

## Chapter 1 Scandinavian Wirral

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### Introduction

Geographically, the Wirral is a relatively remote peninsula tucked away in the north-west of England between the estuaries of the Rivers Mersey and Dee. Today much of it is part of the greater Merseyside conurbation, linked to Liverpool by the ferry across the Mersey, and now also by road and rail tunnels. However, Wirralonians do not consider themselves to be Liverpoolians, and nor do the people of Liverpool see them as true Scousers, to them they are 'woollybacks'. The peninsula also had its own identity a millennium ago, when its northern half became the home of a colony of Viking immigrants in the tenth century.

The Wirral Viking colony is distinct from the other areas of Scandinavian settlement in England. It is a long way from the areas of eastern and north-eastern England that were relatively densely and extensively settled by Danish Vikings, sometimes called the 'Danelaw'. It is more closely associated with the settlement of north-western England by Norwegian Vikings in Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire north of the River Ribble (and extending into Dumfriesshire in south-west Scotland). But there is a gap between the Ribble and the Mersey with little evidence of Viking settlement in that area. Thus the Wirral enclave is also distinct from the Viking settlements north of the Ribble, and the origins and characteristics of the two Viking regions in the north-west were quite different.

This book sets out the evidence scholars have used to piece together the history of the Wirral Viking colony in the tenth century, and shows how they explain its origins and describe its characteristics.

### Vikings

The word 'Viking' is a modern term used of people whose origins were in Scandinavia — the present-day countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In particular, it is used of Scandinavians who, in the period known as the 'Viking Age' (AD 800–1100), left their homelands and were active, as raiders, traders and settlers, in many other countries (see chapter 2 for more detail on this Viking Age background). Much of Britain and Ireland felt the impact of the Viking invasions, particularly by Danes and Norwegians. The Danes were mostly active in England (especially the eastern part), the Norwegians mostly in Scotland, Ireland and the north-west of England. But to see these people as 'Danish' or as 'Norwegian' is somewhat misleading, since many of them did not come directly from the homelands, but were the offspring of families more or less permanently

based somewhere in Britain or Ireland. Like many other Vikings in northern and western Britain, the Wirral Vikings probably did not come directly from Norway. As we shall see, they may have come from Ireland, or the Isle of Man, or even western Scotland. For this reason, scholars tend to use the term 'Norse', which is more wide-ranging than 'Norwegian', and can be used of all people of Norwegian origin, whether in Norway, in the colonies of Britain and Ireland, or in the Viking colonies even further to the west (the Faroes, Iceland and Greenland).

### The arrival of the Vikings in the Wirral

The north-west of England is not well served by contemporary documents such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, so that the outline of Wirral's Viking settlement has to be deduced from other sources. It is true that Viking activity in Wirral is actually mentioned in the *Chronicle* in 893–4. A Danish army based in East Anglia fled the pursuing English army and marched to 'a deserted Roman site in Wirral, called Chester'. Although the English could not penetrate the Vikings' defences, they managed to starve them out by plundering the surrounding countryside, and the Danes returned to East Anglia the following year. This is the only record of Viking activity in this area from an Anglo-Saxon source, and it is probably not relevant to the establishment of the Wirral Viking colony.

Instead, we have to turn to Irish and Welsh sources, which need careful interpretation. The Vikings had been active in Ireland throughout the ninth century, and they established a naval base in 841 at what was later to be the town of Dublin. A reliable source, the *Annals of Ulster*, tells us that in 902 the Irish managed to expel the Vikings from there:

The heathens were driven from Ireland, i.e. from the fortress of Áth Cliath [Dublin] . . . and they abandoned a good number of their ships, and escaped half dead after they had been wounded and broken.

