

HODGSON SAGA

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Contents

Maps

Acknowledgements

Preface

PART 1 – BLOOD OF THE HODGSONS

1	Vikings from Norway to Ireland	1
2	Across The Irish Sea to England	6
3	Some Viking Dates and Place-Names	10
4	The Cumberland Settlements	13
5	The Lonsdale Settlements	18
6	Norse Migrations East of the Pennines	22
7	The Formation of the Hodgson Surname	26
8	The Surname Distribution Evidence	34
9	The DNA Evidence	39
10	Tidying Up and Summing Up	46

PART 2 – HODGSON MISCELLANEA

11	Hodgson Variants	48
12	Hodgson Place-Names	51
13	Some Prominent Hodgsons	53
14	Hodgsons of Hebburn and Other Pedigrees	61

PART 3 – HODGSON FAMILY PORTRAITS

15	From Westmorland to London	64
16	From Carlisle to Australia	78
17	From Stanhope to North America	83
18	From County Durham to Toronto	86
19	Sunderland Hodgsons at Work and War	88

References 91

Index 95

Maps

1. Viking Settlements	2
2. Areas of Norse Settlement in 917	6
3. Norse and Danish Settlement in About 1050	9
4. Cumberland	14
5. Surviving Norse Dialect	17
6. Lonsdale	19
7. Irish-Norse Migration in Northern England	22
8. Frequency of filial names in England and Wales	31
9. The Population Density of Male Hodgson Marriages, 1539-1700	36
10. The Population Density of Male Hodgson Marriages, 1539-1700 (With Land Over 400m)	37
11. Hodgson Marriage Population Density and Irish-Norse Migration	38
12. Conjectural Migration of Ancestors of Some Hodgson Groups	44

Tables

1. Scandinavian Place-Name Elements	11
2. Hodgsons and Variants in the Poll Tax Returns for the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1379	29
3. Percentage of Male Hodgson Marriages by County	31
4. Overall Numbers of Male Hodgson Marriages in Selected Townships in 1539-1700	34
5. Some Parishes with a High Percentage of Male Hodgson Marriages	37
6. Haplogroup Distributions	41
7. Hodgson Groups and Haplotypes	42
8. List of Hodgson Variants	50

Preface

What is the meaning of the Hodgson surname? How was it formed? Where does it originate? Who were the ancestors of the original Hodgsons? Where did they come from? This book answers all these questions. It is the definitive collection of material on the Hodgson origins and heritage, including prominent Hodgsons and selected Hodgson families.

This volume is different from a conventional family history. Family research normally involves the making of family pedigrees, building them back generation by generation, using documentary sources. However, it is often difficult to find such information from earlier than about 1600.

I have pioneered a new line of enquiry, using the earliest possible data on the geographical distribution of Hodgson families. Most early Hodgsons were in areas of Norse Viking settlement. This suggests that the Hodgsons were of Viking descent. This has brought the Hodgson story back in time to the tenth century.

Following the suggestions of surname experts, I proposed in a 1993 book that the Hodgson surname derives from the Norse Viking first names *Oddgeir* or *Oddr*. Thus Hodgson comes from 'son of *Oddgeir*'.

Recent DNA evidence confirms the thesis of Norse origins. The evidence comes from analysis of DNA in the Y-chromosome, which is passed wholly from father to son. This DNA evidence casts additional light on the origins of some Hodgson ancestors in Ireland.

Norse Viking settlers came from Norway and settled in Ireland. In about 902 AD they moved across the Irish Sea and colonised parts of Cumberland and North Lancashire, bringing their language and culture.

This volume first deals chronologically with the history of the Norse settlements in Ireland and England. The DNA and surname distribution evidence are surveyed after the historical account.

Evidence on the Vikings now comes from six types of source:

1. Place names, which can indicate patterns of Norse, Irish-Norse and Danish settlement.

2. Relics, principally stone crosses and tombstones, weapons and coin hoards.
3. Sagas and other written sources from the Viking Age.
4. Dialect studies (e.g. Reaney, 1927; Ellis, 1985; Graddoll, 1981; Orton and Halliday, 1998).
5. Genetic evidence (e.g. Horizon, 1994; Capelli, *et al.* 2003).
6. Surname evidence (Hodgson, 1993).

Early studies of the Vikings used the first four types of evidence (e.g. Collingwood, 1908). Type five is very recent, and made possible by DNA-decoding technology. It has been applied to other surnames (Sykes and Irven, 2000) and this is the first DNA study of the Hodgson surname. Type six has been pioneered by the present author.

