



Wirral SETS SAIL

There's no doubting the beauty of this part of our county. We meet some of the people celebrating its heritage

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Wirral's connection with water is undeniable. The communities in this beautiful area are indelibly linked with the sea, river and estuary surrounding it. You only have to glance at places like West Kirby to realise this. The picturesque seafront, with views towards Hilbre Island, is a popular spot for a sunny day stroll. You will often find Marine Lake populated with watersports enthusiasts, including those in training for some of the top competitions organised and hosted by West Kirby Sailing Club. Everything from the prestigious Wilson Trophy to the British University Sailing Association's National Team Racing Championships pull in visitors from across the country to this coastal town.

It would have been a different scene more than 1,000 years ago when the Vikings journeyed across the Irish Sea to this coastline after they were given permission to settle here by King Alfred the Great.

Professor Stephen Harding has been researching the Wirral's Viking history for many years. It was discovering the



Top: Enjoying the water at West Kirby Sailing Club

Above: I see no ships: Henry Lewis and his granddaughter Molly Crabtree get a closer view of the boats from West Kirby Promenade

Norse roots of his favourite football team, Tranmere Rovers, that first sparked his interest. Since then he has become a leading authority on the area's links with the Vikings with several published books and studies examining the Viking roots of Wirral and today's descendants of those families.

He said: 'The Vikings left Ireland following a large battle. King Alfred granted them permission to settle in this area on very low quality land which would have been between what is now



the lighthouse at Lingham, Hoylake, West Kirby and Thurstaston. This was in AD 902.

‘They spread out as far south as Chester and across the Mersey to south west Lancashire to join another large group. But what people don’t realise is that, until raids in Chester, they set up a large community and settled peacefully for several years. People don’t think of the Vikings in this way.’

Many signs of their existence remain, including several of the place names. Thingwall, for example, is a name derived from the Vikings meaning assembly field or parliament meeting place.

A special 13-mile walk, held annually on St Olave’s Day, will visit some of the area’s important Viking landmarks including St Mary and St Helen Church in Neston, St Bridget’s Parish Church in West Kirby and finishing at St Olave’s

Above: Enjoying a day on West Kirby beach are Daniel, Joshua, Adam and Hannah Roden from Bebington
Right: Aubergine cafe in Crescent Walk



Church building in Chester.

Professor Harding is now working on plans to bring the world’s largest replica of a Viking longship to Wirral next year. There will be 200 volunteer oarsmen and women needed to row the 35 metre Dragon Harald Fairhair vessel, being built for Norwegian businessman Sigurd Aase, along the path the Vikings would

once have taken from Scandinavia to the UK. It will sail down the Mersey, including stopping off at Wallasey and at the Albert Dock.

Professor Harding, originally from Wallasey but now living in Nottingham, said: ‘It’s very possible that when the Vikings came into Wirral they would have arrived in something similar to this

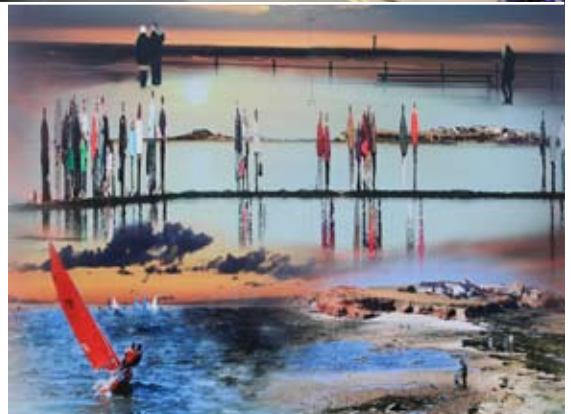


Above left: Professor Stephen Harding is an expert on Wirral's Viking heritage

Above right: The Crescent
Left: The Liverpool University sailing team: Milly Pudney, Michael Entwistle, Tessa Hamer, Jenny Kasper, Will Shepherd and Sarah Moulder

Right: A Breath of Fresh Air: a mural designed and compiled by Barbara Singleton is displayed at Le Bizz cards shop in Banks Road

Below: South Parade and Marina



boat. This version was started being built two years ago.

'What an amazing sight it will be to see it coming into the coast. We will need a lot of people to help make it happen. Training will be given at different boating clubs for people who are interested. It's very exciting to be working on something like this and I

cannot wait to see it.'

Showcasing the spectacular Wirral scenery is mixed media artist and jewellery maker, Jo Smith. The beautiful seascapes that are such an integral part of this area are captured by the 44-year-old, who runs the Seagrass Studio Gallery in Hoylake. She takes much of her inspiration from her daily walks on

the beach at West Kirby.

Jo, who also works as an art therapist, has exhibited widely and her work has been sold across Europe. She also uses items collected on the local beaches to create beautiful art pieces, jewellery and interiors items.

Jo, a member of the Deeside Arts Group, said: 'There is no greater inspiration than the scenery and views we have here in Wirral. I feel an incredible connection to this landscape and I do think this comes out in my work. It makes me feel wonderful. Everything here makes me feel alive and I feel very lucky to call this my home.'

'The art therapy, for me, was also a way of giving back. When my mother, Pat, died when I was younger it was something I took comfort from. It also feels selfish to just indulge your passion so trying to help others through art is very important and something I feel



Above: West Kirby beach
Left: West Kirby railway station



very proud of.'

Moving back to Wirral was a delight for actress Claire Hackett. The 48-year-old, originally from Moreton but now living in West Kirby, had spent several years living and working as an actress in

London and New Zealand. She has trod the boards in the West End and appeared on television with big name actors including Kenneth Branagh, David Suchet and Sheila Hancock but now she loves being back home in West Kirby.

She has launched a craft market in Neston to showcase the talents of creative people from Wirral and its surrounding areas. There are around 20 stalls at each event, with the next one being held on June 2nd at Neston Town Hall.

Claire, who also runs Fairangel Events, said: 'I have always been a bit of a creative person. I love photography and have dabbled in it as a hobby. I wanted a local event that was fun and dynamic and to enable artists and crafters to sell their work as well as get a wider audience locally.'

'More and more people sell their work on the internet but these craft fairs are the ideal opportunity to meet people and to spread the word about your work. There are some fantastic people creating some incredible products here in Wirral and I think it's important we celebrate what we have to offer.'

All aboard



Fiona Hanik of Wirral Sports Development Unit at West Kirby Marina with Simon Lock and Alfie Alleyne aboard their boat

Special events are being organised by Wirral Sports Development Unit at West Kirby Marina over the summer.

A sandcastle competition will be held on June 16th in conjunction with Liverpool Young Architects and Wirral Borough Council. Breeze Bike Rides, for ladies only, have been developed as part of a national project to encourage women to go on a social bike ride. There will also be health walks held every Wednesday. The route will go around Marine Lake as well as the surrounding areas. Help will also be needed to co-ordinate the events. Fiona Hanik, active families' development officer for the sports development unit which works to promote opportunities for people to take part in physical activity, said: 'We are trying to get a friends group set up which will assist with environmental tasks around the sailing centre and marine lake.'

'The group will also help with the upkeep of the sailing centre and will also look at getting funding for other groups to use the marine lake.'

Anybody wishing to join the group is asked to contact Fiona at fionahani1@wirral.gov.uk.



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