

Herrick Family Association

Founded in 2001



Richard L. Herrick, Founder and President Emeritus

Kenneth Herrick, Vice President Emeritus

Joann Nichols, Editor Emeritus

Virgil Herrick, Counselor Emeritus

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Check our new Web Page: www.Herrickfamilyassociation.org or find us on Facebook!

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“Ancestry- Of all the affections of man, those which connect him with ancestry are among the most natural and generous. They enlarge the sphere of his interests, multiply his motives to virtue, and give intensity to his sense of duty to generations to come, by the perception of obligation to those which are past- Hon. Josiah Quincy.”

—NEHGS Register, 1847-2011- taken from Marriages, Births and Deaths at Taunton, Mass. book; page 236

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Save the Date Early September of 2020

Planning is underway for the next HFA meeting and trip to England in early September of 2020.

We hope that you can join the group and explore some of our English ancestor's histories, homes and towns while enjoying beautiful England.

If anyone has ideas for places to visit, speakers to add to our knowledge of Herrick family history, or research topics to pursue, please contact Nancy, Deborah or Michael. Thank you.

Nancy's email is nancyjohnson206@gmail.com, Deborah's email is dkncls@yahoo.com, and Michael's is herrickresearch@me.com.

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Our Association on Facebook

Submitted by Dale Yoe, HFA #062

So, it has been a couple years now that we have been on Facebook. It amazes me how many views we get and postings I receive on this social media.

One posting I recently had was from a person, not in our association, but an art lover. I was asked if the Henry Herrick that we talk about was Henry Walker Herrick from New Hampshire- an artist. I said that I was not familiar with this gentleman- But I should have been.

In doing the research here I found that Henry Walker Herrick (23 Aug 1824 - 1906) was found in the **HGR3, Vol 3, page 2342** (Israel Evans, Asa, Jonathan, John, John, Henerie Hericke). He married Clara Parkinson in 1849 and was a designer and engraver in NYC. He mostly used water colors and did many of the illustrations in children's books and also Harper's Magazine during the Civil War.

He made many illustrations for books and periodicals and supervised the illustrations for the **85HGR**. He designed the frontispiece for the **1846 Coat of Arms** for Gen. Jedediah Herrick.

The person who sent the message said that this Henry was a great man of faith and that he felt that NYC offered too much temptation to men. He apparently has some pieces of his art prints, letters and poems. This Henry had his works of art exhibited at the Currier Art Museum in New Hampshire and helped an art school for women as he felt they should get credit for their great works as well as men. Many thanks to all who post here!

Frontispiece
1846 Herrick Genealogical Register



"IN the Year 1598 was granted from the Herald's Office, unto Robert and William Herrick, the sonnes of John Herrick, the sonne of Thomas Herrick, alias Herrick, of Woughton, in the Countie of Leicester; Gentlemen, and their posteritie forever, a certeyne COAT OF ARMES, or ARMOISES, namelie: On a breaste of their coloures, a HERALD'S ARMOISES Argent, passing forth of a HERALD'S ARMOISES. The ARMOISES, ARMOISES, and ARMOISES, tipped sable. To be annexed and borne with their ancient Coat of Armes, which is ARMOISES, a fesse ARMOISES, OR and ARMOISES."

"ARMOISES."
"ARMOISES OF ARMOISES."
[From the Records of the Herald's College, London.]

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Membership

For those who are slightly older, you may remember Joni Mitchell's song "Big Yellow Taxi". One line is significant: "You don't know what you've got til it is gone!"

Let us tell you what you have in HFA

1. We have published a several volume set of the Herrick Genealogical Register. It is a marvelous research tool and although the hard copies have been sold out, you can still order it from Dale Yoe on thumb drive. Hard copies are available at 32 locations across the USA. (see our web page)
2. We publish a newsletter every 3 months. It contains articles of interest to Herrick researchers in the UK and the USA. (available on our website)
3. We maintain a website (herrickfamilyassociation.org) that has much more information about HFA. You can also go to the Herrick Forum, a place where you can get help on a particular research question that may be puzzling you. The Forum has not taken off the way we hoped but we expect it to grow.
4. Every two years we hold a national meeting somewhere in the USA or UK. Last one was in Salem, MA and the one before was Leicester, UK.

