



Cork Historical and Archaeological Society
Cumann Staire agus Seandálaíochta Chorcaí

Conference 2021

The Vikings and Cork: raiding, trading, and the development of the town

Saturday 19 June 2021, online via Zoom webinar

Booking opens on 1 June 2021

Programme

10am: Conference Opens and Welcome

Morning Session: Chair – Ciara Brett, Cork City Archaeologist

10:05, Clare Downham (University of Liverpool) - *Viking raiding and early settlement in the Cork region*

10:40, David Griffiths (Oxford University) - *The Vikings, Towns and the Irish Sea*

11:15, Discussion

11:25, Break

11:40, Howard Clarke (University College Dublin) - *Viking Cork: a new cartographical perspective*

12:15, Rebecca Boyd (University College Cork) - *Living in a Viking House – what it was like to live in Cork in the 11th century*

12:50, Discussion

1:00, Lunch break

Afternoon Session: Chair – Maeve Sikora, National Museum of Ireland

2:00, John Sheehan (University College Cork) - *Viking Cork: a silver lining?*

2:35, Griffin Murray (University College Cork) - *Late Viking Art in Co. Cork: the evidence from church metalwork*

3:10, Tom Birkett (University College Cork) - *From Pillagers to Pin-ups: Perspectives on the Vikings in the 21st Century*

3:45, Discussion

4:00, Closing Remarks Dr John Herbert (President CHAS)

4:10, Conference Close





Cork Historical and Archaeological Society
Cumann Staire agus Seandálaíochta Chorcaí

Conference 2021

The Vikings and Cork: raiding, trading, and the development of the town

Abstracts and Speaker Profiles

Viking raiding and early settlement in the Cork region.

Clare Downham (University of Liverpool)

Narratives of Viking Age Ireland naturally tend to focus on Dublin given the volume of archaeological and historical evidence from that city. This paper attempts to offer a different view of the Viking Age by focusing on events from a Munster perspective. The evidence of early raids is reviewed to highlight that viking attacks were not haphazard, but they were often well planned and part of a broader strategy. The struggle of vikings to establish a foothold in south-west Ireland through a series of camps will be analysed. Some of these would have an enduring impact as permanent settlements such as those that grew at Cork, Waterford and Limerick. While the history of ninth and tenth century Ireland is popularly portrayed as one of relentless hostility between Gael and Gall, the evidence highlights diplomacy, alliances and economic exchange between different groups which allowed the port of Cork to flourish through the early Middle Ages.



Clare Downham is Reader in Irish Studies at the University of Liverpool. She has authored three books, 'Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland: The dynasty of Ívarr to AD 1014' which was based on her doctoral dissertation, also 'No Horns on their Helmets' and most recently 'Medieval Ireland AD400-1500' published by Cambridge University Press.

The Vikings, Towns and the Irish Sea

David Griffiths (Oxford University)

In this lecture I will address the knowns and unknowns of how a disparate bunch of armed seaborne raiders, operating in hostile territory, within a few decades ended up founding towns which became the commercial centres of medieval Ireland and endure to this day. How did the armed camps or longphuir feed into these developments? What were the stimuli to urban foundations, internal organisation and economics? The Irish Sea will be looked at in



Cork Historical and Archaeological Society
Cumann Staire agus Seandálaíochta Chorcaí

Conference 2021

detail as the background, with reference to cities in Britain such as Chester, Bristol and York. There was clearly a situation of co-dependence in urban growth on either side of the Irish Sea, and many people and goods were exchanged. What were the principal benefits to the Vikings? and how did the situation develop from its earliest origins?



David Griffiths is Professor of Archaeology at Oxford University and Director of Studies in Archaeology for Continuing Education. His book *Vikings of the Irish Sea, Conflict and Assimilation AD 790-1050* (2010/2012) has been an essential text in the past decade for university course modules on Viking Ireland and Britain. He spent part of his PhD studies in the National Museum in Dublin and has been involved in research projects in many parts of Britain, the Orkney Isles, and Scandinavia. He has also been heavily involved with the publication of two of Ireland's most important Viking-age excavations: Woodstown and Dublin Castle.

Viking Cork: a new cartographical perspective

Howard Clarke (University College Dublin)

I shall argue that, as elsewhere, Viking Cork should be distinguished from Hiberno-Norse Cork. There was no continuity between the ninth-century intrusion and the tenth-century re-establishment by a different group. Dungarvan (the North Island) is suggested as the site of Viking Cork properly so-called, and the Cove Street area followed by the South Island as the locations of early urban development in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Much more archaeological evidence will be needed to clarify everything to do with Viking-Age Cork.

The background to this lecture is the preparation by my wife Máire and myself of the Cork fascicle of the Royal Irish Academy's Irish Historic Towns Atlas. The draft essay will contain elements of whatever arguments emerge from the seminar, which will therefore be taking place at a highly opportune moment. This publication will be the biggest and most complex of all the single-fascicle examples in the series.



Howard Clarke is Professor Emeritus of Medieval Socio-Economic History at University College Dublin. He is a long-term editor of the Irish Historic Towns Atlas, the Cork fascicle of which he is currently preparing in conjunction with his Corkonian wife Máire. He has published extensively on the subject of medieval towns.



