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The Wirral Ship Fellowship – Wirral Vikings

# explore the viking village

A tour round a typical viking village

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**We are going to take a tour round a typical viking village that might have existed 1000 years ago on the Wirral peninsula.**

The Ancient Irish annals record a settlement on the Wirral by Vikings led by one Ingimund, who had been expelled from Ireland in around 902 and gained permission from Ethelfleda, Lady of Mercia and daughter of King Alfred the Great, to settle peacefully on the peninsula.

The village might have been situated within a woodland clearing adjacent to a stream or river leading to the coastline.

Some of the streams on Wirral were tidal and led to a marshy area to the north of Wirral at low tide and a large lake at high tide.

This tidal flow would allow easy access to central Wirral and is celebrated in place names today like Overchurch,

The name **Overchurch** comes from the Anglo-Saxon 'ofer' shore, and 'circe' church.

Such Viking Age villages would consist of little more than a few buildings with all its inhabitants, being part of an extended family, sharing the dwelling house. more than a few buildings with all its inhabitants, being part of an extended family, sharing the dwelling house.

The typical Viking settlement was located near the coastline with reasonable boat access; a flat, well-drained area for a farmstead; and extensive grazing areas for domestic animals.

Structures in Viking settlements—dwellings, storage facilities, and barns—were built with stone foundations and had walls made of stone, peat, sod turfs, wood, or a combination of these materials. Religious structures were also present in Viking settlements.

Following the Christianization of the Norse, churches were established as small square buildings in the centre of a circular churchyard.

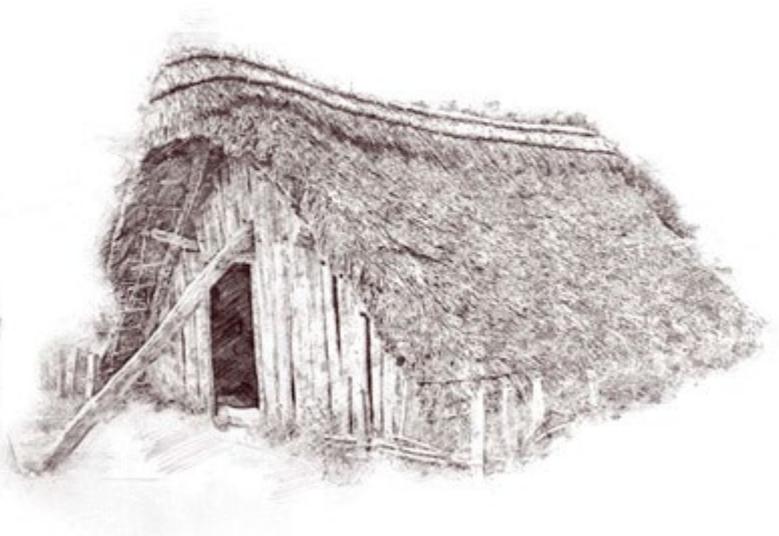


Viking Communities were led by chieftains who owned multiple farmsteads. Early Icelandic chieftains for example competed with each other for the support from local farmers through conspicuous consumption, gift-giving, and legal contests.

Feasting was a key element of leadership, as described in the Icelandic sagas.

Our Viking is an extended family farmstead enduring the harsh realities of life in a new country as they worked together to survive.

The Viking village would initially consist of a series of three or four timber framed buildings. The would consist of the following...



## barn / storage building

A barn/storage building, approx. 6m x 4m:

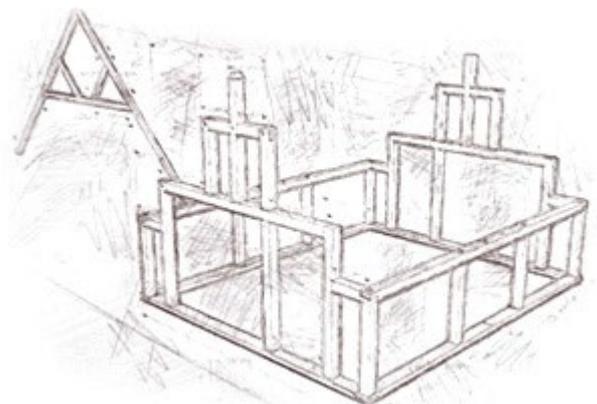
**The traditional Viking barn served as a storage place for both cattle and grain**

The barn will be constructed as a two level building with access to the upper level via a ladder

Farmhouses, barns and storage buildings generally were built on a slope or other high ground which provided for better drainage. Houses were built near running water. While wells were known and used in the Viking age, especially in densely settled areas like trading towns, running water was preferred at a farmstead.

