

The Danish Conquest of England 1016AD

Cnut ruled
England for
19 years



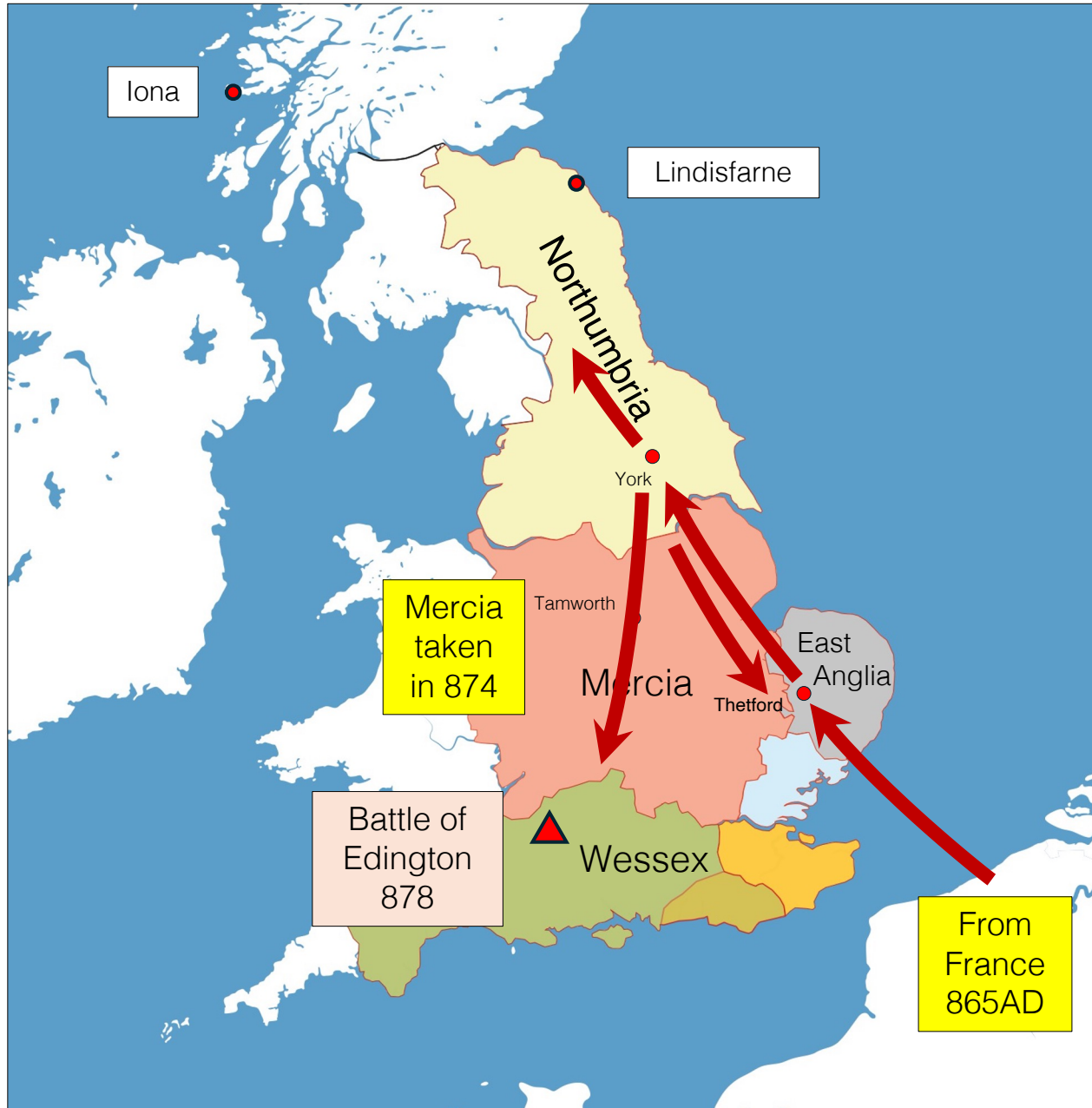
A large wooden sailing ship with a prominent red sail is shown on the sea. The ship is viewed from a low angle, emphasizing its size. The background is a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the image.

The English lost at the Battle of Assandun

It was in Essex but where?

