

Woodstown and Viking Waterford: the historical context

Introduction

This contribution is prompted by the archaeology emerging piecemeal from the dig at Woodstown, arising out of the National Roads Authority scheme to construct the N25 Waterford By-pass. The townland of Woodstown, in the parish of Killoteran, lies about three and a half miles west of the Viking settlement of Waterford, the original focus of which appears to have been the area between the cathedral and Reginald's Tower. I am not an archaeologist and I have no expert knowledge of the Woodstown site itself. I am, rather, a historian of Viking-age Ireland and, like all historians of this period, my source materials include not only written documentation, but also the evidence turned up by archaeologists. Naturally enough, I am fascinated by the snippets of information that have emerged during the summer of 2004 about Woodstown, and especially the indications that this was a Viking settlement of major significance.

On the basis of what has been reported, through the newspapers, at various public presentations and through the rumour-mill, the significance of Woodstown is considerable. Firstly, substantial amounts of material of an early Viking-age date (i.e. ninth century) are reported to have come to light as a result of what are only preliminary investigations. Nothing as early as this was uncovered by the Waterford City excavations of the 1980s and 1990s. Secondly, the site apparently ceased to be inhabited after the early Viking Age, unlike the Viking settlement at Waterford itself which, of course, was continuously inhabited down to modern times. At Woodstown, what we appear to have is a rare opportunity to investigate an early Viking-age settlement that has been substantially preserved from later disruption. The chances are high that full-scale, research-standard excavation at Woodstown will reveal much more. It is an exciting opportunity that Waterford should seize enthusiastically. It is no exaggeration to say that the site has the potential to increase greatly our appreciation of Waterford's past and of the important part Waterford played in the story of the Viking Age in Ireland, as well as enhancing our recognition that the Vikings brought us together as Europeans (for better or worse) long before the EU.

Woodstown is, potentially, a site of European as well as local and national importance.

But that is for the future. This discussion is not about the archaeology of Woodstown, still less about the commendable local campaign, which speaks for itself. My purpose is simply to outline the historical context: to indicate where Waterford stands in the documented history of Viking-age Ireland. There are three strands to this discussion. Firstly, I'll try to outline the general course of the history of the Vikings in Ireland up to the twelfth century. Second, I'll present selected details from the written sources for Viking Waterford's history. Finally, I'll offer some brief and necessarily speculative comments on how Woodstown might fit into the bigger picture.

General Background Information on Vikings in Ireland up to 12th Century

The archaeological information about the Woodstown site that has emerged to date is limited. However, it does seem to indicate settlement during the Viking Age and, in particular, the early Viking Age. In Ireland the Viking Age is conventionally regarded as beginning in 795, the date of the first Viking raid on an Irish location (possibly Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim) to be reported in the Irish annals. These annals, which are contemporaneous records of major events recorded year after year — hence 'annals' from the Latin *annus* 'year' — are the main documentary source for the history of the Vikings in Ireland and the principal source for the present discussion. After their first appearance on the Irish scene as raiders, the Vikings settled here and became a distinctive and more or less independent element in Irish society. The coming of the Anglo-Normans or English to Ireland in the twelfth century ended the comparative independence or autonomy of the Viking settlements here. The end of Viking Waterford is marked by some notable events. One is the massacre of the Waterfordmen by the incoming Anglo-Normans, whom they had gone to confront, at Baginbun Head, Co. Wexford, in May 1170. A second event that marks the end of autonomous Viking Waterford is the marriage, at Waterford, in the autumn of the same year, 1170, of the Anglo-Norman leader, Strongbow, to Aoife, daughter of Dermot MacMurrough, king of Leinster. This followed a bloody onslaught on the town by the Anglo-Normans.

By the time of the Anglo-Norman conquest, then, the Vikings had been settled in Ireland for over 300 years. They called themselves Ostmen 'Easterners', which often denotes Norwegians, specifically, in their own first language, which is commonly known as Old Norse. This language was spoken throughout Scandinavia in the Viking Age and survives today little changed as modern Icelandic. The Vikings or Ostmen of Ireland, then, remained conscious of their Norse origins even after 300 years as residents of Ireland. We should not imagine that they were a race or ethnic group altogether isolated from the Gaelic Irish, despite the fact that the latter knew them as *Gaill* 'Foreigners'. On the contrary, by the twelfth century, the Ostmen were substantially assimilated into Irish society, being, for example, apparently bilingual in Irish and Old Norse. Some probably also spoke English and perhaps French, as a result of hundreds of years of trade with Britain and, to some extent, France. Educated Irish Ostmen also understood Latin, the West European language of the church and literacy. The Ostman towns were, by the standards of the time, cosmopolitan places. They had developed to become the principal urban and trading centres in twelfth-century Ireland. Chief among them were Dublin, Waterford and Limerick, with smaller settlements or bases at Wexford, Cork, Arklow, Wicklow and, at least for periods, Youghal and Annagassan, Co. Louth.