For this volume the Hodgson surname distribution evidence has been recalculated, and the distribution maps redrawn, using additional data. A precise list of 17 Hodgson variants has been used, as explained in chapter 10 below.

Generally I employ the ancient English county names, in existence before major local government reorganisation in 1974. However, the term 'Cumbria' is used here occasionally to refer to the area of the modern county, which includes Cumberland, Westmorland and Furness.

Hodgson contacts were invited to write on their own family histories. Material was kindly contributed by Douglas G. Harris, Bruce G. Hodgson, Clayton E. Hodgson, John Edward Hodgson, Keith W. Hodgson and Michael Conn Hodgson.

The author is also grateful to Peter Christian, David Hodgeton, Bruce G. Hodgson, Gordon C. Hodgson, James Day Hodgson, Joan S. Hodgson, John Hodgson (HWA text and data management), John W. Hodgson, Peter K. Hodgson, the late Father Brendan Hodgson, Marie Kitchin (Oxford Ancestors), Kath Strickland (Kendal Record Office), Karl Sanne, Francis Sejersted, Mark Thomas (University College London), Mike Weale (University College London) and all the participants in the Hodgson DNA Project, for help, discussions and inspiration.

A Viking Prayer

Lo, there do I see my father.

Lo, there do I see my mother, my sisters and my brothers.

Lo, there do I see the line of my people back to the beginning.

Lo, they do call to me.

They bid me take my place among them in the halls of Valhalla,

Where the brave may live forever.

This Viking prayer is from the movie *The Thirteenth Warrior*, which in turn is based on the novel *Eaters of the Dead* by Michael Crichton. Crichton based part of his story on the written memoir of the Arab traveller Ibn Fahdlan, who visited Viking settlers in Russia in the tenth century. A similar but shorter incantation is quoted in Fahdlan's chronicle.

PART 1 – BLOOD OF THE HODGSONS

1. Vikings from Norway to Ireland



Long after the end of the last Ice Age, when the glaciers retreated to the high mountains, Teutonic tribes moved north from the Germanic forests to occupy the lands we now know as Scandinavia. They took with them their Nordic language, culture and myths. Evidence of the use of bronze tools in Scandinavia dates from about 1800 BC. About 500 BC these Scandinavian tribes entered their Iron Age. They grew crops, fished, built boats and traded with other cultures.

These tribes congealed into three main ethnic groups. The first, the Swedes, were centred in the region of lakes and forests around present-day Stockholm and Uppsala. The second, the Danes, occupied the fertile lowlands and islands in an

area slightly larger than present-day Denmark. The third, the Norse, settled in the dales and fjordlands in the more mountainous country now known today as Norway. These three groups differed slightly in matters of language and culture.

In the seventh and eighth centuries AD, the Norse, Danes and Swedes developed a shipbuilding technology as advanced as any in the former classical world of Greece and Rome. These Viking vessels had a long, elegant keeled hull and a large, square sail. In several respects the Scandinavian boats were superior to any other vessel produced until the nineteenth century. They were light, they could be easily beached, they allowed men and horses to disembark quickly,

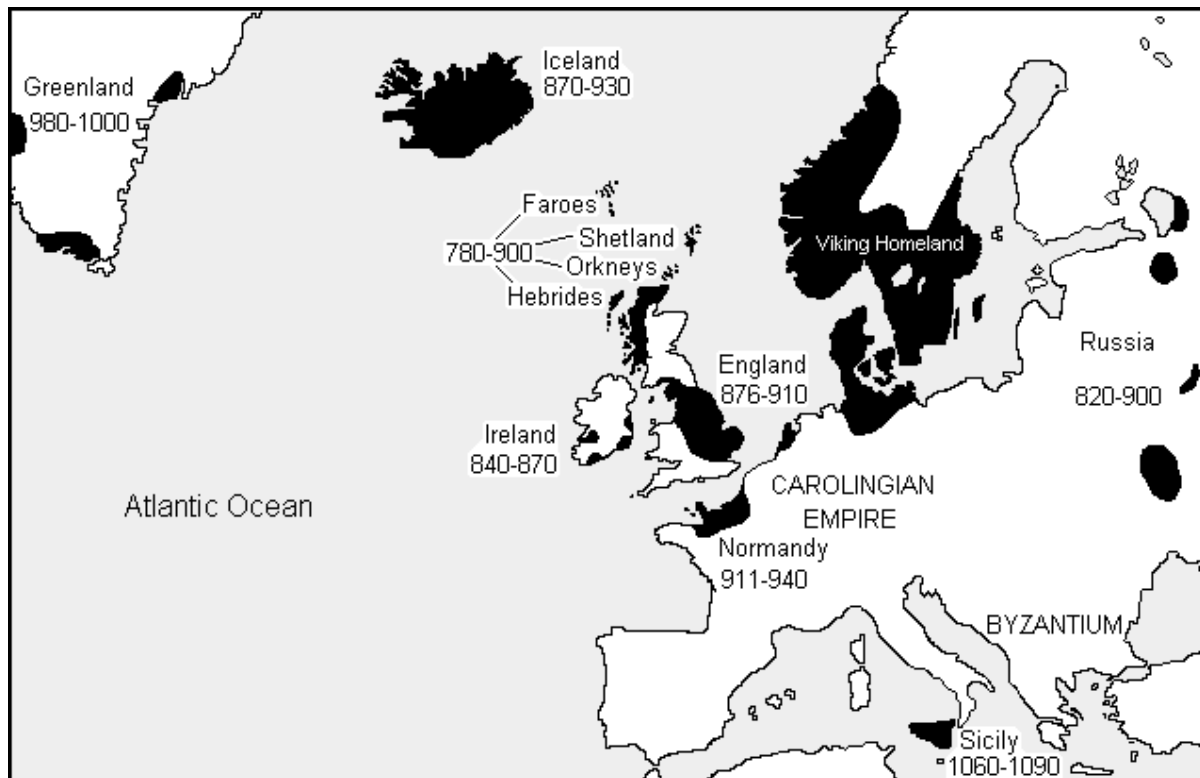
they could be dragged overland from headwater to headwater, they could sail close to the wind, they could be propelled by oars, they could withstand great storms, and they could cross whole oceans.