Where they escaped to is less clear, but it is likely that some of these Vikings settled on the Wirral. The evidence for this comes from a late and unreliable Irish text (the so-called *Fragmentary Annals* or *Three Fragments*, discussed in more detail by Wainwright in chapters 3 and 4 below). This relates how a certain Viking named Ingimund led a party of Norsemen from Ireland to Wales, and how they were driven out of there. Coming to England, Ingimund asked Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians, for land and she 'gave him lands near Chester'.<sup>1</sup> A more reliable Welsh text, the *Annales Cambriae*, confirms Ingimund's attack on Wales in 902, but it does not mention his subsequent journey to England.

The story of these Irish Vikings' arrival in and settlement on the Wirral is not corroborated by any other text, and it is heavily embroidered with fictional elements. Yet scholars have concluded that it must be correct, in its outlines at least, because it provides a satisfactory explanation for the cluster of Norse place-

<sup>1</sup> The Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia at this time covered roughly the same territory as the later counties of Cheshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

names found in the northern half of the peninsula (discussed in detail by Wainwright in chapters 3 and 4, and by Dodgson in chapter 5 below, see also the gazetteer, pp. 131–44). These Norse place-names appear to represent the ‘lands’ on which the Vikings settled, with the approval of the rulers of English Mercia.

These sources provide the foundation for the study of the Viking settlement on the Wirral. The written sources provide one explanation of how and why the colonisation came about, while the place-names give an indication of how far it extended. Within this basic framework, it is possible to study this and other evidence in more detail and to arrive at some understanding of life in tenth-century Norse Wirral. The evidence is sometimes conflicting, and it sometimes raises further questions rather than providing answers, but archaeology, art history and literature can all help to flesh out the picture of the Wirral Vikings and their way of life in the colony.

### ‘Norse’ settlers?

As already noted, it is misleading to think of the Wirral Vikings as purely Scandinavian. The written sources indicate that the Wirral colonists were Hiberno-Norse, that is, Scandinavians who had been established in Ireland. This picture of a culturally-mixed group of settlers is borne out by some of the Wirral place-names. Thus, Irby means ‘settlement of the Irish’, suggesting that some of the colonists were people from Ireland. The names Noctorum ‘dry hill(ock)’ and Liscard ‘hall at the rock’ are both composed of elements that come from the Irish language, suggesting that at least some of the colonists spoke Irish.<sup>2</sup> The picture becomes more complicated once we look closely at other place-names. While Landican appears to be a Welsh name, Denhall (in south Wirral) ‘spring of the Danes’ suggests that Danes were also involved. The place-name element *-by* is characteristic of the Danelaw, rather than more westerly Scandinavian settlements. And what does it mean when Norse speakers called a place ‘the settlement of the Irish’? Did they mean that the inhabitants were Irish-speaking Irish? Or did they mean it was a settlement of Norse speakers who had come from Ireland? This second explanation would suggest that most Norse speakers on the Wirral would have come from somewhere other than Ireland, for such a name to be distinctive. The native Anglo-Saxons should not be forgotten either. The name Denhall may have been given by English-speakers rather than Norse-speakers, in either case the spring was distinguished by the fact that it was frequented by Danes.

In 1983, the place-names expert Gillian Fellows-Jensen published an influential article arguing that some of the Viking settlers on the Wirral came from the Isle of Man.<sup>3</sup> A settlement by Ingimund and his followers from Dublin could not explain the variety and complexity of the North Wirral place-names, and she has suggested that some of the settlers came across the Pennines from the Danelaw, and that those who came across the Irish Sea were partly exiles

<sup>2</sup> For the most recent interpretation of Liscard, see Richard Coates, ‘Liscard and Irish names in northern Wirral’, *JEPNS* 30 (1997–8), 23–6.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Scandinavian settlement in the Isle of Man and Northwest England: the place-name evidence’, in Christine Fell *et al.*, eds, *The Viking Age in the Isle of Man* (London, 1983), pp. 37–52.

from Dublin and partly from the Isle of Man.<sup>4</sup> Fellows-Jensen's theory of the Wirral settlement has been widely accepted, but it does not fully explain how and why the various groups of Vikings came to mix in this way.

