

Chapter 10 Locations and Legends

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Earlier chapters have put the Norse settlement on the Wirral in its historical context. We can be reasonably sure of the dates of, and some of the people who took part in, the establishment of a Norse community. The Norse influence on place-names and some of the local institutions is clear. This chapter tries to draw some conclusions from the location of names and features, and maps the distribution of some Norse-derived names. Finally, we look at some tenacious Wirral legends which show the lasting affection for all things Norse in the region.

Mapping names

Often the earliest document in which major names are recorded is Domesday Book, for which the customary date of 1086 is given. Fig. 10.1 shows the parishes of the Wirral in the nineteenth century, with the heavy line indicating the approximate boundary of the Norse enclave proposed by Griffiths.¹ The boundaries have changed little since Domesday: the original settlements have grown but have not otherwise changed significantly. Minor names are rather different, and much more difficult to locate with confidence. Many are found in the legal and social documents of the centuries intervening between Domesday and the modern Ordnance Survey. For the earlier documents such as charters, names of fields and topographical features can often be narrowed down in location to the parish.

Fig. 10.2 is a charter from the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, and it illustrates how such documents make reference to names, and at the same time it reveals some of the difficulties of this type of evidence. Unless the names in early documents like this survived in some form into the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, when they were mapped by government commissioners for the purposes of enclosure (of common land or open-fields) or tithe assessment, all too often their location is unknown. The originals of these maps are held in the Cheshire Record Office and copies are also kept in the Public Records Office in Kew. Since these early maps, the Ordnance Survey has precisely recorded the development of the region's topography, including the loss of many ancient names through industrialisation and urbanisation, and also the creation of new names through the same processes.

¹ D. Griffiths, 'The Coastal Trading Ports of the Irish Sea', in *Viking Treasures from the North West*, pp. 63-72.

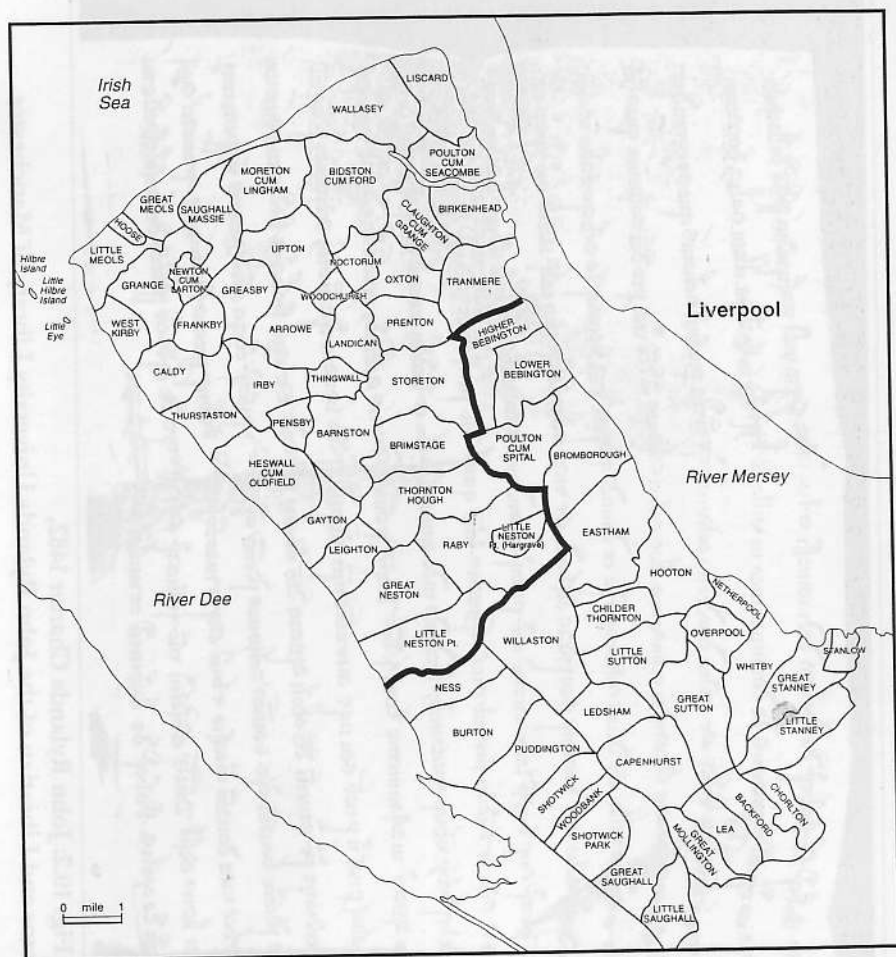


Fig. 10.1: The parishes of the Wirral, showing the conjectured boundary of the Norse enclave.

In this chapter we have used particularly the Tithe Award maps of the nineteenth century to locate the names on the Ordnance Survey grid to an accuracy of 100 metres. With some names this has not been strictly possible, but it has for the vast majority. Where the location is given, SJ refers to the region in the Ordnance Survey, and in the six-figure reference, the first three digits relate to the grid eastwards ('eastings'), the second three digits relate to the grid northwards ('northings'). The final digit in the easting and northing represents a separation of 100 metres. An outline grid is given over most of the maps in this chapter which relates to the grid references of Ordnance Survey maps, and the precise location of the names can be found. Grid references have also been given for the major names discussed in chapter 11, below.

