

The Battle of Maldon

With apologies to Stanley Holloway and an Anonymous Saxon Bard

I'll tell 'ee of Battle of Maldon,
As was fought in nine ninety one,
When Saxons took on Viking First Team
And were beaten by 12 points to none.

T'Vikings 'ad ninety-three longships,
And landed at Folkestone (in Kent).
They ravaged both Sandwich and Ipswich,
And broke wind wherever they went.

So Elderman Bryhtnoth of Essex,
Who ran an 'otel in Southend,
Brought all the 'ome Guard out to Maldon
In the 'ope of reversing the trend.

T'kick-off were sharp at two thirty,
But Saxons were 'alf an hour late
'Cause they stopped off at Wheeler's in t'High Street
For fish and chips, off paper plates.

Then Bryhtnoth called 'is band of warriors,
From 'orseback taught each man 'is task -
Like running whilst 'olding their shields up,
And drinking 'ot Bovril from flask.

"We don't want no trouble," says Anlaf
(who was chief of the Norwegian men).
"Why don't you just pay us a tribute?
We'll settle for thirteen pound ten."

"Give over," says Bryhtnoth all bristly,
"D'you think we're afraid of a fight?
Besides, if we give you the money
We'll 'ave nowt left for lager tonight."

There's a causeway to reach Northey Island
But it's covered by t'sea at 'igh tide:
So they all 'ad to stand there till tea-time,
Throwing mud-bombs at t'opposite side.

But Saxons were taller than Vikings,
So when t'sea began to abate
They all waded over with broadswords,
Saying, "Eh up now lads – meet your Fate!"

"That's typical Saxons," says Anlaf,
"It's just like the other teams say:
They always take unfair advantage
Of folks as is playing away."

Now Bryhtnoth were 'urt by this insult,
It stung 'is East Anglian pride.
"If you're so ruddy good you can prove it –
Come on and get clobbered this side."

T'Saxons 'ad thirty-eight swordsmen;
T'Vikings four thousand and five,
So you don't need to be Stephen 'awking
To see this was somewhat unwise.

The English stepped back from t'causeway,
T'Vikings poured into the breach,
And behavin' like true godless 'eathen
Left litter all over the beach.

They cut the poor Saxons to pieces,
Till Bryhtnoth responded, "By 'eck –
They're beheading the cream of all Essex;
Now that's a right pain in the neck."

So that's 'ow the Danes won t'battle,
They rampaged round Essex for days,
Through Basildon, 'ornchurch and Thurrock,
Till they finally settled in Grays.

And there they 'ave left their descendants,
For there they still 'ave their abode -
Which is why every town south of Brentwood
Is as fair as an 'ole in the road.

Translated by Jon Garvey, 4th June, 2001