

Viking Wirral Venture

Astrid Kähler is a Norwegian freelance writer who contributes to British and Norwegian magazines and newspapers. She has visited Liverpool and the Wirral a couple of times and has fallen head over heels in love with the area, its landscape, history and people.



Thingwall Viking Assembly Field

Considering the appalling behaviour of some of my forefathers when they were last here, I am amazed and relieved that I am not being met with drawn swords and boiling oil when I meet the Wirral History and Heritage Association representatives who have promised to show me around Viking Wirral.

Even though our mail exchanges have been very civil, for all I know they might have planned a plot to finally get back at one of my ancestral scoundrels. And I would, and could not blame them. Having been kicked out of Ireland (no doubt on account of their bad manners), about 1,100 years ago, Vikings roamed the area as if it were their own playground. Plundering here, burning there, and in general literally making a 'bloody' nuisance of themselves.

You'd better shape up

I don't know if it's because we eventually shaped up and settled down, or it was due to the Wirralians' forgiving nature, but the way I am treated gives no cause for alarm. On the contrary – cordially I'm greeted, and cordially I'm shown around.

Wirral's gently rolling landscape framed by waters on three sides is as pleasing to the eye today as it was to settlers in prehistory. And, moreover, it provided them with dry building grounds, good soil and ample natural resources. The many bodies of water have facilitated and encouraged transportation and communication, and Celts, Romans, Anglo Saxons, Vikings, and Normans are among the many groups of people who have made their mark on both landscape and waterscape.

Notebook on fire

My two native guardian angels are so full of knowledge and enthusiasm that soon both my mind and notebook are on fire. Trying to keep up or jot down everything is impossible. I take in as much as I can, all the while slowly, but surely, coming to appreciate the love they have for the area and its rich and many-faceted history. A love constantly nurtured through surveys, carefully selected diggings, research and protective measures. A devotion generously shared with both the general public and students through lectures, training, guided tours, websites and theme days.

The Wirral experience comprises a glorious multitude of historic and prehistoric delicacies. My eyes are pleased and my mind calmed as we drive through quaint little villages. The church, as always, hovering over man and beast, the village green surrounding the often even greener little pond, and the most fortunate communities still harbouring an operative Red Lion, Fox and Hounds or Hole in the Wall in their midst.



Thurstaston Beach



The Railway in Meols where a Viking ship was found buried beneath the pub car park

Botox-injected Hollywood stars

Many of the villages' inviting looking stone cottages and wattle-and-daub houses have had more alterations, extensions and additions done to them than the average gerascophobic, Botox-injected and silicon-upholstered Hollywood star. The result is an interesting tale of changing times, needs and techniques.

Wherever we walk or drive, we keep following or crossing the extensive road system laid out by the Romans. Churches, in themselves well worth a visit, house elaborately and sometimes uniquely carved Viking gravestones. Pub parking lots (well, at least one), cover the remains of assumed Viking longships, laid down by the same people who on a low, but centrally located hill held 'Tings', or assemblies, where decisions were made, differences settled, alliances entered into.

The start of a beautiful friendship

An old port, most likely used for as long as people have lived in the area, relates a never-ending story of subsistence activities, far-reaching trade and communications, wars, pursuit of power, control and wealth. I am being told about and shown the possible site of the crucial turn-of-event-power-structure-and-state-shaping battle field of Brunanburh, Viking settlements now under excavation, the exciting find of a unique Roman Nerva coin, the grounds of a medieval hospital for unfortunate seafarers...

My friends and the area are cornucopias, overflowing with stories and information. The air is so dense with history, in names, genes, artefacts, sites, tales and sagas, that I quickly realise we are just skimming the surface of a huge prehistoric treasure trove, containing goodies dating all the way back to the Stone Age. I have had a mouthwatering introduction to the area, an introduction which hopefully is the start of a beautiful and long-lasting friendship with The Wirral, its history, and ancient and present people.

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