More recently, another place-names expert, Margaret Gelling, has suggested a slightly different model for the Viking settlement of the Wirral that both explains the variety of naming patterns and accounts for how they came about.<sup>5</sup> Gelling argues that the 'lands near Chester' given to Ingimund cannot really be the Norse-named villages of the North Wirral, and adapts a model postulated by Kenneth Cameron to explain the stages of Scandinavian settlement in eastern England (called 'Cameron's theory of secondary migration'). Thus, Ingimund and his followers (who were likely to have been few in number) became the lords of English villages near Chester, taking them over without changing their names. Once the Vikings took control of the peninsula in this way, it was possible for Norse farmers, from Ireland, or the Isle of Man, or almost anywhere, to settle in the relatively underpopulated areas of the Wirral, under the protection of the Viking overlords near Chester. Gelling arrived at this explanation not only by studying the village names of Norse origin, but also certain minor and field-names, which provide additional evidence for the use of Scandinavian speech in tenth-century Wirral, and which also occur in English-named villages. In doing this, Gelling followed in the footsteps of Wainwright (see chapter 8 below). Her study confirms that there was also a cluster of Norse settlements around the Norse-named Helsby and Norse-influenced Whitby (north of Chester), as well as in the northern half of the peninsula.

### Farmers and traders

The field-name elements studied by Gelling reveal the farming activities of the Norse settlers and aspects of the rural landscape. The ON element **þveit** 'clearing, meadow, paddock' found in field-names in Bidston refers to what were originally areas of grassland, which later became ploughed fields. In Childer Thornton, we find ON **afnám** 'a plot taken from common or undeveloped land'. In Hatton, Queastybirch Hall preserves an ON **kviga-stí** 'heifer pen'. Norwegian farmers practised (and still do) what is called 'transhumance', whereby sheep and cattle are pastured away from the farm during the summer to save the hay of the homefields for winter fodder. Viking settlers abroad adopted a word of Celtic origin for this practice and we find ON **ærgi** 'shieling, pasture' in quite a few Norse place-names in Britain. This word is possibly the origin of Arrowe, adjacent to Woodchurch, and of the field-name Organ in Great Sutton.

The Viking settlers named the non-cultivated parts of the landscape, too. ON **brekka** 'slope' is found in minor names in Greasby, Saughall Massie and Liscard. Ellen's Lane in Lower Bebington takes its name from a flat rock (ON **hella**). The ON element **melr** 'sandbank' is found in a field-name in Liscard, as

<sup>4</sup> See also her 'Scandinavian place-names of the Irish Sea province', in *Viking Treasure from the North West*, pp. 31–42.

<sup>5</sup> *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 132–4; 'Scandinavian settlement in Cheshire: the evidence of place-names', in Barbara E. Crawford, ed., *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain* (London, 1995), pp. 187–94.

well as in the major names Meols and Tranmere. But we need archaeological evidence to suggest the coastal activities of the Wirral Vikings. Erosion of the shore at Meols has uncovered the former settlement there, and thousands of archaeological finds were made in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Although these discoveries have not yet been fully published, it is clear from the records that Meols was a coastal trading site from prehistoric times through to the Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup> There was trading there in the eighth and ninth centuries, but there seems to have been a downturn in this activity towards the end of the ninth. In the tenth century, as a result of the Viking settlement in Wirral, Meols became revitalised. Finds of coins and metalwork from Meols dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries show regular trading contacts with the rest of England, the Irish Sea region and beyond. While Chester was an official port and mint for the kingdom of Mercia (see below), Meols seems to have operated as a trading centre for the politically separate Norse enclave on the peninsula, serving its own local Anglo-Scandinavian community.<sup>8</sup> It has even been suggested that a mint, producing 'Viking'-style imitations of official English coins, operated there in the late 1010s and early 1020s.<sup>9</sup>