So began one of the most remarkable and extensive periods of exploration and colonisation that the world has ever witnessed. These people became known as Vikings.

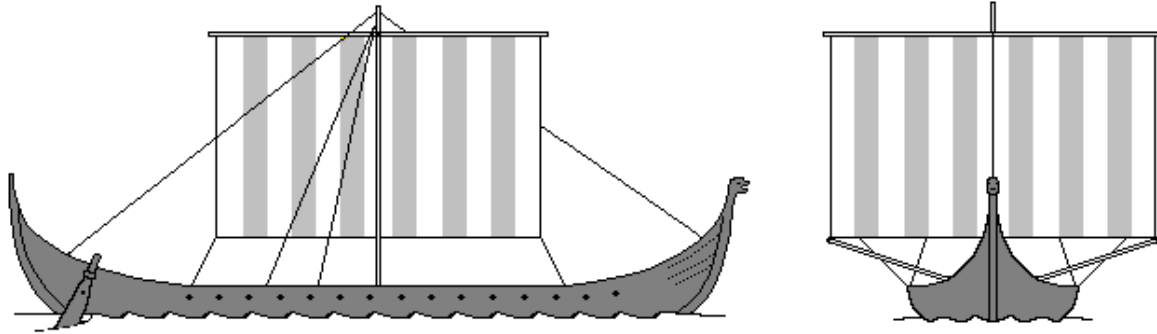
By the eighth century, the Vikings were trading and pillaging at some distance for their homeland. The first clear evidence of a Viking attack was in 793 on the island monastery of Lindisfarne, off the North East coast of England. Within a few years they were raiding up and down the coastlands of Western Europe. They harassed parts of the British Isles, the Low Countries, northern France, the Iberian peninsula and moved into the Mediterranean.

Some scholars have proposed that the first Viking attacks were a reaction to the attempts by Emperor Charlemagne to suppress the Nordic Tribes on his northern borders. By the 770s, Charlemagne's armies were ravaging the area of Saxony (centred on modern Bremen). The Danish occupied the lands just to the north of Saxony and were threatened by these attacks (Nelson, 1997). It is possible that the first Viking raids were provoked by these incursions from the Carolingian Empire.

The Vikings had the military and technological capacity to raid and plunder on an extensive scale. They used their ships to roam and conquer over a huge area. So began the Viking Age. It lasted for four hundred years.



Map 1: Viking Settlements



The Viking Age

The Swedish Vikings moved south and east along the rivers of Eastern Europe. They reached the Black Sea and the Byzantine Empire. The Danish Vikings raided the coastlands of Western Europe, as far south as the Mediterranean. They established colonies in the East of England, in Normandy in France and elsewhere.

The Norse Vikings sailed westwards, to establish colonies in the Faroe Islands, the Shetland Isles, the Orkney Islands, the Hebrides, the western coastlands of Scotland and parts of Ireland. They crossed further to the west, to Iceland, Greenland and North America.

