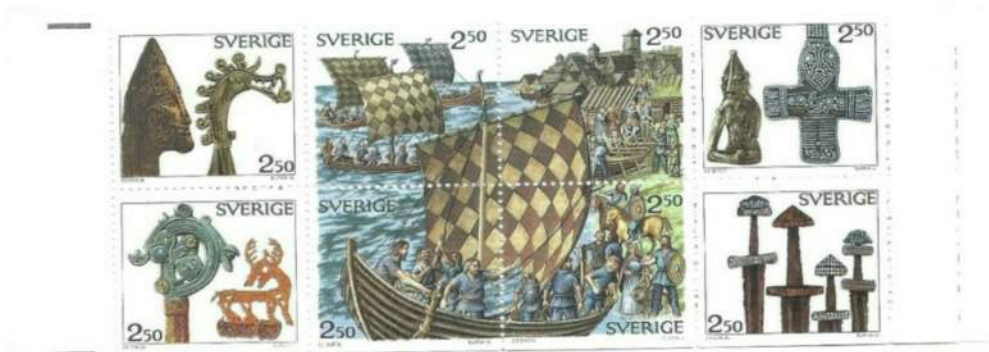


Vikings Misunderstood

The Vikings have never had a particularly good press in Britain. Whether that is because of what they did to us at Lindisfarne (which they sacked as recently as 793 A.D.: A-Z of Britain 2011) or because of our vivid memories of the austerity brought about by funding the Danegeld in the Twelfth Century, but if you ask the man the street about Vikings, chances are he will describe large bearded bullies in metal helmets with horns or wings, intent on a bit of r and p around these shores—the kind of character that might well have graced an Asterix cartoon or Flash Gordon movie. As with the debunking of any stereotype such an image is but partially based on reality.

The word "Viking", derived from Old Norse is something of an enigma but can indicate someone who was prepared to travel long distances overseas, but can also imply the use of underhand military tactics, for example feigning retreat. Over three hundred years from the middle of the Eighth Century such Norsemen travelled all over Europe, to the Middle East, to the North East coast of North America and perhaps even further afield in order—yes, to raid—but also to explore, trade and often to put down roots.



Shown in the foreground of the composite grouping depicting a Viking port on Sweden 1990 (above), on Iceland 1930, Denmark 1976 and on the joint issue by all states in the Northern Countries Union in 1969 is an alternative vessel called a "knarr," designed for cargo, with a wider hull (about four and half metres), shorter in length at around 16 metres and with lower draft. Often pulled in tow to permit crew and cargo transfer to shore is a longboat as seen on Isle of Man 1974.



The two main types of clinker-built sailing vessel used by the Vikings are a typical subject for philatelic commemoration. The troopship with a long slender hull (typically around 22 metres) was built for speed and surprise and could sail with the wind or against it via the employment of a stretching pole or "beitass" mounted to a lower corner of a sail. Such a longship which was double ended—it did not have to be turned around to reverse—could also be rowed. Its tapering bow led it to be feared as a "dragonship" because of its similarity in profile to the fabled beast, as can be appreciated in the stamps above.



Norway 1972 shows the dragon figurehead of the very well preserved Oseberg ship excavated in 1904/5 from a burial mound near Tønsberg in Vestfold county and Denmark 1993 and Isle of Man 1998 similar intimidating images.



The domestic life of Vikings is referenced in the Swedish quartet above and that many of them were peaceable farmers and crofters can be seen from this 2005 minisheet from the Faroe Islands, which hints at one possible reason - the physical limitations of their agricultural land—for Viking wanderlust about which there are many theories. Possibly the model for these images were the ruins of a Viking house, from Kvikvik on the west coast of Streymoy in the Faroe Islands shown in this 1982 Europa issue.



A somewhat tendentious explanation for Viking travel is that they resisted the cultural and geographic influence of the great Christian military leader Charlemagne - Charles the Great (c 742—814) King of the Franks (France 1966) who was eager to proselytise all heathens, responding either by moving away from his aegis or by tackling him head on and chasing his troops as they infringed on Viking land. Such vengeful pursuit was much easier after Charlemagne's death when there was much infighting amongst his heirs regarding possession of the territories conquered in his lifetime.



