

peel vikings



isle
of
man

as
filbert

historical Background

Extract from 'OUTLINES FROM MANX HISTORY' by C. R. Shimmin

In A.D. 798, Viking rovers first visited the Isle of Man. After robbing the Church of St. Patrick, they set the building on fire and sailed away.

For nearly one hundred years the Northmen continued their incursions. They did not settle in the island, but stayed only long enough to plunder and destroy.

At the close of the ninth century, Harold Harfagr, an ambitious chief, after much fighting, made himself king of all Norway, uniting under his crown the petty kingdoms into which the country had been divided. Many of the defeated chieftains, with their followers, rather than submit to the tyranny of the new king, left Norway and settled in the Scottish islands and Mann.

From these islands they harassed Harold by incessantly raiding the new kingdom of Norway. The king at length determined to put a stop to these attacks, and, having collected a powerful fleet of warships, set sail for the islands which sheltered his enemies. Arriving at the Western islands, his course was marked by destruction and slaughter. The news of his arrival quickly spread, and the chiefs and people fled in terror before him into the mountains of Scotland.

Beaching the Longships

Arriving in Mann, King Harold found the island desolated, as the entire population, with their goods and cattle, had retreated into Galloway. The king left garrisons behind him; but when the islanders returned to their homes they destroyed the Norwegians, and, in revenge, again began their raids on Norway.

For nearly one hundred years from this time the Isle of Man had no settled government. As a consequence, the island became a buffer state between the petty Norse Kings of Ulster and Northumbria, and its fate was to be ruled by one and plundered by the other.

It is to the middle of the tenth century that tradition assigns the coming of King Orry. The story says that his fleet came to land on the sands at Jurby on a fine starry night. The Viking, standing in the bow of the vessel, with an upward sweep of his arm, indicated the Milky Way and answered, 'That is the way to my country'.

The Manxmen, sorely in need of a leader, made him welcome. He stayed, became King of Mann and the Scottish Islands, and ruled wisely. He divided the island into six ship shires, or sheadings, and introduced the legislative system which is part of our constitution today.



the pageant

The setting is a Celtic village on the west coast of the Isle of Man, A.D. 798. St. Germanus, patron of the west Manx, in whose name the cathedral on St. Patrick's Isle is dedicated, is shown leading his flock in Christian worship outside a 'keill' (chapel).

Following this, the Celtic people carry out the various activities of village life – cooking, weaving, grinding corn, making weapons and metalwork, cleaning hides, etc. – while the youth of the village are engaged in traditional dancing.

Four brightly coloured galleys appear to the north of the village, as sentries report that they are traders but signal fires warn of danger. The villagers go to the water's edge with items to trade with the Norsemen.

As the longships approach, the shields are turned to the blood-red and the chant 'Odin' is heard. The villagers race back – the men for their weapons and the women and children to the stockades. The ships run on to the beach and a battle between the Vikings and villagers ensues. Then the Norsemen loot and burn the village, rounding up the women and children as slaves.

A Viking Jarl (Earl), killed during the fight, is collected by the Valkyries and is placed in a small 'gig' with his shield and weapons. A slave girl is killed to accompany his soul on its long journey to Valhalla. The small boat is pulled to the water's edge, and to the sound of war horns and cries to 'Odin' the Viking warrior sets out on his last journey – his ship burning.

A.D. 840. The Vikings, now settled in Mann with their Celtic war brides, elect a King to govern them wisely and justly. The Lagman (Deemster) suggests suitable candidates, and by popular acclaim 'Godred' is chosen. In his speech, he urges unity between the Celtic and Norse people.

A great feast is held and the 'King of Mann and the Isles' is entertained by a dancer performing 'The Sword Dance to the Kings of Mann'.

Celtic Chiefs and Viking Earls from other lands arrive to pay homage to Godred and the entire company cheer and stand to sing the Manx National Anthem.

Viking Chieftains



peel viking festival activities

Although the Peel Viking Festival Committee is still only a comparatively new organisation, it has been a very active one. It was formed in October 1960, with the sole object of staging the Viking Festival and it is purely a voluntary body.

From the word 'go' the festival captured the imagination of the public, particularly as all the men grew beards just for the festival. A tremendous amount of work went into the first festival – the costuming of 300 cast with Viking and Celtic costumes; the converting of old ship's lifeboats into longships; the laying out of the beach as a Celtic village. The scene was all set when the stockade was washed down by a storm. It was rebuilt in time for the festival, but the sea was so rough the boats could only come from the breakwater, but the landing was made successfully, watched by an estimated crowd of 22,000, and the festival was here to stay.

In 1962 the festival was again a success, but the committee decided to go further afield. So, in August 1962, a small party of five Vikings and two committee members went on a fishing vessel to Kilkeel, Northern Ireland, to explore the possibility of raiding there. Plans were drawn up, and in September an armada of fishing boats sailed from Peel carrying 120 Vikings and Valkyries and towing the four longships, and the landing was so successful that a further raid was made in June 1963 and it again proved a worthwhile effort. On both occasions, the Peel Vikings captured twelve Irish maidens and brought them back to Peel and gave them a week's free holiday.

In 1963 the Peel Viking Festival was seen by Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Queen Elizabeth, and in 1969 by Miss World, Miss Penny Plumber.

The Boat Races were inaugurated in 1962 and were confined to the crews taking part in the festival. However, in 1966, this event was expanded to include any crew who wished to enter, and a special event for ladies was added, and now this night attracts as large a crowd as the festival. In 1969 a sheading race was introduced when teams from different parts of the island compete.

The Longhouse, which is fast becoming a tourist attraction, was bought in 1967. It was an old net loft which is gradually being transformed into a unique building and is being used for various cultural and charitable purposes. The work being carried out by voluntary labour.

The committee take a keen interest in the preservation of Manx customs, and encourage children, by running competitions, to learn and carry on these traditions. They also run a children's party at Christmas.



Herbert the Terrible