

The Vikings' legacy in Ireland

The Vikings had a major impact on Ireland, firstly as raiders and then as settlers. In Scandinavia, the Vikings were farmers and fishermen with superb boat-building and navigational skills that allowed them to travel to many European countries, as well as to North Africa, Russia, the Middle East and even America.

The Viking long-ships were clinker-built boats with hulls made by overlapping planks of oak and pine. These boats were able to weather the worst storms at sea but were still shallow enough to navigate rivers.

The Sea Stallion is a replica of a large Viking warship discovered near Roskilde in Denmark. The original ship, which had a crew of more than 60 men, was built using trees felled in the Dublin/Wicklow area circa 1042. It was impressive ships like these that instilled the fear of the Vikings in the Irish.

VIKING RAIDERS

The first raids on Ireland took place in the period from the 790s to 830s and were focused on the rich monasteries. By the middle of the ninth century, the Vikings were establishing bases or longphorts, some of which grew into trading settlements and eventually towns.

The remains of Viking longphorts or fortified ship bases from which raiding expeditions were carried out can be difficult to identify. By their very nature, many longphorts were temporary while others, such as Dublin, developed to become large settlements.

A number of Irish longphorts have been identified, such as at Dunrally, Co Laois on the River Barrow, at Athlunkard, Co Clare on the River Shannon and at Annagassan on the coast of Co Louth.

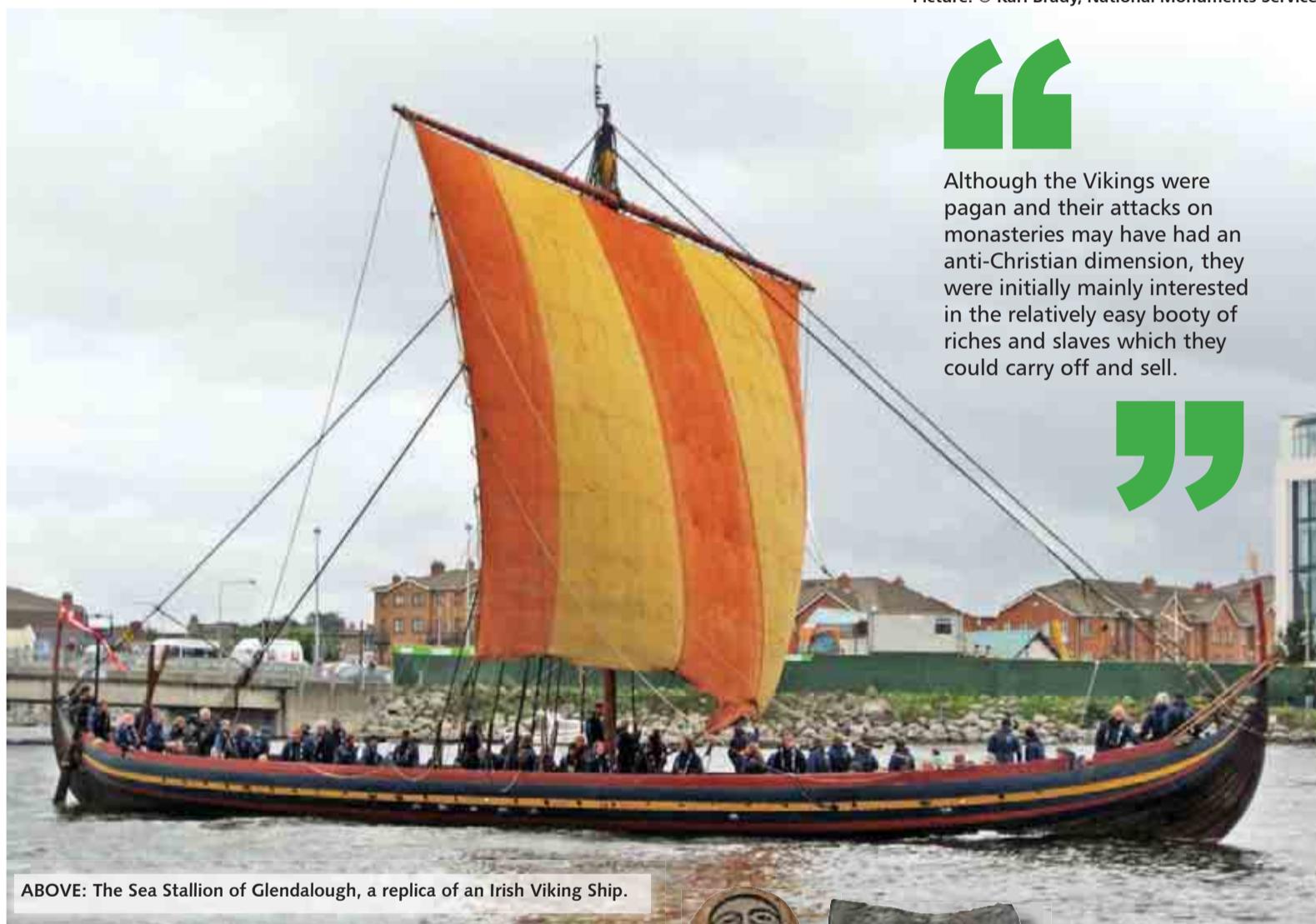
Although the Vikings were pagan and their attacks on monasteries may have had an anti-Christian dimension, they were initially mainly interested in the relatively easy booty of riches and slaves which they could carry off and sell. No doubt the Vikings helped themselves to cattle as they needed them, but their main objective would have been the granaries, other food stuffs and valuables stored in the monasteries. This made the monasteries prime targets for the Norsemen.

