Maldon

SAMPLER
Also by Michael Smith (* indicates a Shearsman publication)

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MALDON

A Version

SAMPLER
He said to his soldiers to set free their horses, to drive them far off, and on foot to fare forth, to think of their hands and boldness of bravery.

Then the kinsman of Offa first found out that the earl was unwilling to countenance cowardice.

From his hands he let fly his falcon, his fair one, toward the wood in the distance, and he went to the battle.
Thereby one might know that the youth was unwilling to waver in combat when weapons he wielded.

He also desired Ealdric to attend to his leader, his lord, in the battle; then forward began to bear spear to the conflict: and he was of hale heart while he could bear with his hands his buckler and broad-blade. His pledge to his prince to fight he upheld as he promised.

Then Byrhtnoth began to exhort his soldiers; he rode and he heartened, showed to his warriors the way they must stand and hold to their stances; he bade them grip their shields correctly and strongly, and be unafraid.

When these he’d well heartened then he dismounted where those of his men, his dearest, most loyal retainers, the troop of his household, he knew to be stationed.
There stood then on shore and shouted out stoutly
the Vikings’ envoy; voiced in words
full of menace the message of the seafarers
addressed to the earl where he stood on the bank:

‘To you the bold seamen have sent me,
commanded me tell you to render up tribute
in return for protection; and for you it is better
to buy off with tribute this onslaught of spears
than take part with us in a battle so bitter.
There’s no need either for mutual slaughter
if you have riches enough and give up your gold
in trade for a truce. If you who are strongest
decide to disband
the gold they determine as tribute for peace,
we shall take to our ships with the coins you have yielded,
set forth on the sea and keep peace with you.’
Byrhtnoth then spoke; he grasped his buckler, brandished his trim spear of ash; angry and resolute, made answer as follows:

‘Listen, seaman, to what this folk tell you. For tribute they’ll give you lances and spears tipped with poison, and ancient swords. Such war-gear to you will be useless in battle. Viking seaman, announce back again, report to your people a message more hateful, that here stands dauntless an earl with his troops prepared to defend this land that is theirs, Aethelred’s homeland, my prince, its people and places. The heathen shall fall prostrate in battle. To me it’s too shameful that you with our tribute depart on your ships untested by battle, having journeyed thus hither far in our homeland.'