

The Vikings in Cleveland

Edited by Heather O'Donoghue
and Pragma Vohra



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Introduction

Pragya Vohra

*a vewe the like whereof I never sawe or think
that any travaillor hath seene any comparable...*

– Cottonian MS, c. 1604

Roseberry Topping, a volcano-shaped outlier of the Cleveland hills, with its distinctive half-cone summit, has long been a symbol of Cleveland. Visible for miles in the surrounding countryside, it dominates the landscape of Cleveland, both in reality and in perception. It is easy to imagine Viking sailors coming up the River Tees navigating by this unique feature. It is also easy to see how this hill – ‘mountain’ according to some local people – became the focal point for an entire region and its peoples, for both established communities and newcomers, as it continues to be today (*fig. 1*).

About the Project

Roseberry Topping has also become the focus for the North East team of the ‘Languages, Myths and Finds Project’, a joint universities project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, investigating the legacy of Scandinavian settlement in communities around Britain and Ireland. More information about the project is available from our website: www.languagesmythsfinds.ac.uk. The team of academics and doctoral students is led by Dr. Heather O’Donoghue, an academic specialising in Old Norse-Icelandic literature and herself a Teesside native, and Dr. Pragya Vohra, an Early Career Researcher, working on social dynamics and migration in the Viking Age. The four doctoral students in our team are: Nik Gunn, who works on language contact in the Viking Age, Jane Harrison, an archaeologist working on Scandinavian settlements in the North Atlantic region, Eleanor Rye, who investigates



Fig. 1. Roseberry Topping from Newton-under-Roseberry.

Photo by Pragya Vohra.

the Scandinavian impact on place-names, and Jo Shortt Butler, who works on medieval Icelandic saga literature. The aims of our project were twofold: to engage with the history of Viking Age Scandinavian settlement in the British Isles and to investigate how this history translated into the present-day experiences of the people in these areas. The research and activities of our team, based in the north east of England, focussed on Cleveland and the Tees Valley.

Our rationale behind choosing to concentrate on the Viking Age history of Cleveland grew out of two factors. The first factor was Roseberry Topping itself. With its characteristic shape, its dominance of the surrounding landscape – a landscape dotted with other Viking place-names – and the probable association of its name with the Norse god Óðinn (Odin), Roseberry Topping seemed to be a natural focal point from which to begin looking at the Viking Age history of Cleveland and the Tees Valley. The second factor hinged on the fact that, despite evidence of Viking Age Scandinavian settlement in the area, Cleveland and the Tees Valley appear to have gone unrecognised both in academic histories as well as in the popular imagination.

Especially when compared to the area around York, the Viking Age history of this region appears rather marginalised. Despite being a natural conduit into the heart of northern England, the River Tees has been conceived of as a boundary rather than a region. Traditional maps showing the boundaries of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms represent the River Tees as the boundary between the Northumbrian kingdoms of Bernicia, with its seat of power at Bamburgh, and Deira, with its seat of power at York. On maps of Viking Age Britain, it often also notionally forms the northern boundary of the Danelaw, the anomalous area ruled and settled by the Vikings. However, like the other major rivers of England, the River Tees was also the locus of settlement in the region, and for the Vikings in particular, an excellent maritime pathway. It was, therefore, both imperative and exciting to attempt to recover the history of Cleveland and the Tees Valley in the Viking Age.

We decided that our task would be to undertake preliminary investigations into aspects of the Viking Age history of the area, as well as to work with local partners, in an effort to raise the profile of this history. Individual research projects were carried out by members of the team, and were centred on their specialisms. These were brought together in discussion and debate, finally leading up to a week-long research field trip. As part of this field trip, we undertook research on the ground across Cleveland and the Tees Valley, visiting landscapes and places of significance, and studying finds in detail. We created and distributed a short survey in an attempt to access local perceptions about the Vikings in Cleveland. The results of this survey have ultimately fed into the final section of this booklet. We also met with local partners and presented our findings to the local community at the Great Ayton Discovery Centre. This event provided us with the opportunity to speak to local history experts and members of the public, to share in their knowledge and experience, and to engage them with the Vikings. This booklet is an endeavour to further disseminate our exciting research into the Viking Age history of Cleveland and the Tees Valley.

The Viking Age in England

... and never before has such terror appeared in Britain...

– Alcuin of York to Æthelred,
King of Northumbria, AD 793

Referred to here as a ‘terror’, the Vikings first appeared in the historical record in the eighth century with some of the earliest recorded raids on monasteries in Lindisfarne (AD 793) and Iona (AD 794). These raids on the British Isles crystallised the image of the Vikings as bloodthirsty warriors, looters and plunderers, which persisted and has stayed with us to the present day. Even the word ‘viking’, despite its obscured roots, appears to refer to pirates and raiders. These people from Scandinavia were, however, more than just raiders. They were excellent seafarers and used their

maritime prowess not only to raid, but also to trade with most of Europe and parts of Asia; to explore the North Atlantic, as far as North America; and to establish colonies and settle in many of the places they encountered.

After an initial phase of sporadic raids in England from c. AD 789–850, the Vikings appeared on the shores of England in AD 865 as a large group of warriors, referred to in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as the *micel here* ('great army'). This group of warriors landed in East Anglia and proceeded to range across England, conquering land (York in AD 866) and collecting tribute (Mercia in AD 867). While the local Anglo-Saxon rulers resisted, not all were able to hold out against this force. In AD 871, reinforcements arrived from Scandinavia. Although the Vikings failed to defeat the kings of Wessex at the Battle of Ashdown (AD 871), they did continue to exercise their control over Northumbria, East Anglia and parts of the Midlands. With the defeat of Mercia in AD 874, the Vikings controlled most of the territory along the eastern shore of England. Splitting into two groups in AD 874, half the *micel here* under their leader Halfdan moved north, extending their control along the Tyne and foraying into Scotland, while the other half under Guthrum moved south, trying once again to conquer Wessex. In AD 876, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that the Vikings 'proceeded to plough and support themselves' in Northumbria, providing us with the earliest written reference to Scandinavian settlement on the island.

King Alfred's victory over Guthrum at the Battle of Edington in AD 878 brought this second phase of Viking activity to an end and saw the establishment of the Danelaw. Viking control was established over the eastern half of England, stretching from the Thames in the south to Northumbria in the north. Settlers from Scandinavia, many with their families in tow, established themselves across the Danelaw. This settlement by the Vikings resulted in the development of an assimilated Anglo-Scandinavian culture in the area covered by the Danelaw, reflected in linguistic exchanges, new forms of artefacts, fashions and sculpture, and even in new place-names.

