

The Danish Conquest of England 1016AD

Cnut defeated
Edmund Ironside at
Assandun and ruled
England for 19 years



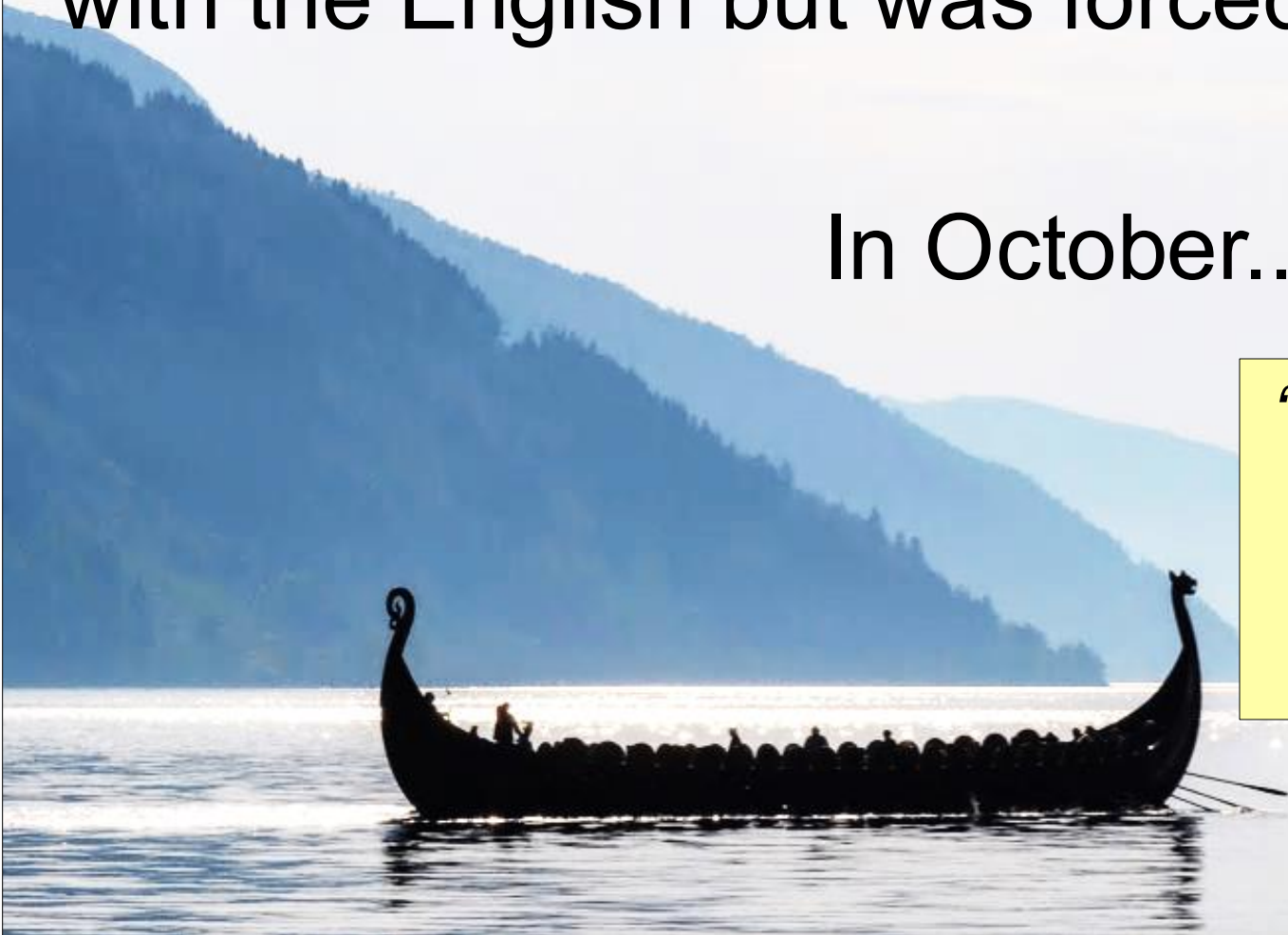
For background information and previous presentations:

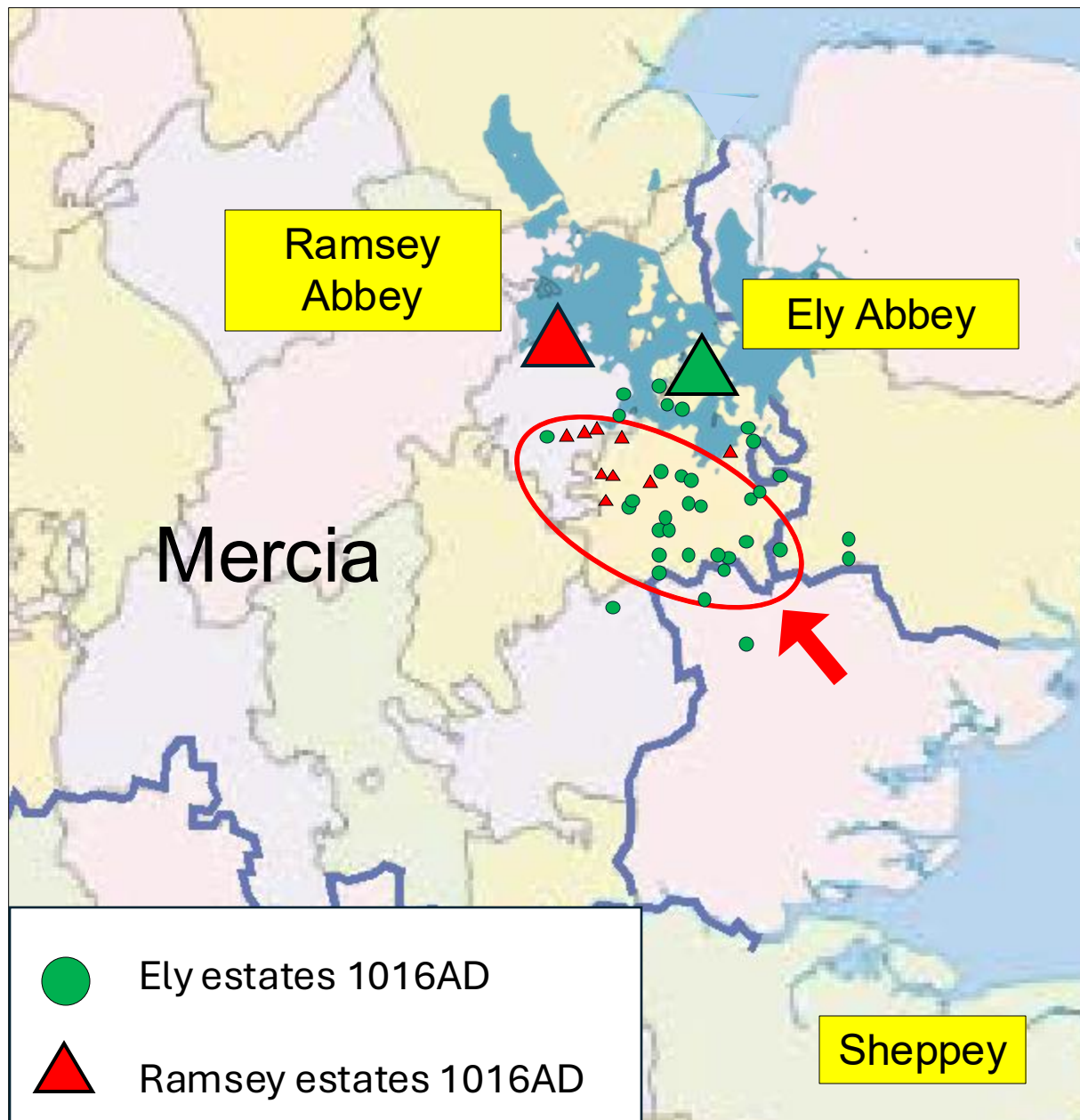
www.assandun.uk

In early 1016, the Danes landed in Dorset in another attempt to conquer England. Cnut fought 4 battles with the English but was forced to retreat to Sheppey.

In October..

“The raiding army turned back into Essex and travelled into Mercia.....” (Anglo Saxon Chronicles E)





But where in Mercia?
Chronicles/manuscripts have clues...

