

Freedom for Bron

N.S.Blackman



Text and illustrations copyright

© 2016 N.S.Blackman

Cover illustration copyright

© 2016 Robert Luke Newberry

All Rights Reserved

Published by Dinosaur Books Ltd, London

First edition: 2016

www.dinosaurbooks.co.uk

Conditions of sale

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior written consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

The right of N.S.Blackman to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

ISBN 978-0-9930105-7-6

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library



Freedom for Bron

N.S.Blackman

Cover illustration by
Robert Luke Newberry



For my Mum and Dad
with love





Contents

- 7. The lands of the early Anglo-Saxons
 - 9. Prologue
 - 11. A decision on the road
 - 16. Thunor, God of Thunder
 - 23. Dragon-Flame
 - 27. The slave boy
 - 31. The storm passes
 - 37. A feast at the farm
 - 41. The visitor to the hill
 - 49. The king's bridge
 - 55. Standing watch
 - 61. The war party
 - 69. The waking forge
 - 72. The hidden path
 - 79. The charm's secret
 - 85. The elder-man decides
 - 93. A meeting on the road
 - 105. To follow a warrior
- 

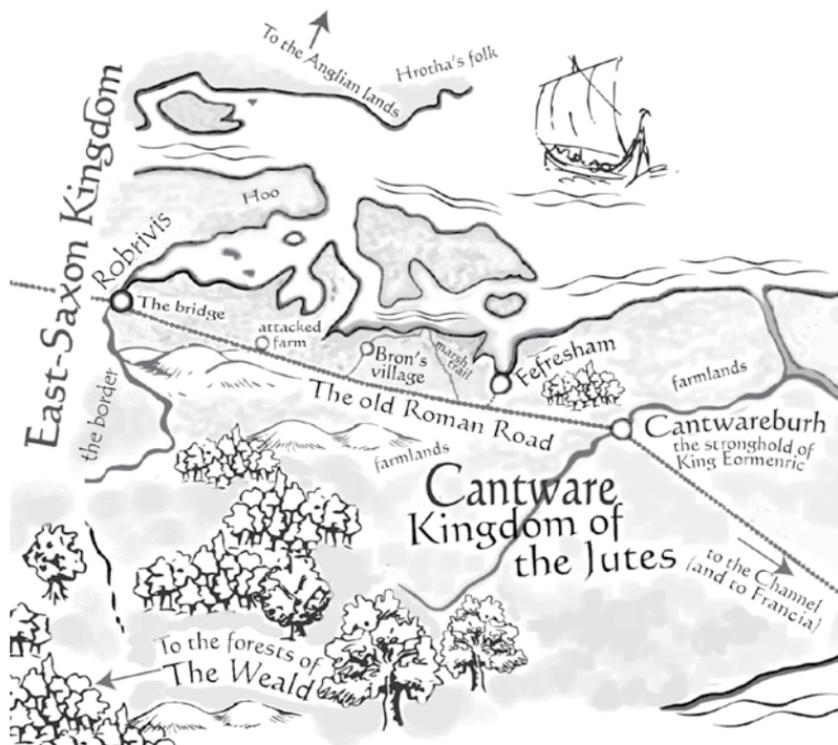
Contents continued

- 111. The tall Jute
- 117. The Frankish smith
- 123. Blood on the road
- 133. Prisoners in the stronghold
- 137. Walking together
- 143. The king's feast
- 155. First lesson for a warrior
- 163. Epilogue
- 169. Fact vs fiction: the real Anglo-Saxons



The lands of the early Anglo-Saxons and Jutes

South-eastern Britain, circa AD 580





N.S.Blackman

Prologue

*This road through the woods is no longer safe.
It was less dangerous once, when the Romans
ruled here – in those times, it is said, a traveller
could walk for miles without fear.*

*But not any more. These days you must tread
with care and keep your hand close to your sword.
The land has grown wild, the Romans have gone
and new tribes live here.*

*The Saxons hold the west and the Jutes control
the east. And war threatens between them...*

Chapter One



A decision on the road

Beogard cursed and sat down. After a day of walking his leg was stiff and he was getting tired. He shielded his eyes and watched the three Saxon warriors racing up the track towards him.

They were running easily, keeping their spears low.

The hot sun didn't bother them.

Ten summers ago he would have moved like that and he would have been faster than any of them. Five summers even.

But not now.

These days he had to stop and pretend to

adjust his shield strap while really he was catching his breath. And his young companions had to pretend not to notice.

Beogard could tell, even from here, that they'd found something.

Edwyn reached him first and his eyes were bright. Aged sixteen he was carrying a full length sword for the first time.

“Well?” asked Beogard.

“River-men,” replied the young warrior, kneeling down next to him. “Five of them, like you said.”

Beogard nodded.

“Aye lad, I thought as much. They'll have a boat hidden down there somewhere. A coward's escape on the tide and they'll be back up the coast before nightfall.”

He shook his head.

Since that morning they had been following the river-men's trail, away from the burning farm. The farm, a cluster of low thatched buildings, had been a nice place before the raiders found it.

Beogard gripped his axe at the memory.

The farmer had been lying dead, still holding onto the stick that he'd tried to use as a weapon. His sword, if he had one, had been somewhere out of reach. There was no sign of the farmer's family but a dog lay panting beside him. Alive but only just. Its fur was matted and bloody.

The dog had growled feebly until Beogard laid a gentle hand on its head, talking and soothing it, before swiftly breaking its neck.

Edwyn was speaking again.
“Lord Beogard? Lord, we can attack the river-men now, while they're resting. We can make them pay for what they did.”

“Do they have prisoners?”

“None that I saw.”

“What about dogs?”

“None, lord. And no look-outs either. They don't expect to be caught.”

The old warrior fell silent and watched the two others approach.

Sigwyn was a bold lass and Beogard liked her. She was fair-haired like her brother and tall for a woman. She carried her own spear and a sword hung from her belt, given to her by her uncle, King Bricgnytt of the East Saxons.

Beside her came Kenhelm. At seventeen he was already strong, less tall than Edwyn but darker and broader.

“There’s another farm down there,” Kenhelm panted, his eyes glinting. “The raiders are hiding, watching it.”

“Like wolves,” snorted Sigwyn.

Beogard nodded.

“And there are *five* you say?”

“Yes. Or maybe six.”

Maybe six.

Beogard looked at his young companions.

“That’s too many. We can’t fight them.”

At once Sigwyn protested.

“But the farm! If we hurry we’ll be able to help...”

“Six is too many. I promised the king, your *uncle*, that I’d keep you safe. I’ll not risk breaking

my oath to go scrapping with bandits.”

“But Lord Beogard, there may be children down there!”

Beogard rubbed at his stiff knee and cursed. Children. Of course there would be children, there always were.

“Lord?”

They were all waiting, looking at him.

Beogard sighed.

“Very well,” he said at last. “Go on then. Show me this farm.”