Compared with the highly stratified civilisations of Antiquity, Viking society was relatively egalitarian. But the Vikings did capture, own and trade slaves. Nevertheless, Viking communities were subject to the rule of law, they developed an early and limited form of democracy, and their *Sagas* were to become jewels of medieval literature.

The *Sagas* also attest to the cruelty of those times. The Vikings at times fought among each other, and were capable of torture and brutality. They sometimes practised human sacrifice. The young Viking warriors fought in a drunken fury; they were known as *baserkir*, from which we derive the word 'berserk'. The Vikings were much feared by their enemies: 'Deliver us, O Lord, from the fury of the Norsemen!' wrote an Anglo-Saxon chronicler.

The supreme Viking god was Odin. He was the god of war, victory, death, magic, runes and ecstasy. The equivalent Saxon god was Woden, from which the word Wednesday is derived. In the myths and carvings, Odin was often depicted accompanied by his two ravens Huginn and

Muninn, and with a horse and a spear. Odin's wife was the goddess Frigg, who gave her name to Friday. Other Viking gods included Thor, the god of thunder, commemorated on Thursday, Tyr a god of war and justice, commemorated on Tuesday, and Freyr the god of fertility. In general, Viking mythology purveys the ideas of kinship, loyalty, honour, vengeance and fate.

For the Vikings, the *thing* was their legislative body. The *thing* was a local parliament, typically situated on a mound or hill, where free-born men old enough to bear arms would debate and pass laws. The *thing* also acted as a legal tribunal or court. Until the creation of centralised monarchies with Christian authority, kings or chieftains in Viking society had no legislative power. The *thing* was the sole legal authority.

The Vikings in Ireland

Ireland was a great prize for the Vikings. Its population was largely Celtic¹ and it was not invaded by the Romans. After the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in 476, much of Europe was ravaged by barbarians. In contrast, after the

¹ The term 'Celtic' is controversial, and refers more to a cultural rather than a single ethnic group. DNA and other evidence suggest that Irish, Scots, Basques and others were part of an original European population, in place before the Celts migrated from Central to Western Europe. The Celts conquered the Irish and Scots, and imposed their language and culture on them, whereas the Basques seem to have resisted this invasion and retained a language that is not Indo-European.



Motif from the Gotland Picture Stone

conversion of the Irish by St. Patrick in the fifth century, Ireland held out as a centre of Christian culture. In the fifth and sixth centuries, Irish monks reintroduced Christianity in many parts of Continental Europe. But its churches and monasteries made it an attractive target for Viking raids. With the arrival of the Vikings, Ireland's position as a haven of Christianity and learning came to a bloody end.

Norse Viking raiders attacked Ireland in 795. They established walled trading ports, at Dublin in 841, at Cork in 846, and at Waterford in 850. They settled and farmed the land. Dublin was their principal port, used to export slaves to places as far away as North Africa.

There were also some Danish raiders and settlers, likewise attracted by Irish trade and booty. The first recorded contingent of Danes came to Ireland in 847.

In these brutal times, slavery and abduction were part of the Viking way of life. This has been confirmed by a DNA study of the modern inhabitants of Iceland. This evidence shows that the male inhabitants of Iceland are largely descended paternally from Viking settlers. But, in contrast, the maternal lines of descent of the Icelanders are largely of Irish blood types. This confirms that while the original Viking settlers of Iceland were from Norway, the females were largely abducted from Ireland and similar Celtic areas in the British Isles. Furthermore, this DNA analysis suggests that some of the male Icelandic settlers were descendants of freed Irish slaves.²

² Helgason *et al.* (2000, 2001); Richards (2001, pp. 126-7).

The Vikings Fostered Irish Sons

The Irish were divided among themselves. The Norse played off one Irish clan against another, and sometimes acted as mercenaries in wars between Irish chiefs. A chronicle for the year 859 in the ancient *Annals of Ireland* lament: 'It is pitiful for the Irish to continue the evil habit of fighting among themselves, and they did not rise together' against the Norse. Indeed, some of the Irish allied with Viking invaders and joined them in their fighting and plundering.³

In the *Annals of Ireland* there are several references to native Irishmen who had given up their Christianity and joined the Norse settlers in Ireland. This is one of several relevant extracts from the ancient *Annals of Ireland*, referring to those Irish who had joined the Norse:

[They] were people who had renounced their baptism, and they were usually called Northmen, for they had the customs of the Northmen, and had been fostered by them, and though the original Northmen were bad to the churches, these were by far worse ...⁴

The historian Gwyn Jones (1968, p. 206) describes these Irish who had taken up Norse ways:

³ O'Donovan (1860, p. 141); Marsden (1993, pp. 108-9); Richards (2001, ch. 5).

