



# Vikings

## nice blokes really

Raping, pillaging, bad reputation: the Norsemen have a lot to live down. But Mike McCartney, Sir Paul's brother, remains a staunch supporter of this much maligned group. **Stephen Manning** reports

**W**hat have the Vikings ever done for us? Their raping and pillaging reputation has given them a generally bad press, but Mike McCartney, Sir Paul's brother, says they were not just a bunch of brutes. He is the cultural ambassador for the Wirral, a one-time Viking mini-state with its own language, old Norse, which resembles modern Icelandic. The region even had its own parliament, called the Thing At Thingwall ("thing" being old Norwegian for "place or assembly").

Mike says: "These industrious Wirral Vikings weren't just a bunch of brutes, but highly skilled people with advanced ways of governing themselves." His comments come in the introduction to a free online resource for key stage 2 and 3, which examines the Viking settlement in the area, which began in 902AD.

The story is told through Ingimund, the first Viking leader in the Wirral, whose tribe fled Norway and settled in Dublin until they were chased out by the Irish.

Having crossed the Irish Sea, poor Ingimund obviously suffered from his ancestors' somewhat scurrilous reputation, because the Welsh king refused to accommodate him, and the English queen reluctantly allowed him and his crew to settle in the Wirral only as long as they "kept away from Chester".

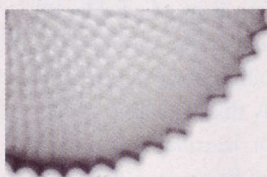
"Unfortunately, I'm sad to say, my ances-

tors did do a lot of raiding of monasteries and took what they had stolen back to Norway," Ingimund tells us. "A very long time ago, of course."

Ingimund did not, apparently, leave Chester alone – and, thanks to "diplomatic rather than violent means", a quarter of Chester's population was Scandinavian by the time of the Norman conquest in 1066.

The online resource was compiled by the Wirral's Learning Grid team, with guidance from Professor Stephen Harding from Nottingham University, an authority on the Vikings, who was born and brought up in the area. The website includes an extensive photo and video gallery and even Viking recipes. Students can learn to play hnefatafl, meaning "king's table" – a Norse precursor of chess – or peruse the section on DNA to find out if they are descended from Vikings ■

[www.wirral-abc.gov.uk/Vikings](http://www.wirral-abc.gov.uk/Vikings)



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