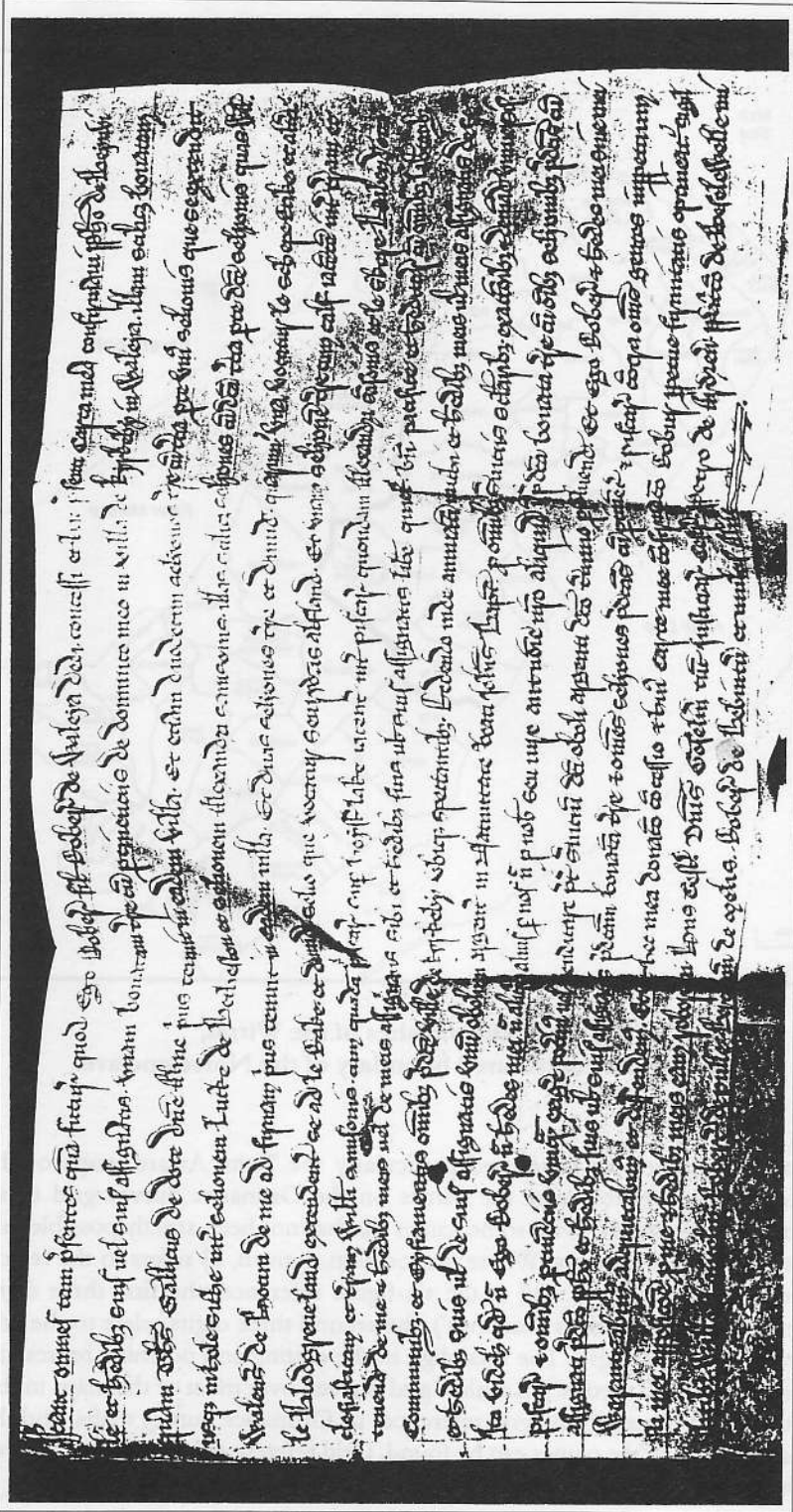


Fig. 10.2: John Rylands Charter 1482,

reproduced by courtesy of the Director and Librarian of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.

The John Rylands charter: transcription

Sciant omnes tam presentes quam futuri quod ego Robertus filius Roberti de Waleya dedi, concessi et hac presenti carta mea confirmavi Philippo de Beynville et heredibus suis vel suis assignatis unam bovatom terre cum pertinenciis de dominico meo in villa de Kyrkeby in Waleya, illam scilicet bovatom quam Thomas Gallicus de dote domine Aline prius tenuit in eadem villa, et etiam duodecim selyones terre cum tertia parte unius selionis que se extendit usque in Hole siche inter selionem Lucke de Betheston et selionem Alexandri Samsonis, illas scilicet seliones cum dicta tertia parte dicte selyonis quas Willielmus Walens' de Hotun de me ad firmam prius tenuit in eadem villa, et duas selyones terre et dimidiam quarum una vocatur le Schepe Rake et altera le Blodgreveland extendent se ad le Rake et dimidiam selio que vocatur Seurydzis Alfland et unam selionem terre cum calf iacentem inter terram ecclesiasticam et terram Willielmi Samsonis cum quadam piscaria super Hoylklake iacentem inter piscariam quondam Alexandri Samsonis et le Skere. Habenda et tenenda de me et heredibus meis vel de meis assignatis sibi et heredibus suis vel suis assignatis libere, quiete, bene, pacifice et hereditarie cum omnibus libertatibus, communibus et eysjamentis omnibus predictae ville de Kyrkeby ubique spectantibus. Redendo inde annuatim michi et heredibus meis vel meis assignatis de se et heredibus suis vel de suis assignatis unum obolum argenti in Nativitate beati Johannis Baptiste pro omnibus serviciis secularibus, exactionibus et demandis universis. Ita videlicet quod nec ego Robertus nec heredes mei nec aliquo alius per nos nec pro nobis seu jure aut nomine nostro aliquid in predicta bovata terre cum omnibus selyonibus predictis cum piscaria et omnibus pertinenciis uniku' exigere poterimus vel vendicare preter servicium dicti oboli argenti dicto termino persolvend'. Et ego Robertus et heredes mei sive mei assignati predicto Philippo et heredibus suis vel suis assignatis predictam bovatom terre et omnes selyones predictas cum pertinenciis et piscaria contra omnes gentes imperpetuum warantizabimus, adquietabimus et defendemus. Et ut hec mea donacio, concessio et huius carte mee confirmacio robur perpetue firmitatis optineat sigilli mei appositione pro me et heredibus meis eam roboram. Hiis testibus: Dominis Goselino tunc justiciario Cestr', Petro de Ardren', Patricio de Beselewelle militibus; Willielmo Lancelin, Roberto de Pulle, Bertram' de Melis; Roberto de Bebintu' et multis aliis.²

² Transcription by Lisa Liddy.

