

The Battle of Fulford at York Racecourse

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Introduction

Fulford is the poor relation of 1066 battles. It gets just two pages in Frank McLynn's '1066: The Year of the Three Battles', despite being one of the three, and barely a page in A H Burne's reference book of England's battlefields. Yet it had a crucial impact. If the English had been victorious at Fulford, Harold would not have lost any men or expended any energy at Stamford Bridge. It would probably have been enough to turn the finely balanced result at Hastings.

We applied the same techniques in the search for the Fulford battlefield that we used to find the probable locations of the Brunanburh, Stamford Bridge and Hastings battlefields. This one was a lot easier. Some of those lost battlefield searches took decades to research and hundreds of pages to explain. This one took a few days to research and just three pages to explain. We conclude that the Battle of Fulford was probably fought between York Racecourse and the River Ouse.

Chas Jones devised the orthodox battle narrative, proposing that the battle was fought at Germany Beck. He was involved in an appeal against a property development at the beck. We delayed publishing for fear our theory might interfere with the case. Five years have passed. Hopefully, it is innocuous now.

About the battlefield

Fulford is the least well documented of the 1066 battles - translations of the contemporary accounts can be found in Appendix A. In summary, there are two core accounts, one English, one Norse. Snippets of new information are added by the other accounts. Together, they create a credible narrative:

- 1. A Norse/Fleming alliance led by King Harold Hardrada and Tostig Godwinson entered the Humber in some 300 ships, sailed up the Ouse and camped at Riccall.
- 2. The following day the Norse fleet sailed towards York, mooring

- midstream in the Ouse within sight of York's ramparts.
- 3. A Northumbrian/Mercian alliance under Earls Morcar and Edwin respectively sortied towards the invaders from York. The Norse fleet moored on the north bank. The army disembarked.
- 4. The armies faced each other on a peninsula of sorts, bounded by the River Ouse on one side, a ditch and marsh on the other.
- 5. The armies were arrayed parallel to each other and perpendicular to the river and ditch. Hardrada and Edwin faced each other on the river side flanks, Tostig and Morcar on the ditch side flanks.
- 6. Morcar's men pushed back Tostig's flank.
- 7. Morcar's flank advanced beyond Hardrada's flank, allowing Hardrada and his reserves to cross the battlefield dividing the English line and sandwiching Morcar's men.
- 8. Morcar's men were squeezed sideways into the ditch where many perished. Seeing their compatriots capitulate, Edwin's men fled along the Ouse to York, some tried to escape into the river.
- 9. The battlefield was north of the Ouse near 11th century Fulford.

There are some apparent inconsistencies:

- The Norse accounts say that the English commanders were Morcar and Walthiof, and that Morcar was killed, whereas Morcar survived and he is known to have fought with Edwin. Sagas are prone to these types of incidental error. In our opinion, it does not undermine the veracity of the events they describe.
- Symeon says that Hardrada and Tostig "took York after a hard struggle" before the Battle of Fulford. This must be misplaced in the narrative. The other accounts agree that Edwin and Morcar sortied from York to attack the invaders.
- Gaimar says that the Norse disembark at St Wilfred's, unclear whether this was before making camp or before the battle. Charles Petrie reckoned it probably referred to Brayton which had the only known church dedicated to St Wilfred in the region. It is downstream of Riccall. If he is right, Gaimar is referring to where they camp on the day before the battle, so it makes no material difference to what follows.

Fallacies in the orthodox battle narrative

The Norse army's arrival at the battle theatre

Here is Ramsay's 1898 interpretation of the orthodox engagement: "Sailing up the Oose (Usa) the invaders finally landed at 'Richale' - Riccal - on the left bank of the river above Selby, but some ten miles below York. From that point they advanced by land along the road to York, with the river on their left. So, they marched as far as Fulford, that is to say, Gate Fulford, about two miles from York. There, on Wednesday, 20th September, they found themselves confronted by the forces of the country, under Eadwine, Morkere, and perhaps Waltheof."

The orthodox battlefield location has changed, but little else. Here is Rayner's 2004 interpretation: "The combined fleet sailed down the east coast, reaching the Humber estuary then sailing towards York. They landed at Riccall on the east bank of the Ouse and formed up ready to march towards York, nine miles away. The brothers Morcar and Edwin marched out to meet them with a smaller army. The Norse met the English just outside York at Fulford Gate, probably along the line of Germany Beck."

There is one glaring discrepancy between the orthodox engagement and the summary narrative we present above: How the Norse army got from their camp at Riccall to somewhere near Fulford on the day of battle. By tradition, they marched. Our summary narrative says that they went by ship. It might seem like petty hair splitting but the ford location and some of the major events depend on how the Norse arrived at the battlefield. This is what the contemporary accounts say:

- ASC-C: "... they both [Hardrada and Tostig] went with all the fleet up the Ouse towards York."
- ASC-D & ASC-E: "... they both went up the Humber until they reached York."

- Gaimar: "... from the Humber they went to the Ouse, and disembarked at Saint Wilfrid's. On the morrow they set sail for York, and arrived there in the evening."
- Huntingdon: "Then they joined their forces and came up the Humber, as far as York."
- Heimskringla: "Thereupon King Harald sailed to the Humber and up the river, and anchored there. At that time there were two earls in York, Morkere and his brother Wæltheow, with a huge army. King Harald lay in the Usa [Ouse] when the army of the earls came down from the land to oppose him. Then the king went on land and began to array his army for battle."
- Saga of Harald Hardrada: "King Harald was lying in the Ouse when the host of the Earls swooped down against him."

These six accounts unambiguously say that the Norse army went to the battle theatre by ship. The others are silent. Yet every reputable historian that has written about the Battle of Fulford says that they marched. None of them reveal their source. We have traced the alleged Norse march back to Edward Freeman who wrote in the 1850s: "At Riccall then the vast fleet of the Northmen was left. Filling up the river, as it must have done, for a long distance, it formed an unwonted and terrible object in waters where no invading fleet had been seen for fifty years. A detachment, under the command of Olaf, the son of the Norwegian King, of the two Earls of Orkney, and of the Bishop of those islands, was left to guard the ships, while the main body, under Harold and Tostig, made ready for their decisive march on York."

Freeman, not unusually sad to say, is writing bilge. Not only do all the contemporary accounts say that the Norse army sailed to the Fulford battle theatre, but they do not say or hint who guarded the fleet. Heimskringla specifically says that Olaf fought alongside his father at Fulford. The Kings Sagas include a poem about Olaf's exploits fighting at Fulford.

The source of Freeman's error can be found in Heimskringla's account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge: "he [Hardrada] ordered the trumpets

to be blown for going ashore. He got his army ready, deciding which troops were to go with him and which were to stay behind. Out of every detachment two men were ordered to go on land, for one to stay behind. Earl Tostig and his company made ready to go on land with King Harald; but left behind, to guard the ships, were Óláf, the king's son, together with the Orkney earls Pál and Erlend". So, Freeman has erroneously conflated the preludes to Fulford and Stamford Bridge, creating a fallacious Fulford narrative. Dispiritingly, it seems that everyone has parroted his mistake for the last 160 years, no one going back to check the contemporary accounts.

Freeman's error is crucial to our battlefield location theory because we think the battle was fought on the west bank of the Ouse. Riccall is on the east bank. If the Norse army marched from Riccall towards York, they must have arrived on the east bank. They did not march. They arrived by ship, so they could have discharged on either bank.

Roads from Riccall and/or Water Fulford to York

Vikings were proto marines. They liked to move around by ship. They might have chosen to arrive at the battle theatre by ship even though there were roads between Riccall and York. This is relevant because, by tradition, Fulford ford is assumed to be where one of these roads crossed Germany Beck, with the battlefield nearby.