### Social organisation

One of the most revealing place-names on the Wirral is Thingwall. It is centrally placed in the area of Norse settlement as defined by place-names, and represents the judicial and administrative centre of the area under Norse jurisdiction whose edge is marked by Raby 'boundary settlement'.<sup>10</sup> Variant versions of the name Thingwall are found in many places in the Norse-settled areas of the British Isles and in Iceland.<sup>11</sup> These places take their name from the common Scandinavian legal institution of the **þing**, an assembly of free men which made laws and took communal decisions. When **þing** is compounded with the element **vǫllr** 'plain, field', the name refers to the locality where such an assembly met. The sites bearing this name have good communication routes by land and sea, and they tend to have a large flat area of some kind so that those attending the assembly could pitch their tents and graze their horses. As the site of the Wirral Thingwall could not really be called a plain, it is likely that the name had already become established as a fixed compound used to refer to an assembly site, whether or

<sup>6</sup> Many are described in A. Hume, *Ancient Meols* (London, 1863). See also J. D. Bu'lock, 'The Celtic, Saxon, and Scandinavian settlement at Meols in Wirral', *THSLC* 112 (1960), 1–28 and his *Pre-Conquest Cheshire 383–1086* (Chester, 1972), pp. 67–8. The Meols finds are in the process of being published by David Griffiths.

<sup>7</sup> Griffiths, 'The coastal trading ports of the Irish Sea', in *Viking Treasure from the North West*, pp. 63–72.

<sup>8</sup> A Viking Age silver ingot found in 1995 at Ness would also appear to reflect trading activity on the Wirral, see below, pp. 18–9.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Blackburn, 'Hiberno-Norse and Irish Sea imitations of Cnut's *Quatrefoil* type', *The British Numismatic Journal* 66 (1996), 1–20.

<sup>10</sup> Dodgson, PN Ch 4 227–8, has argued that **hār** in the nearby Hargreave and Hargrave 'is probably used in the sense "boundary"'. It refers to a wood 'undisturbed for fear of trespass, ... "hoary" with age', and hence is the English equivalent of **rá** in Raby.

<sup>11</sup> See Gillian Fellows-Jensen, 'Thingwall, Dingwall and Thingwall', in *Twenty-eight Papers Presented to Hans Bekker-Nielsen on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday* (Odense, 1993), pp. 53–67.

not the term was entirely appropriate.

If it is not a complete fabrication, the scene, described as a 'council', in the Irish *Fragmentary Annals* in which Ingimund persuades 'the leaders of the Norsemen and Danes' to follow him in attacking Chester is very likely to have taken place at the assembly in Thingwall (see chapter 3 below). The area of Norse jurisdiction in Wirral can still be traced in feudal administrative patterns after the Norman Conquest (see chapter 5 below).

There is a cluster of Norse place-names directly across the Mersey in south-west Lancashire (now in and around Liverpool) which includes another Thingwall and a Roby (a variant of Raby) in an area with a number of other Scandinavian place-names (e.g. Crosby, West Derby).<sup>12</sup> Gillian Fellows-Jensen has suggested that this represents an expansion of the Wirral Viking settlement.<sup>13</sup> Whether the settlers on the underpopulated coasts across the Mersey came *en masse* from the Wirral, or whether they came from elsewhere, they clearly replicated the social organisation of the Wirral, thus showing that contact across the Mersey was as important in the tenth century as it is today.

### Religious organisation

Ninth-century Scandinavians were heathens, but they came into contact with the Christian religion almost everywhere they went, not least in Britain and Ireland. It may be significant that the *Annals of Ulster* mention the expulsion of 'heathens' from Dublin (quoted above, p. 2), but we do not know for certain whether the Wirral Viking colony was heathen or Christian or a mixture of both. Certainly if the settlers included Irish speakers, or the offspring of Hiberno-Norse marriages, it is likely that some of them were already Christian before they arrived in Wirral, and there is no direct evidence for Scandinavian paganism on the Wirral.<sup>14</sup> Although local folklore calls the outcrop of sandstone on Thurstaston Common 'Thor's stone', there is no evidence for any connection with the heathen Norse god. It is unlikely that the local tradition is genuine, or that the rock gave rise to the village-name. However, the place-name is associated with the Norse settlement, as it means 'Þorsteinn's farmstead' and commemorates an early Viking inhabitant of that name.