The Settlement of Iceland

Furthermore because the Vikings were very experienced sailors, it was relatively easy to travel firstly for commercial reasons to territory known to be unoccupied or other lands which they knew to be prosperous and take them over by force of arms, settling their own people there, a process which has featured throughout history : Norway 1942 shows the embarkation of a Viking fleet and Faroes 1982 indicates travel from the west of Norway to Shetland, The Faroes, Iceland and the west of the British Isles. Vikings seem to have been quite opportunistic in this but as time passed the Norsemen were not content just with relatively local expansion and sometimes this need was fuelled by internal strife.



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5a Discovery of Iceland



7a Encampment with dragon head adornments at Thingvellir



15a Naming the island



Issues from Iceland 1930 and 1982 reference the discovery of Iceland by Viking seafarers in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries. According to the Icelandic *Book of Settlement* the first permanent settler was the chieftan Ingólfur Arnarson, (shown on the 1930 10a stamp) who founded and named Reykjavik though other Vikings before him had come and gone. (The 350 value of Iceland 1982 depicts the ceremonial casting of a dais post—used in foundations—into the sea by one of Arnarson's men—with the first Iceland settlement in 874 A.D.)



As settlement plans developed the Norsemen brought slaves with them taken from Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Hebrides. Arnarson had sought new land after very bloody territorial disputes with his own people in Norway

Influence upon Man

Isle of Man 1973 references the Viking arrival in the middle of the Tenth Century, whilst a 1974 set commemorates the millenary of Magnus II Haraldsson (1048-69) joint-King of Norway, who raided the Hebrides and land around the Irish Sea in 1057/8 including incursions into Wales and England.

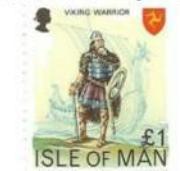
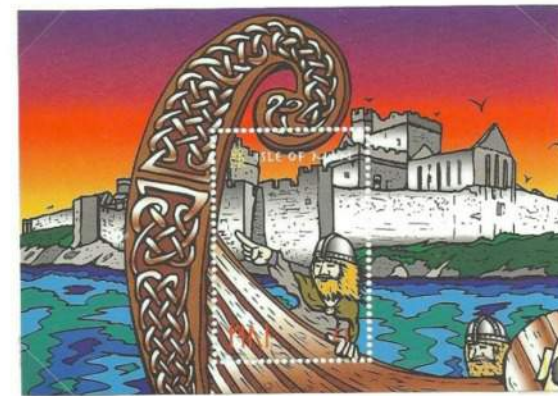
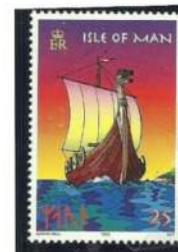
Further 1979 issues for the Millennium of the Manx Parliament Tynwald—founded by Norsemen and whose name is derived from the Old Norse words for a place of assembly—mark a Viking raid at Garwick and show a longship emblem on a crest.