The lower level of the barn is used for wet storage and tools store with tables and benches inside whereas the loft area will be

used for dry items, grain and storage. Framing for these structures will follow quite a rudimentary design with a solid boxed lower structure with raised ends to support the 'A' line roofing struts





## longhouse

A longhouse, approx 20m x 5m:

**The centre of Viking village life & culture was the longhouse.**

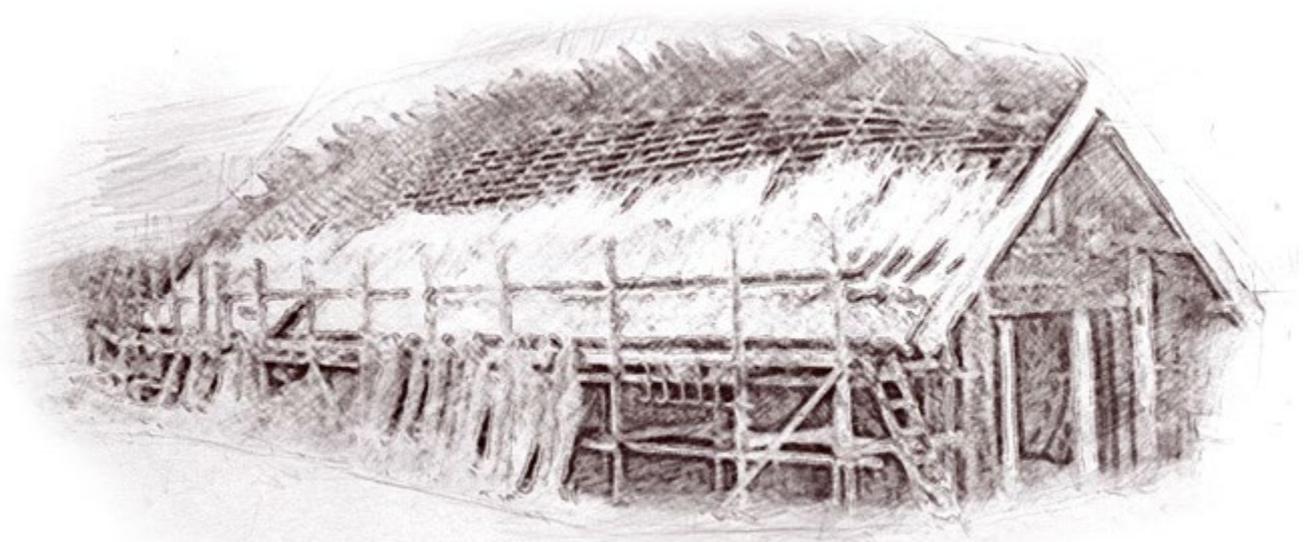
The longhouse would be of trestle construction, typically comprising two outer long walls of upright trunks set into the ground, joined along their length by a timber wall plate.

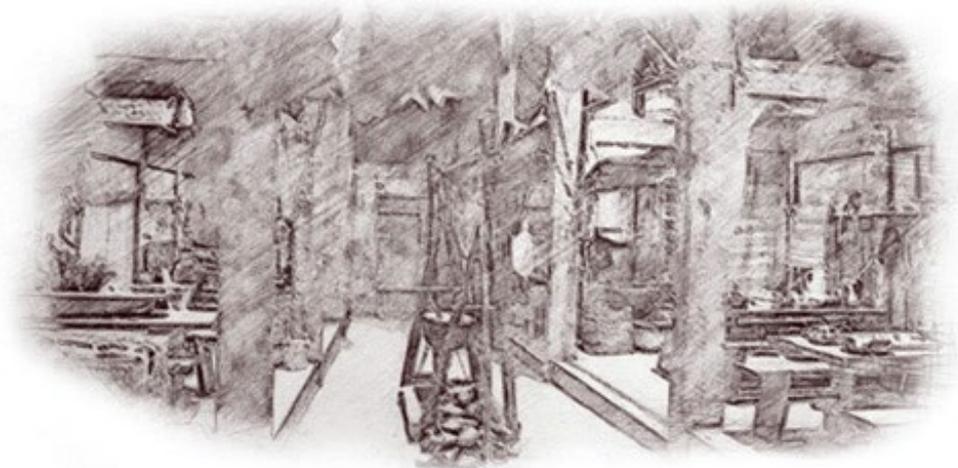
The principal roof beams would span the wall plates with the trestle roof timbers set onto these to support the rafters and ridge.

The rafters would be sheathed in sarking boards and clad in riven timber shakes.

