



HIBERN ð N ð RSE ð WIRRAL

rush lights

Lighting was very important inside the viking homestead.

Hearth fires could be used as a main light source but other options were also available.

Some modern historians would say beeswax was used but for its time beeswax was expensive and also had more important uses. Oil lights with a wick dipped in oil or fat could be used but a more popular and cheaper version was rushlights.

A rushlight is formed by soaking the dried pith of the rush plant in fat or grease. Rushlights were simple and cheap to make. They were believed to give a better light than various types of dipped candles.

Preparation was quite simple. Mature rush stalks are gathered in summer or autumn. The outer epidermis was stripped apart from one section to add strength to the inner pith. After drying the pith was steeped in fat. Some used bacon fat but others preferred mutton as it dried harder and was not as messy as other fats. Small additions of beeswax if available could make a candle burn longer. Remote Atlantic islands such as St Kilda used the stomach oil produced by Fulmar birds.

The average rushlight of 30cm would last for 10-15 minutes. These rushlight would give a good clear light depending upon the rush preparation and oil used.

Using two strips of outer rind on the pith would produce a dimmer light but it would last longer.