There were further Viking raids in the latter half of the ninth century and they continued into the tenth century, affecting both Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and the Danelaw. These were dealt with by local kings using a combination of tactics including new fortifications, reorganised armies, and a system of tribute payments. The expulsion of the Viking rulers of Dublin in AD 902 brought the Hiberno-Norse – the group of Vikings who had earlier settled in Ireland – into northern England. By the tenth century, the Anglo-Saxon dynasty stemming from King Alfred had reconquered large parts of the Danelaw. However, the assimilated Anglo-Scandinavian communities settled in the region continued to thrive. The final phase of Viking activity in England began in the early eleventh century with the invasion of the Danish king, Sveinn Hákonarson and his son, Knútr (Canute), in AD 1013. By AD 1016, Knútr had completed his conquest of England and by AD 1027, England was part of his Anglo-Scandinavian Empire, including Denmark, Norway and parts of Sweden. Knútr's

successors ruled in England until AD 1042, when Edward the Confessor was reinstated, bringing an Anglo-Saxon king back to the throne and setting the stage for the Norman conquest in AD 1066.



Fig. 2. Artist's impression of Roseberry Topping.

Illustration by Jo Shortt Butler.

The Viking Legacy in Cleveland

As is the case with most Viking Age history, the written record of Viking activity is limited. Most textual sources from the period are Anglo-Saxon, written from the perspective of the enemies and victims of the Vikings, or come from later centuries. As a consequence, uncovering Viking Age history requires historians to look beyond the text: to archaeological excavations, to place-name evidence, to analysis of language and dialect, and even to stories, myths and legends. Place-names, like Whitby ('white village' or 'Hvíti's village'), provide indications of where the Vikings settled. Through archaeological finds, we get an idea of how these settlers lived, their occupations and leisure. Burials, like the Kildale burials, show how they died and the objects they considered important enough to be buried with. The influence of Old Norse, the language spoken by the Vikings, is evident in English in the form of widespread words like 'egg' and 'sister', but also in dialect words surviving in the parts of the areas they settled. Scenes carved on stone crosses and hogback stones help us access the myths, legends and beliefs that they may have brought with them, and how these may have changed, whilst the legends associated with places like Roseberry Topping can reflect changing perceptions of 'the Vikings' by later inhabitants of the area.

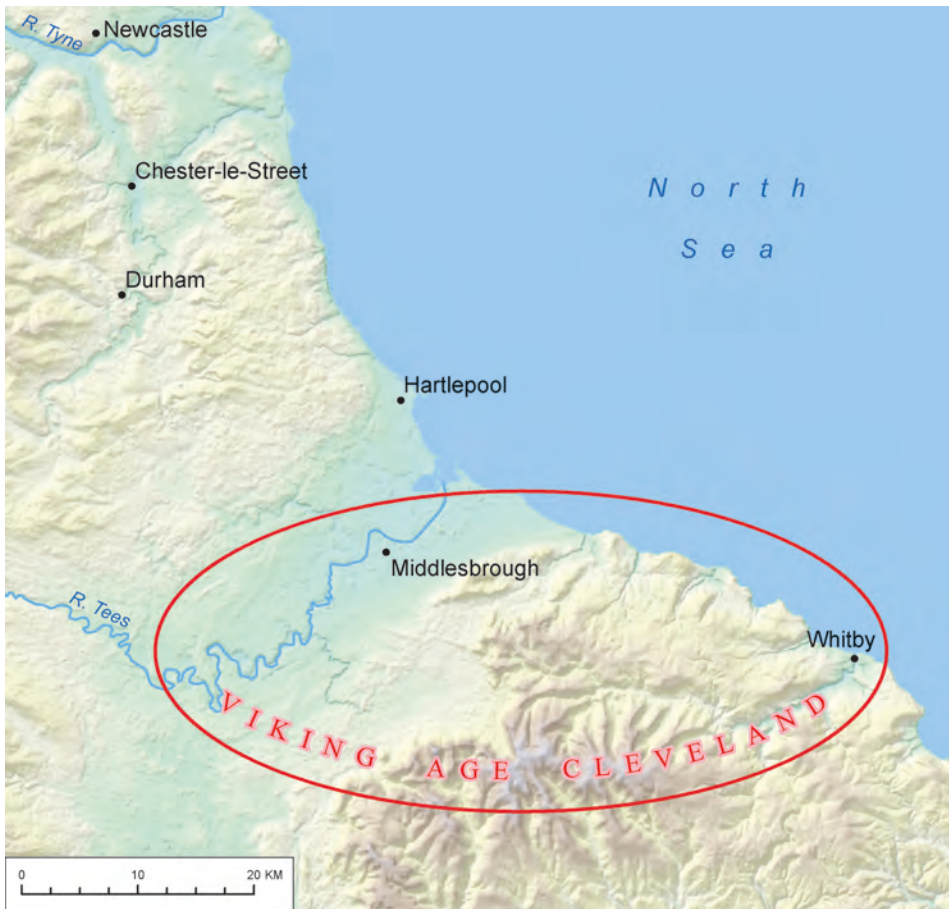
In this project, our team have used all these methods to try and uncover the Viking Age history of Cleveland and the Tees Valley. For this project, we are focussing

our search on what we have called the ‘Cleveland circle’ (*Map 1*), an historical area from the lower Tees Valley in the north to the edges of the North York Moors in the south. We have engaged with archaeological evidence, place-names, dialects, and myths and legends to try and understand the Vikings who settled here. Traditionally viewed as the northern fringe of the Danelaw, this area has been largely neglected in the wider scholarship of the Viking Age in England. It is our endeavour in this booklet to redress this imbalance: to reconsider our notions of boundaries, to reevaluate the importance of the riverine system that runs through the heart of the area, and to give voice to the Vikings in Cleveland.

Timeline of the Viking Age in the British Isles

- AD 789 – First recorded Viking attack in Dorset
- AD 793 – Viking raid on the monastery at Lindisfarne
- c. AD 795 – Viking raid on the monastery at Iona; raids on Ireland begin
- AD 802, 806 – Further Viking attacks on Iona
- AD 835 – Viking raid on the Isle of Sheppey, first major raid in the south
- AD 851 – First Viking raid on Wales recorded in the Welsh chronicles *Annales Cambriae*; Æthelstan, son of the king of Wessex, defeats a Viking fleet in battle off Sandwich; Æthelwulf of Mercia killed by Vikings
- c. AD 841 – Viking *longphort* established at Dublin
- AD 865 – Viking *micel here* ('great army') arrives in East Anglia
- AD 866 – Viking conquest of York
- AD 869 – Edmund, king of East Anglia, martyred by the Vikings
- AD 870 – Vikings destroy Dumbarton, stronghold of the British kings of Strathclyde
- AD 871 – Viking reinforcements ('summer army') arrive; battles with kings of Wessex
- AD 874 – Vikings conquer the kingdom of Mercia; 'great army' splits – Halfdan's army goes north to Northumbria; Guthrum's army goes south to East Anglia
- AD 877 – Welsh king Rhodri Mawr defeated by the Vikings

