

## VALHALLA! CONFERENCE

### ***Wild Women, Strong Ale and the Walking Dead***

INVERNESS TOWN HOUSE

FRIDAY 25<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2017

£25 (packed lunch included)

9.30 Registration

10am Introduction: Chair - Dr Victoria Whitworth

10.15 Dr Stephen Harrison, Glasgow University

#### ***Wild Women and Ancient Landscapes - Rethinking Scottish Viking Graves***

In Scotland, as in many other parts of the Viking World, furnished burials provide a key source of evidence for early migrations and the Viking diaspora. Although these graves share many characteristics across the Viking world, there are important regional variations. This paper will examine the Scottish evidence and argues for a distinctive 'Scotto-Norse' variation in burial ritual, one that seems to have given an unusual prominence to women, and which seems to have had a particular engagement with prehistoric monuments.

11.00 Dr Alexandra Sanmark, Centre for Nordic Studies, UHI Kirkwall

#### ***The Assembly in Norse Society - with some examples from Scotland***

The first half of the paper will examine the role and function of the Norse thing, which functioned as both parliament and court. Through expressions such as 'the assembly of all free men, the thing has frequently been described as an exclusively male arena. Detailed examination of the sources, however, shows that this is far too one-dimensional, and that at least some women had access to the meetings. The second half of the paper will discuss the features of the thing sites established by the Norse settlers in Northern Scotland and how they differ from their Scandinavian counterparts.

11.45 Coffee

12.05 Dr Steve Ashby, Archaeology Department, York University

#### ***Into the Melting Pot: Food and Identity in the Viking Age***

We think we understand Viking-Age food pretty well. Through environmental archaeology: the identification and analysis of seeds, shells, bones and the like, we do know a lot about what Viking-Age people were eating, but much less much about how their meals were prepared, cooked, or served. Small variations in this 'culinary technology' could help us access the question of Viking 'identities' - for so long the preserve of dress accessories, linguistics, and genetics - if we could only access the high-resolution data we need.

A new research project at the University of York is attempting to make this more than just a pipe dream. By applying leading-edge biomolecular science, we will explore how pottery was used to transport, store, prepare and serve food and drink. By studying the patterns of wear

and sooting visible on potsherds, together with the charred food crusts often found adhering to them, and the fats and waxes that have soaked deep into their walls, we will characterise variation in the preparation and cooking of food in a range of settlements across Viking-Age England. In this talk, we will discuss our findings to date, and propose a few suggestions as to how the approach might be extended into Viking Scotland.

12.45 Questions: Chair - Dr Victoria Whitworth

1.00 Lunch (Packed lunch included)

2.00 Andrea Blendl, Centre for Nordic Studies, UHI, Kirkwall

***Women's identities in the Norse diaspora – the runic evidence***

My research centres on expressions of identity in the Orcadian corpus of runic inscriptions.

This paper focuses on the runic evidence for Norse women in Orkney and neighbouring regions such as Caithness. It compares the female names appearing in the corpus of inscriptions with findings from other disciplines like archaeology and DNA studies. In particular, it looks at some current questions in

Norse diaspora research: Can runic inscriptions be used as sources for the presence, and maybe even agency, of Norse women in the region? What do these inscriptions tell us about the gender relationship in medieval Orkney? Did these women consider themselves Norse? Thus, the paper aims to contribute to an interdisciplinary understanding of women's identities in the Norse diaspora, showing them as both participating in a wider network across the sea but also negotiating a unique form of insular identity.

2.45 Dr Clare Downham, Institute of Irish Studies, Liverpool

***Viking Zombies***

The terms vampire and zombie entered into the English language quite late (the eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries respectively) but fear of revenants, that is the dead rising again, can be traced from ancient times. Fear of death is of course natural and universal. Across world cultures, beliefs in immortal souls have spawned fears that a spirit could remain trapped in a body, causing it to reanimate. Tales of the undead may serve as indicators of social tensions and trauma. Historically blame for the misfortunes of the living could be laid on the unquiet souls of the departed. While nowadays restless souls still serve as metaphors for social concerns. This paper explores evidence of viking burial rituals relating to fears of revenants, a rich stream of medieval Icelandic literature and links to sites associated with viking burial in Scotland. Given the number of amateur zombie films circulating online, I am hoping someone will be inspired to add in vikings for a future YouTube blockbuster!

3.30 Questions: Chair - Dr Victoria Whitworth

4.00 Closing Remarks: Chair - Dr Victoria Whitworth

4.30 Finish

To Book: Please contact: Inverness Museum & Art Gallery Tel. 01463 237114 or email: [inverness.museum@highlifehighland.com](mailto:inverness.museum@highlifehighland.com)