Chas Jones describes three routes between Riccall and York. "From Riccall there are two routes on firm ground that converge at Fulford and a third route which passed through some wet land. The main route was along the moraine via Escrick. The other firm route followed the Ouse to the north west before striking north to Naburn and then towards the ford. Although they did not have the benefit of surfaced roads, the going would likely be good enough to cope with a marching army. The third, most direct route is indicated on some 18th century maps, but this had a limited capacity since in three places it had swampy ground on either side". More perhaps: "There would doubtless"

be other tracks and routes leading from Riccall to the fording point". We think there is plenty of room for doubt.

Riccall was an island in the 11th century. No evidence of Saxon era roads has been found. On the safe assumption that all the land under 10m was marshy until it was drained in the 14th century, any road north out of Riccall would have had to cross 2km of tidal marshland. Anglo-Saxons are not known to have built tidal causeways anywhere else. It is difficult to believe that the Romans would have built such a causeway either, unless it had a military or commercial purpose, neither of which would apply to Riccall which had one small Roman villa on perhaps 20 hectares of farmland. If they did, it is difficult to believe that the Anglo-Saxons had the skills, wherewithal or incentive to maintain it. And it is unlikely that there was a land link between Riccall and York, because the Norse army would otherwise have had no reason to go to Stamford Bridge a couple of days later.

As far as we can see, Jones's main reason to believe that there was even one road north out of Riccall is Freeman's fallacious claim that the Norse army arrived at the battlefield on foot. His secondary reason is that: "There was no acceptable by-pass or other route to reach York from the south so the ford was an excellent 'choke point' for the defenders to control because the invaders would be forced to pass that point." But this is wrong too. The Ouse was the main transport link south and southeast of York through to the 17th century. Jones offers some sarcophagi as indirect evidence that there might have been a road between York and Water Fulford, but it cannot be used as evidence of a road between Water Fulford and Riccall. In our opinion, there were no roads north out of Riccall, so the Norse army had to sortie by ship.

Jones has found some evidence of an unpaved medieval local road on the Ouse east bank near modern Fulford. Perhaps, then, this road ran from York to Water Fulford, in which case it would have had to cross Germany Beck, perhaps below its tidal limit. Jones presents indirect evidence of this in the discovery of five Roman sarcophagi that he thinks were associated with an unpaved Roman road that followed the route of the modern A19. Sarcophagi are associated with high status people who tended to live near good infrastructure, often a Roman road, so he might be right. But, as is the case here, the good infrastructure can instead be a nearby navigable river. Moreover, these sarcophagi are not quite as Jones suggests.

He says about the first two sarcophagi: "in 1835 and 1836 workmen quarrying for gravel located two stone coffins in an area of land known as the 'Nunneries' or 'Nunners' fields'. The early OS maps show several gravel workings along the Ings [i.e. east of the Ouse]." The next two (quoting MAP): "During excavations for York sewer in 1892, two Roman coffins were found near St Oswald's church containing human skeletons". The fifth: "In 1997 during work on the A19/A64 interchange: A gritstone sarcophagus was encountered during the machining of a drainage service trench (SE 6135 4790)."

But the first two sarcophagi were found at Masham, 30 miles northwest of York, and are therefore irrelevant. Roman coffins have been found near Clementhorpe Nunnery, which might have been known as the 'Nunneries', but they were on the west bank. A Roman coffin lid was found near Old St Oswalds but it was closer to the river than to Jones's proposed road. The fifth sarcophagus was closer to Jones's road than to the river but only marginally.

Briden reckons that the maximum tidal range at medieval York was 1.5m which implies that Germany Beck would have been tidal 600m upstream (Jones calculates 900m but does not explain how). It seems to us that a river-hugging east bank road would simply have diverted upstream, to where the beck was narrow enough to step across at any time of the day, rather than going to the effort of maintaining a tidal ford over the widest part of the beck.

In summary, there is no substantial evidence of a river-hugging east bank road or of a ford across the tidal part of Germany Beck, and both seem implausible to us. In the unlikely event that Germany Beck had a tidal ford, we think it would have been too insignificant to have had a name. Water Fulford had one family in Domesday. The average traffic between it and York might have been one cart a day. We think that traffic would have crossed Germany Beck on RCHME's 'York Road 1' paved Roman road - also known as Margary 803(x) and RRX030 – a kilometre upstream at the modern golf course (see Figure 1).

Fulford ford location

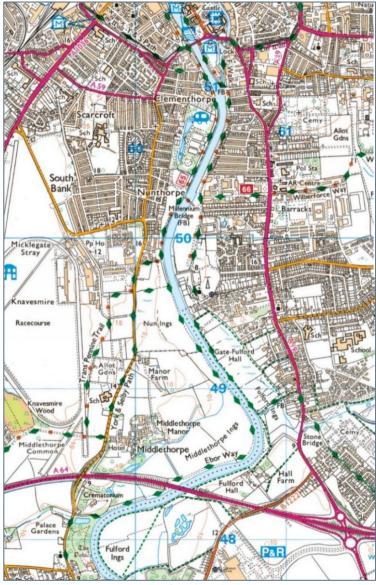


Figure 1: Ordnance Survey map of south York

'Fulford' means 'dirty' or 'muddy' ford, implying that it crossed a wide slow river with a large catchment area. If it was also important enough to have had a name, it probably crossed the Ouse on a commercial and/or military route, most probably to Lincoln and/or Bridlington. The terrain would have been difficult for a ford because the Ouse had marshy floodplain - known locally as 'ings' - abutting one or both banks all the way down to its confluence with the Humber (Figure 1).

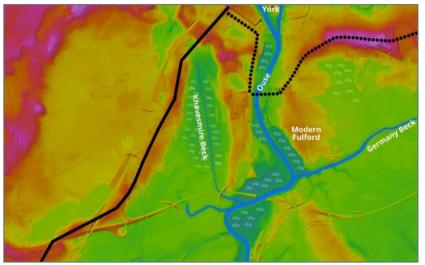


Figure 2: Fulford district relief in 1066; our suggested position of the ford shown in black

The ings were narrowest at Millennium Fields, a 700m stretch of the Ouse between the Millennium Bridge and St Oswalds Road. Old St Oswalds, on St Oswald's Road, is thought to have been built on the site of an earlier Saxon church. That church was presumably associated with a local Saxon settlement, which might have been associated with the ford. Christopher Rainger has found a Victorian road mirroring St Oswalds Road on the opposite bank. He therefore reasons that Fulford ford was probably immediately west of Old St Oswalds Church. He could be right, but it is not where the ings are narrowest, and the church might have been positioned where it is because it was the nearest place to the ford that was above the flood plain.

There is a glacial moraine ridge between York and modern Stamford Bridge. It is shown as higher ground in the northeast corner of

Figure 2. According to the Roman Roads Research Association, it carried a Roman road from York through Fulford and Roman Derventio (near Low Catton) to Bridlington and Lincoln. That road is thought to have been an alternative high route to be used when the River Fosse flooded the main RR810 Roman road. It must therefore have had a link to York's southwest gate. A section of Roman road has been found at Nunthorpe to the west of the Ouse. The obvious straight route, crossing the Ouse at Clementhorpe, would have been difficult because of the ings. We think that the Roman road detoured south to cross the Ouse on Fulford ford somewhere near the Millennium Bridge (black dotted line on Figure 2 and Figure 5), where the ings were narrowest. If the river was naturally too deep to ford the Ouse at low tide, it could have been shoaled.