- AD 878 – Wessex overrun by Vikings; King Alfred hides in Athelney; Vikings defeated at Battle of Edington
- AD 886 – King Alfred's treaty with Guthrum; Danelaw established
- AD 899 – Anglo-Saxon reconquest of Danelaw begins under King Alfred's son, Edward the Elder
- AD 902 – Viking rulers of Dublin expelled; seek shelter in York
- AD 918 – Æthelflæd, 'Lady of the Mercians', dies during reconquest
- AD 919 – Vikings defeat an alliance of northern Irish kings
- AD 937 – Battle of Brunanburh; Æthelstan declared king of all England
- AD 954 – Eiríkr Haraldsson blóðøx (Erik Bloodaxe), last Viking king in England, forced out of York
- AD 973 – Edgar crowned king of England at Bath
- AD 983 – Sveinn Hákonarson becomes King of Denmark
- AD 991 – Æthelred the Unready pays tribute to stop Viking attacks
- AD 1002 – Scandinavian settlers killed in St. Brice's Day massacre ordered by Æthelred
- AD 1013 – Sveinn Hákonarson and his son, Knútr (Canute), invade England; Æthelred flees to Normandy
- AD 1016 – Knútr conquers all England
- AD 1028 – Knútr conquers Norway; Anglo-Scandinavian empire established
- AD 1042 – Edward the Confessor reinstated with Scandinavian support
- AD 1066 – Haraldr harðráði (Harald Hardrada), king of Norway, killed at Stamford Bridge during attempted invasion of England; Harold Godwinsson, English king, defeated and killed at Hastings by the forces of William, Duke of Normandy; traditional end date of Viking Age in Britain.



Map 1. 'The Cleveland circle'.
Map by Michael Athanson.

CHAPTER 1

Scandinavian Settlement in Cleveland

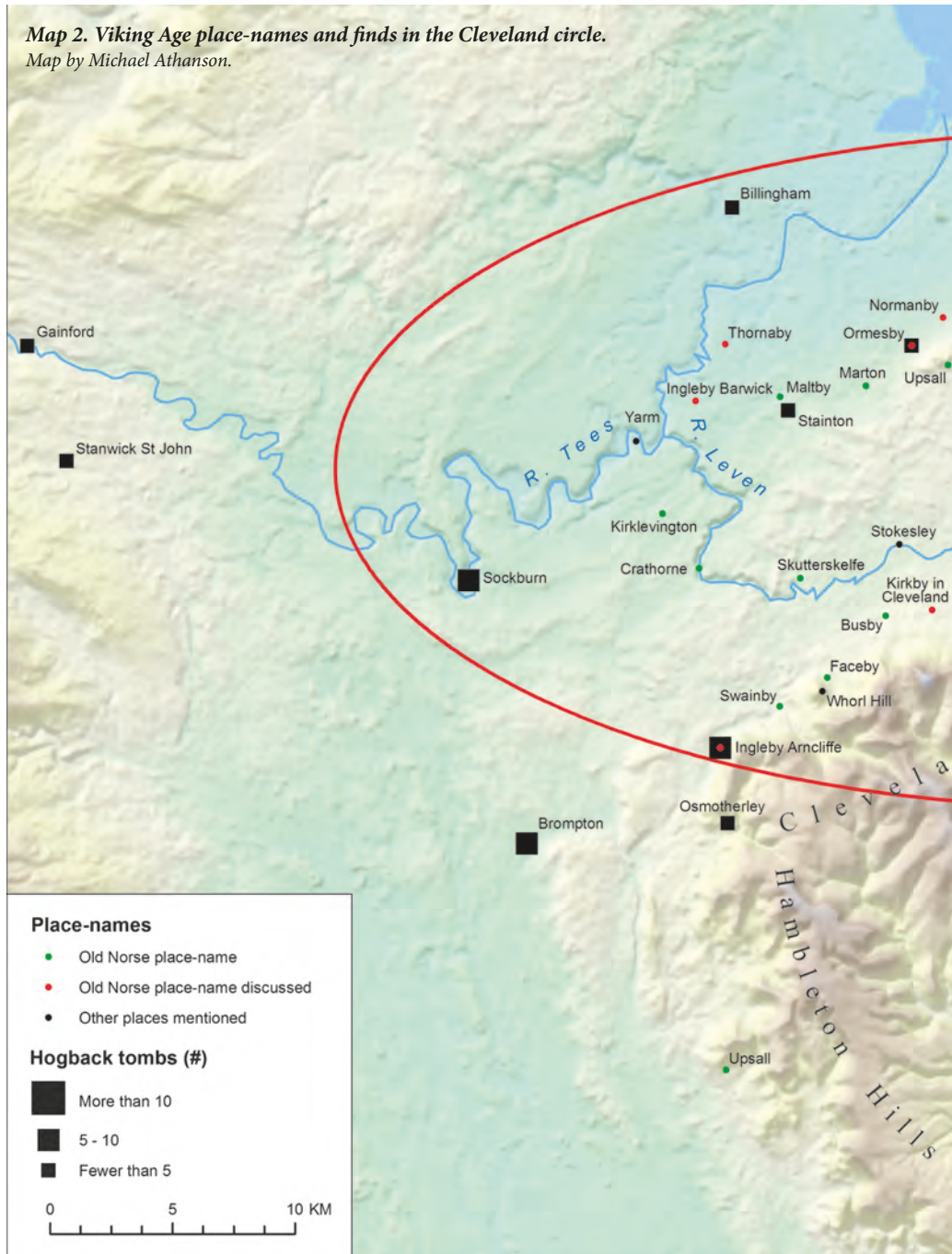
Jane Harrison

Scandinavians raided the north east of England from the late eighth century, and from AD 876 they began to settle, including in the Cleveland area. Many came from modern Denmark, but Cleveland's geographical position meant fighters and settlers also arrived from Norway, across from Ireland via the north west, perhaps even from Orkney (*Map 1*). People, trade and ideas moved both ways between Cleveland and these areas throughout the period.

There were good landing places on the coast at places like Whitby and Staithes, boats were able to reach a considerable distance up the River Tees and there were convenient land-passes over the Pennines into the Eden Valley. Despite this well-connected location, Cleveland was on the fringes of the major power centres during a time of considerable social and political upheaval. North of the Tees, the Community of St Cuthbert, based in Chester-le-Street and then Durham, held a great deal of land and authority. York, the centre of the southern Northumbrian kingdom, was some way south and over the moors – fought over by the English kings and various groups of Scandinavians. Invigorated by trade and new settlement, Cleveland established its own distinctive local identity, not totally under York or the ecclesiastical authority to the north.

What can we see of that period in the area today? Place-names, landscape, burials and especially carved stone sculpture help us reveal the Scandinavian settlement.

