



# Shropshire History

# Danish Shropshire

Return to Index



Between 1013-1014 and 1016-1042 England was ruled by the Danes. The Danes were often called Vikings but the word Viking actually means to go plundering by sea. Although the invaders were usually referred to as Danes, in actual fact they came from Norway and Sweden as well.



800 – Numerous Danish raids were made on the coastlines of the British Isles.

865 - The Danes landed a large army in East Anglia, with the intention of conquering the four Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Northumbria, East Anglia, West Sussex and Mercia. They were led by the brothers Halfdan Ragnarsson and Ivar the Boneless, wintering in East Anglia where they received tribute in exchange for a temporary peace.

867 - King Burgred of Mercia negotiated peace with Ivar, with the Danes keeping Nottingham in exchange for leaving the rest of Mercia unmolested.

871 - The Danes attacked Mercia in a campaign that lasted until 874. During this time they destroyed the famous priory of Wenlock, said to have been founded by St Milburga, granddaughter of King Penda of Mercia.

884 – King Alfred agreed a treaty with the Danes that split Mercia along the line of Watling Street. The area to the north was called Danelaw and was ruled by the Danes. The area to the south remained in Saxon control.

894 - The Danes travelled from Shoeburyness in Essex to Buttington in Shropshire. Here they were beaten in a battle with the Saxons and all the Danes were killed.

896 – The Danes had to abandon their ships on the River Lea near London because of defences which King Alfred had erected between them and the sea. They made their way overland until they arrived at Quatbridge and there constructed a fort where they spent winter.

910 A band of Danes crossed the Severn at "Cantbridge" in the neighbourhood of Bridgnorth.

912 - Aethelreda, the Lady of Mercia, erected a fortress at Bridgnorth against the Danish invaders and another at Chirbury in 913.

1013 –King Aethelred the Unready was defeated by the Danes and England was ruled by the Danish King Sweyn Forkbeard.

1014 – Sweyn died and Aethelred recovered his throne.

1016 – King Edmund Ironside plundered Shrewsbury and the surrounding area to prevent it being used as a base by the invading Danes. Edmund was defeated by Cnut (Canute) and they reached an agreement to divide the kingdom between them. Cnut initially took control of only Mercia but Edmund died the following year and left Cnut as the sole ruler of England.

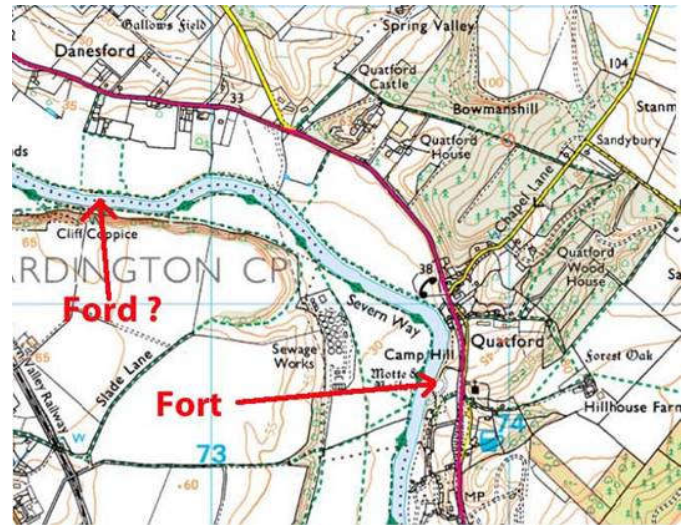
1042 – England was won back from the Danes by the Saxon King Edward the Confessor. They left no lasting reminder of their presence and there is an absence of names in Shropshire ending in "by", "thorpe" or "thwaite" as are found in other parts of Britain.

## Gazetteer of Sites

### Quatbridge (SO737907)

In 896 the Danes stayed here briefly during a raid and the Saxon Chronicles state that "they made their way overland until they arrived at Quatbridge on the Severn, and there constructed a fort. They then sat that winter at Bridge." The Danes were not allowed to build a permanent settlement as Ealdorman Aethelred kept harrying them on behalf of King Alfred until they moved on.

There has been confusion over this name and it has been suggested that the location was Bridgnorth but the bridge there did not exist at that time. That bridge probably dates from 912 when Queen Aethelfreda constructed a fort on the west bank of the River Severn on the site of the later Bridgnorth Castle. Interestingly enough, an area just north of Quatford is called Danesford. What is most likely is that at the time the Danes arrived there was a bridge at Quatford and a ford a little further north. This would be an ideal base for them as they could raid on both sides of the river. The likely site for their fort is the area overlooking the river, later reused for a Norman motte and bailey castle. The fort probably overlooked the bridge crossing and the ford was probably located south of Danesford where footpaths converge.