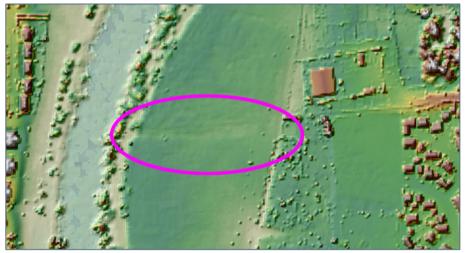


Figure 3: Possible causeway at Fulford Cross

There is a vestigial causeway across the east bank of Millennium Fields (Figure 3). It was used by a Victorian railway and might have been created for that railway, but it is not on the shortest route. What was good for the Romans was perhaps good for the Victorians. It might have been built on an earlier Roman causeway that once led to the ford.

If Fulford ford and settlement was adjacent to Millennium Fields, it was 1500m from Germany Beck, not too far to discount the possibility that the battle was named after it, but not that close either. In our opinion,

the name of the ford should not be used as evidence that the battle was fought at Germany Beck.

The battlefield geography

The Sagas describe the Norse troop deployment in relation to the battlefield geography:

Morkinskinna: "one wing toward the river and the other toward the still water of a deep pool".

Fagrskinna: "one flank of the army facing towards the river and a second towards a certain ditch and that was deep and full of water".

Heimskringla (Laing): "The one arm of this line stood at the outer edge of the river, the other turned up towards the land along a ditch; and there was also a morass, deep, broad, and full of water".

Heimskringla (Smith): "One wing stood forth on the river bank, while the other went farther inland towards a dyke, where there was a deep wide marsh full of water".

Heimskringla (Binns): "One wing by the river, the other by the dyke, a deep swamp full of water".

Heimskringla (Palsson): "One flank reaching down to the river and the other stretching inland towards a dyke where there was a deep and wide swamp full of water".

Heimskringla (Hollander): "One wing stood on the bank of the river, the other was arrayed further up on land, and extended to a ditch. There was a swamp, deep and broad and full of water."

Heimskringla (Finlay): "One wing of his formation was stationed forward on the bank of the river, and the other extended up inland to a certain dyke. It was a deep fen, broad and full of water."

To summarise, the sagas say that the battlefield was bounded by the River Ouse on one side, by a ditch and marsh, or in one case a deep pool, on the other. In other words, the battlefield was roughly rectangular with the shield walls deployed perpendicular to the long sides.

The Sagas are not entirely in agreement about the flank away from the river. Morkinskinna says it was against a deep pool, Fagrskinna that it was against ditch full of water, Heimskringla that it was against a ditch with a wide marsh full of water. Or, at least, all bar one of the Heimskringla translations say that the battlefield was bounded by a ditch away from the river. Samuel Laing's translation implies that the Norse flank away from the river was arrayed along a ditch and that the marsh and water were beyond that. We talk about this in the section about the Orthodox Battlefield below, concluding that Laing's translation is just about valid but unnatural, far less credible than the others. In our opinion, it is wrong and misleading. This is relevant.

The Sagas are the only sources of geographic battlefield information. Laing's Heimskringla translation was the only Saga translation available when the original orthodox battlefield location at Gate Fulford was devised. It was the only one considered by Chas Jones when he developed the new orthodox battlefield location. It is a reasonable match for an east bank battlefield and for that being at Germany Beck. But Laing's translation is almost certainly wrong. The natural Heimskringla translation, which broadly agrees with Morkinskinna and Fagrskinna, is inconsistent with an east bank battlefield, and especially inconsistent with Germany Bech. We will try to explain why.

Figure 4 shows Kelly DeVries's depiction of the original orthodox battlefield at Gate Fulford with a rectangular battlefield bounded by the Ouse on one side and a dyke/ditch on the other with marsh beyond. The Ouse orientation suggests he was thinking that the battlefield was at Gate Fulford Hall. But Fulford Ings was 200m wide at Gate Fulford Hall, so the river side flanks could not have extended to the river. This is true all the way from Water Fulford to the modern Millennium Bridge: There is nowhere on the east bank where the armies could

extend to the river. It is no better on the other side. Morkinskinna says that Tostig and Morcar's flanks were against a wide pool of still water. The other Sagas say that they were against a wide marshy ditch filled with water. In this region, these descriptions would only apply to a tidal ditch or tidal marsh at high tide. But Walmgate Stray, to the east of Fulford, was not tidal. Indeed, according to Jones's soil surveys, it was not even a marsh in the 11th century. And there was no significant ditch east of Fulford.

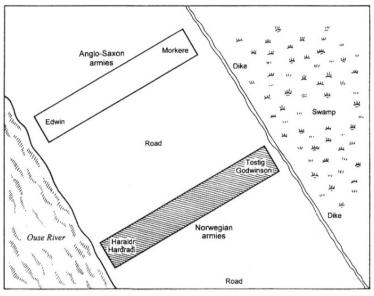


Figure 4: DeVries engagement scenario at Gate Fulford

The only significant east bank tidal ditch was Germany Beck. This is why it is a cornerstone of the new orthodox battlefield theory. But it is perpendicular to the Ouse whereas the Sagas say the ditch was parallel to the Ouse. It was only deep and wide at high tide and within 200m of the river. It was only full of water at high tide and within 600m of the river (Jones reckons 900m). Jones proposes that the armies faced each other across this stretch of tidal beck waiting for the tide to ebb. It seems unlikely to us. None of the accounts hint that the ditch might have been between the armies, or that they had to wait for the tide. Both armies would have been initially deployed on good ground. It is difficult to believe that either army would relinquish good ground to

attack across a boggy ditch. If they did, the enemy would have trapped them on the bad ground. Instead, one or both armies would surely have tried to cross the fluvial beck a few hundred metres upstream, where it was narrow enough to step across, hoping to loop behind the enemy. There is no hint in the contemporary accounts that this was even possible.

To summarise, the east bank terrain is inconsistent with the geography described in the contemporary accounts, bar Laing's translation of Heimskringla which we think to be faulty.

Our proposed battlefield

One reason Jones gives for rejecting a west bank battlefield is that it has no ditch that matches the Saga battlefield descriptions. But it did have one: Knavesmire Beck. It was culverted in the 19th century, leaving it only visible where it discharges into the Ouse, but it is shown as a normal beck on the 1842 Ordnance Survey map with racehorses crossing on bridges at the 14 and 5-furlong posts. Jones questions whether Knavesmire was wetland in the 11th century. Its Old Norse name suggests it must have been. MYO4287 HER explains: "In the early 18th century the Knavesmire was drained and levelled. The first race meet took place there in 1731 having moved from Clifton Ings." We are convinced that it was tidal marshland in the 11th century.

The landscape bounding the battlefield away from the river is variously described as 'a deep boggy wide ditch full of water' (Heimskringla), 'a deep pool full of water' (Morkinskinna) and as a 'ditch and that was deep and full of water' (Fagrskinna). Knavesmire Beck would have been all of these. At high tide, the entire Knavemire would flood, drowning Knavesmire Beck to give the appearance of a wide pool full of water. As the tide ebbed, Knavesmire Beck would emerge from the pool as a wide marshy ditch full of water. At low tide, it would be a deep fluvial ditch with relatively little water.

If Knavesmire Beck is the ditch described in the Norse accounts, the battlefield was to its east, between the beck and the Ouse. We refer to it as the Chocolate Factory Peninsula. It lies between Scarcroft to the north and Middlethorpe Manor to the south. The peninsula is hourglass shaped, some 900m across at the top and bottom, narrowing to 600m in the middle where the former Terry's chocolate factory and racecourse carparks can be found. We think the battlefield was at the waist, or perhaps a few hundred metres south of it.