A Battlefields Trust project is investigating

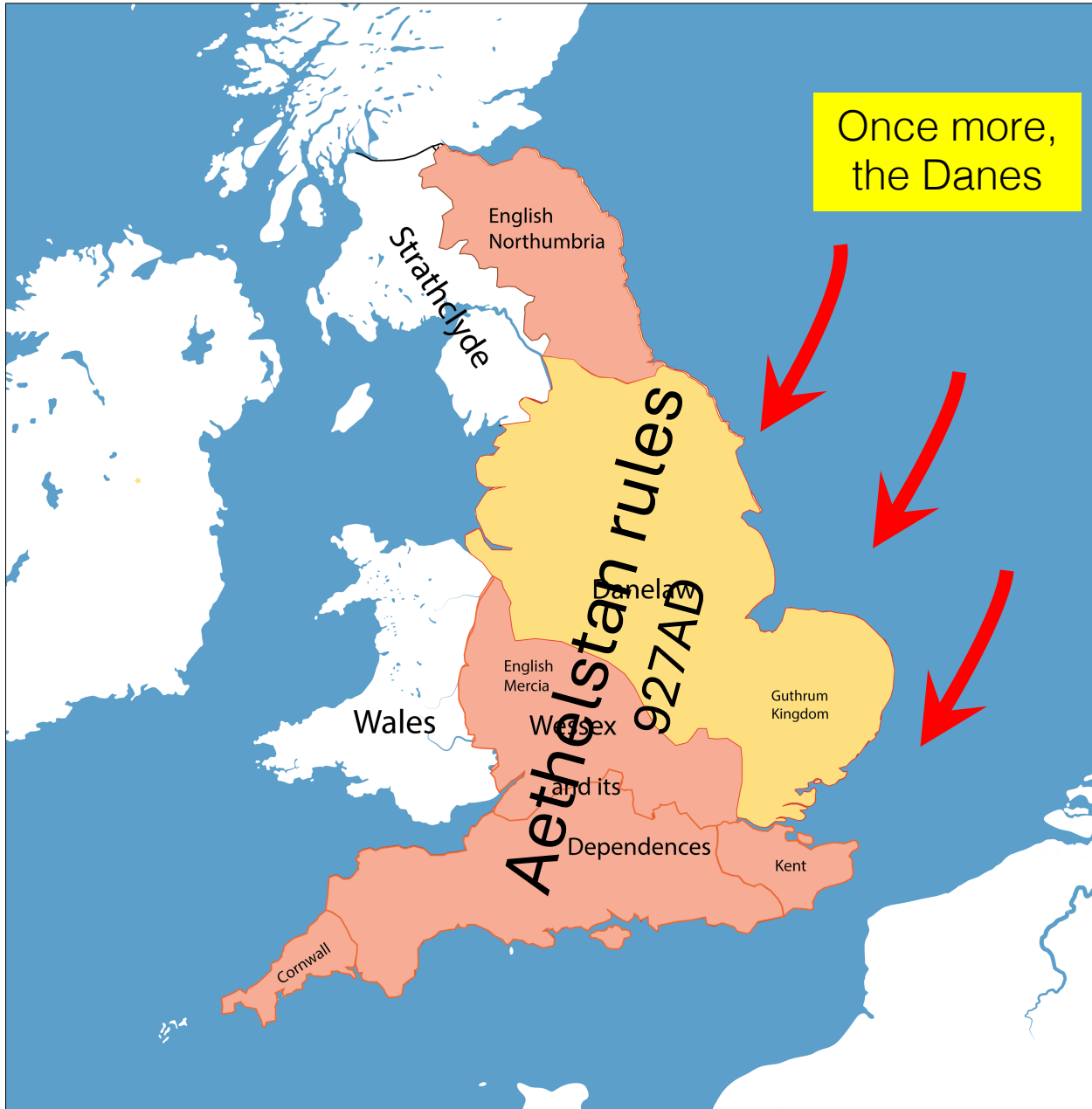
The Hadstock Society is involved



Viking raids started around 790AD

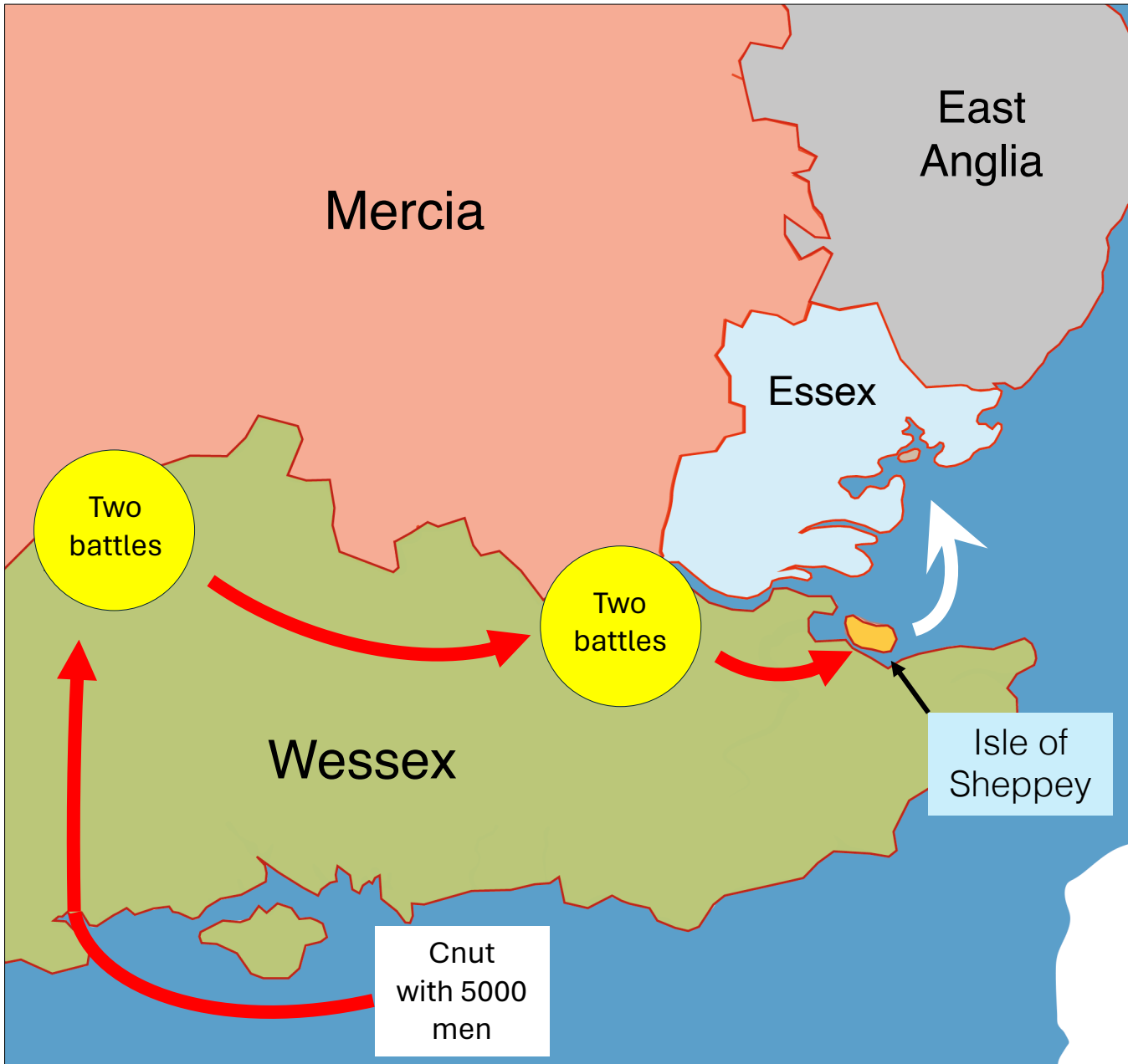
- England comprised 4 main kingdoms, often at war with each other.
- Initial raids from Norway and Denmark were on coastal monasteries with portable wealth.
- In 865, the Great Heathen Army led by the Dane, Ivar the Boneless, attempted to capture and colonise England.
- By 874, the raiding army had taken Northumbria, Mercia and East Anglia. Only Alfred of Wessex resisted, finally defeating Guthrum at the Battle of Edington in 878.

Once more,
the Danes



Alfred agrees to partition England

- In 880, Alfred and Guthrum agreed to divide much of England into two.
- The Danish occupied and settled in an area which became known as the **Danelaw**.
- After years of tension, the Danelaw areas of West Mercia and East Anglia were recaptured by the English in 910.
- Aethelstan finally conquered South Northumbria and became the first king of England in 927AD.
- But Danish raids started again in 980AD.



Cnut's raiding army arrives in January 1016

- Cnut came into Poole with 160 ships - 50 ships would provide at least 1500 fighting troops.
- After 4 main battles in Wessex and London, Cnut's army retreated to its Sheppey/River Medway base.
- In September, Cnut left Sheppey to raid Mercia probably to resupply the base.
- Mooring somewhere on the Essex coast. Cnut reached Mercia but was attacked by the English returning to his ships.