Map 2. Viking Age place-names and finds in the Cleveland circle.
 Map by Michael Athanson.





Scandinavian place-names are found clustered around bays on the coast, along the Tees and on the skirts of the hills (*Map 2*). So the incomers had taken over or founded farms and settlements in those areas best suited to the ways of living they knew. Their economy was flexible and broad-based: mixed agriculture, hunting and fishing, combined with trading and craft work. And as fighting continued, in particular to the south, some may have supplemented their living with mercenary work. The landscape of Cleveland suited this approach. Farmers on the hill-skirts used higher, rough land and low-lying, wetter ground for grazing animals; the better land on the gentle slopes in-between for crops. Those settlers living on the coast, for example around Runswick Bay, were especially well-placed to complement farming with trade as well as fishing. The settlements along the rivers also opened the area for trade; craftsmen could find jet on the coast, building stone and iron in the hills, including on Roseberry Topping. Airey Holme farm, for example, in the foothills to the south of Roseberry Topping, was perfectly placed, with good views and easy access to a range of farming land, sheltered, and close to land routes leading to rivers (*fig. 3*).

Scandinavians seemed to have avoided the flatter plains, perhaps simply because they preferred to see – and be seen – better. But hilly landscapes were a part of their culture. Unusual natural hills, like Freebrough Hill, and visually-dominant built mounds, such as prehistoric burial mounds, were used by communities in Scandinavia as important meeting places and ways of organising the landscape. Many burial



Fig. 3. Airey Holme farm from Roseberry Topping.

Photo by Jane Harrison.



Fig. 4. Artist's impression of Airey Holme farm.

Illustration by Jo Shortt Butler.

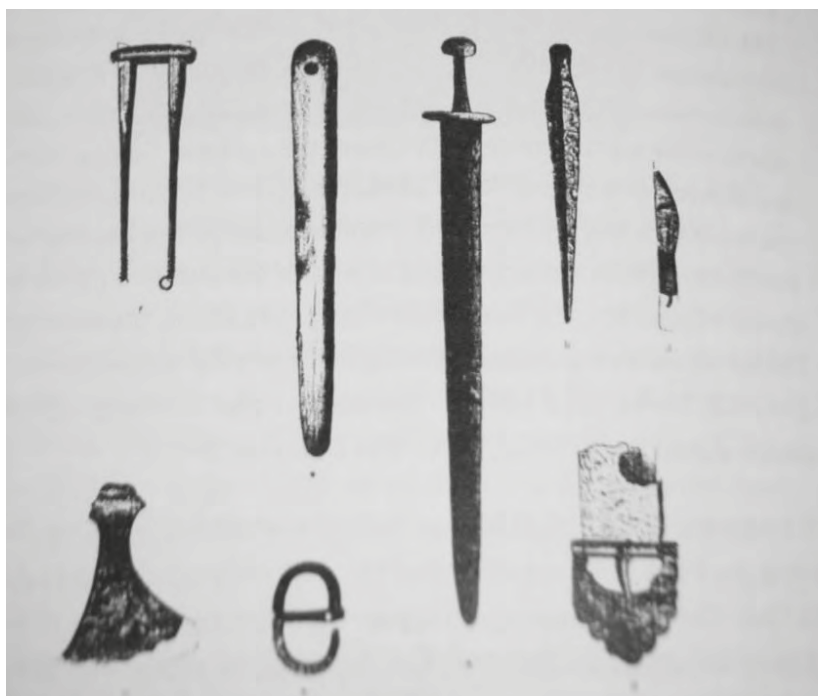


Fig. 5. Finds from the Kildale burial.

Photo by Jane Harrison.

mounds scatter the moors of Eston and the Cleveland hills. So farms like Airey Holme were not only well-located economically but sited amongst hills and near monuments that probably had a powerful resonance with the settlers (*fig. 4*).

The Scandinavians arriving in the late ninth century were pagans. But, like most colonists, they were practical and exploited useful local systems; such local church organisation as had survived the changes seems to have been taken over, for example at Sockburn and Lastingham. New lords would use the influence of the churches to bolster their standing. Only one group of apparently pagan burials has been found in Cleveland: at Kildale (*fig. 5*). Seven or eight individuals were buried under the church with weapons and traders' weighing scales. Kildale must have been a significant settlement, perhaps a major farm linked to a local trade route. Yet no characteristically Scandinavian buildings have been discovered in Cleveland. Maybe such houses will be found, but perhaps settlers simply adopted local building styles, which were not unfamiliar to them.

These colonist farmers, craftsmen and traders needed to meet to discuss their shared concerns and settle disputes. The meetings, usually dominated by a local lord, would take place at visually prominent longhouse halls, on the striking hill-tops or by mounds. Upsall ('high hall' in Old Norse) on an outlier of Eston Moor, and Stanghow ('pole mound' in Old Norse) on a high spur north of the Cleveland Hills with extensive views, could be evidence of such meeting-places. Presumably these gatherings were one of the ways settlers integrated with locals.

There is other evidence suggesting that a network of local-level lords dominated the area, perhaps relatively independently from the power bases to the north and south. This evidence comes from sculpted stone and, in particular, the hogback monuments found in the area. Hogbacks date to the first half of the tenth century and are a distinctive element of Scandinavian settlement. They are long (up to 1.5 m), solid, carved stones with a profile recalling bow-sided Viking long-halls or even the shape of local hills. Although discovered in churches or churchyards, there is no proof that hogbacks covered graves and the carvings are not necessarily Christian. Some images are from Norse mythology and the most eye-catching elements are the end-beasts, often bears, chewing the ends of the roof-ridges (*fig. 6*). Not all hogbacks, however, have end-beasts (*fig. 7*). Crucially, hogbacks seem to originate in this area; there are no prototypes in Scandinavia and the majority of the monuments have been found here (*Map 2*). Large collections were found at Lythe, Sockburn, Ingleby Arncliffe, Crathorne and Brompton.

Only richer, more powerful locals could have employed masons, accessed suitable stone and had the confidence to commission such clear demonstrations of status. Hogbacks were signals of authority and proclaimed membership of the local elite: the hogback-creating group. The monuments would have harnessed the historic power of existing places by being located at church sites – often important early church sites



Fig. 6. Hogbacks with end-beasts from St Thomas's church in Brompton, North Yorkshire.
Photo by Jane Harrison.



Fig. 7. Hogbacks without end-beasts from Conyer's Chapel in Sockburn, Co. Durham.
Photo by Jane Harrison.

– like Lythe, Sockburn or Kirkdale. The stones’ hall shape and their end-beasts also evoked images of power; they were memorials of influential families. That so many were erected suggests that this was a competitive society. Perhaps the uncertainty and change provoked by new arrivals, combined with a lack of strong over-lordship, meant that people were also jostling for influence. The striking hogback sculptures helped to create a local identity; perhaps providing another – and uniquely ‘Cleveland’ – marker for meeting places.