- C11 Anglo Saxon Chronicles state many Ely / Ramsey monks, and their Bishop Eadnoth, died at Assandun.
- C12 Ely calendar is the only source giving the battle date, Oct 18, 1016.
- Entry adds "many friends of ours were killed by the invaders, suggesting Ely abbey estate workers also died."

These clues show Cnut was probably raiding in South Cambs/Hunts

If raiding was in south Cambs/Hunts,
and the battle was in Essex...

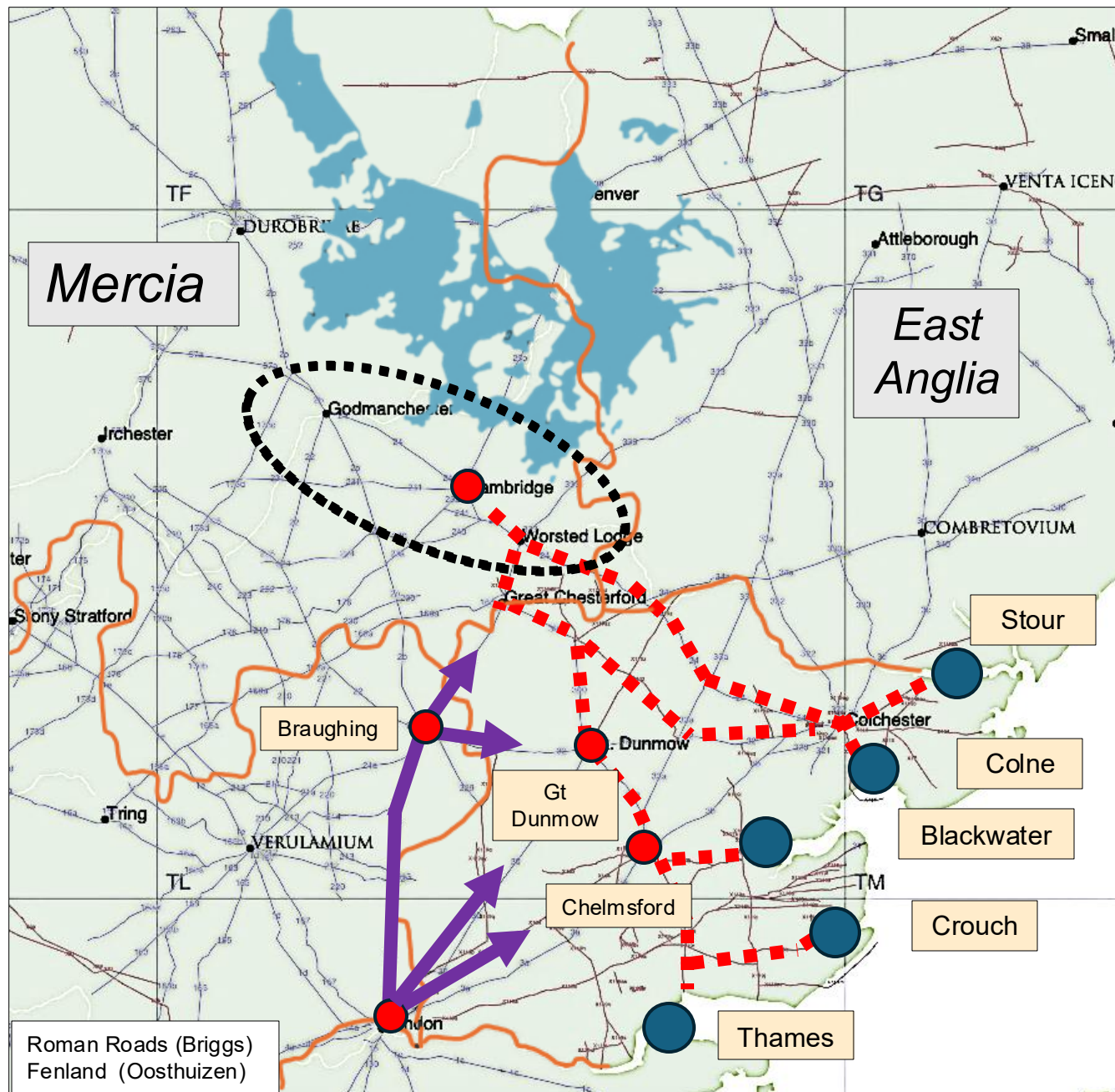
then Cnut was returning to the Essex coast.

*“the king... overtook them in Essex at the
hill which is called Assandun.....” (ASC E)*

A battle area check list

Check 1: The battle area
was at a hill in Essex





Which return route was he taking?

- Leaving the Cambridge area, there were several **Roman road** options to return to the coast.
- **Ironsides could have intercepted via Dunmow or Chelmsford.**
- But we know Ely/Ramsey monks were enlisted by the English, so Ironsides must have been near S. Cambs before pursuing Cnut.

Check 2: The battle area will have been close to a Cnut route back to the coast (red dotted lines).

Is there still an Essex hill called Assandun?

No

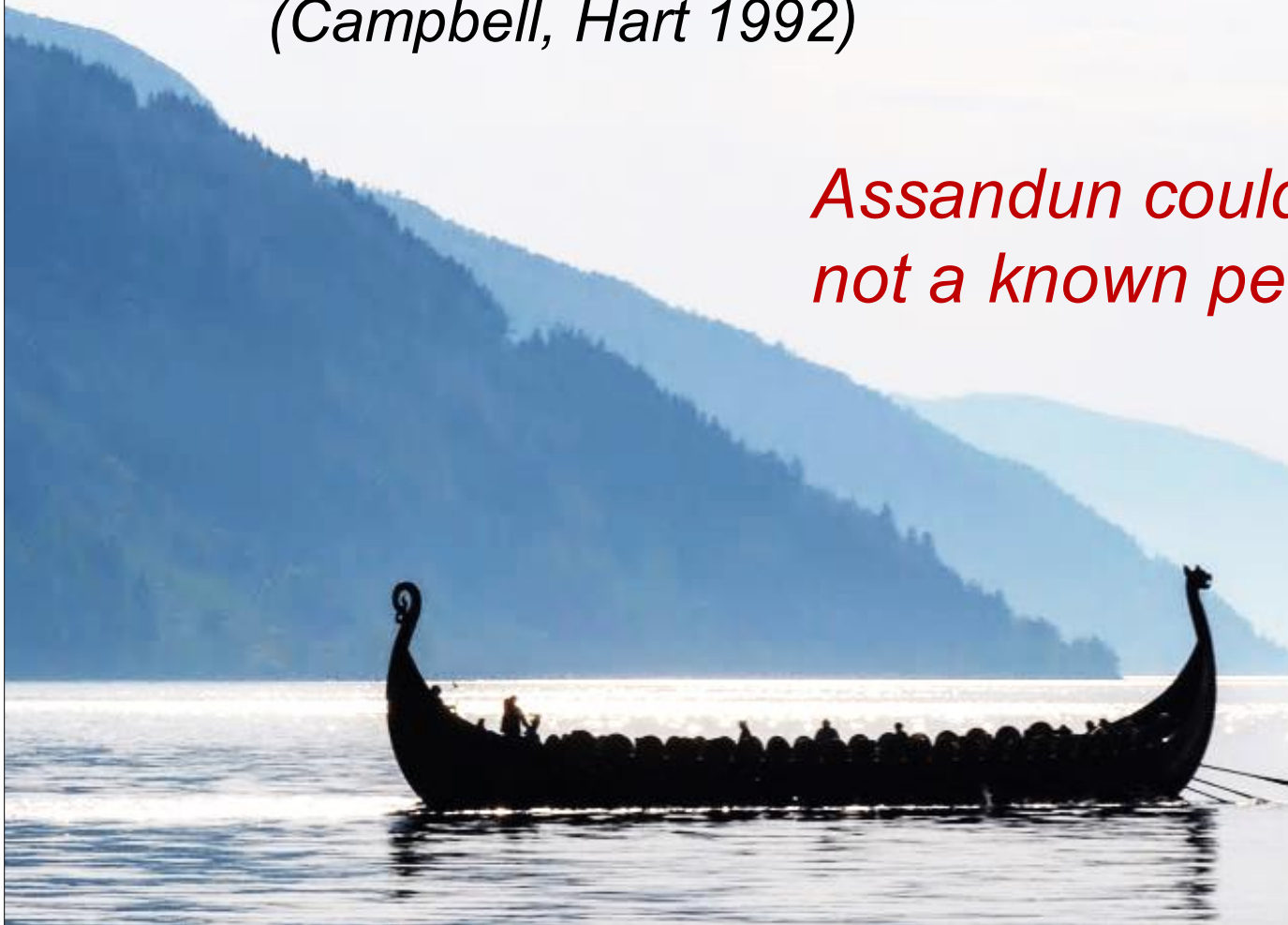
*Encomium 1040AD explains it as 'Hill of the ash trees'
(Campbell, Hart 1992)*