Edmund intercepts Cnut

- The battle was in Essex, a hill called Assandun.
- In 1020, Cnut built a minster of stone at Assandun and installed his own priest there.
- But where? Historians since 1577 have disagreed. NW or SE Essex (Ashdon or Ashingdon)?

Battlefields Trust Project – *Find Assandun*

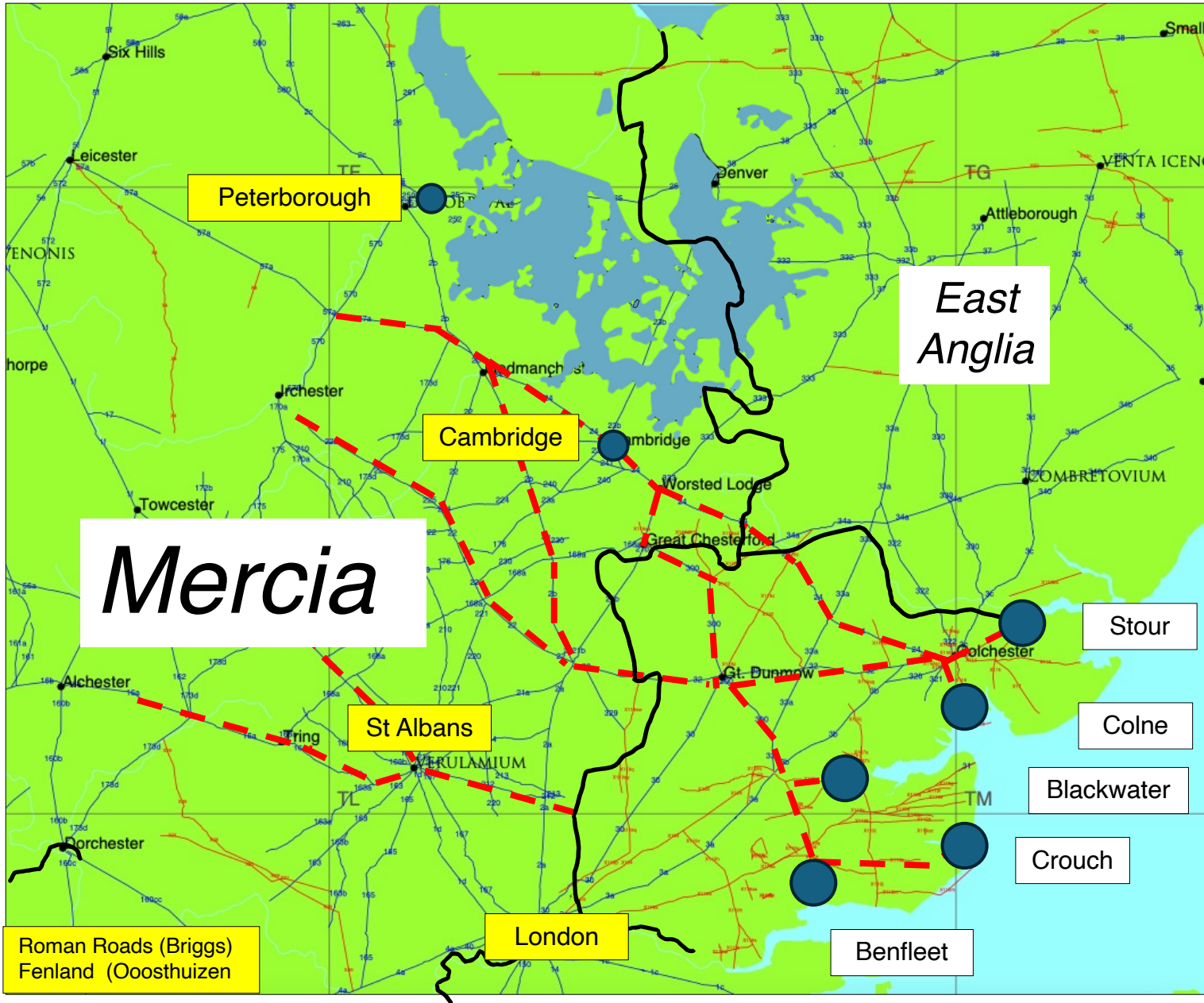
Examine evidence to decide NW or SE Essex

Locate a church of the correct age and with a royal patron in 1020

Identify nearby battlefield site

A group of medieval warriors in armor, including helmets and chainmail, with a shield featuring red and blue diagonal stripes. The image is dimly lit and has a blueish tint. The text "Most probable routes to battle" is overlaid in the center.

Most probable routes to battle



Which route did Cnut take to Mercia?

- 5 possible mooring locations are being studied.
- Several Roman Road options for reaching Mercia
- Tactically, southern road routes would take Cnut closer to English London garrison but greater risk of fifth battle.
- Northerly routes safer, but distances greater. Fen wetlands were a barrier.
- What was Cnut's most likely route?



A clue from those who formed the English army

- From names of those killed at Assandun, 5 regions supplied men to Edmund Ironside.
- Monks from Ely /Ramsey Abbeys were also at Assandun, supporting with relics/prayers.
- Many were reported killed, including Bishop of Dorchester, Eadnoth, and Abbot of Ramsey, Wulfsige.
- Why were clerics from Ramsey and Ely Abbeys called to the battle ?