In reality, raids from the native Irish on monasteries occurred even before the Vikings arrived and probably happened on a more regular basis.

The first phase of lightning raids gave way over time to colonisation and settlement. Important Viking remains and examples of exquisite craftsmanship have been found at

This is the latest in a series of articles from the National Monuments Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to introduce *Farmers Journal* readers to the archaeology of Ireland and to highlight the vital role of the farming community in preserving our heritage.

Picture: © Karl Brady, National Monuments Service.



ABOVE: The Sea Stallion of Glendalough, a replica of an Irish Viking Ship.

Wood Quay, Christchurch Place and in the Temple Bar area of Dublin. In Wood Quay, the remains of about 200 houses from the 10th and 11th centuries were uncovered. The houses were rectangular in plan and had walls of post and wattle and evidence of roofs thatched with barley straw. In most cases, the roofs were supported by posts located inside the house. Most had hipped roofs rather than gabled roofs.

The streets of the Viking town were surfaced with gravel and stones, wattle mats or split logs. Plots and yards were divided from each other by post and wattle fences, implying continuity and respect for property.

VIKING SETTLEMENTS

Viking ports and settlements were also established at Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Limerick, which became the first large towns

in Ireland. There is also growing evidence of a sustained presence along the west coast where they exploited the deep sea fishing and coastal marine resources of the area.

During archaeological investigations in 2002, prior to the building of a bypass around Waterford city, an important discovery was made in the townland of Woodstown on the banks of the River Suir. Excavations uncovered numerous objects, including silver ingots, weights and a Viking burial with weapons. The metal objects have been dated to the mid-ninth century. The evidence suggests that Woodstown was a significant Viking raiding base and trading centre in the ninth century.

Over 1,000 years since the arrival of the Vikings to these shores, their imprint on Ireland is still evident



These and other objects from the Woodstown Viking settlement are on permanent display in Waterford Treasures at Reginald's Tower, Waterford.

ABOVE LEFT: A lead weight with applied glass or enamel panel depicting a stylised human face. ABOVE RIGHT: An iron axehead. ABOVE: An iron Viking sword.

Pictures: © National Roads Authority / Studio Lab

“

Although the Vikings were pagan and their attacks on monasteries may have had an anti-Christian dimension, they were initially mainly interested in the relatively easy booty of riches and slaves which they could carry off and sell.

”

today. *Fjord* is a Viking word meaning an inlet of the sea. When the Vikings came to Ireland they explored our coastline and gave names to inlets such as Carlingford and Strangford loughs, as well as to places like Wexford and Waterford.

Some Irish surnames including MacAuliffe (son of Olaf), McIvor (son of Ivor) and Doyle (dark foreigner) clearly reflect a strong Norse influence.

The National Museum of Ireland has a permanent exhibition on Viking Ireland at Kildare St, Dublin with exciting exhibitions also on display at the County Museum Dundalk and in Reginald's Tower, Waterford city. **CL**

NEXT WEEK: MEDIEVAL GRANGE FARMS