*Assandun could mean Assa's hill but Assa
not a known personal name before 1066.*

PASE 2024, 12,000 names

*This new evidence supports:
Hill of the ash trees*

*Check 3: There should be a place
name indicating ash trees close to
the battle area.*

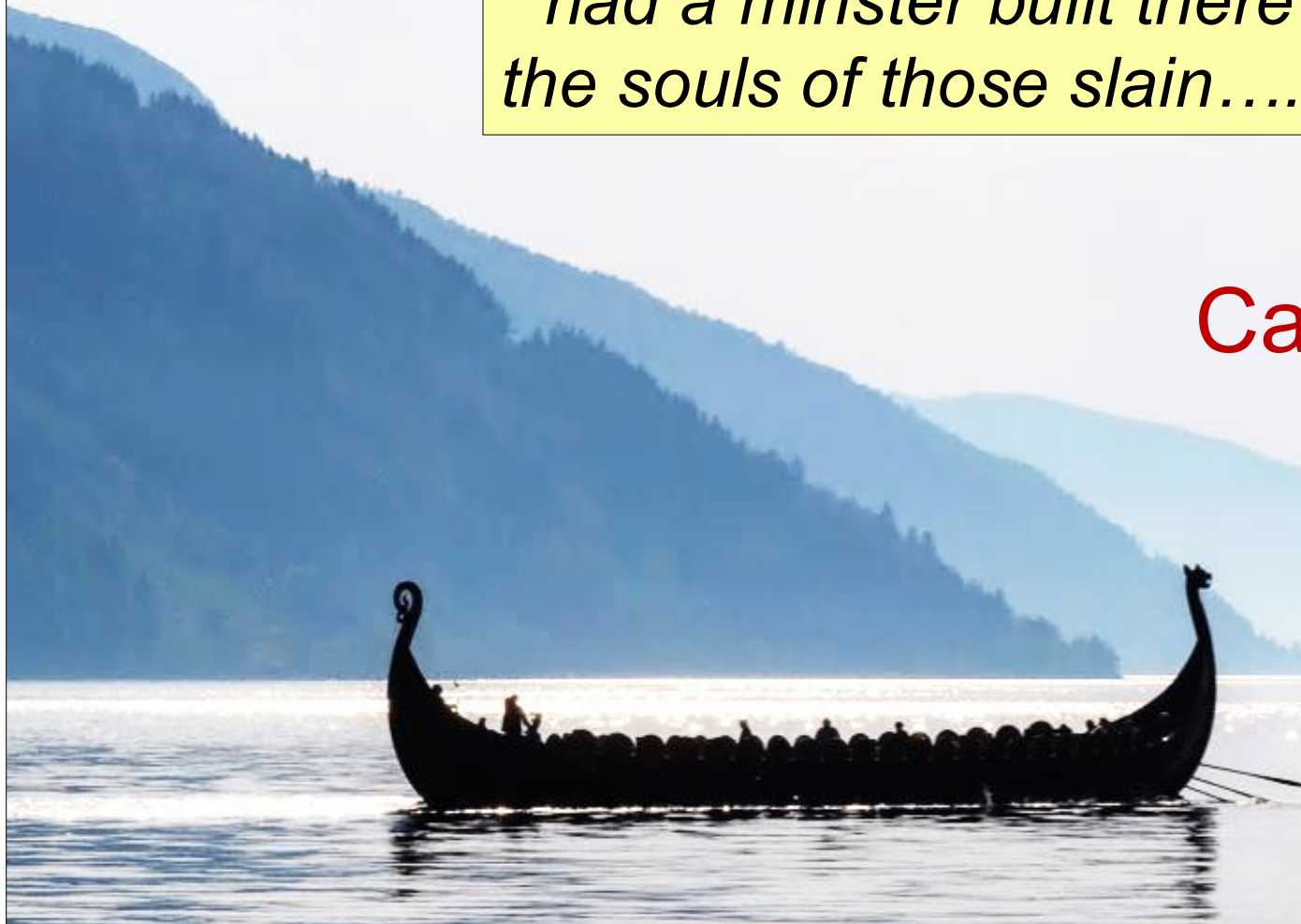


Cnut returned to Assandun in 1020 to consecrate a minster church....

“had a minster built there of stone and mortar for the souls of those slain....” (ASC F)

Can we find the minster ?
(easier task than finding the battlefield)

Check 4: The battle area should be close to a royal church built in 1020AD.



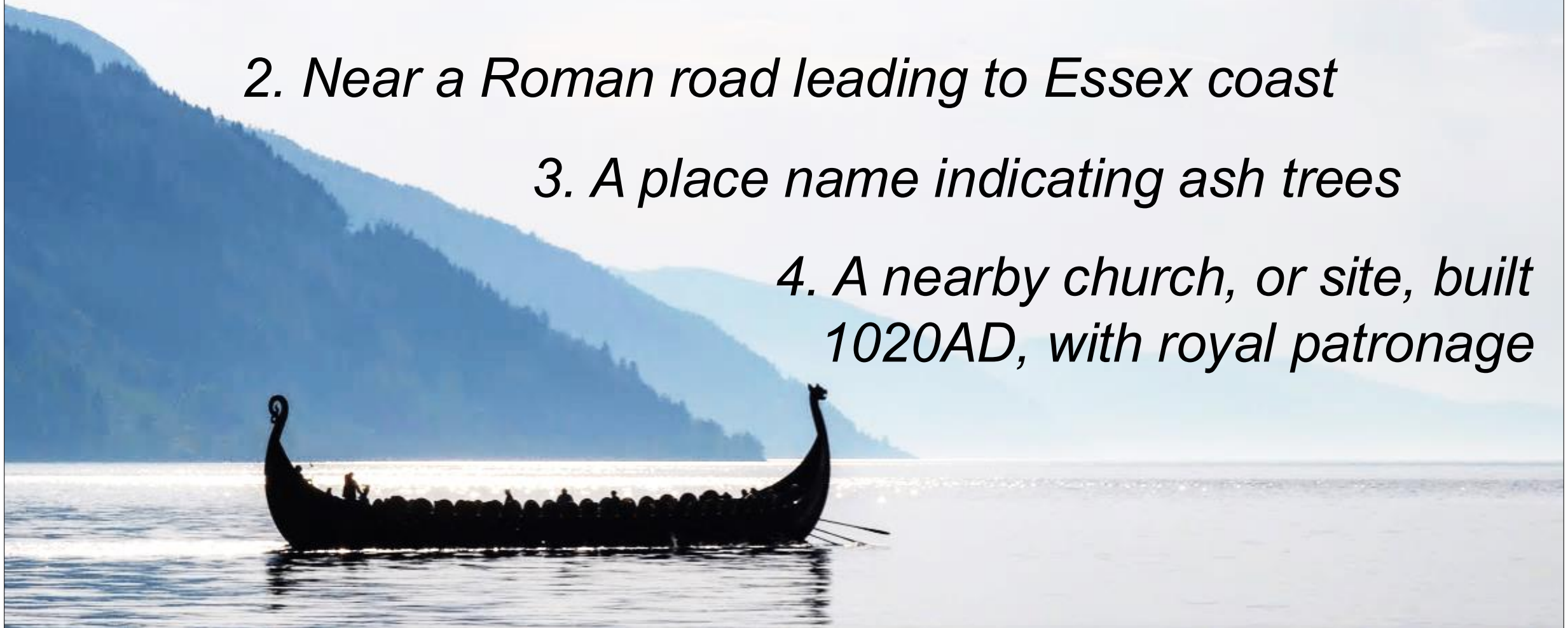
Our check points for any candidate battle area.....