Other abbeys could have supported the English army

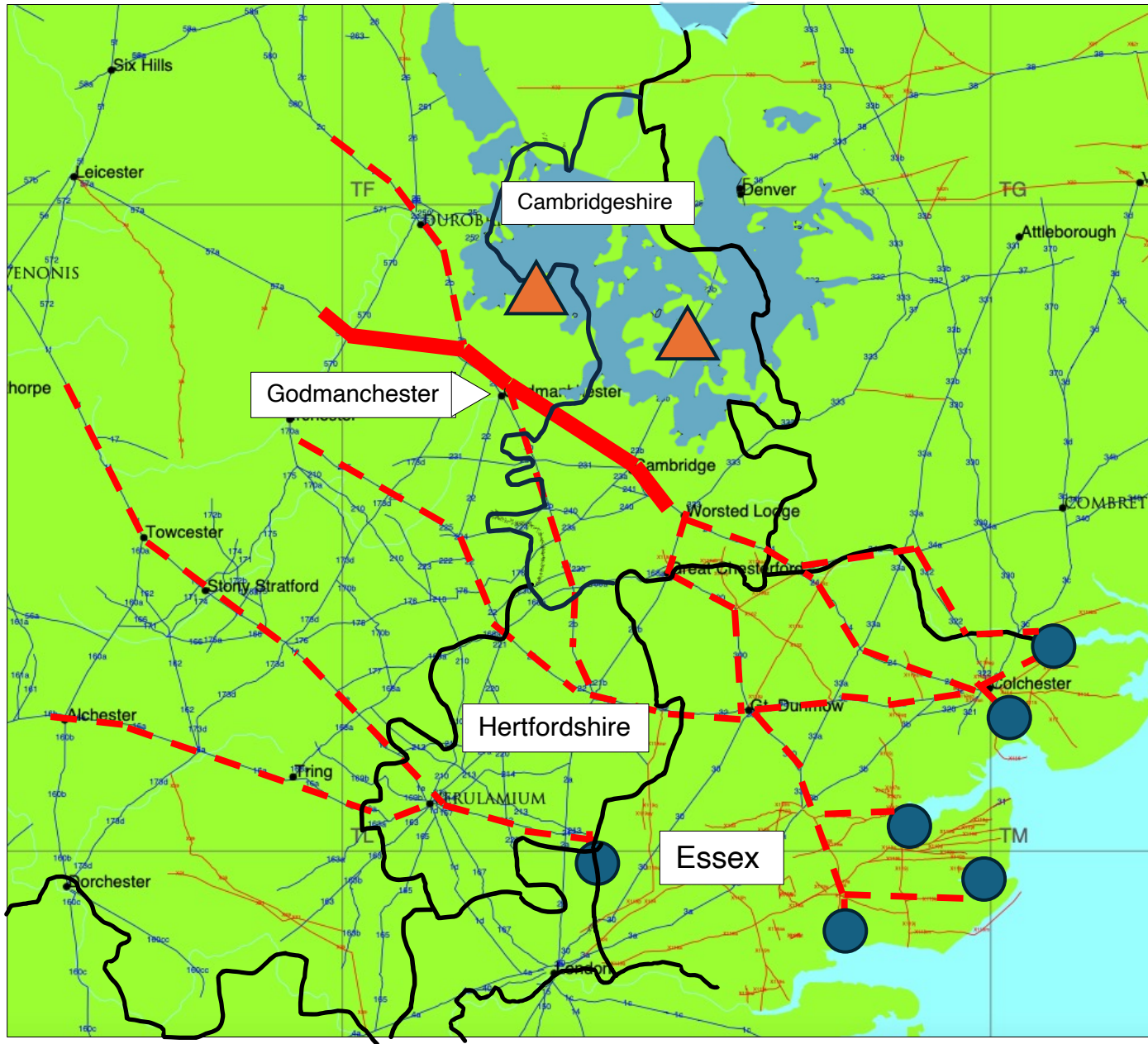
- 2 Dioceses, (Dorchester/London) and 12 abbeys were available to provide relics/prayers.
- Crowland, Peterborough, Thorney Abbeys were north of Ramsey and Ely - no evidence they were at the battle.



Other abbeys could have supported the English army

- 2 Dioceses, (Dorchester / London) and 12 abbeys available to provide relics/prayers.
- Crowland, Peterborough, Thorney Abbeys were north of Ramsey and Ely - no evidence they were at the battle.
- In the south, Bedford, St Neots, Buckingham, St Albans, Barking, Dorchester abbeys not present.

This suggests Cnut's route back lay close to Ramsey/Ely abbeys.



Cnut's most likely return route

- Returning from Mercia, the closest route to Ramsey and Ely was the A14 !
- His army would have passed through Cambridge and entered NW Essex.
- His intended route back to his ships remains uncertain. Research continues into mooring sites.

The evidence points to Cnut returning from Huntingdonshire and entering NW Essex.



The most probable battle site location

Battle name

1. Assandun

*Anglo Saxon
Chronicles C/D/E
c1017-20*

2. Aescenedun

*Encomium Emmae
c1040*

Possible meanings

Ash tree hill
Assa's hill
Donkey hill



Battle area candidates

Location name meaning ?

- Both Ashdon and Ashingdon have a close match with the battle site name (Ash tree hill or a hill belonging to Assa).
- So based on etymology, Ashdon and Ashingdon are equally likely areas for the battle.
- The battle name leads to two areas of research. Do the candidate areas show evidence of:

Hills with ash woodlands

A hill named after a person, Assa

Battle area candidates

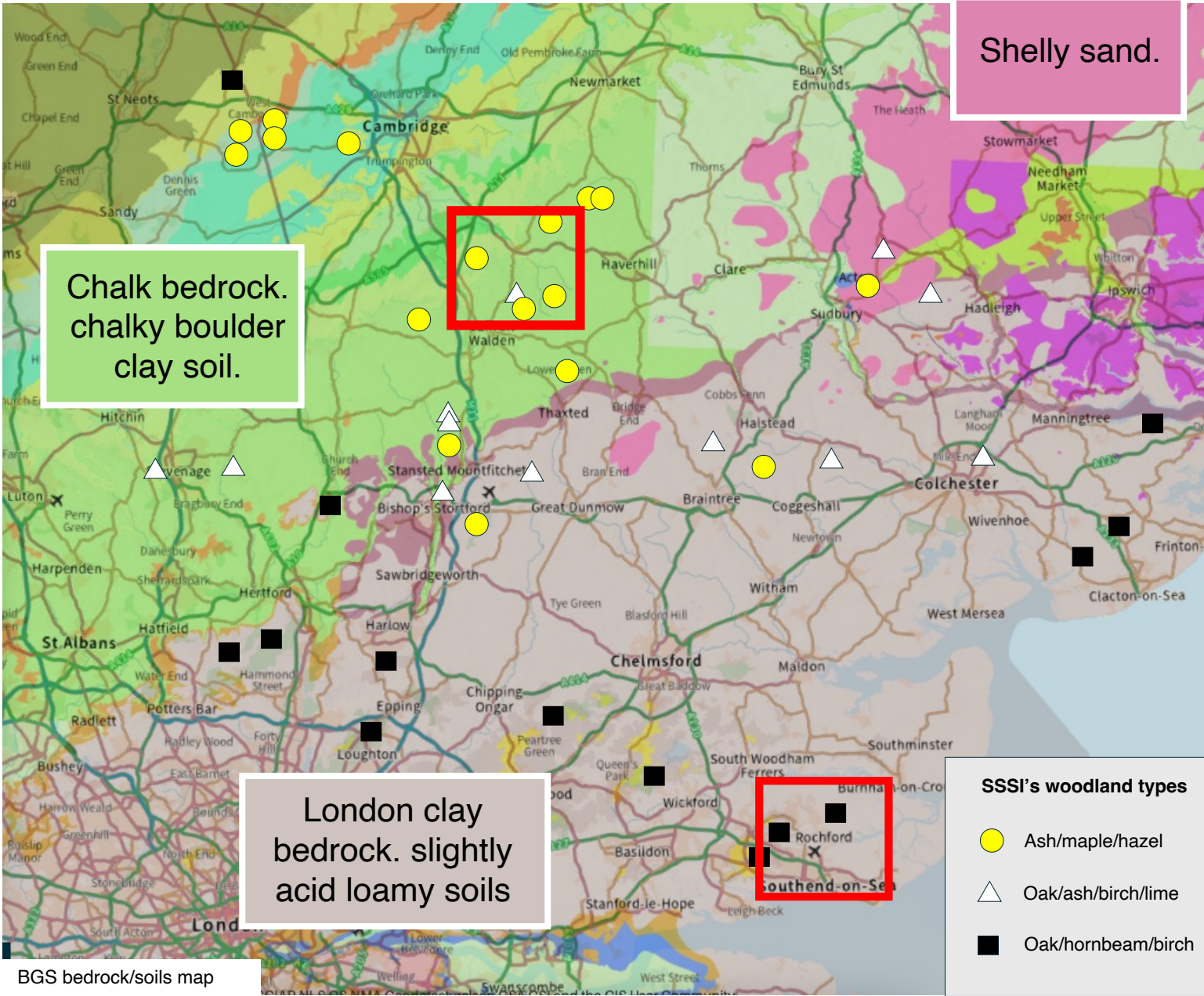
Do we find ash trees woodlands at the candidate locations?



