

Highlights from Viking: Rediscover the Legend

A British Museum and York Museums Trust Partnership Exhibition

**at Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery
9 February to 8 September 2019**

1. The Cuerdale Hoard

Buried Circa 904AD

Made up of more than 8,600 items including silver coins, English and Carolingian jewellery, hacksilver and ingots, the Cuerdale Hoard is one of the largest Viking hoards ever found. The bulk of the hoard is housed at the British Museum.

It was discovered on 15 May 1840 on the southern bank of a bend of the River Ribble, in an area called Cuerdale near to Preston, in Lancashire. It is four times in size and weight than any other in the UK and second only to the Spillings Hoard found on Gotland, Sweden.

The hoard is thought to have been buried between 903 and 910 AD, following the expulsion of Vikings from Dublin in 902. The area of discovery was a popular Viking route between the Irish Sea and York. Experts believe it was a war chest belonging to Irish Norse exiles intending to reoccupy Dublin from the Ribble Estuary.

2. The Vale of York Hoard

Buried 927–928AD

The Vale of York Viking Hoard is one of the most significant Viking discoveries ever made in Britain. The size and quality of the material in the hoard is remarkable, making it the most important find of its type in Britain for over 150 years. Comprising 617 coins and almost 70 pieces of jewellery, hack silver and ingots, all contained with a silver-gilt cup; it tells fascinating stories about life across the Viking world.

The Vale of York Hoard was discovered in North Yorkshire in January 2007 by two metal-detectorists. It was declared Treasure in 2009 and was valued at £1,082,000 by the independent Treasure Valuation Committee and was acquired in partnership by the Yorkshire Museum and The British Museum.

3. The Bedale Hoard

Buried circa late 9th to early 10th century AD

The Bedale Hoard was found by metal detectorists in 2012 and bought by the Yorkshire Museum after generous donations from the public and grants from national bodies including the Art Fund and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund.

It spent many months being conserved by York Archaeological Trust (YAT), with fascinating and intricate details of the metalwork being uncovered for the first time.

The hoard comprises a unique iron sword pommel inlaid with gold and decorated in the Trewhiddle style, in addition to an exceptional four-strand silver neck collar, various pieces of rare silver jewellery and 29 silver ingots; three of which are incised with crosses. The material highlights connections between Viking Yorkshire and the rest of the Viking world.

4. York Armring

866-1066AD

The Vikings used silver predominantly, so Viking gold is rare. This huge armring, weighing 324g of solid gold, was likely gifted by a Viking ruler to an important loyal follower. Found in York and discovered amongst the contents of a York builder following his death, this object reflects the wealth and power of Viking Yorkshire.

5. York Helmet

750AD - 775AD

The world-famous York Helmet is the most outstanding object of the Anglo-Saxon period ever discovered. This iron and brass helmet was found in 1982 in a shopping district of York called Coppergate, when it was nearly struck by the claw of a mechanical digger. Luckily the operator stopped to check when he hit something hard. A wood-lined pit contained the helmet, along with an iron tool and fragments of antler, stone and glass.

The decoration of the nose-piece is a beautiful example of Anglo-Saxon craftsmanship – notice the animals entwined in the intricate pattern. On the crest is an inscription in Latin which translates as, '*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and God; and to all we say amen Oshere*'. The helmet was undoubtedly a prized possession and a great status symbol for the owner. 'Oshere' was certainly a nobleman and may well have been a member of the Northumbrian royal family, the most powerful dynasty in England at the time.

6. The Ormside Bowl

750-800AD

This beautifully decorated double-shelled bowl, found in 1823, is one of the finest pieces of Anglo-Saxon silverwork to be found in Britain. It is gilded silver and bronze with blue glass beads dating from the mid-8th century. It was discovered buried alongside a Viking warrior in Great Ormside, Cumbria. The bowl started life as an ecclesiastical vessel, used in a religious house. It was most likely looted by Viking raiders or given to them in tribute. The inner skin was then added to the bowl, turning it into a drinking vessel.

7. Gilling Sword

800-866AD

This beautiful sword is one of the finest Anglian weapons to be found in England. It was discovered by nine year old Gary Fridd whilst playing next to Gilling Beck, Gilling West, near Richmond in North Yorkshire. Eagle-eyed Garry was later awarded a Blue Peter badge for his amazing discovery in April 1976.

