

UNLOCKING THE VIKINGS

Translating Norse and Viking Cultures for the Twenty-First Century

28-29 June 2014, University of Nottingham

Keynote speaker

Edmund Southworth

Norse, Celt or English? The view from the Isle of Man

Papers, posters and workshops

Tom Birkett

Coming to a Harbour Near You! The Sea Stallion from Glendalough and heritage in motion

The Sea Stallion – a reconstruction of the Skuldlev 2 Viking ship built near Dublin and recovered from the Roskilde Fjord in Denmark – has been dubbed the ‘rock star of the sea’ by the Scandinavian press, and draws large crowds wherever it travels. As an instantly recognisable (and highly mobile) symbol of the Viking past, the Sea Stallion represents a unique way to bring tangible heritage to a wide audience, and to highlight the dynamism and internationalism of the Viking world stressed by the British Museum Vikings exhibition.

In this paper, I will discuss the use of the Sea Stallion as an extremely successful public engagement platform by the Roskilde Viking Ship Museum, drawing on my personal experiences of sailing with the Havhingsten crew last summer and participation in the mobile exhibition and cultural tour. In particular, I will assess the potential that such ‘heritage in motion’ projects have to bridge the gap between local and international contexts, and to ensure that a shared heritage remains accessible and inclusive. I will conclude with examples of the ways in which the experience has fed back into my own research and the Munster component of the Languages, Myths and Finds Project.

Ruarigh Dale

‘A Frothing Madman with a Blade’: Depictions of *berserkr* in modern fiction

What does it mean to be a *berserkr* or berserker? With the injunction by the British Museum to ‘go berserk’ at their new exhibition it is timely to consider how ‘berserk’ is used in modern English and how it relates to its Old Norse antecedent *berserkr*. This paper will focus on fictional depictions of berserkers in English-language literature from the 1950s to the present day. Primarily using examples from historical and fantasy fiction, it will demonstrate the core of the modern concept of the berserker, showing how this core element is consistent across genres, while apparent

differences in depictions are, in reality, just ‘colour’ accreted to that core. The differences and similarities between the modern and the medieval concepts will be shown by comparison of the modern depictions with episodes from the *Íslendingasögur* and the *fornaldarsögur*. In this way, the relationship between the modern concept of the berserker and the medieval concept, as understood by those that wrote the sagas down, will be shown to be different at their heart, providing a starting point for deeper understanding of what it meant to be a berserker.

Thor Ewing

Riddle Gestumblindi: Viking myths and music

Thor Ewing has been bringing Vikings to the public for two decades. He was performing Viking stories and music for “roving chef” Ainsley Harriott back in 1995. For many years he was both musician and storyteller for the Jorvik Viking Festival’s Saga & Song evenings (regularly sold out in less than a week!). Thor is one of the very few exponents of Viking musical instruments, and his music will feature in the British Museum’s upcoming event ‘Here come the Vikings’ (9/5/2014) and BBC Radio 3’s ‘In Tune’ (5/3/2014). Since 1994, his popular school workshops have focussed on music and myth as two key elements of Viking cultural life. Thor’s new book *Viking Myths: Stories of the Norse Gods and Goddesses* (Welkin Books 2014) brings the modern reader closer than ever before to the spirit of the original stories.

In ‘Riddle Gestumblindi’, Thor Ewing presents a semi-staged performance of the story of King Heithrek’s Riddle Game against the Viking god Odin (the performance includes music). This classic tale from the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* provides a narrative frame for several myths, as well as an opportunity to test the audience’s skill with riddles.