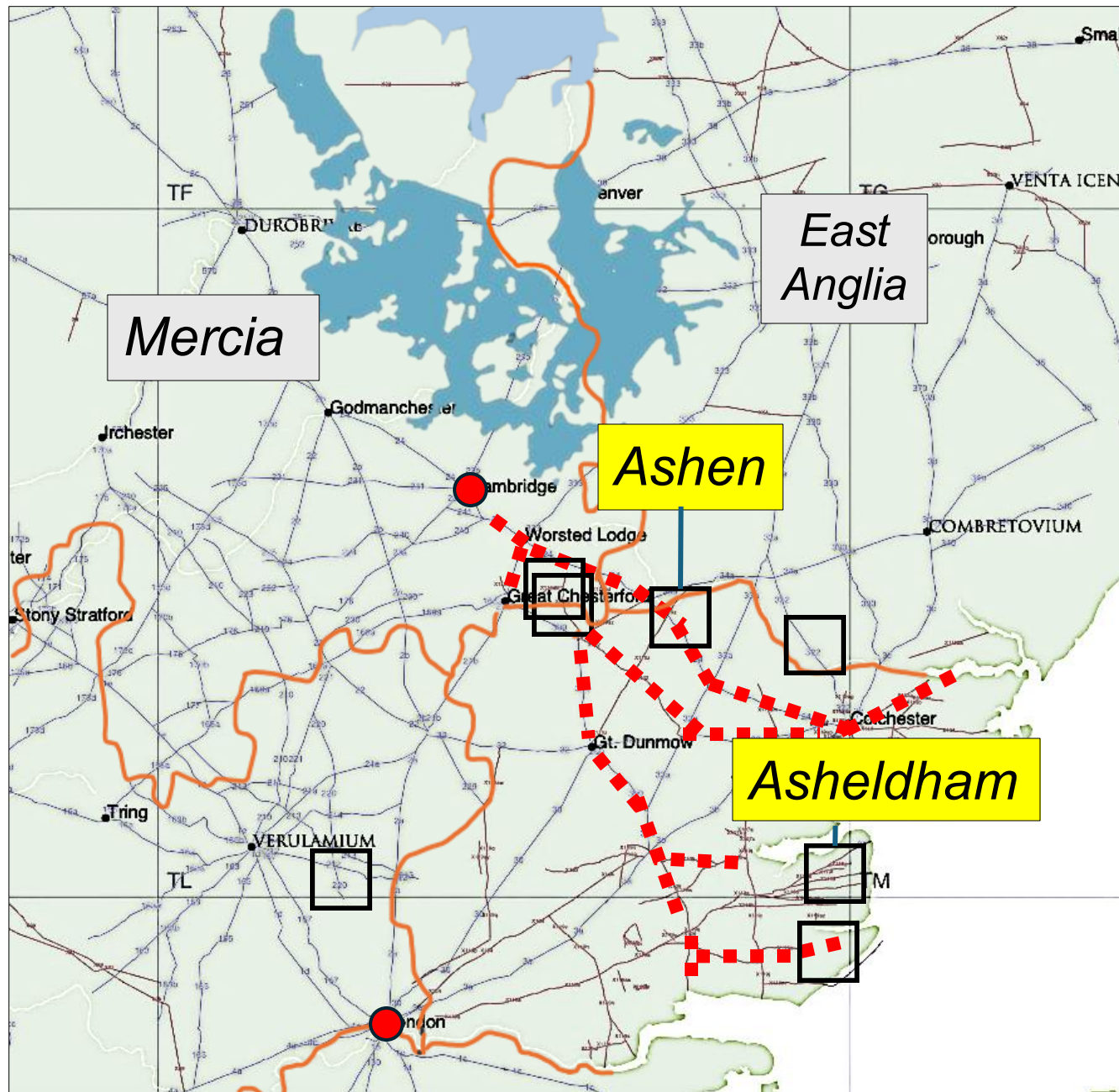
1. In Essex with nearby hill

2. Near a Roman road leading to Essex coast

3. A place name indicating ash trees

*4. A nearby church, or site, built
1020AD, with royal patronage*



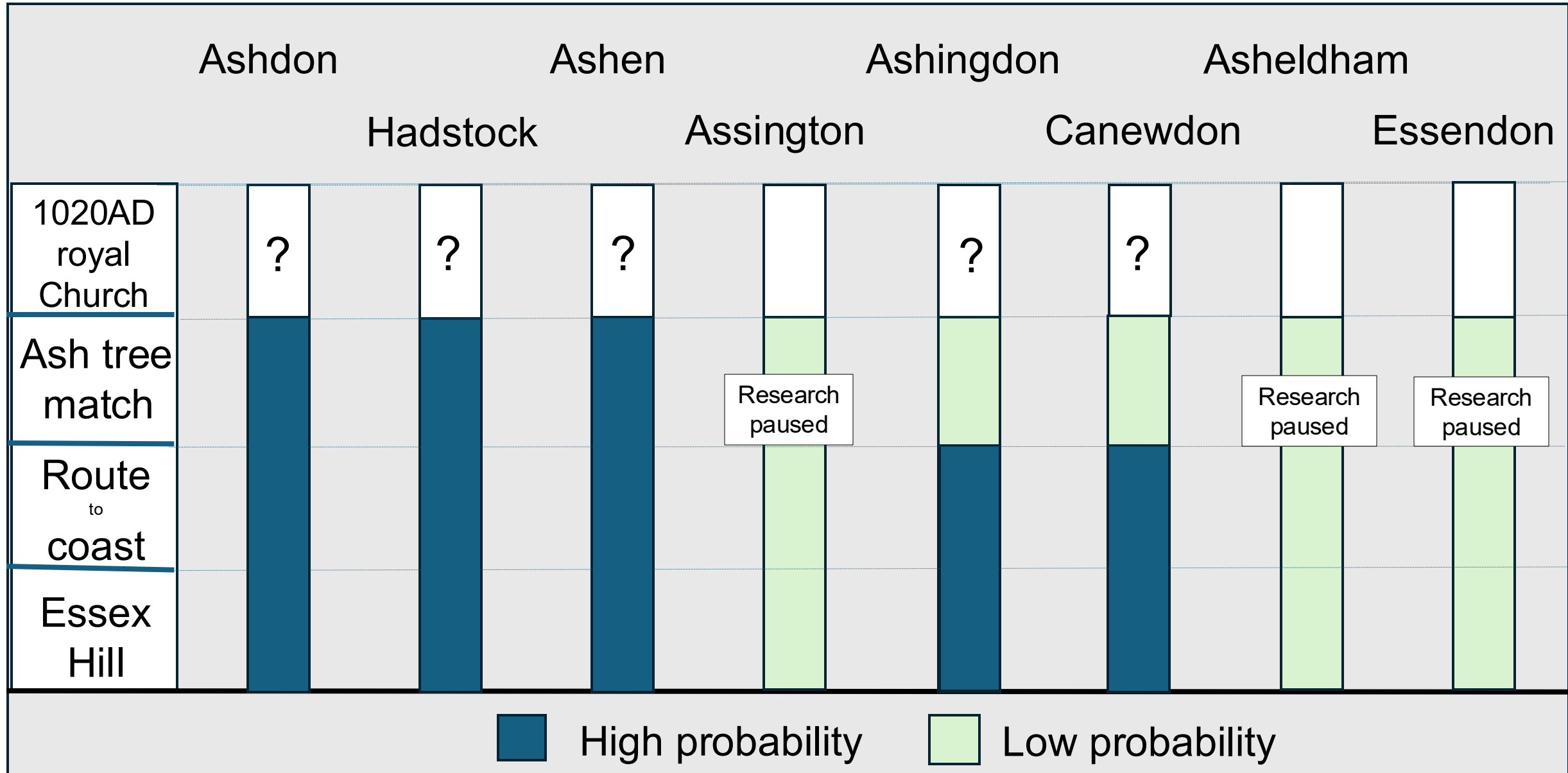


Candidate areas for battle/minster

Ashdon
Hadstock
Ashen..... new
Assington

Ashington
Canewdon
Asheldham.....new
Essendon

First probability assessment



The minster search - dating and patronage

Churches are complex buildings. Many additions/rebuilds. A lost site?