The number one reason to continue your membership is to keep Herrick history alive! Future generations need to know the contributions that our ancestors made to society. Your membership will keep HFA alive and in turn keep Herrick Genealogy alive for generations to come!

—HFA Board of Directors

To submit your form for membership, please fill out the form in the link below and mail it to the address provided or send it to Jim Hilton at jhiltonjr@frontiernet.net

<http://www.herrickfamilyassociation.org/membership/index.html>

If you would like to submit your payment through PayPal, please sign in to PayPal and send a payment using the email address of the HFA at hfa_website@comcast.net. You will still need to submit your completed form via email. You can also renew your membership by sending a check directly to Dianne at the mailing information below:

Checks to HFA c/o Dianne Herrick
6707 St. Johns Parkway
Victor, NY 14564-9255

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Recently Published Book about the Herricks

HFA Member Michael Herrick HFA #118 has just published a non-fiction book about the Herricks in England and his Herrick ancestral line in America. The title is *Echoes of the Past: A Family Story*. The book will be available for sale after March 4th, 2019, and should be available in independent book stores as well as on Amazon. Both hard cover in color and paperback in black and white editions will be available.

Orders can be placed through Michael's website with this link for a 10% discount—

<http://herrickresearch.com/herrick-book/>

Echoes of the Past: A Family Story

This is a true story of one family's ancestral line spanning over 26 generations and over 100 centuries. It is a story of success, failure, joy and sorrow. It is a story of individuals experiencing life's ups and downs within their vastly different environments. It is a story of English and American history through the lens of one single family and ancestral line. The story begins with Henry Herrick in early 17th century Leicester, England. Henry Herrick's early life in Leicester is narrated, as is his later life in Salem, Massachusetts. Once Henry makes the decision to leave England and sail to New England for a new life, he begins to contemplate his family history beginning with his Scandinavian Vikings roots who settled in England to his famous English family to his current Puritan beliefs. Once in New England, the life and times of his descendants along one family line are described to the present time.

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Herrick Project Member has a Family Tree DNA Y-DNA37 Match

Submitted by Curt Herrick HFA #100

I found the interesting 23 January 2019 email I mentioned to you which I recently received from Tommi Borg. As an HFA DNA administrator I review most of the Family Tree DNA new test reports that link our members to the new reports of individuals in the FTDNA worldwide database. Since Tommi's 25 November 2018 email which was referred to in our last HFA Newsletter, I noticed that Tommi seemed to be receiving many more DNA test report matches than anyone in our Herrick DNA Project. As a result I wrote a curious email to Tommie asking how he was handling the deluge of new DNA information. He responded that he had spent more than 50 hours studying the new DNA information and was expanding his research of the Swedish influence in the greater Scandinavian Empire and a colony in America. This information is further discussed in the four URLs in his letter. His material may be further translated with the aid of Google. He points out that the I - L-22 Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP), Y-DNA and the Family Finder test results are important in this investigation. We have come a long way in this regard since the HFA was formed in the 2002 period.

Tommie is certainly turning the rocks over to conclude more information for all of us. See his email below.

Yes, I have used over 50 hours to find final glue to the genealogical database I send few earlier down to the kings and my tow closest four step hits on the 67-marker level. I have also commutated with the people sent those Y-DNA tests. The problem is the fact that their ancestors are Finnish soldier in Swedish army on the 1600-century. They lived on different parishes in Finland according to commands. Military kept own records and gave new Swedish family names and Finnish church books used original Finnish family names. Sometimes priests did not even write down on their records of those people. That is why the descendants of those soldiers have ordered more Y-DNA tests as other Finns.

I believe I guess already the connection to the above large database, but not yet found proof. Anyway I updated one page and try to continue with other DNA pages later on.