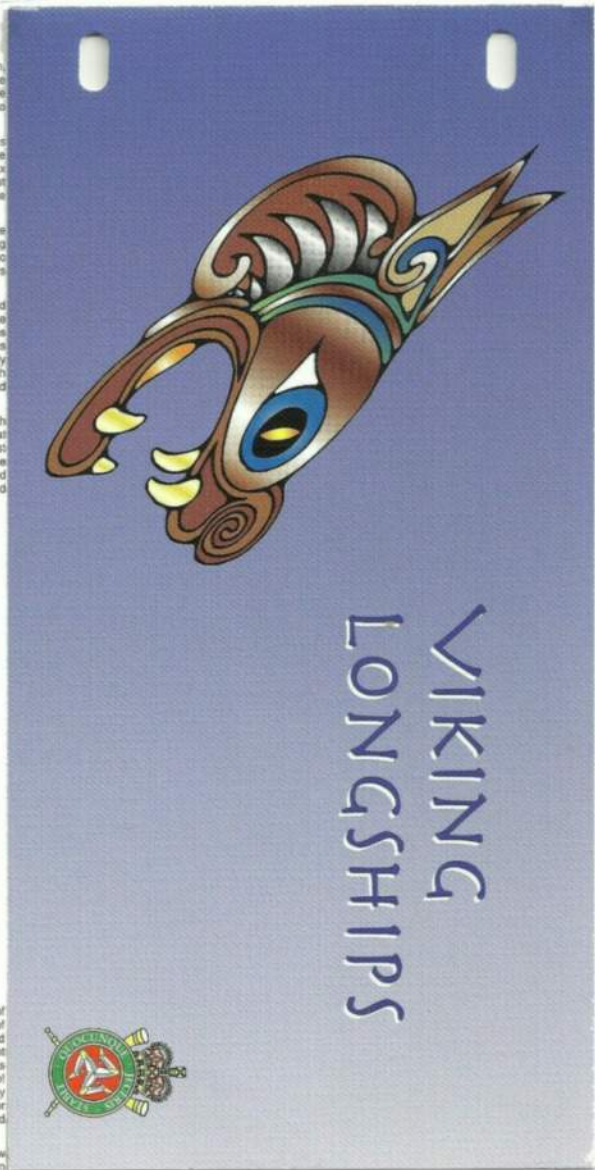
Viking ship burial of a warrior king, stone carving with runes and legendary heroes (real and imaginary) feature within this 2008 issue from the Isle of Man....



A runic inscription also appears on stamps showing different longships in an Isle of Man set from 1998 with the runes representing the word "Maun" or "Mon", meaning mountainous, the term by which the Vikings knew the island. Confusingly the Vikings also used the term "Mon" for the Island of Angelsey, 150 miles to the South.



Right, one of two presentation pack covers
Below, text describing the four stamps from
inside the other cover



The Scandinavians who attacked the British Isles were variously known as Northmen, Vikings or Danes. They first attacked Northumbria, or North-east England, in 793, and the Isle of Man fell victim shortly after. Once they appreciated its perfect position in the middle of the Irish Sea, the Island became a haven for these seafaring raiders and traders, who settled its land and used its harbours.

In time, they intermarried with the Manx and became farmers, but their warlike nature was not forgotten: often settling in the more vulnerable parts of the Island, their presence sometimes protected the Manx from later pirate raids. Eventually the power of the Manx Vikings touched the neighbouring coasts of Ireland, Wales, England and South-west Scotland, and ranged far beyond amongst the Western Isles of Scotland and as far as the Outer Hebrides, as the Kingdom of Man and the Isles was born.

Five centuries of Viking influence, directly attributable to the supremacy of the Scandinavians' ship-building technology and to their seafaring, have left an enduring impression on the character of the Isle of Man, on our people, our parliament, our artistic influence and on much else besides. Here those influences are celebrated in diverse ways on our four Viking Longship stamp designs.

21p The Vikings felt that their longships were imbued with living characters, and bestowed names upon them - like Long Serpent - which reflected this. Their love of intricate carvings and the importance they attributed to the gods, giants and fantastic creatures which feature in their mythological tales are also reflected in the monstrous figureheads they sometimes fixed to their ships. These mythical creatures not only served to frighten those unfortunate enough to suffer from the raids which characterised early contact with the Scandinavians but also warded off evil spirits and protected the longships and their crews.

25p Viking longships were immensely lightweight, flexible and seaworthy vessels. With their ability to navigate out of sight of land, the longships could traverse the sea at speed and with confidence, in the early days arriving over the horizon almost magically and without warning to terrorise the unprepared inhabitants. The construction of a longship required freshly felled oak which could be bent and twisted to form the flowing lines which gave the longship hull its smooth form and contributed to its speed.



31p The classic image of the Vikings, so beloved of the Victorians and of Hollywood, is of their raiding prowess. More careful analysis of the written works of the time, so full of historical accounts of the destruction of monasteries and the taking of treasure and slaves, shows that these were generally lawless times, and that the Vikings were not the only culprits. The Irish monasteries, whose annals are full of such tales, were as likely to be raided by bands of Irish outlaws as by Vikings - if not more so! Nevertheless, the longship was the perfect means of transport for a pirate, ideally suited to running ashore on sandy beaches, or penetrating far inland along major rivers, their appearance made more terrible by fearsome figureheads, garish sails and multi-coloured shields racked along the gunwales.

