

The Elder Days, 1971-1979

Commentary by Paul Murphy

Nothing springs into life fully formed, but instead grows in phases and can change significantly along the way. So it was for re-enactment, though most of us were unable to witness it, so the story is necessarily told second hand and after a time lag where events become somewhat hazy or disputed.

In our case the story begins in a London militaria shop where a regular customer (Alan Jeffery) and the manager (Peter Seymour) discussed the film work which Pete had been involved in called “It Happened Here” which explored what the UK would have looked like had Germany successfully invaded in 1940. Further film work seemed an attractive way to meet like-minded people and earn some money to pay for more collectibles, and so a club was formed to act out experiences and to train further recruits. However, further opportunities proved limited, and in an attempt to broaden the potential appeal, a decision was made to also cover the Viking period, and thus the **Norse Film and Pageant Society** was born.

With numbers initially under 20, public events were small scale or involved working with other newly-formed re-enactment groups covering the medieval period, including another Viking group in Durham which had formed independently. For the first few years, this new society staged 4-6 events per year, including at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich in 1973. A small collection of photos of this event survive in the archives, while a splendid piece of BBC film shows the event at Tonbridge castle in 1975 where Vikings and Knights fought each other for possession of the castle. Among the early members seen on screen are Pete Seymour, Gerry East, John Hamm, and a very young Chris Franklin – scan the QR code to view the video on Youtube.



After a parting of the ways in 1975, the founder members established the **Odin Guard**, leaving Gerry East to run the society. Gerry set about expanding membership considerably, and groups sprang up in several places over the latter years of the 1970s, including Blackpool, Norwich, Troon/Glasgow, Bristol and Birmingham.



The celebrations to mark the Manx Millennium in 1979 provided an opportunity for the society to travel to the island to take part in both the Tynwald ceremonies and a battle on the beach at Peel alongside the locals who had been staging their own Viking displays since 1961.

While in the early days our members struggled for information on what authentic clothing and equipment should look like, they didn't lack enthusiasm and the foundations had been laid that allowed us to build what we have today.