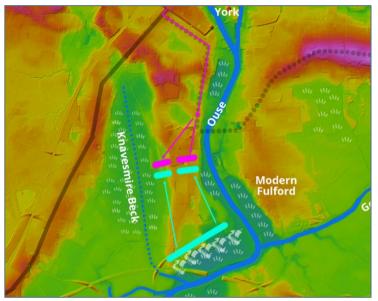


Figure 5: Engagement and battlefield; Edwin & Morcar in magenta, Hardrada in cyan

Figure 5 shows our proposed engagement scenario and battlefield. To summarise. The Norse fleet was lying in the Ouse near Water Fulford. Edwin and Morcar sortied from the west gate to fend them off. Hardrada chose to fight, mooring on the north bank at Middlethorpe Ings (longships). The Norse army disembarked and formed a line north of Middlethorpe Manor (lower cyan line). The English headed east on what is now Nunnery Lane to join the Roman predecessor of Bishopthorpe Road, the cobbled remains of which were found 2m below the current surface in a 1981 excavation (EYO786). They marched south down this road, alongside the Ouse, until they reached

the former chocolate factory where they forked into two flanks, one towards the river, the other towards the dyke (magenta lines).

The contact zone depends on how far the Norse army advanced from Middlethorpe Hall. The contemporary accounts are silent. They must have advanced at least 100m because the Sagas explain that Tostig's flank was pushed back. If he was pushed back from Middlethorpe Hall, it would have been into the river. We depict the contact zone at the peninsula waist on all our diagrams, assuming that Hardrada tried to get to the narrowest ground, between the allotments and the chocolate factory. The contact zone might have been up to 750m south of this. The three diagrams below show our interpretation of the main battle events, as described in the King's Sagas unless we say otherwise.

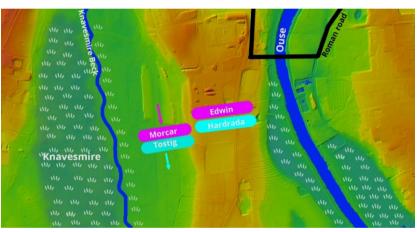


Figure 6a: Tostig's flank is pushed back

Figure 5 shows the initial engagement. Figure 6a shows Tostig's flank being pushed back. Morcar's men think they are fleeing and chase. They come alongside Hardrada's men (Heimskringla): "King Harald saw that the battle array of the English had come down along the ditch right opposite them".

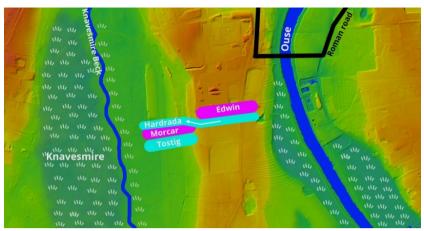


Figure 6b: Morcar's men are sandwiched

Figure 6b shows that Hardrada led some of his men across the battlefield to split the English line and get behind Morcar's cohort: "King Haraldr led the attack with his troops and joined battle so fiercely that the enemy was split" (Monkinskinna), and "he turns with his men at the back of Morcar's battle" (Hemings Tale). Morcar's men are sandwiched with nowhere to fall back.

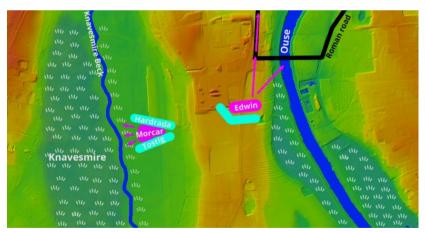


Figure 6c: The English flee

Figure 6c shows Morcar's men being squeezed west: "the local army began to flee. They retreated to a place where there was no armed opposition, in the swampy ground around the pool." (Morkinskinna). The east bank of Knavesmire Beck was lined by 50m of marsh. Morcar's

men are forced into the marsh. So many Englishmen died in this marsh that the Sagas reckon the Norse could walk over their bodies without getting their feet wet (Heimskringla). Many of those that make it across this marsh died in the dyke. Meanwhile, seeing Morcar's men capitulate, Edwin and his men fled back to York along the Roman road. Some stragglers jumped into the river to avoid getting caught by the chasing Norse. So many of them died that the river got blocked with their corpses (Vita Edwardi Regis).

These events are almost identical to those depicted on David Cooke's battle diagram from his 2006 book 'Yorkshire Battlefields from the Romans to the Civil War' (Figure 7). Despite the terrain mismatch, we think he has got the major battle events exactly right, just mirrored because they are on the wrong riverbank.

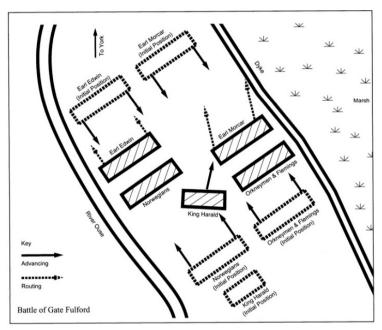


Figure 6: David Cooke's battle scenario

Our proposed battlefield matches all the other clues, with a couple of possible exceptions that we return to below:

• The Chocolate Factory Peninsula is the only place in the vicinity that matches Symeon and John of Worcester's statements that the

battlefield was on the "north bank of the River Ouse, near York", because it is north of the only stretch of the Ouse that runs close to east-west

- The Chocolate Factory Peninsula is the only place in the vicinity that matches the Harald's Saga's claim that the ditch was on the inland side of the Ouse.
- Middlethorpe Ings is the only place in the vicinity that makes sense of Morkinskinna's statement that: "He [Harald] landed and drew up his troops on the riverbank, with one wing toward the river and the other toward the still water of a deep pool." It sounds wrong. If the Norse army was on the riverbank, it was parallel to the river, where neither flank was towards the river and neither flank could be towards a deep pool. But there is a right-angle bend at Middlethorpe Ings. Morkinskinna is trying to say that the Norse army was arrayed either side of Middlethorpe Manor, on the east-west riverbank with one flank towards the north-south riverbank, the other towards Knavesmire Beck.
- Middlethorpe Ings is roughly 2km miles from York, within sight and hearing from the ramparts at York.
- The Chocolate Factory Peninsula waist is adjacent to what we think is the most probable location of Fulford ford at JS Rowntree Greens.
- The Chocolate Factory Peninsula uniquely matches the line breach and flight descriptions.

A west bank battlefield is not without a couple of possible inconsistencies, most notably that modern Fulford is on the east bank. It might be misleading. Two Fulfords (spelled 'Fuleford' and 'Foleforde') are listed near York in Domesday. Historians think they were north and south of modern Fulford. The only clue to their location is Old St Oswald's church on the east bank, but it post-dates the naming of the battle. It seems just as likely to us that the two Fulfords were settlements on either side of the ford. If the battle took its name from the ford or from a settlement beside the ford, the battlefield is just as likely to have been on the west bank as the east.

Our proposed battle theatre matches all the contemporary account descriptions, perhaps bar one. The Sagas say that Morcar's men jump into the ditch to flee. Knavesmire is level today. When it floods – which it did as recently as 2020 - the entire racecourse is under water. Before being drained in the 14th century, it used to flood at every high tide. If it was as level then as it is now, the marshy ground east of Knavesmire Beck would have been 200m wide. Just as we say about the east bank, Tostig and Morcar's flanks could not be described as 'extending to the ditch', which is what most of the Sagas say, if they were 200m away. Moreover, when Morcar's men fled into the ditch, they would have had to cross 200m of marsh, which is inconsistent with them 'jumping into the ditch' as reported in some Sagas. Something has probably changed: either the racecourse finishing straight was above high tide in those days or Knavesmire Beck was further east. It is known that the racecourse was levelled in the 18th century. There are no records of the details, but we guess that 2m of soil was taken from the finishing straight and dumped on the back straight. If not, Knavesmire Beck probably ran 150m east of its current culvert.

We cannot definitively prove that the battle was fought on the Chocolate Factory Peninsula, but it uniquely fits all the geographic clues, and it is not inconsistent with any of the contemporary accounts. There are only two other candidates, both on the east bank and both of which fail to match the geography or events described in the contemporary accounts.