75p The Viking longship had a double-ended hull, the only difference between the bow and stern being the attachment of a steering oar to the latter. Because of the design, and shape of the hull there was no place for a centrally mounted-rudder at the stern, and gradually the expedient of lashing an oar to the side of the hull developed into a purpose-made and carefully-mounted oar which pivoted upwards in shallow water and could be easily controlled by the attachment of a tiller-arm at the upper end. The steering oar was always fixed to the right side of the ship, giving rise to the term 'starboard' or 'starboard'.

Christian Influence on Norse Legend



On the previous page one stamp in the 2008 set depicts stone carving. A set from 1978 illustrates three of the best examples of such artefacts integrating two belief systems.



The richest example anywhere known of such illustrations of the old Norse Mythology is the handsomely carved cross-slab at Kirk Bride. Above the circle which surrounds the cross, and at either side of a rectangular panel, stands a small figure; above the panel and connecting one of these figures with the other is a chevron design. By comparison with a hog-back monument of the period at Heysham,* we may recognise in the latter the Firmament which is upheld by four dwarfs here represented by the two small figures. Below the circle and by the side of another panel appears a man holding a staff-now too worn for one to say positively what it was intended for; it might be Odin, father of the gods. Below this and separated from it by a panel of plait-work is a scene of trouble which seems to represent the trampling of victims under the hoofs of horses. Figures on the other side of the panel are more certain. The being attacking the serpent or dragon is undoubtedly intended for Thor, bearded and girt with his strength-belt, who at Ragnarök is to slay the Midgarthsworm, and, stepping back nine paces, to be himself overcome by its deadly venom. Below is the mighty giant, Rungin, who challenged Thor to mortal combat, and, when he thought the god was coming by the nether way and would attack him from beneath, cast his shield upon the ground and stood upon it.



Old Ballaugh Church 6

"OLAF LIOTULFSON ERECTED THIS CROSS TO THE MEMORY OF ULF HIS SON"

Or "Thorlaf, the son of Thorjolf erected this cross to his son Olave."



Odd's Cross

In Braddan, on the outskirts of Douglas is a group of crosses of Celtic and Scandinavian / Norse design dating back to the 9th to 11th centuries. A remarkable number of these have survived on the island but most are in parishes in the north. The crosses are inside old Braddan church .

The pictures show a Celtic wheel-headed cross of the 9th or 10th century and one of the Norse crosses: the surviving shaft of 'Odd's Cross' of the 10th or 11th century with its carved dragons.

Thorleif's cross from 900AD - 1000AD is a tapering pillar with pieced cross head ring. The shaft is decorated with Scandinavian dragons in Mannen style, their tails and limbs interlaced. The inscriptions as been translated as 'Thorleif erected this cross to the memory of Fiac his son, brother's son to Hair'.



Thorleif's Cross



A minisheet from Faroes 2002 shows Viking transatlantic exploration toward Greenland, a primitive compass and a Viking sailor calculating directions from a longship in heavy seas.

Across the Atlantic c 1000 A.D.

So on a different scale altogether from investigating Iceland and the British Isles were the adventures and discoveries of Erik "the Red" Thorvaldsson (950-c.1103) a Norwegian outlaw escaping justice who founded the first Norse colonies in Greenland, his son Leif Ericson (c.970-c.1020) the first European to make landfall on the North American continent and settle at Vinland in what we now call Newfoundland and Thorfinn Karlsefni.

Four stamps from Greenland in 1999 show a Viking knarr, arrowheads and coins, a settler collecting driftwood and Tjodhilde's Church at Brottal.



A stamp from Iceland 2000 shows the Viking explorer Thorfinn Karlsefni who attempted to settle Vinland around 1010 and who sired the first child of European descent known to have been born on the American continent. Beside him are other stamps depicting Leif Ericson and their longships.



A 1987 stamp from Canada commemorates the arrival of Vikings on what is now Canadian territory.



Iceland 1982 depicts the discovery of "Vinland" aka "Wine land" hence the grapes - the North East of the American continent c. 1000 A.D.

