wessex into the south. Penda of Mercia defeated Cenwalh of Wessex in 645, making Mercia the most powerful kingdom in Britain. The kingdom reached the height of its power under King Offa, he of the famous dyke on the Welsh border. Sussex, Kent, Essex and East Anglia all became Mercian tributaries and Offa cemented alliances with both Wessex and Northumbria through marriage links.

## NORTHUMBRIA

The kingdom of Northumbria was the third most important of the Anglo-Saxon states. It was created by the amalgamation of the smaller kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira in 604 under Æthelfrith. At its peak, the kingdom occupied all the east coast of Britain from the Humber to the Firth of Forth, and the west coast from the Mersey to Cumbria. Northumbria's fortunes waxed and waned even more so than those of Wessex and Mercia, but at one point King Oswiu killed King Penda at the Battle of Winwaed, gaining control of Mercia – at least for a while.

## EAST ANGLIA

Comprising of Norfolk and Suffolk, the kingdom coalesced early in the 6th century, possibly because of a continuous stream of migrants from, and contact with, the continent. The ruling royal family were the Wuffingas, the most notable of whom was Rædwald in the 7th century. He is the king most commonly associated with the ship burial at Sutton Hoo. His defeat of Æthelfrith of Northumbria in 616 made him the most powerful ruler in Britain. East Anglia was taken by the Danes in 869, becoming part of the Danelaw and hence part of England in 918.



## ESSEX

The kingdom of Essex occupied the land north of the Thames, from the modern county of Essex to Middlesex. The state formed in the 6th century. Mercia took over the land west of the modern county of Essex in the 8th century. For most of its history, Essex was subservient to Mercia, Wessex or East Anglia although it did briefly control Kent. In 825, Sigered ceded the kingdom to Egbert of Wessex, ending Essex's independence.

## KENT

The kingdom of Kent retained its ancient name from the Celtic Cantium (corner in English) via the Roman *civitas* name of Cantiaci. Similarly the modern name of Canterbury, the important Kent cathedral city, is derived from the Celtic via the Roman city name of Durovernum Cantiacorum.

Kent is thought likely to have been the source of the Hengist legends, although it is not clear to what century this story is supposed to refer, and it may have been home to Germanic *foederati*. This might explain the continuation of Latin place names in the county. The first recorded king, Æthelberht, created a powerful and wealthy kingdom. In the 8th century the kingdom was weakened by dynastic warfare and lost London to Mercia, which came to dominate the smaller kingdom.

Caedwalla of Wessex invaded Kent in 686 and 687 after the murder of his brother, ravaging the land. Peace with Wessex

was negotiated in 694 by the payment of suitable compensation to the Wessex royal line. Kent suffered grievously from Viking raids in the late 8th and 9th centuries. The kingdom followed the pattern of East Anglia in becoming subservient to Wessex in the 9th century and a province of England in the 10th.

## SUSSEX

The last of the 'official' Heptarchy, the kingdom of Sussex, was based on the Roman *civitas* of the Regnenses, the modern county of Sussex, separated to the north by the dense forest of the Andredsweald, now just known as the Weald. The coastline would have been extremely marshy compared to today. Droveys linked the coastal zone to summer pastures in The Weald. Germanic influence can be detected early in the 5th century in Sussex, possibly due to the presence of *foederati*, but Sussex only appears in written records from the period of the 7th century.

The exiled Prince Cædwalla (another Celtic-derived name – Cadwallon) ravaged Sussex in the 680s, killing King Æthelwealh. As King of Wessex, Cædwalla conquered Sussex and reduced the inhabitants to near slavery. Sussex broke away in the 8th century but was always subject to invasions from Wessex. In 771, King Offa conquered Wessex from Kent and it became a province of Mercia until Offa's death. In 827, Sussex was annexed by Wessex.





# THE MEN OF THE NORTH

## HEN OGLEDD

Hen Ogledd (the Old North) was a region of Britain encompassing what are now northern England and the southern Scottish lowlands whose inhabitants spoke a dialect of Brythonic Celtic called Cumbric. It was divided into a number of independent or semi-independent kingdoms, notably Elmet, Rheged, Gododdin and Strathclyde, but also Aeron, Calchfynydd, Eidyn, Lleuddiniawn, and Manaw.

The kingdom of Elmet was centred in what is now the West Riding of Yorkshire located between Mercia and Deira. King Gwallog of Elmet was apparently killed in battle after the collapse of the northern alliance against the Saxon kingdom of Bernicia. It was overrun and incorporated into Northumbria at Easter, 627. A recent genetic analysis apparently shows that the people of the West Riding still show distinct characteristics from the rest of Yorkshire. The realm was referred to by Bede as 'forested'.

Rheged was based in Cumbria and is associated with the Roman Civitas Carvetiorum (Carlisle). It was taken over by Northumbria in the early 8th century apparently peacefully as a result of long standing marriage links between the two royal families.

The people of Gododdin are thought to have been descendants of the Votadini and lived in what is now southeast Scotland and northeast England. They were decisively defeated by Saxons at the Battle of Catraeth, and in 638 Din Eidyn (Edinburgh) was besieged by Domnall Brecc, King of Dál Riata. The kingdom was incorporated into Northumbria in the late 8th century but seems to have been rebellious, a force of Gododdins sacking the Northumbrian monastery at Abercorn.

The last major Hen Ogledd kingdom was that of the Alt Clut, or the Kingdom of Strathclyde. Two battles are recorded in the 8th century, 711 and 717, between Strathclyde and Dál Riata – but where and why they were fought is unknown. King Óengus of the Picts attacked Strathclyde unsuccessfully on three occasions: 744, 750 and 756, the latter two campaigns in alliance with Eadberht of Northumbria. The last of these was disastrous for the Northumbrians who were ambushed and their army destroyed during the retreat.

## DÁL RIATA

This was a Gaelic maritime kingdom covering northeast Ireland and the western highlands of Scotland. Their



An army of Picts arrayed for battle.



most successful king, Áedán mac Gabráin, was beaten at the Battle of Degestan by King Æthelfrith of Saxon Bernicia. In the 7th century, after a disastrous defeat in Ireland, Dál Riata in Britain came under the overlordship of Northumbria.

## THE PICTS

The Pictish Confederation seems to have arisen in the late Roman era as one of the barbarian alliances created by contact with the Empire. It controlled all Scotland north of the Firth-Forth line, except for Dál Riata. The Picts fought a number of battles to check Northumbrian expansion, eventually breaking Northumbrian power north of the Forth at Nechtansmere.

Picti first occurs in a panegyric written by Eumenius in AD 297 and is the Roman name for the people: we don't know what they called themselves. It means 'painted', which could be just a poetic generic reference to 'wild Britons'.

The confederation was destroyed by the Vikings and the people absorbed into Gaelic Dál Riata as the Kingdom of Alba.



Men went to Catraeth, keen their war-band.  
Pale mead their portion, it was poison.  
Three hundred under orders to fight.  
And after celebration, silence.  
Though they went to churches for shriving,  
True is the tale, death confronted them.

Men went to Catraeth, mead-nourished band,  
Great the disgrace should I not praise them.  
With huge dark-socketed crimson spears,  
Stern and steadfast the battle-hounds fought.  
Of Brennych's band I'd hardly bear it  
Should I leave a single man alive.  
A comrade I lost, faithful I was,  
Keen in combat, leaving him grieves me.  
No desire had he for a dowry,  
Y Cian's young son, of Maen Gwyngwn.

Men went to Catraeth at dawn:  
All their fears had been put to flight.  
Three hundred clashed with ten thousand.  
They stained their spears ruddy with blood.  
He held firm, bravest in battle,  
Before Mynyddawg Mwynfawr's men.

Men went to Catraeth at dawn:  
Their high spirits lessened their life-spans.  
They drank mead, gold and sweet, ensnaring;  
For a year the minstrels were merry.  
Red their swords, let the blades remain  
Uncleansed, white shields and four-sided spearheads,  
Before Mynyddawg Mwynfawr's men.

*Y Gododdin, Book of Aneurin*



# CYMRY - THE MEN OF THE WEST



A bitter struggle on the banks of the river.

Cymry means countrymen, in the sense of 'our people' and refers to those who spoke Brythonic Celtic and shared the same culture. This region covers what is now the modern principality of Wales, the north of which is the last Brythonic Celtic speaking area of Britain, northern England and southern Scotland. It never coalesced into a single kingdom, possibly because of the unhelpful geography of Wales, but remained a patchwork of small British communities that became increasingly more hierarchical with time.

In the southwest, Cornwall retained much of its Celtic character and language (called Kernewek) until the 18th century but the Cornish are not considered Cymry. By the 20th century Cornwall was just another English county, although there have been various romantic efforts to reintroduce 'Cornishness' in the 21st.

The social structure of Wales was of kinship groups (clans) with hereditary slaves and tenant peasant farmers at the bottom and warrior aristocrats at the top. A person's position was therefore defined by their family relationships (*tud*) and social status (*braint*). The Welsh differed from the Gaels and the Saxons in this period in that Welsh people associated themselves with geographic location, rather than an association with a 'tribe' who happen to be living in some location at the time. This probably reflects a vestige of Roman culture absent from the Gaels and Saxons. Many of the Welsh petty kingdoms seem to have been based around local Roman administrative structures.

## GWYNEDD

The Kingdom of Gwynedd is located in north-west Wales and is the most significant of the Welsh successor states. This area was under Irish immigration in the Dominate. According to legend, the Irish were driven out by Cuneda of the Votadini, who migrated into the area with his people from Manaw Gododdin (the Firth of Forth) in the late Roman era or mid-5th century. Cuneda claimed descent from Padarn Beisrudd ('Paternus of the red cloak', i.e. a Roman officer). Whatever the truth, Gwynedd under the Cuneda dynasty had a distinctly Romano-British culture.

King Einion Yrth ap Cuneda recaptured Anglesey from the Irish by 470 and Cadwallon Lawhir ap Einion consolidated Gwynedd into the most powerful of the Welsh kingdoms. The fourth Cunedan King, Maelgwn Hir ('Maelgwn the Tall') was one of the five 'tyrants' castigated by Gildas. He is described by the censorious monk as the 'Dragon of the Island', i.e. British High King, and is otherwise famous for supporting the Celtic Church. While on the subject of Gildas, he also attacked Cuneglas of Gwynedd (whom Gildas described as a 'bear') who was not a king but certainly a member of a powerful aristocratic family. The reason why the five warlords in question were singled out for condemnation is unclear but it looks suspiciously like the rulers of Gwynedd and their power base of client kings.





Maelgwn's death in 547 created a power vacuum. His son, Rhun Hir ap Maelgwn, fought his son-in-law, Elidyr Mwynfawr of Strathclyde for the throne – the latter dying in battle – precipitating a war between Gwynedd and Strathclyde. In 613 (?), Rhun's grandson, King Iago ap Beli, with Powys allies was defeated by Northumbria (and possibly killed) at the Battle of Chester establishing the Welsh-English border in the north.

Gwynedd continued to exercise regional power on the island under the Cuneddan royal line. Cadwallon ap Cadfan returned from exile in Ireland to defeat a Mercian takeover of Dumnomia and then ally with Mercia against Gwynedd's old enemy of Northumbria, sacking York in 633 and being killed in a battle at Hadrian's Wall in 634.

In the 9th and 10th centuries Gwynedd suffered deadly Viking raids. The last Cuneddan king died in 825 to be replaced by a related royal lineage descended from Coel Hen. Rhodri the Great briefly united most of Wales, including the important state of Powys, but when he died in 878 the British habit of Balkanisation reasserted itself. The throne of Gwynedd became recognised as that of the High King and was fought over by many pretenders. Gruffydd ap Llywelyn of Powys seized the throne subduing most of the other Welsh kingdoms by 1055. He defeated English armies pushing the Welsh border eastwards until he was defeated by Harold Godwinson in 1063.

## POWYS

The Kingdom of Powys was an important Romano-British state based around the Roman city of Wroxeter. Viroconium Cornoviorum was the fourth largest city in Britannia and recent archaeological evidence suggests that it functioned to some degree as an urban centre well into the 6th century. Powys at its height was located in north-east Wales and the West Midlands of modern England. The name Powys is thought to have been derived from the Latin *pagus*, meaning countryside.

The Gwerthrynion royal line of Powys claimed to be descended from the legendary marriage of Vortigern and Sevia, the Emperor Magnus Maximus's daughter – and you don't get a better pedigree than that!

Æthelfrith of Northumbria defeated and killed Selyf ap Cynan of Powys at the Battle of Chester in 613. However the campaigns of Mercia and Gwynedd against Northumbria seem to have assisted Powys in pushing back, eventually fixing the border with England along Offa's Dyke. Offa mounted punitive raids into Powys in 760, 778, 784 and 796 but little of strategic importance resulted. Hywel Dda ('Hywel the Good') seized the throne in 942. He introduced a golden age, codifying Welsh laws, introducing coinage minted in Chester, going on a pilgrimage to Rome, and enjoying a close and cordial alliance with Æthelstan, King of England. Hywel's descendent, Gruffydd, briefly united most of Wales. In 1055, he beat Ralph the Timid, Earl of Hereford and sacked the city. He was driven off the throne by Tostig Godwinson in 1063.

## DYFED & DEHEUBARTH

The kingdom of Dyfed arose in the early 5th century in the south-west peninsula of Wales. This area had been under Irish influence in the Dominate and Gaelic seems to have been the primary language. Brythonic Celtic dominates from the 5th century onwards with inscriptions in Latin and Roman prestigious titles used by the ruling class. The Roman name for the people of this area was *Demetae*. The word Dyfed may have an association with sheep (as may the name of Devon). King Vortiporius of Dyfed is one of Gildas's five tyrants. Dyfed suffered from Viking raids from the 8th century onwards and, possibly as a result, sought the protection of Alfred the Great. Deheubarth never properly coalesced into a kingdom but was more a name for the region of South Wales in the 10th century with a single king, originally Hywel Dda. It consisted of Seisyllwg, Dyfed, and eventually Brycheiniog.

## GWENT

The Kingdom of Gwent seems to have been derived from the Silures of south-east Wales. In 931 Morgan Hen (Morgan ab Owain) of Gwent became the liege of Athelstan. Gwent was invaded by King Canute in 1034 and the future King Harold Godwinson in 1065.



# THE VIKING ERA: 800-1000 AD

By 800 AD, England had settled down into three regional powers – Wessex, Mercia and Northumbria – controlling to a greater or lesser extent a number of smaller kingdoms like Kent or East Anglia. A military stalemate ensued, suggesting that this political fragmentation could have continued into the High Medieval Era despite the increasing coalescence of an ‘English’ culture.

This changed in 789, with a seemingly minor event. Three boats of traders from Hordaland in what is now Norway arrived on the south coast of Wessex at Weymouth Bay. The royal shire-reeve (sheriff) from Dorchester went down to collect such Royal customs as were due and was promptly murdered: the Vikings had arrived. Subsequently, in 792, Offa of Mercia was required to create defences against pagan sea-raiders on the shores of Kent.

Then the Vikings discovered wealthy, unguarded, religious institutions conveniently located in maritime regions of Britain. Lindisfarne was raided in 793, Monkwearmouth-Jarrow Abbey in 794, and Iona in 794, 802 and 806. In 840

a Viking warband defeated an army of Wessex at Carhampton. In 843, a huge raiding force of 350 ships (if you believe the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle) landed in Kent, defeating a royal Mercian army commanded by their king, Beorhtwulf. But they were subsequently massacred by an army of West Saxons who were also led by their king, Aethelwulf, at ‘Oak Field’ in Surrey. But remember that the Chronicle is Wessex propaganda.

The danger worsened considerably when bands of Viking adventurers began to overwinter in Kent, on the Isle of Thanet in 850 and 864 and on the Isle of Sheppey in 854. Such bandit camps would act as a magnet for other freebooters and disgruntled locals.

The Great Heathen Army, a large group of warbands under independent leaders, landed in East Anglia in 865. It went on to capture Northumbria, Mercia and almost Wessex, finally being stopped by Alfred the Great at the Battle of Edington in 878. England was divided into greater Wessex, the last Anglo-Saxon kingdom standing, and Viking-controlled territory.





The Vikings were pushed back by the reorganised army of Wessex, which went on to win The Great Battle of Brunanburh, in 937, establishing Æthelstan as King of England. A new Viking invasion came in 947, led by Eric Bloodaxe, who went on to become King of Northumbria. York was bitterly fought over by Saxon, Irish Norse, and Norwegians in the 10th century.

In 1013, King Sweyn Forkbeard of Denmark started a ten year war which culminated in him being crowned King of England. When he died in 1014, Edmund Ironside of Wessex seized the throne back only to lose it to Sweyn's son, Cnut (Canute), in 1016. Danish Kings ruled England, but which Dane ruled depended on the support of powerful Wessex earls, like the Godwin clan.



“The brother of Ivar and Halfdan landed in Wessex, in Devonshire, with 23 ships, and there was he slain, and 800 men with him, and 40 of his army. There also was taken the war-flag which they called Raven.”

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*



A Viking raiding party ready to board their longships and sail West.



# DARK AGES SPECIAL RULES



To the victors belong the spoils.

## GENERAL

Players should dice to see who goes first if there are no scenario instructions. This order is then maintained for every turn.

The battles last for at least five turns, or until an army is defeated. At the end of the fifth turn one of the players rolls a dice: on a 3+ the game continues for a sixth turn. At the end of the sixth turn roll again: on a 5+ the game continues for a seventh turn. Victory is decided in the usual way.

Note that some Warlord special abilities could result in historical battles changing 'shape' considerably. It is up to players whether they wish to ignore such special abilities for an historical scenario.

Armies in this period were still to some degree warbands led by warlords, rather than the organised military forces of the Classical or High Medieval worlds. The new army lists below are designed to reflect this, but players may prefer to use the original *Hail Caesar* lists.

## GENERAL RULES

Divisions must contain at least four non-skirmisher units. Each division must be led by a commander. The 'Royal' division must be led by the General (King).

Unless otherwise specified in the scenario, divisional and junior allied generals are valued with a leadership of 7, reflecting Dark Age warrior indiscipline, and a fighting value of 2. Generals (kings), including the general of the primary force in an allied army, in scenarios that have no other special rules, are always leadership 8 and fighting value 2.

Although the low leadership values do reflect the poor command control of Dark Age armies they can slow the game down. This is demonstrated by the way some very dodgy command rolls had a serious influence on how events unfolded in the Battle of Ashdown play-through later in this book. Players may wish to speed up their games by bumping up every leadership value in this book by +1.

## HEROIC LEADERSHIP

Dark Age command was more about heroic leadership than tactical generalship so included here are some useful, but completely optional, rules changes.

Commanders must be attached to a unit in their division at the start of the game and they stay with this unit for the entire game until either they are killed or it is destroyed. Commanders move along with their units in the command part of the turn and can issue orders to other units within their division both before and after they move in this way. Moving along with a unit in the command part of the turn does not compromise a commander's ability to move away from the unit subsequently if it is destroyed.

The player must test to see if the general is killed or wounded if the unit to which he is attached is shattered. He must be immediately attached to another unit in his division should he survive.

A wounded commander that receives an additional wound has to pass a 4+ dice test or he is killed.

'If a follow me' order is failed, the unit may still make a 'free move' unless a 'blunder' is rolled (Note that Blunder





Moves always take precedence): the unit making one move as the player wishes together with its commander.

A commander may still attempt to rally a unit within 12" but he stays attached to his original unit and is not placed with the 'rallied' unit.

Dark Age troop loyalties were about kinship and personal oaths and obligations between the leader and the led rather than nationalism, so every unit in the army must take an immediate break test if the general is killed. Apply the results from the ranged attacks line for units not engaged in hand-to-hand combat, and from the hand-to-hand combat line for units so engaged. Similarly, every unit in a division must take an immediate break test if the divisional commander is killed. These tests interrupt the normal flow of play and the results are applied immediately.

