

# Viking Swansea – Fact or Fiction?

*MEMO Research Day* *10 April 2014*  
(part of the RIF-funded project *Welsh Communities and the Old World*)

**RIAH Conference Suite, James Callaghan Building B02/03 (basement), Swansea University**  
**10.30am – 5.15pm**

The Swansea Millennium Research Project has been set up by Swansea University's Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Research (MEMO), to research the origins of the city and to see what light this might shed on Wales's place in the world before the Norman Conquest.

It has long been recognised that Swansea's foundation presents an intriguing gap in Welsh history. Whereas so many Welsh towns can trace their origins to the establishment of Roman settlements, it seems likely that Swansea is a later creation, albeit not one recognised in surviving early medieval material in Welsh. The particularity of the city's name, not obviously derived from Welsh, Latin or Old English, encouraged the theory that Swansea was derived from two words from Old Norse or Old Danish, representing the personal name Sweyn and *ey* – generally translated as island. In the eleventh century the most prominent Danish magnate active in Britain, and therefore, perhaps, most likely to lend his name to a settlement or trading post, was Sweyn Forkbeard, who first united the crowns of Denmark and England in 1013. Sweyn died in the spring of 1014, and his death provides the *terminus ante quem* for the suggestion that Swansea should be celebrating its millennium.

The research workshop on 10 April 2014 will concentrate on the support provided by the archaeological evidence – not in Swansea itself, where, so far, no significant evidence has emerged, but from the evidence uncovered elsewhere in Wales and in Southwest England, which support theories of Scandinavian contact with England, Wales and Ireland. Professor John Hines and Professor David Griffiths will consider what evidence can be drawn from research elsewhere in Wales, in Ireland and along the Severn in this period. Professor Jeremy Knight will comment on what appears to be a shift in the trading axis from the York-Chester-Dublin axis to the Bristol-South Wales-Waterford/Wexford axis in the early eleventh century, which might be considered a significant background to the foundation or development of Swansea in this period. These investigations of early contact will be complemented by a paper by Professor John Davies reflecting on Swansea's often singular role in Welsh history.

It is hoped that the workshop will begin raising questions which can then be addressed more fully at a conference in July 2015. Some of these will concern the development of Swansea itself. Already in the twelfth-century descriptions, we see Swansea fulfilling a vital and influential role as the fulcrum of political, social and ecclesiastical authority for the Lordship of Gower to the west, and the Swansea valley to the east, but we have far less certainty in knowing how and when this authority developed. More broadly, the conference will seek to readdress the question of Wales's relationship to other regions and other cultures in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Recently, for example, it has been suggested that several important manuscripts of the period, previously identified as English, were in fact written in Wales. If the manuscripts are Welsh, we do not know for certain where they were produced, or if they provide evidence of manuscript exchange between England and Wales, or Wales and the continent. The conference will seek to bring together evidence of cross-cultural contact – between Wales and the Scandinavian kingdoms (including Dublin), Wales and England, Wales and France and Wales and Brittany – as well as between England and Denmark, Ireland and Denmark, contact with Iberia, with French and German speaking regions and countries, and between Ireland and the continent.

This workshop is being funded by the Research Institute of Arts and Humanities at Swansea University (through its Research Initiatives Fund), and the Learned Society of Wales.

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## Programme

- 10.00 Registration
- 10.30 Introduction to the project by Dr Simon Meecham-Jones (Swansea University)
- 10.45 Presentation by Prof. John Hines (Cardiff University)
- 11.45 Coffee
- 12.15 Presentation by Prof. Jeremy Knight (University of Kent)
- 1.15 Lunch
- 2.30 Presentation by Prof. David Griffiths (University of Oxford)
- 3.30 Tea
- 4.00 Presentation by Prof. John Davies (Cardiff University)
- 5.00 Closing remarks

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## Registration Form

Please tick the box.

I wish to attend the research workshop *Viking Swansea: Fact or Fable?* (10 April 2014).

Name: ..... Title: .....

Affiliation: .....

Address: .....

Email: .....

I wish to have lunch on 10 April.

Please indicate any dietary requirements: .....

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Please return this form to: Prof. Daniel Power, College of Arts and Humanities, Swansea University, Singleton Park, Swansea SA2 8PP (email [d.j.power@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:d.j.power@swansea.ac.uk)).