

The Raven Banner

Player's Guide



A megagame of the Danish invasion of England.

By John Keyworth, 12-16 players, 3 hours



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Table of Contents

Introduction	1	Game Rules	9
England in 871	3	Game Maps	10
Kingdom of Northumbria	5	Game Resources	11
Kingdom of Mercia	5	Initiative Tokens	11
Kingdom of East Anglia	6	The Game turn	12
Kingdom of Wessex	6	Rules Reference	19
Saxon Culture	7	Characters	20
Medieval Christianity	7	Factions	21
Danish Culture	8	Shires	21
Other Factions	8	England in the Aftermath	23

Introduction



For decades Danish raiders have been pillaging the coasts of England, but recently the “Great Heathen Army” conquered the northernmost kingdom of Northumbria.

As a Saxon aristocrat or Danish raider you will be fighting and negotiating to ensure the best future for yourselves in this chaotic and violent era.



A game of Raven Banner lasts approximately 3 hours and there are 12 to 16 players, plus 2 organisers who keep the game running smoothly.

You should familiarise yourself with the rules before turning up; although the organisers can help during the game their time is limited. You will be given a character brief by an organiser, although if you have a preferred role let them know in advance.



Playing Raven Banner is a bit different from other games you may be familiar with. For one the turns are timed: the game will not wait for you to take your actions, so manage your time wisely.

Second, there is no clear winner. Your brief will have goals to strive towards and to get the most out of the game you should both use the game rules, and negotiate with the other players, to achieve those goals - although you are unlikely to achieve all of them.

At the end of the game you can decide for yourself how well you did, but win or lose, you will have collectively told a new narrative which will change of fates of Dane and Saxon alike.



game of Raven Banner is split into five 25-minute turns, each with 4 phases:

- ⌘ Team Phase (5 minutes)
- ⌘ Battle Phase (5 minutes)
- ⌘ Maintenance Phase (5 minutes)
- ⌘ Encounter Phase (10 minutes)

The game organisers announce when each turn and phase begins.

The game space is split into 7 tables:

- ⌘ One per starting team - Kingdom of Mercia, Kingdom of Wessex, Great Heathen Army and Great Summer Army.
- ⌘ One per region of England - Northern, Western and Eastern

In the Team Phase gather with your allies at your team table to discuss your plans

In the Battle Phase, if you have an Initiative Token, choose to start a battle; if you don't, choose a battle to join.

Fights will be won or lost, and territory and Initiative Tokens may change hands.

In the Maintenance Phase collect income and take maintenance actions.

Finally in the Encounter Phase negotiate with other players and take encounter actions.

The actions that can be taken during the Maintenance and Encounter Phase are found on your briefing sheet and vary per role.

England in 871

A.D. 866. This year Æthered, brother of Æthelbert, took to the West-Saxon government; and the same year came a large heathen army into England, and fixed their winter-quarters in East-Anglia, where they were soon horsed; and the inhabitants made peace with them.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles

The year is 871 and for the last eight decades Danish raiders have been raiding the coasts of the British Isles - striking fast and leaving with all the treasure their longships can carry.

Six years ago that changed when the “Great Heathen Army” landed in Kent and fought their way north before overwintering in the Kingdom of East Anglia. These new foreign invaders were here to stay.


They have conquered Northumbria and East Anglia, and been paid off by the remaining Saxon Kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex.

This is a momentary peace that cannot last as both Saxon kingdoms are suffering politically as well as militarily:

- ⌘ The Mercian King Burgred has fled, leaving his lands without clear leadership.
- ⌘ Meanwhile King Æthelred of Wessex has just died, leaving his sickly younger brother Alfred with the crown.


Meanwhile the success of the Danish leaders has increased the ambitions of their lieutenants who are still waiting to be rewarded for their efforts.

Kingdom of Northumbria

hen the Danish forces came to Northumbria in 866 they found it in the midst of a civil war. This left Eoforwick (modern day York, which was renamed Jorvik by the Danes) an easy target to take and hold.

While Kings Ælla and Osberht did put aside their differences they were both slain in battle and Northumbria surrendered, with the Danes installing a puppet king to lend some legitimacy to their rule of the region.