Leszek Gardela

Vikings Reborn: Facets of early medieval reenactment in contemporary Poland

The Vikings and the Viking Age have fascinated people around the world for centuries, resulting in numerous works of art, music and film which creatively revisited and reused the archaeological, historical and mythological motifs from the North. Over the last 20 years or so the interest in Vikings and their culture has been growing at a rapid pace also in Poland, which now hosts some of the largest Viking reenactment festivals in the world (i.e. the annual Festival of Slavs and Vikings in Wolin). Various Viking groups are active all around Poland and they gather both young and senior enthusiasts from very diverse social backgrounds. Contemporary Vikings meet at markets and popular events to trade, fight and experience living a life of adventurers, merchants and warriors. Currently, the modern Viking reenactment scene has grown so large that for some people “being Viking” has become not only an attractive pastime but their major occupation to which they devote not only their time but also heart and soul. This paper will explore the fascinating history of this phenomenon and the lifestyles of contemporary Vikings in Central Europe. Who are they? Where do they come from? What is their understanding of the Viking Age and the Viking way of life?

Jane Harrison

Where are the Vikings in Cleveland?

Documentary sources, place names and stone sculpture provide substantial evidence for Viking settlement in Cleveland, but it has proved very more difficult to discover how new-comers were living amidst the existing population and how that Viking society was organised. The archaeological evidence for 'Viking' homes and farms is almost non-existent. This paper considers the problem and, by analogy with areas of Viking settlement with well-preserved and distinctively Viking social landscapes, suggests how we might begin to understand Viking life in Cleveland beyond distribution maps. Studies of topography, communications and resources and will be combined with place-name and sculpture evidence, and reflections on the relationship of incomer settlement to landscape features and prehistoric monuments.

Genevieve Hopkins

The Position of the Valkyrie in the Young Adult Literary Genre

With the advent of the 'Twilight' series of vampire books, a new era of literature was born: that of the Young Adult or YA genre.

Traditional literature had seen a bipolarisation between classic children's books, such as the 'lashings of ginger beer, and heaps of tomatoes' writing style of Enid Blyton and W.E. Johns, and the classical (and far wordier) styles of Austen and Dickens. As a young reader, you were expected to jump from Blyton to Dickens in the blink of an eye, via the odd Jackie Collins-style pot-boiler.

The rise of the YA novel acknowledged and even celebrated the literary gap between childhood and adulthood, spawning numerous subgenres, such as the supernatural (vampires, werewolves, faeries), the dystopian (*The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*) and the mythical. Within the last of these, the Greek gods have been reworked (Josephine Angelini's Goddess series), and the Roman and Egyptian gods dealt with (Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series and the Kane chronicles), so it was only a matter of time before Norse YA reared its head. Within Norse mythology, the Valkyrie (a group of young, beautiful women, who harvest the souls of warriors) are perfect fodder for the YA genre, just waiting to have their story told...

Mark Kirwan

Who Cares About the Vikings? Perception of the Viking Age and the people who have studied it.

This paper will examine how the Viking Age was perceived and studied in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, focusing on the various people and groups who engaged with it. Taking a comparative approach to the topic in Britain and Ireland, I will explore how attitudes and opinions have varied across time and location, and how contemporary affairs often shaped these attitudes. This paper will show what the Vikings meant to people in the recent past, the sometimes surprising

roles the Vikings played in the public imagination, and their part in the formation and evolution of national identities in these islands.

Christina Lee

Wikingertage, Wicky the Viking and Wotan's Fluch: Vikings in German popular culture

Most German children have their first encounter with 'Wicky, the Viking' an animated series on a small Viking boy and his extended family and it remains one of the most popular programmes on children's television, so much so that it was made into two feature-length films by the director Michael 'Bully' Herberger. This paper will explore how Vikings are portrayed in German popular culture after WWII, when many things 'Norse and/or Germanic' had become a taboo topic. In anticipation of the Viking exhibition moving to Berlin next year, it will discuss which aspects of 'Viking' are popular in contemporary German culture and which parts of academic work get 'translated' into popular culture.

Emma Vosper

The 'Vikings in Schools project' at Nottingham

Poster.

