

## Flashback




DISCOVERING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY  
WITH MARTIN RIGBY

# Norse by north west

**D**NA research is now one of the fastest-growing branches of genealogy.

The forensic techniques used in plotting DNA markers on the Y chromosome (in males) now enable any individual to plot their distant origins.

The Y chromosome markers alter only very occasionally in hundreds of years, making it fairly straightforward to track the general area of origin of your earliest ancestors.

It is a fascinating subject and one which has been brought close to home in an exciting survey into the north west's Viking past.

Using a database of people with surnames dating back to before the 17th century in Wirral and West Lancashire, **Professor Stephen Harding** from Nottingham University and **Mark Jobling** of Leicester University are due to announce the results of 10 year's research into the north west's Viking ancestry on Tuesday.

The event is being held at the David Lloyd Leisure centre in Knowsley and should be a fascinating evening.

Professor Harding said: "In the north west Scandinavian place names are concentrated in Wirral and West Lancashire. Here are the only definite examples of the place name Thingwall (assembly field) in England, indicating settlements of sufficient density and autonomy to warrant their own parliaments."

Among the place names considered to be Viking in origin are Kirkby, Crosby, Meols, Cuerdale and Skelmersdale.

In order to compare the DNA from volunteers in the north west with known Viking samples, the research team chose a particular DNA marker that is prevalent in Scandinavia, Shetland, Orkney and the Isle of Man,

but relatively rare in English and Welsh samples.

Just how strong the Viking influence is in the north west will be revealed on Tuesday in conjunction with the publication of the results in the scientific journal *Molecular Biology and Evolution*.

Along with DNA technology the research team has used archaeological evidence to build up a picture of the region's Viking roots.

Recently the discovery of a possible Viking boat under a pub car park in Meols has excited researchers.

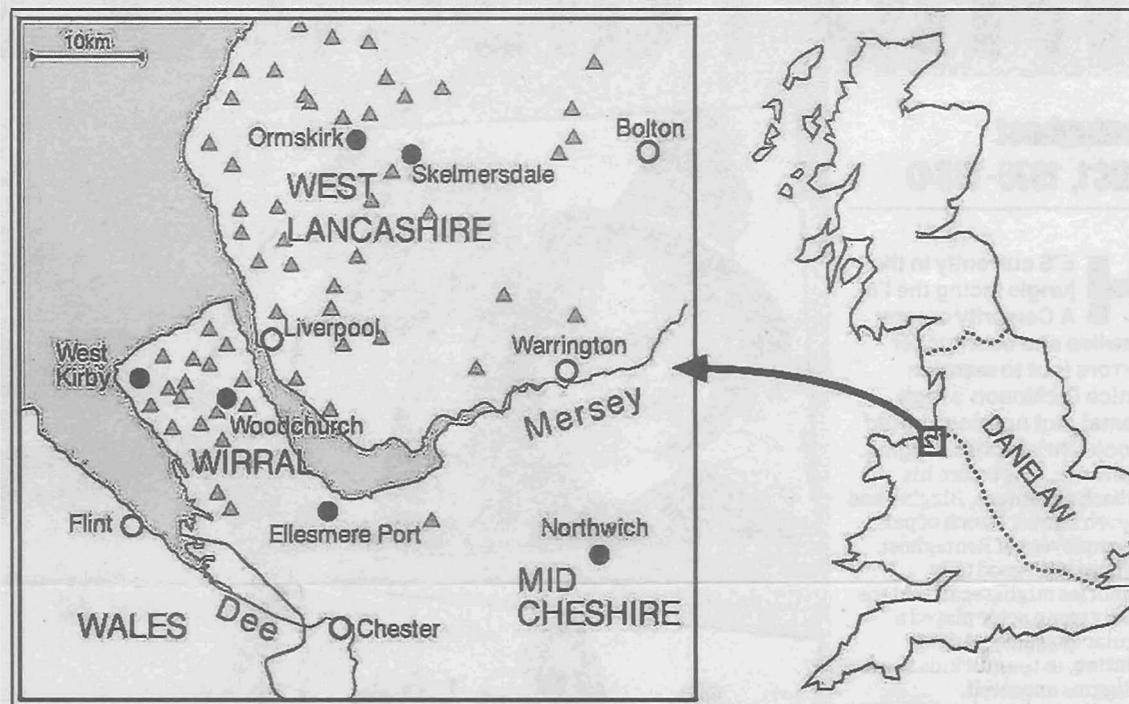
The boat was apparently discovered in 1938 buried beneath the Railway Inn but deliberately covered up by builders to avoid delays in construction work. Written notes and a sketch of the discovery came to light in the 1990s following a planning application to build a patio. Subsequent preliminary investigations using ground-penetrating radar have revealed the existence of a boat-shaped anomaly.

Further assessments of the information will now take place before deciding whether to proceed with a preliminary excavation.

People wishing to attend the event in Knowsley on Tuesday should contact [patrickwaite@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:patrickwaite@hotmail.co.uk) or [steve.harding@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:steve.harding@nottingham.ac.uk) or the West Lancashire Heritage Association on **01695 573350**.

Tickets are £6 but thanks to a generous donation from the Royal Norwegian Embassy there is no charge for senior citizens or young persons under 21.

● In a future column I will be revealing how to go about conducting your own DNA research and how to access the growing databases of results from people who have the same DNA characteristics as your own.



Locations for the team's samples are shown by the blobs. The unfilled blobs show major towns and cities. Grey triangles show major Scandinavian place names in the region



Stephen Harding, inset, and with Icelandic visitors at Thingwall Hill. DNA research, which could link your past to their's is one of the fastest-growing areas of genealogical research.