⁴ O'Donovan (1860, p. 139). These Irish-Norse were referred to in the *Annals* as the 'Gall-Gaeidhil' or Gall-Ghaeil. With the Norse they migrated across the Irish Sea, giving their name to Galloway, in southwest Scotland. For mentions of the Gall-Ghaeil in the *Annals* see O'Donovan (1860, pp. 127, 129, 139, 141, 233, 235). Logan (1991, p. 49) hypothesises that some of the Gall-Ghaeil were not Irish, but Scots who had intermarried with the Norse in the Hebrides.

a proportion of them were of mixed Norse-Irish parentage, sharing the culture, and blending (or muddling) the beliefs of Viking and Celt. ... [They were a] mongrelism of race, culture, religion and political interest ...

It is remarkable how often that the ancient *Annals* refer to this incorporation of Irish individuals into Norse communities. They mention ‘foster-children to the Northmen’ and the ‘many’ young Irish who became a Norse ‘foster-son’. Many of the fostered male Irish would have married Norse females. Their descendants, although of mixed ethnicity, would have become absorbed into the Norse culture, adopting the Norse language and naming practices.

Within a couple of generations, many of the Norse in Ireland had intermarried with Irish, creating Irish-Norse communities of mixed race and culture. Some intermarriage is recorded between members of the Viking and Irish royal families. Ethnic intermarriage also occurred among lower social ranks (Ó Corráin, 1997, p. 106).

The cultural influences were in both directions. The Irish adopted some Norse words and customs. With the incorporation of some Irish, some elements of Celtic culture were transferred to the Norse communities. An indication is the widespread Viking adoption of Celtic first names such as Neil and Cormac, as preserved in Scandinavian literature in *Njal’s Saga* and *Kormak’s Saga*.

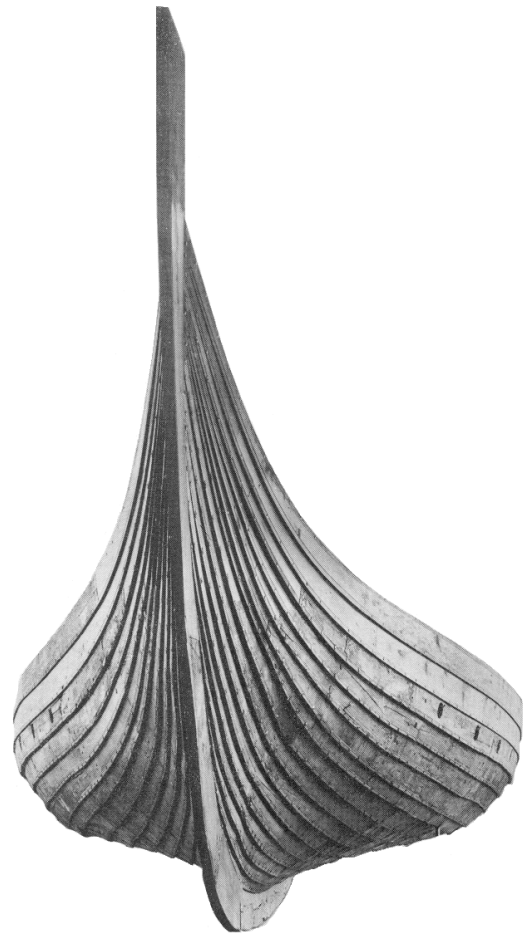
The history of Ireland in these times is not one of unified hostility or resistance against the Viking invaders. It is more one of division, collaboration, intrigue and betrayal. Irishman fought Irishman and Viking fought Viking.

After the year 873 a dynastic strife broke out among rival Norse leaders in Dublin. It continued until 902 when the Irish Kings of Leinster and Breda joined forces and attacked Dublin. The *Annals* record that the Dublin Norse ‘were driven from Ireland’ and they ‘escaped half-dead after they had been wounded and broken.’

The Norse temporarily lost control of this strategic city, and with their Irish allies they fled across the Irish Sea to the coast of Britain. As well as on their established colony on the Isle of Man,

they settled on the coastlands of Lancashire and Cumberland.⁵

These settlements after 902 in England are the subject of the next chapter. In 914 the Norse recaptured Dublin. Despite their defeat at Clontarf in 1014, many Norse subsequently remained in Ireland. There was a community in Dublin speaking Norse and trading with Scandinavia until the thirteenth century or later (Ó Corráin, 2001).



**The Gokstad Viking Ship,
Preserved at Oslo, Norway**

⁵ Smyth (1975, pp. 60-1); Wainwright (1975, pp. 132 ff.).