The Vikings continued and made their own the ancient practice of erecting runestones to glorify warriors, heroic campaigns and deeds. Most of these stones are to be found in Scandinavia but the design of Monaco 1982 marking the discovery of Greenland by Erik the Red includes an image of the Kingittorsuaq Runestone found on an island in the Upernavik Archipelago in N.W. Greenland.



Settlement of Greenland



Above Greenland 2001 Vikings (3rd series) shows from left : fisherman and seals, mouse sitting on food, man with packhorses, stone wall and common raven

Right Greenland 2000 Vikings (2nd series) shows from top left clockwise : walrus, story teller and model of great Northern diver, Viking with gyrfalcon, walrus tusks and other goods for trade and dog chasing reindeer



Leif Ericson

Leif Ericson (Old Norse: *Leifr Eiríksson*; Norwegian: *Leiv Eiriksson* c. 970 – c. 1020) was a Norse explorer regarded as the first European to land in North America (excluding Greenland), nearly 500 years before Christopher Columbus.¹ According to the Sagas of Icelanders, he established a Norse settlement at Vinland, tentatively identified with the Norse L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland in modern-day Canada.

It is believed that Leif was born around the 970s—the son of mother Thjodhild and father Erik the Red, an explorer and outlaw from Western Norway. Erik founded the first Norse colonies in Greenland, and was based at the family estate *Brattahlíð* in the so-called Eastern Settlement, where Leif had his upbringing. Leif had two known sons: Thorgils, born to noblewoman Thorgunna in the Hebrides); and Thorkell, who succeeded Leif as chieftain of the Greenland settlement.

He is commemorated below in stamps from Faroes & Iceland 1992, Iceland 2000, Hungary 1978, and USA 1968



statue of Leif Erikson near the Minnesota State Capitol



Below statue at Trondheim, Norway



Thorfinn Karlsefni

Thorfinn Karlsefni (Old Norse: Þorfinnr Karlsefni, Icelandic: Þorfinnur Karlsefni) was an Icelandic explorer who circa 1010 AD led an attempt to settle Vinland with three ships and 160 settlers. Among the settlers was Freydis Eiríksdóttir, according to *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*, sister or half-sister of Leif Erikson. Thorfinn's wife Guðrið Þorbjarnardóttir gave birth to a boy in Vinland*, known as Snorri Guðriðarson, the first child of European descent known to have been born in the New World and to whom many Icelanders can trace their roots. The exact location of Thorfinn's colony is unknown but is believed to potentially be the excavated Norse camp at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland.



In the early twentieth century, Einar Jónsson, an Icelandic sculptor, created the above statue of Thorfinn Karlsefni which was placed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There is another casting of the statue in Reykjavik, Iceland.

*Vinland was the name given to an area of North America by the Norsemen, about the year 1000 AD.

Archaeology has given support to the long-held theory that old Norse sagas show Vikings reached North America approximately five centuries prior to the voyages of Christopher Columbus. In 1960 archaeological evidence of the only known Norse settlement in North America (outside of Greenland) was found at L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern tip of the island of Newfoundland, in what is now the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This proved conclusively the Vikings' pre-Columbian discovery of North America. Recent archaeological studies suggest that this site is not the Vinland of the Norse accounts in its entirety but was the entrance to a larger region called Vinland by the Norse.

Karlsefni is celebrated in a issue from Iceland in 2000.



Artefacts—evidence of Culture

As regards Viking appearance and armour, quite correctly none of the stamps illustrated above show Vikings wearing those mythical horned or winged helmets - but see Cuba 1969 for misconceptions—which would have been quite dangerous in the narrow confines of a Viking vessel. A set from Sweden in 1975 shows not only an authentic style of Viking iron helmet (55 ore) and bronze helmet decoration (10 ore) but also an iron sword hilt and iron shield buckle, all intricately designed and constructed as part of a wealthy Viking's military wardrobe.



Further Viking appreciation of sophisticated artefacts which belie the brutish stereotype can be seen on Swedish stamps from 1990 — a carved bone head and dragon head, a series of Viking sword heads owned by a typical freeman the style of some suggesting importation from Southern Europe.