The wall panels would be of wattle and daub construction with the wattle fixed internally to the upright posts that support the roof.

The floor of the Viking longhouse was typically pounded earth. With a hearth in the center.





The longhouse will consist of a meeting area with walled benches as well as a central hearth for cooking and warmth. The walled benches will be wide enough for activities as well as containing storage below and allow sleeping for overnight activities. The benches were traditionally used for sleeping in halls.

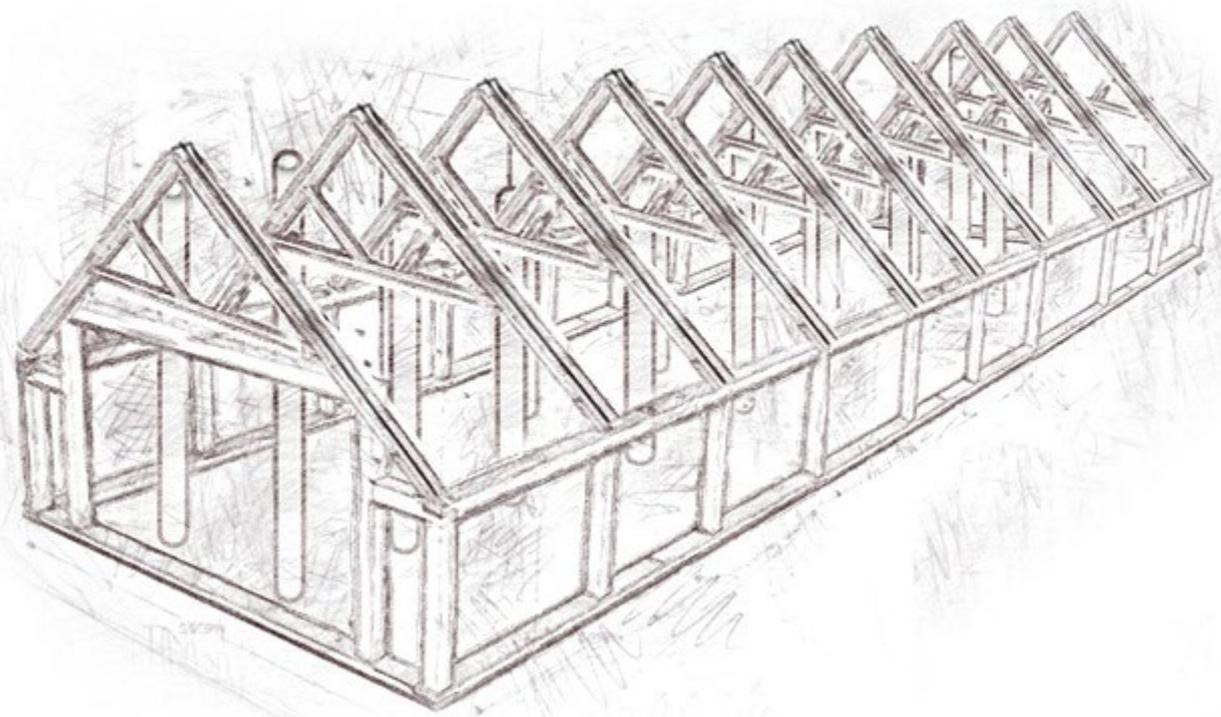
Viking families would live in the central hall portion of the building. Rooms were partially set off; in some longhouses one end might be used as a barn to keep cattle and horses in the winter as well as storage for crops and tools. The other end could be set up as a workroom for artisanal crafts or the family's vertical loom.

The centre of the Longhouse will have a long thin fire hearth. Above through the turf roof will be a specially built covered opening to allow smoke to escape. Fuels used by the Norse for heating and cooking included peat, peaty turf, and wood. In addition to being used in heating and building construction, wood was the common fuel.

The turf roof allows for a living structure, ecologically sound and would require less maintenance than a wooded shingle roof which will need replacing ever 15-20 years.

The longhouse gable ends will have a small window / smoke hole high up. A vestibule in the centre of the end walls would contain an inner and an outer door.





## workshop / blacksmith

**A workshop / blacksmith, approx 5m x 4m:**

The workshop / blacksmith would allow the village to undertake metalwork and larger scale crafts in comfort.

The smithy will consist of a hot forge area, and workshops would contain an area for other crafts.



The blacksmith was a central figure in Viking Age society. He could be encountered every day, making new tools and weapons either by order or perhaps with the intention of being put to sale from his store.

