Search for the Norse Influence.

This short piece is written for VAST-VIEW ('Viking Age Skills Training – Venues, Infrastructure, Environment, Work') and explores the Vikings in England – especially in the North West where project partners Grampus Heritage and Moorforge are based.

This rather interesting map is a good basis for discussion about the Norse (Viking) influence in England. It shows the rather delicate balance in the year 878 AD, with Saxon (English) territories effectively split by a Norse 'push' over present-day Stainmore and through the Yorkshire Dales to link east and west coasts of northern England. Celtic influences hang on in the west. The year 878 is significant because it was the date of the 'Treaty of Chippenham' (or 'Wedmore') - ***" The agreement made between King Alfred and the Danish leader Guthrum at Wedmore proved a turning-point in the Danish wars. From their fortified position at Chippenham the Danes had threatened to overrun all Wessex, but Alfred emerged from his refuge at Athelney, inflicted a severe defeat on the Danes at Edington, and forced peace on Guthrum on condition that he would himself accept baptism and that his army would leave Wessex. The Danes kept the substance of the arrangement, moving the army back to Cirencester and ultimately to East Anglia"*** *(ref: 'A Dictionary of British History by John Cannon,* 2009, ISBN-13: 9780199550371)

Of course, this is a long way off the end of the Norse influence story. Between 878 and 1066, the following critical events followed….

In Ireland the year 902 saw Máel Finnia mac Flannacain of Brega and Cerball mac Muirecáin of Leinster joining forces against Norse Dublin, and "The heathens were driven from Ireland, i.e. from the fortress of Áth Cliath [Dublin]". The refugees settled in Anglesey, Cumbria, the Wirrel and South West Scotland. This would have been the time of greatest influence around Plumbland, Crosscanonby, Aspatria and Gilcrux (the area around Dave Watsaon's Moorforge –

VAST-VIEW partner). This is also (possibly) the period when the Cuerdale Hoard was buried…the largest Viking hoard ever found outside Russia, was discovered in 1840 by workmen repairing the embankment along the River Ribble at Cuerdale near Preston in Lancashire.

Around 8,600 objects were buried in the lead-lined chest, made up mainly of coins but also including ingots, amulets, chains, rings, as well as broken-up brooches and armlets.

Cuerdale Hoard

Most of the hoard is made up of bullion, weighing over 36kg (the total hoard weighs approximately 40kg). Most of the pieces were items of silver jewellery that had been broken up, either for use as hacksilver or for payment in bullion. Much of it was of Norse Irish origin – i.e. bossed penannular brooches and thistle brooches – alongside Scandinavian arm-rings and neck-rings. A Carolingian buckle and some brooch fragments showed evidence of contact with France and there was also a Pictish silver sheet and fragment of a silver comb.

Even by today's standards, this 10th century cache represents an astounding wealth, leading to speculation that this was a massive war chest put together by the recently expelled Vikings from Dublin intent on making a forceful return.

That much of the hacksilver, or bullion, is of Irish Norse gives weight to this argument, as does the presence of newly minted coins made by York Vikings. Added to this, the Ribble Valley was a main thoroughfare for trade between Viking York and the Irish Sea. Ref: 'Current Archaeology Oct 2010'.

Some scholars think that these Hiberno Norse settlers became a significant element in the army of the Cumbrian king Dunmail - himself being the last of a long line of Cumbrian kings of ancient British lineage. His father, Owain, supposedly the 'giant' buried at the Giant's Grave in Penrith (Norse influenced 'Hogback stones'), fought and lost at the great Battle of Brunanburh against the Saxon King Athelstan in 937CE. Just eight years later, his son found himself similarly imperilled at the site of Dunmail Raise.

The critical factor was the allegiance of the Scots. In 937CE, King Constantine fought with Owain of Cumbria. In 945CE, Constantine's son Malcolm switched sides and fought with the Saxon King Edmund against Dunmail. Their combined forces were overwhelming, and the Cumbrians (+ Norse) were defeated. The presence of the Norse at Dunmail Raise was attested by (but not proven) the British artist, historian and author, W G Collingwood. By the 1890s Collingwood had become a skilled painter and also joined the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society. He wrote a large number of papers for its Transactions; becoming editor in 1900. Collingwood was particularly interested in Norse lore and the Norsemen, and he wrote a novel, *Thorstein of the Mere* which was a major influence on Arthur Ransome.

In 1897, Collingwood travelled to Iceland where he spent three months over the summer exploring with Jón Stefánsson the sites around the country in which the medieval Icelandic sagas are set. He produced a large number of sketches and watercolours during this time (e.g. the picture of the Althing shown left), and published, with Stefánsson, an illustrated account of their expedition in 1899 under the title *A Pilgrimage to the Sagasteads of Iceland* (Ulverston: W. Holmes).

Collingwood was a member of the Viking Club and served as its president. In 1902 he co-authored again with Jón Stefánsson the first translation it published, a translation of Kormáks saga entitled, *The Life and Death of Kormac the Skald*. His study of Norse

and Anglican archaeology made him widely recognized as a leading authority. Following Ruskin's death Collingwood continued to help for a while with secretarial work at Brantwood, but in 1905 went to University College, Reading (now the University of Reading) and served as professor of fine art from 1907 until 1911.

Below left: W G Collingwood's painting of the Althing with its buildings (booths) makes me think of Dave Watson's forge and Guðjón Stefán Kristinsson's and Margrét Hrönn Hallmundsdóttir's pithouse (below right) constructed during the 'Green Village' project and VAST-VIEW (a 'Transfer of innovation from that project).

King Canute or Cnut the Great (Old Norse: *Knútr inn ríki*; 985 or 995 – 12 November 1035), became a king of Denmark, England, Norway, and parts of Sweden, together often referred to as the Anglo-Scandinavian or North Sea Empire. After his death, the deaths of his heirs within a decade, and the Norman conquest of England in 1066, his legacy was largely lost to history. Historian Norman Cantor has made the statement that he was "the most effective king in Anglo-Saxon history", despite his not being Anglo-Saxon.

Cnut was of Danish and Slavic descent. His father was Sweyn Forkbeard, King of Denmark (which gave Cnut the patronym *Sweynsson*, Old Norse *Sveinsson*). Cnut's mother was the daughter of the first duke of the Polans, Mieszko I; her name may have been Świętosława. As a Prince of Denmark, Cnut won the throne of England in 1016 in the wake of centuries of Viking activity in northwestern Europe. We might consider this point in history to be the height of Norse influence in England. His accession to the Danish throne in 1018 brought the crowns of England and Denmark together. Cnut maintained his power by uniting Danes and Englishmen under cultural bonds of wealth and custom, rather than by sheer brutality. After a decade of conflict with opponents in Scandinavia, Cnut claimed the crown of Norway in Trondheim in 1028. The Swedish city Sigtuna was held by Cnut. He had coins struck there that called him king, but there is no narrative record of his occupation.