Ash Trees

- The second most common woodland tree to oak.
- Ash trees like chalky soil but also grow on slightly acid soils
- Natural England defines 3 types of ancient woodland across SE England:

ash/maple/hazel
oak/hornbeam.
oak/ash/birch (mixed)



Shelly sand.

Chalk bedrock.
chalky boulder
clay soil.

London clay
bedrock. slightly
acid loamy soils

- SSSI's woodland types**
- Ash/maple/hazel
 - △ Oak/ash/birch/lime
 - Oak/hornbeam/birch

SSSI ancient woodlands *and geology*

- The geology of the bedrock is a major factor deciding the type of woodland
- Plotting SSSI woodlands shows:
 - London Clay favours oak/hornbeam.
 - Chalky boulder clay favours ash/maple.

On this issue, the Ashdon area has the best conditions for ash woodland

BGS bedrock/soils map



Index of personal names in place names

(Pick) (YN); Aslockton (Nt).

Aslákr (ODan) *Oselokeswey* 1334, *Oslokeszwong* 1250 (Nth).

Asli PASE1.

Asloc DLV.

Asmoth PASE1 DLV.

Asmund (ODan) *Osmoundesdikys* 1467×84 (Le).

Ásmundr (ME, ODan, OE, ON, Sc)

(→**Ösmund**) ?*Osmanthorpe* (Nt);

?*Ossoms Hill* (St); *Asemondcroft*

1313, *Osemundewong* 1253 (Nth);

Asmundemere 1279 (BdHu);

Asmundesrugge (Gl); *Osmans Dene*

2.89 (Ch); *Aismunderby* (YW);

Osmotherley (YN).

Asne DLV.

Asrothr PASE1.

Assa *Asham* (Sx);

Ashingdon(?) (Ess); *Assendon* (O).

Asser PASE2.

Asl PASE1

Asten (A-Sc) *Alstonby*, *Astinhole*

1261 in *Rottington* (Cu).

Asterius PASE1.

Astin (ME) *Astinriding* 13 (YW);

Astenthwaite (We).

Asulf PASE2 DLV.

Ásúlfr (Sc) *Aislaby* (WhitbyS) (YN).

K Briggs

Battle area candidates

Is there a record of the Assa name at either location?

- Index of 12,651 ‘personal names in place names’ created in 2023 from records dating from 597AD.
- 3 locations for which the name ‘Assa’ could be behind the place name.
- **But** the list shows no record of the name ‘Assa’ for documents covering Anglo-Saxon period, 597-1042AD.

So, Ashingdon has a low probability of being derived from the personal name ‘Assa’

Summary 1 of Battlefield Location Issues and probabilities

	N W Essex Ashdon/Hadstock area	S E Essex Ashingdon area
Place name matches battle name	H	H
Chalk soils favouring ash, not oak	H Chalky boulder clay / chalk bedrock	L Slightly acid, London clay
Hill belonging to Assa	L	L



Battle area candidates

Would Ramsey/Ely monks have supported Edmund at either location?

- Ashdon not in the Dorchester diocese but close to Dorchester /London diocesan border.
30 miles from Ely. 2 days travel
- Ashington in the London diocese
80 miles from Ely. 5 days travel.
Barking Abbey was only 30 miles

On this issue, Ashdon area has a much stronger case than Ashington.



St Botolph's,
Hadstock
*Saxon features,
Very large church in
small Parish,
Evidence of Royal
patron in 1300*



All Saints, Ashdon
*No external Saxon
features,
Hidden smaller church?
Proprietary church not
royal*



St Nicholas, Canewdon
*Large church in rural area,
C14th but hidden smaller
church?
Royal patron unclear,*

Battle area candidates

A nearby church, right age and patronage?

- Cnut's minster was a stone building erected in 1020 with royal patronage.
- Candidate churches in SE and NW Essex have been studied and the following short listed for further research:

St Botolph's, Hadstock

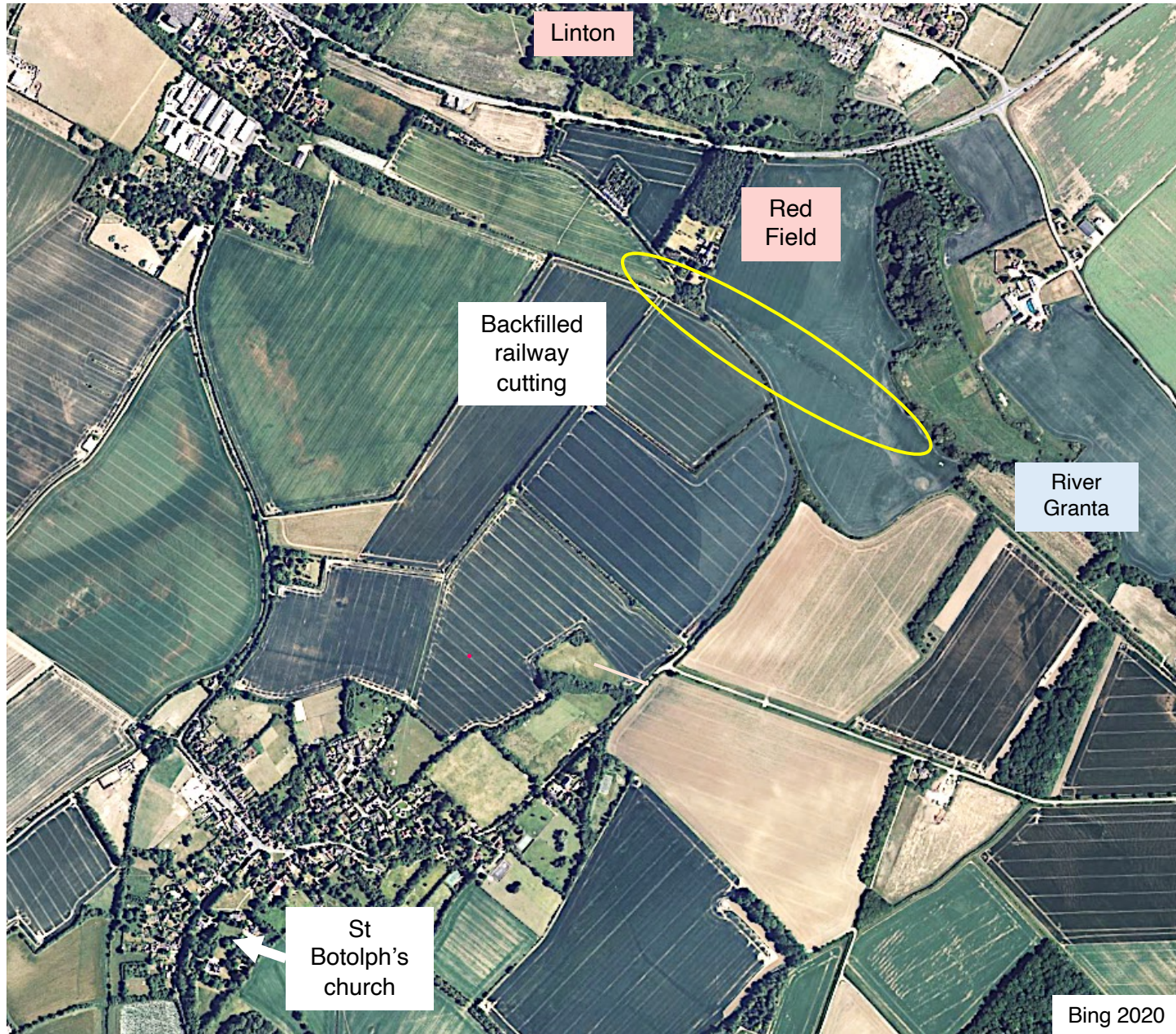
—
All Saints, Ashdon

St Nicholas, Canewdon

*St Botolph's is the leading candidate
with many Saxon features and a royal
patron in early history*

Summary 2 of Battlefield Location Issues and probabilities

	N W Essex Ashdon/Hadstock area	S E Essex Ashingdon area
Place name matches battle name	H	H
Chalk soils favouring ash not oak	H Chalky boulder clay/chalk bedrock	L Slightly acid, on London clay
Hill belonging to Assa	L	L
Probability of Ely monks supporting at the battle location	H 30 miles from Ely	L 80 miles from Ely
Minster of correct age and patronage	H	M



A likely battle site near Hadstock or Ashdon church?

- Numerous skeletons were found in 1863 in Red Field (Marks Tey to Shelford line).
- Crop marks reveal the old railway cutting backfilled in the 1960s.
- Oral tradition Hadstock confirms discovery of many skeletons. These were not in graves.

Until further skeletal remains are uncovered it is not possible to confirm that the skeleton discovery was battle related.

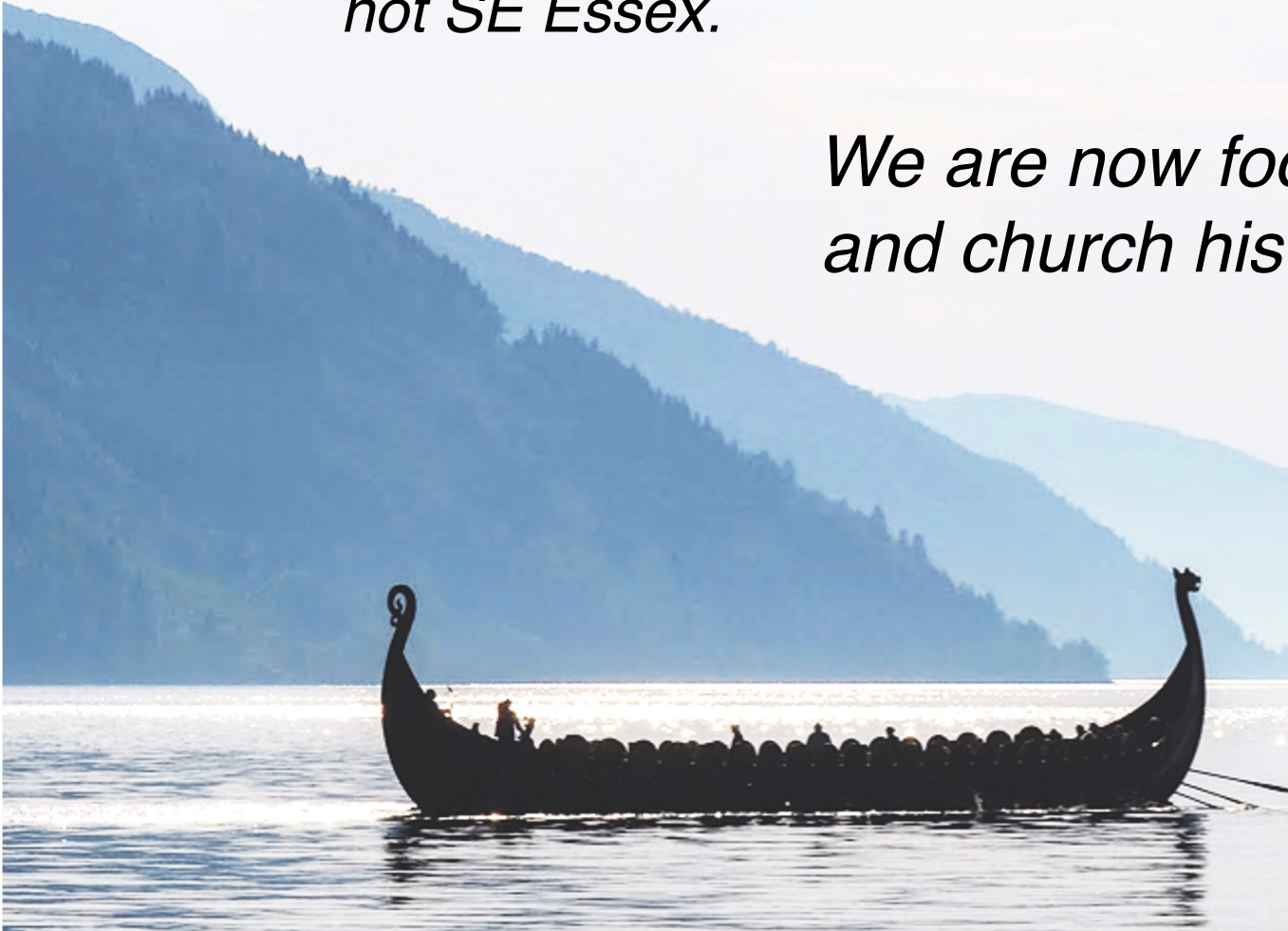
So, after 550 years of speculation.....