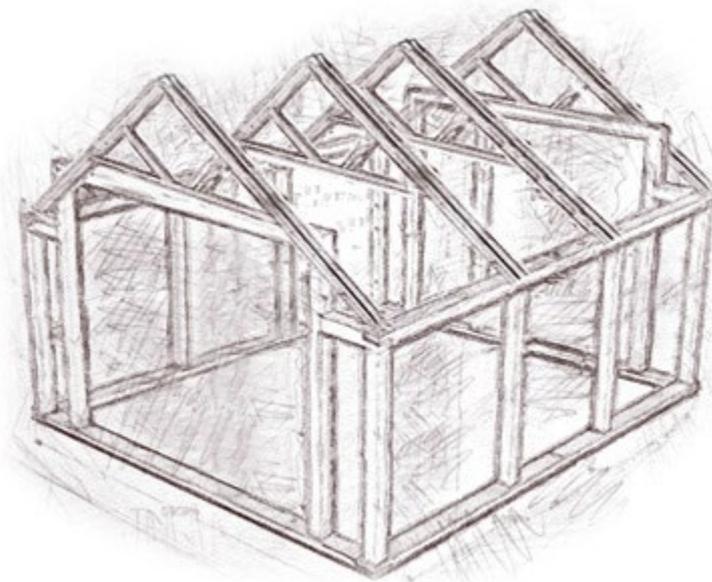
His goods are in high demand, for everyone has need of the knives, fire steels, harness buckles, plough blades, nails and all the other things he would create.

It is hard, hot and dirty work fashioning the glowing iron into useful objects - and sure enough the blacksmith can usually be recognized from afar by his blackened clothes.

It was often necessary for the smith to extract iron from local sources of bog ore, in order to have sufficient raw materials for his production.

Forges were open and closed. Open relates to one end being open to the elements giving good ventilation unless the wind is blowing into the forge.

A closed forge given more protection from the elements but consideration must be given to the buildup of smoke and heat.





The raised roof in this construction allows for the heat to escape through a venting system in the roof.



With the open ended forge like in the diagram the heat and smoke can easily escape but the end of the forge is open more to the elements and changes in weather and wind direction which can lead to issues if embers are blown into the forge.



## waterside jetty

### A jetty by the nearby lake or river

The jetty would be a very important part of the village allowing access to ships and the open sea for fishing, trading and raiding.

A shallow bank area by the jetty would allow for shallow water netting (fishing) on the incoming and outgoing tides. The shore edge would also be used for net making and other fishing techniques like hook-work on fine days.



## ritual house / church

A place of worship, approx 4m x 4m

Ritual Houses were simple wooden buildings not much different from other buildings. Ritual houses were a place to display the weapons of defeated enemies.



But as time went on, they became more complex. They became imitations of churches. They often had multi-layer roofs with decorations on the peaks. The entrances were also ornamented with decorated columns. Most rituals (slaughtered and burnt animal sacrifices) took place outside, so the majority of the decorations were on the outside).

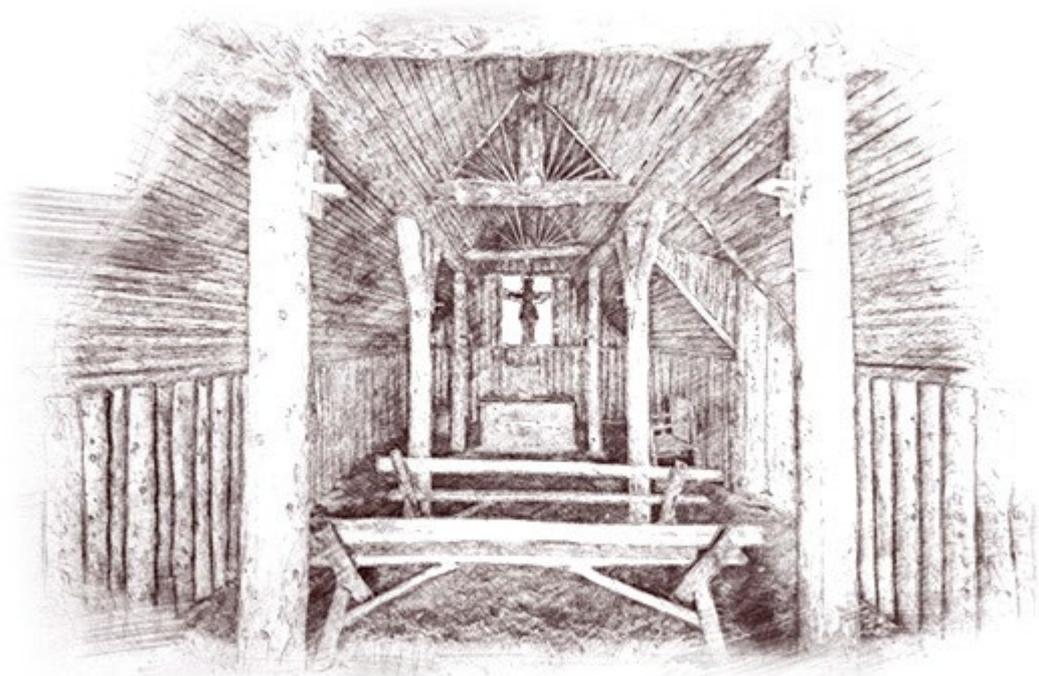
The designs shown here are early Christian in style with a central area to sit.

