

# Family



A mismatched pair of dress fasteners worn by a Viking woman buried at Adwick-le-Street in South Yorkshire. Doncaster Heritage Service, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council. DONMG 2001.6



Images of male violence and brutal rule dominate popular visions of the Viking Age. Stereotypes of savage Norsemen attacking and raiding have, however, overplayed the part of the warriors and underrated the roles of women and children in the conquest.

Written evidence and archaeological finds from Torksey Viking camp indicate that Viking women stayed there. A Scandinavian trefoil brooch found at Torksey would have been worn by a woman who accompanied her husband as he invaded England. These brooches served as functional items to pin parts of a dress together. They were also decorative accessories, the more finely constructed displaying the wearer's wealth and prestige. In Danelaw settlements, brooches crafted in the Scandinavian style would be important markers of the wearer's Scandinavian identity and its spiritual implications. A Viking woman was buried at Adwick-le-Street wearing characteristic Scandinavian oval brooches.

Overall women and children comprised approximately 20% of the burials at Repton Viking camp. In one instance a middle-aged Scandinavian woman was buried there within a generation of the arrival of the Great Army. This shows that she either arrived with the army or came over later to join them and died near Repton. This

Stereotypical image of Viking warriors in EM Wilmot-Buxton, *Told by the Northmen* (London 1908). Eiríkur Benedikz Icelandic Collection Juvenile PZ8.1.W4



Viking women in WG Collingwood, *A söguöldum* (Reykjavík 1969). Eiríkur Benedikz Icelandic Collection DL3124.C6

burial is evidence of immigration by Scandinavian families to England at this time.

Women and family played a vital part in the continuation and preservation of Viking cultural identity in foreign settlements.

Women did not merely act as the bearers of children and keepers of the homestead,

but by transmitting the Vikings' native language and life skills to their offspring, they could ensure cultural continuance. Their presence sustained the Viking settlement in England.