The John Rylands charter: translation

Let it be known to all people both present and future that I, Robert son of Robert of Wallasey, have given, granted and by this present my charter have confirmed to Philip de Beynville (Benfield) and his heirs or assigns one bovate of land with appurtenances out of my demesne in the vill of Kirby in Wallasey, namely that bovate which Thomas the Welshman held in the same vill of the gift of lady Alina, and also twelve selions of land with the third part of one selion which extends to *Hole siche* ('Hole ditch') between the selion of Luke of Bidston and the selion of Alexander Samson, that is to say those selions with the third part of the said selion which William Welsh of Hooton held of me to farm in the same vill, and two selions and a half of which one is called the Sheep Rake ('the sheep path') and the other the *Blodgreveland* ('Bloodgrieve's land'³) extending as far as the Rake and the half selion which is called *Seurydzis Alfland* (? 'Sæfrith's half land'⁴) and one selion of land with *calf* (?) lying between the church land and the land of William Samson with a certain fishery on Hoylake lying between the fishery formerly Alexander Samson's and the skerry (i.e. Perch Rock, PN Ch 4 326). To be had and held of me and my heirs or assigns to himself and his heirs or assigns freely, quietly, well, peacefully and by inheritance with all liberties, rights of common and easements of the aforesaid vill of Kirby universally pertaining. Returning therefore annually to me and my heirs or assigns from himself and his heirs or assigns one obol ('halfpenny') of silver at the Nativity of Blessed John the Baptist for all secular services, charges and claims. In such a way that neither I, Robert, nor my heirs or anyone else through us or on our behalf whether by fight or in our name shall be able to exact or claim anything in the aforesaid bovate of land with all the aforesaid selions with the fishery and all appurtenances anywhere (?) beyond the service of the said obol of silver to be paid at the aforesaid term. And I, Robert, and my heirs or assigns will guarantee, free of charge and defend the aforesaid bovate of land and all the aforesaid selions with appurtenances and the fishery against all peoples for ever. And so that this my grant, concession and the confirmation of this my charter should have the strength of everlasting validity I will validate it with the affixing of my seal on behalf of myself and my heirs. With the following witnesses: Lord Goscelin, then justiciar of Chester; Peter de Arden', Patrick de Beselewelle, knights; William Lancelin, Robert of the Pool, Bertram of Meols, Robert of Bebington and many others.

³ *Blodgreve* is probably a toponymic surname, cf. the p.n.s. Bloodgate, Bloodmoor, Bloodworth, etc.

⁴ In spite of PN Ch 4 335 *Seurydzis* or *Seurydzis* looks an awkward form for ON *Sigríðr*, which usually has ME spellings *Segrída*, *Sigberit(h)*, *Sigerid*, *Sigerith*, *Sigertha*, *Sigherige -ride*, *Sigreda*, *Sigreth*, *Sigrída*, *Sigritha*, *Sirid*, *Siritha -e*, *Sygeride*, *Syrith*, *Sytherithie* etc. There are no examples of *Seu-*. A personal name such as **Sæfrith* by contrast could produce *Seuryd*.

Some minor names

Recent studies by scholars such as Kenneth Cameron have shown that the minor names in an area tell us a good deal about the kind of name vocabulary that was available to the local people.⁵ The higher the number of instances there are of a particular element, the greater the likelihood that the element was common to the vocabulary of the community, and not just one or two people. The apparent simplicity of this proposition is somewhat complicated by the fact that where an element refers to a particular landscape feature, names deriving from the element are not likely to be found in the absence of the feature itself. Names referring to marshland features can only congregate in marshy areas, as we shall see.

Fig. 10.3 is a map of the *carr* names on the Wirral. Ultimately this word is from ON **kjarr** 'brushwood, marsh, boggy land overgrown with brushwood'. At first sight it appears that the name with a few exceptions is peculiar to the area of the ancient Norse enclave. But the distribution map, while interesting, shows the concentration of the boggy areas of Wirral as much as it does the Norse influence on naming. Much the same goes for the *holm(e)* names (fig. 10.4), where the word comes from ON **holmr** 'dry ground in marsh, a water meadow'. The overlap between the distributions of the two elements is striking.

The original Scandinavian words were borrowed early into English, as *holm* and *ker*, and the evidence of the use of these elements in Wirral is all from after the Norman Conquest. There is only one example from Wirral that is purely Scandinavian, *Routhholm* in Wallasey, where **holmr** is compounded with the ON adjective *raudr* 'red'. But perhaps the fact that the normal Old English words for these particular topographical features, elements such as **mersc** 'marsh' and **ĕg** 'dry ground in marsh', are almost completely absent from these areas is significant. The Norse-derived words, that is to say, had become the normal ones in the area when the names were given, and had possibly replaced earlier English ones.

Fig. 10.5 shows the distribution of names deriving from ON **inntak** 'land taken in, enclosed from waste'. Neither the practice nor the name is particularly distinctive as Scandinavian, and the element is widely distributed throughout the north of England. Fig. 10.6 gives the evidence for the element *rake* 'narrow lane, path up a hill', and by extension, 'land adjoining a narrow lane'. While this element is quite frequently found in Scandinavian-settled areas, such as Derbyshire and Cumberland, it is also found outside of such areas. What is extraordinary here is the number and distribution of the names in Cheshire: there are something over a dozen *rakes* in Cheshire excluding Wirral, but some 90 examples within the peninsula that we have traced.

This distribution raises questions about the origin of the word. A. H. Smith discussed the possibilities, specifically OE **hraca** 'a throat' and hence topographically 'a pass', and ON **rāk** 'a stripe'.⁶ A further suggestion of ON **reik** 'a path' is given no countenance by Smith. He also notes under OE ***racu** 'a hollow, the bed of a stream', that it is hard to distinguish from **hraca** and **rāk**,

⁵ For example, 'The Danish element in the minor and field-names of Yarborough Wapentake, Lincolnshire' in *Names, Places and People*, pp. 19–25.