*We have shown that the battle was most probably in NW Essex.....
not SE Essex.*

*We are now focusing on potential battle sites
and church history at Ashdon and Hadstock.*

By the way.....

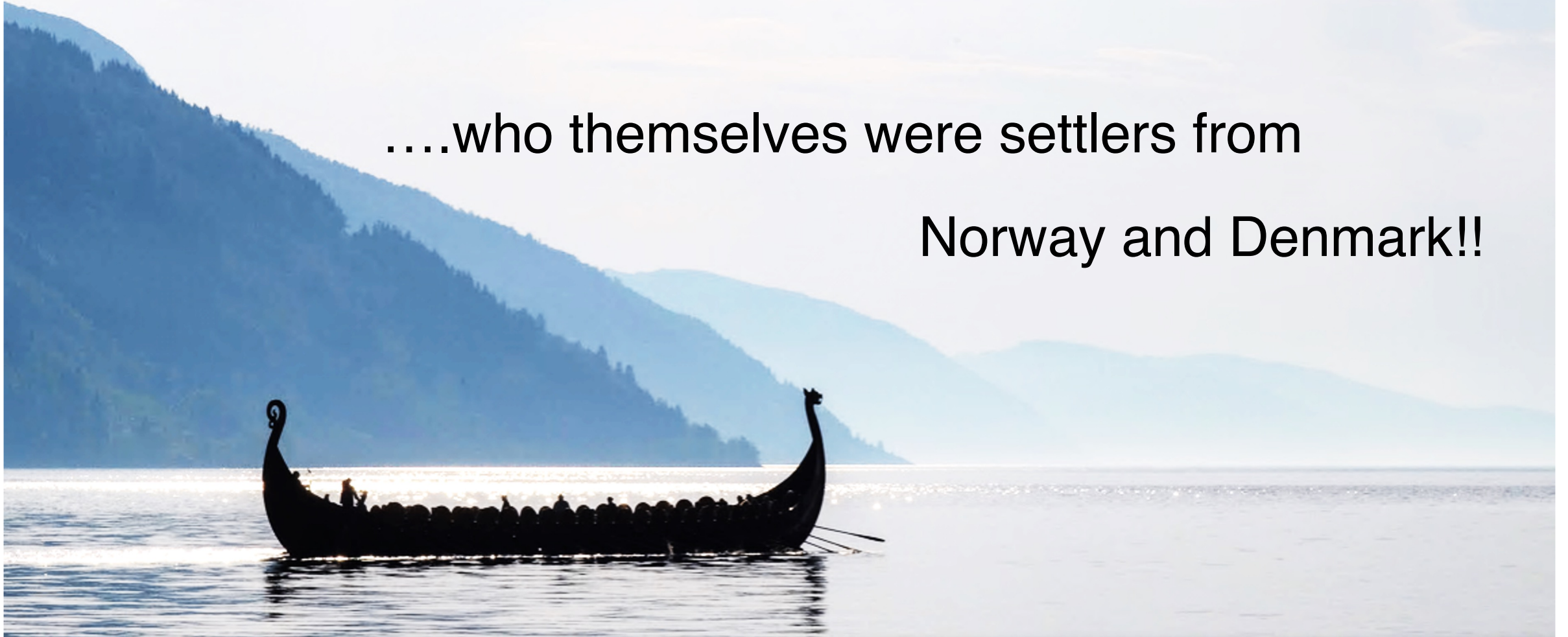
*Cnut and Edmund split the
Kingdom, Edmund was
murdered 2 months later. Cnut
ruled England for 19 years.*



There was peace for 50 years, but in 1066, England was conquered again by the Normans

....who themselves were settlers from

Norway and Denmark!!