## HILL-FORTS

Hill-forts are treated as buildings and all the rules in *Hail Caesar* pertaining to buildings can be applied to hill-forts. They are summarised here for convenience but players should consult the *Hail Caesar* rulebook for more comprehensive explanations.

- Units in hill-forts ignore all break test results of 'Retreat' or 'Gives Ground', which are converted to 'Hold Your Ground', although 'Disordered' results still apply.
- Victors may move into a hill-fort and occupy it after combat only when the garrison has been broken and destroyed.
- Note that only infantry can enter or assault hill-forts.
- Assume the garrison is spread along the defences.
- It takes one move to enter or leave a hill-fort, and it can be to or from any face – gates are just modelled for show.
- Units can charge out of a hill-fort if they can reach an enemy unit.

- Units garrisoning hill-forts are limited to a maximum of two dice from any face in ranged combat, up to their total maximum value.
- Units garrisoning hill-forts get +2 to their morale value.
- Note that an attacker is fighting 'uphill' against a defender garrisoning a hill-fort, so the latter gets a +1 bonus on his 'to hit' modifier for hand-to-hand combat.

## FORTIFIED LINE

- Units defending a fortified line ignore all break test results of 'Retreat' or 'Gives Ground', which are converted to 'Hold Your Ground', although 'Disordered' results still apply.
- Victors may move across a defended part of the fortified line after combat only when the garrison has been broken and destroyed.
- Note that only infantry can defend or assault a fortified line.
- An undefended section of fortified line is a linear obstacle for movement purposes.
- Units defending the fortified line get +2 to their morale value.
- Note that an attacker is fighting 'uphill' against a unit defending the fortified line.

## MARSHES

Marshes are Rough Ground for purposes of movement. Units 'Giving Ground' after hand-to-hand combat across a marshy area must be tested by an additional die roll and are destroyed on a 4+.

Note that many Dark Age battles in Britain were fought near rivers and these were quite different from the straightened, canalised, water-extracted excuses that we have for rivers in modern Britain. Extensive flood plains with semi-permanent marshy areas would have been a feature of the landscape.



Saxon ceorls



## WARRIORS IN COLUMNS

These rules are given in full in the *Hail Caesar* rulebook but are summarised here for convenience.

- Units in column move once if they fail an order.
- Units in column cannot charge the enemy. They must be given an order to reform into a fighting formation before charging. (Hint: remember Division Orders.)
- Units in column cannot move to join an engagement as a support.
- Units in column cannot make ranged attacks.
- Units in column have a combat value of one die regardless of their size.
- Units in column deduct 2 from their morale value.

## SHIELDWALL

The shieldwall is a classic pre-firearm heavy infantry tactic that probably goes right back to the Bronze Age. In a shieldwall, the infantry assume a formation that packs tight shoulder to shoulder so that the entire fighting line is protected by a wall of contiguous shields.

A shieldwall offered increased protection, both physical and psychological, the latter being particularly valuable for inexperienced militia soldiers. However such a militia would have had to have received a degree of military training to form and hold a shieldwall formation in the face of the enemy.

The disadvantage of forming a shieldwall is that it is an essentially defensive strategy. Warriors in a shieldwall are less mobile and, indeed, generally less flexible in combat. Also, as part of this inflexibility, a force is likely to disintegrate into a routed mob if its shieldwall is breached.

It takes a complete move while stationary for units to form shieldwalls: i.e. it is a formation change as in the *Hail Caesar* core rulebook.

Units may come out of shieldwall formation without movement penalty at the start of their movement turn.

Units in shieldwall:

- move at half speed;
- deduct 1 from their combat values;
- add 1 to a morale roll;
- add 1 to any break test dice roll resulting from hand-to-hand combat.

Note: these rules replace the Close Ranks Rule, in the *Hail Caesar* core rulebook.



## RELIGION

An army is either pagan or Christian. If it is led by a named general it is assumed to be the same religion as the general. If the general can be either pagan or Christian then the owning player gets to choose his religious alignment. In an allied force, the religious alignment of the whole army is considered to be the same as the primary ally.

An army may carry an appropriate religious icon which must be attached to a division and a unit in that division. This may be the same unit as the general's if the player so wishes. If the unit is destroyed then roll a die: on a 4+ the icon escapes the massacre and is moved to another unit in the same division. Otherwise it is captured by the enemy.

Icons are free and do not have to be used, but only one may be chosen per army.

### RAVEN BANNER (PAGAN)

The raven is the bird of blood, corpses and battle. It is a symbol of warfare and harsh justice on the undeserving for





A Saxon army ready to defend their homeland.

Odin is the Raven God and two of the birds, Huginn and Muninn, perch on his shoulders. The banner is the symbol of victory but if it hangs limp in the wind it is a harbinger of defeat.

**Rule:** Once per turn, a unit in a division flying the Raven Banner may re-roll failed attack dice (does not apply to the attacks added by an attached commander, so roll these dice separately).

#### RING OF THOR (PAGAN)

A large gold ring without ostentatious embellishment, Thor's Ring is worn by pagan chieftains on the arm when they preside over assemblies. It is used for swearing oaths and in battle is believed to give the wearer the strength of Thor.

**Rule:** The ring must be worn by a commander who may re-roll his own failed attack dice, so roll these attack dice separately when fighting. In addition, the player can re-roll any test to check whether the commander is wounded or killed.

#### PIECE OF THE TRUE CROSS (CHRISTIAN)

According to tradition, the Christian Empress St Helen found the True Cross in Jerusalem in 320. The Cross was gradually broken into smaller fragments as Constantinople repeatedly changed hands. One splinter made its way to Britain via Rome.

**Rule:** Once per turn a unit in a division carrying the splinter of the True Cross may re-roll a break test.

#### THE SHIN BONE OF ST COLUMN (CHRISTIAN)

Sacred Relics are items associated with a saint but only the bones of the saint themselves are considered to be first class. In theory a saint's remains should be venerated, not dismembered and certainly not have odd bits paraded on the battlefield, but needs must...

**Rule:** Once per turn a unit in a division carrying the Shin Bone of St Column may re-roll any failed morale saves during hand-to-hand fighting.



# CAMPAIGN RULES

The battles may be strung together for a narrative campaign. Players may play as many or as few battles as they choose. When the campaign is over total up the campaign points and the player who has the most has won the campaign. If one player has more than twice as many campaign points as his opponent, they may consider themselves to be Bretwalda of the Island of Britain.

Campaign points are awarded as follows:

- **For defeating the enemy army:** 5 points (+2 if the king/general is of the opposing religious faction)
- **For killing the enemy king/general:** 5 points (+2 if the king/general is of the opposing religious faction)
- **For each enemy divisional commander killed:** 1 point
- **For each enemy division broken:** 3 points
- **For capturing the enemy's religious icon:** 5 points
- **Special points awarded (if any):** as described in specific scenarios

**“There was  
great slaughter at  
Woden’s hill,  
and Ceawlin was  
driven out.”**

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*



Note religious factions are Christian and pagan.

Where an army consists of two or more independent allies then one is considered to be the primary force and must consist of more points than allied forces. For purposes of campaign victory points all the allied forces have to be defeated to gain the five points. Generals in command of the lesser allied forces are only worth 1 point, not 5.



To arms! A Viking raid catches their Saxon foes unawares.



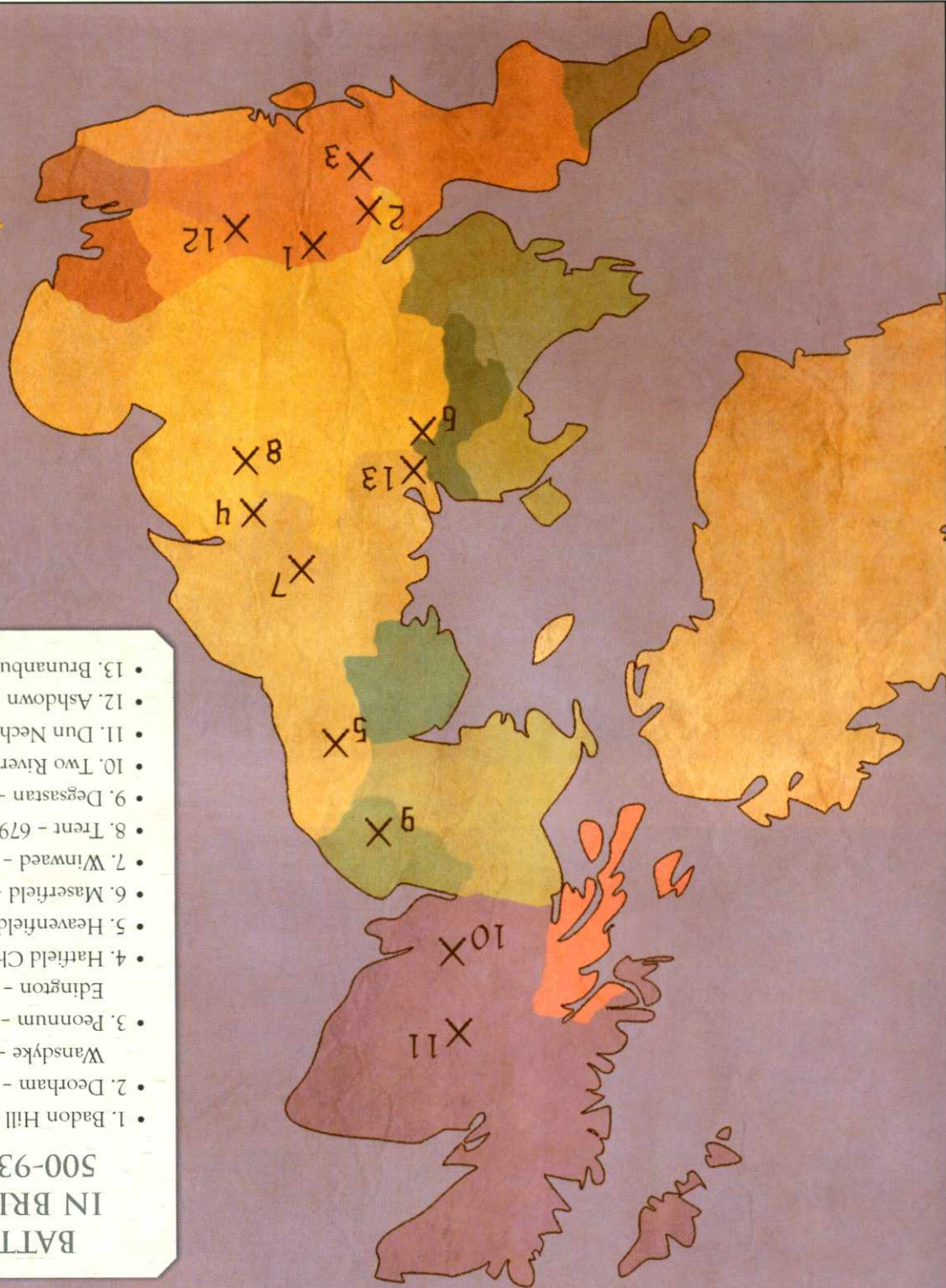
We have depressingly little detail to go on when trying to wargame the battles of the 7th and 8th centuries, and such information as we have is tarnished by the political and religious objectives of the later scribes that recorded it.

We sometimes know (i) the name of the kings leading the armies; (ii) the name of the kingdom(s) from which they drew

The scenario descriptions described in this book are often speculative to a lesser or greater extent.

## BATTLES IN BRITAIN 500-937 AD

- 1. Badon Hill - c.500 AD
- 2. Deorham - 577 AD
- 3. Peonnum - 652 AD
- 4. Hatfield Chase - 633 AD
- 5. Heavenfield - 634 AD
- 6. Maserfield - 642 AD
- 7. Winwæd - 654/655 AD
- 8. Trent - 679 AD
- 9. Degsastan - 603 AD
- 10. Two Rivers - 671 AD
- 11. Dun Nechtain - 685 AD
- 12. Ashdown - 871 AD
- 13. Brunanburh - 937 AD





# BATTLE OF BADON HILL: c.500 AD

The first battle that the kingdom later known as Wessex may have participated in is the Battle of Badon Hill, which probably occurred around 500AD between the British and Saxons – the British winning. It was probably fought somewhere in the eastern West Country and has become associated in later mythos with the legendary and probably mythical King Arthur. Here, we set it at Little Solsbury hill-fort, which is as good a choice of location as any. In 556 the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records a battle between Wessex and the Britons at Beran byrg, where the victorious Saxon army was led by King Cynric and his son Ceawlin. Beran byrg is possibly Barbury Castle (hill-fort) near Swindon. Maybe this was the rematch.

## TERRAIN

As on map. Note that the River Avon is impassable. The streams count as linear obstacles to normal movement but are classed as impassable to a unit giving ground.

## ARMIES

### Early Saxon

The Saxon army sets up on the eastern side of Little Solsbury hill-fort at the bottom of the hill as shown on the map. Ceawlin leads the army.

### British

One British division may be set up in and around the hill-fort; only two units may be actually in the fort. The others must be set up to the west of the hillfort, at least 12" from an

"The citizens were sometimes victorious, sometimes the enemy, in order that the Lord, according to His wont, might try in this nation the Israel of to-day, whether it loves Him or not. This continued up to the year of the siege of Badon Hill and of almost the last great slaughter inflicted upon the rascally crew."

*Gildas, De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*

enemy unit. At the players' discretion, the British general may be called Arthur and given a leadership of 10 and a fighting value of 4.

## SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

Little Solsbury is a hill-fort and the special rules apply.

## SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

When the game ends, if only one player has a unit(s) inside the hill-fort then they are awarded an additional three campaign points.



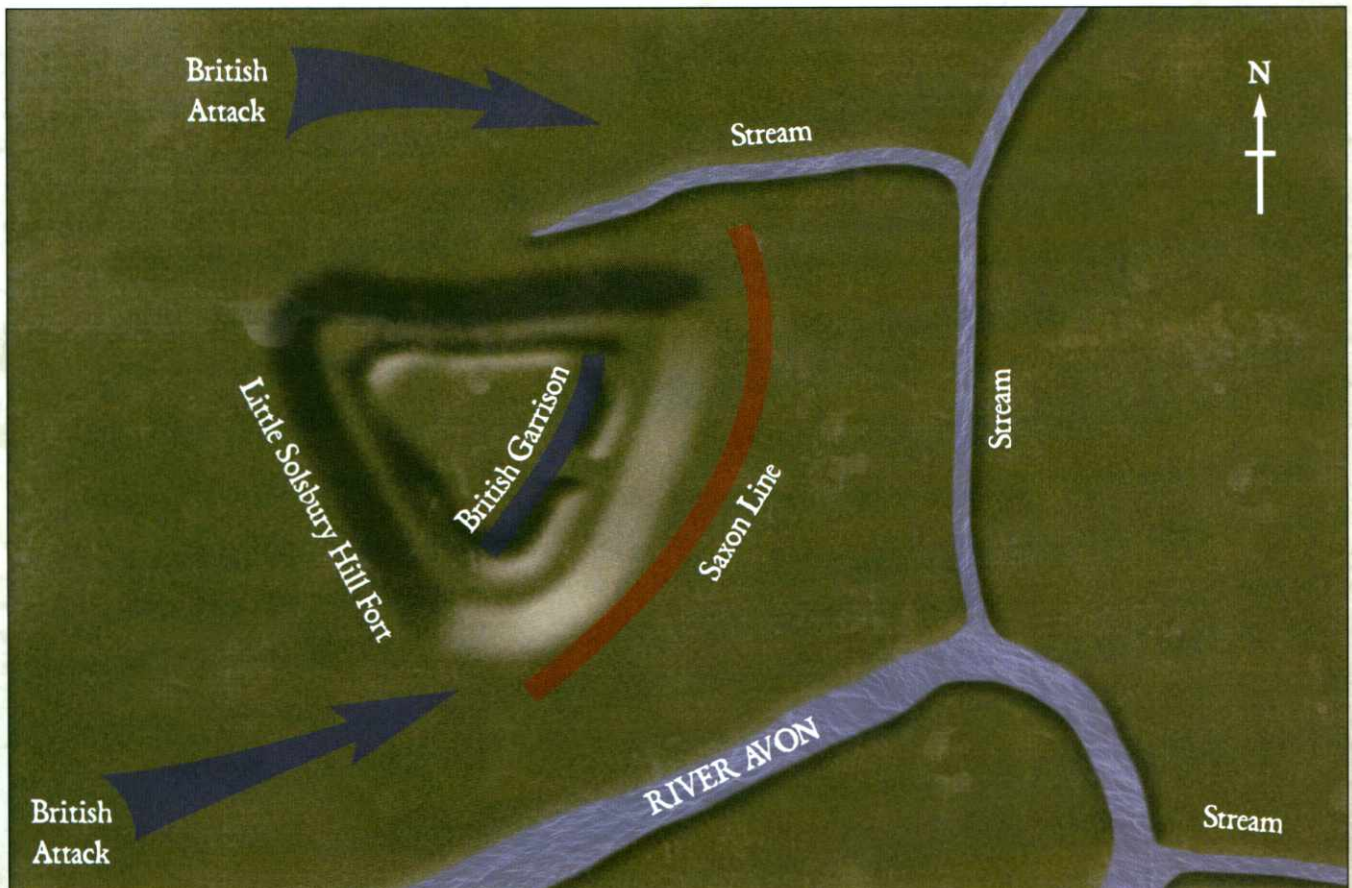
King Arthur sallies forth from his hill-fort.



## EXPANSION OF WESSEX



Saxon archers find themselves unexpectedly in the frontlines.





# BATTLE OF DEORHAM: 577 AD

Ceawlin (with Cutha) is then recorded as campaigning against Æthelberht of Kent, defeating him at Wibbandun and killing two Kentish ealdormen, Oslaf and Cnebba. After securing their rear, the West Saxons returned to campaigning in the west, Cuthwulf capturing four towns, Limbury, Aylesbury, Benson and Eynsham, after a victory in 571 at Bedcanford – exact location unknown. One suggestion is that these campaigns in the west recovered the land lost after Badon Hill, giving Wessex a springboard for further invasion of British territory. This came in 577, with the Deorham campaign.

The Battle of Deorham is presumed to have taken place near Dyrham in South Gloucestershire. King Ceawlin of Wessex accompanied by Cuthwine led an army out of the West Saxon stronghold in the upper Thames valley, then over the Cotswolds into the lower Severn valley. This productive area was a Romano-British stronghold that seems to have consisted of three separate communities based around the Roman cities of Corinium (Cirencester), Glevum (Gloucester), and Aquae Sulis (Bath). Archaeology suggests that many of the villa complexes situated around these cities were still – to a greater or lesser extent – going concerns at this time. The British armies were led by Condidan, Commagil, and Farinmagil, respectively.

The following recreation is largely drawn from AH Burne. I should add that it is simply a possible description based on the assumption of where the battle took place. It seems likely that the British armies combined and waited for the Saxons at a defensible spot. Assuming the West Saxon army was advancing west along what is now the Cotswolds Way then Hilton Hill Camp is the most likely spot in the Dyrham area for the British to make their stand. It is a triangular, univallate, Iron Age hill-fort situated on a spur overlooking the valley of the River Boyd to the west. A gateway was situated through the 2.4 metre high rampart on the east side of the fort.

Burne walked the area and noted two small ridges between the fort and where the A46, the Bath Road, is now. These ridges are simplified into a single structure on the battle map. He suggested that the British would have formed a line on the most easterly and largest ridge, with a view of falling back into the safety of the hill-fort if pressed. In any event, the result was an utter disaster for the Romano-British with all three kings killed. This suggests that the British army was surrounded and almost completely destroyed, explaining why the battle was so decisive. Any conclusion as to whether the British were enveloped on the ridge, or their army disintegrated in the retreat, or they made their last stand inside the hillfort, is entirely speculative – but destroyed they were.