CHAPTER 2

Scandinavian Place-Names in Cleveland

Eleanor Rye

*And in that year Healfdene shared out the land
of the Northumbrians and they were ploughing
and providing for themselves.*

– Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Manuscript A, AD 876

It is well known that Scandinavians settled in areas of northern and eastern England from the ninth century. These settlers spoke an early form of Old Norse (ON), the language from which the mainland Scandinavian languages and Icelandic developed. English has borrowed many words from the language of the settlers and the linguistic legacy of these Scandinavian settlers is also clearly visible in place-names from areas of Scandinavian settlement. Cleveland is no exception in this respect.

Roseberry Topping is one of the iconic sights of Cleveland, and seems a fitting place to begin this discussion of the Scandinavian place-names of Cleveland. The name is recorded in sources datable to the twelfth century in the forms *Othenesberg* and *Ohensberg* (fig. 8). These early forms suggest the name is either ON *Óðins berg* meaning ‘Odin’s mountain’ or a name incorporating the Scandinavian personal name Auðunn meaning ‘Auðunn’s mountain’. Intriguingly, the place-name *Onsbjerg* on the Danish island of Samsø, recorded as *Othensberg* in the fifteenth century, is also interpreted as meaning ‘Odin’s mountain’ and so confirms that the interpretation of the place-name as ‘Odin’s mountain’ is plausible. The modern form of the name results from



Fig. 8. Roseberry Topping from Airey Holme farm.

Photo by Jo Shortt Butler.

a misinterpretation of the form in the name of the nearby settlement, Newton-under-Roseberry, which would have been something like *Newton under Ounsbery* before the final 'r' of 'under' became attached to the beginning of *Ounsbery*. The final element 'Topping' occurs in other Yorkshire and Lancashire hill-names and is first recorded in the seventeenth-century form *Ounsbery* or *Rosebery Topping*.

The example of Roseberry Topping, whose modern form differs so greatly from the historic forms, demonstrates the necessity of referring to earlier forms of place-names when interpreting them. The place-name Commondale is a similar example. Commondale was recorded in the thirteenth century in the form *Colemandale*, demonstrating that the first element is the Irish personal name, Colmán. If we did not have earlier records of this name, we would not suspect from the modern form that this place-name reflected Scandinavian contacts across the Irish Sea.

One problem when investigating Scandinavian place-names is that it is not always possible to distinguish Old Norse words from Old English words in place-names because the two languages were so closely related. For example, Langbaugh, the name of the *wapentake* covering most of Cleveland, derives from either Old English *lang* or Old Norse *langr*, both of which mean 'long', and either Old English *be(o)rg* meaning 'mound' or 'hill' or Old Norse *berg* meaning 'hill' or 'mountain'. In this case,

the English and Scandinavian words are indistinguishable. However, in some cases, traces of specifically Scandinavian inflections (i.e. word endings giving information about grammatical case and number) survive, which show that the elements being used are Scandinavian rather than English. One example of such a place-name is Upleatham, which was recorded in Domesday Book as *Upelider*. In this case, the characteristically Scandinavian nominative/accusative plural ending ‘ir’ demonstrates that the second element is Old Norse *hlið* ‘a slope, a hillside’ rather than the Old English word *hlið* with the same meaning. The preservation of a Scandinavian inflection in this place-name is also direct evidence that Old Norse was spoken in Cleveland.

Happily, many place-name elements occurred in Old Norse but not in Old English and so we can be more certain about interpreting these names as Scandinavian. One such class of characteristically Scandinavian names are the many names ending in ‘by’, which derives from ON *bý(r)* meaning ‘farmstead’ or ‘village’. Some of these names refer to some feature of the settlement or its inhabitants. Thus, Kirkby-in-Cleveland (ON *Kirkjubý(r)*) means ‘farmstead or village with a church’ and Mickleby (ON *mikillbý(r)*) means ‘large farmstead or village’. Other names refer to the perceived ethnicity of the inhabitants: the three Ingleby names (ON *Englabý(r)*) mean ‘village of the English’ (**fig. 9**) whilst the names Danby (ON *Dana-bý(r)*) and Normanby (ON



Fig. 9. Roseberry Topping and Ingleby Greenhow in the landscape.

Photo by Pragya Vohra.

Norðmannabý(r)) might mean ‘village of the Danes’ and ‘village of the Norwegians’ respectively, although it is uncertain whether the terms ‘Dane’ and ‘Norwegian’ were applied as specifically in the Viking Age as they are today.



Fig. 10. Airey Holme farm in the present day.

Photo by Jane Harrison.

Many place-names ending with ON *bý(r)* have a personal name as the first element and so can tell us something about the personal names in use amongst the Anglo-Scandinavian population of the area. One such example is Ormesby, where the first element is the Scandinavian personal name Ormr, and another is Thornaby, where the eleventh-century forms *Turmozbi*, *Thormozbi* and *Tormozbi(a)* reveal the first element to be the Scandinavian personal name Þormóðr. Ellerby is also an interesting name in this respect as the eleventh-century forms *Elwordebu* and *Alwardebi* reveal the first element to be the Old English personal name Ælfweard. Ellerby is therefore a place-name which demonstrates interaction with the English-speaking population, either through the use of an Old English personal name in a Scandinavian-speaking milieu or by borrowing the place-name element *bý(r)* into English.

Other types of Scandinavian place-names in Cleveland can tell us about how the area was farmed and about industry in the period after Scandinavian settlement in the region. For instance, Airey Holme, recorded in AD 1086 as *Ergun*, seems to be ON

ærgum ‘at the shielings’. The element *ærgi* found in this place-name is, like Colmán in Comondale, further evidence of contact with Irish speakers; this element was borrowed by Scandinavians from Old Irish *áirge* and used as far north as the Faroes. Further indications of industry come from examples like the place-name Skinningrove, near Skelton. The final element of Skinningrove (*Scinergreve* AD 1273, *Skynnergryf* AD 1348) is generally interpreted as ON *gryfja* ‘a hole, a pit, a hollow’, which is probably also the origin of the Yorkshire dialect word *griff* ‘a deep, narrow valley’. The first element in the name could be an ON byname *Skinnari*, but could alternatively be the Scandinavian word for a tanner, *skinnari*, from which the byname is derived. If the latter suggestion is correct, the place-name can be interpreted as *skinnaragryfja* ‘the tanner’s pit or valley’.

This overview of Scandinavian place-names from Cleveland has discussed how these place-names can reveal aspects of Scandinavian settlement in the region: the contacts that Scandinavian settlers in Cleveland had with inhabitants from this and other areas of the British Isles; the economy; and the types of settlement that existed when Scandinavians settled in Cleveland. The names discussed here represent just a handful of the Scandinavian place-names from Cleveland and there are many more that are of Scandinavian origin in the area. If you are interested in finding out more about Scandinavian names in Cleveland – or indeed elsewhere – you can do this by using the books and website listed at the end of the booklet.

