Norðmenn and their names?
Languages and dialects in contact in Viking-Age England

Eleanor Rye
eleanor.rye@york.ac.uk
PhD: ‘Dialect in the Viking-Age Scandinavian Diaspora: the evidence of medieval minor names’

- Based on ‘*minor names*’: the names of places smaller than settlements

- A *quantitative study*: compared Old English and Old Norse contributions to place-name vocabulary in two areas:
  - the **West Ward of Westmorland Barony** in Cumbria
  - the **Wirral** in the north-west midlands.
Scandinavian settlement in Wirral

- Scandinavian major place-names.
- Settlement reported in *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*.
- Jewellery and sculpture of types associated with Scandinavian spheres of influence.
- Genetic survey (Bowden et al. 2008): 47 ± 5% Norwegian male ancestry in pre-industrial population.

Scandinavian settlement in the West Ward

- Major place-names
- Jewellery and sculpture of forms associated with areas of Scandinavian settlement.
- Genetic survey (Penrith): 37 ± 3% Norwegian male ancestry in modern population (Bowden et al, 2008).
Outline

- Quantifying Scandinavian vocabulary in minor place-names from northwest England:
  - how can this be done and what can it tell us?
  - findings from case-studies
- The legacy of English-Scandinavian contact: English and Scandinavian vocabulary in the Middle English period.
Quantifying Scandinavian vocabulary in minor names: material

- All minor names recorded before 1500 excerpted from volumes of the Survey of English Place-Names
- Wirral: 584 names
- West Ward: 555 names

Quantifying Scandinavian vocabulary in minor names: method

- Count both English- and Scandinavian-derived words in order to assess the relative Scandinavian contribution to minor name vocabulary.
Identifying Scandinavian place-name elements

- Closely related languages: some words indistinguishable, especially **cognates** (e.g. OE *hūs*, ON *hús* ‘house’, OE *land*, ON *land* ‘land’)

- **BUT**: some cognates only used in place-names in one of the languages, e.g. ON *holmr* ‘island, water-meadow’ (cf. OE *holm* ‘sea, wave’)

---

### Identifying Scandinavian vocabulary: sounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old English</th>
<th>Old Norse</th>
<th>Modern English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ɑː] (as hɑrm) <em>stān</em> ‘stone’</td>
<td>[ɑɪ] (as bʌy) <em>steinn</em></td>
<td><em>nay</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[tʃ] (as church) <em>čiriče</em> ‘church’ [sometimes!]</td>
<td>[k] (as kɪte) <em>kirkja</em></td>
<td><em>kirk</em> ‘church’ (Scottish and northern)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[j] (as yɛs) <em>ġeard</em> ‘enclosure’ [sometimes!]</td>
<td>[ɡ] (as gate) <em>garthr</em></td>
<td><em>garth</em> ‘enclosed land’ (eastern and northern)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ʃ] (as ship) <em>scip</em> ‘ship’ [sometimes!]</td>
<td>[sk] (as skɪn) <em>skip</em></td>
<td><em>skirt</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[æɑ] <em>hlēap</em> ‘leap’</td>
<td>[ɑʊ] (as loud) <em>hlaup</em></td>
<td><em>loup</em> ‘leap’ (Scottish and northern)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Differences in vocabulary, personal names and grammar

- Vocabulary, e.g.:
  - bý ‘farm, village’ (Derby; Raby, Ch.)
  - holmr ‘island’, raised ground (Durham; Levenshulme, La.).
  - lundr ‘small wood’ (Lound, Nt.)
  - toft ‘building plot’ (Lowestoft, Sf.)
  - þveit ‘clearing’ (Crosthwaite, Wml.)

- Personal names: e.g. Þorsteinn (Thurstaton, Ch.), Ragnhildr (Raynildes Pool 1330, Ch.)

- Distinctively Scandinavian grammatical endings, e.g. Helperby (North Yorks) < ON fem. personal name Hjalp (genitive singular Hjalpar) + bý ‘farm, village’.
Results

West Ward, Cumbria

Wirral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Old English</th>
<th>Old Norse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different Elements</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Elements</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Old English</th>
<th>Old Norse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different Elements</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Elements</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

- Major names: Scandinavian place-names in both areas.
- Scandinavian vocabulary remained a very significant proportion of vocabulary used in minor names in the West Ward...
- ...and much less so in Wirral.
- Explanation?
  - Continued use of Norse in Cumbria into 12th century (runic and place-name evidence)
Delving deeper into the Scandinavian impact on the areas’ dialects

- Middle English dialect of West Ward contained a great deal more Scandinavian-derived vocabulary than dialect of the Wirral.
- The legacy of English-Scandinavian contact
  - how was Scandinavian vocabulary integrated into the two areas’ dialects?
- Investigate what happens in the following situations:
  - element known in Old Norse only
  - elements for which Old English and Old Norse cognates exist and are used in place-names
ON þveit ‘clearing, meadow’ (cf. OE ?*þwīt)

- (Related English element*þwīt very rare).
- Wirral (1):
  le Thwayt iuxta le Newemedewe (1357), le Thwaytes (1357), Oldetwayt (1357)
- West Ward (11):

- Old Norse diphthong [ai] almost always preserved.