The whole area passed into the control of Wessex, including the three 'chesters' and their satellite villas. The West Wansdyke (Wodin's Dyke) became the new border. As this fortified line, an earthwork with stone or timber revetment, faced the Saxon zone it is possible it was constructed at this time – but it could have been a Roman dyke that made a convenient place for the British to hold.

King Ceawlin and Cutha's last recorded battle against the British was in 584 at Fethan Leag, which is identified with the village of Stoke Lyne (Fethelée), near Bicester just north of Oxford. Bicester was a crossroads of two Roman roads and there was a Saxon settlement there in the 6th century. The Chronicle records it as a great victory but Cutha was killed and Ceawlin "in anger ... turned back to his own." Given that the Chronicle is Wessex propaganda one may wonder who really won this encounter.

In 592, Ceawlin was defeated by persons unknown (possibly Wessex political rivals) in a 'great slaughter' at Woden's Burrow (Adam's Grave, at Alton Priors, Wiltshire) and driven off the throne. He died the following year.

## Hinton Hill Camp

Severn Valley

Severn Valley

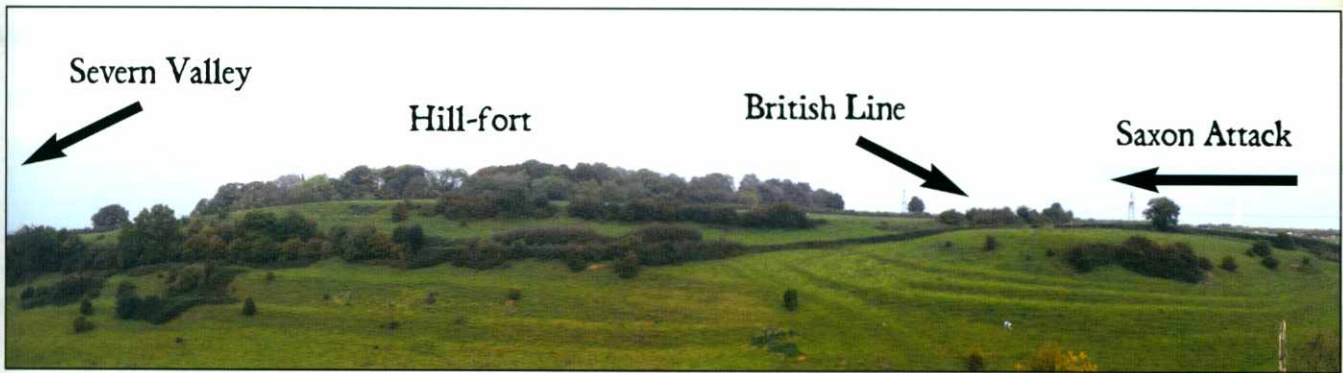
Second Ridge

First Ridge

The approach to Hilton hill-fort from the east: the two low ridges identified by AH Burne as suitable defensive locations for the British line can clearly be seen. They are concatenated into a single ridge on the scenario battle map. Note that the hill-fort is now overgrown by trees which would not have been present at the time of the battle. Photograph by the author.



## EXPANSION OF WESSEX



Hinton hill-fort from the south. The fort stands on the end of a peninsula projecting over the rich Severn Valley to the west. It is protected by steep slopes to the south, west and north offering no escape from an army attacking from the east. The hill-fort made a visible meeting point for the three British armies and was suitable as a camp, but was not itself defensible from the east. Photograph by the author.

### TERRAIN

As on map.

### ARMIES

#### Early Saxon

The Saxon army sets up on the eastern side of the ridge as shown on the map. Ceawlin must lead the army.

The Saxon army sets up second but has the first turn.

#### British

The British army sets up on the ridge before the Saxon army is set up. One British division may be placed on and around Hinton Hill Camp.

### SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

Hinton Camp is a hill-fort and the special rules apply.

A unit on top of the ridge is considered to be 'uphill' when attacked and so receives a +1 hand-to-hand 'to hit' modifier

### SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

When the game ends, if only one player has a unit(s) inside the hillfort then they are awarded an additional three campaign points.





# BREAKING THE WANSDYKE LINE

The history of the expansion of Wessex in the 7th century is one of success against the South Saxons and British, set against increasing pressure from Mercia. This is perhaps the era when Wessex ceased being a loose confederation led by the Kings of Gewisse and coalesced into a single political entity. The first recorded battle is that of King Ceolwulf against the South Saxons in 607, possibly for control of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

An entry in the Chronicle for 614 records that Cynegils and Cwichelm fought the British, supposedly killing 2,066 – a suspiciously exact number – at the Battle of Beandun, which may be Bindon in east Devon. If so this battle marked the final Anglicisation of much of the West Country. According to Bede, Cwichelm ordered the failed assassination of King Edwin of Northumbria in 626 for reasons unknown.

The major event of this century was the attack on the Severn Valley by Penda of Mercia in 628. He defeated Cynegils and Cwichelm at the Battle of Cirencester, taking possession of the territory of the Hwicce from Wessex. This strategically important defeat by their main rival sealed Wessex into the south.

In 652, Cenwalh of Wessex (note Cenwalh may be a British name) resumed the push for the Bristol Channel, breaking through the Wansdyke line with the British near the old Roman town of Bradford upon Avon. This may

have broken a treaty with Mercia arrived at after the Battle of Cirencester as around this time Cenwalh abandoned his wife, who happened to be Penda's sister. Wessex seems to have been in an anti-Mercian alliance with Northumbria as the two northern Saxon powers were at war. Penda, who was understandably miffed at his sister being treated so cavalierly, responded by driving Cenwalh into exile in East Anglia.

## TERRAIN

As on map.

## ARMIES

### Early Saxon

The Saxon army sets up at least 12" south of the Wansdyke. Cenwalh must lead the army.

### British

British divisions may be placed along the Wansdyke, with infantry defending and cavalry behind. Divisions may also be placed in reserve up to 12" north of the dyke.

## SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

The Wansdyke is a fortified line and the special rules apply.

## SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

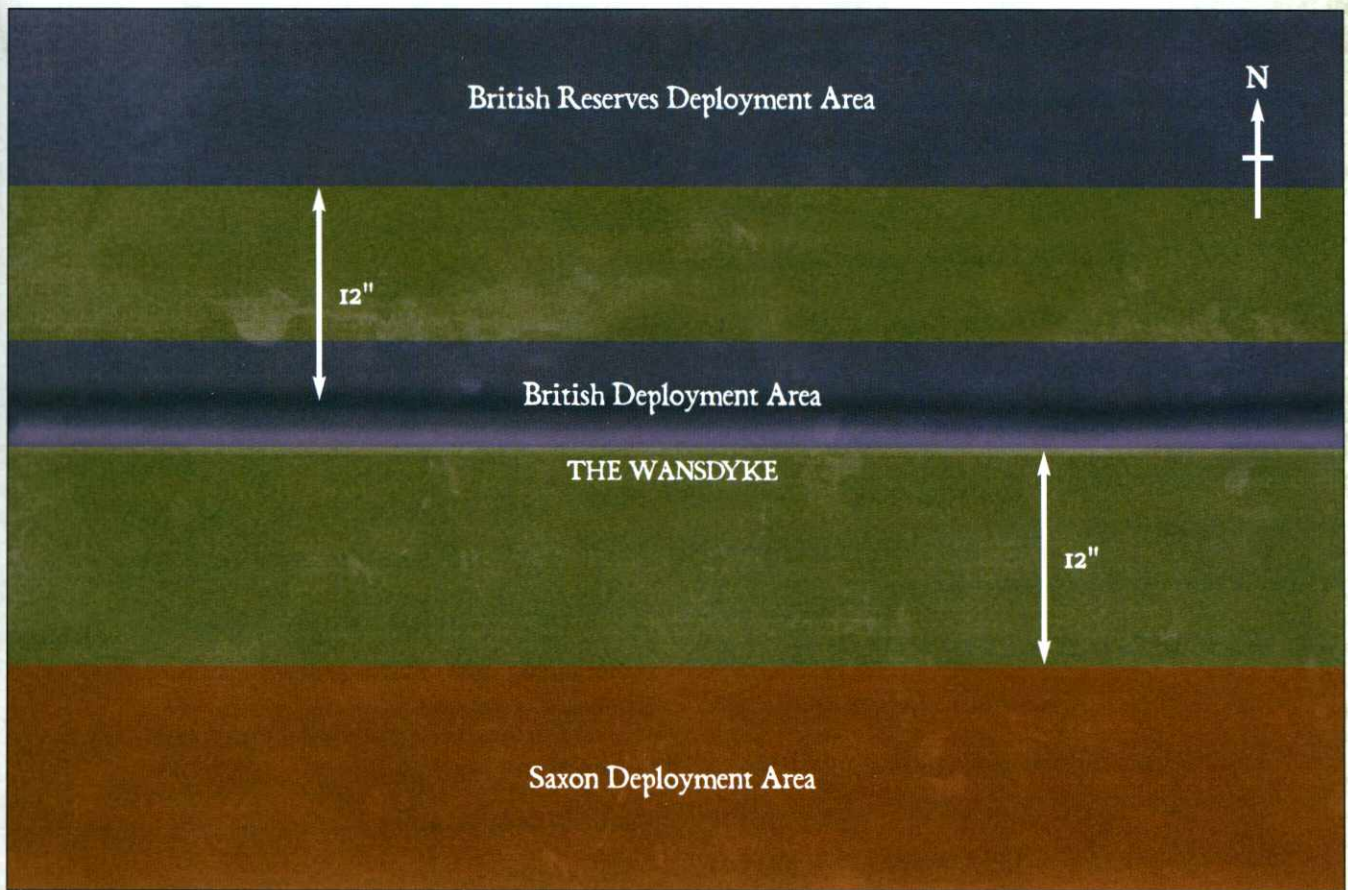
If neither army has broken when the game ends, then the player with the most unshaken units north of the dyke is awarded an additional three campaign points.



A British army advances.



## EXPANSION OF WESSEX





# BATTLE OF PEONNUM: 658 AD

Cenwalh returned from exile, possibly after Penda died at the Battle of Winwaed with Northumbria in 655. In 658 he resumed his attack on the British. Cenwalh won a major victory at Peonnum, possibly at Kenwalch's Castle (i.e. Cenwalch's Castle) at Penselwood near Wincanton, capturing lands as far west as the River Parrett including Glastonbury Abbey. Kenwalch's Castle is a four-acre, univallate Iron Age hill-fort now with a two metre ditch and two metre high bank. It seems to have been refitted at some time by the Roman army (or Romano-British?).

By 661 Penda's son, Wulfhere, had consolidated his position sufficiently to drive south into Wessex as far as the Isle of Wight. The Mercian Frithuwold was appointed to rule Surrey and parts of Hampshire were given to the South Saxons. The promotion of Winchester (Wintancestir) as the Wessex capital may date from this time. Around this time Mercia also gained control of the rich trading city of Lundenwic (London).

Cenwalh died in 672, to be succeeded by his wife, Seaxburgh. After her short reign of a few years, Wessex broke up into rule by sub-kings, the most important of which was Æscwine who defeated an invasion of Wessex led by the Mercian King Wulfhere at Biedanheafde (location unknown), in 675.

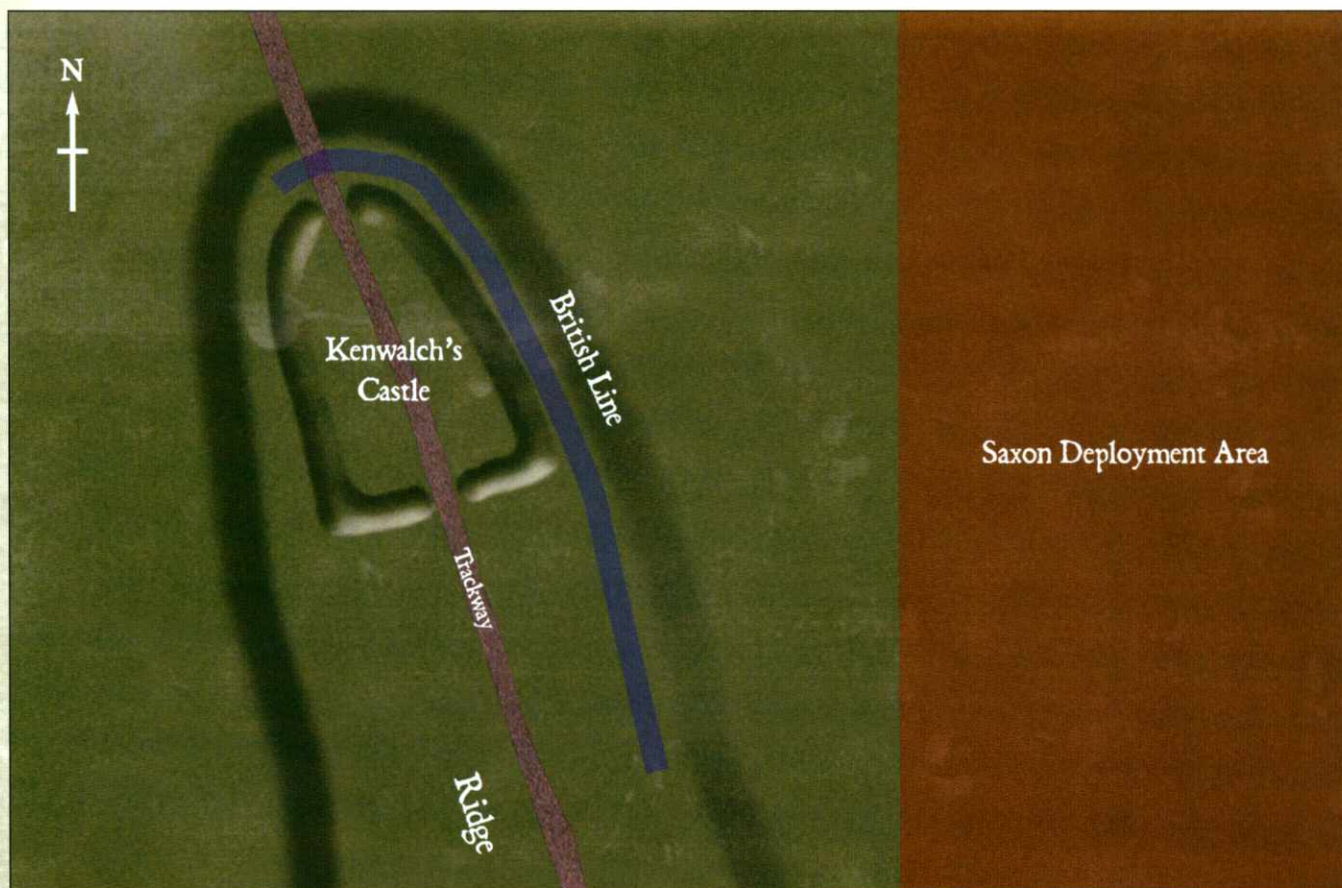
By the end of the century, the exiled aethling (prince) Cædwalla, took control of Wessex after a meteoric rise and

"[Cenwalh] refused to embrace the mysteries of the faith, and of the heavenly kingdom; and not long after also he lost the dominion of his earthly kingdom; for he put away the sister of Penda, king of the Mercians, whom he had married, and took another wife; whereupon a war ensuing, he was by him expelled his kingdom..."

Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*



fall as King of Sussex: note that Cædwalla is another British Celtic-derived name. In a series of campaigns he took back Wessex's eastern territories from the Mercians, turned Kent into a client kingdom, massacred Isle of Wight pagans (the last pagan Saxons), abdicated and died in Rome after being baptised by Pope Sergius I – there's a novel in there somewhere! He was buried as 'the King of the Saxons': Wessex had arrived.





## EXPANSION OF WESSEX



British spearmen make their move.

### TERRAIN

As on map.

### ARMIES

#### Early Saxon

The Saxon army sets up on the eastern side of the ridge as shown on the map, after the British army has set up, but goes first. Cenwalh must lead the army.

#### British

The British army sets up on the ridge. One British Division may be placed on and around Kenwalch Castle. The fort sits

on a ridge which extends in front of it and to the south. A unit at the top of the ridge attacked from below is considered to be 'uphill' when attacked and so receives a +1 hand-to-hand 'to hit' modifier

### SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

Kenwalch Castle is a hill-fort and the special rules apply.

### SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

When the game ends, if one player only has a unit(s) inside the hill-fort then they are awarded an additional three campaign points.



"It's over, Saxons! We hold the higher ground!"



# HATFIELD CHASE: 633 AD

## MERCIA & GWYNEDD VERSUS NORTHUMBRIA

When the Saxon kingdoms reached a certain size it became extremely difficult for one state to 'gobble up' another. This is exemplified by the long struggle between Mercia and Northumbria for control of middle Britain. The early to mid-7th century saw a power struggle between Northumbria, and the alliance of Mercia and Gwynedd. The roots of the conflict appear to go back to an invasion of northern Wales by Edwin in which he captured the 'Mevanian Islands', including Anglesey. Edwin overreached himself and Cadwallon recovered and drove him back into Northumbria.

A vengeful Cadwallon formed an alliance with Penda of Mercia, who must also have perceived Edwin as a threat.



At the time of the Battle of Hatfield Chase (Meigen in Old Welsh), King Edwin of Northumbria was the most significant king in Britain. The battle occurred because Penda and Cadwallon invaded Northumbria, presumably to curtail Northumbrian power.

The armies met at a marshy location on the south bank of the River Don, a few miles northeast of Doncaster, which Bede called Haethfelth. There the road from York passed through a narrow gap flanked by marshes and the river. The suggestion is that Edwin was ambushed and his army destroyed by being forced back into the river in a manner similar to Hannibal's victory over the Romans at Lake Trasimene. Note that the modern terrain bears no resemblance to the traditional watercourses due to drainage.

Edwin was killed, leading to the breakup of Northumbria back into Bernicia and Deira. Penda and Cadwallon must have considered that the objective had been achieved but Cadwallon, in particular, could not resist ravaging Northumbria and destabilising the new regional sub-kings.

### TERRAIN

As on map. Note that the River Don is impassable. The Torse counts as a linear obstacle to normal movement but is classed as impassable to a unit giving ground.



Gwynedd's troops in tight formation.



## MERCIA & GWYNEDD VERSUS NORTHUMBRIA

### ARMIES

#### Northumbrian (use Early Saxon list)

The Northumbrian army sets up along the south bank of the River Don and all the units are in column, marching from east to west. The general must be Edwin.

#### Allies

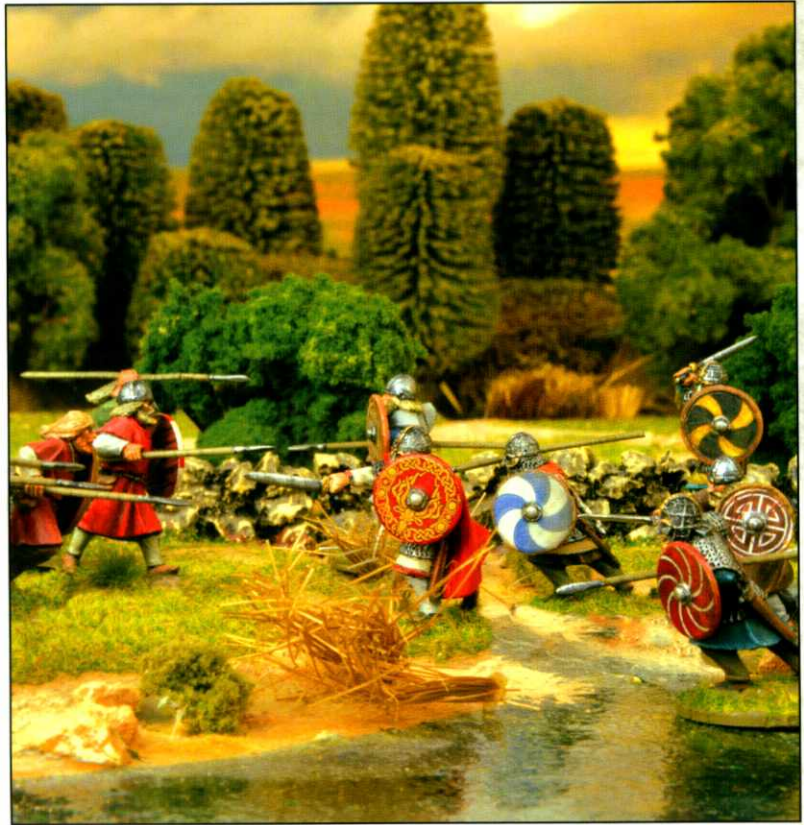
The allied armies set up to the west of the marshy area, at least 18" from the Northumbrians. Use the Early Saxon list for the Mercians, led by Penda, and the British list for the army of Gwynedd, led by Cadwallon. One must be chosen as the primary ally, player's choice.

### SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

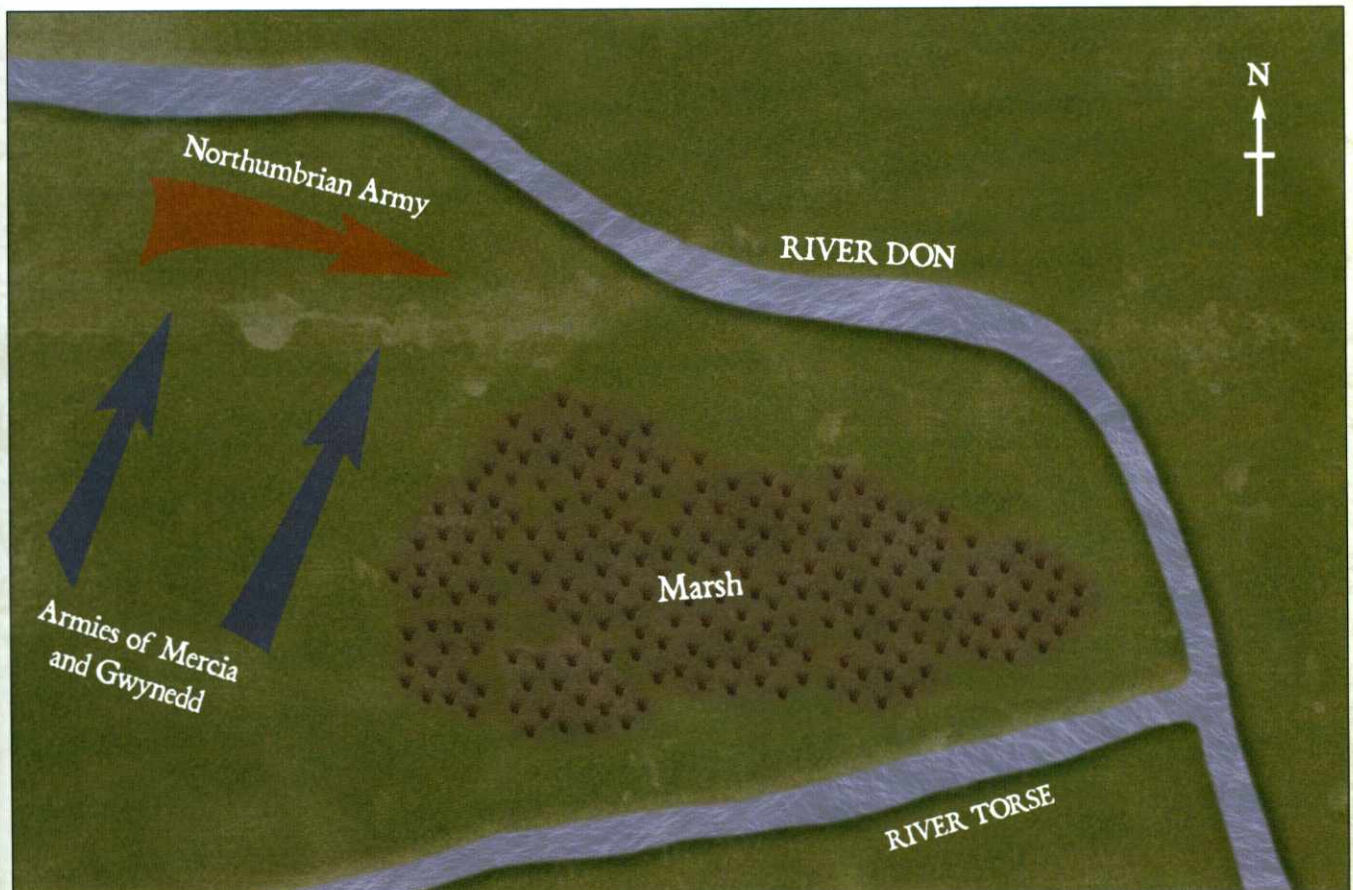
Marsh rules apply.

### SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

The Northumbrians have been ambushed and are in a desperate position so they receive three bonus campaign points if their king/general is not killed and three additional bonus points if their army is not broken at the end of the game.



A clash at dawn.





# HEAVENFIELD: 634 AD

"Oswald, the most Christian king of the Northumbrians, reigned nine years, including that year which was held accursed for the barbarous cruelty of the king of the Britons and the reckless apostasy of the English kings."

Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*

The battle was fought between the Saxon King Oswald of Bernicia/Northumbria and the premier Brythonic King Cadwallon ap Cadfan of Gwynedd. It was recorded in the Welsh Annals as the *Bellum Cantscaul*. Oswald returned from 17 years exile in Dál Riata to claim the crown of Northumbria after Cadwallon killed his brother Eanfrith, King of Bernicia – during negotiations – and Osric, King of Deira. The new king promptly raised a Northumbrian army, challenging the alliance of Gwynedd and Mercia.

Cadwallon marched north from York along the old Roman Road of Dere Street. Oswald, with a smaller army, marched from Bamborough and waited for the Welsh near Hexham.

Supposedly, he was accompanied by 'Scottish' allies – presumably from Dál Riata. Oswald chose a location in a narrow pass between Hadrian's Wall and Brady's Crag, forcing the Celtic army into a direct assault on a narrow front. St Oswald's Church now supposedly marks the site of the battle. The Welsh army was routed with heavy casualties and Cadwallon killed at the Brook of Denis (Rowley Burn?). Oswald reunited Bernicia and Deira back into the Kingdom of Northumbria.

## TERRAIN

As on map. The Wall and Brady's Crag are impassable.

## ARMIES

### Northumbrian (Early Saxon list)

As on map. The army is led by Oswald.

### Gwynedd (British list)

As on map. The army is led by Cadwallon. Gwynedd takes the first turn.

## SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

None.

## SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

Cadwallon must win this battle as he is on hostile territory.

The Northumbrians receive three additional campaign points if neither army is broken at the end of the game.

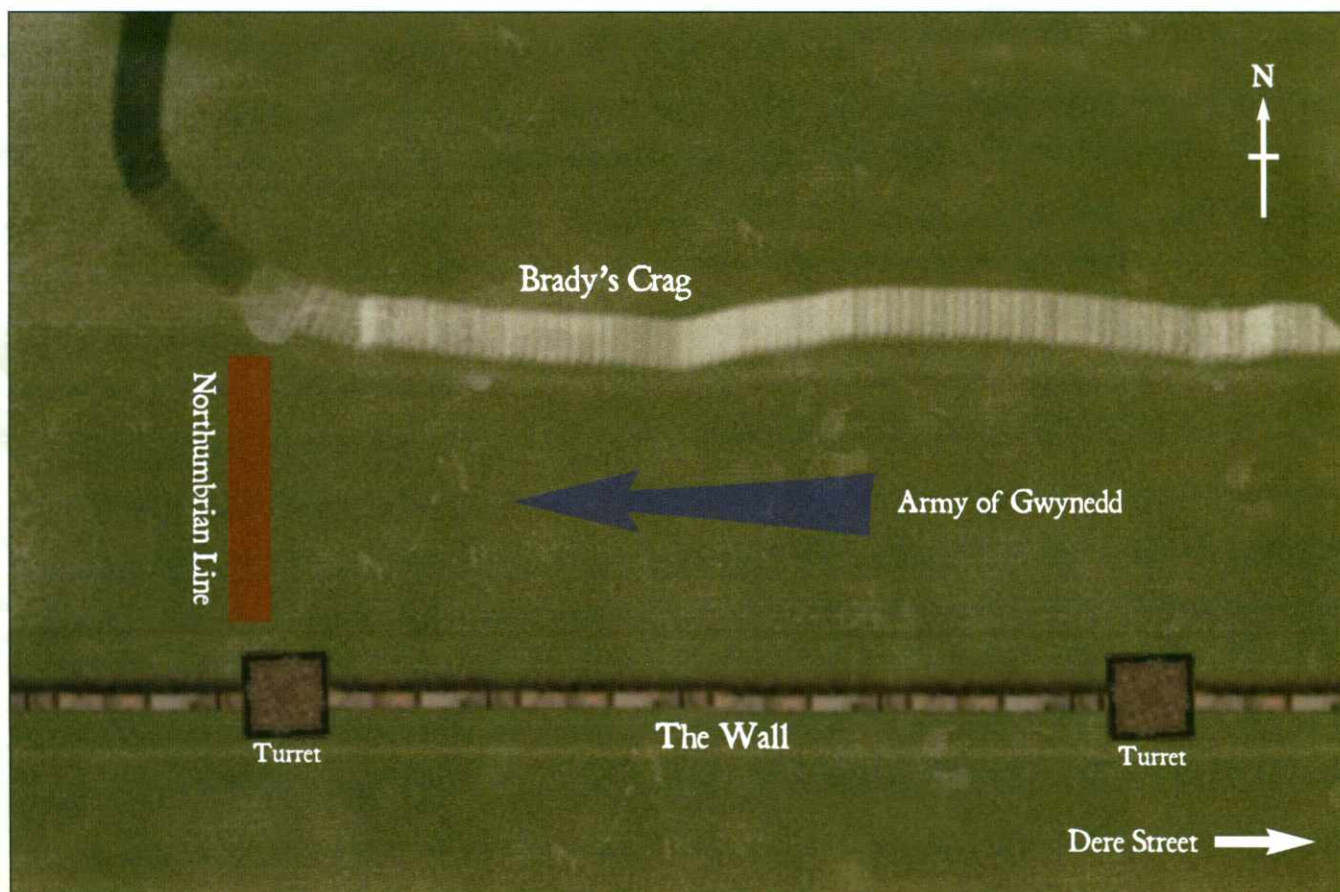




## MERCIA & GWYNEDD VERSUS NORTHUMBRIA



The ground trembles as battlelines clash.





# MASERFIELD: 642 AD

Maserfield was another show down between a Mercian army led by King Penda, and a Northumbrian army led by King Oswald. We don't know the circumstances leading up to the battle, or even who was the aggressor – although the location implies it was Oswald – but the battle site is traditionally located at Maes-y-llan, Oswestry, in Shropshire on the Welsh border. This is a flat area of gently rolling hills with clumps of trees. The battlefield itself may have been marshy but, in any case, would have been relatively open.

Tradition would have it that Penda's brother, Eowa, fought on the side of the Northumbrians so the root cause of the conflict may have involved a Mercian dynastic struggle. Another suggestion by Chris Peers is that Oswald was trying to preempt a linkup between the armies of Powys and Mercia by marching down the Welsh border from Chester. It's possible that this was another ambush with the Northumbrians trapped between the two armies.

Prince Cynddylan ap Cyndrwyn of Powys allied with Penda and although Bede spun the conflict as between Christians (the Northumbrians) and Pagans (the Mercians) it is worth noting that Powys was also Christian. The result was the death of Oswald (and Eowa) in a catastrophic defeat for the Northumbrian army, causing Northumbria to politically disintegrate. Oswald was dismembered and his head and arms paraded on poles. His body was recovered by his brother, Oswiu, whereupon his bones carried out a number of miracles.

## TERRAIN

As on map.



Mercians stand defiant.



Powys cavalry.

## ARMIES

### Northumbrian (use the Early Saxon list)

As on map. The Northumbrian army is in column and is led by Oswald.

### Allies

Powys (use the British list). As on map. The army must set up at least 18" from the Northumbrians.

Mercia (use the Early Saxon list). As on map. The army must set up at least 18" from the Northumbrians and is led by Penda.

## SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

The British and Mercians fight as two separate armies, each worth half as many points as the Northumbrian army.

The allied player may nominate either as the dominant ally.

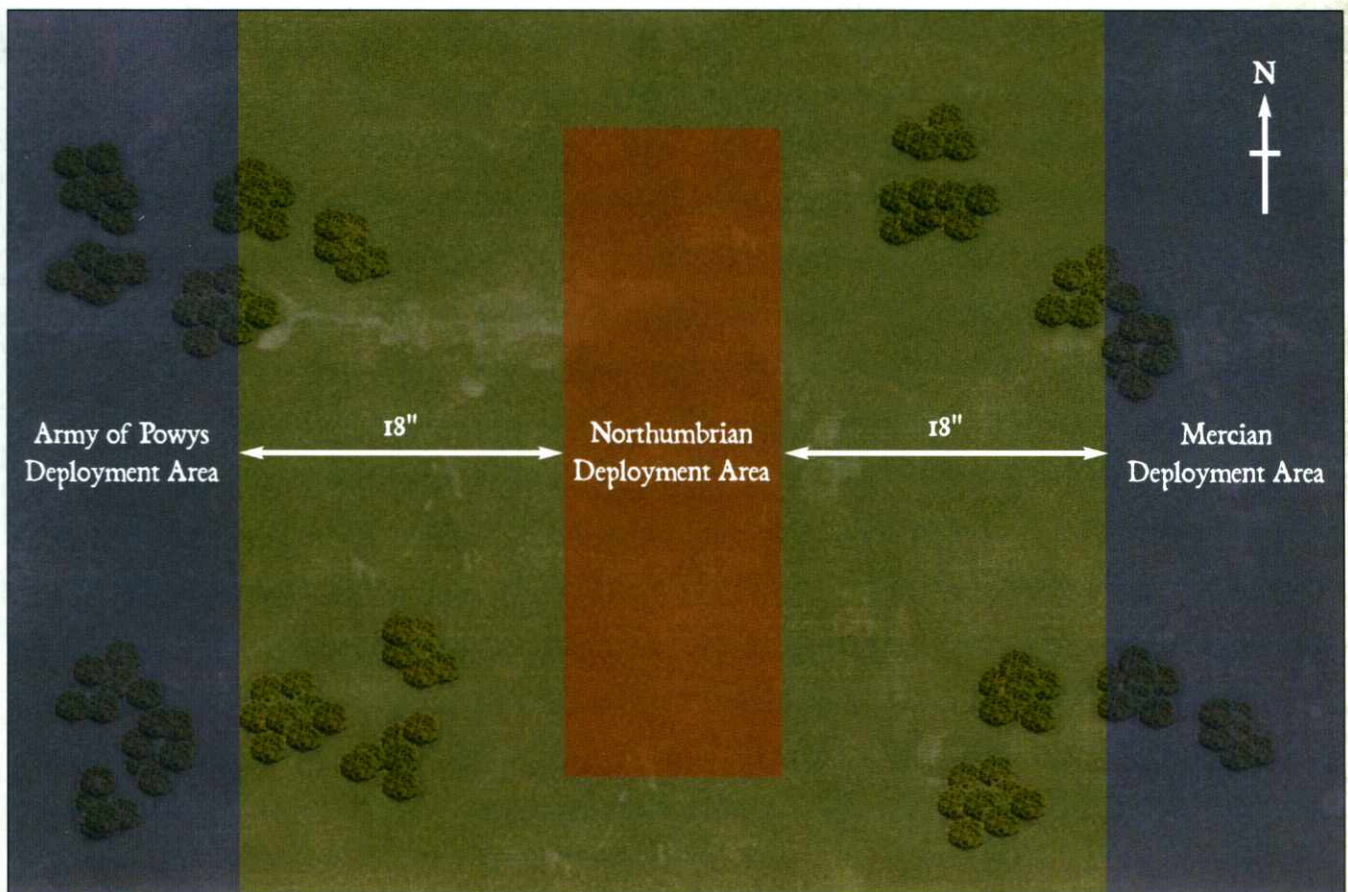
## SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

The Northumbrians have been ambushed (again!) and are in a desperate position so they receive three bonus campaign points if their king/general is not killed and three additional bonus points if their army is not broken at the end of the game.





## MERCIA & GWYNEDD VERSUS NORTHUMBRIA



King Oswald's troops make their final charge.



# WINWAED: 654/655 AD

After Maserfield, Penda campaigned into Bernicia on a number of occasions, even besieging the capital, Bamburgh. In 654/5, Penda moved north again in alliance with the southern 'Northumbrian' Kingdom of Deira. Possibly, the strategic aim was to keep Northumbria divided or maybe he was simply after loot.

Penda assembled an army of 'thirty warlords', including allies from East Anglia and the Welsh kingdoms. He besieged Oswiu at an unknown location called Urbs Iudeu. What happened next is confused. Supposedly, Oswiu bought Penda off with a payment of bullion, which the Mercian king distributed amongst his Welsh allies led by Cadafael ap Cynfeddw, who promptly marched home. Cadafael was nicknamed Cadomedd ('Battle Dodger') for ever after.

The armies of King Penda of Mercia and King Oswiu of Bernicia clashed on the banks of a river known as the Winwaed. Its location is uncertain but it may be Cock Beck near Leeds: a place nearby is called Penda's Fields. How or why the armies came to be here is a mystery but it is possible that Oswiu took the opportunity to ambush the retreating Mercians who may have been loaded down with loot and/or running short of food or possibly Penda was simply ambushed crossing the river. Penda's ally, King Aethelwald of Deira, apparently abandoned the Mercians and withdrew his forces to a place of safety. According to the tradition, it rained heavily throughout the battle and many Mercians drowned, presumably trying to cross Cock Beck.

This area is one of those strategic locations that become 'cockpits'. In 1461, Towton was fought nearby, the Lancastrian army being destroyed in the river, and Marston Moor is not far away. Penda was killed as was his ally, King Aethelhere of East Anglia: thus passed the last great pagan Saxon king.

Mercia was divided into two. Penda's Christian son, Peada, married into the Bernician royal family and ruled the south while the north was directly annexed by Oswiu.

## TERRAIN

As on map. Note that the River Winwaed is a linear obstacle to movement but impassable to a unit giving ground in hand-to-hand combat.

## ARMIES

### **Bernician (use the Early Saxon List)**

As on map. The army must start at least 18" from the Mercians.

### **Mercian (use the Early Saxon List)**

As on map. The Mercians must be deployed between the high ground to the north east and the River Winwaed and are led by Penda.

"When [Bishop Aidan] saw the flames of fire and the smoke carried by the wind rising above the city walls, he is said to have lifted up his eyes and hands to heaven, and cried with tears, »Behold, Lord, how great evil is wrought by Penda!«"

*Bede, Historia ecclesiastica  
gentis Anglorum*



## SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

None.