⁶ Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, EPNS 25 and 26 (Cambridge, 1956), snn.

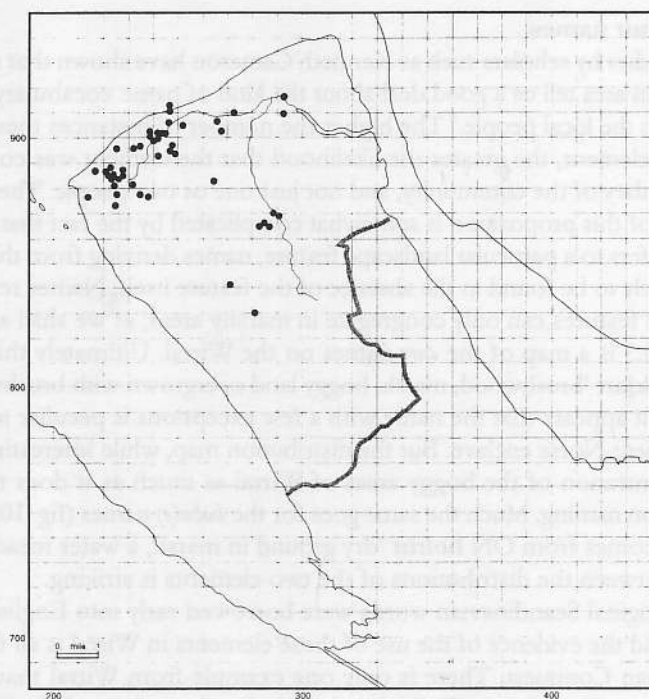


Fig. 10.3: Carr names.

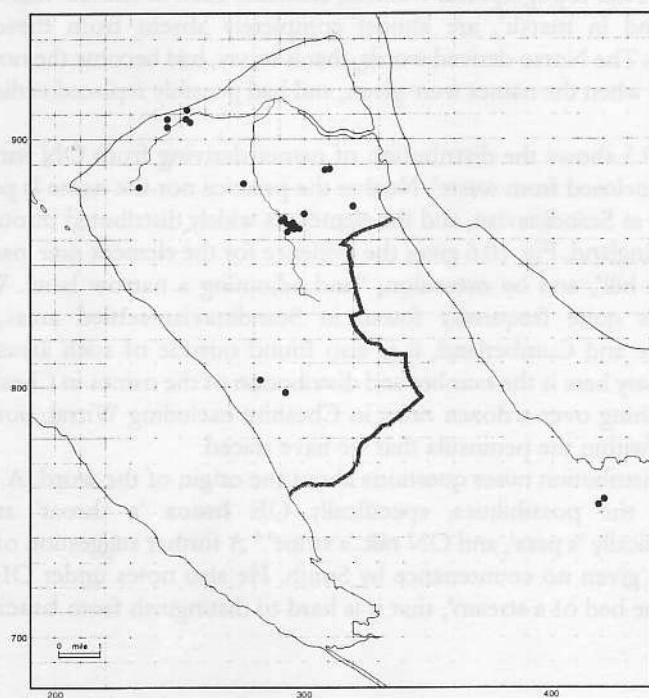


Fig. 10.4: Holm(e) names.

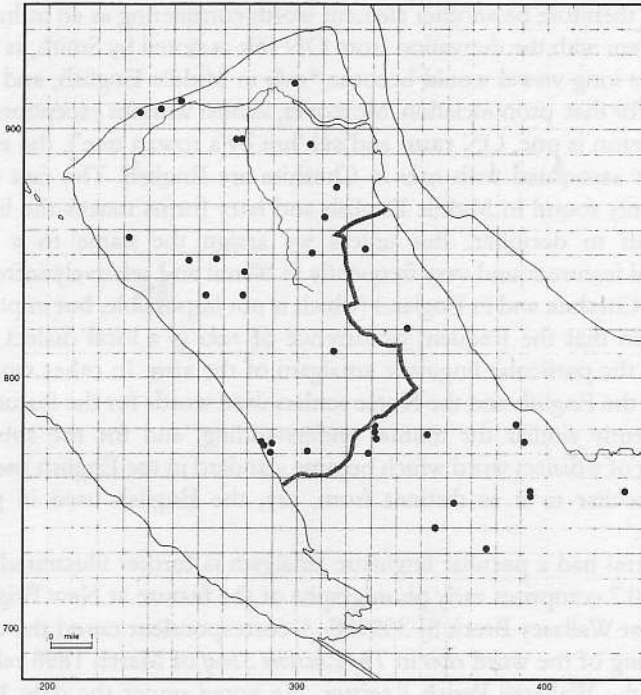


Fig. 10.5: *Intake* names.

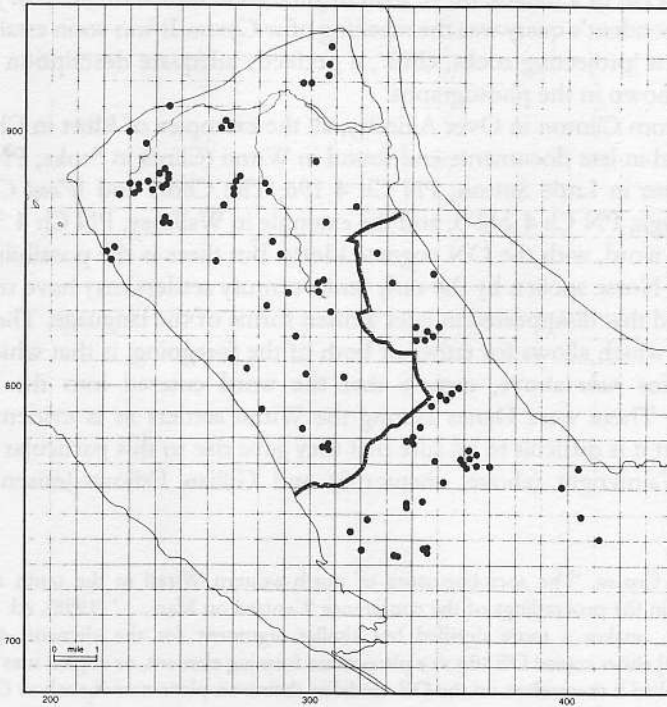


Fig. 10.6: *Rake* names.