<http://www.tompansuku.net/Borg/index.php?Page=BorgDNA>

The Family Finder did not bring much new to me in my case, but not yet studied it more deeply. I guess in the USA this tool is working better.

My wife's cousin ordered 67-markers Y-DNA and FF tests. Their father line has lived from abt. 1410 year in neighborhood parish Veteli. In this case FF found one close relation in Delaware area. This man has Flemish family name and we guess his roots are from the New Sweden colonization 1638, where many Swedish were actually Finns.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Sweden

Yes, during moving to the new house is difficult to decide, what belongs you take with and what to distribute or destroy. We moved two years ago to this lather large house, which is partly built 110 years ago with 8" quadrangle logs. Figs

<http://www.tompansuku.net/index.php?Page=FiskarinenOy>

On 1980-talent they made some wrong repair system to the air ventilation on the basement. To prevent fume and keep house for future I have been as worker and used heavy rock hand drill machine and other tools few days. We are here back with strategy and principles with new houses used earlier by Finns as at

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C._A._Nothnagle_Log_House

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Herrick Viking Heritage

Submitted by Alice Reynolds HFA #3

After Curt shared the news from Tommi Borg and our Finnish relatives, it was clear that there is lots of interest in pursuing the Herrick's Viking ancestors. Mike Herrick has been collecting good information and sources for his own book. Curt Herrick helps us stay linked through the DNA discoveries. And AB (Alice Reynolds) has been trying to figure out how to learn more about the early Herricks in England. Mike suggested we list some research questions to stimulate our search and to entice others to join us. Here is a starter list of research questions. Please let us know what you would like to add or modify.... and, indicate your interest in helping so you'll be looped into our conversations. New discoveries, of course, will be shared in future newsletters. — A.B.

Herrick Viking Heritage

Research Questions

Herricks after the Viking period in England

1. What steps should we take to confirm our Henry of Belgrade theory?
2. We have identified early Herricks in England from 1300-1700s. We know a little bit about them. Where can we learn more about them and perhaps discover others?
3. What historical events were Herricks connected to? What roles did they play?
4. Who were the allied families and what roles did they play in history?
5. How do we want to document this information? Trees, biographies, event descriptions, etc.?

Herricks as Vikings in England

Background: Because Curt was able to get the Herrick family name included in Turi King's single source DNA study, we know that Herrick is a single source name with the I-L22 SNP (Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms) and several other key SNPs that identify this family group. The I-L22 SNP identifies the Herrick's who participated in the study as descendants of a Viking family that lived in England during the Viking period – 800-1066.

6. What are the key historical events and timeline of the Vikings in England? Can we provide more detail to the timeline created for reference for the 2014 England trip?
7. Where did these Viking-related events happen? Which towns and cities' histories are relevant to the Herrick story? (Ripton, Sherwood Forest, etc.)
8. Who are experts who might help us understand Viking history and the Herrick connection? Peter Liddle, Roderick Dale from Nottingham, others in Lincoln? Or York?
9. Can we develop a theory about the migration of Herricks within England?
10. How do the two Eric's we've heard about (Eric during the time of King Alfred (xxx) and Eric during the time of William the Conqueror (1066) fit in to the timeline and the family tree?) Were they real? What is the evidence?
11. Who are the other Herricks who share the same DNA in England? Can we learn from them?
12. In what form should be document the Herrick story during the Viking period?

Herrick Origin in Scandinavia

DNA Study Background:

Curt Herrick writes: "My (research) path is based in the DNA of the single source name Herrick group (Turi King's research in England) as well as history. We (Herricks in England) share the I-L22 Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNP) and a number of others. Stockholm-Uppsala area is the center of one of the largest concentrations of I-L22 on the earth. The I-L22 is a fairly unique group."

“... a 2013 Family Tree DNA test revealed a Y-DNA 67, 7 step difference, match between Tommi Borg of Finland and Eric Herrick of the Herrick y-DNA Surname project. The I-L22 match is a major step in beginning to study the Viking relationships between England and Scandinavia. Tommi Borg joined the Herrick DNA Surname Project two days after our HFA welcome email.”