Kingdom of Mercia

ercia was invaded from the north and the city of Snottingham (modern Nottingham) was taken in 868 and the Danish army remained there over winter.

The combined armies of Mercia and Wessex couldn't dislodge the forces and in the end King Burgred paid the Danes to leave the city.

King Burgred later fled to Rome, leaving the land in need of leadership.



Kingdom of East Anglia

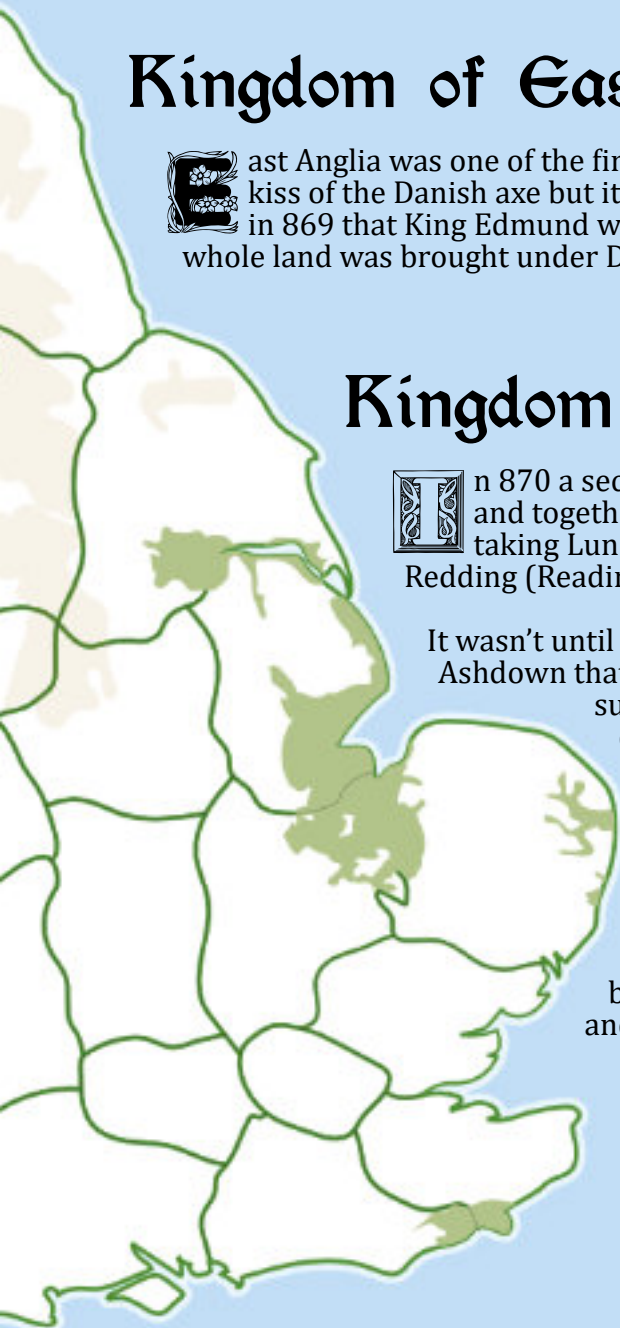
East Anglia was one of the first Kingdoms to feel the kiss of the Danish axe but it wasn't until they returned in 869 that King Edmund was killed in battle and the whole land was brought under Danish control.

Kingdom of Wessex

In 870 a second Danish host arrived and together they attacked Wessex, taking Lundenwic (London) and Redding (Reading).

It wasn't until 871 at the Battle of Ashdown that the Danish armies suffered their first major defeat at the hands of Wessex.

A few month later, after several more battles and the death of King Æthelred the Danes were once more paid for peace by the new king, the young and sickly King Alfred.



Saxon Culture

The Anglo-Saxons were a Germanic people who came to England in the 5th and 6th century.

Since their migration they have become the dominant cultural and political force on the island, as well as converting from their old pagan gods to the “one true faith” Christianity.

Their aristocracy are all expected to be warriors, and fight for their subjects, maintaining a personal *Huscarl* warband, calling upon the peasant *Fyrd* levy when additional soldiers were required.

