

Unravelling the Northwest's Viking past

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The blood of the Vikings is still coursing through the veins of men living in the North West of England — according to a new study which has been just published.

Focusing on the Wirral in Merseyside and West Lancashire the study of 100 men, whose surnames were in existence as far back as medieval times, has revealed that 50 per cent of their DNA is specifically linked to Scandinavian ancestry.

The collaborative study, by The University of Nottingham, the University of Leicester and University College London, reveals that the population in parts of northwest England carries up to 50 per cent male Norse origins, about the same as modern Orkney.

The 14-strong research team, funded by the Wellcome Trust and a prestigious Watson-Crick DNA anniversary award from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), was led by the University of Nottingham's Professor Stephen Harding and Professor Judith Jesch and the University of Leicester's Professor Mark Jobling.

Stephen Harding, Professor of Physical Biochemistry in the School of Biosciences said; "DNA on the male Y-chromosome is passed along the paternal line from generation to generation with very little change, providing a powerful probe into ancestry. So a man's Y-chromosome type is a marker to his paternal past. The method is most powerful when populations rather than individuals are compared with each other. We

can also take advantage of the fact that surnames are also passed along the paternal generations. Using tax and other records the team selected volunteers who possess a surname present in the region prior to 1600. This gets round the problems of large population movements that have occurred since the Industrial revolution in places like Merseyside.”

After their expulsion from Dublin in 902AD the Wirral Vikings, initially led by the Norwegian Viking INGIMUND, landed in their boats along the north Wirral coastline. Place names still reflect the North West’s Viking past. Aigburth, Formby, Crosby, Toxteth, Croxteth are all Viking names — even the football team Tranmere is Viking. Thingwall is the name of a Viking parliament or assembly (Thingvellir in Iceland) and the only two in England are both in the North West — one in Wirral and one in Liverpool.

The results of this research have just been published by *Molecular Biology and Evolution*.

Source: University of Nottingham

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