“A brilliant man in the DNA Special Interest Group of the Fairfax (County) Genealogical Society, of which I’m a member, concluded we and Borg are closely related. He calculated we could be on nearby branches or on the same branch separated by a small number of years. At this time, he could not conclude with his figures which was the older group. We are studying a Venn diagram.”

Tommi Borg wrote in a recent update and attached report to Curt listing his family history. One notation is “Ragnar “Lodbrok” Signurdsson of Danmark og Norge b. 765 Uppsala, Sweden and d. 845 Snake Pit, Northumberland, England. Wife Aslaug (Aslog) Kraka Sigurdsdatter, Warrior Queen.” Tommi assumes, based on the current family tree and study, that his 5-8 steps Y-DNA ancestors are in this group. The history indicates that his ancestors were involved in Viking operations into England during the 800s and relationships to major figures in early Viking history.

13. What does the DNA link to Tomi Borg tell us? If he is related to these early Vikings, are we too? How closely?
14. What Viking history relates to the Herricks? Did our ancestors settle in the area where Swedes settled on what is now the Finnish west coast? Did they join the groups forming on the Gotland Island, south of Sweden, with others who started trading abroad in 500 AD?
15. What can learn from the history of the Stockholm-Uppsala area that has one of the largest concentrations of L-22 (Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms - SNP)?
16. Who are the best sources to connect with in Finland, Sweden, etc?
17. How can we assist Curt and Tommi Borg?
18. In what form should this information be documented?

* * *

The Herrick Brothers: William, Robert and Nicholas

Submitted by Michael J. Herrick HFA #118

In the late 16th century and early 17th century, three Herrick brothers from Leicestershire gained fame and success in the metals business. The metals side of the family were actually bankers before there was a designation of banker. Sir William and his brothers Robert, the ironmonger from Leicester, and Nickolas, the goldsmith in London, were essentially bankers, or money lenders.

William was particularly successful in his trade, apprenticing as a goldsmith with his other brother, Nicholas, in London and then taking over his brother’s goldsmith business in London’s Cheapside after Nicolas’s tragic death. The goldsmith business gave one the exclusive power of coining money, which gave them the power to act as both banker, or money lender, and pawnbroker. William made money, loaned money, and became noteworthy as a banker as well as continuing as a goldsmith in the capital city. William Heyricke (as it was spelled then) became one of the most eminent goldsmiths in London. Queen Elizabeth herself was one of William’s best customers and the relationship continued when James I took the throne after the queen’s death. William Heyricke’s fine jewelry work created the opportunity for him to be commissioned as the king’s official court jeweler. His appointment as court jeweler paved the way for knighthood, and William then became Sir William Heyricke.

Sir William’s wealth and fame preceded knighthood, however. In 1595, William purchased Beau Manor. When William purchased Beau Manor the house was run down and dilapidated. So, William immediately started repairing and altering the estate. The Beau Manor that William purchased was the original medieval

home built in the 13th century and at that time had a moat surrounding it with a drawbridge giving access to the house.

The interior of Beau Manor, after its renovation, was impressive. In the main parlor was a huge painting of William. But the painting was unusual and highly distinctive in that William was wearing an odd looking costume characteristic of the Ottoman Empire. The painting was painted on William's return from an "errand", as it was described, to Turkey requested by Queen Elizabeth. The errand was actually an important embassy visit in 1575 to the Ottoman Port, the Sultan of Turkey, which was commissioned by Queen Elizabeth. Before becoming Sir William, he was ambassador to Turkey. His success in negotiating with the Turks won him great favor with the Queen and was thus given an appointment in the Exchequer, which he held throughout the Queen's reign and into the reign of King James. As Exchequer, William was in charge of a government department responsible for the collection and management of taxes and revenues, and for making payments and auditing accounts on behalf of the monarch. In addition to this official role, William loaned money to the monarchs, took orders from them for gems and other luxurious jewelry. King James I continued the Court's respect for William.

