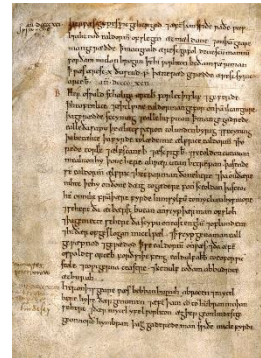


## Battle of the River Parrett – 845 CE

If you are inclined to take a walk through the dunes by the sea to the West of Lymphsham and Eastertown, you will probably have enjoyed a good view of the Bridgwater Bay and the mouth of the River Parrett. The gently sloping sands make for an easy landing from a boat on a high tide with the wind blowing from the West, up the Severn Estuary.

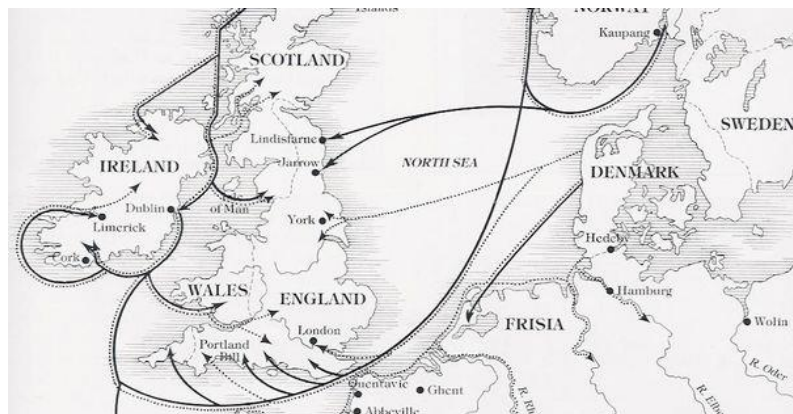
For over 200 years after AD 836 the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and other documentary sources describe Scandinavian activities in the Bristol Channel.

In the South-West, Vikings joined in the struggle between the indigenous Britons and the West Saxon kings, targeting their royal centres and estates.



Invasions by the Norse men from Scandinavia took place in several waves over a long period of time. In between assaults on the British Isles, they also pillaged the coast and river estuaries of modern-day France, travelling sometimes hundreds of miles up the major rivers into the interior.

One of the earlier raids along the north coast of Devon and Somerset was met by a strong force of local people in this area. It is believed that there was a Saxon settlement at Burnham, recorded as 'Burnhamm' circa 880 CE, with the Parrett itself being recorded as early as 658 CE. Undoubtedly people would have been living here long before that time, given that the Romans had used the navigable estuaries for their own purposes up to around 409 CE when the Roman occupation of Britain came to an end.



With its commanding views over the Berrow flats to the West, it is very likely that Saxon people on Brent Knoll may have been the first to see the imminent arrival of the Viking longships as they appeared in the bay. For some time, historians believed that the site of the battle was near Pawlett Hill. More recent opinions think that shipborne landings so far inland in a meandering, muddy, silty river, would have rendered the Viking ships and the men in them vulnerable to attack before they could reach a landing site.

Given the local topography, the flat Somerset levels, the local countryside would have presented an attractive prospect for a terrestrial raid, so it seems likely that the Danes drew up their ships and the battle was fought on one bank or other of the river in order to prevent the Danes successfully progressing inland.

The combined forces of the men of Somerset and Dorset and the leadership of significant personages suggest that a Danish attack was expected rather than that the Saxons were taken by surprise. This increases the plausibility of a lookout being kept from Brent Knoll. The Saxon objective would have been to intercept the Danish forces and prevent penetration inland to gain possession of a defensible hill.

*'845. Her Eanulf aldor man gefeaht mid Sumur saetum and Ealch stan bisc. and Osric aldorman mid Dorn saetum gefuhton aet Pedridan muthan with Deniscne here and thaer micel wael geslogon and sige namon. From the Manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.*

'845 In this year Ealdorman Eanwulf with the people of Somerset and Bishop Ealhstan and Ealdorman Osric with the people of Dorset fought against the Danish army at the mouth of the Parrett, and there made a great slaughter and had the victory.'



Peter Smith