AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NA LOCHLANNAIGH

THE VIKINGS

Nótaí le dul leis an stiallscannán den ainm céanna.
Notes to accompany the filmstrip of the same title.

Stiallscannán agus Nótaí arna gcur amach ag

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS,
BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 1.

Filmstrip and Notes issued by

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION,
DUBLIN 1.

NA LOCHLANNAIGH

THE VIKINGS

Cuireadh na frámaí don stiallscannán seo ar fáil ag

AN MÚSAEM NÁISIÚNTA,

AMBASÁID RÍOGA NA DANMHAIRGE,
BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH,

INSTITIÚID NÁISIÚNTA NA SCANNÁN.

Slides for this filmstrip were provided by

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM,

THE ROYAL DANISH EMBASSY,
DUBLIN,

THE NATIONAL FILM INSTITUTE OF
IRELAND.

An Roinn Oideachais, Baile Átha Cliath, 1974.

THE VIKINGS*

The Vikings, whose descent on these shores caused such terror and dismay, did not confine their piratical activities to the coasts of Ireland and Britain. Prior to its decimation by plague in 892 the "Great Army" of the Vikings had been, for thirteen years, the scourge of the Low Countries and of north eastern France; they sailed further south to raid the settlements on the coasts of Spain and Portugal and, passing through the Straits of Gibraltar, they plundered the Mediterraenean littoral as far as Italy.

The Vikings were much more, however, than the fierce sea-raiders of popular opinion. Their sagas and stories reflect, in heightened form, a people with a formidable appetite for adventure and exploration. They were among the most skilful shipbuilders and navigators of their age as well as being its most daring sailors. They sailed westward to the Orkneys and farther west to Iceland (where there were already Irish monks) and westward still to the Greenland shore. There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that they sailed southwest from Greenland to the mainland of North America thus to become, perhaps, the first Europeans to set foot on that continent. Certainly such a feat was not beyond their skill or their daring.

*Vikings - the sea-rovers from Norway, Sweden and Denmark whose activities commenced towards the end of the eighth century and ended in the latter half of the twelfth. Scholars do not agree on the derivation of the word but many accept that it derives from the Norse word "vik" which means a creek or inlet. The term "Viking" occurs in the literature of Scandavian countries but in Ireland they were known as Gaill or Lochlannaigh, in England as Dani, in France as Normannai while in Eastern Europe and parts of Western Asia the Swedish Vikings were known as Rus. (c.f. Brnstead "The Vikings" (Pelican) - pp. 36 - 39).

They were traders and town-builders - as well as being good horsemen - and the Swedish Vikings, in a combination of trade and conquest, penetrated eastwards to the Volkhov and the Dnieper, there to establish the great trading centres of Novgorod and Kiew and to give Russia its name - Rus being the Slavic term for a Viking. Trading out of Novgorod they followed the course of the Volga, crossed the Caspian Sea and journeyed overland to the heart of Islam - the Caliphate of Baghdad. Again as traders they overcame the hazards of the Dnieper and sailed to Constantinople (Istanbul) which was then at the height of its brilliant civilization and here many of them served in the corps d'élite of the Byzantine army - the Varangian Guard*.

Under Rollo** they settled in that part of France to which they have given their name and eventually became vassals of the French kings. If by doing this they shed their essential Viking character it was to emerge, not much later in history, as a great race of warriors and statesmen.

England, because of its wealth and because of its proximity to the Scandanavian countries, suffered heavily at their hands. As in Ireland and in France colonization followed the earlier piratical phase. Although attended by considerable initial success the Viking threat to southern England was contained by the skilful and resolute defence of the house of

*The Viking period in Russia extends from the middle of the eighth century to the end of the twelfth although, by then, what was left of their original power was vestigial. Novgorod prospered in the post-Viking era but Kiev was not so fortunate. The sack of Constantinople during the Fourth crusade (1204) was a commercial disaster for Kiev and towards the middle of the same century the city was laid waste by the Golden Horde of Batu Khan - grandson of the Tatar conqueror Genghiz Khan. It recovered something of its older glory in the seventeenth century when it became part of Tsarist Russia.