The first period of the recorded Viking presence in Ireland, from 795 to about 830, was characterised by raids on churches and battles with local Irish forces. This phase of activity was confined to the coast, but from the 830s the raiders began to penetrate inland. The Vikings stole decorated church metalwork, which turns up, recycled as items of jewelry, in Viking-age graves in Scandinavia, especially in western Norway. Such grave-goods are usually indicative of pagan burial practices. The first Vikings in Ireland were certainly pagans and thus had no compunction about plundering church settlements, but the native Irish Christians were not above attacking the churches of their enemies on occasion. The Vikings apparently set more store by capturing people for ransom or slavery. That, at any rate, is the aspect of Viking raiding most frequently recorded in the Irish annals for the ninth and tenth centuries. Most scholars see the period around 840 as one in which the Vikings first began to settle in Ireland. Such settlements began life as coastal raiding bases where Vikings over-wintered, instead of returning home after the summer raiding season, as

they had originally done. (The word viking —*vikingr* in Old Norse— actually means a summertime raider, although the English word is used by many scholars as, in effect, a catch-all ethnic label for the Scandinavian adventurers and settlers of this period).

The Vikings never conquered a large part of Ireland. There is, or was, a widespread idea that Vikings, usually known as ‘Danes’ in popular tradition, conquered all Ireland, and that Ireland was subject to the Vikings until liberated by Brian Boru at the battle of Clontarf in 1014. This is, in fact, a myth, but one of great antiquity. It takes its origin from a twelfth-century Irish-language literary work called *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib* ‘The war of the Irish with the Foreigners’. This is a saga or hero-tale of Brian Boru, written around 1100, or about a century after Brian’s death at the battle of Clontarf. That battle was really the old king’s last hurrah (he was in his early seventies at the time), a vain effort to defend his position of a decade or more, as king of Ireland, against adversaries that included the Irish of Leinster as well as the Vikings. Brian’s victory was pyrrhic, in that he himself was killed, his dynasty’s grip on national power was ended for a generation, and the Viking enclaves in Ireland carried on as going concerns, much as they had before 1014. That did not deter the author of *Cogad* from depicting an altogether fictitious picture of Brian dying a martyr in the cause of liberating Ireland from 200 years of Viking oppression. In reality, the Vikings were only occasionally dominant in ninth and tenth-century Ireland. For a period in the mid ninth century, and again in the first half of the tenth, the Vikings’ leaders — in particular, the kings of Dublin — could face down or at least compete with the leading native Irish kings. At other times before 1014, the Vikings were major, but by no means dominant players in Irish politics. By the second half of the tenth century, indeed, the political influence of Dublin and of the other Viking or Ostman settlements was much reduced. From the mid eleventh century onwards, the Ostman towns were usually the political subordinates of the leading regional Irish kings. For example, Dublin, just before the coming of the Anglo-Normans in the late 1160s, was subject to Dermot MacMurrough, the king of Leinster. Waterford, from the mid eleventh century onwards, was usually subject to leading Munster kings.

The Vikings, then, did not conquer Ireland; neither did they settle as widely as in Britain. But, in the ninth and tenth centuries, they established coastal raiding bases, some of which eventually became towns. More recently, scholars have realised that there was also some rural Viking settlement, including in Co. Waterford, albeit on a limited scale and usually in the hinterlands of the more important towns. Dublin was certainly established by 841 at the latest, when the annals report an over-winter base on the lower Liffey. Dublin, of course, became the main centre of permanent Viking settlement until it was secured by the Anglo-Normans in the 1170s. There were several other Viking raiding bases established before the mid ninth century. Some were abandoned sooner or later, but others became more or less permanent settlements like Dublin. The documentary evidence, primarily the annals, indicates a complex political and military relationship between these Viking settlements and the native Irish. Vikings were as often allied with Irish kings as at war with them. The Dublin excavations since the 1960s have produced abundant archaeological evidence for the physical, social and economic character of that Viking town from the tenth century to the twelfth. Until recently, we have been almost entirely reliant on documentary sources, notably the annals, for our knowledge of Viking Dublin in the earliest period of its existence in the ninth century. This is because no archaeological evidence of ninth-century Dublin had come to light until recently, with the exception of burials uncovered in the nineteenth century. The present state of our knowledge of Viking Waterford is remarkably similar. The excavations of the 1980s and 1990s, published exhaustively and to a high academic standard by Waterford Corporation, came upon nothing earlier in date than the eleventh century, for a good reason, to which we shall return. We remain totally reliant for our knowledge of Viking Waterford in the ninth and tenth centuries on documentary sources, the field of expertise of the historian rather than the archaeologist. That source-material, chiefly in the form of the annals, is more abundant for the tenth century than it is for the ninth.