Truly, Sir William Heyricke was well connected in business and in politics throughout the reign of both Queen Elizabeth and King James. His wealth and fame also won him elections as a Member of Parliament from Leicester in 1600, 1605, and 1620.

Sir William, although wealthy, civic minded, and connected to royalty, had an equally noteworthy brother, Robert. In addition to being an Alderman along with his brother, Robert was elected Mayor of Leicester three times - 1584, 1593 and 1605. He was also elected as a Member of Parliament from Leicester in 1589, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Robert also was involved the family business of metals, but because of his wealth he too was involved in banking, specifically lending and trading. Robert's trade business involved shipping all across the Mediterranean Sea and into Indonesia to purchase gems and other valuable materials for his business.

The first thing that likely comes to mind about Robert would be the Free Grammar School in Leicester. When the Free Grammar School was built in 1573, Robert donated 13 shillings and 4 pence for its construction. In addition to the Free Grammar School, his Will states, "I give more forth of the Grey Fryers yearly forever to be paid unto the School Master that teaches the 'petties', 13 shillings and 4 pence. Robert Heyricke's extensive Will, written a year before he died in 1618, documented many of his benevolences and charities. His Will indicated that he provided funds for the purchase and repair of Trinity Hospital in Leicester and for the repair of St. Martin's Church.

Robert was particularly generous to poor families and widowed women. His Will stated that he bequeathed "one shilling per year to poor households of Leicester forever." He also stated that 40 shillings will be paid to "poor widows in Leicester each year forever." But the charity that he started before his Will was written, and later documented formally in his Will, was the charity for which he was most known. That is the Herrick Bread Charity. This charity insured the distribution of bread to poor households throughout Leicester each year. Specifically, his Will stated, "To be paid yearly forever, 5 pounds into the Mayor's hands for the purpose of purchasing loaves of bread, 2 penny loaf at least, to be distributed to every householder of 'old body' in all the parishes of the town."

Robert was also the proud owner of a manor house, which he built on top of the Grey Friars monastery after the dissolution of the Catholic monasteries in England in 1538. Robert wanted his manor house to be located in the village center, close to the Guildhall and St. Martins Church, unlike his brother William who opted for Beau Manor about 10 miles outside Leicester in Loughborough. Since the Grey Friar monastery had been demolished and it stood nearly adjacent to St. Martins and Guildhall, Robert purchased enough of the land where the Grey Friary once stood to build his manor house and extensive gardens. Robert purchased the land in 1558 from Queen Elizabeth I not long after the dissolution of the monastery. Robert and most of the Leicester townsfolk knew that King Richard III was buried in the Grey Friar monastery after he was killed in the Battle of

Bosworth in 1485. But not long after the monastery was demolished, memories faded, stories spread, and people assumed that the King Richard's body was removed and thrown into the River Soar. However, when Robert built his manor house, he knew the body of Richard III was probably still interred somewhere in the monastery grounds, perhaps even in his garden. In 2012, an excavation for the remains of King Richard III

began and his remains were found under a car park. The car park was over the tiles of Robert Herrick's garden which he had placed over the demolished Grey Friars Monastery and the remains of Richard III.

Not only did Sir William and Robert gain incredible fame, wealth and notoriety, but their brother Nicholas, also an ironmonger who specialized in gold and precious stones, gained notoriety through his son, Robert. This Robert Herrick was no ironmonger, however. He was a preacher who wrote poetry on the side. Robert Herrick was born in 1591 in London's prestigious Goldsmith's Row. His father, Nicholas, moved from Leicester to London to continue to grow his flourishing goldsmith business. The youngest of seven children, Robert was only one year old when his father died from a freak fall out of their home window, or some say a successful suicide. At the age of 16, Robert began a ten year apprenticeship with his uncle Sir William in London to learn the goldsmith trade. His intent was to follow in his father's footsteps. But he gradually grew disinterested in the trade, due primarily to his love of literature, which grew as he strolled through the bookstalls around St. Paul's churchyard.