We can research build dates from:

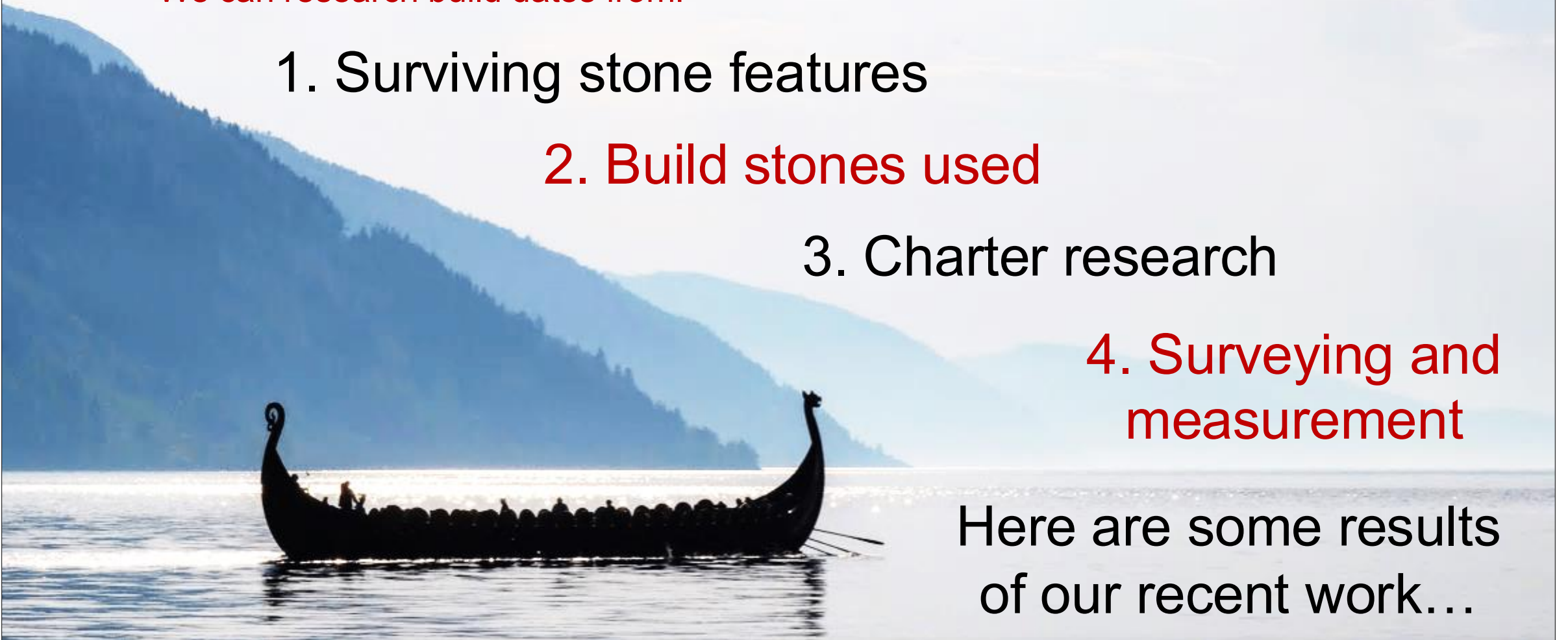
1. Surviving stone features

2. Build stones used

3. Charter research

4. Surveying and
measurement

Here are some results
of our recent work...

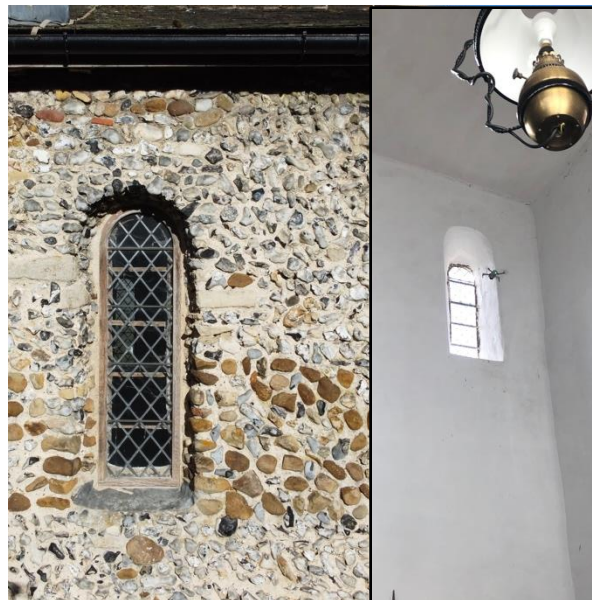




Long/short quoins,
e.g Strethall church

Saxon <1066

Double splayed
windows, no
dressings, e.g.
Hadstock church



Side-alternate quoins,
e.g. Hadstock church



Decorated capitals/imposts,
e.g. Selham church



Herringbone courses

1. Church dating by stone features

- Long-short quoins and double splayed windows are distinctly **Saxon**.
- Other features probably **Saxon** if long/short quoins or double splayed windows are also present.

St Botolph's, Hadstock is
our only candidate
showing surviving Saxon
features.

Saxon or Norman

2. Church dating by build stone

What were the stone resources in Essex in C11?