Saxon Kings derive their authority from God’s favour on the battlefield, and that has been in short supply. Something must be done soon if the Kingdoms are to remain united...

Medieval Christianity

Christianity in England was thoroughly entrenched at this time, and worship was central to life in the Saxon Kingdoms. There was a great focus on the veneration of saints and their relics - something the Saxons had a great many of.

The favour of God was very real for the Saxons and could bring in fertile harvests or win battles, and spreading the faith was very important to all his followers.

While technically Catholic, and answering to the Pope in Rome, English Christianity diverged from the orthodoxy enough to be of concern to the church on the continent - their dating of Easter, style of tonsure, and kings appointing their own bishops. Kent, and the Archbishop there, was the last bastion of papal influence on the island.

Danish Culture

There has been increasing pressure - demographic, economic and political - on the people of Scandinavia to spread out and seek wealth, fame and land in other shores.

As much as they are known for being fierce warriors they are also expert craftsmen, canny traders, unmatched shipwrights and, as with all societies at this time, the majority of Danes were farmers.

Danes have their own gods, and while they are important, they do not seek to spread their religion.

Each raider fights for their own goals, and typically follow a leader who can help them reach those goals, rather than out of a sense of obligation or duty.

While the Danes have earned a reputation as raiders over the last century the pressure to claim more treasure and land has not eased, a peace bought by the Saxons will not last for long...

Other factions

Britons: The disparate peoples of Wales, Strathclyde and Cornwall are collectively known as Britons but have no political unity. They have their own kingdoms and are mostly interested in remaining at peace.

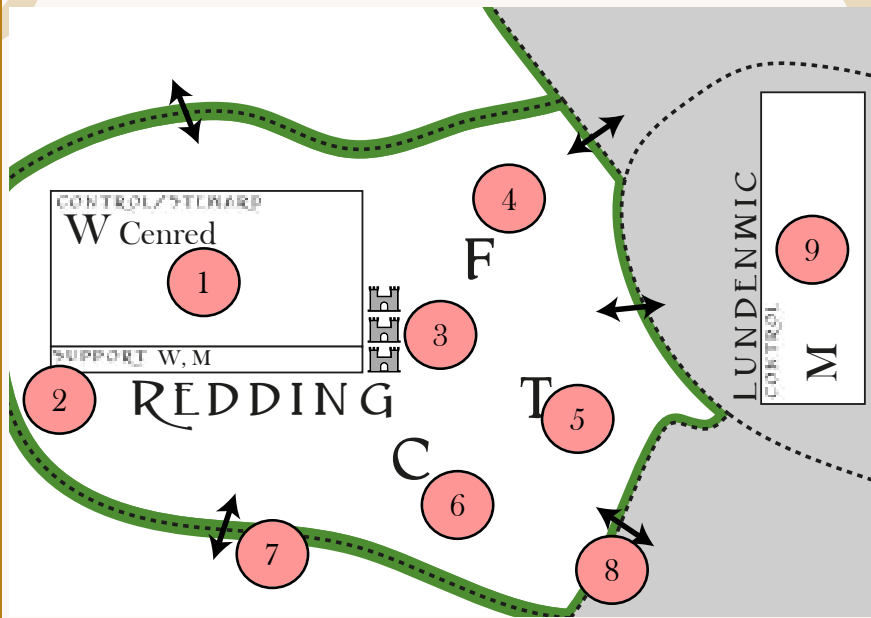
Franks: The Frankish empire is a large European power, extending beyond the borders of modern France, which is experiencing their own problem with the Danes. Like the Saxons they are Christians and are interested in seeing it spread.

Danes and Scandinavia: The region is split between multiple kings and is the region most of the Danish invaders originate from. They have ships, soldiers and silver for anyone who can give them a return on their investment.

Game Rules

A.D. 871. This year came the army to Redding in Wessex; and in the course of three nights after rode two earls up, who were met by Alderman Æthelwulf at Englefield; where he fought with them, and obtained the victory. About four nights after this, King Æthelred and Alfred his brother led their main army to Reading, where they fought with the enemy; and there was much slaughter on either hand.