There is, however, evidence that links the Norse settlers with Christianity, particularly Irish Christianity. The church dedication of the parish of West Kirby is to the popular Irish saint, Bridget. Although the first mention of a church in West Kirby is in 1081, finds of cross-fragments from the tenth and eleventh centuries suggest that the church was much older. It could even have pre-dated the arrival of the Vikings, since they called the village *Kirkejuby* 'church settlement' (a name they also gave to the now-lost Kirby in Wallasey, in relation to which

<sup>12</sup> See F. T. Wainwright, 'The Scandinavians in Lancashire', *TLCAS* 58 (1945-6), 71-116; reprinted in H. P. R. Finberg, ed., *Scandinavian England* (Chichester, 1975), pp. 181-227.

<sup>13</sup> *Scandinavian Settlement Names in the North-West* (Copenhagen, 1985), p. 373.

<sup>14</sup> Prudence Vipond has identified a reminiscence of a heathen shrine in a field-name in Heswall, but this is an Old English name and refers to the period before the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of the Wirral became Christians, see her 'Harrow fields in Heswall-cum-Oldfield', *JEPNS* 25 (1992-3), 9-10, and Margaret Gelling, 'Paganism and Christianity in Wirral?', *JEPNS* 25 (1992-3), 11.

this one is designated West Kirby). West Kirby is also the site at which the Wirral's only hogback monument has been found (see fig. 7.6). Hogbacks are an Anglo-Scandinavian form of monument, and the main types are found only in northern England and southern Scotland, in areas of predominantly Norse settlement. They originated in North Yorkshire in the tenth century and their function is uncertain, but they were probably grave-markers. Their regular association with churches suggests that they marked the graves of Christian, rather than pagan, Vikings.<sup>15</sup>

While relatively few sculptures from the pre-Viking period survive on the Wirral (and in the rest of Cheshire),<sup>16</sup> it is clear that the Viking Age saw a great revival of stone sculpture in the whole Irish Sea region. Examples of this Viking-period sculpture have been found at several church-sites in Wirral: Bromborough, Neston, West Kirby and Woodchurch (see chapters 6 and 7 below).<sup>17</sup> A fragment of a cross-shaft discovered less than twenty years ago at Thornton-le-Moors north of Chester is also in an Anglo-Viking style, though with a fragmentary inscription in Old English.<sup>18</sup>

Like other evidence, the sculpture emphasises Wirral's links with the whole Irish Sea region and it is thus not a purely Scandinavian phenomenon.<sup>19</sup> However, this great surge in sculptural activity has been linked to the increasing prosperity of the region which accompanied (or perhaps even resulted from) the Scandinavian immigration.<sup>20</sup> This prosperity benefited the church as wealthy parishioners commissioned sculptures for it.

### The battle of *Brunanburh*

The evidence for Wirral's cultural, ecclesiastical and trading links with the rest of the Norse-influenced Irish Sea region is strong. But it is hard to pin down actual historical events associated with these contacts. One such event which some scholars have been inclined to link to Norse Wirral is the battle between the English king Æthelstan and a Scoto-Hiberno-Norse coalition, which is described in Old English verse in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 937, and recorded in a number of other sources.<sup>21</sup> This battle was decisive in Æthelstan's assertion of his authority over most of England, and against the active threats from Vikings, Irishmen and Scots (although the triumph of the House of Wessex was not complete until the defeat of Eirik Bloodaxe at Stainmoor in 954). The Old English poem says that the 937 battle was at a place called *Brunanburh*. Since the

<sup>15</sup> See James T. Lang, 'The hogback: a Viking colonial monument', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 3 (1984), 85–176.

<sup>16</sup> The Anglo-Saxon rune stone from Overchurch (now in the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum in Birkenhead) is one example, see R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 142.

<sup>17</sup> See also R. H. White, 'Viking-period sculpture at Neston, Cheshire', *JCAS* 69 (1986), 45–58, and B. E. Harris and A. T. Thacker, *A History of the County of Chester* I (Oxford, 1987), pp. 275–81 and 286–92.