Most of Essex

Flint/Field
stones

Left by Anglian
ice sheet



North Essex

Barnack stone
for corners, doors,
window surrounds

Lincolnshire
limestone



Across Essex

Re-used
Roman

Septaria/brick/tile
from buildings,
forts and walls



South Essex

Kentish Rag
for walls and
surrounds

Kent limestone



St Andrew, Ashingdon

North wall:
Kentish rag with Roman brick



St Nicholas, Canewdon

East wall:
Kentish rag with small amounts of septaria



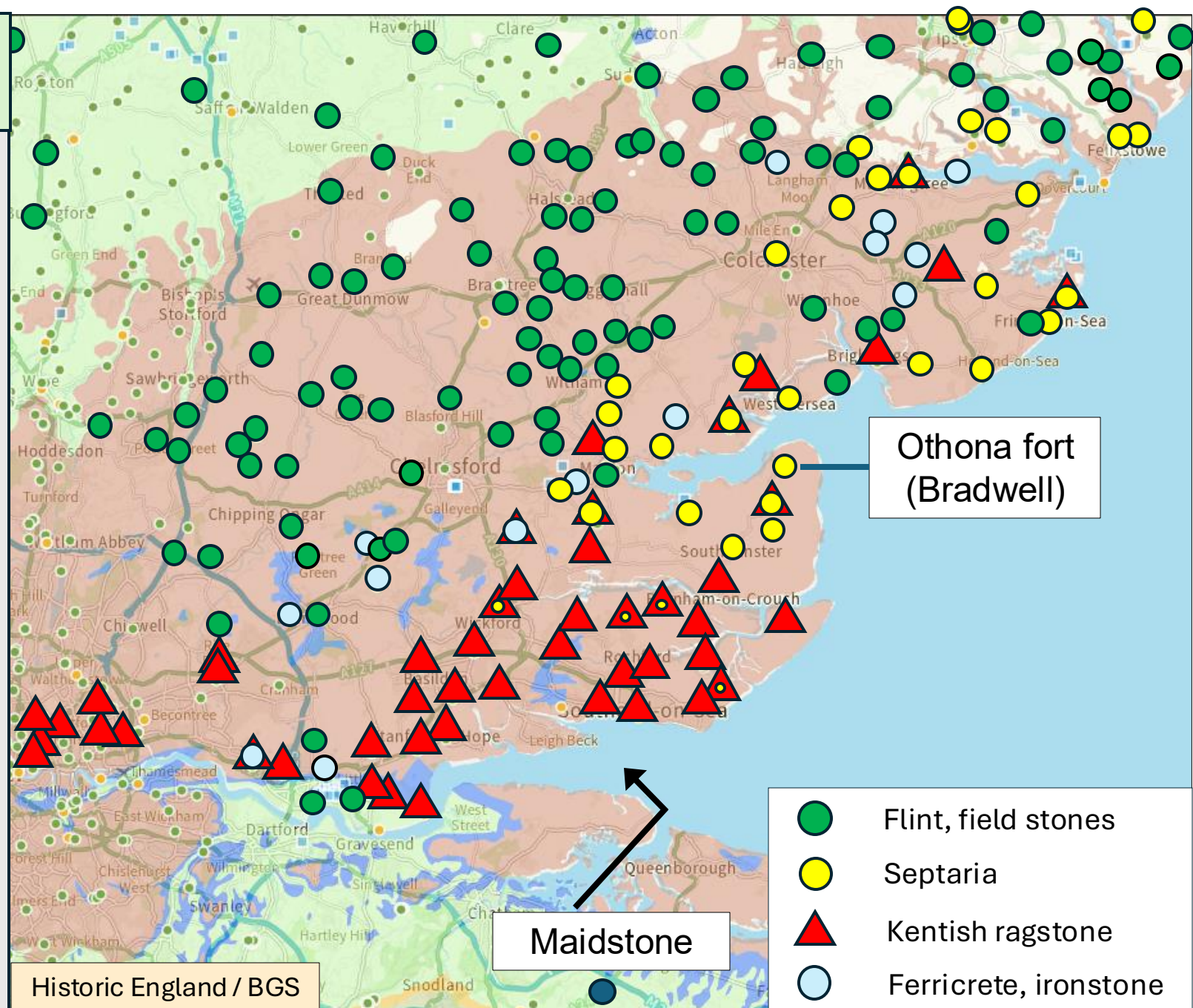
Dating of coursed rubble walls

St Andrew and St Nicholas churches

- In 2024, their architecture/materials were expertly assessed (Andrews).
- St Andrew shows mainly Kentish rag stone in the nave walls and footings, but some septaria, much reused Roman material and C12 peg tiles.
- St Nicholas is also mainly Kentish rag with low amounts of septaria, and walls contain peg tiles.
- Peg tiles date later than 1100AD and could indicate a rebuild phase. Any rag footings are probably original.

How does church wall stone vary across Essex?

- Kentish rag is a common stone in S. Essex today.
- Mined at Maidstone, Kent, much rag was shipped to London in Roman times, but all quarries had shut by 300AD. Re-opened C12.
- A 1020AD church with rag footings at Ashingdon or Canewdon, would imply either the Kent quarries re-opened in the C11, or rag was reused from nearby Roman walls and forts.





Barnack
stone
quoins



Dating of quoin stones

St Botolph's church, Hadstock

- The lower lifts of the north transept are part of the oldest fabric (Rodwell, Hall).
- This year, the transept quoin stones were expertly assessed as Barnack limestone, in a side-alternate design and Saxon (Woodcock).
- So, if the quoins are C11, how did the Barnack stone get to Hadstock 1000yrs ago, a journey of 70 miles ?

Anglo-Saxon waterway network:
Chisholm M, 2011
Fen outline: Oosthuizen S

Barnack

Crowland
Cut

Kings
Lynn

Wisbech

Peterborough

Ramsey

Ely

Bury St
Edmunds

Huntingdon

Cambridge

Linton

Hadstock

— R. Welland
— R. Nene
— R. Ouse/
— R. Cam

Answer - by boat through
Fenland

- Barnack limestone quarry was open in Roman times but closed around 1460AD.
- For centuries, stone was being shipped around the fens in loads up to 10tns for cathedrals/churches.
- e.g. St Bene't's church tower Cambridge, ca 1020 -1040, contains Barnack stone.

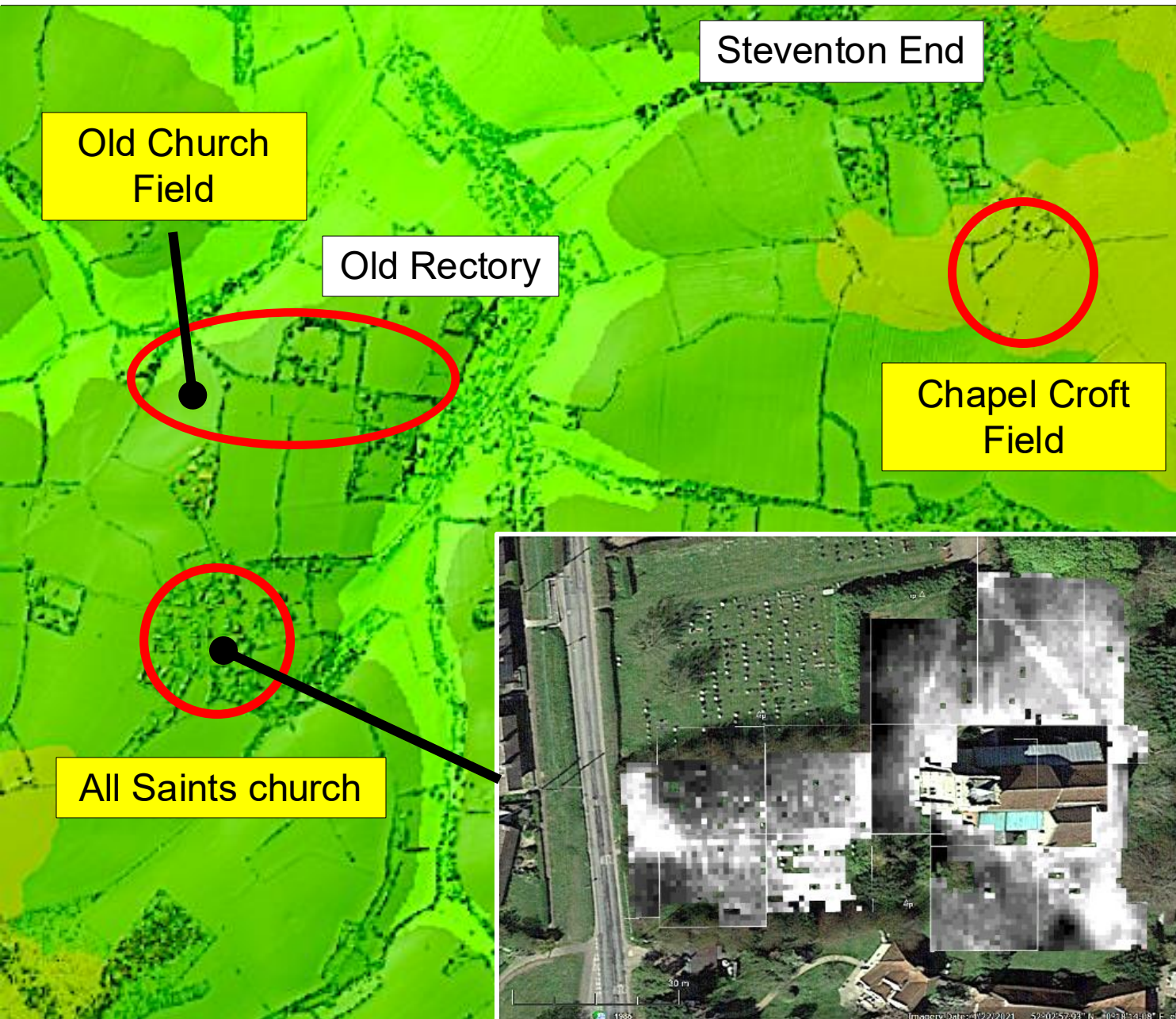
Barnack stone could have reached Hadstock in C11 via the river Cam and Linton.

~~Notification by Henry I generally addressed: That, for the souls of his father and mother and the redemption of his own sins, he has granted, at the prayer of Hervey, first Bp. of Ely, a weekly market to be held in the vill of Hadstock [Essex]; and has confirmed the fair held there on St. Botulf's day, as it was in the time of William I and at the day of King Edward's death. All who resort to the said fair and market are to have the King's firm peace. The rights of the market and the fair and all emendable offences are to belong to Bp. Hervey and the church of Ely.~~

This reveals an annual St Botolph's fair had been running since at least 1066.



This confirms St Botolph's church is Saxon, dating to at least 1044AD.



4. Dating by Surveying

Three lost sites, Ashdon district

- Rodwell proposed Old Church field as a lost minster site 1993.
- A chapel was recorded in 1285 in Steventon End, possibly in Chapel Croft field.
- Then in 1987 dowsing trials suggested a hidden building in All Saints churchyard.
- All 3 sites have now been resistivity surveyed, but we have found no sign of a lost church footprint, lying E-W.