The Domesday Book entry for this area records only a new house and borough yielding nothing, ie no rents. No mention is made of a bridge so, having been replaced in importance by the one at Bridgnorth, it is likely that the Quatford bridge had fallen down or been washed away. It was probably as a result of this that the name Quatbridge became Quatford. Earl Roger Montgomery built a timber castle there in 1085 and it would be an obvious thing to reuse an existing fortification. Any trace of the Danish occupation would have been destroyed when building the Norman fortification. A documentary source records that the settlement of Quatford was transferred to Bridgnorth in 1102, when Robert de Belmese established his castle there.

### Buttington (SJ247112)

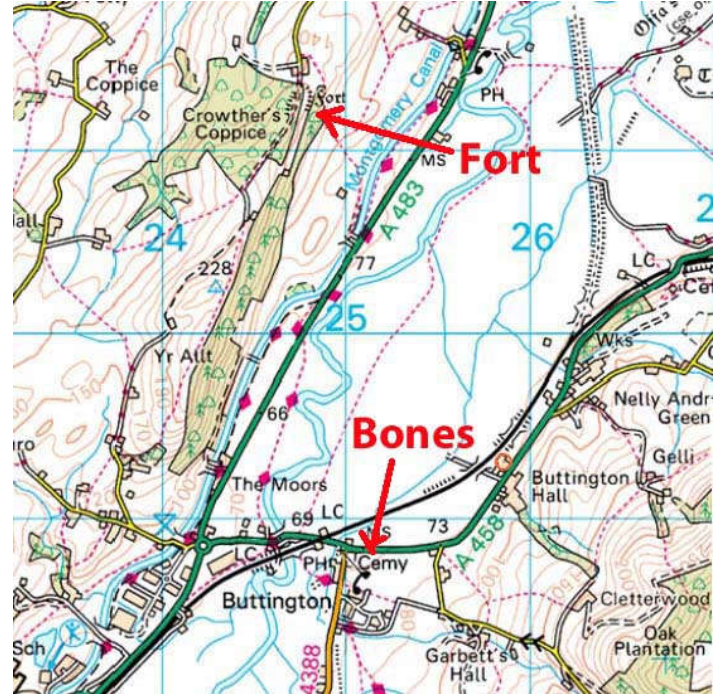
In 893, a formidable Danish army led by Hastein was gathered at Benet in Essex. He set out on a raid in Mercia but, whilst the main army was away, the garrison was defeated by Saxons from Wessex. They captured the fort, along with the ships, booty, women and children (including Hastein's own wife and sons). The following year, Hastein launched his men on a savage retaliatory raid along the Thames valley, then up the River Severn. He was pursued all the way by Ealdorman Aethelred of Mercia and eventually Hastein was stopped at Buttington by a combined army of Mercians, West Saxons and Welsh.

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There was a ford at Buttington (where the bridge is now) and Hastein used it to cross into Wales and occupy the old hill fort at Crowther's Coppice. The British army besieged Hastein in the fort and camped on both sides of the river around Buttington. The siege lasted for several weeks and the British hoped to starve them into submission. The Danes ate most of their horses and the rest perished with hunger. Eventually Hastein and his men made a break for freedom. They broke out of the fort and crossed the ford, where they fought a battle in which many of them were killed. Hastein and a few of his men escaped and made their way back to Essex. The site of the battle is probably where the church now stands. This occupies a slightly elevated area above the flood plain and there is reference to the "island of Buttington" so presumably much of the surrounding land was flooded at the time. In 1838, 400 skulls and other bones were found in three pits in the churchyard. They are believed to be from the battle as many skulls showing signs of violent death.

The Danes occupied Shropshire for only a relatively short time and have left nothing that has survived. Any defensive work would only be earthworks of banks and ditches but none of these have been identified. Settlements would have been simple houses and, again, nothing seems to have survived. One possible reason for the lack of remains is that they were so hated by the Saxons and Britons that when they left the area their settlements were burned to the ground.

Danes usually lived in long buildings called Long Houses. The walls were made with large vertical timbers, with the spaces between filled with wattle and daub. The roof would be a thatch of straw or reeds. There was only one room with a cooking fire in the middle and the smoke escaped through a hole in the roof. Animals lived in the same building, the people living at one end of the house and the animals kept at the other end in an area called the byre.