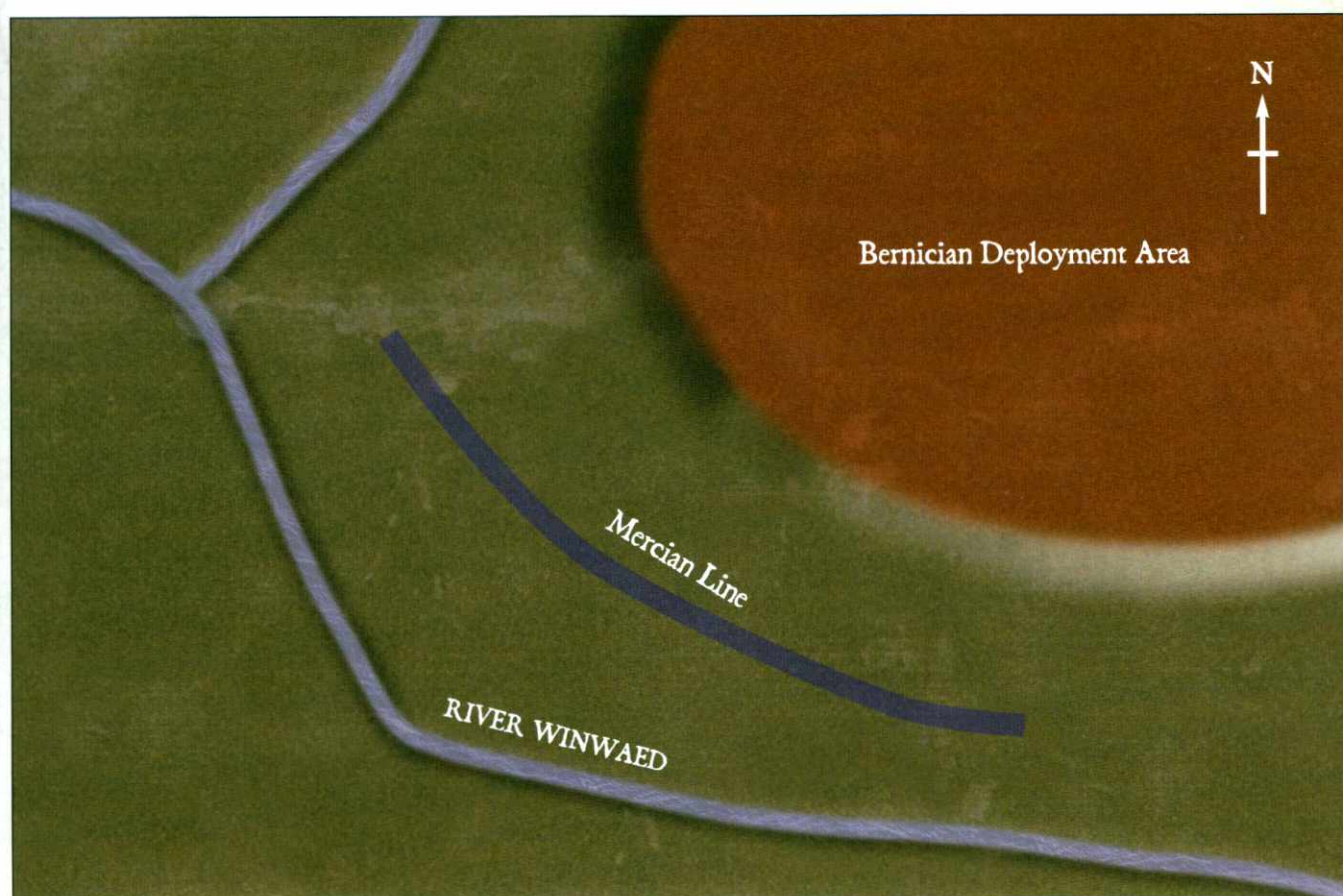
## SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

The Mercians are trapped so they receive three bonus campaign points if their king/general is not killed and three additional bonus points if their army is not broken at the end of the game.





## MERCIA & GWYNEDD VERSUS NORTHUMBRIA



Raise the alarm! Saxon warriors prepare for battle.



# BATTLE OF TRENT: 679 AD

In 674, Wulfhere of Mercia formed a grand alliance of southern peoples and marched on Northumbria – to be soundly defeated. Wulfhere promptly expired from disease (which makes a change from a ‘surfeit of lampreys’). The new king, Æthelred, fought King Ecgrith of Northumbria somewhere on the River Trent near the Mercian subkingdom of Lindsey, inflicting a defeat upon the invaders. The popular 18-year-old Northumbrian subking, Ælfwine of Deira, was killed and further bloodshed was only prevented by the mediation of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The exact location of the battle is unknown, but the Humber Estuary extended much further inland in the Dark Ages, almost making Lindsey an island, so Torksey Lock was in the region of the most northerly safe crossing of the Trent. This is also where the Roman canal, the Foss Dyke, connects the Trent to the River Withan at Lincoln, the Roman capital of Lindsey. The north-south land bridge between the two rivers is a natural highway from Northumbria into eastern Mercia so it seems possible that this may be where the Northumbrians formed a defensive line, their flanks protected by the Trent and the Dyke.

The battle served to restore the status quo between Mercia and Northumbria which had been upset by King Edwin’s aggressive expansionist policy. Nearly fifty years of bloodshed had achieved nothing of any permanence.

## TERRAIN

As on map.

The River Trent and the Foss Dyke are linear obstacles.

## ARMIES

### Mercian (use the Early Saxon list)

As on map. The army must set up first.

### Northumbrian (use the Early Saxon list)

As on map. The army sets up second and has the first turn.

## SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

The armies must start at least 18" apart.

## SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

None.

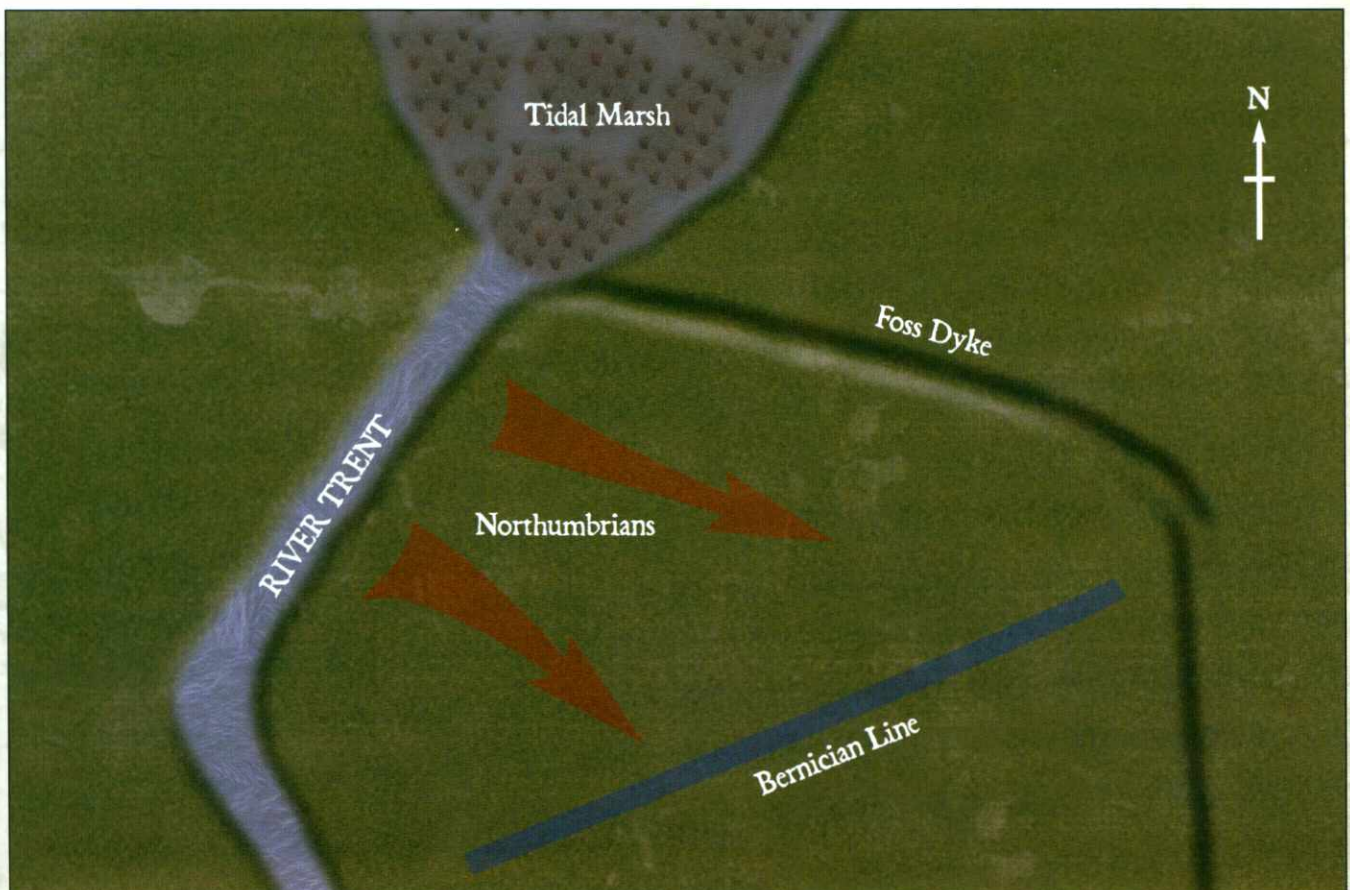




## MERCIA & GWYNEDD VERSUS NORTHUMBRIA



Storm clouds gather as Saxon forces do battle.





# BATTLE OF DEGSASTAN: 603 AD

The Battle of Degsastan was fought between king Æthelfrith of Bernicia and the Gaels under Áedán mac Gabráin, king of Dál Riata. The Gaelic King appears as Aedan Bradawc, meaning treacherous or cunning, in the Welsh tradition. He mounted a series of attacks on the British kingdom of Strathclyde and the Bernicians. Alarmed by the rise of the Northumbrian Saxons, according to Bede, Áedán invaded their territory to be decisively defeated by the smaller army of Æthelfrith. The Bernician king's brother, Theobald, was killed in the battle.

The location is unknown, but is possibly somewhere near Dawston in Liddesdale, which is north of The Wall at the end of the Maiden Way Roman road. Dawston Rigg is a low ridge situated by Dawston Burn between two streams. An ancient cross once stood on top suggesting that this might be the exact site of the battle.

Also according to Bede, this was the last invasion of a Saxon kingdom by the Gaels of Britain. Degastan was one of the two battles, the other being Dun Nechtain, that were decisive in setting the approximate place of the border between England and Scotland.

King Domnall Brecc, of Dál Riata attacked Din Eidyn, Edinburgh, in 638 according to the monks of Iona, who maddeningly give us no further information. But in 637, Dál Riata was heavily defeated at Moira in Ireland, severely weakening the kingdom. Óengus mac Fergusa, King of the Picts, conquered the kingdom in the 730s in three campaigns.

## TERRAIN

As on map.

Dawston Rigg is raised so defenders on top of the ridge have the advantage of being uphill.

Dawston Burn and its tributaries are a linear obstacle to movement and impassable to a unit giving ground in hand-to-hand combat.

## ARMIES

### Gaels

As on map. The army must start at least 12" north of Dawston Rigg and is led by Áedán mac Gabráin.

The Gaelic army has the first turn.

### Saxons (use the early Saxon list)

As on map. The army must be deployed on, or south of, Dawston Rigg and is led by Æthelfrith.

The Saxons set up first.

## SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

None.

## SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

The army that has the most unshaken units on Dawston Rigg at the end of the game is awarded five bonus campaign points.



Fierce warriors of the North prepare to launch their assault.



## STRUGGLE FOR THE NORTH



“Ædan, king of the Scots that inhabit Britain, being concerned at [Æthelfrith’s] success, came against him with an immense and mighty army; but was beaten by an inferior force, and put to flight; for almost all his army was slain at a famous place, called Degsastan.”

*Bede, Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*



Unarmoured Saxon spearmen.



# BATTLE OF THE TWO RIVERS: 671 AD

Northumbria maintained a continuous pressure against the Pictish lands to the north during the 6th and 7th centuries. The *Gododdin* is a poem describing the British defeat at Catraeth, possibly Catterick. The 'siege of Etain' recorded in the Irish Annals of Tigernach probably records the capture of Edinburgh and the seizure of Gododdin lands south of The Forth. In 671, Drest mac Donuel who was King of Fortriu (probably in north-east Scotland) marched south to liberate Gododdin from the Northumbrians. King Ecgrith got wind of the plans and raced to intercept the Pictish army. In this he was aided by the local Saxon sub-king, Beornhæth. The Northumbrian army was on horseback when it fell into a Pictish ambush at an unknown location which Fraser suggests might be Moncreiffe Island. In any event, the Picts suffered a catastrophic defeat with casualties sufficient to 'fill two rivers'. Drest fell from power to be replaced by Bridei mac Bili (or King Bridei III).

## TERRAIN

As map. Note that the River Tay is a linear obstacle to movement and impassable to units giving ground in hand-to-hand combat.

## ARMIES

### Picts

As on map.

### Saxons (use the Early Saxon list)

As on map. The army is in column and takes the first turn.

"Men went to Catraeth with a war-cry, speedy steeds and dark armour and shields, spear-shafts held high and spear-points sharp-edged, and glittering coats-of-mail and swords."

*Y Gododdin*

## SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

The Saxon army must stay in column on the track until the Saxon turn after a Pictish unit that is within 8" of a Saxon unit moves or shoots.

## SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

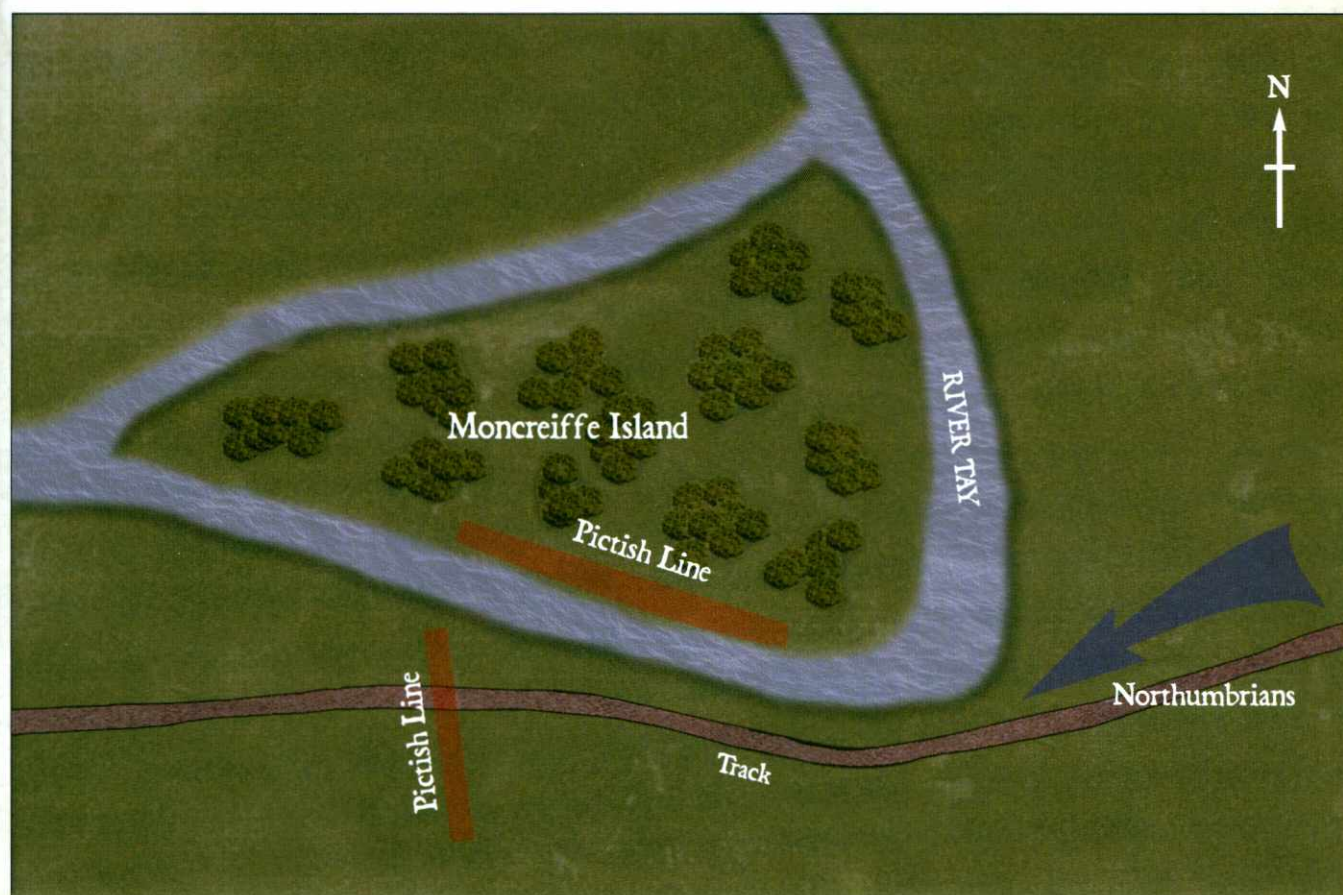
The Saxons have been ambushed and are in a desperate position so they receive three bonus campaign points if their king/general is not killed and three additional bonus points if their army is not broken at the end of the game.



Picts hold their ground on a forest-covered Montcreiffe Island.



## STRUGGLE FOR THE NORTH



“He [Ecgfrith] slew an enormous number of the people, filling two rivers with corpses, so that, marvellous to relate, the slayers, passing over the rivers dry foot, pursued and slew a crowd of fugitives.”

Stephen of Ripon,  
*Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*





# BATTLE OF DUN NECHTAIN: 685 AD

King Bridei soon showed himself to be a competent and effective warlord, destroying Orkney and liberating Pictish lands from Northumbria. King Ecgrith was also under pressure elsewhere, a Mercian victory over Northumbria, at which Ecgrith's brother, Ælfwine of Deira was killed, being listed in the Irish annals. Bede records Ecgrith sending an army led by Berhtred, son of Beornhæth, to Brega in Ireland in 684 to pre-empt a Gaelic-Briton alliance.

In 685, King Ecgrith led the Northumbrian army into the highlands. King Bridei seems to have retreated back from the southern Pictish lands to tempt the Northumbrians deep into the Pictish Kingdom of Fortriu. The Picts used a feigned retreat tactic to ambush the Northumbrian army at Dun Nechtain near the lake of Linn Garan. Ecgrith was killed and his army destroyed, forever ending Northumbrian ambitions in the Pictish kingdoms.

Woolf recently suggested Dunachton, north west of Loch Insh, as the most likely site of the battle.

## TERRAIN

As map. Note that the River Spey is a linear obstacle to movement and impassable to units giving ground in hand-to-hand combat. Loch Insh is impassable.

## ARMIES

### Picts

As on map. The army is led by Bridei mac Bili.

### Northumbrians (use the early Saxon list)

As on map. The army is in column and has the first turn.

## SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

The Saxon army must stay in column on the track until the Saxon turn after a Pictish unit that is within 8" of a Saxon unit moves or shoots.

## SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

The Saxons have been ambushed and are in a desperate position so they receive three bonus campaign points if their king/general is not killed and three additional bonus points if their army is not broken at the end of the game.



The fearsome Picts prepare to battle the Northumbrian invasion.



# STRUGGLE FOR THE NORTH





# BATTLE OF ASHDOWN: 871 AD

Alfred was born in 849 and ruled Wessex from 871 to 899, which coincided with the rampage of the Viking Great Heathen Army. He was one of the only two English Kings to be given the title of 'The Great' – the other being Cnut (Canute) who was arguably not English – and by his death had been hailed as the first King of all the English. His first recorded battle was not auspicious. In 868, he was part of a Wessex army led by his brother, King Æthelred, in support of Mercia in the face of an invasion by a Viking force led by Ivar the Boneless: the Saxons were defeated.

By 870, the Vikings began to penetrate into Wessex provoking a series of inconclusive skirmishes. Eventually, the

Vikings were driven back into their fortified camp at Reading after they lost the Battle of Englefield, where Earl Æthelwulf leading a Wessex army ambushed and killed the Danish Earl Sidrac. Æthelred and Alfred marched a royal host in support. The army of Wessex proceeded to harry Danish foragers. Led by Halfdan and Bagsecg, the Vikings poured out of their fortifications and put the Saxon army to flight, slaying Earl Æthelwulf in the process. The English escaped by means of a ford over the River Loddon at Twyford, local knowledge proving invaluable.

A few days later Halfdan and Bagsecg led a Viking force out of their Reading encampment on the 8th January. They marched north west along the Thames probably in search of the Royal Wessex army to force a decisive encounter. They found the Saxons not twelve miles away offering battle on a strong blocking position at the top of a hill. What followed was a smashing Saxon victory known as the Battle of Æscesdun, or Ashdown, which is thought to refer to the Berkshire Downs.