The orthodox battlefield

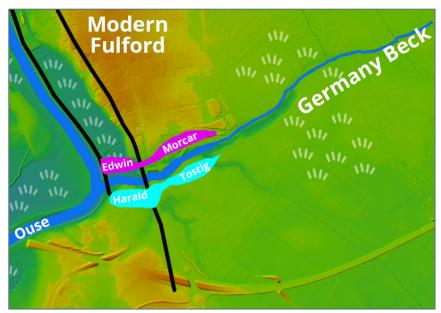


Figure 7: Chas Jones battle scenario at Germany Beck

Chas Jones has spent 25 years researching and writing about the Battle of Fulford. He was developing Guy Schofield's theory that the battle was fought at Germany Beck, itself based on an original idea by Professor Forrest Smith Scott. They think that the English lined up on the north bank of Germany Beck, the Norse on the south bank, with a road crossing a tidal ford 200m or so from the Ouse. They think that this is the ford from which Fulford got its name. This theory is accepted by most historians, but if we are right, it is faulty. We will review the argument.

Jones presents his engagement and battle scenario in the 'Battle at the Ford' section of his book. He thinks the armies were arrayed as shown on Figure 8. He refers to the marshy north bank confluence of river and beck as the 'delta'. His narrative is like this. The Norse crossed the beck to attack the English who were on the better ground. The English moved down to attack them in the marshy ground adjacent to the beck. Hardrada's men waded through the delta around the river end of the English line, trying to get behind Edwin's flank: "Once enough of King"

Harald's men had crossed the beck's delta, Edwin had to fall back". Meanwhile, Morcar's men were battling Tostig near to the beck. Hardrada's men pushed Edwin back far enough that they could break the English line and slide across behind Morcar's flank. He says: "The first many of the English warriors would have known of the trap that was about to enclose them might have been when those behind them were felled by Norwegian warriors."

It is difficult to know how Jones might have arrived at this sequence of events. The only details are in the Sagas. They tell a different story. Heimskringla says: "Then the earls proceeded down along the ditch. There the wing of the Norwegian army extending to the ditch gave way, and the English followed them up, thinking that the Norwegians were about to flee." It was the English advancing, not the Norse. The kink in the English line was caused by Morcar's flank advancing, not Edwin falling back. It was Tostig's flank - away from the river – that gave way, not Edwin's.

So, there are two versions of the orthodox narrative, one from the Sagas in which the English attack, the other from Jones's book in which the Norse attack. Jones's evidence applies equally to both scenarios:

- 1. Jones has found compelling evidence of iron recycling, perhaps of weapons and armour, on the banks of Germany Beck.
- 2. Jones's battleoffulford.org.uk website says of the fleeing English that: "one version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records them as fighting their way to Heslington, a mile away along the Beck". Heslington is east of Fulford. If the English fought their way to Heslington, they must have started on the east bank, probably near Germany Beck.
- 3. Jones suggests that five Roman sarcophagi infer that a Roman road ran near the route of the A19. He believes that Fulford ford is where it crossed a tidal part of Germany Beck some 200m from the Ouse.
- 4. Laing's translation of Heimskringla's description of the Norse troop disposition says: "The one arm of his line stood at the outer edge of the river, the other turned up towards the land along a ditch; and there was also a morass, deep, broad, and full of water." Jones

- understandably interprets this to mean that the flank away from the river was arrayed along a ditch. It only makes sense if the ditch is roughly perpendicular to the river. The only candidate on either bank is Germany Beck.
- 5. Heimskringla's description of the English advance says: "The earls [Edwin and Morcar] deployed their army down along the river with the whole body of their men ... Then the earls proceeded down along the ditch." If, as nearly everyone believes, the Norse army was on the east bank, this can be interpreted to mean that the English marched south along the east bank of the Ouse, then turned to march along a tributary ditch. The only candidate is Germany Beck. Therefore, Jones reasons that Fulford ford crossed Germany Beck, and that it was the location of the battle with the Norse army on the south bank facing the English army on the north bank.

Jones's Germany Beck recycling centre is good evidence that the battle was fought in the vicinity, but not necessarily at the beck. Clay and charcoal are heavier and bulkier than weapons and armour. It is therefore quite plausible that weapons and armour were recycled at Germany Beck even though the battle was fought elsewhere, perhaps because the RCHME Roman Road 1 (which cross Germany Beck at the golf course) was linked to woodland and/or marl pits.

The rest of the Germany Beck battlefield evidence is dodgy at best. This is especially true of an Anglo-Saxon Chronicle annal about the English fighting their way to Heslington. As far as we know, no Anglo-Saxon Chronicle recension says or implies anything of the sort. Only one of Jones's five sarcophagi can be used as evidence that a road crossed Germany Beck, and it is unconvincing. Even if there was such a road or ridgeway, it would probably have been diverted a few hundred metres upstream where the fluvial Germany Beck was narrow enough to step across without the need for a ford.

We can see what Laing was thinking with his translation of Heimskringla's description of the Norse troop deployment. The Icelandic original says: "stóð fylkingararmrinn annarr fram á árbakkan,

en annar vissi upp á landit at díki nökkuru, þar var fen djúpt ok breitt ok falt af vatni." It uses the term 'vissi' which can mean 'faced' and the term 'at' which can mean 'along'. He interprets the phrase to mean that the Norse flank away from the river faced along a ditch. We are told that it is one valid translation among several possibilities but one of the least likely, and the context makes it look wrong. Heimskringla goes on to say that the Norse line thins towards the ditch, which makes no sense if the line was parallel to the ditch. The other Norse accounts say that the Norse line was between the river and a ditch/dyke/pool, which is also inconsistent with Laing's translation. Hollander translates the same passage as: "One wing stood on the bank of the river, the other was arrayed further up on land, and extended to a ditch"; Binns: "One wing lay forward of the river, the other extended up inland to a dyke"; Finlay: "One wing of his formation was stationed forward on the bank of the river, and the other extended up inland to a certain dyke". These natural translations agree that the Norse line was arrayed between the river and a dyke/ditch, as if the river and dyke/ditch are parallel, so the dyke/ditch was not Germany Beck.

Heimskringla's statements about the English advance are out of context, taken from this passage: "One wing stood on the bank of the river, the other was arrayed further up on land, and extended to a ditch. There was a swamp, deep and broad and full of water. The earls deployed their army down along the river with the whole body of their men. The royal banner was close by the river. There the king's men stood thickest, and the lines were thinnest by the ditch, with the troops he could least rely on. Then the earls proceeded down along the ditch. There the wing of the Norwegian army extending to the ditch gave way". The "lines were thinnest by the ditch" and the wing that "extended to a ditch" and the wing "extending to the ditch gave way" would make no sense if the Norse army was arrayed along the ditch. "down" implies downstream or downhill whereas the Earls would be heading upstream uphill at Germany Beck. In our opinion, this Heimskringla passage is inconsistent with a battle at Germany Beck.

To summarise, Jones's discovery of metal recycling at Germany Beck is good evidence that the battle was fought in the vicinity, although not necessarily at Germany Beck. The rest of his evidence is faulty, ambiguous or irrelevant. Jones updated his theory in 2020 to reflect post-Victorian Saga translations. He acknowledges: 1) That all the Heimskringla translations bar Laing say that the armies were arrayed 'to' or 'towards' the dyke, not parallel to it; 2) That the Sagas say that the entire Norse army arrived at the battle theatre by ship; and 3) That the Sagas say that the English attacked not the Norse. But he stands by his narrative. Indeed, he reckons that these recent translations corroborate his Germany Beck battlefield theory. Needless to say, we disagree.