and this may therefore be another element worth considering as an influence on *rake*. A problem with the derivation from ON *rák* as noted by Smith, is that the word with its long vowel would become **roke* in Middle English, and there is no evidence for that pronunciation. Moreover, almost without exception (*Ransell Rake* in Storeton is one, ON *raun* and *sel* 'hut by a rowan tree'), the elements combined or associated with *rake* in Cheshire are English. The fact that the element is only found in Middle English and later forms makes the linguistic form difficult to decipher. But unless we assign the name to a specific topographical feature found very frequently in Wirral and relatively infrequently elsewhere in Cheshire and in England (which is not impossible, but implausible), it would seem that the frequent occurrence of *rake* is a local dialect feature, arising from the particular linguistic amalgam of the area. In other words, it is possible that the English and the Norse settlers used words for the feature which were sufficiently similar for mutual understanding, and for the subsequent development of a dialect word which became standard in the English used in the area, but peculiar to it as distinct from, say, the English used in parts of Lincolnshire.⁷

That Wirral had a peculiar linguistic amalgam is further illustrated by The Clints. Fig. 10.7 comprises early photographs of the feature at New Brighton SJ 298942 and at Wallasey Breck SJ 305908. A correspondent raised the question of the meaning of the word *clint* in *The Cheshire Sheaf* of March 1898 relating to a record in the Wallasey Parish Register. He noted under the date 1642 the 'curious entry among the burials: "Elizabeth Smyth and May Johnson kild at ye Clynse by a fall of a pinnacle on ye 24th of June were buried on ye 27th June".' The correspondent's query was the meaning of *ye Clynse*. It was soon established that it meant 'projecting rocks, cliffs', a perfectly adequate description of the feature as shown in the photographs.

Apart from Clinton in Over Alderley, all the examples of *clint* in Cheshire are recorded in late documents and found in Wirral (Clints in Stoke, PN Ch 4 182, *le Chyntes* in Little Sutton, PN Ch 4 196, The Clints and *Wood Clints* in Bromborough, PN Ch 4 242-3, and the example in Wallasey, PN Ch 4 334). It is a Danish word, with the ON cognate *klettr*. But there is the possibility that the form of Norse spoken by the early tenth-century settlers may have retained the *-n-* sound that disappeared in later written forms of the language. The other alternative, which allows for either or both of the foregoing, is that which was suggested for *rake* above, namely that the word entered into the dialect vocabulary. There were Danes among the Wirral settlers as is evident from Denhall, but it is difficult to be sure that they gave rise to this particular name.

F. T. Wainwright (above, chapter 3) and Gillian Fellows-Jensen⁸ have

⁷ Richard Coates, 'The sociolinguistics of north-western Wirral in the tenth century', forthcoming in the proceedings of the conference 'Centred on Man . . .' (1998), ed. Andrew Hamer et al., makes a more detailed but similar argument for the element *-ton*: '[the Scandinavians] either copied OE *tūn* as a place-name forming element, or copied it as a lexical word and applied it themselves on the OE model in their own place-names such as *Claughton*, *Larton*, *Storeton* and *Gayton*.'

⁸ 'Scandinavians in Cheshire: a reassessment of the onomastic evidence' in Rumble and Mills, eds, *Names, Places and People*, pp. 77-92.



Fig. 10.7a: *Clint* at New Brighton, SJ 298942.

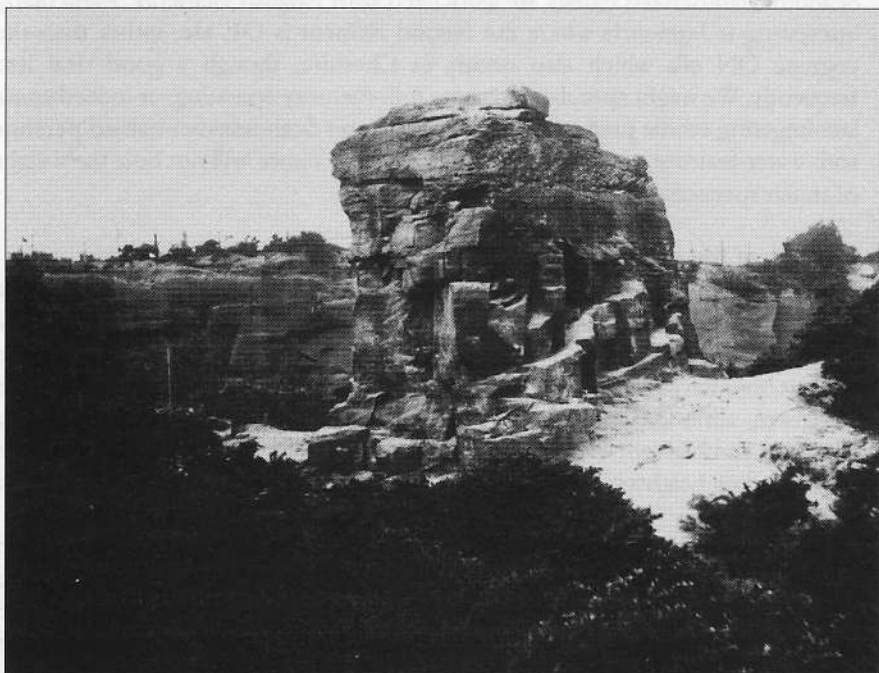


Fig. 10.7b: *Clint* at Wallasey Breck, SJ 305908.