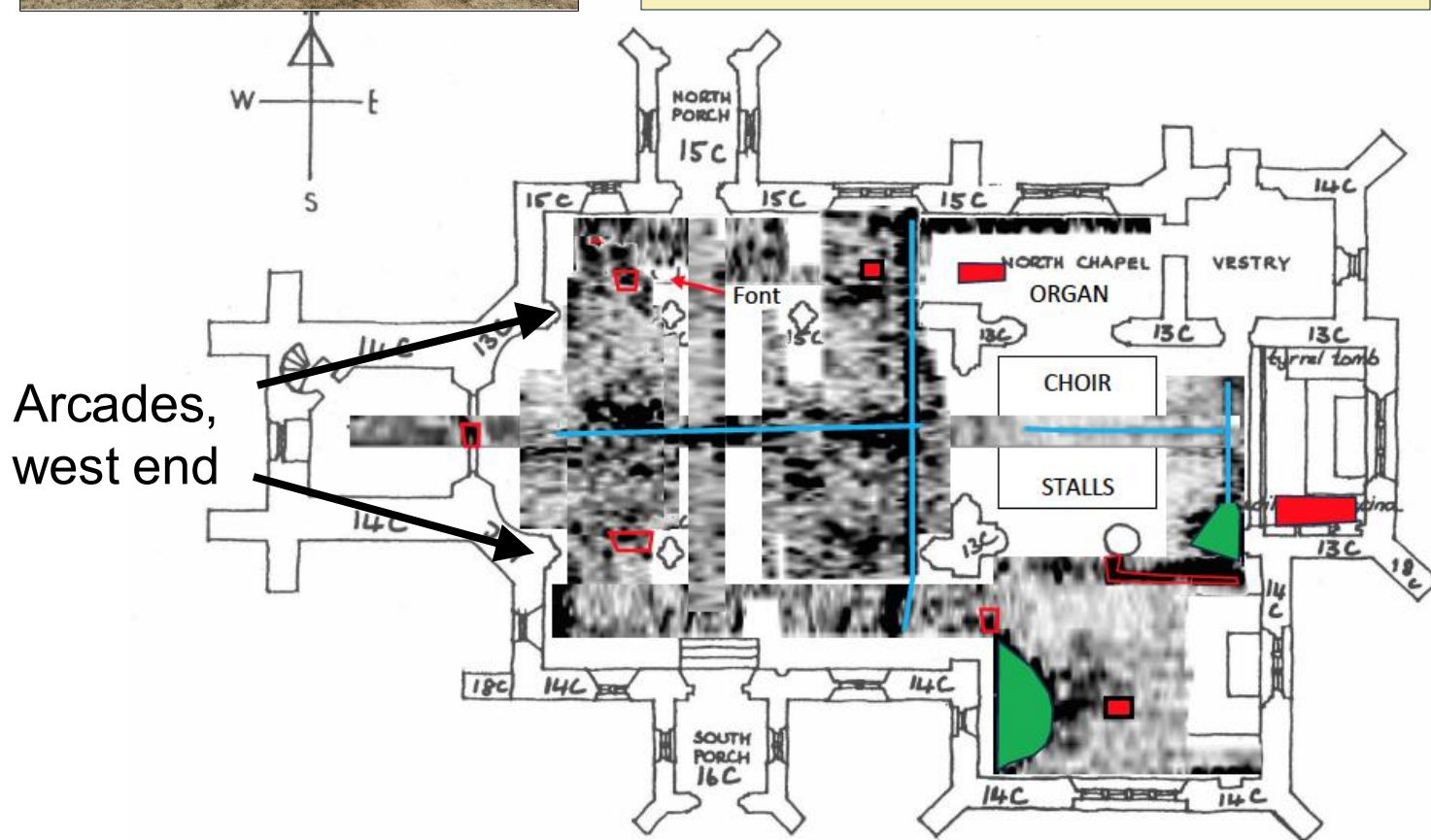


Swete 1893 "During some internal rearrangements in 1886 the foundations of an earlier church were brought to light."

Dating by Surveying

All Saints church, Ashdon

- In June 2024, the floors of the nave, aisles and arcade areas were surveyed using ground penetrating radar.
- There is little evidence of remnant walls under the arcades which might have indicated a smaller church.
- Ownership/patronage in 1020AD is under review.





Planned area for
2025 mortar
dating

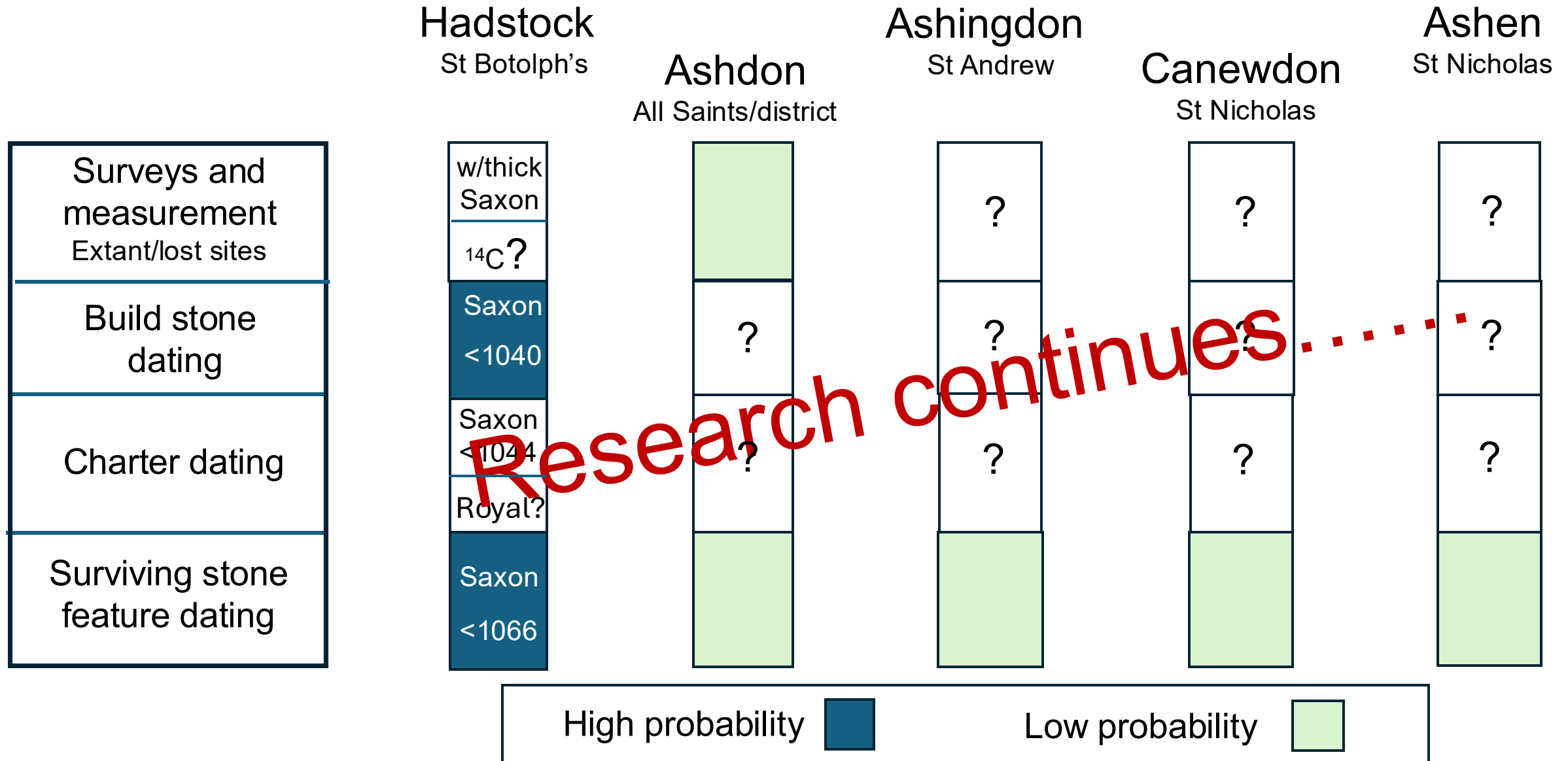
In 2018, ^{14}C date :
675-780AD 75% probability

Church dating by measurement

St Botolph's, Hadstock - nave walls

- Originally a half-timbered church, St Botolph's was rebuilt in C11 to a full masonry structure (Rodwell's Phase 3, 1974). But rebuild decade is unknown.
- ^{14}C mortar dating is planned to see if the full masonry lift was c1020, the consecration of Cnut's minster.
Note the surprising ^{14}C date for lower wall lifts.
- Wall thickness data can also help church dating. Saxon church walls are typically <1m thick, and Norman walls >1m. St Botolph's nave walls are 0.8m, thus supporting a Saxon origin.