Two other stamps in the set imply the gradual Christianisation of Viking culture, with one showing a bronze figurine of the god Frö juxtaposed with a silver crucifix and another a west-European crozier beside the figure of deer embroidered in gold thread on a piece of Eastern silk.



Denmark 1979 shows an intricate piece of Viking jewellery in the form of a "gripping beast" pendant.



Sophistication is also clear from an aerial view of the kind of camp that Viking harriers would have constructed whilst on campaigns shown on Denmark 1953. This illustrates a ring castle with large protective ramparts and four symmetrical entrances built at Trelleborg which can be dated by dendrochronology to the reign of King Harald Bluetooth (d.986).



The End of the Viking Age

is generally regarded as coinciding with the Norman invasion of southern Britain. The growth of Christianity in Scandinavia had brought many cultural changes and the Viking traits of violence, theft and slave-taking were more and more looked up with disapproval.

The Normans (blood ancestors of the Norsemen) who came with King William to England in 1066 were part of the Viking diaspora and the similarity of "Norman" ships involved in the invasion to the traditional Viking vessels is striking: see France 1966 celebrating the Battle of Hastings.



A pair of French stamps issued in 1994 to mark Franco-Swedish Cultural Relations depicts a scene from The Bayeux Tapestry, - as does GB 1966—which shows events leading up to the Norman invasion and says explicitly that it was Viking led. Furthermore a stamp from a 1963 Polish series on the history of sailing ships depicts "a Norman ship from the 1066 invasion fleet" - in fact the *Mora*— Duke William's flagship.



The invasion fleet comprised some 400 Viking-style vessels, eleven of which are depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry. For example in the left hand of the French pair above vessels nos 1, 2 and the stern of no 3 and in the right hand vessel no 8 above whose mast appears in Latin "ENE SÆ" which when seen in full—see image of Tapestry below translates as "(and arrived at Pev)ENESÆ" - Pevensey Bay in East Sussex provided shelter for the invasion fleet in 1066. Vessels nos 2 and 3 are shown in the British 6d stamps.



Archaeology.....Excavation.....Replica Construction



Norway 2004 marks the centenary of archaeological discoveries at Oseberg showing from left a ship's prow and barrels, a sled and a bed

A burial mound at Oseberg farm near Tønsberg in Vestfold county, Norway contained numerous grave goods and two female human skeletons. The ship's interment into its burial mound dates from 834, but parts of the ship date from around 800, and the ship itself is thought to be older. It was excavated in 1904-1905. This ship is regarded as one of the finest finds to have survived the Viking Age. The ship and some of its contents are displayed at the Viking Ship Museum, in Bygdøy.



Denmark 1976 shows Skuldelev undergoing a testing sea trial



Denmark 2004 honouring the Viking Ship Museum at Roskilde shows from top left clockwise the original excavation, the reconstructed hull, the boat on exhibit and a trial sailing of Skuldelev.

In July 2007 *Skuldelev 2* was reconstructed using Viking technologies and renamed *Sea Stallion* sailed with 70 crew from Roskilde in Denmark to Dublin, also taking around six weeks. Five Viking longships had been discovered in 1962 during excavations near the village of Skuldelev, Roskilde Fjord and the ship was "going home" as botanic research showed that the original had been constructed from Irish trees.



Denmark 1998, marking the millenary of the city of Roskilde (founded in Viking times) depicts such a longship and Ireland 2007 and minisheet commemorates the voyage of the *Sea Stallion* itself.



Fascination with Vikings in the Twentieth Century led to a number of Thor Heyerdahl inspired replica constructions and voyages. A 1979 Isle of Man stamp depicts *Odin's Raven* a joint Isle of Man/Norwegian project which sailed from Norway to Peel over six weeks in the Summer of 1979 to commemorate the millenary of Tynwald, the Manx Parliament. The longship is now on display in the House of Manannan museum in Peel.

A colourful illustration of a Viking longship sailing past Peel Castle on the Isle of Man appears in the 1998 set commemorating Viking longships. The cartoon is somewhat anachronistic as although the fortification was built in the 11th century under the rule of King Magnus Barelegs it was made of wood. The prominent round tower was originally part of the original Celtic monastery, which the Vikings adapted but



the prominent local red sandstone battlements were added in the early 14th century.

