

# WIRRALH SKIP FELAGR



*Viking & Anglo Saxon Living History*

**“Have you heard about that Viking boat under the pub car park?”**

Much media attention has been given to the rumours of an intact Viking boat buried under a pub car park in Meols. If true this would be a nationally important archaeological find and the only intact Viking boat ever found on mainland Britain. However, whilst it would be fantastic if this does turn out to be true it is important to reflect on what little evidence we have in a reasoned manner rather than get caught up in media hype or speculation.

In the early 1990's a local man contacted the museum authorities to inform them of a boat his father recalled finding in 1938 when involved in construction work at The Railway Inn at Meols, handing over copies of brief sketches made by his father at the time. The boat was said to be buried more than eight feet below ground level in clay. It was described as being clinker built with a round end, and from the six foot or so exposed it was estimated the full boat would have been twenty to thirty foot long by at least three foot wide. A recent ground penetrating radar survey of the car park prompted by disclosure of this story proved the existence of a roughly boat shaped anomaly under the car park, but what do we actually know that might suggest it is Viking?

Meols was certainly an important Viking beach trading site in the tenth century, but the archaeology suggests it has been important since prehistory through to late medieval times. Clinker construction has been in use since at least the seventh century and has continued in use through to today. So whilst finding an old clinker boat buried in Meols isn't surprising, this offers no solid clue as to when it might have been built. The traditional or iconic Viking boat has a very pointed bow and stern which would not fit with the description of a rounded end; something which sounds more like a hollowed out log boat with additional planks to increase the depth of its hull and load carrying capacity. The closest known match to this description is a fourteenth century boat from the lake district, but several late Viking age log boats have been recovered more locally from the river Mersey at Warrington.

In short we don't have enough evidence to categorically prove the boat is Viking, nor do we have enough evidence to prove it is not. The balance of probability given what little we know of the shape of the boat and its inland position in relation to how we know the shore line has moved over the centuries due to erosion, is that it is most likely later medieval but we simply don't know.

Whilst we'd all like to know for sure, the extensive excavation needed to resolve this would be very expensive and the boat itself is under no great threat where it is. Consequently it's excavation remains a low priority awaiting advances in affordable non destructive survey techniques. Even if funds were available to recover the boat, the next logical step would be to try sample the ground and clay around the boat to see if we can date the context and establish a more reliable time frame for the burial of the boat before considering removing it from the ground.

[www.wirralvikings.org.uk](http://www.wirralvikings.org.uk)

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