The Vikings buried their dead a short distance from the settlement, typically 300 - 600 m away. Many farms and burial places were separated by a watercourse. This has been identified at significant Danish sites, such as Gammel Lejre and Tissø on Zealand and Mammen, near Viborg, in Jutland.

The explanation for this may be found in Norse mythology, in which the watercourse Gjöll divided the land of the living from that of the dead. Comparisons can be drawn with Greek mythology's river Styx, upon which the ferryman Charon received payment to ensure transport to the land of the dead known as Hades.

Perhaps such locations for burial sites can be seen as evidence of the Viking religion? However, such an interpretation is not appropriate for all Viking burial places. A significant number of burial sites are located more than 1 km from a watercourse. Here other explanations are likely to be involved.

**Palisade constructions** are known from buildings from the Viking Age. Logs were split in two-halves, set or rammed into the earth (generally called post in ground construction) and given a roof. This proved a simple but very strong form of construction. If set in gravel, the wall could last many decades, even centuries. An archaeological excavation in Lund uncovered the postholes of several such churches.

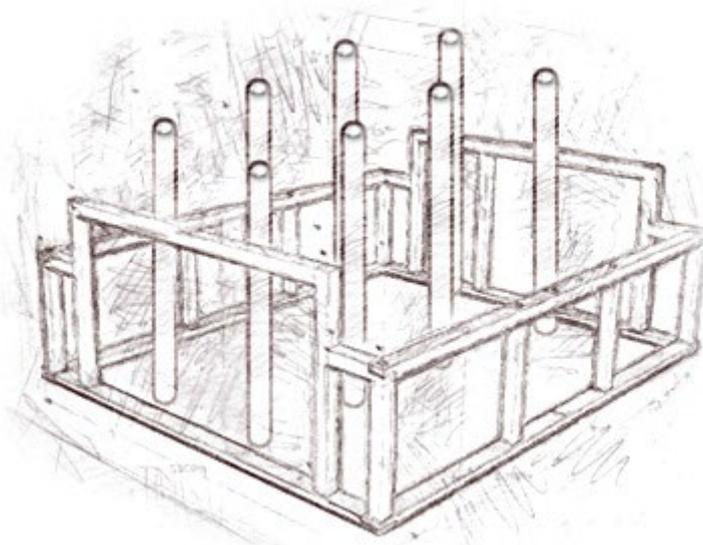


**In post churches**, the walls were supported by sills, leaving only the posts earth-bound. Such churches are easy to spot at archaeological sites as they leave very distinct holes where the posts were once placed. Occasionally some of the wood remains, making it possible to date the church more accurately using radiocarbon dating and/or with dendrochronology. Under the Urnes Stave Church, remains have been found of two such churches, with Christian graves discovered beneath the oldest church structure.

A single church of palisade construction has been discovered under the Hemse stave church.

The next design phase resulted from the observation that earthbound posts were susceptible to humidity, causing them to rot away over time. To prevent this, the posts were placed on top of large stones, significantly increasing their lifespans. The stave church in Røldal is believed to be of this type.

In still later churches, the posts were set on a raised sill frame resting on stone foundations. This is the stave church in its most mature form.



It is now common to group the churches into two categories: the first, without free-standing posts, often referred to as Type A; and the second, with a raised roof and free-standing internal posts, usually called Type B.

Those with the raised roof, Type B, are often further divided into two subgroups. The first of these, the Kaupanger group, have a whole arcade row of posts and intermediate posts along the sides and details that mimic stone capitals. These churches give an impression of a basilica.



## as the village grows...

Additional buildings were constructed as the village grows. These would consist of dwellings and further workshops as a village would grow.



# defensive ditch and wall

## Defensive structures

In some cases parts of the village would be surrounded with a defensive ditch and wall for protection like Anglo Saxon burhs might have been constructed at the time. Made from posts sunk into the ground these were the early fortifications of the day.

