

'None of the material published here has been formally verified, and is based on personal views, informal exchange of information known, and element of supposition along with 'on-the-ground' observation. There is however some supporting information used from arial maps, and other internet information.'

The Era of Railway Transport & Rail Track information

Rail transport brought huge social change to all rural communities - Oakley included [albeit our village was already a key coaching stop-off for the main trunk road out to the South West]. Once the steam technology was proven and 'steam power' visualised & designed for engines - the era of Steam trains and the need for track quickly took hold and rapidly escalated. For Oakley's History this was the rail track laid down by the **London and South Western Railway**, which opened in stages from 1838 to 1840 after a difficult construction period.

[Just considering the steep embankment slopes of the multi path section along to the green iron bridge section gives a vivid picture of the tonnes of earth that had to be shifted. All manually with the railroad 'navy' and horse power. Note the recent plaque along this section to commemorate these stout hearted men.]

The need which fed the appetite for the huge investment costs arose from a desire to expand trade between Southampton merchants [especially imported goods from the docks] to the London market. The London and Southampton Railway (L&SR), was promoted to connect Southampton to the capital; the Company envisaged a considerable reduction in the price of coal and agricultural necessities to places served, as well as imported produce through Southampton Docks and passenger traffic.

Construction probably started on 6 October 1834, but progress was slow [due to the construction challenges already mentioned]. However, the railway was immediately successful, and road coaches from points further west even altered routes so as to connect with the new railway at convenient interchange points [although goods traffic was slower to develop].

Other key stages of the The London and South Western Railway was the extension of the main Western line to Exeter via Salisbury. Stages local to our area were:

- Basingstoke to Salisbury
 - Basingstoke to Andover opened 3 July 1854
 - Andover to Salisbury opened 1 May 1857

This extended rail line service created a need for both railway station AND a suitable cross over point for two very busy lines... and the BattleDown flyover was built to accommodate this. [see notes below]

Oakley railway station was opened on 3 July 1854 by the London & South Western Railway. It closed on 17 June 1963.

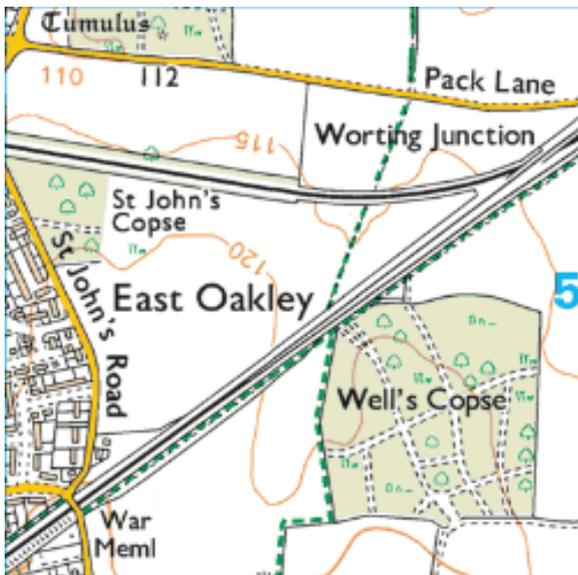
BattleDown Flyover

When the line was first opened in 1854, Worting Junction was constructed as a flat junction. This required that down trains heading west and up trains from Southampton cross each other's paths. Initially this was not a great problem, however as traffic and speeds increased the junction became a bottleneck. To relieve this, a [flying junction](#) was provided to the south, opening on 30 May 1897. This changed the arrangement so that up

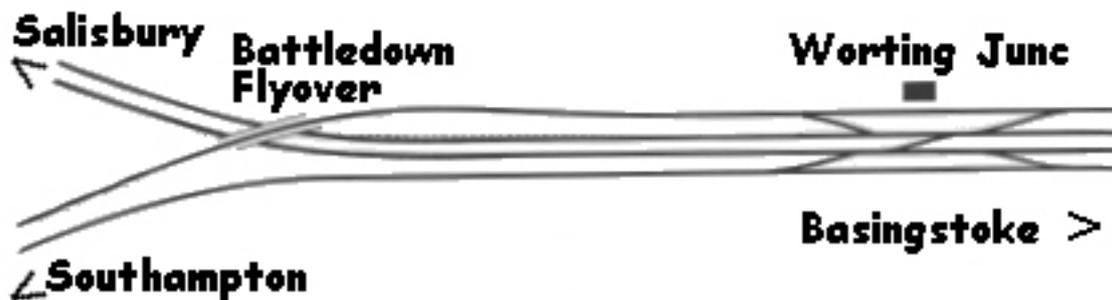
trains from Southampton line now crossed over the up and down Salisbury lines on Battledown Flyover, 3¼ miles west of Basingstoke.