Victoria Whitworth

First Catch Your Viking: Creating Norse Narratives for a Twenty-First Century Audience

This presentation looks at the way character is constructed by both historians and historical novelists. It asks whether there is an identifiable personality which goes along with a 'Viking persona', and if so, on what that persona is based. Ideas about Vikings and character have deep roots in fiction, going back to nineteenth century novels by authors such as W.G. Collingwood and H. Rider Haggard which draw both on Icelandic sagas and Victorian ideals of British identity. Given the amount of research in recent years into all aspects of Viking society, has the 'Viking persona' kept pace? Where do we look now to construct our ideas about psychology and interpersonal relationships in 8th to 11th century Scandinavia and the wider Viking world? How do these ideas work out in other fictional/historical worlds, such as computer games, re-enactment groups and live action role play? The talk/workshop will draw on my own academic experience as well as my two novels set in the Danelaw, *The Bone Thief* (Ebury Press 2012) and *The Traitors' Pit* (Ebury Press 2013). If offered as a workshop, the focus will be on the construction of character and the identifying of 'frameworks of plausibility' within which that character can develop.

Languages, Myths and Finds Presentations

Cleveland - On the Trail of the Vikings in Cleveland

Heather O'Donoghue, Pragma Vohra, Nikolas Gunn, Jane Harrison, Joanne Shortt Butler, Eleanor Rye

Cleveland, an area straddling the boundaries of North Yorkshire and County Durham, lies on the northern periphery of the main area of Viking Age Scandinavian settlement in eastern England. To date, there has been relatively little exploration of the history of Scandinavians in the area and local museums focus either on the Anglo-Saxon or on the industrial history of the region. Significantly, however, a recent son et lumière display on Roseberry Topping was entitled *Odin's Glow*, inspired by the name of the hill, which probably derives from the god-name Óðinn.

However, as a handful of publications predominantly by Cleveland residents demonstrate, there are many further indications of Scandinavian settlement in the area. Dialect preserves Scandinavian-derived vocabulary and a significant number of place-names, most famously Roseberry Topping, are of Scandinavian origin. An accompanied burial from

Kildale has been interpreted as a Viking burial and a sundial from Skelton bears an Old Norse inscription in the Roman alphabet alongside an inscription in Scandinavian runes. This group presentation will explore both the evidence for Scandinavians in Cleveland and how they have been presented – and sometimes overlooked – in treatments of the history of the area.

We will also produce an A0 poster showing what types of evidence there is for Scandinavians in Cleveland and where it is found. This will show the sites of archaeological finds and the distribution of Scandinavian place-names in their landscape context and will be based on a map of Cleveland.

Dublin - Scandiknavery: A walking tour for families

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, Rebecca Boyd, Erin Goeres, Rosalind Bonté, Eleanor Jackson, Maria Teresa Ramandi

The history of Viking-age Dublin is relatively well known, and the city boasts a number of educational sites that cater for both tourists and local residents interested in the city's past. The archaeological exhibits at the National Museum, the interactive displays at Dublinia, and the newly built 'Viking House' at the National Botanic Gardens all offer different ways in which to explore the city's Scandinavian heritage. However, it is more difficult to find evidence of that heritage in the urban landscape of the modern city. The LMF Dublin Team has created a family-friendly walking tour that aims to raise awareness of Dublin's Viking and Hiberno-Norse history through an exploration of the city and its relationship with the past. The team's presentation will introduce the walking tour and its main sites using a slideshow of photographs from the trip; the team will also discuss the opportunities and challenges of the LMF project within the specific context of the city of Dublin.

Hebrides - Viking Heritage in Lewis

Judy Quinn, Brittany Schorn, David Etheridge, Michael Hart, Eleanor Heans-Glogowska, Patrycja Kupiec

Situated off the northwest coast of Scotland, Lewis is well known for its beautiful, rugged scenery, and as a bastion of Scots Gaelic. It is also famed for the discovery of the Lewis chessmen – a collection of 78 medieval walrus ivory chess pieces, probably made in Norway. These have become popular emblems for signs and souvenirs across the island, and they are currently in the spotlight because of the imminent return of six chesspieces to Lews Castle in Stornoway, on permanent loan. Our aim has been to set this famous find of Scandinavian material into its broader setting of long-term contact with the rest of the Viking world. Lewis boasts a range of sources for its Scandinavian heritage and settlement, including archaeological finds and numerous place-names of Old Norse derivation.