**Rollo was created first Duke of Normandy in 911.

Wessex under Alfred the Great and southern England, as well as much of western England, remained free of Viking colonization. North of London and east of a line running through Warwickshire and Staffordshire to the Welsh border at Cheshire was the Danelaw which, as the name implies, was dominated by the Danish Vikings. The Danelaw was bounded on the north by the Norse Vikings whose power centred around the city of York and who had strong links with the Vikings of Dublin.

Athelstan, grandson of Alfred, wrested the iniative from the Vikings and achieved some degree of supremacy. His son, Edgar, was even more successful. His supremacy was acknowledged by Saxon and Viking alike and in 973 he was crowned as first king of England and, more important, established the concept of strong central government. Under the irresolute leadership of Aethelred the power of the house of Wessex declined and after the untimely death of his son, Edmund Ironside, in 1016 the Danish Viking, Cnut, was acknowledged as ruler of England. Under Edward the Confessor and his great commander, Harold of Mercia, there was a resurgence of native power and Harold, who by then had succeeded Edward as king, inflicted a crushing defeat on the Norse Vikings at Stamford Bridge in 1066. This did not signify the end of the Viking raids but it ended the threat of Viking dominance.

Three days after Harold's victory another claimant to the throne of England, William the Conqueror, and his Norman knights landed on the south coast of England. Harold marched to meet the new invader.

FRAME I (title frame)

THE VIKINGS

FRAME 2 (credits)

FRAME 3

THE VIKING WORLD (map)

FRAME 4

A Norwegian fiord but seen here under idyllic conditions - winter would show a much harsher picture. It was from places such as this that the Viking longboats set out on their sea voyages.

FRAME 5

THE OSEBERG SHIP

Excavations at a mound at Oseberg on the western side of the Oslo fiord in 1903 revealed an excellently preserved ship-burial. Apart from the ship itself many other objects were found including a tapestry, a cart and some sledges.

The elegance of outline and the ornamentation of the wood make the Oseberg ship a work of art in its own right and illustrate the Viking feeling for vitality and movement. It was probably not intended as a sea-going vessel but may have been used in sheltered waters as the pleasure craft of a king or a great noble. It measures about 71 feet in length, 17 feet in width and is five deep from gunwale to keel*.

*Ships of the later Viking period belonging to kings such as Olaf Trygvason and Cnut the Great were said to have been twice the length of the Oseberg ship.

The sea-going ships of the Vikings would have been similar in outline but of rougher and more durable construction. They were clinkerbuilt and powered by oar and sail. There were as many as thirty pairs of oars and the mast was positioned amidships. The longboats were eminently suited to their purpose. The keel was made of a single piece of timber, often of oak, and the planking was lashed to the ribs of the ship to give the added resilience necessary to prevent the ship breaking up in heavy seas.

FRAME 6

CARVED HEADPOST

The function of this grotesquely carved wood has not been clearly established. Five of these objects were found at Oseberg and they may have been used for some religious or ceremonial purpose.

FRAME 7

THE OSEBERG CART

This richly carved cart was part of the Oseberg find. Its fittings include sturdy wheels with central hubs and long shafts. It has a ceremonial appearance and would scarcely suit the rough demands of pastoral life. Tapestry found at Oseberg depicts an open cart and a closed one - both of the four-wheeled variety and with wheels similar to those of the Oseberg cart. It would appear that the horse and cart were extensively used in Viking countries and that the Swedish Vikings held the horse in high regard.

FRAME 8

THE OSEBERG SLEIGH

This is a more elaborate and ornate version of the sleigh in ordinary use in Viking times. The body of the sleigh is detachable from the runners. The snow and the frozen rivers and lakes of the Scandanavian winter made the use of sleighs necessary.

FRAME 9

TRELLEBURG CAMP

Trelleborg was purely a military and naval base and was constructed between the years 975 and 1050. It was built in a strongly defensive position, being protected to the seaward by the confluence of two rivers and to the landward by a deep ditch. The central fortification is circular with a radius of 234 feet. The circle is divided into quadrants by roads running north-south and east-west; sited within each quadrant were four houses arranged in squares and in the centre of each square was another and smaller house. The precision of the work shows a very high degree of engineering skill. In the curved section which lies between the inner fortification and the perimeter were a further thirteen houses and there were two other houses in the rectangular section which adjoins the eastern gate. The houses were elliptical in shape - a design inspired, perhaps, by the shape of the longboat.