Anglo-Saxon Chronicles



Game Maps

There are 3 maps in the game, each split into 6 Shires. Throughout the game these will be modified by drawing directly onto the maps.

1. The character who controls the Shire, and the initial of their faction (Cenred, from Wessex).
2. Which factions have Support in this Shire, which can help with defence and taxation (Wessex and Mercia).
3. Number of castles defending the shire.
4. F represents a farm, which produces Food.
5. T represents a town, which produces Silver.
6. C represents a church, which is important to christian characters.
7. Adjacency to a Shire on the same map.
8. Adjacency to a Shire on a different map
9. The faction that currently controls a Shire on a different map.

 Momentum 2	 Silver 4	 Food 4	 Soldiers 3	 Ships 0
				

Game Resources

There are five types of character resources in the game, which are tracked on your character sheet. When changing their values, cross out the old value and write in the new one.

- ⌘ Momentum - cannot be traded.
- ⌘ Silver - can be traded.
- ⌘ Food - can be traded.
- ⌘ Soldiers - represent approximately one hundred trained troops loyal to you per point, cannot be traded.
- ⌘ Ships - can be traded.

Trade-able resources can be exchanged freely at any time outside of the Battle Phase.

Initiative Tokens

When you choose a Shire to target for an attack it must be adjacent to one your team already controls, or all attackers in the battle must spend Ships to take part (see below).

Your token can be lost if you *don't choose a target*, and they can also change hands during the battle phase.

At the start of the game two players have Initiative Tokens that allow them to choose a Shire to fight in.

The Game turn

Each of the game's five turns has four phases: Team, Battle, Maintenance and Encounter.

Team Phase

Phase Time: 5 minutes



There are four team tables and you must remain at your team's table, and not communicate with the other teams during this time.


It is possible for teams to be created or disbanded during the game; the organisers will make sure each team has their own area.

Take this time to report what has been happening and make plans for the next turn.

You may have an Initiative Token that lets you choose a location to fight a battle. You should decide where to attack during this phase, or tell an organiser if you do not want to fight.

Battle Phase



Phase Time: 5 minutes

 Each battle phase begins with the current holder of each Initiative Token declaring a Shire to attack.

If you do not have a token, choose to either join one of the attacks, or defend against one of them.

Once everyone has decided which battle to participate (or have decided to stay out of the fighting) in the organisers will assign you a partner to fight against. If you have a particular rival in mind you should mention it now.

Each pair of fighters is referred to as a Clash.

-  Extra defenders will be able to reinforce or scout later.
-  Extra attackers will be unopposed and count as winning their Clash.

Each attacker/defender pair then resolve a Clash.

Each player chooses a tactics card to use, in secret. Both players then flip their cards.

You cannot play a tactics card that has a higher Battle Score than your total Soldiers.

Card Rank	Tactic Name	Battle Score	Losses Dealt	Losses Received
A	Withdraw	1	-1	-1
2	Defensive	2	0	-1
3	Ambush	3	2	0
4	Stand Firm	4	1	0
5	Charge	5	2	+1

Your tactics card decides your starting Battle Score.

- ⌘ All defenders also gain a +1 bonus to their Battle Score if there are at least 3 defended settlements in the attacked Shire.
- ⌘ Any extra defenders may choose to Reinforce: Choose a battle to commit up to 2 soldiers to, for +1 Battle Score each. If they Reinforce they will not be able to Scout later.

You then choose to either Lead the Charge, and join the battle personally, or fight normally. If you decide to fight normally and your opponent Leads the Charge you can change your mind. Then roll on the following table to determine the leadership bonus to your battle score:

Dice Roll	1	2	3	4	5	6*
Normal	+0			+1		+2
Lead the Charge	-1	+1	+2		+3	+4

* If you roll a 6, mark a Wound on your opponent.

If you Lead the Charge and your leadership bonus is *less than or equal to* your opponent's, you mark a Wound.

By Leading the Charge and some bad luck, it is possible to receive two Wounds in a single battle.