The two-edged iron sword dates from the 9th century. The sword's handle is decorated with silver which has a combination of geometric and plant designs. Anglian and Viking warriors were often buried with their swords. Archaeologists have discovered a number of such burials in North Yorkshire. Other swords of this date have also been found in rivers and it is thought that weapons of defeated armies may have been thrown into rivers.

After the discovery of the Gilling West Sword it was put up for auction and acquired by the Yorkshire Museum, then cleaned and restored by the British Museum before going on display.

8. Lewis Chessmen

1150- 1200 AD

The Lewis Chessmen are probably one of the most iconic sets of objects ever discovered. Of the 93 pieces known to us today, 82 are in the British Museum. The chess pieces were found in the vicinity of Uig on the Isle of Lewis some time before 11 April 1831. The precise findspot seems to have been a sand dune where they may have been placed in a small, drystone chamber. The set contains elaborately worked walrus ivory and whales' teeth in the forms of seated kings and queens, bishops, knights on their mounts, standing warders and pawns in the shape of obelisks. They were likely to have been made in Norway, approximately AD 1150-1200.

The chess pieces show the cultural and political connections between Britain and Scandinavia in the Middle Ages, and the growing popularity within Europe of the game of chess, which originated in India. The intricately carved Knight piece from the set will feature in the exhibition.

9. Raven Penny

Anlaf (Olaf) Guthfrithsson was the Viking King of Dublin who fought in the Battle of Brunanburh in 937 alongside Constantine II and Owen I against Aethelstan, King of England. This was not a victorious campaign for Anlaf but he survived the conflict and successfully seized York and parts of the East Midlands in the aftermath of Aethelstan's death in 939. Raven Pennies was minted at York during this occupation.

The obverse legend means 'King Anlaf' in Old Norse and is one of the earliest surviving texts in this language. The use of Old Norse language instead of Latin coupled with the raven image, associated with the Norse god Odin, is a strong indication that the Vikings at this time were declaring their independence in the British Isles.

10. Seal of Snarrus the Tax Collector

1100- 1199AD

This seal, inscribed with the name of its owner and made from walrus ivory, is a very rare find indeed. The ivory used to make the seal was probably imported from the Baltic region. It belonged to a tax, or toll collector named Snarrus. His name is inscribed around the outside edge. Snarrus is a Viking name which survived into the Norman period in York. The seal was used as a symbol of Snarrus' authority, as he collected tolls from the people who came to York to trade.

11. Viking Brooch

This Viking brooch is a bone plaque made in the shape of a bearded male face. The holes suggest it was once attached to something, but we don't know what. It was found on Clifford St in York and it's very significant because it's a contemporary image of a Viking, ie: it was made by a Viking person in the Viking period, so it shows us how they looked/saw themselves, whereas most of our images of the Vikings come from much later and so are not necessarily realistic.

12. The Hingham Hoard

A hoard of four silver brooches, two silver strap-ends and twenty-three silver pennies of King Edmund. They show the sort of wealth Anglo-Saxons were burying in the ground at exactly the time the Vikings were raiding the kingdom in the 860s.

13. Gold lozenge brooch from Attleborough

A high-status brooch made from gold sheet with filigree wire inlays that is of a type made in Scandinavia and then imported. Lozenge brooches were a typically Scandinavian form of brooch which are relatively well known from England but this is unique in being made of gold.

14. The Æthelred penny

A silver penny of an East Anglian king known only from this coinage – itself with only seven examples known. This shows that unlike the historical record, East Anglia had a king who survived the murder of Edmund in 869. Æthelred must have ruled on behalf of the Vikings until Guthrum settled in the kingdom in about 880.

15. Field Dalling Thor's hammer

A silver Thor's hammer, this accurate representation of a hammer is a reminder of why the Anglo-Saxons called the Vikings heathens, as they believed in pagan gods. Like a Christian wearing a crucifix, this pendant was worn as an amulet hoping for Thor's protection of the wearer.

16. Borre disc brooch

This tiny disc brooch is one of the best surviving examples of its type known from Britain and was found at Burnham Market, Norfolk. Unusual for the amount of gilding surviving, it shows three small animals, their noses all pointing towards the centre of the brooch. Their rounded mouse-like ears can be seen along the outer edge.

For high resolution images please contact:

Esther Morgan, 01603 223215, esther.morgan@norfolk.gov.uk