discussed the names of Scandinavian land-holders in Domesday Book. The minor names of Wirral add a few more Scandinavian-named persons to the list. Arni appears in The Arno and Arno Hill, Oxton (with ON *haugr*, 'mound', PN Ch 4 270), and his name, like that of the Domesday land-holder, has probably been Anglicised from ON Erni or Erne. Fiðill may be recorded in Fiddlestone Plantation in Burton Point (though the earliest reference appears to be nineteenth-century, PN Ch 4 213). Þóraldr has bequeathed his name to the Thoraud family, who owned land in Mollington Torold (now Great Mollington, PN Ch 4 177–8). Ketill had a creek or pool named after him, and the name is recorded very early in the fifteenth century in Hooton, *Ketilspoll'* (PN Ch 4 191). The nearest site fitting the description of 'a creek' is the Riveacre Country Park and this might have been where Ketill's creek flowed. In Tranmere, near Tranmere Pool, there were two pools named after women. *Gonnille Pool*, *Gonell's* ~, *Gonall's* ~, all from the sixteenth century, represent an Anglicised form of ON Gunnhildr (PN Ch 4 259). Nearby, and recorded from the fourteenth century, was *Raynildes Pool*, from ON Ragnhildr. Ingiriðr had a stream named after her, *Ingrinessiche*, recorded in 1340 in Capenhurst (with OE *sīc* 'a stream', PN Ch 4 202). Also recorded from Wallasey in the fourteenth century is *Tokesford*, 'Tóki's ford' representing a crossing point of Wallasey Pool, probably near SJ 309909.

The caveat must be registered that names of Scandinavian linguistic origin do not necessarily belong to people of Scandinavian ethnic origin; there is abundant evidence that fashions in name-giving transcend ethnicity. It is noticeable that apart from what appears to be a genuinely early name, Arno, all the other Scandinavian-derived names are associated with English elements. Particularly interesting is *Ingrinessiche* where the second element is OE *sīc*, rather than the cognate ON *sīk* which also occurs in Cheshire, though a good deal less frequently. We might speculate on some folk-memory operating, or indeed some late-lingering ethnic preference, which associates Scandinavian-named persons with water-features, streams and pools; but the evidence will not bear the weight of much speculation.

Aspects of life in the Middle Ages

Place-names can tell us something of organisation of life in the Wirral after the Norse settlement. It has been suggested that the boundary of the main Wirral Norse enclave ran between Raby and Hargrave. It is interesting to note that the current boundary for Wirral Metropolitan Council also passes through Raby and Hargrave, although the modern boundary cuts from west to east excluding Leighton and Neston, whereas the old Norse boundary cut south west to north east including Leighton and Neston but excluding Bebington, Bromborough and Eastham.

Fig. 10.8 shows the distribution of the *býr* names, both major and minor: Frankby, Greasby, Irby, Kirkby in Wallasey, Pensby, Raby, West Kirby and Whitby; and lost names Haby in Barnston, Hesby in Bidston, Warmby in Heswall, Kiln Walby in Overchurch, Stromby in Thurstaston and Syllaby in Great Saughall. The number of lost names hints at the marginality of some of the settlements, as suggested by Wainwright in chapter 4 above. All but Whitby and Syllaby are on the Norse side of the proposed enclave boundary. Thingwall is

central to the area, and a very reasonable site for the **þing**, the general council. The precise location of the **þing** at Thingwall is thought to have been at Cross Hill, at or near the site of the current reservoir.

West Kirby and Kirkby in Wallasey are two of the 16 examples of names containing the ON element **kirkja** 'church' in Wirral. **Kirkju-býr** 'village with a church' suggests a pre-existing village with a distinguishable ecclesiastical building, which was simply called 'church village' by the settlers. Most of the remaining examples of **kirkja** are minor names, referring to roads, fields and landscape features, but attesting to the presence and importance of Christianity in the Wirral from early times.

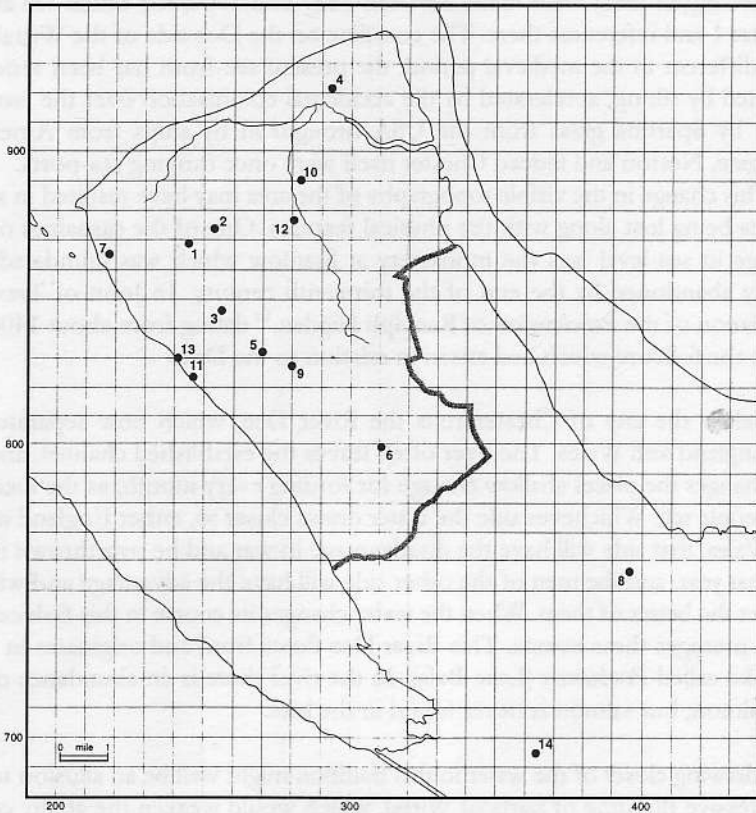


Fig. 10.8: Wirral -by names.

1: Frankby, 2: Greasby, 3: Irby, 4: Kirkby in Wallasey, 5: Pensby,
6: Raby, 7: West Kirby, 8: Whitby.