CHAPTER 3

The Dialect Heritage of Viking Age Cleveland

Nik Gunn

The Scandinavian settlers of the ninth to eleventh centuries spoke a language that is today known as Old Norse. This language is closely related to English, and together they are part of the Germanic family of languages, which includes German and the modern Scandinavian languages. Old Norse had a profound effect on the development of English, which was the dominant language in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England at the time of the Viking invasions. While today our language contains numerous French and Latin borrowings, many of our most common words are ultimately loaned from the Vikings, including ‘they’, ‘their’, ‘sky’, ‘egg’ and ‘skirt’. Old Norse influence on English was even more pronounced where Scandinavian settlements were densest, a region that stretches in an arc from Cumbria in the north-west, down through Yorkshire, and finishing in the south-east Midlands. Cleveland falls comfortably within this region that some linguists have called ‘the Great Scandinavian Belt’.

The arrival of Scandinavian newcomers in the Cleveland area undoubtedly caused some social tension, but the overall situation appears to have been one of cooperation between the English and Old Norse speaking populations. Old Norse speakers converted from paganism to Christianity and clearly became great patrons of their new religion, a fact that is reflected in the stone sculpture of the region. Some of this stonework even preserves the language of the eleventh-century Anglo-Scandinavians: for example, a fragment of a sundial kept in All Saints’ Church in Skelton-in-Cleveland has an inscription in Old Norse using Roman script, but might include an English loanword,



Fig. 11. & 12. The situation of Orm Gamalson's sundial in St Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale and detail of the inscription (below).

Photo by Pragya Vohra.

the relative pronoun *hwā* (meaning 'who' or 'what'). Alongside this inscription is some faded writing in the form of runes, the distinctive alphabet used by the ancient Germanic-speaking peoples that can be

found in much greater density – and in much better preservation – carved into stone monuments in mainland Scandinavia. Just outside the Cleveland region at St Gregory's Minster in Kirkdale, a man with a distinctively Old Norse name – Orm Gamalson – had a sundial made containing a fairly extensive inscription in English (**fig. 11 & 12**) at some point in the mid-eleventh century, suggesting that the Scandinavian settlers were by this point being fully assimilated into Anglo-Saxon society. The fact that a man with a Scandinavian name helped to restore an Anglo-Saxon minster when it was *æl tobrocan 7 tofalan* ('completely ruined and fallen') suggests that the incoming population was, by this point, becoming fully assimilated into eleventh-century Yorkshire. These carvings are just a small indication of the complexity of the speech communities that inhabited North Yorkshire during the Viking Age, but also suggest that the settlers were being assimilated by the mid-twelfth century. It is unfortunate that more has not come down to us intact. It is possible – perhaps even likely – that future archaeological finds containing Roman or runic script might expand this small corpus of Anglo-Scandinavian texts and give us greater insight into the languages used in the region.

English had probably completely reasserted itself as the main language of the area by the end of the twelfth century, although Old Norse certainly left its mark on the local dialect in the form of loanwords. These words would have soon lost any ‘exotic’ connotations that they may have once had and became absorbed fully into the lexicon of local people. Many of these old dialect words are to do with agriculture and the landscape, including *ings*, meaning ‘low-lying pasture’, *brant*, meaning ‘steep’, and *lay*, meaning ‘a scythe’. Some words can still be found today in the place-names of the region: for example, the word *beck*, meaning ‘a stream’, is found in the name of the village of Boosbeck. The majority of these Old Norse-derived words were best preserved by smaller farming communities, and it is plausible that they are a distant reflection of the Viking Age settlers’ own day-to-day economic concerns and their perceptions of the landscape around them. Unlike archaeological remains, which leave their physical mark on the landscape, or place-names, which are recorded in documents, dialect words are more ephemeral due to the fact that they tend to be used only in speech. It is likely that some – but not all – of these terms have fallen out of use in the last fifty years as the region has changed economically. But, luckily for students of the Viking Age, over the past two centuries, dialectologists have endeavoured to record these words for posterity.



Fig. 13 . Farm and pastureland in Cleveland.

Photo by Pragya Vohra.

The first of these was Reverend J.C. Atkinson, a nineteenth-century vicar, who took over Danby parish and became greatly interested in Cleveland's culture and history. He was particularly struck by his parishioners' speech, partly because he found them very difficult to understand, but also because he perceived a distinct Scandinavian element to their language. Atkinson diligently recorded the dialect words used by the local populace and published them in his 1868 book, *A Glossary of the Dialect of Cleveland*, noting in its introduction that there was a distinct likeness between 'no scanty portion of the Cleveland words and those in current use among the Danes, Norwegians and Swedes of our own day.' As mentioned above, the languages of the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons were very closely related, and occasionally Atkinson pushes for an Old Norse derivation for a word when an Old English one is just as plausible. To take one example, the Cleveland dialect word 'strong', which meant 'cold' or 'bitter', could have just as easily come from either Old Norse *strangr* or English *strang/strong*, but Atkinson gave greater emphasis to the former. Although Atkinson's observations were no doubt exaggerated to some extent by enthusiastic romanticism, his passion for philology was crucial in discerning a part of Cleveland's Viking past that may otherwise have been lost. Just under a century later in the 1950s, Professor Harold Orton conducted his *Survey of English Dialects*, a huge undertaking focussing on older rural speakers who were considered most likely to preserve archaic dialect forms. Two of the localities selected for study were Skelton-in-Cleveland and Stokesley, and he found that many of the words recorded by Atkinson remained in use, a selection of which are provided below. Orton's research comprehensively confirmed the presence of the 'Great Scandinavian Belt' in northern England, and Cleveland shared many of its Old Norse dialect words with places in the rest of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, and Cumbria. While 'beck', 'ket', and some of the other words provided may still be commonplace, others will have been forgotten; either way, they are a great testament to Cleveland's Viking heritage.