Fully manned Trelleborg could house 1,200 men and an establishment of this size could scarcely have been built and maintained other than by some powerful king. Trelleborg may have been built towards the end of the tenth century by Sweyn Forkbeard, father of Cnut the Great.

FRAME 10

TRELLEBOURG CAMP

FRAME 11

A RECONSTRUCTION OF A TRELLEBORG BARRACK

The building measures 29.6 metres by 7.4 metres. The walls are made from oak-trunks and planks and the building is roofed with shingles. Its Viking counterpart would have housed about 75 men.

FRAME 12

AN ORNAMENTED DANISH IRON AXE-HEAD INLAID WITH SILVER

THE VIKINGS IN IRELAND

The Ireland of 795 does not present a picture of unity or of central power. It consisted of a multiplicity of small tuatha dominated at various times and in various ways by more powerful overlords. The best known of the overlords were the Northern and Southern Uí Néill. By the beginning of the tenth century the Northern Uí Néill ruled over Tyrone, Derry and Fermanagh as well as exercising control over parts of Armagh, Louth and Monaghan. To the west of the Northern Uí Néill territory lay the lands of Cinél Conaill while to the east, and stretching from the north coast of Antrim to the borders of Down, were the small kingdoms of Dál Riata, Dál nAraide and Dál Fiatach. The power of the Southern Uí Néill was based mainly on Meath, Westmeath and Longford and they exercised varying degrees of dominance over the surrounding areas. Uí Néill claimed the overlordship of Ireland - a claim not easily enforced - and this doubtful sovereignty was shared alternately, in theory at any rate, by the two branches of the family.

In Connacht were Uí Briúin and of these the O'Connor branch eventually dominated. Their emergence as a provincial and national power, however, postdates the Viking period.

Numerically powerful and scattered widely over Munster were the Eóganacht but their structure was fragmented and lacked the dynastic qualities of Uí Néill. This structure was further weakened by the division of the Eóganacht into the mutually hostile groupings of the eastern and western branches and although the eastern Eóganacht of Caiseal achieved a considerable degree of dominance and supplied Munster* with many kings the inherent weakness, coupled with the hostility of the kingdom of Ossory led to the emergence in Munster not of a branch of the Eóganacht but of a branch of the western Déise.

*The last of the Eóganacht kings, O'Maolmhuaidh, did not belong to Caiseal but to the Eóganacht of Raithlind.

Of great importance, not only in the history of Ireland but in the history of Wales as well, were the Déise of which there were two branches in Munster - the eastern Déise of south Tipperary and Waterford and the western Déise of west Limerick and east Clare. Dal Cais of the western Déise were ultimately to achieve national dominance under Brian Boru.

Leinster, in Viking times, comprised the area lying south of the Liffey and bounded on the west by the river Barrow. Dominant in this area were Uí Dúnlainge to the north and, of greater importance, Uí Chennsalaig to the south. In north Kildare were Uí Faoláin and it was to these that Mael Mórda, king of Leinster at the time of Brian Boru, belonged. Like Uí Briúin the emergence of Uí Chennsalaig belongs to the post-Viking era and manifested itself in the formidable person of Diarmait mac Máel na mBó (d.1072) who was the most powerful Irish king of his time. Uí Chennsalaig, through the Viking port of Wexford, maintained considerable contact with Bristol and with part of south-western England - a contact not without significance in the career of Diarmait mac Mael na mBó's great grandson, Diarmait mac Murrough.

The first recorded Viking raid on Ireland occurred in 795, when the church on Lambay island was burned and the monasteries of Inismurray and Inisbofin were plundered. From 795 to about 836 the attacks were on a hit and run pattern and were concentrated on the north-east of Ulster and on the western coastline. These occurred on an average of one per year and had little impact on secular society. From about 830 the Vikings began to make use of the rivers and the great lakes to ravage the midlands and the north of Ireland. They first spent a winter in Ireland near Lough Neagh in 840-41 and they established defended ship-enclosures at Annagassan and at Dublin in 841. At this point the Irish kings began to move more successfully against them because they were no longer a mobile and elusive target. They became a factor in the politics of the country especially in the incessant dynastic squabbles. At this point feuds broke out

between the Vikings and a force of Danes which arrived in Dublin in 851.

