

# HIST31361 Heroes and Holy Men: the Irish Sea World in the Viking Age, 800-1100

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The 'Viking Age' covers the period from c.780 to c.1100 and was a messy but fascinating period in the history of Britain and Ireland. We all know about the Vikings, horned helmets or not, and we might even have heard of the 'Danelaw', the area of Scandinavian settlement in eastern and northern England, but historians focus far less attention on the Irish Sea. Over the period covered by this course the Irish Sea

became a 'Viking lake' and Viking activity – trading, raiding, conquest and settlement - had had a profound impact on the peoples that lived on its shores and whose imprint can still be seen today in the largest silver hoard found in Britain, at Cuerdale in Lancashire (deposited in the early tenth century), or the Scandinavian place names of Merseyside and Wirral. The men who deposited the Cuerdale hoard never returned to collect it, and we will never know who the *Orm* of Ormskirk, or the *Skjalmar* of Skelmersdale were, but these lost individuals and their treasures are immortalized in the landscape around us.

In this course we will examine the broader context of Viking activity in Britain and Ireland before focusing on the Irish Sea zone. Although the popular image of the Vikings revolves around warfare and trade, Viking settlement and cultural influence permanently changed north-west England, eastern Ireland, western Scotland and Wales, change that can be measured in language, literature, landscapes and material culture. The period also saw the Irish Sea become an important arena for competition between the new kingdoms of England and Scotland and the Vikings themselves. At the end of our period, the dynamics of the Irish Sea changed again with the arrival of another group of Scandinavian descent – the Normans.

### Provisional List of Weekly Topics:

1. Sources, Problems and Possibilities
2. Defining a 'Cultural Province'
3. The Vikings in Ireland and Northumbria
4. Markets, Towns and Urbanisation
5. Settlement, Languages and Landscapes
6. The Native Response
7. Dublin and the Kingship of Ireland
8. The Rise of the English State: land, lordship and power
9. New Identities: Assimilation or Acculturation?
10. The Irish Sea in the Eleventh Century
11. The Arrival of the Normans



### Teaching Methods:

One x 1 hour lecture and one x 2-hour seminar per week, with Course Unit Office Hours and a field trip equivalent to one hour per week. I hope to run a field trip to the Yorvik Viking Centre in York.

### Sources and Reading:

The main books for the course are all readily available (in some cases electronically), and we will be using a range of primary sources – narrative, literary and even material/archaeological - that are easily available or accessible (also often electronically) in translation; these resources are supplemented by a seminar documents book.

### Indicative Reading:

- Clare Downham, *The Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland: the Dynasty of Ivarr to 1014* (2007)
- David Griffiths, *Vikings of the Irish Sea* (2010)
- Dawn Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society and Culture* (2006)
- Dawn Hadley and Julian Richards (ed.), *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (2000)

### Assessment:

- Source Analysis – 2000 words – 40%
- Essay – 3000 words – 60%

### Dissertation Links

A range of topics with easily accessible primary sources can be linked to this course:

- The Vikings as a 'diaspora' society
- Settlement and place-name studies
- State-formation in early medieval Britain
- Modern reception of the Vikings
- Construction of identities in Viking Age Britain
- The Viking Age and National Myths
- Gender, politics and society in Viking age Britain

**Zoom consultation hour: Tuesday 13th**

**June at 12.00-1.00** <https://zoom.us/j/9495222462> Meeting ID: 949 5222 2462

**Passcode: 749758**