

HISTORICAL NOTE

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The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ed. G. N. Garmonsway, 1953, p. 127) records that in 991 Ipswich was 'harried', whatever that may mean, shortly before the epic battle of Maldon. It also shows (pp. 139-40) that the large force under Thurkil the Tall that had been burning and plundering in Sussex, Hampshire and Berkshire, landed at Ipswich in the spring of 1010—after Easter and before 18 May. But this formidable force may not have done much damage in Ipswich. The Chronicle specifically says they went 'straight to where they had heard that Ulfcytel was with his levies'. Ulfcytel or 'Ulfkell Snillingr' was a leading East Anglian Dane settled here earlier, conceivably at Ilketshall. Snillingr is the Norse for valiant, and East Anglia was subsequently known in the north as Ulfkell's land. In 1004 he had beaten off the Viking king, Sweyn. But now in 1010 he was routed by the Viking force that had moved straight from Ipswich to meet him: This was the long-commemorated battle of Ringmere Heath—fought either at East Wretham in Norfolk or Rymer Point, between Bury and Thetford.

Domesday Book reveals Ipswich as a town with a pre-Conquest population that has been calculated at more than 3,000—compared with nearly 4,750 at Thetford and at least 6,600 at Norwich (Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 530). It also shows that, like Norwich, at sometime between 1066 and 1086 Ipswich had been devastated. On folio 290 it says: 'In the borough there were in the time of King Edward 538 burgesses rendering custom to the King . . . but now there are 110 burgesses who render custom, and 100 poor burgesses who can render to the King's geld only a penny a head . . . And 328 burgages (*mansiones*) within the borough lie waste'. It ends with: 'And the Earl now as then has the third part'. This last phrase may contain the clue to the calamity. One of the features that normal pre-Conquest boroughs had in common was the right of the earl to the 'third penny', *i.e.* to one-third of the public revenue. The cause of Norwich's ruin is specifically stated in Domesday Book to be 'the forfeitures of earl Ralf'. The most critical rebellion of the Conqueror's later years was planned by the new earl of East Anglia, Ralf de Gael, or Ralf Guader, son of Ralf 'the Staller', at his bride-ale at Exning. It was stamped out in 1075. Ipswich, like Norwich, is likely to have suffered horribly for its association with earl Ralf. It would not have been popular with the Conqueror for its earlier association with the East Anglian earl Gyrrh, who fought against him at Hastings. But by 1086 the town would presumably have recovered from any punishment

inflicted in 1066. On the rather sketchy evidence available, I think that the Conqueror's 'visitation' of 1075 is likely to have been more devastating than either of the late Viking raids. But violent death was not uncommon in those centuries, any more than it is in our own.

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