From the middle of the ninth century onwards, after Ivar the White, son of a Norse king, came to Dublin and assumed sovereignty over the Vikings, the kingdom of Dublin began to behave more and more like any petty Irish state. There were other less important Viking settlements at Waterford, Carlingford Lough, Youghal, Cork, Limerick and Wexford. Divisions among the Vikings of Dublin led to their defeat by the kings of Leinster and Brega in 902. This led to secondary Viking migrations from Dublin to north-west England and to Iceland. At this period, too, extensive cultural assimilation had taken place between the Norse and the Irish, including a gradual conversion to Christianity. The establishment of Dublin contributed to the collapse of the Brega dynasties and to the collapse of the Uí Dúnchada in Leinster at a later date. Viking attacks did much to weaken the Eóganacht power in Munster. Viking settlements and attacks diverted the attention of the Uí Néill and other overkings from the extension of their power and from the creation of greater overlordships.

In the beginning of the tenth century the Viking raiders from Europe found the lands of northern France and England closed against them. From 914 large fleets began to ravage Ireland. The Norse kings of Dublin also tried to establish themselves in the kingdom of York and they made attempts to control other Viking settlements in Ireland. The counter-attack came in Ireland under the Uí Néill (overkings from 926 to 944) against the Kingdom of Dublin. Dublin lost its importance in the Irish political struggles but it remained one of the most powerful states in the Norse world, with colonies and dependencies in Strangford and Carlingford and close connections with the Norse peoples of the Scottish Isles. The Vikings of Limerick had colonies in Cashel, Thurles, Co. Limerick, on Lough Ree and Lough Corrib. The Cork Vikings controlled an area to the south-west of the city. There were extensive Viking settlements around Waterford and Wexford and there was a Viking community in Armagh.

From the middle of the tenth century it was as traders that the Vikings made their greatest impact on Ireland. They were responsible for the foundation of the first towns in the country; for the initiation in 995 of the first coinage struck in Ireland; for the pervasion by Norse terms of the Irish vocabulary relating to boats, navigation and commerce and for the introduction of more sophisticated sea-going and river-craft. Dublin became the centre of Viking trade in textiles, wine and slaves.

The Vikings also influenced the development of the arts and literature. Methods and motifs were borrowed in the arts. The Vikings and their homeland, Lochlainn, appear occasionally in the Fiannaíocht. Viking raids on the northern coastal regions led to the Ulster sagas being copied and rewritten in the midland monasteries. The interest in scholarship and literature, particularly in a lyric poetry which is remarkable for its sophistication and feeling, which arose in the Celi Dé movement in the monasteries of Tallaght and Finglas near Dublin, was transferred to the monasteries of the lower Shannon basin.

The profound Norse influence on Irish armament and the intermingling of Irish and Scandanavian art styles seem to indicate that the relationship between the two peoples was much closer than has hitherto been assumed.

In the struggle for the overlordship of Munster during the second half of the tenth century the Déisi of East Clare, known as the Dál Cais since 934, rose to power under Brian Ború, who had become their king in 976 after the execution of his brother Mathgamain by Donnubán, king of Fidgente (Co. Limerick). In the north there was a major succession struggle among the Uí Néill from 945 to 975 which allowed the kings of Connaught and Munster to become powerful and which opened the way for the overthrow of the Uí Néill by Brian Ború. This prepared the way for the prolonged struggle for the kingship of Ireland which was to dominate Irish politics until the Norman invasion. The battle of Clontarf, 1014, in which

Brian Ború defeated the Vikings, was not a struggle between the Irish and the Vikings for the sovereignty of Ireland; neither was it a great national victory which broke the Viking power for ever. It was part of the internal struggle for sovereignty and it was essentially the revolt of the Leinstermen against Brian Ború, a revolt in which their Viking allies played an important but secondary role. No attempt was made after the battle of Clontarf to extirpate the Viking settlements because the Vikings had become an accepted part of the Irish scene, no more odious and no more agreeable to any Irish tribe than any other Irish tribe might be.