In 1610, Robert wrote his first poem, dedicated to his brother Thomas upon his decision to leave London to farm in Leicestershire. This event plus his own talent for writing caused Robert to leave the apprenticeship with Sir William with 4 years left on his contract in order to go to Cambridge to study law. While at Cambridge, Robert became rowdy, enjoyed good drinks at London taverns, and ran up huge debts. He had to ask for loans from Sir William and those loans were always granted. Soon he realized that he needed a quieter environment, so he transferred to Trinity Hall where he received his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees. Three years later in 1623, Robert was ordained a priest. Returning to London, however, he restarted his drinking at various London pubs and, in doing so, became a close friend and admirer of another poet by the name of Ben Jonson, to whom he wrote a poem about their friendship.

Returning to London, he continued to write and in 1648 his collection of 1,402 poems were published under the title, "Hesperides, or The Works both Humane and Devine". Robert eventually returned to Devon where he died in 1674 and was buried in Dean Prior. Robert never married but was acquainted with many women, the most frequent was Julia to whom he wrote about in many poems. His poetry is often associated with classic romanticism but also dealt heavily with death and time. His most famous poem captures his sense of 'seize the day', for our time on earth is short.

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The Viking Invasion of Leicestershire

Submitted by Alice Reynolds HFA #3

We know exactly when the Viking Age began in England – it was more than 1,200 years ago – on June 8, 793. That was the day when invading Norsemen destroyed the Abbey church on the island of Lindisfarne, off the north-east coast of England. Lindisfarne was a centre of learning famous across the continent – but that meant nothing to these fierce invaders.



The Vikings arrived in England in 793 AD

Monks were either killed in the abbey, thrown into the sea to drown or carried away as slaves – along with the church’s treasures. The devastation of Northumbria’s Holy Island shocked Europe. “Never before has such an atrocity been seen”, declared the Northumbrian scholar, Alcuin of York. The Vikings had announced themselves in a devastating way. This was just a warning of what was to come.

Over the next 300 years, more and more invaders would flood into England, and Leicestershire would be full of Vikings.

Divided Country

At the time, England was not one united country – it was divided up into Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Leicester was included within Mercia, and was known as Legrecestre. It was the principal city in that kingdom. Even a thousand years ago and more, Legrecestre was a bit of a melting pot. It was a meeting point of several different cultures – the Angles from the Wash and the Humber, Saxons from Warwickshire, Mercians from the Trent, and Celts from the hills of Charnwood. In Leicester, they met, traded and eventually settled. What increasingly united these peoples was Christianity. Mercia was Christian – the “new” religion reached Leicester in the year 658. A church was said to have stood from the 7th century on the current St Margaret’s site. Leicestershire, as we know it, was in the heart of the Mercian kingdom and is thought to have been the capital for political and ecclesiastical affairs. It was far enough away from the frontiers to avoid changing hands as the unstable boundaries of the mini-kingdom advanced and receded. But what the Anglo-Saxons had worked so hard to build in Leicestershire, was about to come to an end. The Scandinavian enemy was at the gates and Mercia would never be the same again.

Ruthlessly Pillaged

In 10 short years, between 865 and 874, the whole structure of life in Mercia collapsed. A huge Scandinavian army marched and pillaged up and down England. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has preserved a glimpse of these years of chaos in its records of “a great heathen army” that pillaged East Anglia in the year 865. Between 865 and 868 the Northmen widened their field for plunder and tribute to East Mercia. Leicester was attacked in 868, partly destroying the ancient Roman city walls.

Thousands of Danes swarmed down the River Soar in their small, easily-managed boats, penetrating the very heart of the country, carrying fire and sword among the simple and terrified population, whom they ruthlessly pillaged and massacred. In the winter of 874 to 5, after defeating Burhed, King of Mercia in battle, the raiders established their quarters at Repton on the River Trent. Monasteries, the repositories of rich and beautiful objects in gold, silver and jewellery, formed particular targets for the pagan invaders. The monastery that had been founded at Breedon in Leicestershire was reputedly sacked. But these Danes didn’t just hit and run, like the early invaders on Lindisfarne.