There are other reasons to think that the battle was not fought at Germany Beck. All but the last three are common to both versions of the orthodox narrative:

- 1. One contemporary account says that the battle was on the north bank of the Ouse, whereas Germany Beck is on the east bank of the Ouse.
- 2. One contemporary account says that the ditch and marshland were on the inland side of the Ouse, whereas Jones has them on the seaward side of the Ouse.
- 3. Heimskringla says of the English flight: "most leapt into the ditch. There the bodies of the fallen lay so thick that the Norwegians could walk dry-shod over the swamp". It means that the marsh was immediately adjacent to the ditch, but this is not the case at Germany Beck where Jones proposes the fighting went on. Jones suggests that the high tide might have floated the bodies into a carpet beside the ditch, which is perhaps vaguely possible, but it seems to us that Heimskringla meant that they drowned in the swamp, which would not be possible at Germany Beck.
- 4. Several English accounts say that the English fled into the river, many getting drowned. Indeed, Vita Edwardi Regis says that so many drowned that the "Ouse was choked with corpses". But Fulford Ings was between the English side of Jones's battlefield and

- the Ouse, so they could not have fled into the river. Jones suggests that they might have fled along a levee and into the river, but there is no evidence there were any levees on this reach at the time.
- 5. Jones reckons that Germany Beck was 40m wide at the start of the battle when the tide was at its height. It should have been a major factor in the battle, yet none of the accounts mention it, or say that there was an obstacle between the armies, none of the accounts say that combat was delayed while waiting for the tide to ebb.
- 6. Jones reckons that Hardrada's men tried to loop behind Edwin's flank by crossing the delta, but if that was their intention, they would clearly have tried to cross the fluvial beck upstream. Indeed, trying to outflank the enemy by crossing the fluvial beck, then crushing them against the boggy river bank, or defending against the enemy trying to do so, should have been both leaders' primary concern throughout a battle at Germany Beck, but none of the contemporary accounts mention it.
- 7. The Sagas say that most of the English flee by jumping into the ditch, many of them perishing. The only ditch in the vicinity of Jones's battlefield is Germany Beck. If the Norse attacked across the beck, the English would have had to run away from York and through the Norse line to get to Germany Beck. If the English attacked across the beck, Morcar's men should have been able to return safely the way they came without coming to any harm.

One last point is that Chas Jones graciously explained to us his theory about why no battle related archaeology has been found at his proposed battlefield: Anything valuable would have been scavenged and the acid soil would have corroded away any weapons or armour that were missed. This may be so, but hundreds of men died at the battlefield, over 1000 Englishmen alone, according to Marianus Scotus. We would have expected archaeologists and metal detectorists to find dozens of copper alloy personal items, like strap ends, brooches and buckles that were too small or too worthless to be scavenged.

Long before Schofield published his battlefield location theory, historians thought the battle was fought a few hundred metres north at

'Gate Fulford'. DeVries produces one of the few depictions of the original orthodox Battle of Fulford engagement (Figure 4). It fits most contemporary accounts, but not the geography at Gate Fulford.

Perhaps the biggest geographic discrepancy is that the Norse accounts say that the armies were between the river and a dyke, as depicted on DeVries's diagram, but there is 200m of Fulford Ings marsh between Gate Fulford and the river – see Figure 1. Also, the dyke to the east of Gate Fulford, depicted on DeVries's diagram, is a modern drainage ditch that was not there in 1066.

There are other reasons to think that the battlefield was not even on the east bank. Its flood plain is 200m wide all the way down to Naburn. There are no known 11th century ditches in the battle theatre that are parallel to and east of the Ouse. Given the generally accepted size of the armies at the Battle of Fulford, the 1200m-wide higher ground between the Ouse flood plain and Walmgate Stray 'marsh' feels too wide for the battle described in the contemporary accounts.

If medieval Fulford ford was between the Millennium Bridge and Old St Oswalds, the battlefield could have been around the modern York Garrison, but we think it unlikely. It has much the same geographic inconsistency as Gate Fulford, with 200m of marshland between the possible battlefield and river, and no known dyke to its east.

We remain confident that the battle was fought on the west bank but cannot find any proof that it was not fought at Germany Beck or Fulford Gate.

Arguments against a west-bank battlefield

What about the reverse, reasons to believe that the battle was not fought between York racecourse and the Ouse? Jones considers other possible battlefields and gives his reasons for rejecting them. Here are his reasons to reject a west-bank battlefield, and our responses.

C J: "It lacks any ditch even though augering was undertaken to locate any 'lost' ditch. There are no equivalent becks entering this stretch of land that can be identified, even using LIDAR or on old maps."

MB: This is wrong. Knavesmire Beck runs through Knavesmire north to south. It has been culverted, but at the time of the battle, it would have been just like Germany Beck on the other bank.

C J: "Some early historians place the battle on the northern bank of the Ouse while Middlethorpe is west of the Ouse."

MB: Upstream of its confluence with the Wharf, the Ouse mainly flows north-south. Its banks would normally be referred to as the east and west. There is only one place in the battle theatre that could be described as the north bank of the Ouse, which is Middlethorpe to the north of an ENE to WSW flowing stretch of the river.

C J: "Other sources mention 'south of York' and Middlethorpe moves the battle to the western bank and it is not sensible to regard it as 'south'."

MB: It is not obvious to us what Jones is trying to say, but our proposed battlefield on the Chocolate Factory Peninsula is south of York. We cannot think of any reason "it is not sensible to regard it as 'south'".

C J: "Both armies would have to cross to the west bank of the Ouse to fight. This might have been possible for the Norse if sandbars and low tides had allowed this, but the evidence for low-tide fording places across the Ouse is extremely limited. The tides at the time of the battle were extremely high with a corresponding very low tidal level to follow. The onrushing tidal bore would threaten a repeat of the closing of the Red Sea, with its fatal consequences if an army got the timing wrong. There is no mention or hint of the armies crossing the Ouse in any writing and it is hard to image that such a 'parting of the waves' would have gone unmentioned."

MB: This arbitrarily presupposes that the Norse arrived at the battlefield on foot and that the English left York through the east gate. It has no basis. The Norse accounts all clearly state that the Norse army

arrived at the battle theatre by ship. They could have disembarked on either bank. If they landed on the west bank, the English would have left through the southwest gate on the Roman road to Tadcaster.

C J: "The presence of elements of the Mercian army to the west of the Ouse is however implied by the evidence of tanged arrows on the only possible mooring place, which is beside Water Fulford Hall. This accommodation would provide a further incentive for the Norse army to stay on the opposite bank. But physical evidence in the form of tanged arrows however does imply some action on the Middlethorpe Ings although confined to the southern limit where the Ouse turns sharply west towards Bishopthorpe."

MB: The tanged arrows were found close to where we think the Norse fleet moored and close to where we think the battle was fought. They might be evidence of a west bank landing or a Middlethorpe battlefield.

C J: "Even had the opposing armies come face to face on these Ings ..." MB: As far as we know, no one is suggesting that the armies met on the Ings. They would have met on the relatively high ground north of the Ings, to the east of York racecourse.

C J: "... there is no obvious place in this landscape for either of the commanders to anchor their flanks except by stretching their shieldwalls to fill a gap of 2100 metres between the river bank and the Knavesmire, which might or might not have been wetland in 1066."

MB: 'mire' is Old Norse for 'marsh', so Knavesmire was almost certainly wetland in 1066. The maximum lateral distance from the Ouse to the Knavesmire is 900m, where it crosses Middlethorpe Ings. We think the battle was further north, around the York racecourse carparks and the former Terry's chocolate factory, where the peninsula is 600m wide.

C J: "The Norse ships posed a threat to which the Mercians were bound to respond. The boats might threaten an attack on York, make a landing on the west bank, or a move to outflank Morcar. A bridge of boats might have been feasible and that would have moved part of the conflict to Middlethorpe. However, the possibility of a D-Day style landing by King Harald to allow full battle on these ings, didn't happen.