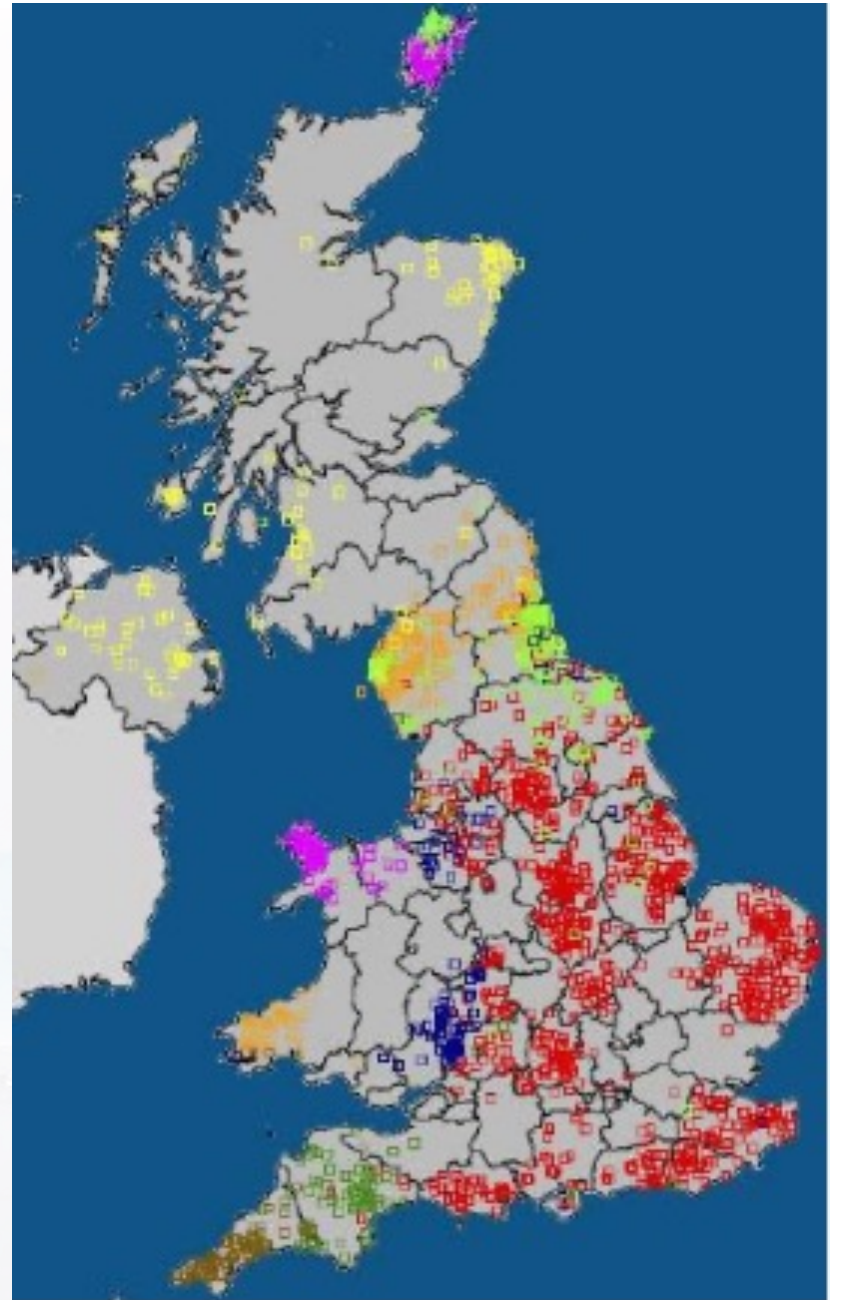


Finally, here's a question.....

Do we all have Viking DNA in our ancestry?

This 2015 genome map shows people in most of England form a single cluster. The cluster has ~40% Anglo-Saxon DNA contribution.

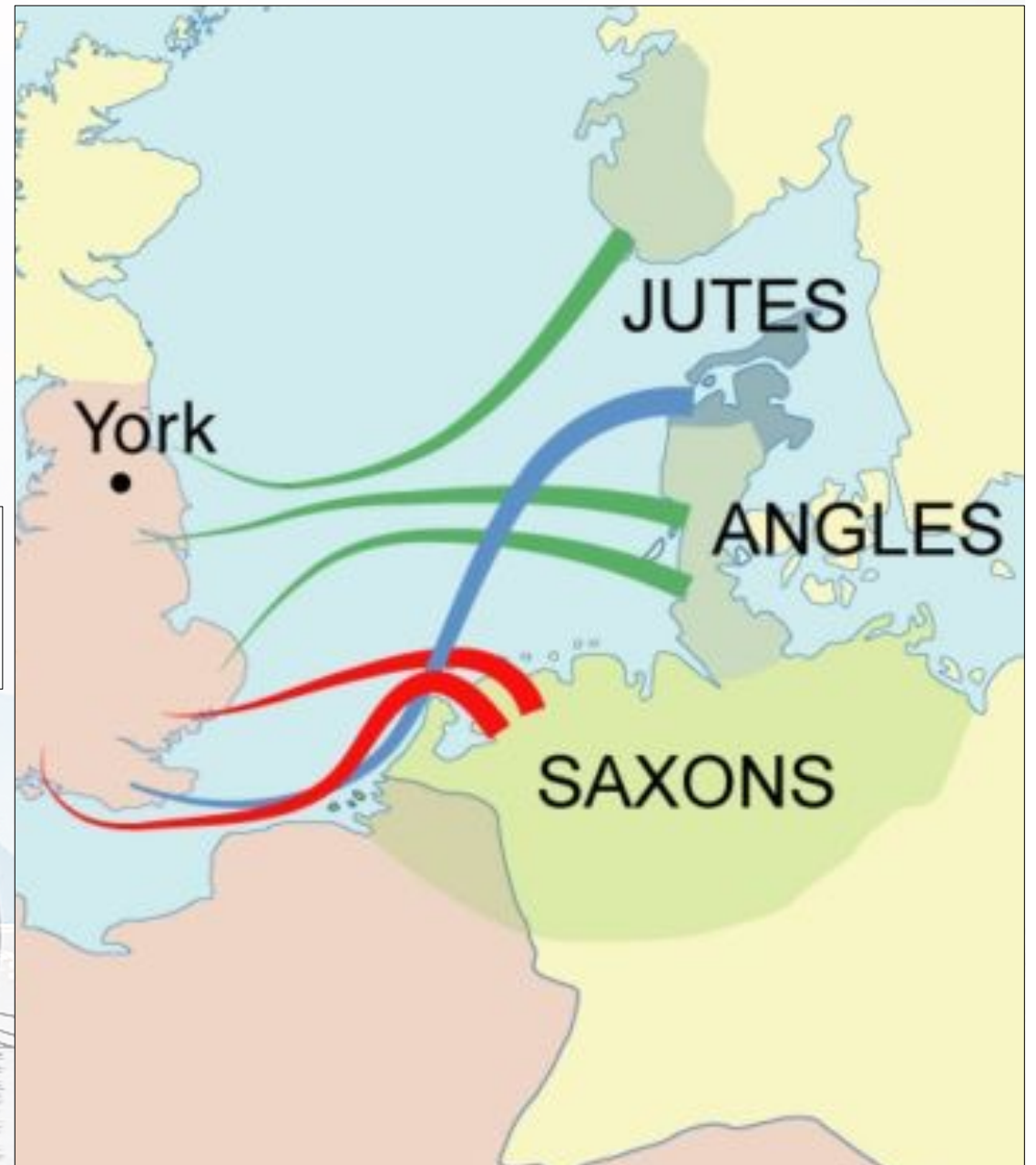
But NO detectable Danish DNA was found despite immigration in Danelaw areas from 800-1000AD. Why?



Our Anglo-Saxon ancestors raided and colonised England in 500-700AD.....

Most came from a similar area of Europe to the Danes.

So, the Danish DNA is hidden in our Anglo-Saxon DNA count.



Vikings were seafaring pirates from Northern Europe who raided and settled many countries – it was an occupation.

Jutes/Angles/Saxons/Danes/Norwegians were all Vikings.

So, most of us in Britain have Viking ancestry in our DNA!



Our research continues to find

the Battle of Assandun.....