The Vikings swarmed down the River Soar

In its records of the year 877, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle suggests a permanent settlement of the land. The Danish army it says “went into the land of the Mercians, and shared out some of it, and gave some to Ceolwulf”. Ceolwulf was the puppet king whom the Danes placed on the Mercian throne. It seems Mercia was now divided in half.

Large parts of its eastern territories had passed into the hands of the Scandinavian invaders and were open to settlement. Within the next decade, in 886, the losses of Anglo-Saxon territory in Mercia were clearly defined by a treaty that King Alfred the Great concluded with Guthrum, the leader of the Danes, after his Wessex Saxons had recaptured London.

A permanent “country of Danes” was now established within England, known as the Danelaw. This Danish part of England comprised the greater part of eastern England from East Anglia to North Yorkshire, incorporating most of Leicestershire. You could say that Leicester was part of Denmark.

Leicestershire was close to the Danelaw boundary though, and it is believed that some of the wealthier inhabitants migrated with as many possessions as they could carry. As the churches were destroyed and Christian rites trampled, the Bishop of Leicester retired to safety at Dorchester-on-Thames. It would be more than a thousand years before there would again be a Diocese of Leicester. Leicester, with Derby, Nottingham, Lincoln and Stamford, became one of the “Five Boroughs” of the Danelaw. Leicester, as a former Anglo-Saxon royal city, continued its importance under Danish rule. Danish forms of taxation and local government took root in Leicester.

Danish Leicester

Although the Danelaw’s existence was relatively short-lived, it left an everlasting mark on the history of Leicestershire. The Scandinavians left an indelible impression on the language of the East Midlands. Vocabulary, grammatical structures and the very tones of local dialect were deeply affected by the contact with Scandinavia. Despite this, there aren’t many archeological finds to be seen; visible remains of the Norsemen are hard to come by. Leicestershire’s archaeological record lacks burials, pottery and everyday implements.

Finds that we do have are generally personal ornaments such as brooches, horse accessories, coinage and weaponry. There are also some distinctly Irish objects found in Leicestershire that were probably plundered by Vikings during raids, and transported back to the Danelaw lands. Such finds include a “shrine mount” from Breedon and belt buckles from Melton.

Our understanding of Danish settlement and the geography of the Danelaw depends largely on the evidence of Scandinavian place-names. The place-name ending of by, which means a farm or more usually a settlement, is seen throughout Denmark. That same ending is common in England too. In Leicestershire alone, 56 villages end in by (such as Oadby) and of these, half the number contain a Danish personal name as their other element. But towards Leicester, on the broad gravel spreads where the River Wreake empties into the Soar, the character of place-names changes. The sounds of the Scandinavian invaders gives way to names of an older Mercian origin with names ending in -ton. Thrussington, Syston and Cossington all speak of an earlier period in Leicestershire’s settlement history. Even though the ton element suggests the presence of a settlement that survived the impact of the Danish army, the first element in these names is frequently a Scandinavian personal name. Many Leicestershire villages were named after powerful Danes. Ingarsby is named after the Danish Prince Ingar and it is now believed that Humberstone may be named after Ingar’s brother, Hubba. Both Princes entered Leicester during the Danish invasion and could have settled in the villages named after themselves.



Some think the Viking princes are on the tower of Humberstone church

But as well as being named after actual people, many villages were named after the gods. Thurmaston, Thurcaston, Thurlaston and Thurnby all owe their name to one of the principal pagan gods of the Scandinavian culture – Thor, who together with Odin, were the most commonly worshipped gods. An archaeological find from Leicestershire of a miniature “Thor’s Hammer”, the god’s famous magical weapon, is on display in the Jewry Wall Museum.