It would be many centuries before an opposed, mass landing from ships would be successful."

MB: This arbitrarily presupposes that the English were waiting at the battlefield for the Norse army/fleet to arrive. It has no basis. The Norse accounts unambiguously say that the Norse fleet was 'lying in the Ouse' when Morcar and Edwin leave York, they unambiguously go on to say that Harald then lands and arrays his troops before the engagement. Therefore, the English were not at already battlefield waiting for the Norse army to disembark.

- C J: "This was one of the areas chosen by archaeologists for a comparative metal detecting survey but it yielded only modern debris." MB: It sounds like the survey was in Middlethorpe Ings, and therefore unlikely to produce any Saxon era finds. Even if it was near the prospective battle theatre, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.
- C J: "The area was also subject to some soil survey work as a way to understand the Ouse. The possibility that the Fulford Ings had at one time extended further west to include the Middlethorpe Ings (or vice versa) could not be excluded until the evidence demonstrated the stability of the course of the Ouse."

MB: Once again, this arbitrarily presupposes that the Norse army arrived at the battle theatre on foot when the Norse accounts unambiguously say they arrived by ship. If they arrived by ship, they could have landed at Middlethorpe Ings.

C J: "Finally, if one respects the tradition that has named this the battle of Fulford, this name cannot sensibly be attached to a battle on the Middlethorpe Ings."

MB: Middlethorpe was probably known as Torp when Symeon and Gaimar named the battle, but it had no inhabitants according to Domesday. We think the battle took its name from the ford, or from a settlement adjacent to the ford, because it was the closest named place that Symeon and Gaimar knew. If so, the battlefield could have been on either side of the Ouse.

Conclusion

The Battle of Fulford narrative is about as straightforward as any medieval battle can be. There are only two main accounts - one English, one Norse - and they are not inconsistent. All the others are based on one or the other, albeit with some added information. They form a coherent engagement narrative in which the armies face each other across a narrow peninsula. They form a coherent battle narrative, in which Morcar's flank advances beyond Hardrada's flank, allowing Hardrada to cross the battlefield and sandwich Morcar's men. They form a coherent flight narrative, with Marcar's men fleeing into the marsh and beck, while Edwin's men flee along the riverbank. They all point to a battlefield on the west bank of the Ouse within 2km of York, probably somewhere adjacent to the County Stand on York racecourse.

Appendix A - Contemporary accounts

ASC-C (Whitlock translation):

Harald, king of Norway, came by surprise north into the Tyne with a very large naval force - no small one: it could be [300?] or more. And Earl Tosti came to him with all those he had mustered, just as they had agreed beforehand, and they both went with all the fleet up the Ouse towards York. Then King Harold in the south was informed when he disembarked that Harold, king of Norway, and Earl Tosti were come ashore near York. Then he went northwards day and night as quickly as he could assemble his force. Then before Harold could get there Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar assembled from their earldom as large a force as they could muster, and fought against the invaders and caused them heavy casualties, and many of the English host were killed and drowned and put to flight, and the Norwegians remained masters of the field. And this fight was on the eve of St. Matthew the Apostle, and that was a Wednesday. And then after the fight Harold, king of Norway, and Earl Tosti went into York with as large a force as suited them, and they were given hostages from the city and also helped with provisions, and so went from there on board ship and settled a complete peace, arranging that they should all go with him southwards and subdue this country.

ASC-D & ASC-E (Whitlock):

Meanwhile Earl Tosti came into the Humber with sixty ships and Earl Edwin came with a land force and drove him out, and the sailors deserted him. And he went to Scotland with twelve small vessels, and there Harald, king of Norway, met him with three hundred ships, and Tosti submitted to him and became his vassal; and they both went up the Humber until they reached York. And there Earl Edwin and Morcar his brother fought against them; but the Norwegians had the victory.

Symeon (Stevenson):

After these events, Harold Harvager, king of the Norwegians, brother of king Olave the saint, came unexpectedly to the mouth of the river Tyne with a very powerful fleet, to wit, more than fifty great ships. Earl Tosti, with his fleet, met him there as he had before agreed, and with a quick voyage they entered the mouth of the river Humber, and so sailing up the river Ouse they landed at the place called Richale, and took York after a hard struggle. When king Harold learnt this, he rapidly marched his troops towards Northumbria. But before the king arrived, on Wednesday the vigil of St. Matthew the Apostle, the brother earls Edwin and Morkar, with a large army, joined battle with the Norwegians at Fulford, near York, on the northern bank of the river Ouse, and at the first onset of the fight they overthrew many; but after a long continuance of the contest, the Angles, unable to resist the force of the Norwegians, turned their backs not without some loss of their men, and many more of them were drowned in the river than fell in the field. The Norwegians were masters of the field of slaughter, and taking five hundred hostages from York and leaving there a hundred and fifty hostages of their own men, they retired to their vessels.

John of Worcester (McGurk):

When these things had been done, Harald Fairhair [should be Hardrada], king of the Norwegians, brother of St Olaf the king, landed unexpectedly at the mouth of the River Tyne with an extremely strong fleet; that is more than [300?] great ships. Earl Tostig joined him with his fleet as he had previously promised, and on a swift course they entered the mouth of the River Humber; sailing thus up the River Ouse, they landed at a place called Richale [Riccall]. When King Harold learnt of this, he speedily undertook an expedition to Northumbria. But before the king arrived there, the two brother earls, Edwin and Morkar, with a great army joined battle with the Norwegians on the north bank of the River Ouse, near York, on Wednesday, the eve of St Matthew the Apostle's day,

and fighting manfully in the first thrust of the battle, they laid many low. But after the struggle had continued for a long time, the English were unable to withstand the Norwegian attack. Not without some small loss they turned to flee, and many more of them were drowned in the river than had fallen in battle. But the Norwegians gained the mastery in that place of death and, having taken 150 hostages from York, they returned to their own ships.

Gaimar (Stevenson):

Now they [Hardrada and Tostig] wished first by their warfare to divide all England between them. The two had a great fleet, four hundred ships and seventy sailed forward. They steered and sailed a great way until they entered the river Humber; from the Humber they went to the Ouse, and disembarked at Saint Wilfrid's. On the morrow they set sail for York, and arrived there in the evening. But the two earls met, and brought the people of six counties; and they fought at Fuleford, the Norwegians were masters of the field; but, on both sides, there were many killed. Afterwards the Norwegians took the land; they desolated all the country and seized many spoils. Whoever knows not this, let him remember that it was twelve days within September.

Henry of Huntingdon (Forester):

He [Tostig] escaped to Scotland, where he fell in with Harald, king of Norway with 300 ships. Tosti was overjoyed, and tendered him his allegiance. Then they joined their forces and came up the Humber, as far as York, near which they were encountered by the Earls Edwin and Morcar; the place where the battle was fought is still shown on the south side of the city. Here Harold, king of Norway, and Tosti, his ally, gained the day.

Morkinskinna (Andersson & Gade)

He [Harald] subjected the whole north of England, then sailed south to the Humber and sailed up the Ouse. There the jarls of Northumbria, the sons of Jarl Godwin, Morkere and Waltheof of Huntingdon, marched against him with an enormous army that had been gathered throughout the summer and autumn. King Haraldr elected to give battle. He landed and drew up his troops on the riverbank, with one wing toward the river and the other toward the still water of a deep pool. The jarls led their formation with all the rank and file down along the river. The king's standard was close to the river, where his battle array was densest, while it was thinnest by the pool. There too the troops were least reliable, and when the attack was made, that wing gave way. The English launched their attack down along the river, then toward the pool, and they thought that the Norwegians would flee. King Haraldr led the attack with his troops and joined battle so fiercely that the enemy was split and the local army began to flee. They retreated to a place where there was no armed opposition, in the swampy ground around the pool. Jarl Morkere had followed the standard closest to the pool, and Jarl Waltheof fought the king more toward the river. He fled up along the river, and the troops with him were the only ones to escape. Jarl Morkere fell, and together with him so many men that the pool was full of corpses where the fleeing men had congregated. Some were driven into the water and killed there together with some who jumped into the pool and were speared, so that it was filled with corpses, as Steinn Herdisarson says:

Many died in the river; submerged men drowned; soon countless warriors lay dead around young Morkere. The proud lord of the Filir pursued the fleeing enemies; the army rushed madly before the ready king. Proud-minded knows beneath [the sun].