If you have marked 3 Wounds throughout the game your character is dead, and you must see an organiser in the Encounter Phase (continue to resolve the rest of the clash normally until then).

Each side adds their leadership bonus to their battle score.

The victor is the side with the highest total battle score (attackers win ties).

Example: For this example Clash, the Dane Guthrum is fighting King Alfred of Wessex. Guthrum has 10 soldiers, while Alfred has 3 soldiers and is defending a shire with 3 defended settlements, granting him a +1 bonus to his Battle Score.

First both sides select a *Tactic card*:

- ⌘ Guthrum wants victory, but does not want to lose all his soldiers at once, so selects 4 "Stand Firm".
- ⌘ Alfred has fewer soldiers and cannot commit to anything of higher than a 3 battle score. Wishing to conserve his forces he selects 2 "Defensive".

Both sides reveal their tactics cards.

Alfred decide to Lead the Charge, while Guthrum decides to hang back and roll normally, so both players roll 1d6 and add the appropriate bonuses:

- ⌘ Guthrum rolls a 6, consulting the chart this gives +2 battle score and inflicts a Wound on Alfred.
- ⌘ Alfred rolls a 5, granting a +3 battle score.

Guthrum has $4+2=6$, while Alfred has $2+1+3=6$, resulting in a tie. Since attackers win ties Guthrum is victorious.

Each side now loses soldiers according to the two tactics cards played - sum your opponent's losses dealt with your own losses received. If there are multiple defenders they can choose who takes the casualties.

Everyone involved must now feed 1 soldier per battle score on their tactics card, minus any casualties, or take them as additional casualties.

Reinforcements must feed the Soldiers they committed, minus any casualties.

Next we calculate casualties; Guthrum has 3 food and Aldred has 5.

- ⌘ Guthrum committed 4 soldiers and loses 0 (from Alfred's Defensive tactic) +0 (from his Stand Firm tactic). This means he still has 4 soldiers to feed, and with only 3 food he must spend it all and still lose 1 soldier to attrition.
- ⌘ Alfred committed 2 soldiers and loses 1 (from Guthrum's Stand Firm tactic) -1 (from Alfred's Defensive tactic). This means he still has 2 soldiers to feed, so he spends 2 food and loses nothing.

If the attackers won at least one clash per castle:



Castles are shown on the map, by the Shire's control box.

- ⌘ Control of the shire passes to the attackers.
- ⌘ The player with the Initiative Token can declare a new Steward.
- ⌘ Cross out one castle in that shire, if there are any (to a minimum of 2).

If the defenders won *at least 2 Clashes* the defending Steward gains the Initiative Token. This can happen even if the Shire does change hands.

Any extra defenders who did not Reinforce can Scout, counting as an additional victory when determining whether the Initiative Token changes hands.

Seizing the Initiative

After all battles are resolved, if a faction did not make any attacks, nor have any of their Shires attacked, they gain a temporary Initiative Token that they can use in the following turn (after which it disappears - it cannot be retained nor taken by the defender).

Maintenance Phase

Phase Time: 5 minutes

During this phase you collect your income. For each shire a player is the Steward of they gain:

- ☞ 1 food for each farm
- ☞ 2 silver for each town

If you don't have Support in the shire then defended settlements do not provide any income.

Support is given in a Shire if you or your liege have the crown corresponding to any of the faction initials in the Shire's Support box on the map.

You may also take maintenance actions, as described on your briefing sheet.

Any spare time should be spent talking and trading with other players (only Silver, Food and Ships can be traded).

Encounter Phase

Phase Time: 10 minutes

During this phase players can take encounter actions.

Any spare time should be spent talking and trading with other players.

Rules Reference

Characters

Each player controls a single character, a notable leader from either the Danish or Saxon side of the conflict.

Characters are represented by a number of resources they can spend, actions they can take and, possibly, lands they are steward of.








Actions: Each character will have a list of actions they can take, determined by their background.

Players can take as many actions in the appropriate phase as they have resources to spend on them.

Resources: There are five types of character resources in the game, which are tracked on your character sheet. When changing their values, cross out the old value and write in the new one.

