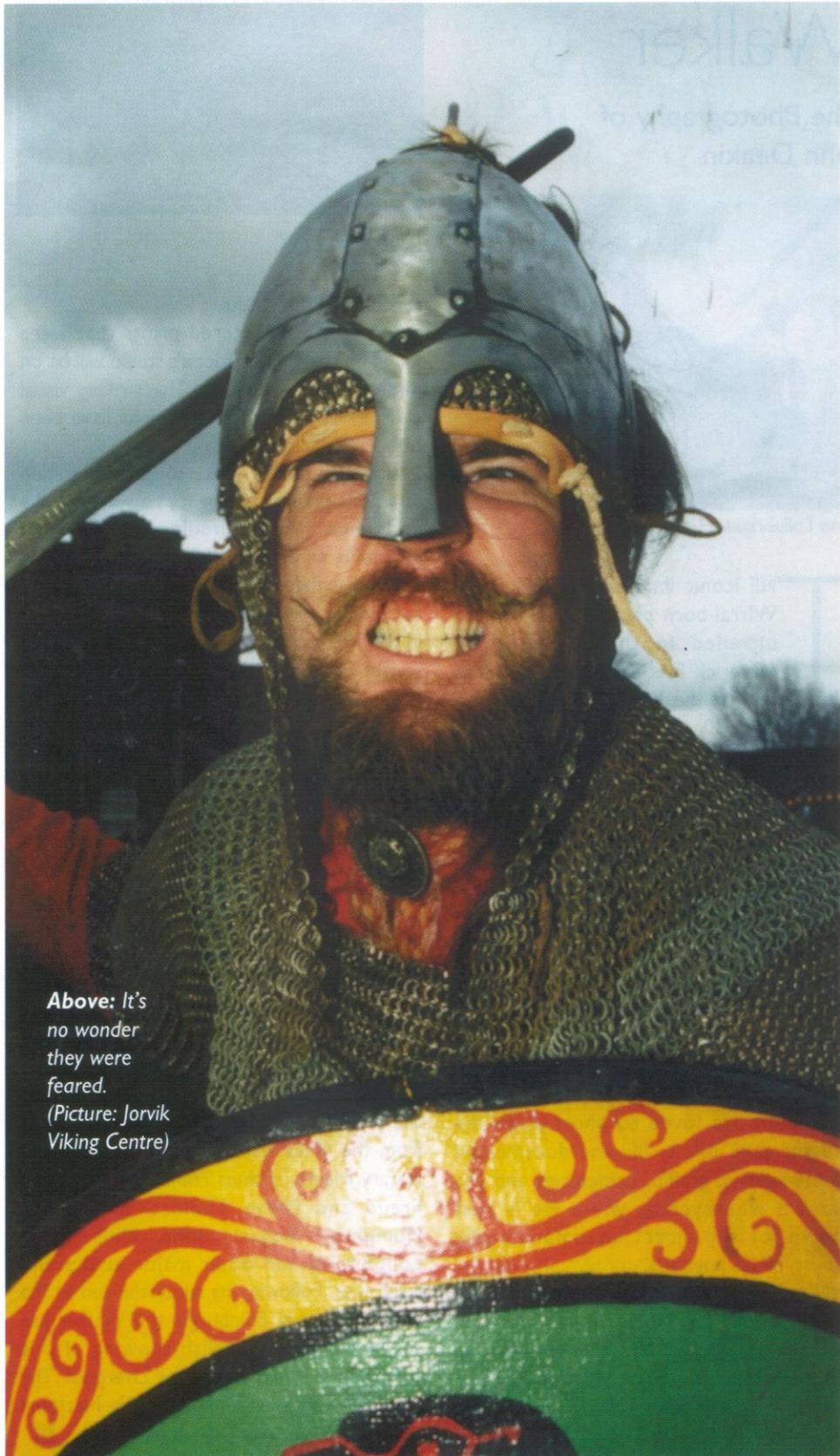


# Wirral Vikings



**Above:** It's no wonder they were feared.

(Picture: Jorvik Viking Centre)

In his new book *Northern Roots*, David Simpson comes to the conclusion that Scouse could be an Irish-Viking dialect

## Norseman of Merseyside and the Wirral

MOST of the old country of Cheshire, in what was then western Mercia, lay outside the sphere of Viking influence, although there was slight Danish influence in the north and east towards Manchester where we find names like Knutsford (Canute's Ford), Cheadle Hulme, Kettleshulme and Toft.

However, the most important area of Viking settlement in Cheshire was undoubtedly the Wirral peninsula

## The Viking Battle of the Wirral

IT IS thought that one of the most important battles ever fought



**Left:** This Viking long house was built by Kevin Taylor in his Scarisbrick back garden.

**Below:** The Norsemen were fearsome warriors (Picture: Jorvik Viking Centre)

between the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings was fought on the Wirral. This was the battle of Brunaburh fought in 937 AD somewhere in the North West of England. The site of the battle has never been identified, but the most likely location is Bromborough, near the banks of the Mersey and within the Wirral peninsula. The Scots assisted the Vikings in this battle, but it was the Anglo-Saxons under the leadership of King Athelstan who were victorious. The victory limited the threat of Viking expansion in the north of England.

