The Vikings’ legacy in Ireland

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.

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.

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 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 at places like Wexford and Waterford. Some Irish surnames including MacAuliffe (son of Olaf), McVor (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.

NEXT WEEK: MEDIEVAL GRANGE FARMS

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