However, replication of Viking longship adventures well predates *Skuldelev* and *Odin's Raven*.

In 1893 the *Viking* an exact replica of the 8th century Gokstad ship sailed with a crew of twelve from Norway to be exhibited at the World Columbian Exposition at Chicago, USA, proving Vikings were capable of becoming the first Europeans to reach the New World, long before Columbus in 1492; USA 1925 marking the Norse-American Centennial. Such Viking presence has since been proved by archaeological research in Greenland and the North East mainland of Canada.



The Viking at the Chicago exhibition in 1893 and on Cambodia 1998

The original ship was found in a burial mound at Gokstad farm in Sandar, Sandefjord, Vestfold, Norway. Shortly after the 1880 New Year the sons of the owner of Gokstad Farm, having heard of the legends surrounding the site, uncovered the bow of a boat and its painter while digging in the still frozen ground. Specialist archaeological experts moved in to preserve the find.



Modern Allusion in Art and Science

Because of their heroic reputation The Vikings have been the subjects of many artistic treatments...



This Soviet stamp from 1974 depicts the 1901 painting "Guests from Overseas" by Russian artist N.K.Rörich showing travellers arriving in what is clearly a Viking ship.



In 1928 Evald Aav (1900-39) composed the first National Estonian opera *Vikerlased* (*The Vikings*) premiered in Tallinn on 8th September and marked by this 2006 mini-sheet showing the Estonian national opera house and a scene from the opera.

Viking was the name given to an American Mars lander which made the first successful soft landings at two locations on the Martian surface and returned the first images from the surface.



The orbiters extensively mapped the surface of the planet. Viking was designed to orbit Mars and to land and operate on the planet's surface. Two identical spacecraft, each consisting of a lander and an orbiter, were built. These spacecraft were launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida in 1975.

Viking 1 reached Mars orbit June 19, 1976, and Viking 2 began orbiting August 7, 1976. Viking 1 landed on Mars July 20, 1976 on the western slope of Chryse Planitia (the Plains of Gold)

Surprising Lack of Interest by Royal Mail

From the preceding frames it's clear to see that the Vikings have had an enormous influence on the history of Europe and "discovered" the American continent, peopled by emigrants from Asia over 12,000 earlier.

Their influence on the British Isles has also been significant.

By the late 9th century Viking lords controlled a third of what we now call England with York (to them Jorvik) their centre for trade and King of Norway Eric "Bloodaxe" Haraldsson (d.954), later King of Northumbria.

The King of Denmark Cnut (c.90—1035) seen here on 1985 issues from Denmark and Sweden —of fabled inability to control the waves—was King of England from 1016-35.



Through their diaspora Viking influence was a very important feature of the Norman Invasion of 1066 which changed Britain immeasurably.



In Northern Scotland in particular the Viking influence is prevalent with for example surnames like MacSween (son of Sven) and MacAulay (Son of Olaf) quite common and Shetland annually conducts a celebration of Viking ancestry of international importance: see Up-Helly-Aa postmark.

The only allusion to Viking invasion on our stamps is oblique and tendentious as the inclusion of the Scottish thistle as a sometimes tiny symbol on GB definitives from 1912 onwards and more distinctly on regional definitives first issued in 1958. (For "British" Viking stamps you need to scrutinise catalogues for Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey issues from the 1970's onwards).



Legend has it that one reason for the adoption of the thistle as a Scottish icon was that invading Viking soldiers stood on the prickly plants as they tried to attack a settlement on the West coast and the noise of their pains alerted the defenders in time to save the day. This may have happened at the Battle of Largs in 1263 or much earlier or indeed not at all.

In short, given the obvious great cultural and historic importance of the Viking Age to Europe and the British Isles it seems a great shame that to date the only Viking to be celebrated on Royal Mail issues stamps was this one in 1994 !! Perhaps this is down to prejudice born of typical misconceptions.

Noggin the Nog—the greatest Viking—to our Royal Mail at least !