Old Norse [ar] vs. Old English [ɑː:]
Cognate elements: OE *brād*, ON *breiðr* ‘broad’

Wirral

OE *brād* (6):

- *the Brode* Rene (1454) (OE/ON *rān/rein* ‘boundary ditch’);
- *Bradesiche* (1305) OE *sīc* ‘stream’;
- *boscus de Bradegreue* (1294) OE *grāfe* ‘grove’;
- *le Bradlond* (1340) OE/ON *land*;
- *le Brodmed* (13th) OE *mād* ‘meadow’;
- *Broderenes* (1398); *les Brodereenes* (1432), -*renes* (1440) OE/ON *rān/rein.*
Cognate elements: OE *brād, ON breiðr ‘broad’

**West Ward**

**OE *brād (6):**
- *Brademilland* (1345) OE *myln* ‘mill’, OE/ON *land*;
- *le Bradeacre* (1366) OE/ON *æcer/akr* ‘acre’;
- *Bradeleye* (13th); -*legh* (1320), *Bradley* (c. 1300) OE *lēah* ‘woodland, clearing’;
- *Bradrane* (a. 1300) OE *rān* ‘boundary strip’;
- *le Braderidding* (1340) OE *ryding* ‘clearing’;
- *(le)* *Bradeheng* (a. 1290, 1345) ON *eng* ‘meadow’

**ON *breiðr (1):**
- *Braythetwayt* (1265) ON *þveit* ‘clearing’

---

Old English [ɑː:], [d] vs. Old Norse [aɪ], [ð̥]
Cognate elements: OE *brād*, ON *breiðr* ‘broad’

West Ward, Cumbria

**brād** OE, 'broad'. I Bradley (2), Bradleyfield, *Bradwood*, Broadfold,
-gate (2), -Ing(s) (3), -mire (2), -Oak(s) (3), -slack, -thorn; II
 *Brad(e)gate*, -holme (1393), -howes, -meadowe (13th), -mosse (1320),
-myre (1282), -rane (1300), -ridding (1349), -riddynges (1484), -slak,
*stanehals* (1379), Bradwath, Broad flatt (1312), -foard, -ing,
Broad Inges (1650), -mire, Broad Oake.

**bræc** OE, 'thicker'. II (b) Bracks (ii, 180).

**brædu** OE, 'broad strip'. I (c) Sockbridge; II (d) Robin bread (i,
80 add.). v. also *gār-brēde*, *scof-brædu*.

*brakni* ON, *braken* ME, 'bracken, fern'. I (a) Brackenbar, -ber
(b), -hill, -Howe, -slack, -thwaite (3); (c) White Brackens; II (a)

*Brackenbarr*, Bracken bed(s) (3), -ber (3), *Brackenbergh* (1390–4),
Brackendale, -how(e) (2), -intake, -rig(g) (b), -thwaite (2), *Bracken-
twhait* (1.12th), Bracken Wreays, *Brakanberch* (1240).

**brand** OE, 'fire, place cleared by burning'. II Brand ridding,

**brant** OE, 'steep'. I Brant Fell, -field (2), Branthwaite, Brant Street;
II Brantbank (2), *Branthbarre*, Brant brow, -dalt, -field, -healds.

**brēc** OE, *break* ModE dial., 'land broken up for cultivation'. I
Breaks Hall (ii, 89), Brigbriggs.

**bred** OE, 'board'. I (c) Sockbridge.

**brēg** OE, 'brow of a hill'. II (d) *Herclebray* (1567).

**breiðr** ON, 'broad'. I Brathay; II Braeslacks (1560), *Brathetweit*
(1200), *Braythetwayt* (1265), Breesty.
OE sīc, ON sīk ‘small stream, ditch’

Very similar patterns with OE dīc, ON dík ‘ditch’ and OE cirice, ON kirkja ‘church’.

(spelt with <ch>) < OE sīc, e.g.:
- Ingriessiche (1340)
- Holesiche (1278–81)

West Ward

- 17 forms indicating final [k] (spelt with <k, c>) < ON sīk, OE sīcum (etc.), e.g.:
  - Modersike (1225)
  - Rudekeldesic (a. 1239)
- 1 form indicating OE sīc (spelt with <ch>):
  - Ronesiche (1286)

Old Norse [k] vs. Old English [ʧ] and [k]
OE *middel*, ON *meðal* ‘middle’ and OE *midlest* ‘middlemost’

**Wirral**
- *Medleste*|*heyard* (1260–80)
OE *geard* [referring to a fishery]
- the *Medylfylde* (1454) OE *feld* ‘field’

**West Ward, Cumbria**
- *Methilrig* (1235)
- *Medilknott* (1220–47)
- *Myddelrig* (1250)
- *Medil Scogh* (1471)

Development of compromise form

Old English [d], [i] vs. Old Norse [ð], [e]
Conclusions

- Norse-derived vocabulary constituted a very significant proportion of the vocabulary used in late-medieval minor names in the West Ward...and much less so in Wirral.

- These differences were most marked when all elements were counted (repeated elements counted multiple times).
Conclusions

Assessing use of Norse- and English-derived (potential) variants revealed:

- continued use of Norse-derived form (ON þveit) [no English-derived form]
- English-derived form dominant in both areas (OE brād, ON breiðr)
- English-derived form dominant in Wirral (OE sīc, dīc, cirice), Norse-influenced (ON sīk, cf. OE sīcum) or Norse-derived (kirkja) form dominant in West Ward
- development of compromise form (ME medil < OE middel, ON meðal)
- Tendency for reduction in number of variants in both areas:
  - Increased selection of English-derived variants in Wirral.
  - Increased selection of Norse-derived variants in West Ward.