

WIRRALH SKIP FELAGR



Viking & Anglo Saxon Living History

Vikings among us!

Modern science enables us to study the genetic heritage and ancestry of groups of people by analysing the Y chromosome endlessly passed from father to son over countless generations. We are fortunate that local Viking enthusiast Stephen Harding is a well respected Professor of genetics at Nottingham university and has conducted extensive surveys to establish to what extent the "native" people of North West England and the Wirral were descended from Viking settlers.

In any study of this kind it is of course important to try establish that the volunteers you are testing are "native" to and have their roots in the appropriate area as opposed to being more recent immigrants. This is a problem massively exaggerated locally as the local population increased by more than ten times the national average due the huge numbers of migrant workers attracted by growing employment opportunities during the industrial revolution turning the north of England into the manufacturing capital of the world during the Georgian and Victorian periods.

For Wirral and west Lancashire, two sets of volunteers were used. The first set providing a "modern" sample were those people who could prove their paternal grandfather to be from the area. The second set providing a "medieval" sample were people who possessed a surname shown to be present in documents and records of the region more than four hundred years ago (or a surname that was derived from a local place name) and where as far back as they could trace their family tree, they could prove their most distant paternal ancestor was from the region.

Analysing the significance of the results of these tests is complex but in general terms we can draw the following conclusions. There is enough of a difference between the DNA of modern Norwegians and modern British to separate them, thereby enabling people descended from Norse Viking men to be distinguished from those descended from Anglo Saxon men. There is far less difference between Danish DNA and modern British DNA making it difficult to identify those descended from Viking Danes. In terms of establishing "how Viking" the local people are, then traces of Viking DNA were present in some of the "modern volunteer group" but in terms of the select group of "medieval volunteers" these showed very high amounts of Norwegian DNA comparable to places like Orkney, itself noted for being a predominantly Viking settlement. This shows what an impact Norse Viking men had on the local population of our area.

Due to the tradition of women adopting the names of their husbands it is not possible to identify a similar group of female volunteers we can be sure have their distant ancestry in the local area. However, a study of maternally inherited mitochondrial DNA distributions in Shetland, Orkney, the Western Isles, Isle of Man and Iceland, showed that in general terms the further away from the Scandinavian homelands the Norsemen settled the less likely they were to bring families from Scandinavia. All of which suggest that when the Hiberno Norse expelled from Dublin began settling the Wirral that they were most likely to be marrying into the existing Anglo Saxon population rather than displacing them.

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