- ⌘ Momentum - cannot be traded.
- ⌘ Silver - can be traded.
- ⌘ Food - can be traded.
- ⌘ Soldiers - represent approximately one hundred trained troops loyal to you per point, cannot be traded.
- ⌘ Ships - can be traded.

Trade-able resources can be exchanged freely at any time outside of the Battle Phase.

 Momentum 2	 4	 4	 Soldiers 3	 0	Ships
					

Factions

There are four main factions at the start of the game, the Great Heathen Army, the Great Summer Army, the Kingdom of Wessex and the Kingdom of Mercia. Each faction has a single leader.

Membership and leadership of factions can change, and new factions could arise. These changes are adjudicated by the facilitators.

Vassals: Players can become the vassal of a Saxon king, or any Dane.

Any lands a vassal has stewardship over are controlled by their liege's faction and can be used by that faction's members for calculating adjacency (see below).

Saxons must rebel against their liege to change liege; Danes can do so at any point during the Team Phase.

Alliances: If your faction does not control a shire you can use another faction's control, if the Steward or their liege is present and agrees.

Shires

There are 18 shires split between the three maps in the game. Each has a Steward who controls and collects income from it.

Adjacency: Some actions require adjacency to a Shire that is controlled by your faction. Adjacency is shown by a double headed arrow.



⌘ A player can gain adjacency to a coastal Shire for the turn by paying that Shire's Ship cost. If this is done to choose the target of a battle then *all* attackers must pay the ship cost.



Castles are shown on the map, by the Shire's control box.

Castles: Each shire has a number of castles next to the control box. The more castles, the more attackers are needed to take control of the Shire.

Support: Each Shire can support one or more factions. This represents who the peasants are willing to accept as their rulers.

- ⌘ You can collect income from defended settlements if you have support.
- ⌘ Shires with support always count as adjacent for players from the relevant faction.
- ⌘ Some actions require support.
- ⌘ The more Shires controlled by one of their supported factions the more settled England will be (see England in the Aftermath below).

For Saxons to count as having support they must possess one of the crowns that the Shire supports, or their liege must have support there. Which crown(s) you have will be marked on your character sheet.

For Danes you always count as having support in Shires marked with a D, although there are none at the start of the game and they can only be added by taking actions.

Settlements: Each Shire can have one or more settlements within it. There are three types:

- ⌘ Farm - 1 food income per turn.
- ⌘ Town - 2 silver income per turn.
- ⌘ Church

A settlement with a circle around it is “defended”; it is harder to raid and won't provide income to occupiers.

Stewardship: Each Shire is controlled by a single player who is referred to as its Steward.

England in the Aftermath



While you are free to interpret your personal goals and narrative to give your character an epilogue, England as a whole will be given one by the organisers based on the state of the maps and factions once the game ends.

While the organisers have some leeway in their interpretation, they will certainly take into account the following:

Christianity: The faction with the most churches will likely control the direction of the church going forwards.

Depending on the number of Shires under pagan stewardship that don't have a missionary cross in them:

0-1: No significant pagan influence.

2-4: The church takes on some pagan influence.

5-8: The island becomes segregated between christian and pagan control.

9+: Christianity once more leaves the shores of England.

Danelaw: The number of Shires under Danish stewardship determine the ongoing cultural influence:

0-2: Little to no impact.

3-5: Some Danish enclaves.

6-8: Significant influence.

9-12: Danish becomes the dominant culture.

13+: Saxon culture is replaced.

Stability: The number of Shires controlled without support.

0-1: A generation or two of peace.

2-4: War is inevitable, but there is peace for the moment.

5+: The war continues, the land will be devastated.

Prosperity: Count the number of settlements in the country:

0-39: Famine and poverty hit all levels of society.

40-59: England will take decades to rebuild to its former strength.

60+: All of England prospers.

Foreign Influence: Should too many concessions be given for Frankish, Briton or Papal assistance this could have an effect on the country.

They told him also, that their king would receive baptism. And they acted accordingly; for in the course of three weeks after, King Guthrum, attended by some thirty of the worthiest men that were in the army, came to him at Aller, which is near Athelney, and there the king became his sponsor in baptism.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicles.

Credits

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