Beyond large sculptures of wooden chesspieces, however, signs of this Viking and Norse history are not immediately visible on the island today. Focusing on a few archaeological sites on the western coast – such as the settlement at Bostadh and the burials on the Bhaltos peninsula – we will discuss some of the reasons this is the case, as well as what the finds can tell us about the nature and legacy of the Scandinavian presence in the Hebrides from the ninth century onwards. Finally, we will present our own experience with community engagement in Uig, where we held an event for local school children; and the resources we have been developing to support both locals and visitors seeking to explore the Viking heritage of Lewis and the outer Hebrides.

Isle of Man - Viking Myths and Rituals

Carolyne Larrington, Leszek Gardela, Timothy Bourns, Brian McMahon, Heidi Stoner, Aya Van Renterghem

The Isle of Man lies at the heart of the Irish Sea. Settled by Scandinavian immigrants in the late 9th century it is now rich in material remains of their presence. This presentation will foreground various aspects of the Viking Age in the Isle of Man by concentrating on different categories of archaeological and iconographic evidence – from lavishly equipped burials, to remains of Norse and Celtic settlements and magnificent carved crosses with both pagan and Christian imagery. We will present some of the results of our study trip, conducted in April 2014, which sought both to explore the islands' heritage and promote knowledge of Viking-Age culture within the local community. We had a stimulating discussion of viking finds and heritage issues with Manx National Heritage at the Manx Museum and The House of Manannan. We also organized two workshops via the Isle of Man Children's University t Arbory School. One the highlights of our trip was a dramatic reconstruction of a Viking funeral which took place sometime in the 10th century in Ballateare, Jurby. The reconstruction was orchestrated by members of our team and made possible thanks to collaboration with a local re-enactment group 'The Vikings of Mann'. We will also present photographs and observations from our examination of the numerous carved crosses, which contain intriguing imagery referring to Old Norse myths and ritual practices. These will be supplemented by a display of artistic reconstructions of two Viking Age burials and a full-size replica of one of the finds.

Munster – Searching for Cork’s Elusive Viking Heritage

Christina Lee, Thomas Birkett, Rachel Backa, Annemari Ferreira, Mark Kirwan, Alexander Wilson

The legacy of the Vikings in Munster is complex, as is the relationship between the three main towns founded by the Vikings in this region: Cork, Limerick and Waterford. The evidence for Viking settlement varies considerably between these three locales. The excavations at Waterford (ON *Veðrafjörðr*) and nearby Woodstown have yielded significant evidence of Viking settlement and some exciting finds, whilst the evidence of settlement in Limerick is based primarily on historical sources and place-names, and in Cork tangible evidence of the Vikings is in even shorter supply, the earliest archaeological evidence of Scandinavian settlement in the city coming from the end of the eleventh century. Whilst the Hiberno-Norse character of these post-Viking Age finds hints at the earlier Norse settlement mentioned in the annals, the Cork Vikings remain elusive. This in turn has led to vastly differing approaches to heritage in each location, with Waterford’s Viking Triangle dominating the regeneration of the city and numerous heritage events taking place in the local area, whilst in Cork there is barely a mention of the city’s Viking past in the city museum, with relatively few people aware that this flood-prone city has Scandinavian foundations.

This presentation by the Munster group will talk about the challenges of translating Norse culture in Cork in light of the limited evidence, and the ways in which the wider evidence of Vikings in the Irish Sea region, as well as initiatives in neighbouring Waterford and Limerick, might provide a way to contextualise heritage in a city with a great appetite to learn more about its Viking past. We will present the results of our collaborations with local heritage experts and academics, along with a video documenting the group’s investigations and workshop in local schools.