

Additional Information: The Riccall Skeletons



In December 1956 a farmer digging in his farm near Riccall in Yorkshire felt his spade hit something hard. He scraped away the soil and found ... a human skeleton. He called the police and they then called in archaeologists who started to excavate the site despite thick fog, freezing temperatures and heavy frost.

Over the next year, the archaeologists found 39 skeletons. They couldn't identify the sex of all of them but their first thoughts were that most of the skeletons were men but there were some women and children among them.

But that's not the end of the story.

When the archaeologists checked back in local history books they discovered that more skeletons had been found in the area in the 1800s though no-one knew how many.

Later, in 1976, workmen digging trenches for drains found 2 more skeletons.

Then in 1985, 23 more skeletons were uncovered.

Overall, 64 skeletons have been found at Riccall but probably many more were found in the past.

Clue B

Riccall was near the site of two famous battles that were fought in 1066.

Battle of Fulford - 20 Sept 1066

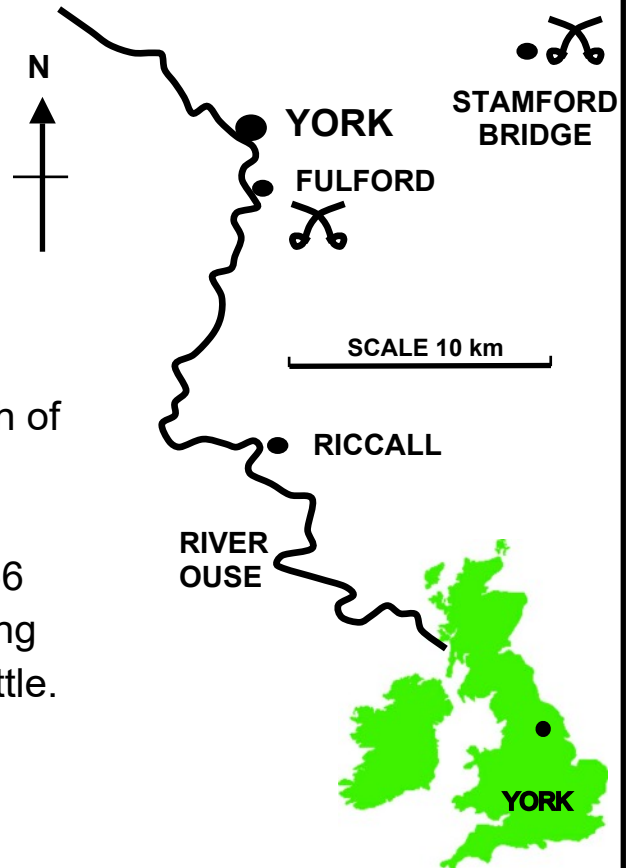
A large Norwegian army invaded the north of England and defeated an English army.

Battle of Stamford Bridge - 25 Sept 1066

The Norwegian army was beaten by King Harold of England after a long, bloody battle.

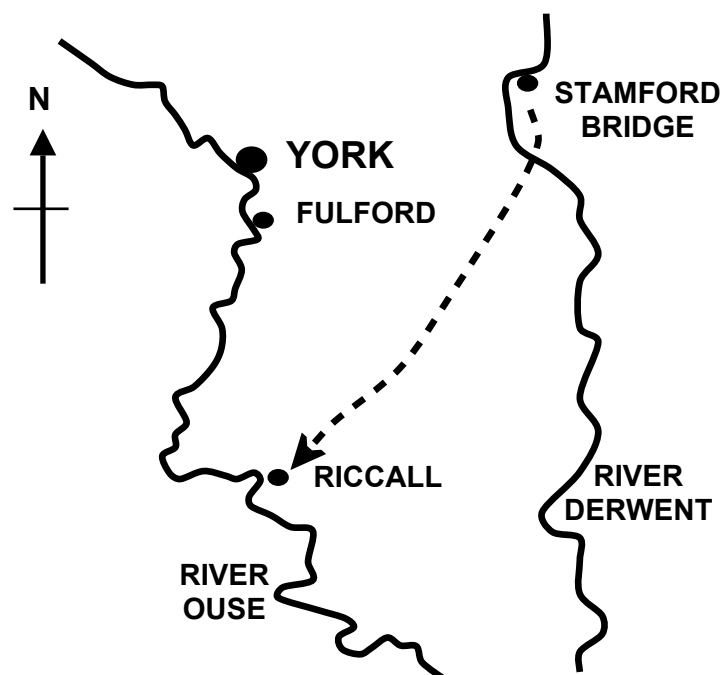


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Clue E

This is the probable route of the Norwegian soldiers as they tried to get back to their ships after the battle of Stamford Bridge.



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Clue D

Scientists examined the bones of the skeletons very carefully.



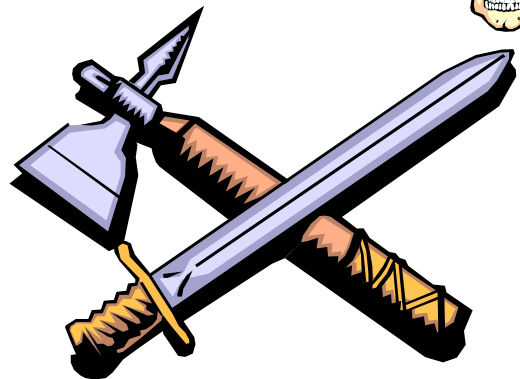
They found cut marks on many of the bones that looked as if they had been made by swords or axes.