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THE BURNING AND PLUNDERING OF IRISH CHURCHES AND MONASTERIES

It is popularly supposed that the chief agents in the burning and plundering of Irish churches and monasteries were the Norsemen, who were, it is believed, primarily attracted by the treasure of shrines, altar vessels and other valuable furnishings which they contained. But it has been pointed out by A. T. Lucas that "the bullion value of the great bulk of the Irish metalwork of the time was exceedingly small". D. Ó Corráin suggests that "monasteries were the object of attack because they were rich in lands, stock and provisions, because they were the areas of concentrated economic development and wealth in Ireland".

"No satisfactory explanation of the constant Viking raids on Irish monasteries is possible without an appreciation of their function as places of safe-keeping for lay property". It was usual for neighbouring laity to deposit some of their more valuable personal property in churches and monasteries where it was considered to be under the protection of God and the patron saint of the site. Viking raids on monasteries become understandably profitable when it is realised that much property belonging to the lay population was to be found there.

Viking raids on monasteries cannot be considered in isolation from the raids carried out on the same monasteries in the same period by the Irish, whose objective must have been the property in sanctuary. The Irish appear as offenders in this matter of raiding and burning churches and monasteries even before the coming of the Vikings. Between the years 612 and 792 the annals record the burning of monasteries on at least 30 occasions. "On the 309 occasions on which ecclesiastical sites were plundered between the years 600 and 1163, where the nationality of the plundering party is known, the Irish were responsible on 139 occasions, the Norse on 140 occasions, while on 19 occasions the plundering was carried out by the Irish and Norse in combination. Where the burners can be identified on the 313 occasions on which churches or monasteries were

burned during the same period, the Irish were responsible in 50 cases, the Norse in 37 and a combination of Irish and Norse in 5. Of the 20 churches said to have been both plundered and burned in the same span of years 12 were maltreated by the Irish and 7 by the Norse".

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Ireland Before The Normans	by	Donncha Ó Corráin

FRAME 13

A map of Ireland indicating the main political divisions.

FRAME 14

A map of Ireland indicating the important monasteries and Viking settlements.

FRAME 15

A Viking battle-axe of iron with the original wooden handle. This was found at Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo.

FRAME 16

A Viking sword of iron with the name of the sword-maker. It was probably made in the Rhineland and came to Ireland via Norway. It was found in a crannóg at Ballinderry, Co. Westmeath.

FRAME 17

A carved horn showing the helmet of a warrior. The type of helmet shown is conical and there is a protective nose-piece. (12th century, Sigtuna, Sweden).

FRAME 18

Golden ornaments from the Danish National Museum.

FRAME 19

Two gilt bronze tortoise brooches and silver chain found together at Arklow.

FRAME 20

The heart of old Dublin - under the shadow of Christ Church Cathedral. Demolition of buildings in the High Street/Winetavern Street area afforded a unique opportunity for archaelogical excavations. The work was carried out under the direction of Dr. Brendan O'Riordan of the National Museum. The slide shows the excavations at High Street.

FRAME 21

Two gold armlets of Scandanavian type (Early 11th century, High Street).

FRAME 22

A gilt bronze disc brooch - the long pin is a later addition. (10 th century, High Street).

FRAME 23

A silver coin of Hiberno-Viking type showing a bust of Sitric Silkenbeard. (11th century, High Street).

FRAME 24

Polished bone dress pins representing the carved heads of a dog, a duck and a ram. (11th Century, Winetavern Street).

FRAME 25

A comb and comb-case made from the antlers of the red deer. (11th century, Winetavern Street).

FRAME 26

A bone die and gaming piece. (11th century, High Street).

FRAME 27

A trial mould showing interlaced animals. (11th century, High Street).

FRAME 28

Iron fish hooks and a small iron sickle. The fish hooks belong to the eleventh century, the sickle to the twelfth/thirteenth century. (High Street/Winetavern Street).

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