Lost names: 9: Haby, 10: Hesby, 11: Warmby, 12: Kiln Walby,
13: Stromby, 14: Syllaby.

Road communications into the Scandinavian enclave were relatively poor. There was a road from Chester to West Kirby, called *le Porteswaye* 'the road to a market-town' in the Middle Ages, now the Old Chester Road, A41; and another, possibly Roman, road, *le Blakestrete* 'the dark road', from Chester through Willaston to Wallasey. Otherwise, the area was threaded by a system of minor

roads and the drove-roads, the *rakes* discussed above.

Sea and river communications were naturally significant for the Norsemen. Apart from Thingwall, probably the most significant place for the Wirral Norse community would have been Meols, its main trading port. The coastline in the ninth and later centuries of the medieval period was rather different from that of today. Sea-level was lower and as a result the coastline at Meols extended outwards into the sea. In the nineteenth century very low tides, assisted by erosion of the covering sand, revealed the former settlement together with the remains of a forest of earlier times which have also now gone. This was apparently the location of the medieval trading port and thousands of archaeological finds were made between 1837 and 1900, for which see above chapter 1 and references there. The coastline on the Dee side of the Wirral was also different in the medieval period: the present sea-front has been seriously affected by silting, accelerated by the accidental colonisation over the last 150 years by *Spartina* grass from the USA brought in by ships from America.⁹ Parkgate, Neston and indeed Chester itself were once thriving sea-ports.

This change in the visible topography of the area may have resulted in some names being lost along with the physical features. One of the casualties of the change in sea-level was the monastery at Stanlow which was inundated and finally abandoned by the end of the thirteenth century. In John of Trevisa's translation of the *Polychronicon* of Ranulph Higden,¹⁰ dating from about 1400, he notes the folklore which had arisen in relation to the Dee:

Below the city of Chester runs the River Dee, which now separates England and Wales. The river often leaves the established channel, and changes the places shallow enough for fording every month, as the local people tell. Whichever side the water draws closer to, either England or Wales, that side will have the disadvantage in war and be overthrown in that year, and the men of the other side will have the advantage and will get the better of them. When the water changes its course in this fashion, it presages these events. This River Dee flows from and originates in a lake called *Pimbilmere* [Lake Bala]. In the river there is an abundance of salmon, but salmon is never found in the lake.

The drawing closer of the water in this tradition might well be an allusion to the progressive flooding of parts of Wirral, which would weaken the ability of the people to fight in the minor continuing conflicts.

The apparently modern tradition that Cnut, king of England 1017–35, of Denmark and of Norway, undertook his attempt to turn back the waves on the Wirral is well known amongst folk in the North Wirral area. The event is supposed to have taken place somewhere between Meols and Moreton or Leasowe. 'Sea come not hither nor wet the sole of my foot' was carved on the back of the so-called Canute chair (fig. 10.9). This was once on the sea-front at

⁹ R. and M. Freethy, *Discovering Cheshire* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 33.

¹⁰ Text from K. Sisam, ed., *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose*, rev. edn (Oxford, 1985), translation the editor's.



Fig. 10.9: The 'Canute' chair and N. F. Ellison:
note the legend 'Sea come not hither nor wet the sole of my foot'.

Leasowe Castle before being destroyed by vandals and used as firewood, as recorded by N. F. Ellison (1955). The chair itself was probably made for the Cust family in the early Victorian period. Sir Edward Cust KCB of Belton, Lincolnshire married the owner of Leasowe Castle, Mary Anne Boode in c.1821. The Cust family may have been the source of the association of the legend and the Wirral, though it might also show the affection in which the Norse heritage of the Wirral is held locally. The Cnut story is recorded by Henry of Huntingdon in the twelfth century without specifying the place, and Henry's language is echoed by the inscription on the seat. Henry records Cnut saying to the sea, 'I command you therefore not to rise on to my land, nor to presume to wet the clothing or limbs of your master'.¹¹ Also in the twelfth century, the Anglo-Norman historian Geoffrey Gaimar mentions that Cnut tried to stem the waves, but the place is given as Westminster, on the tidal estuary of the Thames.¹² Clearly the story is legendary, but it would have particular point for the medieval inhabitants of Wirral who were suffering periodic inundation: not even the great Cnut, king of England and more than half of Scandinavia could turn back the waves. In view of this, a medieval origin for the Wirral tradition is not unimaginable.

The River Dee was always a significant waterway. Legends grew up about it, as we have seen. In a footnote to one of his articles, 'The English Arrival in Cheshire', John Dodgson suggested that the *Dingesmere* mentioned in the Old English poem on the battle of *Brunanburh* might well mean 'the sea named after, or associated with, the River Dee', and thus provide further support for his argument that the battle of *Brunanburh* was fought at Bromborough.¹³ Since the defeated Norse forces fled over the Irish Sea *Dingesmere* could well have been a local name, deriving from the Dee:

in their studded ships,
the blood-stained survivors of the spears departed on *Dingesmere*,
over the deep water, to seek Dublin,
went back to Ireland covered in shame.¹⁴

At any rate, this is the most plausible suggestion yet for the evidence of the names in the poem. The significance of the battle and its possible background has been discussed by N. J. Higham, who argues that this area of English Mercia was particularly targeted by the Scandinavians in the early tenth century because of its vulnerability.¹⁵ John of Worcester, a twelfth-century historian, records the later tenth-century king, Edgar, sailing on the Dee in the year of his coronation, 973:

¹¹ D. Greenway, ed., *Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People* (Oxford, 1996), iv, 8, pp. 366–8.

¹² A. Bell, ed., *L'Estoire des Engleis, by Geffrei Gaimar* (Oxford, 1960), lines 4693 f.

¹³ *THSLC* 119 (1967) 1–37, n. 11, and see above, chapter 5.

¹⁴ Text from Alistair Campbell, *The Battle of Brunanburh* (London, 1938), translation the editor's.

¹⁵ 'The context of *Brunanburh*' in *Names, Places and People*, pp. 144–56.