The Wirral formed the far north western corner of the historical county of Cheshire and is situated on the coast between the River Mersey and the River Dee. It is

sandwiched between the city of Liverpool and the coast of North Wales.

It is known from historical records that an Irish-Norse Viking called Ingimund settled the Wirral. He was one of a group of many Irish-Norwegians to be evicted from Ireland around 920 AD and he was among the first wave of Irish Norwegians to settle in the Merseyside area. Many more Vikings would follow.

#### **Scouse - An Irish-Norse Dialect?**

IT IS possible that Merseyside's Scouse dialect and the dialect of the Wirral may have some Irish-Norse roots. Scouse pronunciations like 'Doze Tings





By sheer coincidence it was 18th century Scandinavian sailors who introduced a stew or broth to the area that was known as 'lapskaus' or 'lobscouse'.

Dere' (Those things there) also occur in the Viking settled Shetlands and Orkneys where they are known to be of Norse origin. This kind of pronunciation also occurs in Dublin. It is usually assumed that Irish immigration in recent centuries most greatly affected the dialect of Merseyside. Nevertheless there is much evidence for significant Irish-Norse settlement in the whole Merseyside area. The Scandinavian connection

continues into modern times. By sheer coincidence it was eighteenth century Scandinavian sailors who introduced a stew or broth to the area that was known as 'lapskaus' or 'lobscouse'. It became especially popular amongst the Liverpudlian sailors who came to be known as 'lobscouers' and later 'Scousers'. The name is now given to anyone originating from Liverpool.

There is much place-name evidence for Viking settlement in

the Wirral where we find names like Thurstaston, Greasby, Whitby, Raby, Pensby and Irby. The last of these place-names means 'settlement of the Irish Vikings'. In fact the Wirral was a small Viking State in its own right, with a local parliament held at Thingwall, a place-name near Heswall on the south side of the peninsula. Thingwall's name derives from the Viking word 'Thingvollr' meaning 'the Assembly Field'. There is much folklore to associate the Wirral with the Vikings and at least one expert believes that the Norse language continued to be spoken in the Wirral for centuries after the Norman Conquest.

### **Chester City and the Irish Vikings**

IF THE Vikings of the Wirral posed a threat to the neighbouring countryside then the Mercian City of Chester must have played an important defensive role. This Anglo-Saxon City lay close to the north eastern border of Wales, but was also situated on the neck of the Wirral peninsula, with the Irish



Vikings of the Wirral located to its north. When we consider that Danes were also not far away in Lancashire to the north, we can see why Anglo-Saxon kings in the south recognised Chester's important defensive role. However, the Vikings were not unwelcome in the City of Chester, as it is known that a small community of Irish-Vikings lived in the city in Viking times. They lived in a street close to a bridge over the River Dee. To the

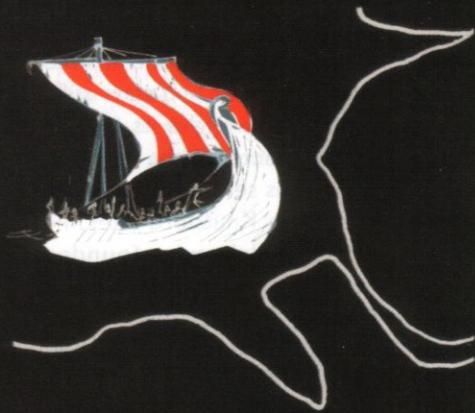
west of Chester, the coast of North Wales also came under strong Irish-Norse influence as is shown by names like 'Great Orme's Head'. This may account for some of the similarities between the accents of Chester, Liverpool and North Wales that are still apparent today.

**Northwest Roots** is published by Business Education Publishers Ltd, Sunderland. Price £7.95

**Above:** The Vikings landed at Formby (Photograph: Patrick Trollope) **Opposite:** This Viking long house built by Kevin Taylor

## **VIKING MERSEY**

Scandinavian Wirral, West Lancashire and Chester



by Stephen Harding

### **Viking Mersey: Scandinavian Wirral, West Lancashire and Chester. Stephen Harding**

AROUND 1,100 years ago the Viking invasion of the Mersey region began. The Vikings left behind place names like Kirkby, West Kirkby, Meols, Croxteth and Thingwall, all of which can also be found – as Kirkjubaer, Vestri Kirkjubaer, Melar, Kroksstaor and Thingvellir in another region they were invading: Iceland. People with Viking names like Mabilla Raynaldesdoghter and Richard Hondesson were still filling in their rent books as late as 1398. This book is about these people in peace and war, their customs, traditions, pastimes, their paganism and the Christianity, their government at the Things and their financial centre at Chester. It also describes how modern genetic methods are being used to probe for evidence of descendants of these invaders in the modern day population. Their legacy remains in other surprising ways the names of football teams like Tranmere Rovers, Burscough and Skelmersdale United, and possibly even Everton, all have Viking connections. Viking Mersey is written by Stephen Harding and is a Countrywise Publication, Wirral UK 2002, costing £10. ISBN 1901231348