Current thinking is that the battle may have taken place on the Ridgeway somewhere east of Aldworth. Part of the Icknield Way, the Ridgeway is arguably the oldest 'road' in England. It runs in from the west, crossing the Thames at Goring before turning north. Tradition places the battle at Kingstanding Hill on the north (i.e. to the west) side of the river. Before modern forestation, the hill provided a commanding view of the countryside to the south.

As the story goes, the Vikings split their army into two divisions – a kings' division commanded by both warlords personally and an earls' division. In response, the Saxons also split into two divisions commanded by Æthelred and Alfred respectively. Alfred's division formed a shieldwall on the ridge while Æthelred's was held in reserve, supposedly while the King prayed for divine assistance.

What seems to have happened is that the Vikings were unaware of Æthelred's forces and fell into a trap. It is surmised that the Viking plan was for the earls' division to pin the Saxon line in place while the kings' division outflanked it via the lowland by the river. The Saxon line could then be rolled up. Æthelred's arrival outflanked the Vikings in turn and Alfred drove the kings' division against the river with great loss of life. Bagsecg himself was slain and the Viking army fled in disarray back to Reading.

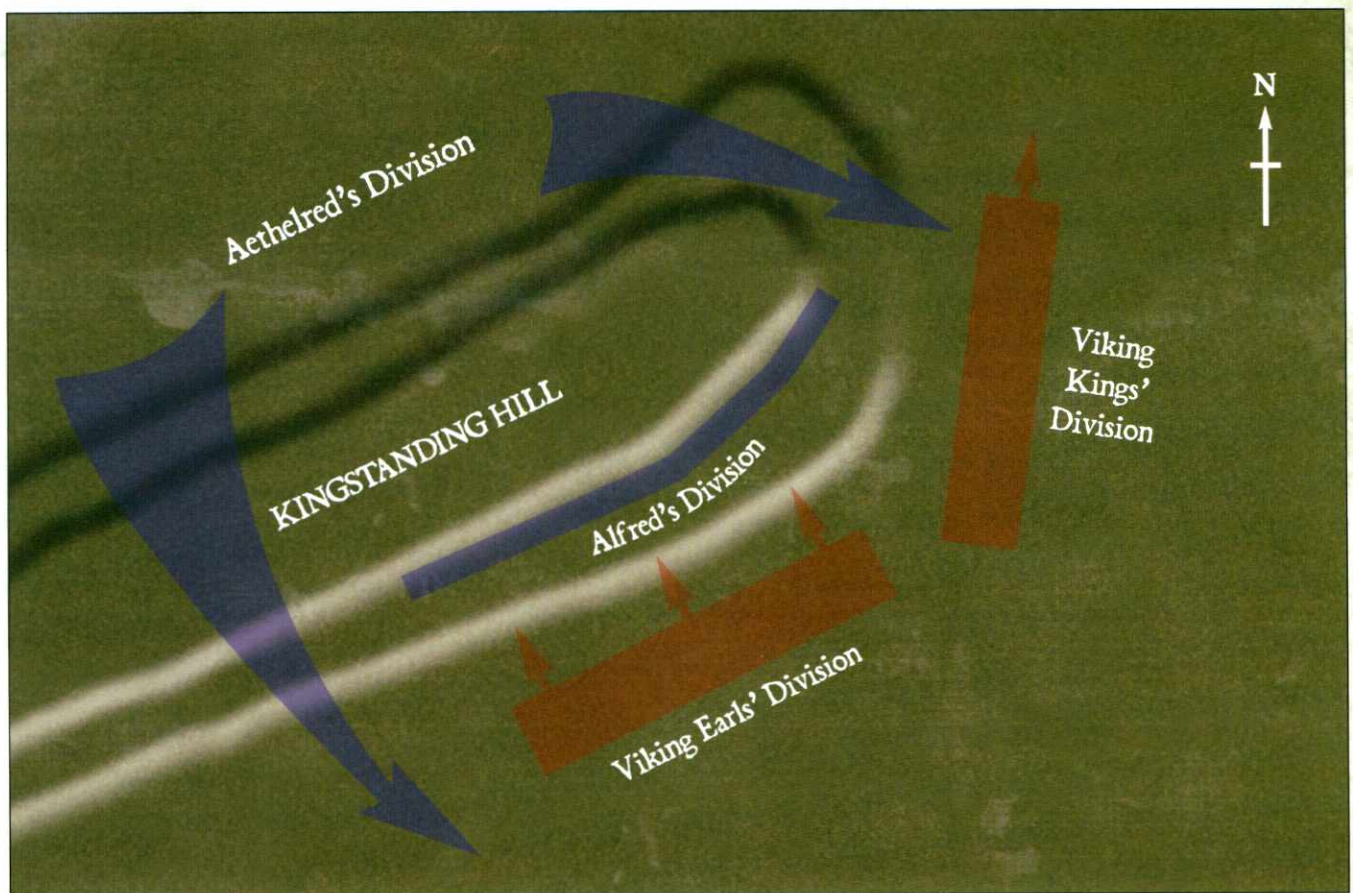
The Vikings were reinforced by fresh warriors via the Thames and soon broke out again, defeating the Saxons at Basing and Merton. Æthelred died shortly afterwards, possibly of his wounds. Alfred inherited the throne of a kingdom in dire trouble.

Ashdown was not in any way a decisive battle. Its importance is simply that it showed that a Saxon army could defeat a Viking army in a set piece battle.





## WESSEX & MERCIA VERSUS THE VIKINGS



### TERRAIN

As on map. Note that the River Thames is impassable.

### ARMIES

#### Late Saxon

The Saxons operate as two divisions. Alfred's division sets up on Kingstanding Hill and starts in shieldwall formation. King Æthelred's division may be placed anywhere to the rear of Alfred's line.

#### Vikings

The Vikings also operate in two divisions, a kings' division and an earls' division.

The Viking kings' division is led by Halfdan (and Bagsecg, see character special rules), who is the general.

### SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

The Viking kings' division and Æthelred's division are in column at the start of the battle.

### SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

The Saxons were expected to lose so they receive five bonus campaign points if neither commander is killed or three additional bonus points if only one commander is killed. The Vikings needed to destroy the royal Wessex line to facilitate the disintegration of the kingdom. That was more important than just winning the battle, so they receive five bonus points for killing both Saxon commanders.



Viking hirdmen



## SCENARIO PLAY THROUGH

I elected to play as the Vikings so my regular *Hail Caesar* opponent, Shaun – you may recall him from the *Britannia* supplement – played the Saxons. This suited both our personalities as I tend to be somewhat over aggressive while Shaun's natural instinct is to be a cautious general. We set the game up exactly as described in the scenario, as this is

one of those battles where a freestyle set up is unlikely to play anything like the real battle. But, of course, other players might regard that as a positive advantage rather than a problem. As always in *Hail Caesar*, 'you pays your money and you takes your choice'.

Our armies were as follows:

## THE ARMIES – ORDERS OF BATTLE

### SAXONS

#### King's Division (Æthelred leading)

- 1 unit of Huscarl heavy infantry (Æthelred attached)
- 1 unit of Viking mercenary heavy infantry
- 1 unit of Thegn heavy infantry
- 2 units of Ceorl medium infantry
- 1 small unit of Thegn medium cavalry
- 1 small unit of British light cavalry
- 1 small unit of British skirmishers with bows

#### Aetheling's Division (Alfred leading)

- 1 unit of Thegn heavy infantry (Alfred attached)
- 1 unit of Thegn heavy infantry
- 3 units of Ceorl medium infantry
- 1 unit of Gebur light infantry
- 1 small unit of light infantry skirmishers

### VIKINGS

#### Kings' Division (Halfdan & Bagsecg leading)

- 1 unit of Huscarl heavy infantry (Halfdan & Bagsecg attached)
- 1 unit of veteran warrior heavy infantry
- 2 units of Hirdmen heavy infantry
- 1 unit of Bondi medium infantry
- 2 small units of Thrall skirmishers

#### Earls' Division (unnamed earls leading)

- 1 unit of veteran warrior heavy infantry (earls attached)
- 4 units of Hirdmen heavy infantry
- 1 unit of Bondi medium infantry
- 1 small unit of Thrall skirmishers
- 3 Berserkers



Vikings and Saxons hurl insults and challenges ahead of the fight.





Shaun divided his army evenly into the two divisions. He placed his cavalry in the mobile force in reserve, while manning the top of the ridge with a solid line of battle infantry, the heaviest of which was on the Saxon left flank overlooking the passage between the river and the high ground.

I placed the skirmishers at the front of the outflanking column as a protective screen – in case Shaun’s reserve division came around the river-flank into the front of my column – and beefed up the diversion division occupying the front of the Saxon army as it would have to fight uphill. This would be a hammer and anvil attack with the Viking kings’ division as the hammer.

On turn 1 my Viking kings’ division managed a single move in column along the river valley while my earls’ division flatly refused my instruction to advance up the hill and attack – I rolled a 10 on the command dice. Shaun’s Saxon king’s division moved up behind Alfred’s division in column. Alfred’s division stayed in shieldwall formation, banging their spears on their shields, making rude gestures, and singing even ruder songs at the stationary Vikings.

The second turn largely repeated the manoeuvres of the first, or in the case of the Viking earls’ division a complete lack of manoeuvre – an 11 this time! More rude gestures from the Saxon battle line on the ridge. Æthelred moved his division out to the Saxon right flank, the one on t’other side to the Thames.

The Viking leadership of the earls’ division surpassed themselves on turn 3, moving three times. That may have been because I rolled a 3 (there is nothing like moving from one extreme to the other, is there?), or it may be because Halfdan sent a runner to the division’s general with some friendly, kindly, encouraging advice – that included words like ‘red hot poker’. Two of my heavy infantry units actually managed to reach Alfred’s Saxons – (you’re not singing, you’re not singing, you’re not singing anymore...) to initiate combat and the others weren’t far behind.

The fact that the Viking earls’ division now wasn’t where it was supposed to be threw Æthelred’s division into a command control meltdown, with everything in the wrong place for an attack. That took a turn to sort out. Meanwhile, Halfdan et al. were still plodding around the hill: the going proving not quite as good as they hoped as the Thames flood plain proved very marshy (we had added a ‘banks of the Thames bad-going’ die roll that impeded movement to the scenario to spice it up a bit

as Halfdan’s outflanking manoeuvre had not been terribly successful in the real battle – players should feel free to experiment like this with their own *Hail Caesar* games).

One thing became immediately clear as we rolled the first combat dice. Attacking up-hill into a shieldwall formation of steady infantry is a serious challenge, even for good troops like Viking heavy infantry. My first attacks were easily rebuffed.

Fighting broke out all along the ridge on turn 4, as the rest of the Viking earls’ division engaged the Saxon line. I had some successes, forcing back some of the lighter Saxon medium infantry in places. This allowed me to acquire footholds on the top of the ridge. Viking hopes started to rise like the lark in summer. I had visions of forcing Alfred’s division back down the hill and swinging my kings’ division into their rear.

Unfortunately, on turn 5 Shaun rather cleverly abandoned his ambitions to outflank me and simply used his king’s division to feed fresh units into the line against my increasingly tired units. They were soon forced back off the top of the ridge. I was now fighting uphill again and one of my heavy infantry units on the right flank of the earls’ division was shaken and incapable of further aggressive moves. My reserves in the form of the Viking kings’ division were out of the bogs and moving up the right flank of the hill in battle formation but the focus of the battle had flowed along the ridge so they still could not get into combat.

The battle of the ridge swayed backwards and forwards on turn 6 with both sides suffering attrition but it became clear that the combined Saxon divisions were just too strong and my earls’ units fell back down the hill. Indeed, my shaken unit broke and ran. The real action occurred on the Viking right by the river. Alfred (Shaun) had carefully husbanded his two best heavy infantry units, keeping them back from the melee on the ridge. Using Alfred’s inspirational leadership (9 – a roll of 5 giving three moves), he hurled them down the hill straight into the middle of the Viking kings’ division. They smashed through, breaking in two the Viking flanking line.

At that point dusk fell (turn 6 proved to be the last as decided by a die roll) and the tired armies disengaged. Tactically, there was nothing in it. Neither army had broken. The Saxons lost a Ceorl medium infantry unit, a Gebur light infantry unit and a small unit of skirmishers. The Vikings lost a Hirdman heavy infantry unit and a Bondi medium infantry unit (with two berserkers destroyed before they could fight). Pretty much 50 points of losses each, rounding up and down to the nearest ten – claiming a tactical win with less than a ten point lead seems unsporting – so we agreed on a draw

Strategically though, this was undoubtedly a Saxon triumph. Shaun held the hill against every attempt I made to throw his Saxons off. Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle would have reported Ashdown as a great victory over the pagans (and perhaps the real battle went something like this!). If we had been playing the battle as part of a campaign, Shaun would have acquired five campaign points (for both his generals surviving) against none for me.

Ah well, better luck next time.



# BATTLE OF EDINGTON: 878 AD

After Ashdown, the Saxons were defeated in two more battles that appear to have been indecisive since a peace was negotiated by Bishop Asser, one that involved the heathen army evacuating Wessex and retreating to London, presumably with a huge pay off. In 876, Guthrum led a major Viking shipborne raid on Wareham. Alfred succeeded in besieging the attackers in Wareham but, as usual, the Saxons were unable to overcome Viking fortifications.

A peace was negotiated that Guthrum immediately broke, despite swearing on a ring sacred to Thor. He murdered his Saxon hostages and moved to Exeter, pursued by Alfred. There, Guthrum waited for reinforcements to trap Alfred's blockading army between two Viking forces. Unfortunately, Guthrum's fleet carrying said reinforcements went down with all hands off Swanage, the English Channel living up to both its name and its vicious reputation. Maybe Thor had taken umbrage at the broken oath. A new peace was agreed at a meeting where Alfred held all the cards. The Viking army marched, not sailed, north out of Wessex, disbanding and settling in Eastern Mercia.

Peace with Vikings rarely lasted long and, in the winter of 877/878, Guthrum launched a lightning attack on the Royal vill at Chippenham where Alfred and his court celebrated Christmas. The raid seems to have been timed to support an anti-Alfred coup by senior clergy and earls, including the Archbishop of Canterbury and Wulfhere,

Earl of Wiltshire. Unfortunately the traitors failed to kill Alfred who escaped and formed a resistance movement based in the impenetrable marshes of the Somerset Levels.

Guthrum outflanked Alfred, by sending an army under Ubba, complete with Raven Banner, to besiege the Devon fyrd at Countisbury Hill. In a complete reversal of the Battle of Reading, Earl Odda stormed out of his fortifications, took the Viking besiegers by surprise and massacred them, slaying Ubba and capturing the magical banner.

Fresh from burning the cakes, Alfred rode with his bodyguards to Egbert's Stone and called out the fyrd in May 878. He was answered by men from Somerset, Wiltshire and Hampshire, showing he still had considerable support among the rural people and gentry of Wessex. Guthrum was left with no choice but to sally forth from Chippenham in full battle array or lose Wessex by default. He chose a blocking position in front of Bratton Camp hill-fort near Edington to wait for Alfred's army.

Alfred attacked, breaking and massacring the Danish army. Survivors fled back to their fortified base at Chippenham for refuge. The Saxons followed up, killing foragers and all who might assist the besieged survivors. After two weeks without food, the Danes surrendered. Alfred resettled Guthrum and his Danes in East Anglia as a Christian 'Saxon' subking under the patronage of Wessex, thus





## WESSEX & MERCIA VERSUS THE VIKINGS



protecting his flank by means of loyal foederati in the time honoured Roman fashion. The king went on to reorganise Wessex into a militarised, fortified state and begin the reconquest of Mercia and Northumbria.

How well Alfred's plans worked can be demonstrated by the fate of a seaborne raid on Rochester by a Viking force out of the Low Countries. The citizens retreated into their fortified burh, defending themselves vigorously and forcing the sea-raiders to dig in. Alfred quickly marched to their relief with his new mobile 'professional' Royal army. The Vikings ran back to their ships without even bothering to re-embark their horses and fled back across the Channel.

In 892 (or possibly 893) a massive Danish invasion fleet of apparently 330 ships complete with women and children landed in south east England. By 896 (897?) they had been harried so mercilessly by the reorganised mobile fyrd operating from defended and supplied fortifications that they abandoned their invasion.

Alfred's children, Edward King of the English and Æthelflæd Lady of Mercia, expanded the kingdom, defending newly won territories with Alfred's 'burh' system until they ruled all Britain south of the Humber.

At some point someone carved a white horse in the chalk on the west side of Bratton Camp. The earliest record of such a carving dates back to 1742 so when it was carved is a mystery, but the purpose is likely to have been to record and celebrate Wessex's victory.

### TERRAIN

As on map.

### ARMIES

#### Late Saxon

Set up as shown on the map after the Viking army has been set up. The Saxons take the first turn.

#### Danish (use Viking list)

Set up first as shown on the map.

### SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

Bratton Camp is a hill-fort and the special rules apply.

### SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

Everything depended on Alfred's survival; in many ways he was Wessex. If Alfred dies in the battle the Vikings receive five bonus campaign points; if he survives the Saxons receive five.



# BATTLE OF BRUNANBURH: 937 AD

Æthelstan, Alfred's grandson, was crowned King of the Anglo-Saxons in 924, and King of the English in 927 after conquering Viking Northumbria. In 934, Æthelstan invaded Scotland with a Saxon army supported by Welsh allies and a fleet. He penetrated deep into north east Scotland as far as Norse Caithness.

Later that year a charter was prepared where Constantine of Scotland, Owain of Strathclyde, and the Welsh princes Hywel Dda, Idwal Foel, and Morgan ap Owain acknowledged Æthelstan as 'ruler' of Britain: this was the high noon of, what was in effect, the Wessex-Mercian empire of Britain.

Olaf Guthfrithson, ruler of the Norse Kingdom of Dublin, resolved to break Æthelstan's hold on Northern Britain and take back Northumbria where his father had ruled. To this effect he created an unlikely triple alliance with the Christian monarchs Constantine of Scotland and Owen of Strathclyde. The Cornish and Welsh princes remained strictly neutral, perhaps unwilling to fight against countrymen but mindful that, whoever won, they would still have to deal with a powerful Saxon kingdom as a neighbour.

In August 937 the Irish-Norse fleet crossed the Irish Sea, probably landing somewhere in what is now south west Scotland to rendezvous with the Strathclyde and Scots armies. Such arrangements were notoriously difficult to coordinate in preindustrial societies so it is likely that the link up was in friendly territory in case of delays.

The allies probably made their way south down the Roman road that runs from the western end of The Wall at Luguwallium to Manchester and Chester, apparently supported by the Norse fleet which no doubt was useful for supplies. Æthelstan seems to have held the combined Wessex and Mercian army back in the northern Midlands, waiting for his enemies to come to him. In this way he would have easy access to logistical supplies and his men would be fresh.

