

BATTLE OF ARDENDRAUGHT

MALCOLM II vs PRINCE CANUTE OF THE DANES

‘Cuir críoch na Dane!’ screamed Malcolm II’s warriors as they prepared to attack the Scandinavian forces of Sweyn, King of Denmark in 1012AD. Many scholars have argued that ‘Croij Dane!’ a phonetic rendering of the Scots Gaelic, which literally translates as ‘Die Dane!’ is the origin of the name Cruden Bay. The Bay of Ardendraught, the reputed site of this conflict already had a Norse name, meaning Old Dane’s Road. Malcolm II, King of Alba, son of Kenneth II (the same assassinated by Lady Finella), ruled a much smaller Scotland than we know today, stretching only as far as Moray in the north and Midlothian in the south. He had already attempted to secure control over the Western and Northern Isles by marrying his youngest daughter to Sigurd, Earl of Orkney. Her sisters were married to the Abbot of Dunkeld and Mormaer of Moray, which further increased the king’s influence. But the Danes were a nuisance, and Malcolm’s men were spoiling for a fight. Sweyn sent his second son, Canute, later the famed King of England, with an army, intent on Scottish invasion.



Site of the Battle of Ardendraught

Malcolm wisely engaged in guerrilla tactics, harassing the Danish army, much to his men’s annoyance. Eventually these angry Celts bore down their leader’s resistance and had a decisive showdown with the seventeen-year-old Dane and his forces. According to Smith’s A New History of Aberdeenshire, the “hottest part of the conflict is supposed to have been on the plain skirting the bay and along the valley, about half a mile in breadth”, where stands the golf course laid out by Great North of Scotland Railway five years before the great railway hotel was built in 1899.

BATTLE OF ARDENDRAUGHT
MALCOLM II vs PRINCE CANUTE OF THE DANES

The battle was a bloody one; the Scots were the victors, but their dead almost equalled those of the Danes. Malcolm and Canute agreed a truce, the terms of which included the total withdrawal of Danish forces from Scotland, and the founding of a chapel near the battlefield to commemorate the dead of both sides. Thus St. Olaf's Chapel came into being. Historians argue that as the patron saint of Norway was not even canonised until 1164, the dedication must have come much later. A granite font was installed in the chapel, and it is this relic which would prove the last link to the ancient battle.

Malcolm II likely agreed to the chapel as a form of atonement for the death of so many. Devout Catholic he might have been, but that did not stop him having his nephew assassinated to ensure the succession of his grandson, Duncan, setting up later conflict with younger grandson, Macbeth.

The font, restored by local priests, James Pratt and Stewart Forbes, now stands in the sanctuary of St James the Lesser, Cruden Bay's Episcopal Church. It is a huge hollowed-out stone, clearly the work of more primitive masonry, but is still used in baptismal services, a symbol of cleansing, as the prayers of the early priests would have been for Cruden's Dark Age battlefield.