It is in fact Hampshire's only flying junction. The line from Southampton crosses over the lines to and from the West of England. Nearby, both cross over the road, Pack Lane. Rail over rail over road!
The rail lines actually meet a mile to the north-east at Worting Junction.

<https://www.geograph.org.uk/showmap.php?gridref=SU58925073>



North of Worting Junction, stopping services to/from London Waterloo and Cross Country services to/from the North of England via Reading use the outer pair of tracks, while express services to/from London Waterloo use the inner pair of tracks. The inner pair of tracks are un-electrified through the junction and continue towards the west to Salisbury and Exeter.



BATTLEDOWN, (AND THE BATTLE OF ACLEA)



Quiet fields between Basingstoke & Oakley – Now... © Nigel Smith

Close to where I live now in Oakley Hampshire, the railway divides in 2 directions, at Battledown Flyover, for the South and the West Country. Battledown has been well known to train buffs for over century. But what of the name, and could Battledown be a plausible site for the ancient The Battle of Aclea?

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle describes a battle in 851 between invading Vikings landing around the Thames, against Beorhtwulf The King of Mercia, and then King Aethelwulf of the West Saxons. The West Saxons whilst coming to the aid of their saxon 'Brothers' strengthened their own influence with their victory against the Danes at Aclea . (Aethelwulf's son Alfred, would later galvanise the saxons further leading the first recognisable 'English' kingdom as we know it, with his capital at Winchester Hampshire.

There has been much speculation about where the battle took place but no one has been able to confirm for sure the exact location. Aclea meant 'Oak field or glade' and Ockley in Surrey, an Oakley in Bedfordshire and Water Oakley in Berkshire are all suggested candidates for this battle.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reference is as an event, but it doesn't give exact hints of location. From the point of view of the Vikings landing in the East from the Thames direction, Surrey and Kent would seem the likely regions... However from the Thames, the course of the Viking insurgency went west, across Bedford, Surrey & Berkshire. This part of North Hampshire borders Surrey and Berkshire, and the Thames so a skirmish could have easily meandered!



Oakley, Hampshire's location in South England

It was in the late Victorian period the idea of Oakley Hampshire being a possibility was raised. In a letter to The Hampshire Chronicle Newspaper in 1884, [Charles Cooksey](#) explained why he felt the setting for the battle was in Hampshire. In 1910

Charles Oman's book 'England before the Norman Conquest' also highlighted Oakley a possible site. Philologist Richard Coates reflection on the Anglo Saxon Chronicle in 1989 also felt Oakley had some mileage away from the Ockley in Surrey location. The arguments have carried on being debated, and is still not convincing to everyone. 'Surrey Medieval' blog in 2013 still has it's concerns against this evidence.

So why do I too suggest that Battledown could be the scene of the battle? As said, I'm not the first person to suggest this or saying I am an expert, but it should be considered a possibility. The point is no-one can really be sure 100% sure of the location.

The Location of 'Battledown'



Ancient routes near Oakley in location to 'Battledown'

The Place has got history...

The location of Battledown is important. The Romans built a road from Silchester to Winchester, and we still use this route today (A33). But older than that is 'The Harrow Way' which intersects the Roman road at Battledown. This ancient trackway forms part of 'The Old Way' from the Neolithic period. (The Neolithic hillfort Winklebury camp is also a couple of miles north which you can read in another [blog](#) of mine).

REPORT THIS AD

Oakley is 16 miles north of Winchester the Wessex capital, less than half a days ride. According to F.H. Baring, he believed several Synod's of West Saxons, had been held at Acleah in 782 & 789 in Hampshire. An article of 'Roots.Web' suggests A West Saxon Witenagemot or a 'Kings Council' I read of took place in 824 during King Egbert's reign. I think it is fair to say it was probably a good place to 'convene' with its trackways still primary routes across the Kingdom of Wessex.

It is said there was a battle that was fought there in 904 AD when Ethelwulf defeated the Danes, (after a previous battle recorded in 871 against the Danes, which had been lost. In Basingstoke this area is still called 'Daneshill' to the North East). King Alfred followed later, but the historic battles with the Danes would have been an influence in his shaping as a King of Wessex.



The area of Battledown today © Nigel Smith

The Roman road, towards the Winchester direction is marked by the trees on the left.



© *Nigel Smith*

I don't wish to get all mystical about the setting, but if you walk or cycle across this spot, (which I recommend just for its peace and subtle beauty), It feels very believable that a battle took place here. As time has progressed, the fact is other sites have gained credibility in academia maybe just because of their logical convenience to London. Oakley has, on the face of it, just become a dormant setting away from the action. I just go back to my original nagging thought, Why has the name 'Battledown' endured?

<https://mapsmithblog.wordpress.com/2017/03/12/battledown-and-the-battle-of-aclea/>