

A little history from 1066 and all that!

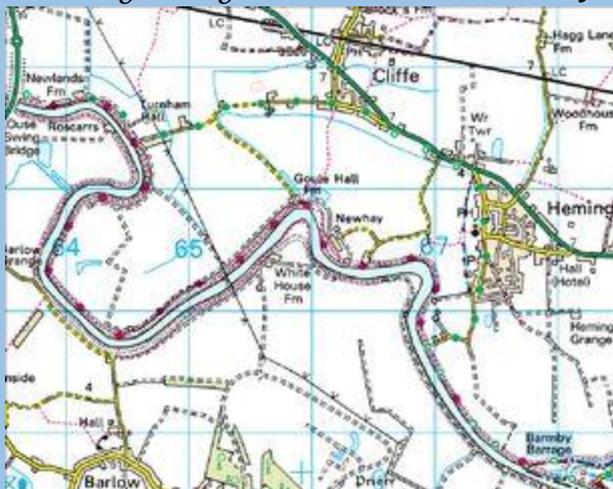
As you will know we are trying to reclaim some of the ponds on the Memorial Walk (Oldways)

Oldway's used to be an oxbow of the river Ouse!

An oxbow lake starts out as a curve, or meander, in a river. A lake forms as the river finds a different, shorter, course. The meander becomes an oxbow lake along the side of the river

BBC Domesday reloaded (1986)

The River Ouse runs to the south of Cliffe and Hemingbrough. It is part of a large river system with several river tributaries which rise in the Pennine Hills and flow out to the North Sea via the Humber Estuary. The southern parts of the parishes of Cliffe and Hemingbrough have been affected by the course of the river which has changed on a number of occasions in the past. Today the river is enclosed within banks which are raised above the surrounding ground to prevent it flooding. The river here is very slow and follows a meandering course. The "Oldways" is an oxbow lake formed because the river cut itself off and followed a shorter course. The new land was thus added on to the parish of Hemingbrough. It is called Newhay but was once part of Drax.



The ox bow lake was still used when they built Saint Mary's Church in the 12th century, so here is a little History from 1066 and how the river was used.



Battle of Fulford, 20 September 1066, Fulford, near York, Yorkshire (then capital of Northumbria)

The battle was between the Saxon troops of Mercia and Northumbria, under Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar, (brothers of the queen, Ealdgyth,) and a Norse army under King Harald Hardrada, with the aid of Earl Tostig, brother of King Harold Godwinson of England



King Edward the Confessor of England had died in 1065 aged 61, and had reportedly named Harold, Earl of Wessex, as his successor.

Two other nobles also laid claim to the crown; Harald Hardrada, King of Norway, and William, Duke of Normandy. (King Edward had promised the throne to William in 1051)

While William gathered a fleet in Normandy and waited for favourable winds to sail to the south coast of England, Harald had gathered an invasion force in the north.

The winds that kept William waiting in Normandy helped to speed Harald's fleet of longships across the North Sea and to support him he had the exiled brother of King Harold, Earl Tostig.

Tostig Godwinson was an Anglo-Saxon, and was the previous Earl of Northumbria, (brother of King Harold Godwinson.)

Tostig was said to have been heavy-handed with those who resisted his rule, including the murder of several members of leading Northumbrian families and was outlawed in 1065.

Harald sailed from Norway to the mouth of the Tyne, where he joined with Tostig. Tostig was quite ready to support Harald in his invasion in return for help in regaining the Earldom, Together they sacked and burned Scarborough, and sailed up the Humber.

The combined forces of Harald and Tostig must have been formidable; it is likely that the invasion force numbered over 10,000 men at arms. .

King Harold, waiting in the south, received news of the strong Norse force, and began to march north to meet the threat.

Harald Hardrada landed at Riccall, passing by Hemingbrough with 460 longships. Harald left a sizeable force of men to guard his fleet, but even so, his army must have numbered over 7,000. They met the defending army, made up of levied troops from Mercia and Northumbria, at Fulford, on the outskirts of York.



The Battle

The terrain around Fulford was flat, but sodden; a mixture of water-meadow and marshland.

The Norwegian army advanced along the banks of ditch leading east from the River Ouse.

The English attacked the Norwegian line and pushed them back in disarray. But Harald had kept the bulk of his troops back against the river itself, and as the English advanced, Harald's left wing swept around in an abrupt pincer movement, trapping the English against the ditch.

The fighting was fierce and terrible, but as the day wore on, the English spirit broke, and the armies of Mercia and Northumbria were cut to pieces. Some were trapped against the ditch, others fled, and the bodies of the English lay so plentifully upon the ground that, the Norse were able to advance over the meadow without getting their feet wet.

York prudently surrendered to the invaders, and Harald did not enter the city.



The Result

The Norse had but 5 days to enjoy their victory at Fulford. On 25 September, King Harold surprised Harald Hardrada at Stamford Bridge, and inflicted a decisive defeat on the Norsemen. Hardrada himself was killed, as was Tostig, and the Norse withdrew.

That is not the end of the tale, however, for scarcely had the dust of Stamford Bridge settled when news came of a landing of Norman troops under William of Normandy on the south coast. Harold ordered Morcar and Edwin to gather new levies, while he sped south once more with his exhausted troops. Perhaps unwisely, Harold chose to meet William in battle before the fresh northern troops could arrive. On 14 October, 1066, he met William's army at Hastings, and there Harold in turn was killed, and the Saxons decisively beaten.

The repercussions of Fulford were enormous. The losses suffered by the Mercian and Northumbrian levies at Fulford meant that the army led by Harold into battle at Hastings was desperately undermanned. It is not a stretch of imagination to claim that the Battle of Fulford led directly to the success of the Norman invasion that followed.