<sup>18</sup> Marilyn M. Brown, D. B. Gallagher and J. Higgitt, 'An Anglo-Viking cross-shaft from Thornton Le Moors, Cheshire', *JCAS* 66 (1983), 23–30.

<sup>19</sup> Richard N. Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (London, 1980), pp. 177–82.

<sup>20</sup> Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in the North-West*, pp. 407–8.

<sup>21</sup> See Alistair Campbell, *The Battle of Brunanburh* (London, 1938), pp. 43–80.

regular phonological development of this Old English name would give Modern English Bromborough, it has been argued that the battle was at the place of that name in Wirral (see chapter 5 below). Certainly, Bromborough, on the edge of Norse Wirral where it meets Anglo-Saxon-controlled Mercia, would be a logical place for the meeting of the two sides, and the Mersey, with similar Norse colonies on either shore, would be a logical escape route for the defeated Vikings returning to Dublin.

The poem does not have much to say about the location of the battle and therefore we cannot use it to surmise anything about the Norse colony on the Wirral in the 930s. A thirteenth-century Icelandic saga, *Egils saga*, contains a description of a battle which many scholars have assumed is intended to be the same battle as the battle of *Brunanburh*. This is a reasonable enough conjecture, but in spite of this it is not possible to use the saga-descriptions as evidence for the appearance of the battle-site, since they are very likely the fabrications of the saga-author on the basis of a vaguely-remembered oral tradition, using common literary motifs.<sup>22</sup>

### Chester in the tenth and eleventh centuries

Ingimund's failed attempt to conquer Chester (see chapter 3 below) suggests that he recognised its strategic importance even at the beginning of the tenth century. The Mercian authorities needed to control the north-west of their earldom with its maritime openings to the Irish Sea. Once the city had been refortified by Æthelflæd, it experienced an economic boom and became an official port and mint.<sup>23</sup> It had particular significance as a trading port for the Irish Sea region, as shown by the predominance of Chester-minted coins found in tenth-century Irish hoards.<sup>24</sup>

As in many other Viking Age towns in Britain and Ireland, the trading community in Chester had a Scandinavian element, as demonstrated by some Scandinavian place-names in the city, which show the use of the Old Norse language, and by the names of some of the moneymen who struck coins there in the tenth and eleventh centuries (see chapter 3 below).<sup>25</sup> Chester also has two churches with dedications that suggest a community with Hiberno-Norse and Scandinavian interests: St Bridget's recalls the dedication of West Kirby, while St Olave's is dedicated to Scandinavia's first royal martyr, King Olaf of Norway, who was killed in battle in 1030, and whose cult was popular in England by 1055 at the latest. The place-names and the churches are both in the area south of the Roman fortress and it has been suggested that this was the area where the

<sup>22</sup> See Ian McDougall, 'Discretion and deceit: a re-examination of a military stratagem in *Egils saga*', in *The Middle Ages in the North-West*, pp. 109–42.

<sup>23</sup> Griffiths, 'The coastal trading ports of the Irish Sea', in *Viking Treasure from the North West*, p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> D. M. Metcalf, 'The monetary economy of the Irish Sea province', in *Viking Treasure from the North West*, pp. 89–106.

<sup>25</sup> J. McN. Dodgson, 'Place-names and street names at Chester', *JCAS* 55 (1968), 29–61. Harris and Thacker, *A History of the County of Chester I*, 257.



Scandinavians settled, as part of a multi-ethnic trading community.<sup>26</sup> Although personal names are not necessarily an indication of ethnic origin, it is noteworthy that individuals with Scandinavian names can be found in Chester records until the thirteenth century (see chapter 3 below).

Links between Chester and Norse Wirral can be traced in the Viking-period sculpture already mentioned. Art historians have identified a workshop associated with St John's Church in Chester. The crosses from West Kirby and Hilbre Island are thought to have been made at St John's or by craftsmen from there, and the crosses at Neston, Bromborough and Woodchurch are also closely related (see chapter 6 below).