Living in a Viking House – what it was like to live in Cork in the 11th century

Rebecca Boyd

Cork in the 11th century was a new town, literally built on new ground reclaimed from the river. Over the past thirty years, archaeologists have excavated Viking houses, yards and streetscapes on several sites around South Main Street. In this paper, we will explore the archaeology of the houses and yards of Viking Cork to see what life might have been like as one of the first people ever to live in Cork. Who might your neighbours have been? What languages were spoken on the street and at home? Where did your food come from? What do we know about the relationships between this new urban place and the river Lee, St. Finbarr's Monastery, and the hinterlands of Cork? Finally, as we all know that Cork is the real capital of Ireland, I will end by considering the differences between Viking Cork and Viking Dublin.



Rebecca Boyd is an archaeologist with a special interest in Viking archaeology. Her new book *Exploring Ireland's Viking-Age Towns: Houses and Home* will appear later this year. Rebecca's perspective is that archaeology is about telling the story of the people who were here before us.

Viking Cork: a silver lining?

John Sheehan (University College Cork)

This lecture will examine the early Viking-age silver and gold hoards from Cork and its environs. These comprises eight examples, of ninth- or tenth-century date, most of which contain only bullion. All were discovered during the nineteenth century and, as a result, there is little on record about their archaeological contexts. The question of the relationship between these finds with Viking Cork will be examined and it will be proposed that Cork's silver-working industry, if one existed, was not of any significance within the broader context of Viking-age Ireland and Britain. Many of Ireland's Viking-age hoards ended up in Irish ownership, indicating a relationship between the Scandinavians and the kingdoms of Ireland's dominant dynasties. This will be explored within the background of the Cork evidence, and it will be suggested that the relative scarcity of silver in this area is connected to its level of political ranking within Viking-age Ireland.



Cork Historical and Archaeological Society
Cumann Staire agus Seandálaíochta Chorcaí

Conference 2021



John Sheehan is a senior lecturer in UCC's Archaeology Department. His primary research area is on Ireland's Viking Age, specifically on the silver and gold hoards. Arising from this focus he has also conducted research on related hoards from Britain and Scandinavia as well as on other aspects of the Viking Age and its economy.

Late Viking Art in Co. Cork: the evidence from church metalwork

Griffin Murray (University College Cork)

The Hiberno-Scandinavian towns in Ireland were not only centres of population, trade and economic activity, but were also great centres of craft, metalworking and art. Notably, they continued to be influenced by Scandinavia and its art styles into the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. This lecture discusses the evidence for late Viking art in county Cork from church metalwork. It principally examines St Lachtin's arm from Donoughmore and the Cloyne cross within their wider contexts. Both objects are now in the National Museum of Ireland, and both are richly decorated in the Hiberno-Urnes style. The lecture will also discuss the locations where these church treasures may have been made and the patrons that lay behind them. In particular, it will look at the patronage of Tadhg and Cormac MacCarthy, kings of Desmond, and their interest in, and patronage of, Cork in the early twelfth century.



Griffin Murray is a lecturer in Archaeology at University College Cork. Principally researching Insular metalwork (AD 400–1200) within its European context, he also works on Insular-Scandinavian relations, Viking art, and museum and antiquarian-collections history. He is author of *The Cross of Cong: A Masterpiece of Medieval Irish Art* (2014) and of numerous papers.



From Pillagers to Pin-ups: Perspectives on the Vikings in the 21st Century

Tom Birkett (University College Cork)

The Vikings have undergone something of a makeover in the twenty-first century. Savage men with matted hair and a fondness for killing monks have been replaced in the public discourse by a view of the Vikings as enterprising individuals with a rich culture and complex morality. One important driver of this change has been the History TV show *Vikings*, which merges the legend of Ragnarr Loðbrók with historical events from the Viking Age. Here, and in similar big-budget shows such as *The Last Kingdom*, the Vikings sport elaborate tattoos and ever-changing hipster haircuts, and thirst for adventure as much as for blood. Shieldmaidens fight alongside the men and wield considerable power. Elsewhere, the entrepreneurial spirit of the Vikings is celebrated by tourist boards and companies which use the appeal of the Vikings to market their products: everything from lifesaving equipment to cybersecurity.

A few years ago, the Cork-based World-Tree Project set out to crowdsource information about the public perception of the Vikings from across Europe. This talk will present some of the findings from this initiative, and ask the questions: what is it about the Vikings that makes them such a source of fascination for a twenty-first-century audience, and more importantly, what do “our Vikings” say about us?



Tom Birkett completed his PhD at Oxford before taking up a position as lecturer in Old English at UCC in 2012. He publishes on Old English and Old Norse textual and literary culture, and has recently led two IRC-funded projects in Cork on the translation of medieval poetry, and on the popular perception of the Vikings (the World-Tree Project). His co-edited collection on *Reimagining the Vikings* came out with Medieval Institute Publications in 2019, and his *Norse Myths, an illustrated retelling of stories about the Norse gods*, has been reissued as a paperback and recently translated into Chinese and Japanese.