

WIRRALH SKIP FELAGR



Viking & Anglo Saxon Living History

Wirral's early medieval decorative stone carving.

The Vikings (if we can even think of them as one group of people rather than several) were skilled carvers who worked and built predominantly in wood not stone. However wood rots in a way that stone doesn't and so the few stone monuments they created do tend to survive in higher quantities. Though examples can be found in Scandinavia, carved stone seems to be an art form predominantly influenced by local practices encountered upon arriving in Britain and in turn most of the Viking stone carvings found locally seem to have connections with the Christian church reflecting yet another way in which local culture affected the attitudes and beliefs of the Norse men who settled here.

Several examples of Viking age decorative stone carving have been found on the Wirral. The most famous is probably the large hogback tombstone on display in St Bridget's church in West Kirby but a smaller example was recovered in a garden in Bidston. The "Overchurch stone" from near Upton is a broken fragment from something much larger but retains fractions of a rare runic inscription proclaiming "the people erected a memorial" and "pray for Aethelmund" though we know nothing of who he was or what he did. At St Mary's and St Hilary's church in Neston parts of a carved cross were found and there is another more or less intact cross at St Barnabas in Bromborough. It is probable that when new many of these pieces of carved stone would have been painted bright and contrasting colours

Hogback stones are sculptured stones with distinctive bowed sides and a curved ridge. They are presumed to be symbolic 'houses' for the dead right down to stylised representations of roof shingles along either side of the central ridge, combining the form of period buildings, Viking art forms with an underlying design representative of Anglo Saxon burial monuments.

The St. Bridget's stone is of Anglo-Norse origin dating from the 10th century AD which was discovered during the restoration of the church in 1869. It is carved from a hard, grey sandstone not found locally and which may have come from the Ruabon or Cefn area of North Wales. The quality of carving is perhaps not as well executed as carved stone monuments found in Cumbria or the Isle of Man but it clearly falls within what can be considered as a regional tradition or style of Viking carved stone monuments.



www.wirralvikings.org.uk

part of  **Regia Anglorum**