A 1020AD royal church? – our position so far

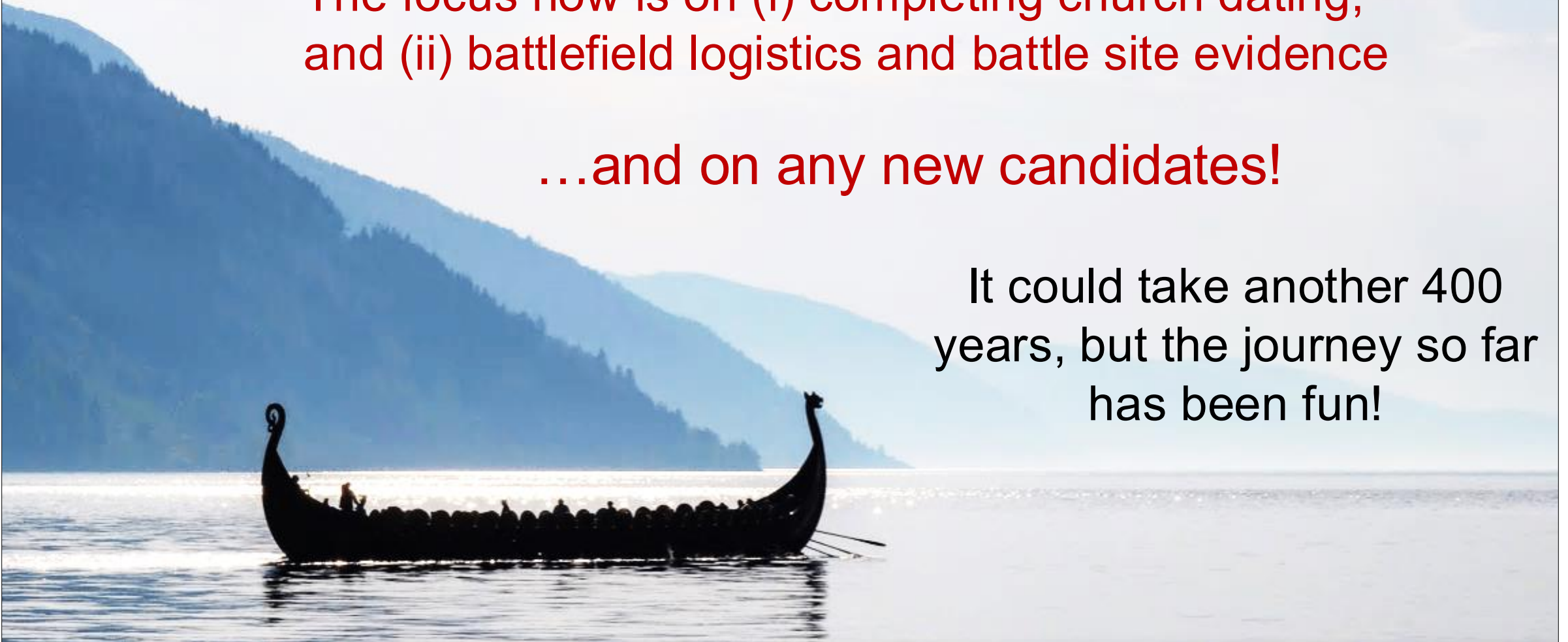


Future work on candidate battle areas

The focus now is on (i) completing church dating,
and (ii) battlefield logistics and battle site evidence

...and on any new candidates!

It could take another 400
years, but the journey so far
has been fun!

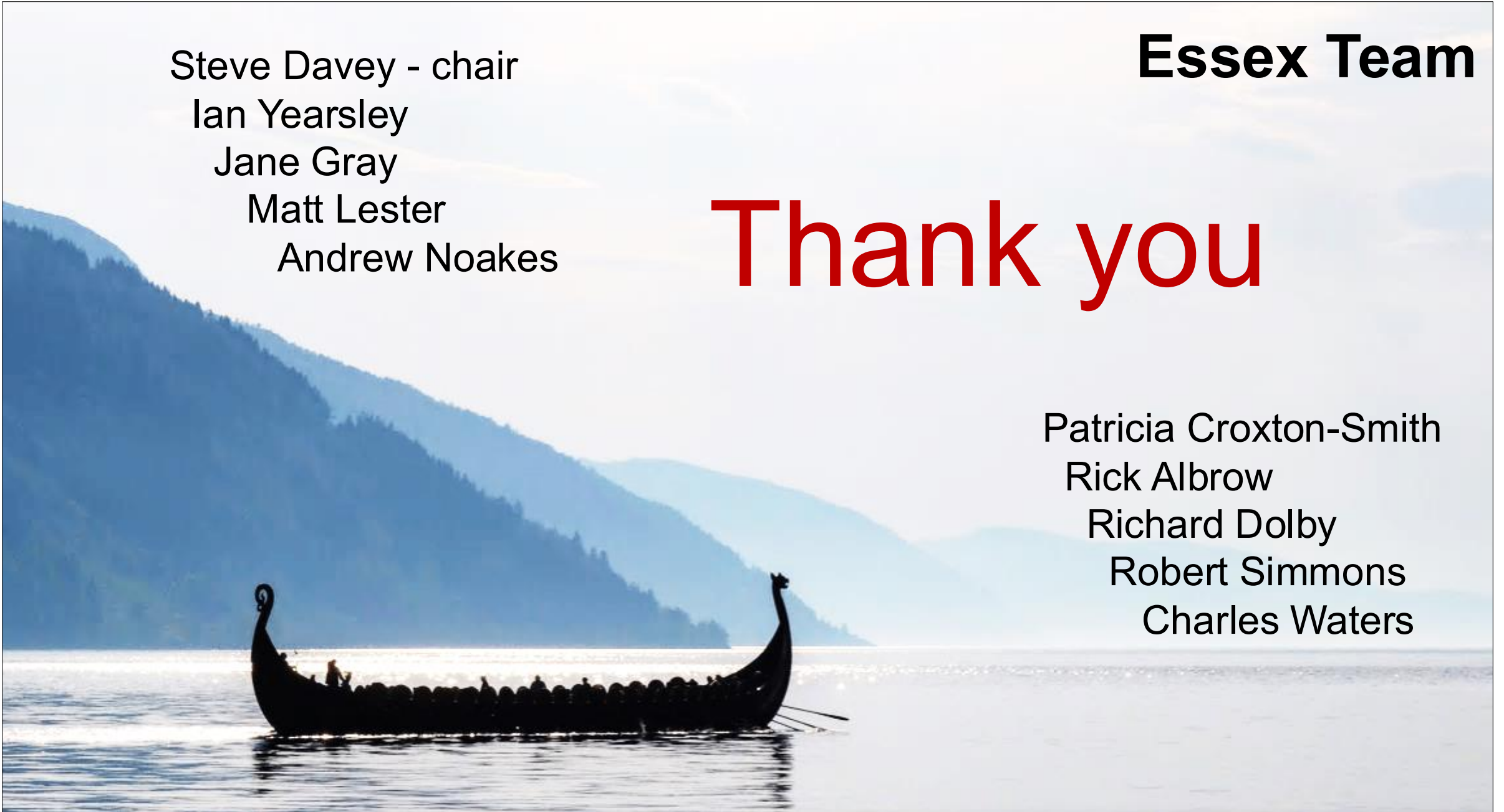


Steve Davey - chair
Ian Yearsley
Jane Gray
Matt Lester
Andrew Noakes

Essex Team

Thank you

Patricia Croxton-Smith
Rick Albrow
Richard Dolby
Robert Simmons
Charles Waters



Questions please