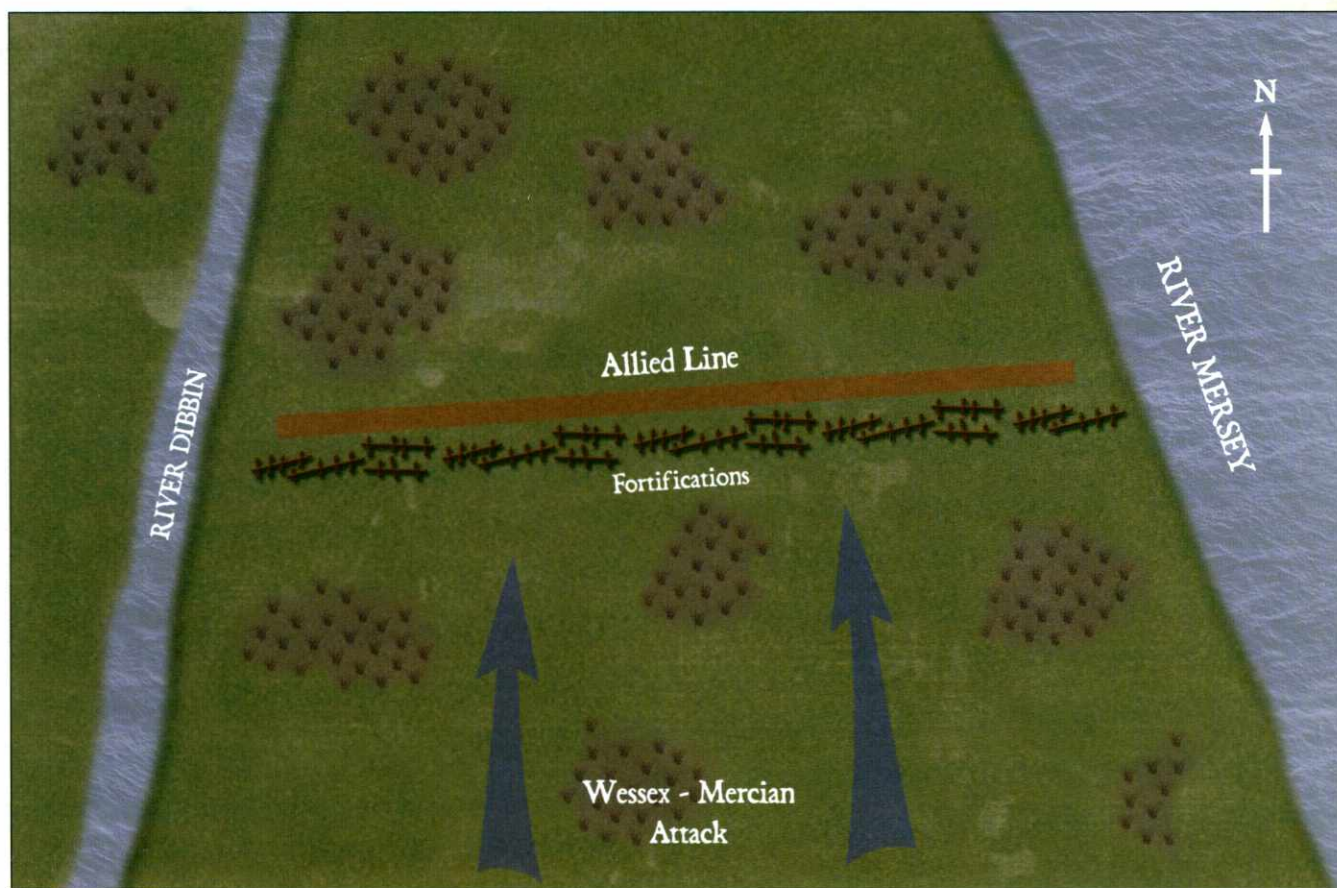
Paul Cavill and colleagues make a good case for the location of the battle site as Bromborough in the Wirral. Bromborough was known as Brunanburh until the 18th century. The allies seem to have dug in on the peninsula, using the old Viking technique of fighting from a fortified place. Æthelstan went onto the tactical offensive, breaking through the fortifications and putting the enemy to flight. Great slaughter is recorded for both sides. The Saxons must have suffered initially in their assault on the defences, most of the allied losses presumably occurring during the rout and pursuit. Seven earls and five British 'kings' lost their lives, as did two of Æthelstan's immediate family. The Gaelic-Norse survivors were taken off by their fleet via the Dee, returning to Ireland.

Brunanburh is one of those battles deemed to be decisive, by those who look for decisive battles, but in truth it changed very little. There was little possibility of Olaf Guthfrithson's disparate alliance destroying the Wessex-Mercian state even if they won. As for the Saxons, Æthelstan died in 939 and Olaf was King of Northumbria within weeks after taking back York.





## WESSEX & MERCIA VERSUS THE VIKINGS



The Irish Vikings went on to reconquer the Five Boroughs – Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham and Stamford. Brunanburh did, however, inspire an epic Saxon poem.

### TERRAIN

As on map. The terrain has changed dramatically in the last thousand years but it is a reasonable assumption that it was marshy so players may wish to scatter marshes and pools around.

### ARMIES

#### **Wessex-Mercia (use the Late Saxon list)**

Set up as shown on the map after the Allied army has been set up. There are two independent Saxon armies, Wessex led by Æthelstan and Mercia led by a Mercian general.

#### **Allies**

Set up first as shown on the map. There are three independent allied armies. The Irish-Norse is led by Olaf Guthfrithson, the Strathclyde army by Owen (use the British list) and the Scottish by Constantine (use the Pictish list).

### SPECIAL SCENARIO RULES

The fortified line special rules apply.

### SPECIAL CAMPAIGN POINTS

The Saxon army is committed: it must break the line. The army can't stay where it is as it risks being outflanked by the

allies using their fleet. So the Saxons must have more unshaken units (not counting skirmishers) than the allies north of the fortifications by the end of the game or the allies get an additional five campaign points.

Note: there is an excellent and comprehensive account of the Battle of Brunanburgh in the *Hail Caesar* rulebook, page 154, complete with new army lists. Readers are directed there for an alternative take to the scenario included here.

“Never, before this,  
were more men in this  
island slain by the  
sword’s edge.”

*Brunanburh Poem*



# EARLY SAXON ARMY LIST

The Saxon army list here is for all the Germanic cultures of Britain whether classed as Saxons, Angles or Jutes.

## ARMY COMPOSITION

- Only one unit in ten may be cavalry and the first cavalry unit must always be placed in the Royal (General's) division.
- Only one unit in three may be Gesith.
- The army is pagan.

## DARK AGES ARMY LISTS

Armies in this period were still to some degree warbands led by warlords, rather than the organised military forces of the Classical or High Medieval worlds. The new army lists on this page and the following pages are designed to reflect this but players may prefer to use the original *Hail Caesar* lists.

### Early Saxon Troop Values

Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points Per Unit	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
Gesith heavy infantry with spears	7	7	3	0	4+	6	30	Stubborn, Tough Fighters
Gesith medium infantry with spears	6	6	3	0	5+	6	23	
Gesith medium cavalry with spears and/or javelins, fielded as small units	6	3	2	0	5+	4	20	
Folcfry light infantry with spears and/or javelins	5	5	3	0	6+	6	20	
Folcfry skirmishing light infantry with javelins, fielded as small units	3	2	2	0	0	4	11	
Folcfry skirmishing light infantry with slings, fielded as small units	2	2	2	2	0	4	12	



## SPECIAL RULES

- **No Retreat:** Saxon commanders must be attached to infantry units. For a Saxon leader to remain horsed indicates that he intends to flee the battlefield if necessary and hence is a weakling and coward who no true warrior will follow.
- **Oath Of Loyalty:** One translation of Gesith is companion, so Gesith swear an oath of loyalty to their commander. Any Gesith unit with an attached commander may re-roll a break test. The second roll stands even if it is worse.
- **Shieldwall:** Gesith infantry may use a shieldwall formation.

## ALTERNATIVE ARMY LIST

An alternative army list for Saxon armies is given on page 40 of the *Hail Caesar: Army Lists Late Antiquity to Early Medieval* supplement, under the name Anglo-Saxon.



Royal Anglian Huscarls.



## NOTABLE EARLY SAXON WARLORDS

### CEAWLIN OF WESSEX

Reigned: 560–592

Religion: Pagan

Leadership: 8

Fighting Value: 2

#### Special Rules

Ceawlin was operating in a time when Wessex was really the Gewisse plus whatever other clans they currently had under their control so Ceawlin's sub-commanders are likely to be of erratic and variable enthusiasm. When Ceawlin is general of a Saxon army roll D6 for each divisional sub-commander. On a roll of 1 they have a leadership of 5, on 2 a leadership of 6, on 3, 4 or 5 a leadership of 7, and on 6 a leadership of 8.

### ÆTHELFRIITH OF NORTHUMBRIA

Reigned: 593–616

Religion: Pagan & Christian (roll for which before the battle)

Leadership: 9

Fighting Value: 2

#### Special Rules

Æthelfrith established Northumbria as the regional power by his series of conquests over the British and Gaels, earning the nickname Flesaur ('Twister'). When fighting against British or Gaelic armies, the division led by Æthelfrith may make one free move before the start of the battle after the forces have been set up.

### EDWIN OF NORTHUMBRIA

Reigned: 616–633

Religion: Pagan & Christian (roll for which before the battle)

Leadership: 10

Fighting Value: 2

#### Special Rules

Enhanced leadership. Edwin was an exceptionally successful and aggressive warlord, cowing Wessex and making war against an alliance of British and Mercians. He raised Northumbria to great power status on the island.

### PENDA OF MERCIA

Reigned: 626 – 655

Religion: Pagan

Leadership: 8

Fighting Value: 2

#### Special Rules

Despite his fame as a warrior-king Penda does not seem to have been an especially clever tactician, but he showed great capacity to survive battles in an era when generals led from the front. If Penda is killed during a battle roll a D6. On a 1 or 2 he really is killed, on a 3 or 4 he is wounded instead of killed, and on a 5 or 6 'it was only a scratch' and the result is ignored. Note that a wounded Penda who suffers a kill result and subsequently rolls a 5 or 6 is miraculously restored to full health.

### CENWALH OF WESSEX

Reigned: 642–645; 648–674

Religion: Pagan & Christian

Leadership: 8 against the Mercians (and other Saxons), 9 against the British (including Gaels and Picts)

Fighting Value: 3

#### Special Rules

Variable Leadership, see above. Cenwalh was more effective against the British than other Saxon armies.

### OSWALD OF NORTHUMBRIA

Reigned: 634–642

Religion: Pagan & Christian

Leadership: 8

Fighting Value: 2

#### Special Rules

Oswald spent much of his youth as an exile in Dál Riata with whom his family enjoyed good relations. Dál Riata supplied warriors when Oswald mounted an invasion to retake the Northumbrian throne. An army led by Oswald can add a Fianna warband. This warband does not count as Gesith.



# BRITISH ARMY LIST



This category includes most of the British Celtic kingdoms of Wales, the north, and the south-west. Next to nothing is known about British armies of this era, but they seemed to follow the Dark Age pattern of semi-professional warriors (Teulu), who are the companions of kings and important aristocrats, sub-kings or Priodaur, and amateur warriors based on freemen who were presumably led by minor aristocrats. The freemen were subdivided into men who possessed land (Bonnedig), and men who didn't (Theog). Social structure, and hence military role, was closely based on kinship.

## ARMY COMPOSITION

- Skirmisher units make up between half and one quarter of the army.
- Up to one quarter of the army may be cavalry units.
- There may be up to two Teulu units in the Royal (General's) division and the general must be attached to one of them.
- There may be up to one Teulu unit in a Priodaur (non-General's) division and the commander must be attached to it.
- There may be up to one Gaelic fianna mercenary unit in the Royal (General's) division only.
- The army is Christian.

## British Troop Values

Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points Per Unit	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
Teulu medium cavalry with spears	8	5	3	0	5+	6	30	Stubborn, Tough Fighters
Teulu medium infantry with long spears	8	6	3	0	5+	6	31	Stubborn, Tough Fighters
Heavy infantry with swords	6	6	2	0	4+	6	23	
Gaelic fianna mercenary warband with swords and javelins	7	5	2	0	5+	6	25	Wild Fighters
Bonnedig light cavalry with spears and/or javelins fielded as small units	5	3	2	0	6+	4	20	Feigned Flight
Bonnedig light infantry with spears and/or javelins	5	5	3	0	6+	6	23	Feigned Flight
Theog skirmishers with javelins, fielded as small units	3	2	2	0	0	4	11	
Theog skirmishers with slings, fielded as small units	2	2	2	2	0	4	12	
South Wales skirmishers with bows, fielded as small units	2	2	2	2	6+	4	13	

## SPECIAL RULES

- **Heroic Last Charge:** The remnants of Teulu units that break in hand-to-hand combat may make an immediate last heroic attack on their attackers using half their sustained combat value, rounding fractions up, before being removed from the table.

## ALTERNATIVE ARMY LIST

An alternative army list for British armies is given on page 27 of the *Hail Caesar: Army Lists Late Antiquity to Early Medieval* supplement, under the name Welsh.





## NOTABLE BRITISH WARLORDS

### CADWALLON AP CADFAN OF GWYNEDD

Reigned: 625-634

Religion: Christian

Leadership: 9

Fighting Value: 2

#### Special Rules

Cadwallon was the last great British warlord until the rise of the Tudors, taking over adjacent British kingdoms and making successful war on the Northumbrians. He had a bad press from the Northumbrian Bede but there is no evidence that he was any worse than any other Dark Age warlord. Mercia attached itself to Cadwallon as a junior ally and later kings of Wessex adopted his name so Bede's charge of Cadwallon's 'genocide' against the English fails to be convincing. A British army led by Cadwallon may include one Gesith unit of foederati.

"Cadwalla, king of the Britons, rebelled against [Edwin], being supported by Penda, a most warlike man of the royal race of the Mercians, and who from that time governed that nation twenty-two years with various success. A great battle being fought in the plain that is called Heathfield, Edwin was killed...and all his army either slain or dispersed."

*Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica  
Gentis Anglorum*



Romano-British cavalry.



# PICT ARMY LIST

The Pictish army lists represent the British living in central and north-eastern Scotland. These are considered to be sufficiently culturally different from other British kingdoms to merit their own army list.

## ARMY COMPOSITION

- Skirmisher units make up between half and one quarter of the army.
- Up to one quarter of the army may be cavalry units.
- Only one unit may be upgraded to a Royal Troop and the general must be attached to it, if present.
- There may be up to one Gaelic fianna mercenary unit in the Royal (General's) division only.
- The army is Christian.



Pict Troop Values

Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points Per Unit	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
The Royal Troop: Medium cavalry with spears and/or javelins	8	5	2	0	5+	6	28	Tough Fighters
Medium cavalry with spears and/or javelins	8	5	2	0	5+	6	26	
Medium infantry with long spears and mixed weapons	8	6	2/0	0	5+	6	27	Long Spears
Fianna warband with swords and javelins	7	5	2	0	5+	6	27	Wild Fighters
Light cavalry with spears and/or javelins, fielded as small units	5	3	2		6+	4	20	Feigned Retreat
Skirmishers with javelins, fielded as small units	3	2	2	0	0	4	11	
Skirmishers with bows and/or crossbows, fielded as small units	2	2	2	2	0	4	12	
Skirmishers with slings, fielded as small units	2	2	2	2	0	4	12	

## SPECIAL RULES

- **War Dogs:** Such limited Pictish evidence that has survived has suggested that Picts may have used hunting dogs for warfare. One cavalry unit and one medium/warband infantry unit in the army may incorporate war dogs.

War dogs in a unit that is directly involved in close combat (i.e. not supporting a close combat) allow the player to force his opponent to re-roll a break test resulting from that combat. The second roll stands. War dogs in any one unit may only be released (used) once per game. A war dog model should be placed beside the unit so that it is clear which units are so blessed. The dog models should be removed after use.

## ALTERNATIVE ARMY LIST

An alternative army list for Pictish armies is given on page 30 of the *Hail Caesar: Army Lists Late Antiquity to Early Medieval* supplement.





## NOTABLE PICT WARLORDS

### BRIDEI MAC BILI OF FORTRIU

Reigned: 672-693

Religion: Christian

Leadership: 9

Fighting Value: 2

#### Special Rules

Bridei III was a master at deception and ambush. A Pictish army led by Bridei may hold one third of all divisions (fractions rounded down but never less than one) and place them onto the table from the Pictish table end or either of the two neutral table sides from the start of turn 2 onwards. The units of the division must be placed within 6" of the table edge and 9" or more from an enemy unit.

"Egfrid is he who made war against his cousin Brudei, king of the Picts, and he fell therein with all the strength of his army and the Picts with their king gained the victory; and the Saxons never again reduced the Picts so as to exact tribute from them. Since the time of this war it is called Gueith Lin Garan."

Nennius,  
*Historia Brittonum*



Savage Picts ambush their enemy.



# GAEL ARMY LIST

This army list is for the kingdom of Dál Riata that extended over the west coast of central Scotland or for any Irish army operating on the British mainland.

## ARMY COMPOSITION

- Warbands must make up half the units in the army.
- Only one unit in ten may be cavalry.
- Up to half the units in any particular division may be skirmishers.
- The army is Christian.

## SPECIAL RULES

- **Heroic Commanders:** Generals and Commanders have a fighting value of 3.



### Gael Troop Values

Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points Per Unit	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
Medium infantry warband with swords and javelins	9	6	2	0	5+	6	28	Frenzied Charge
Fianna warband with swords and javelins	7	5	2	0	5+	6	23	Wild Fighters
Light cavalry with spears and/or javelins, fielded as small units	5	3	2	0	6+	4	18	
Skirmishers with javelins fielded as small units	3	2	2	0	0	4	11	
Skirmishers with slings fielded as small units	2	2	2	2	0	4	12	



Norsemen and Gaelic warriors engage.





Gaels ready to defend their homeland.

#### ALTERNATIVE ARMY LIST

An alternative army list for Gaelic armies is given on page 25 of the *Hail Caesar: Army Lists Late Antiquity to Early Medieval* supplement, under the name Scots-Irish.

#### NOTABLE GAEL WARLORDS

ÁEDÁN MAC GABRÁIN, KING OF DÁL RIATA

Reigned: 574-609

Religion: Christian

Leadership: 8

Fighting Value: 4

#### Special Rules

Aedán the Wily had a close, if not always entirely friendly, relationship with British kingdoms. A Gaelic army led by Aedán may include one Teulu and one Bonnedig allied unit in the Royal (General's) division.





# VIKING ARMY LIST

There is no evidence that Viking armies or large raiding warbands differed substantially in composition from Norse royal armies, which can be thought of as simply more of the same.

## ARMY COMPOSITION

- Up to one quarter of each division may be skirmishers.
- At least half the units in the army must be hirdmen.
- Up to one in five non skirmisher units in the army can be light infantry.
- Only one Royal Bodyguard Huscarl heavy infantry unit may be present in the army and the general must be attached to it, if present.
- The Army is pagan.

### Viking Troop Values

Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points Per Unit	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
Royal Bodyguard Huscarl heavy infantry with assorted arms <i>Extra to field with heavy throwing weapon (counts as pilum)</i>	8	8	3	0	4+	6	35 +3	Tough Fighters, Stubborn, Elite, Valiant
Veteran Warrior heavy infantry with assorted arms <i>Extra to field with heavy throwing weapon (counts as pilum)</i>	7	7	3	0	4+	6	33 +3	Tough Fighters, Stubborn, Elite, Valiant
Hirdmen/Warriors heavy infantry with assorted arms <i>Extra to field with heavy throwing weapon (counts as pilum)</i>	7	7	3	0	4+	6	23 +3	
Saxon Gesith 'allied' medium infantry with spears <i>Reduction to make Wavering</i>	6	6	3	0	5+	6	23 -11	Wavering
Bondi medium infantry with spears	6	6	3	0	5+	6	23	
Bondi medium infantry with bows	4	4	3	3	6+	6	21	
Bondi medium infantry with bows fielded as small unit	3	3	2	2	6+	4	15	
Thrall skirmishers with spears and javelins, fielded as small unit	3	2	2	0	0	4	11	
Local skirmishing insurgent allies, fielded as small units	2	1	1	0	0	4	6	Levy

## SPECIAL RULES

- **Berserkers:** Up to five Viking units may have a single berserker attached at a cost of +1 point. The berserker adds three attacks on the first turn that a Viking unit is in hand-to-hand combat provided that the Viking unit initiated the combat by charging. Otherwise the berserker has no effect in the game. A berserker model should be placed beside the unit so that it is clear which units are so equipped. The berserker models should be removed after use or if they become irrelevant.
- **Outflankers:** Viking armies seem to have been more professional and flexible than their opponents, particularly when fighting from fortifications. When a Viking army is in possession of fortifications, one division consisting of not more than one fifth of the army units may be held in reserve off table. It can be brought on from either side table edge from the start of turn two, the distance from the Viking base line along the flank governed by the turn number. The outflanking division must come on before turn five or it is

considered to have been destroyed. It may not enter the table within nine inches of an enemy unit.