Miniature Thor's Hammer found in
Leicestershire

Names are Clues

With invading forces, you may assume that they would settle on the broad and fertile river terraces of the Soar. But settlements already existed here and new areas of land were needed to house the large band of men who came to dwell in Leicestershire. By the study of place-names, it appears that they turned towards the emptier and perhaps less rewarding river terraces that flank the narrow valley of the Wreake. Along that river we find Frisby, Hoby, Rotherby, Brooksby and Rearsby. The word “Wreake” is also derived from Scandinavia, being the Old Norse word for “twisted”. So, Wreake is both a description and the new name for the river once known as the River Eye. Historian Sir Frank Stenton said the Wreake settlement was occupied by a large body of the Danish army who took permanent occupation of the land some time around 877.

The army would have been stationed here so it could spring to the defence of Leicester if the town was ever threatened by invaders from the west. Another Danish encampment is thought to have stood on the area of Leicester known as Dane Hills. The creation of the Danelaw made as great an impression on Leicester as in the surrounding countryside. The colonising Danes, soldiers and farmers, turned the Mercian cathedral city into a garrison town. The term “gate,” descended from the Old Norse, “gata,” meaning a street, occurs in a handful of streets in the heart of Leicester. All in the same part of town we find Gallowtree Gate, Humberstone Gate, Church Gate, Belgrave Gate and Sanvey Gate. They lie outside the line of the former Roman and medieval wall, beyond the bounds of the Anglo-Saxon town. As we all know, the first four streets converge at the Clock Tower where High Street passed through the former East Gate out of the walled enclosure of the medieval town. Thus, the presence of the “gata” element in modern street names of Leicester suggests that the Danes, when they made Leicester one of their strongholds, established a new town outside the wall of the Mercian city. By the early years of the 10th century, Leicester may have been like a town of two halves, sharply divided into Anglo-Saxon and Danish quarters.

Fresh Conquests

But Leicester wasn’t to remain in Danish hands. In 918, after taking the town of Derby, King Alfred the Great’s daughter, Ethelfleda collected a large army and captured Leicester from the Danes. Shortly afterwards, the Danes of York made peace with this powerful princess, and bound themselves by oath to obedience.

Ethelfleda was known as “the Lady of the Mercians”, and she is credited with strengthening the fortifications of Leicester, building the first castle and founding a church on the site of St Mary de Castro, probably levelled during the Norman Conquest. By building this church, she re-established Christian worship in Leicester. But not long after taking Leicester, Ethelfleda died at her palace in Tamworth on June 12, 918.



Statue of Ethelfleda in the
courtyard
of Leicester Guildhall

She is said to have been wise, just and righteous, and to have walked in the ways of her father. After the reconquest of Mercia, a mint was established in Leicester near the North Bridge, which continued until the reign of King Henry II. Coins with a local stamp from the reign of Edgar (959-975), Ethelred II (978-1016) and Canute (1016-1035) have all been discovered locally. The recapture of Mercia was, on the face of it, a temporary deliverance. It was followed by more Danish and Norse raids and, in 1013, the Five Boroughs made submission to Sweyn, King of Denmark. Leicester was sacked by Edmund Ironside in 1016, the year of the decisive Battle of Assandun, which made Canute master and ruler of all England.

Short Lived Peace

Gradually the Danish invaders became absorbed into English society. By the start of the 11th century, the men of the Danelaw, though they kept their own customs and language, had become more or less Christian and more or less Englishmen, after amalgamating with the Anglo-Saxons for well over a hundred years. Canute was a foreign ruler, but he did not, like William the Conqueror, impose domination by a foreign race.

After the Battle of Assandun and until the Norman Conquest, the town of Leicester was free from ravages of conflicting armies, and was “well-peopled”. But the peace would not last long. In another half a century, the Normans would arrive and the town would again face the brute force of a powerful army.

More information is available at <http://www.thiswasleicestershire.co.uk/2012/11/the-viking-invasion-of-leicestershire.html>

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We hope that you enjoyed this latest quarterly HFA newsletter.

If you have anything that you'd like included in future newsletters or if you have comments or suggestions, please email Nancy Herrick Johnson at nancyjohnson206@gmail.com.