Archaeological evidence from Chester strengthens the impression of the importance of its Irish Sea context. Ring-headed pins, arm-rings and brooches found in the city have parallels in Dublin and the Isle of Man, while some of the wooden buildings in tenth- and eleventh-century levels of the 'Scandinavian' area of the city are similar to buildings excavated in Viking Age trading towns such as Dublin.<sup>27</sup> The growth of Chester seems to have begun in the 920s, when there was both extensive building and extensive minting of coins there. The archaeology of the buildings suggests there was both industrial and agricultural activity at this period, while pottery finds suggest that Chester became prosperous as a staging-post in the trade between central and southern England and the Irish Sea area.<sup>28</sup>

### This book

In this book, we present a complete gazetteer of the major place-names of the Wirral (pp. 131–44), which provides the most important evidence for the Viking settlement of this area. To introduce this material, we have reprinted some of the most influential articles of the last eighty years, in which a variety of scholars consider this and other evidence for that settlement (chapters 3–8 below). These are all classic studies in the history of Viking Wirral. Although some of their details may have been superseded by more recent research, they are still the most detailed and thorough expositions of the evidence available, and are still well worth reading. In this introductory chapter, I have tried to summarise the current state of research on the Wirral Vikings, and interested readers may wish to follow up some of the references in the footnotes to see how scholars' interpretations are changing. In the following chapter I introduce the Viking Age background to the Wirral settlement, and the Scandinavian homelands, and give consideration to where the Viking settlers came from and how they found their way to Wirral.

<sup>26</sup> Griffiths, 'The coastal trading ports of the Irish Sea', in *Viking Treasure from the North West*, p. 68; D. J. P. Mason, *Excavations at Chester. 26–42 Lower Bridge Street 1974–6: The Dark Age and Saxon Periods* (Chester, 1985), p. 21; Simon W. Ward, *Excavations at Chester. Saxon Occupation within the Roman Fortress: Sites Excavated 1971–1981* (Chester, 1994), p. 121.

<sup>27</sup> Harris and Thacker, *A History of the County of Chester I*, p. 258; Griffiths, 'The coastal trading ports of the Irish Sea', in *Viking Treasure from the North West*, p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> Griffiths, 'The coastal trading ports of the Irish Sea', in *Viking Treasure from the North West*, p. 69.

The first of the reprinted papers is F. T. Wainwright's seminal study from 1942 of 'North-west Mercia' in which he considers Ingimund and does an initial survey of Old Norse place-names in the Wirral to see how the Viking settlers were distributed. This is followed (chapter 4) by his thorough study from 1948 of the Irish and Welsh sources for 'Ingimund's invasion'. In chapter 5, John Dodgson's study of 'The background of [the battle of] *Brunanburh*' is as much an analysis of the Norse colony in Wirral as it is an argument for locating the battle in Bromborough. The Wirral Norse were largely Christianised, as is clear from the following two chapters on Viking-period sculpture. In chapter 6, J. D. Bu'lock's study from 1956-7 of the 'Pre-Norman crosses of West Cheshire and the Norse settlements around the Irish Sea' links the Wirral sculptures to the rest of the Norse-influenced Irish Sea region. This is followed in chapter 7 by W. G. Collingwood's more detailed analysis of the 'Early Monuments of West Kirby', including the hogback, and first published in 1928. Chapter 8 is a short introduction to Scandinavian field names in Wirral published by Wainwright in 1943.

Although the reprinted articles were all produced in the twentieth century, interest in the Norse past on Merseyside goes back well before then, as is demonstrated in chapter 9, written for this volume by Andrew Wawn. Chapter 10 explores in more detail the local origins of some common Wirral names and legends: Stephen Harding identifies locations in present-day Wirral which reveal its Viking heritage and considers some recent legends about its Viking past. This leads into the gazetteer of major names, which is also an index, compiled for this volume by Paul Cavill. The book concludes with some suggestions for further reading.