He composed the praise poem that includes this stanza for King Haraldr's son Olafr. It was the evening before Saint Matthew's Day, which fell on a Wednesday. After this battle all the troops in the neighbouring districts submitted to King Haraldr, but some fled, as is told in this poem:

Young lord [Olafr], you let farmers fall close to the River Ouse; the army attacked where the reckless king risked his life. The arrival of that king must undoubtedly appear to those Englishmen who were left alive as if they are still pursued.

Fagrskinna (Finlay)

From there he sailed the fleet south to the Humber and went up along the river to the Ouse. There the jarls of Northumbria, Morukári (Morkere) and Jarl Valbjófr of Hundatún (Waltheof of Huntingdon) came against them with an overwhelming force, which had been gathering together all the autumn. King Haraldr offered them resistance, went up onto the river bank and drew up his troops there with one flank of the army facing towards the river and a second towards a certain ditch. And that was deep and full of water. The jarls sent their army with all its men slowly down along the river above the king's standard. The ranks were thickest there, but sparsest beside the ditch. When the fighting had been going on for a short time, the flank of Haraldr's army lining the ditch gave way, and the Englishmen pressed them hard at that moment, expecting that the Norwegians would flee. King Haraldr with his troop advanced so hard that (the enemy) gave way before him in two directions. Then flight broke out in the land army, and the flank that was nearest to the ditch jumped out into it. And Morukári had been moving with the standard that was nearest to the ditch. Jarl Valbjófr fled from the battle up along the river, and only those who went with him got away. There Morukári fell, and men so thickly around him that the ditch was full of dead men. So says Steinn:

Men drowned, submerged; many died in the river. No few soldiers soon lay around young Morukári. The men's lord forced on, fearless, the flight; before the brave leader headlong the army hastened. Headed off, strong-minded, from under . . . He composed this about Óláfr, and that was on the eve of St Matthew's Day (21st September), which fell on a Thursday that year. Morukári and Valbjófr were brothers of Haraldr Guäinason.

Heimskringla (Hollander):

Thereupon King Harald sailed to the Humber and up the river, and anchored there. At that time there were two earls in York, Morkere and his brother Wæltheow, with a huge army. King Harald lay in the Usa [Ouse] when the army of the earls came down from the land to oppose him. Then the king went on land and began to array his army for battle. One wing stood on the bank of the river, the other was arrayed further up on land, and extended to a ditch. There was a swamp, deep and broad and full of water. The earls deployed their army down along the river with the whole body of their men. The royal banner was close by the river. There the king's men stood thickest, and the lines were thinnest by the ditch, with the troops he could least rely on. Then the earls proceeded down along the ditch. There the wing of the Norwegian army extending to the ditch gave way, and the English followed them up, thinking that the Norwegians were about to flee. That part of the English army was led by Morkere. But when King Harald saw that the battle array of the English had come down along the ditch right opposite them, he had the trumpets blown and sharply urged on his men to the attack, raising his banner called Landwaster. And there so strong an attack was made by him that nothing held against it. Then there was a great slaughter among the earls' men. Soon their army took to flight. Some fled up or down along the river, but most leapt into the ditch. There the bodies of the fallen lay so thick that the Norwegians could walk dry-shod over the swamp. There Earl Morkere lost his life. As says Stein Herdisarson:

Their lives lost there many, left this world by drowning. Mired in the marsh, lay by Morkere young a legion. Pursued the sea-king this smitten host. They madly fled before the brave king. *Foremost under heaven*

This dråpa Stein Herdisarson composed about Óláf, the son of King Harald; and we are told here that Óláf took part in the battle with King Harald, his father. This is mentioned also in the poem called Haraldsstikki:

Lay the fallen in fen thickly, Wæltheow's men, by weapons slaughtered; so that walk could warlike Northmen on dead bodies dryshod across.

Earl Wæltheow and those who managed to escape fled to the 1066 fortified town of York. It had been a murderous battle. It took place on Wednesday, the day before Saint Matthew's Day.

Saga of Harald Hardrada, part of Heimskringla (Hearn & Storm):

Now having come thus far on his journey King Harald fared south to the Humber and went up that river and lay in it beside the banks. At that time there were up in Jerirk [York] Earl Morcar and his brother Earl Waltheof and with them was a vast host. King Harald was lying in the Ouse when the host of the Earls swooped down against him.

And King Harald went ashore and set to arraying his host, and one arm of the array was ranked on the banks of the river, whereas the other stretched up inland over towards a certain dyke, and a deep marsh was there, both broad, and full of water. The Earls bade the whole multitude of their array slink down alongside the river.

Now the banner to the King was near the river and there the ranks were serried, but near the dyke were they more scattered, and the men thereof also the least trustworthy.

The Earls then came down along by the dyke, and that arm of the battle-array of the Norwegians which faced the dyke gave way, and thereon the English pushed forward after them and as it seemed that

the Norwegians would flee. Therefore did the banner of Morcar progress forward.

But when King Harald saw that the array of the English had descended alongside the dyke and was coming right toward them, then commanded he the war-blast to be sounded, and eagerly encouraged his men, and let the banner 'Land-waster' be carried forward; and even so fierce was their advance on the English, that all were repulsed and there fell a many men in the host of the Earls.

This host was even soon routed, and some fled up beside the river and some down, but the most of the folk ran right out into the dyke, and there the fallen lay so thick that the Norwegians could walk dryshod across the marsh. There too fell Earl Morcar. Thus said Stein Herdisason:

Many in the river sank (The sunken men were drowned); All round about young Morcar of yore lay many a lad. To flight the chieftain put them; The host to swiftest running Olaf the Mighty is.

The song that follows was wrought by Stein Herdason about Olaf the son to King Harald, and he said, by which we know that Olaf was in the battle with his father. This is told likewise in 'Haraldsstikka':

There the dead lay Down in the marsh Walthiof's fighters Weapon-bitten, So that they might The war-wonted horsemen There wend their way On corpses only.

Earl Walthiof and those men that contrived to make their escape from out the battle fled even up to the town of York, and there it was that the greatest slaughter took place. This battle was on the Wednesday or ever St. Matthew's Day.

Heming's Tale – Appendix to the Orkneyinga Saga (Dasent):

King Harald was lying in the Ouse when the host of the Earls swooped down against him. They [Hardrada and Tostig] go on land with the host, but some watch the ships. Those brothers Morcar and earl Voltheof, and Aki their brother in law, gather a host together as soon as they hear of the Norwegian host. They met at that river which is hight [named] Ouse, and there the hardest fight arises, and is kept up till nones [mid-afternoon]. Then Eystein had gone through the array of the English and slain Aki the tall. Then he sees that Morcar has got at the back of Tosti's battle; and so he turns with his men at the back of Morcar's battle. And when earl Morcar sees that he bids his men face about and defend themselves well and manfully. And at last flight broke out among his men, and they flee out into the river [stream] and earl Morcar is there slain and the most part of his folk. Many too sunk beneath the stream. By that time king Harald had taken earl Valtheof prisoner.

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