

# Battle of Ashingdon

Date 1016

Location Ashingdon

Result Decisive Danish victory

The Battle of Ashingdon was fought on October 18, 1016, at Assandun, which is now believed to be Ashingdon in SE Essex, England, though the location is still debated. It was a victory for the Danes, led by Canute the Great, who triumphed over the English army led by King Edmund II ('Ironside'). The battle was the climax and triumphant conclusion to the Danish reconquest of England.

Canute had besieged London with major support from the English nobility against the Saxon hierarchy; particularly the Southampton nobles. The siege was in response to Edmund's reconquest of recently Danish-occupied Wessex, as well as conducting various indecisive offensives against Canute's army. London had withstood the siege and Edmund repulsed the raid-minded Danes, but needed troops following a successful attack against the Danes in Mercia.

Leaving London, Edmund risked travelling into the countryside, dominated by enemies and at risk of being attacked by superior Viking soldiers. Canute's intelligence became aware of Edmund's movements, and whilst marching through Essex, Edmund's army was intercepted by Canute. The surprise interception overwhelmed the English, causing some of them to desert, and the Danes poured on the English, decisively slaughtering much of the nobility. However, a minority of pro-English primary sources claim that the Danes were losing ground, and that Eadric (the traitor) was not a coward, but had previously made a deal with Canute to desert the other English forces. Nevertheless, the majority of sources believe it was a great, proper victory of Canute. Edmund survived.

Following his defeat King Edmund II was forced to sign a treaty with Canute in which all of England except for Wessex would be controlled by Canute, and when one of the kings should die, the other king would take all of England; his sons being the heir to the throne. After Edmund's death (possibly murder) on 30 November, Canute ruled the whole kingdom.

A few years later saw the construction of St. Andrews memorial church in 1020 on the hill of the site of the Battle in Ashington, which still stands to this day. The church was founded after Canute's succession to the throne in 1020.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has a brief account of the battle.

“ When the king learned that the enemy army had gone inland, for the fifth time he collected all the English nation, and pursued them and overtook them in Essex at the hill which is called Ashington, and they stoutly joined battle there. Then Ealdorman Eadric did as he had often done before, he was the first to start the fight with the Magonsæte [i.e. of Herefordshire], and thus betrayed his liege lord and all the people of England. There Cnut had the victory and won for himself all the English people. There was Bishop Eadnoth killed, and Abbot Wulfsige, and Ealdorman Ælfric, and Godwine, the ealdorman of Lindsey, and Vlfcetel of East Anglia, and Æthelweard, son of Ealdorman Æthelwine, and all the nobility of England was there destroyed.[1] ”

The battle is also mentioned briefly in *Knýtlinga saga* which quotes a verse of Icelandic poetry by Óttarr svarti, one of Canute's court poets.

“ King Knut fought the third battle, a maior one, against the sons of Æthelred at a place called Ashington, north of the Danes' Woods. In the words of Ottar:

*At Ashington, you worked well  
in the shield-war, warrior-king;  
brown was the, flesh of bodies  
serued to the blood-bird:  
in the slaughter, you won,  
sire, with your sword  
enough of a name there,  
north of the Danes' Woods.*