Edgar, the peaceable king of the English, was blessed, crowned with the utmost honour and glory, and anointed king in his thirtieth year at Pentecost, 11 May, in the first indiction, by the blessed bishops Dunstan and Oswald, and by the other bishops of the whole of England in the city of Bath. Then, after an interval, he sailed round the north coast of Wales with a large fleet, and came to the city of Chester. Eight underkings, namely Kenneth, king of the Scots, Malcolm, king of the Cumbrians, Maccus, king of many islands, and five others, Dufnal, Siferth, Hywel, Iacob, and Iuchil, went to meet him, as he had commanded, and swore that they would be loyal to, and co-operate with, him by land and sea. With them, on a certain day, he boarded a skiff, having set them to the oars, and having taken the helm himself, he skilfully steered it through the course of the Dee, and with a crowd of ealdormen and nobles following in a similar boat, sailed from the palace to the monastery of St John the Baptist, where, when he had prayed, he returned with the same pomp to the palace. As he was entering it he is reported to have declared to his nobles at length that each of his successors would be able to boast that he was king of the English, and would enjoy the pomp of such honour with so many kings at his command.¹⁶

This indicates the importance of the Dee and the adjacent territories in the unification of England following *Brunanburh*. The significance of Edgar's actions here is that he is re-enacting Æthelstan's taking submission from the Celtic kings at Eamont Bridge, Westmorland, in 926, reinforced by military power at *Brunanburh* in 937. John locates *Brunanburh* on the Humber in his *Chronicle*, and he does not therefore see that Edgar is asserting his authority over the kings and the waterways of those areas which have most recently fomented rebellion against the English crown. Edgar is refreshing Celtic memories of the English victory at *Brunanburh*.

Stones and stories

We have seen that Clints are more common in Wirral than anywhere of comparable size. And above, the distinctive carved stones of the area have also been treated. The Norse and Irish-Norse context of these stones is demonstrable. Our last picture, fig. 10.10, is of the large rock outcrop known as Thor's Stone on Thurstaston Hill and Common (see further chapter 9). The local legend insists that this is the final resting place of the head of Thor's hammer, Mjöllnir. This book has documented the Norse heritage of the Wirral; Wirral people cherish their Norse ancestry — but we can offer no guarantee of the accuracy of this particular piece of local folklore.

¹⁶ R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, eds, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1995), II, 423-25.

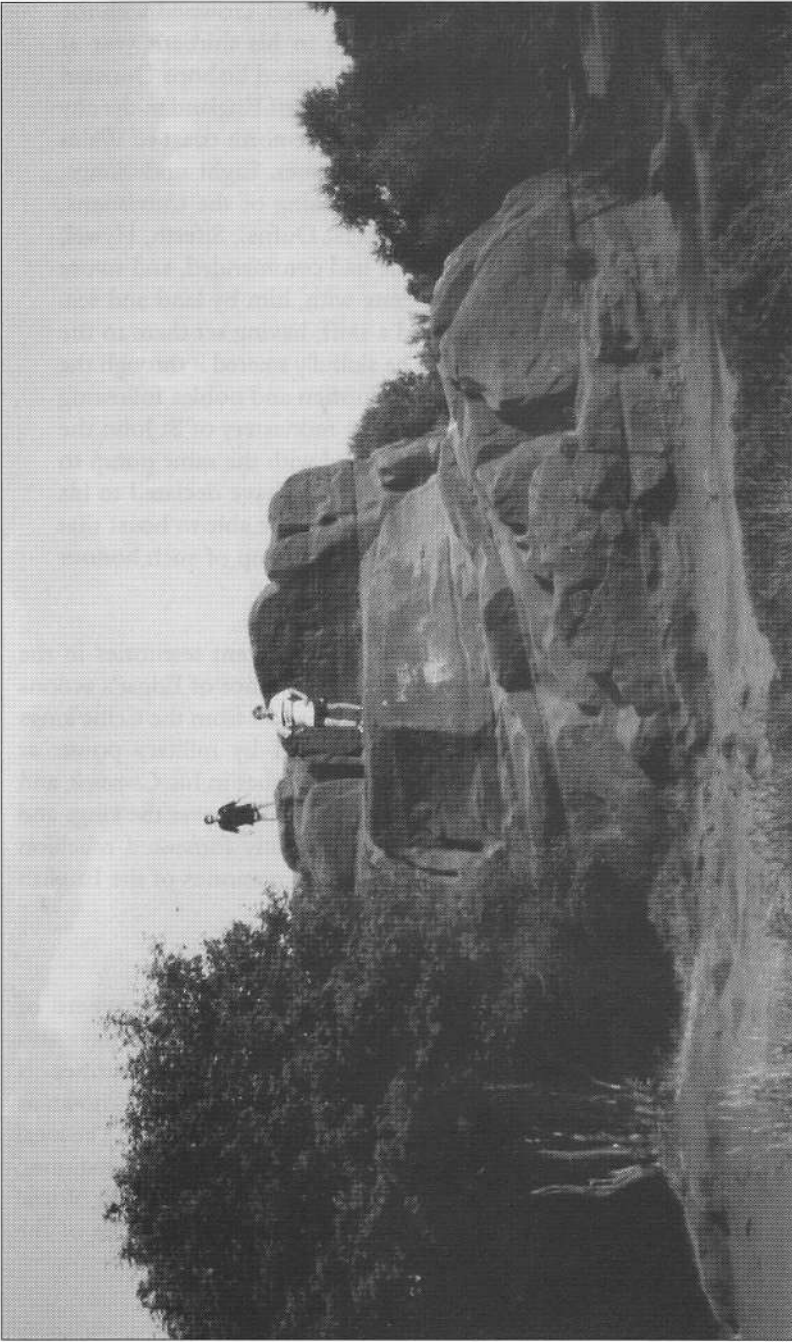


Fig. 10.10: 'Mjollnir' Thor's stone, SJ 244849.
The photograph shows Thomas (12) and Matthew (17) Harding.