A selection of Cleveland dialect words derived from Old Norse

bait – ‘packed lunch,’ from *beita*, meaning ‘food.’

bairn – ‘child, baby,’ from Old Norse *barn* / Old English *bearn*.

beck – ‘a stream,’ from *bekkr*.

brant – ‘steep,’ from **brantr* (the asterisk indicates that this is an unattested word, but is reconstructed from the Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian form *brattr*).

cleg – ‘a fly,’ from *kleggi*.

garth – ‘a paddock or enclosure,’ from *garðr*.

gilt – ‘a young sow,’ from *gyltr*.

gimmer – ‘a young female lamb,’ from *gymbr*.

ket – meaning both ‘rubbish, garbage’ and ‘sweets,’ from *kjöt*.

ings – ‘low-lying land,’ from *eng*, meaning ‘meadow, pasture’.

lake – ‘to play,’ from *leika*.

laup – ‘to jump, leap,’ from *hlaupa*.

lea(-scythe) – ‘scythe,’ from Old Norse *lé*.

mawk – ‘a maggot,’ from *maðkr*.

sackless – ‘innocent’ or ‘simple,’ from *saklauss*, meaning ‘innocent.’

slape – ‘slippery’ or ‘cunning,’ from *sleipr*.

smoot(-hole) – ‘an opening in the bottom of a hedge or wall to allow sheep to pass through,’ possibly from Old Norse *smátta*, ‘a narrow lane.’

stee/sty – ‘ladder,’ from *stigi*, ‘a step or ladder.’

wath – ‘a ford,’ from *vað*.

CHAPTER 4

What do we think of the Vikings and what did the Vikings think of Cleveland?

Jo Shortt Butler

Despite evidence of Viking Age settlement in Cleveland, there are few written sources for Norse interaction with this specific part of the country. However, two moments stand out from the sagas of Norwegian kings, compiled in Iceland from the twelfth century onwards. The first, and most well-known, incident is one that records the appearance of King Haraldr harðráði of Norway (Harald Hardrada) off the coast of ‘Klíflönd’ in AD 1066 (*fig. 14*). Prior to his famous defeat at Stamford Bridge, Haraldr raided inland, subjugating the locals before returning to the coast and burning the settlement of Scarborough.

The next time we hear of such an attack is in c. AD 1151–2, led by King Eysteinn Haraldsson of Norway – a man who was, in fact, born in Scotland. Eysteinn raided down the east coast, starting in Orkney and then moving down to Aberdeen, Hartlepool, Whitby and possibly as far as Lincolnshire. The Latin chronicler Reginald of Coldingham (also known as Reginald of Durham) is our only native source for these events, and he only mentions a raid on the Farne Islands by Eysteinn. Whilst the Scandinavian sources claim that Eysteinn sought revenge for the defeat of his great-great-grandfather, Haraldr harðráði, the lack of information from British sources is suggestive of another motive: that of opportunity. Whilst England and its



Fig. 14. Coast near Whitby, North Yorkshire.

Photo by Pragya Vohra.

commentators were occupied largely with internal disputes, the east coast was easy pickings for raiding parties. During this period, the country was embroiled in a civil war known as the Anarchy and Eysteinn's raids took advantage of an England ill-prepared to deal with this sort of attack. The raids were spread out, just far enough apart that no defence could be mounted to keep pace with them, and thus in many ways they resemble the earliest Viking raids that so incensed Anglo-Saxon commentators in the eighth and ninth centuries.

The popular perception of Vikings is that they were pagan warriors, picking on the rich Christian settlements of the British Isles with impunity. Even though both Haraldr and Eysteinn were Christian kings of a Christian state, they were behaving in a manner comparable to the Vikings who raided Lindisfarne in AD 793. Yet these later raids have not impacted evidently upon local conceptions of what constitutes a Viking. Vikings are still bloodthirsty, *pagan* warriors. A key feature here appears to be the religious affiliation of the raiders and there is, therefore, an interesting parallel with perceptions of the Reformation-era plunder of priories, abbeys and Church property in the same region. With comparatively little Norse presence in the local archaeological record, it is easy to see how the destructive side of Scandinavian interaction has dominated locally and contributed to a lingering mistrust of all things Viking.



Fig. 15. Artist's sketch of an overturned coble, showing the Norse-style shallow bottom.
Illustration by Jo Shortt Butler.



Fig. 16. Freebrough Hill.
Photo by Pragya Vohra.

Balancing the shocking, violent nature of raids conducted by the Vikings with a broader explanation of the successful integration of Norse settlers is often still a challenge. On a trip to Lindisfarne, it was suggested to us that some local residents felt strongly that Lindisfarne with its Christian heritage was an inappropriate place to stage Viking re-enactments. The Viking presence in the museum's exhibitions was curiously subdued (although the gift shop was an entirely different matter!). Even the interactive display about runes unequivocally identified them as only Anglo-Saxon writing. In the modern chapel by the priory ruins, a letter from the diocese of Nidaros in Norway apologised profusely for the acts of the Vikings, referring to the brave martyrdom of the monks of Lindisfarne. Of course, such things are couched in terminology applicable to their setting, but it was still curious to read the local response: 'although we had not previously realised that we were still at war with Norway, peace was definitely declared'. Thus it was made abundantly clear how the impact of events such as the Viking raids can affect communities for centuries after.

I have been unable to make contact with locals who find the yearly re-enactments at Lindisfarne upsetting, but the re-enactment society involved generously shared their thoughts on the event. The answers that I received from Mark Talbot, publicity officer for 'The Vikings – Dark Age re-enactment society', emphasised the role of education. In the interests of such, they do not hesitate to portray 'the violence of murder and theft of [*sic*] an unarmed abbey', but seek equally to balance their re-enactment of this raid with one showing armed Anglo-Saxon resistance. Whilst parts of Lindisfarne's spiritual community have passively shown their objection – sometimes by singing hymns during the re-enactment – the re-enactors have found the experience overwhelmingly positive. Educating people about the nature of the society in which the Vikings operated (that 'the Vikings were perhaps violent but that they lived in a similarly violent world', in Talbot's words) is an essential part of tourist events like the re-enactments at Lindisfarne.

Talbot's assertion that there is a generational discrepancy in attitudes towards the Vikings is an interesting one, although the results from the handful of completed surveys that we received from the residents of Cleveland suggest a little more nuance in our primary area of interest. Most respondents claimed that attitudes towards the Vikings have changed during their lifetimes, and that the violent aspect of the Viking raider has been tempered by an awareness of their achievements in craft and art. Nevertheless, very few people thought that integrating or settling were high on the list of Viking priorities – seafaring was the predominant activity with which they were associated, although fishing also came very low (these results come from the instruction to list in order of importance eight activities associated with the Vikings: seafaring, raiding, settling, fishing, trading, farming, invading and integrating). One perceptive response suggested that in Cleveland people see the Vikings as people who came and then went, meaning that in local eyes the subdued presence of the area's

Scandinavian heritage is owed not to the successful integration of settlers, but to the successful defence of Anglo-Saxon lands by the natives.

