

Flashback



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Modern day Vikings

How experts are tracing descendants

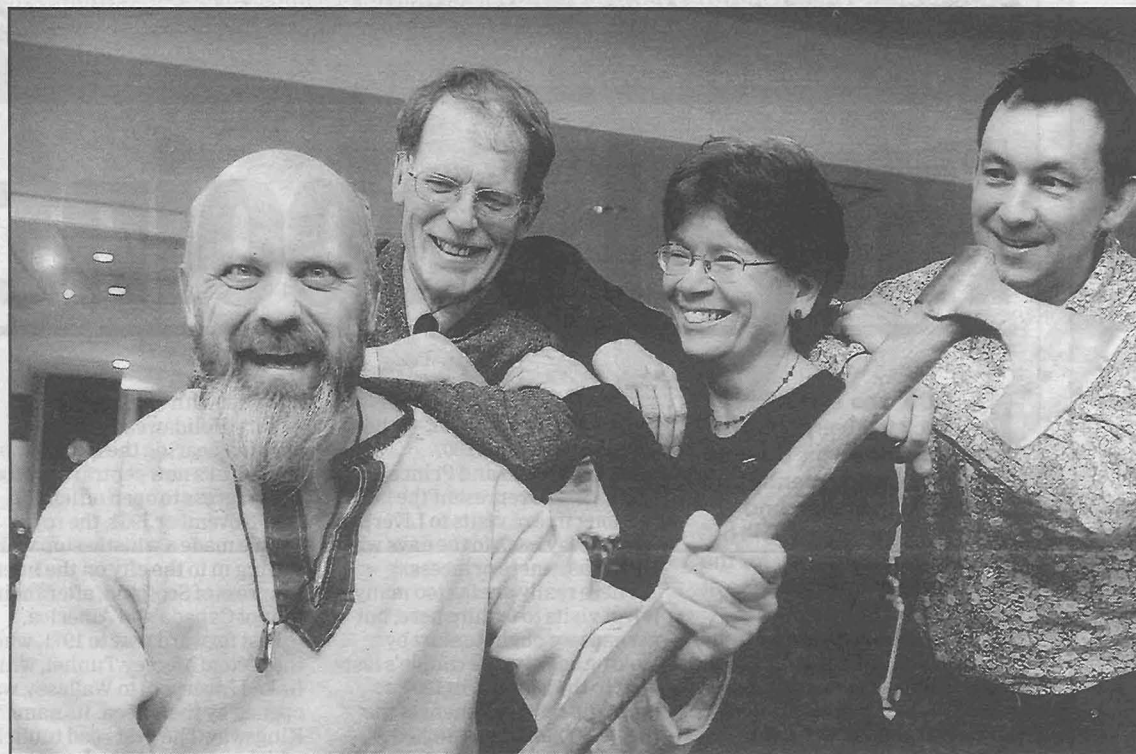
THEY came to raid and settle in the North West... and they are still here!

A remarkable study about our Viking ancestors has revealed that many of their genetic descendants are alive and well, and living in Wirral and West Lancashire.

A collaborative study between the Universities of Leicester and Nottingham has exploited the connection between surnames and DNA to reveal the links between the Vikings and people living in the region today.

Many of the place-names in Wirral and West Lancashire, such as Toxteth, Tranmere and Formby, are of Norse origin. This reflects the presence of Norse Vikings who arrived in the region after being expelled from Dublin in 902 AD. These two regions possess the only definite English examples of the place-name Thingwall – which derives from an old Norse name meaning “Assembly Field” and indicating an established settlement with its own regular meeting-place.

One of the leaders of the project, Professor Stephen Harding, from Nottingham University, said: “The intensity and distribution of minor place-name elements attests to the

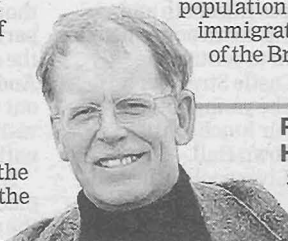


REAL LIFE VIKING: Kevin Taylo, who has Viking blood, with (Left to right) Prof Stephen Harding, Prof Judith Jesch and Mark Jobling at the publication of the research

Picture: Jason Roberts jr271107v

persistence of a Scandinavian dialect region were likely to be obscured by population growth, including immigration from other parts of the British Isles over the

The results of the study, revealed on Tuesday at a special conference in Knowsley, found that although Viking traces in the genes of the population in the



PROFESSOR HARDING:
Study into our Viking past

last thousand years, the research team had discovered a way to solve the problem.

The team collected samples of men who carried surnames found in early local documents. One list contained the names of men who had promised to contribute to the stipend of the priest of the altar of Our Lady at Ormskirk in 1366; another recorded

the names of all those households paying taxes in Wirral in the reign of Henry VIII. Surnames derived from local place-names were also included.

Genetic analysis of these men focused on the Y chromosome, which, like a surname, is passed down from father to son. Surnames provide a link to the past, so the Y chromosomes of men with old local surnames might give a genetic picture of what the population was like, closer to Viking times.

When such samples of men were compared with samples based only on the birthplace of the paternal grandfather, they were found to carry a much higher proportion of Norse ancestry. In fact, the population carries about 50% male Norse ancestry – about the same as modern Orkney, confirming the belief the region was once heavily populated by Scandinavian settlers.

The team plans further studies of the rest of Lancashire, as well as North Yorkshire and Cumbria, in the hope of mapping the genetic contributions of Vikings in more detail.

The paper which reveals the West Lancashire and Wirral findings has just been published by the leading scientific journal *Molecular Biology and Evolution*:

<http://mbe.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/msm255?ijkey=jUXWdH8qRj9j6mF&keytype=ref>

The study is an example of the ‘deep origins’ genealogical research which has now been made possible by advances in DNA analysis and which will be the subject of a future column.