

Traumatic means by which Norfolk village was named

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My great-grandfather came from a south Norfolk village which, about 1,150 years ago, was the scene of a dramatic and probably rather traumatic event.

We know about this from the name of the village itself, Aslacton. In Norfolk, most of our place-names are Anglo-Saxon.

They are composed of elements made up of Old English words such as -ham (home-stead), and -ton (enclosure). You can see this in names such as Wals-ham and Run-ton, where the first elements come from names of Anglian leaders like Walth and Runi.

Norfolk also has some names of Scandinavian origin. These use elements made up of words from the Old Norse language of the later Viking colonisers, such as -by (settlement). They include names such as Scrabty and Mautby, where the first elements are from names of Danish leaders like Skrauti and Malti. Research suggests that these Scandinavian place names are often found in locations which were less readily habitable than those which had already been taken by the Angles

But there are a few names which have a more complicated history and which indi-



■ St Michael's Church in Aslacton.

Picture: DENISE BRADLEY

cate that the Danes did not always settle on virgin territory. These names end in an Old English element like -ton, but begin with a leader's name which is not English but Norse. Aslacton is one of these: Aslak was, and still is, a Scandinavian man's name.

These hybrid names came about because of The Great Heathen Army, as the Anglo-Saxons fearfully called it. That was how our Anglian ancestors referred to the very large Viking army which landed on the East Anglian coast in 865, intent on conquering the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

The army spent their first winter at Thetford and then marched north to take control of York. But in 869 they returned,

and defeated and killed the East Anglian king Edmund. The invaders then remained in control of East Anglia for 50 years until it was retaken by the English in 918.

After they had seized East Anglia, the men of the Great Viking Army shared out the land which they now had under their control. After four centuries of Anglian ownership, the south Norfolk village which was later to be my great-grandfather's home fell to the Vikings.

And its dispossessed English Christian population came under the rule of alien warriors led by a pagan called Aslak.

The inhabitants of the village we now call Aslacton probably weren't very happy.