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Clue F

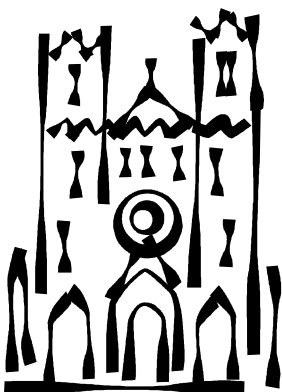
Saxon and Viking weapons.

These were the kinds of weapons used at the battles of Fulford and Stamford Bridge.



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Clue C



Historians checked whether there had been a church near the field where the bones had been found.

There had not!



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Clue G



An extract from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 1066. This was a record of the main events of each year written by English monks. This account of the Battle of Stamford Bridge had been written by the 1080s.

King Harald of Norway sailed up the River Ouse towards York with 300 ships. King Harold of England was in the south but went northwards day and night as quickly as he could.

Before Harold could get there, Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar fought the invading Norwegians but many of their army fled or were killed. The Norwegians won the battle.

Then King Harold of England and a large force of English soldiers took the Norwegians by surprise at Stamford Bridge. They fought strenuously until late in the day. One of the Norwegians stood on the narrow bridge and held off the English army so that they could not cross the bridge or win victory. An Englishman shot an arrow but missed. Then another Englishman crept under the bridge and stabbed the Norwegian from beneath.

Then Harold and his army went over the bridge and killed King Harald Hardrada and large numbers of Norwegians.

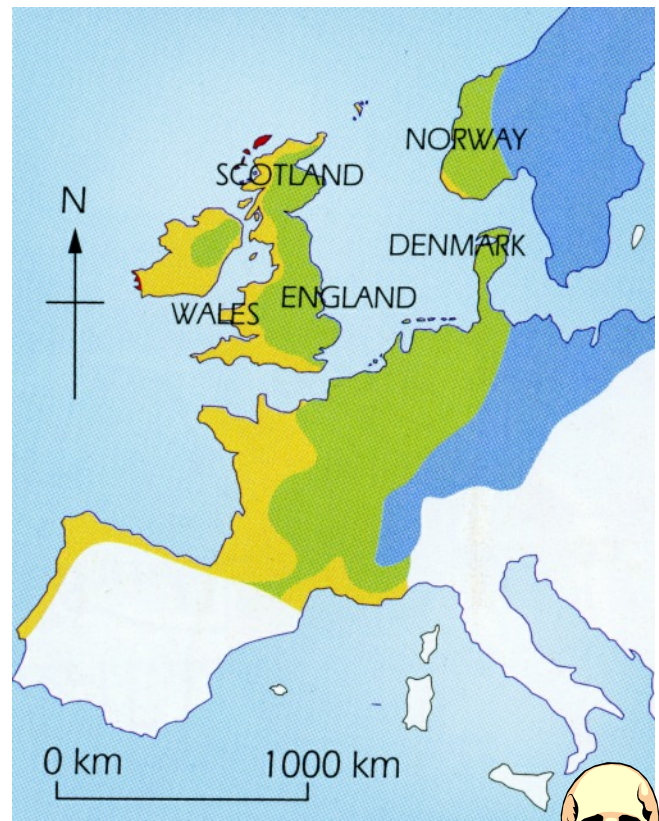
The surviving Norwegians fled. The English pursued them and attacked them fiercely until they reached their ships. Some were drowned and some burned and some killed in various ways so that few survived. The King let the survivors go home in 24 ships.

Clue H

Scientists examined the teeth from 6 of the skeletons

Scientists can tell which region people grew up in from their teeth. This is because traces of the water that children drink stay in their teeth for ever.

The tests on the teeth of the skeletons showed that the people grew up in the dark blue areas on the map.



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Notes:

Note 1: Clue A and Clue H are available on the accompanying PowerPoint.

Note 2: Clue H is the only clue that needs to be in colour. So if you only have a black and white printer, print the cards for the other clues and use the PowerPoint version of Clue H.

Clues I, J and K

In 2007 new scientific tests were carried out on the bones found at Riccall. These tests were carried out to check if the results you saw in Clue H were correct. This time, all 64 skeletons were examined, using tests that were more detailed and accurate because scientists had improved the tests since the previous tests in 2001.

This is what they found.



Clue I

The skeletons belonged to men, women and children. They included at least six children and there were slightly more women than men. One of the men had died at a very old age.

Only two of the skeletons showed evidence of being damaged by sharp-edged weapons.

Clue J

The skeletons had been buried in different centuries. The earliest burials had been in the 7th century (the 600s), the latest in the 11th century (the 1000s)

Clue K

The teeth of 12 skeletons were examined to find out where those people grew up. The new tests showed that all the 12 people had grown up in and around where they were buried in Yorkshire.