Turn	Distance
2	12"
3	24"
4	36"

- **Shieldwall:** Viking heavy and medium infantry may use shieldwall formations.



### ALTERNATIVE ARMY LIST

An alternative army list for Viking armies is given on page 42 of the *Hail Caesar: Army Lists Late Antiquity to Early Medieval* supplement.



## NOTABLE VIKING WARLORDS

### HALFDAN & BAGSECG

Reigned: 865–877 (Halfdan), 870–871 (Bagsecg)

Religion: Pagan

Leadership: 8 (both)

Fighting Value: 3 (both)

#### Special Rules

Halfdan starts out as general of the army, but Bagsecg assumes command if Halfdan is killed. Simply replace a Halfdan model with a Bagsecg model.

“This year [793] came dreadful forewarnings over the land of the Northumbrians, terrifying the people most woefully: these were immense sheets of light rushing through the air, and whirlwinds, and fiery dragons flying across the firmament.”

*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

“Behold the church of St Cuthbert spattered with the blood of the priests of God, despoiled of all its ornaments.”

*Alcuin, Archbishop of York*



A bloodthirsty Viking war party pillages a church.



# LATE SAXON

## ARMY COMPOSITION

- At least two thirds of the units in the army must be infantry, not counting skirmishers.
- There must be at least as many medium infantry units as heavy infantry units in the army.
- Only one unit in the army may be Huscarl and the general must be attached to it, if present.
- Only one unit in the army may be Viking mercenaries and it must be in the general's (Royal) division.
- Up to one quarter of the units in a division may be skirmishers.
- The army is Christian.



Late Saxon Troop Values

Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points Per Unit	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
Huscarl heavy infantry with assorted arms	7	7	3	0	4	6	36	Tough Fighters, Elite, Stubborn, Valiant
Viking mercenary heavy infantry with assorted arms	7	7	3	0	4+	6	30	Tough Fighters, Stubborn
Thegn heavy infantry with spears <i>Extra to arm Thegns with long spears</i>	7	7	3 3/0	0	4+	6	26 +6	Phalanx
Ceorls medium infantry with spears	6	6	3	0	5+	6	23	
Thegn medium cavalry with spears and/or javelin, fielded as small units	6	3	2	0	5+	4	20	
British light cavalry with spears and/or javelins, fielded as small units	5	3	2	0	6+	4	18	
Gebur light infantry with spears and/or javelins	5	5	3	0	6+	6	20	
Gebur skirmishing light infantry with javelins, fielded as small units	3	2	2	0	0	4	11	
British skirmishers with bows, fielded as small units	2	2	2	2	6+	4	13	
Skirmishing light infantry with slings, fielded as small units	2	2	2	2	0	4	12	

## SPECIAL RULES

- **No Retreat:** Saxon commanders must be attached to infantry units. For a Saxon leader to remain horsed indicates that he intends to flee the battlefield if necessary and hence is a weakling and coward who no true warrior will follow.
- **Shieldwall:** Late Saxon heavy and medium infantry may use a shieldwall formation.



### ALTERNATIVE ARMY LIST

An alternative army list for Saxon armies is given on page 40 of the *Hail Caesar: Army Lists Late Antiquity to Early Medieval* supplement, under the name Anglo-Saxon.



## NOTABLE LATE SAXON WARLORDS

### ALFRED THE GREAT

Reigned: 871–899

Religion: Christian

Leadership: 9

Fighting Value: 1

#### Special Rules

Alfred had an instinct for timing a decisive charge (see *Ashdown*). Once per game, Alfred's division automatically passes a three-move order provided at least half the unshaken units in the division charge into hand-to-hand combat as part of the move.



### ÆTHELSTAN

Reigned: 924–927

Religion: Christian

Leadership: 8

Fighting Value: 2

#### Special Rules

Æthelstan was the acknowledged King of all the English so he had a greater authority than his predecessors. Once per turn, when a unit in another division fails an order, it may be re-rolled using Æthelstan's leadership provided the king has not already failed to give an order this turn. The divisional commander has still failed an order so may give no further orders, but Æthelstan is unaffected if the re-roll also fails.



“But when king Athelstan perceived king Olaf’s division beginning to break, he then spurred on his force, and bade his standard advance. A fierce onset was made, so that King Olaf’s force recoiled, and there was a great slaughter.”

*Egil’s Saga*



Saxon Thegns ready for battle.



# IRISH-NORSE

## ARMY COMPOSITION

- Up to one third of the units in the army may be Irish
- Up to one quarter of each division may be skirmishers.
- At least half the Norse units in the army must be hirdmen.
- Up to one in five non skirmisher units in the army can be light infantry.
- Only one Royal Bodyguard Huscarl heavy infantry unit may be present in the army and the general must be attached to it, if present.
- The Army is pagan.

Irish-Norse Troop Values

Unit	Combat				Morale Save	Stamina	Points Per Unit	Special
	Clash	Sustained	Short Range	Long Range				
Royal Bodyguard Huscarl heavy infantry with assorted arms <i>Extra to field with heavy throwing weapon (counts as pilum)</i>	8	8	3	0	4+	6	35 +3	Stubborn, Tough Fighters
Veteran Warrior heavy infantry with assorted arms <i>Extra to field with heavy throwing weapon (counts as pilum)</i>	7	7	3	0	4+	6	33 +3	Tough Fighters, Stubborn, Elite, Valiant
Hirdmen/Warriors heavy infantry with assorted arms <i>Extra to field with heavy throwing weapon (counts as pilum)</i>	7	7	3	0	4+	6	23 +3	
Irish Fianna warband with swords and javelins	7	5	2	0	5+	6	23	Wild Fighters
Bondi medium infantry with spears	6	6	3	0	5+	6	23	
Bondi medium infantry with bows	4	4	3	3	6+	6	21	
Bondi medium infantry with bows fielded as small units	3	3	2	2	6+	4	15	
Thrall skirmishers with spears and javelins fielded as small units	3	2	2	0	0	4	11	
Irish skirmishers with slings fielded as small unit	2	2	2	2	0	4	12	
Irish light cavalry with spears and/or javelins fielded as small units	5	3	2	0	6+	4	18	
Irish light chariots	6	5	4	0	6+	4	28	Fierce Fighters

**Note:** It is questionable whether the Irish were still using light chariots and even more questionable that a Norse warlord would ship them across the Irish Sea to Britain – but, for the romantics amongst us....

## SPECIAL RULES

- **Berserkers:** Up to five Norse units (i.e. any unit not described as Irish) may have a single berserker attached at a cost of +1 point. The berserker adds three attacks on the first turn that a Norse unit is in hand-to-hand combat provided that the Norse unit initiated the combat by charging. Otherwise the berserker has no effect in the game. A berserker model should be placed beside the unit so that it is clear which units are so equipped. The berserker models should be removed after use or if they become irrelevant.
- **Outflankers:** Norse armies seem to have been more professional and flexible than their opponents,

particularly when fighting from fortifications. When a Norse army is in possession of fortifications, one division consisting of not more than one fifth of the army units may be held in reserve off table. It can be brought on from either side table edge from the start of turn two, the distance from the Norse base line along the flank governed by the turn number. The outflanking division must come on before turn five or it is considered to have been destroyed. It may not enter the table within nine inches of an enemy unit.

Turn	Distance
2	12"
3	24"
4	36"

- **Shieldwall:** Norse medium and heavy infantry may use a shieldwall formation.





## NOTABLE IRISH-NORSE WARLORDS

### OLAF GUTHFRITHSON

Reigned: 934–941

Religion: Pagan

Leadership: 8

Fighting Value: 4

#### Special Rules

Olaf had the luck of the Devil, surviving many battles until a skirmish in 941. Olaf may re-roll 'the death of a general' if the result is not to the player's liking. The second re-roll stands

"A great, lamentable and horrible battle was cruelly fought between the Saxons and the Northmen, in which several thousands of Northmen, who are uncounted, fell, but their king, escaped with a few followers. A large number of Saxons fell on the other side, but Æthelstan, king of the Saxons, enjoyed a great victory."

*Annals of Ulster*



Irish-Norse troops.



# CREATING SCENARIOS

Players can create perfectly good games simply by lining up their forces facing each other across open ground and letting slip the dogs of war. Equally, the historical scenarios listed in this book can be used as templates. However, nothing is more satisfying than creating one's own bespoke scenarios, possibly as part of an imaginary campaign between two would-be Bretwaldas.

So where did Dark Age battles tend to occur? To answer that question we have to look at the logistical issues facing a warlord, especially the lack of maps. To raise an army, our warlord would have to put out the word for his liegemen to meet at a certain well-known and easily distinguishable place, such as an ancient monument. This could be the ruins of a Roman town (a 'chester'), an ancient religious centre like Bath or Stonehenge, a place where two Roman roads (streets) met, or where such a road crossed a river. The Roman bridge itself might be wrecked but there was still likely to be a ford close by. The English town name Stratford is actually street-ford.

For the strategic defender, the chosen place may also be the chosen battle site. A degree of collusion was required between the opposing warlords over the time and place for a battle. It would have been remarkably easy for a Dark Age warlord to avoid battle altogether by just staying out of the

way of an invader, or simply not raising an army in the first place. However, given the 'heroic' culture at the time, a 'king' who avoided battle with the foe was a king living on borrowed time.

The defending army, by definition, would often turn up to the battlefield first and get to choose where to take a stand. This would normally be on top of a hill or ridge, forcing the invader to attack uphill. Even if the ancient monument chosen for the site was a hill-fort, or ruined fortified Roman town, it was unlikely to be used as a defensive position. Early British armies are a possible exception to this observation.

An invading army moving out of its own territory had the additional problem of finding its way without maps. Local guides might be hired but could prove unreliable (or in the pay of the opposition). So invaders tended to follow linear features that went in the right general direction and offered reasonably good going. These might include Roman roads, ancient trackways, drover trails or rivers. Many battles took place beside rivers, especially at crossing points. Certain well-trodden streets or tracks became known as 'herepaths' (military routes). Ambushes of armies on herepaths were far from unknown, especially in the wilder uplands of the island where there were fewer, and hence more predictable, routes.



"Feel the fury of the Northern!"



## RANDOM TERRAIN GENERATOR

First place a track/street down the centre of the table and decide who is to be the invader and who the defender, if necessary by dicing, drawing cards or a tea-drinking race. Then each player rolls a D6, invader first, consults the table below, and places the terrain on the table. Repeat as necessary until you have an interesting battlefield.

D6 Score	Result
1	Ridge
2	River
3	Hill
4	Roman Ruin (buildings/defensive walls)
5	Hill-fort or fortified dyke
6	Marsh

Each player then rolls a D6 to see who arrives at the battlefield first, the defender adding two to the die. In the event of a tie repeat without adding two until you have a winner. The winning player arrives first so chooses which long

side of the table he will play from then sets up his army anywhere in his half of the table. The losing player then sets up his army anywhere in his half of the table at least 18" from the other player's units. The losing player goes first.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The end of the first millennium is also the end of the early medieval era in Britain commonly known to wargamers as the Dark Ages. By 1000 AD, the inhabitants of the islands had been divided into the four native cultures known today as the English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh, and the geographical boundaries between them had solidified with only minor adjustments over the next millennium.

The foundations for our world were laid down here.

## BRETWALDA

The term Bretwalda first surfaces in a West Saxon chronicle of the late 9th century that applied the term to Egberht, King of Wessex in the early 9th century. The chronicle also applies the title retrospectively to seven kings that Bede listed in 731 in the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. The literal meaning of Bretwalda is disputed but a rough translation is 'high king' or perhaps 'king of kings'

The list in chronological order is as follows:

- Ælle, King of Sussex
- Ceawlin of Wessex
- Æthelberht of Kent
- Rædwald of East Anglia
- Edwin of Deira (southern Northumbria)

- Oswald of Northumbria
- Oswiu of Northumbria
- Egbert of Wessex (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle)
- Alfred of Wessex (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle)

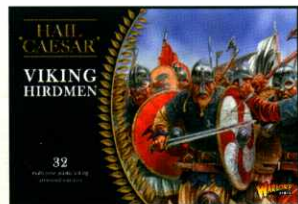
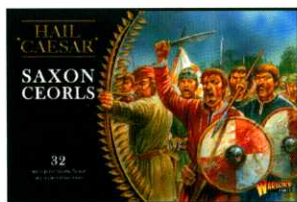
The reader will note that the early list moves from early southern Saxon and Jute kings, to Angle kings, especially Northumbrians. Bede was himself a Northumbrian Angle. Only after Bede does it move back down south to Wessex, where the chronicle itself was composed. Somehow the powerful kings of Mercia, such as Penda or Offa (who were enemies of both Northumbria and Wessex) managed to be omitted.

In short, the Bretwalda list is Northumbrian and Wessex propaganda.





# ENTER THE DARK AGES



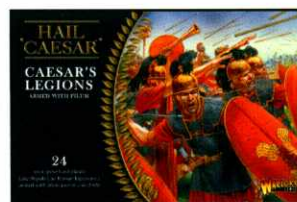
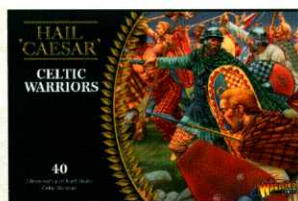
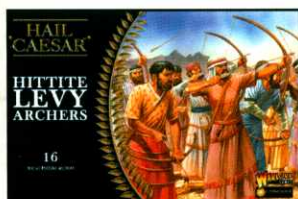
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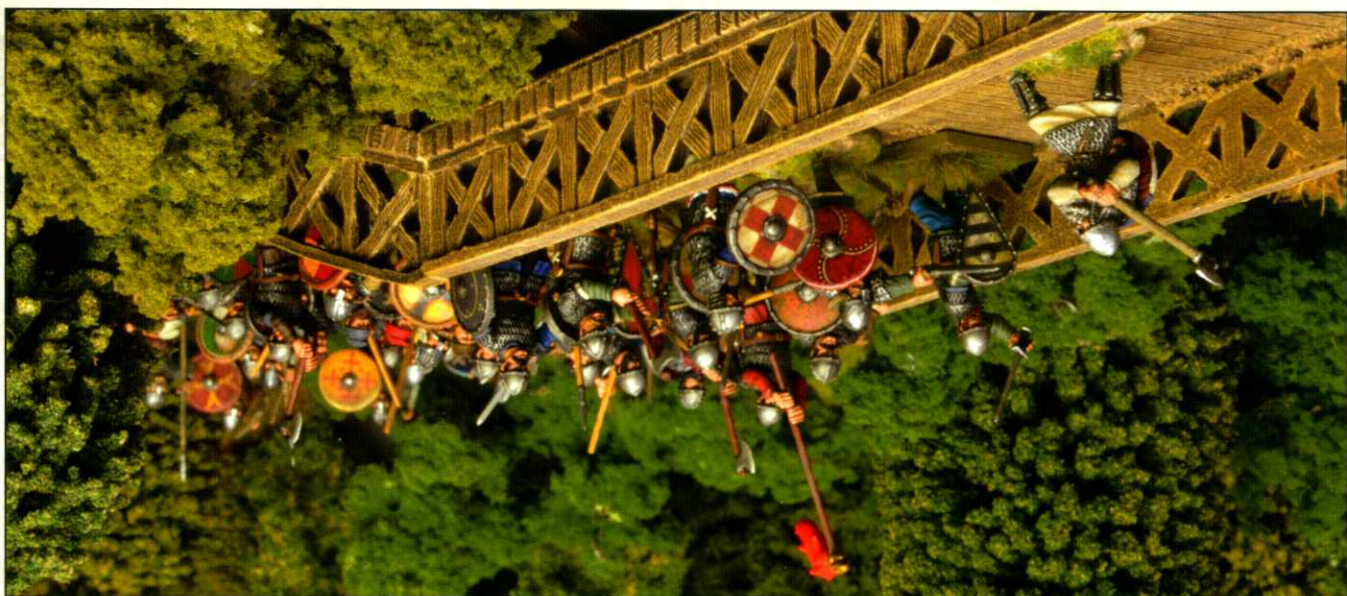


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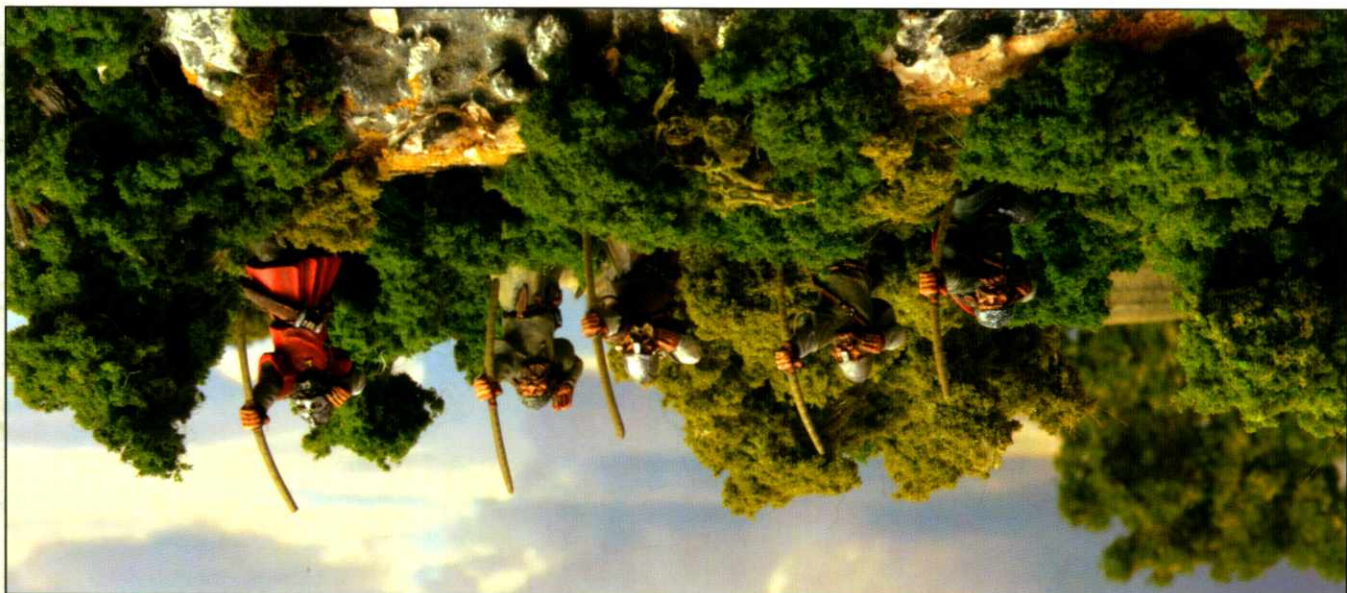
Stand your ground! A Norse axemen single-handedly holds up the Saxon advance across the bridge.



Saxon warriors prepare to hold their river crossing.



Viking archers unleash a hail of arrows.





• HAIL CAESAR •

# SHIELD WALL

The Dark Age Sagas – Volume I



A notoriously unstable and rebellious member of the Roman Empire, Britannia was thrown into bloody conflict as the Western Roman Empire began to crumble. Axe, spear and sword became the dominant currency for those vying for control of the kingdoms.

*Shield Wall* is a supplement for *Hail Caesar* which introduces the main battles, armies and personalities of the Dark Ages in the British Isles from around 400AD up to 1000AD.

In addition to the traditional *Hail Caesar* massed battles the supplement introduces rules for smaller scale engagements between warbands as reflects much of this period. *Shield Wall* also contains campaign rules and several linked scenarios – from Badon Hill to Brunaburh.

The army lists are included for Limitanei, early and late Saxons, Romano-British, Welsh-Cymru, Irish, Picts, Gaels, Vikings and Irish-Norse.

**A copy of the *Hail Caesar* rulebook is required to use this supplement.**