This attitude is also borne out in local folklore. There is little to tell of the Vikings beyond references to raids such as those mentioned in church displays at Kirkdale and Lythe. The Vikings also appear in a story about raiders receiving hospitality up on the moors: they enjoyed the Yorkshire puddings they were served so much that they did not raid there anymore, but followed the locals' advice to head for Lancashire! Snippets of affiliation with the Norse settlers are also to be found in Goathland, south of the Esk and east of the moors, which has a dance troupe (called the Goathland Plow Stots) who claim their sword dance was brought by Norse settlers. Additionally there is the coble, a type of fishing boat used locally but also found further north and south along the east coast. It shows traces of Norse influence in its shallow-bottomed, high-bowed design (*fig. 15*), and there remains an awareness of this locally. It is unsurprising that such a connection would be maintained with pride given another aspect of the popular Viking reputation: that of their seafaring skill.

Fully fledged myths involving the Norse are harder to find. Beyond these connections with swords, boats and good Yorkshire cooking, we are left to ponder the significance of Roseberry Topping and Freebrough Hill. As already mentioned, Roseberry Topping may well contain the only known example of an Óðinn (Odin) place-name in England, and at some point a connection between Freyja (Freya) and the nearby Freebrough Hill has developed. Like Roseberry Topping, Freebrough Hill is also an outlier, a visible feature in the landscape with a similar shape (*fig. 16*). However, exactly when and how this connection came to be is unclear – unlike Roseberry we have no evidence from old spellings to suggest Freyja's presence here. It is probable that in recent times the association of Óðinn with Roseberry Topping has resulted in a corresponding link between Freyja and Freebrough Hill.

In Old Norse mythology – as written down by Icelanders in the thirteenth century – Óðinn is the 'all-father' of the pantheon of gods known as the Æsir, and he receives slain warriors into Valhøll. Freyja comes from the group of deities known as the Vanir and is commonly associated with fertility and love, although she also presides over the dead in her hall, Fólkvangr. Throughout the years, Freyja has often been confused with Óðinn's wife, Frigga, and some believe that they were once the same deity.

Whilst it may be tempting to connect Freyja's hall with the legends of hundreds of dead warriors buried beneath Freebrough Hill, there is no solid basis to do so. Evidence for her connection with the hill does not appear to date back very far, and it should rather be seen as indicative of a comparatively modern awareness of Roseberry Topping's potential connection with Óðinn, that has itself been extrapolated upon.

Evidence for any awareness of the Óðinn-Roseberry link is worthy of note, as it is not clear how widespread knowledge of such a possibility has been until recently. In 2009, Newton-under-Roseberry hosted *Odin's Glow*, which began life as the dream to

celebrate and – literally – highlight a local landmark. The originator of the idea, Joanne Hodgson, then had no notion of Roseberry Topping's significance to Scandinavian settlers, but as soon as she began to research its history, she and the other event organisers agreed that the Norse god was the 'hook' that they needed in order to build interest among the local populace. Although this aspect of the hill's history was a surprise to many, the artists involved relished the strong visual aspect of Viking and Norse culture. The village was filled for several nights with runes, battle-ready warriors, the sounds of hearth-fires and ravens and Old Norse poetry. Karen Monid's sound piece, *Contours*, sought particularly to unite the Old Norse with Old and Modern English, and to lead people into a more nuanced understanding of the culture of Norse settlers – by first enticing them in with the romantic strangeness of the stereotype.

Despite scant evidence for Norse heritage in local myths and folktales, *Odin's Glow* entrusted a good deal of its marketing to a Norse god of war. That it did so – and was a runaway success – is a satisfying indication that perhaps the Vikings and Norse settlers are not so unwelcome in the local area and its heritage as their deceptive absence from the myths may imply. Additionally, it is pleasing to imagine that the significance that locals still apply to Roseberry Topping gives them something in common with many of the area's previous inhabitants, including the Vikings.

Conclusion

Heather O'Donoghue

In the standard histories of Viking Age Britain, Cleveland is often overlooked, or given short shrift, partly because it is seen only as marking the very northern edge of the area of strongest Scandinavian influence – the Danelaw – and partly, perhaps, because it is an area without immediate and obvious geographical definition. But as we hope our booklet with its accompanying maps has demonstrated, Viking Age Cleveland occupies a very clearly defined space – from the coast of North Yorkshire across the North York Moors and up the Tees Valley in the east – and has an even clearer and more distinct historical and cultural identity. In fact, this distinct Viking Age identity arises from Cleveland's status as a borderland, a place caught between and fought over by the opposing forces of Northumbria, with its powerful Anglo-Saxon Church and royal dynasties, and the aggressive Scandinavian and Hiberno-Norse rulers of York to the south. The people who lived here during the Viking Age – Norwegians, Danes, Scandinavians from Ireland and the original Anglo-Saxons – together produced a distinctive Anglo-Scandinavian culture.

Of course, it is exciting to trace this Anglo-Scandinavian heritage in our area. It has left its mark – as our booklet shows – on local place-names, on the local dialect, on the folklore of the area, and in the wonderful collection of Anglo-Scandinavian carved stones you can see all over Cleveland, including the dramatic and very beautiful 'hogback' sculptures, a proud and high status Viking Age demonstration of an Anglo-Scandinavian identity. More of them are found in Cleveland than anywhere else in Europe; they may even have originated here. And, at the centre of all this, we have Roseberry Topping: an iconic feature of the Cleveland landscape, and unique amongst all British place-names in probably preserving within it the name of the Norse god Óðinn. It is possible that Roseberry was a sacred place for early pagan Scandinavians. But it has also certainly provided vital resources and thus been a centre of human

industry from prehistoric times right through the Viking Age and almost to the present, with its deposits of ochre, ironstone, and alum.

This brings us to reflect on the history of Teesside so many centuries later. Middlesbrough – Gladstone’s ‘infant Hercules’ – and the surrounding towns and villages expanded rapidly in the nineteenth century, with a huge influx of migrant workers from all over the British Isles. They came to work, to settle and put down roots, and to forge, along with their neighbours, not only a productive and diverse community but also a new, and distinctive identity. For many of them, who had moved in from rural Cleveland, history was repeating itself. There is still a lot to learn about Viking Age Cleveland, but it already has a lot to tell us.



Fig. 17. Rockfall face of Roseberry Topping.

Photo by Jo Shortt Butler.

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Languages, Myths and Finds

Translating Norse and Viking Cultures for the Twenty-First Century

The *Languages, Myths and Finds* project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, ran in the years 2013-14, coinciding with the British Museum's international exhibition *Vikings: Life and Legend*. The aim of the project was to encourage conversations between specialist university academics and advanced research students in Old Norse and Viking Studies, and local communities around Britain and Ireland who were interested in knowing more about their Viking heritage. The communities chosen for the project were Cleveland, Dublin, Isle of Lewis, Isle of Man and Munster. Five small teams of academics and students were chosen to work with each community by developing and researching topics most suited to that locality, as identified in dialogue with the community. These booklets are the products of the research done by those teams together with the local partners, especially during field trips to the localities in the spring of 2014. The full set of five booklets can be viewed on the project website, <http://languagesmythsfinds.ac.uk>, where there is also further information about the project.

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