Selected details from the written sources for Viking Waterford's history

Heretofore, modern scholars have either denied the existence of any settlement at Waterford before the tenth century, or have played it down, casting doubt on the quality of the evidence. Certainly Smith's assertion, in his mid-eighteenth-century

County and city of Waterford, that the place was established by a certain Sitric in precisely 853, finds no corroboration in any document surviving today. Its character suggests, however, that we should not lightly dismiss the claim: perhaps Smith did have access to some document that is now lost. Yet we do not have to rely on such an uncertain prop for a conviction that there was a ninth-century base/settlement at Waterford. A careful reading of all the relevant annals for the period makes that quite clear. There are two absolutely explicit references in the annals to a Viking base at Waterford in the ninth century, and other circumstantial evidence that helps flesh out these two incontrovertible notices. Because the documentary evidence for Viking Waterford in the ninth-century has been particularly under-appreciated by previous writers, I'll give it especial attention here. It is of great importance because it appears to corroborate, and to be corroborated by, the newly emerging archaeological data from Woodstown for ninth-century settlement.

The first unimpeachable reference to the Vikings of Waterford occurs in the annals for 860. In that year, *loinges Puirt Láirge* 'the (Viking) fleet of Waterford' was defeated by the king of Osraige, (approximately the diocese of Ossory, mainly Co. Kilkenny), Cerball mac Dúngaile. The location of this battle, *Achaid Maic Erclaige*, is perhaps to be identified with the parish of Killahy, about two and a half miles northwest of Mullinavat. This first explicit reference to the Waterford Vikings shows them penetrating about 10 miles north into the territory of the modern Co. Kilkenny, evidently for plunder. In addition to the contemporary annals-record of this event, there is a more elaborate account in a later, literary work that may be based on some kind of chronicle/saga of the doings of Cerball king of Osraige. This story dramatises the defeat of the Waterfordmen in 860. It is claimed that king Cerball was alerted to the incursion of the Vikings into his territory at a rather inconvenient time. It was at night, and Cerball was thoroughly drunk after a bout of feasting. Nevertheless, the story recounts graphically how Cerball rose to the occasion and, although vomiting greatly (*ra sgé go mór*), he fought with growing strength and valour to defeat the Waterford Vikings. Whatever we think of these literary details, we can be confident that there was a Viking base at Waterford by 860 at the latest.

We have no means of knowing for certain how long a Waterford base had been in existence before 860. We'll come back to that later, in connection with the Woodstown site itself. Use of the term *loinges* 'fleet, naval expedition' for the Waterford Vikings in 860 might suggest a recently arrived force, taking account of the way this term is sometimes used in the annals for the 830s and 840s. However, one should not make too much of this. It is possible, for example, that a new and substantial Viking force had established itself in a location where there was an earlier, but unrecorded, Viking base. All one can safely say, at this point, is that Vikings are reported in the annals as raiding and fighting in the southeast, in the region of modern Cos Waterford, Kilkenny and south Wexford, as early as the 820s, 830s and 840s. Where these Vikings were based is not indicated. A further, indirect pointer to probable Viking control of Waterford Harbour around 860 is a raid on Leighlin, Co. Carlow, in 860 or 861. This was followed by a defeat of the Vikings involved, led by one Rodulb (in Old Norse Rau?olfr or Hró?leifr), in the nearby Slieve Margy hills, again at the hands of Cerball mac Dúngaile, king of Osraige. The destruction of *longphort Rothlaibh* 'Rodulb's encampment' by an ally of Cerball is reported in the annals for 862. Recently, it has been proposed that this encampment is a surviving earthwork on the bank of the Barrow at Dunrally, Co. Laois, about six miles north of Athy. However that may be, Rodulb's Vikings had evidently penetrated very far inland, presumably along the Barrow valley from Waterford Harbour. It is possible, of course, that Rodulb's forces were the Vikings of Waterford, of which *longphort Rothlaibh* might have been an advance base. We have no evidence on this point, however, and it is equally possible that Rodulb led an independent Viking force that gained access to the interior due to Viking control of Waterford Harbour. We might bear in mind also that in 866 a Viking fleet (*loinges*) at Youghal was defeated, and their encampment (*longphort*) destroyed by the Déisi (the native Irish of the region centred on modern Co. Waterford). This is the only reference in the annals to a Viking base at Youghal. There is no indication of its relationship, if any, to Waterford. The hostility of the Déisi was doubtless connected with the fact that Vikings at Youghal would have blocked access to the sea along the lower River Blackwater from Lismore, easily the most prominent church settlement in Déisi territory.

The second explicit reference in the ninth-century annals to Viking Waterford occurs in 892. The annal for that year again reports a defeat by the king of Osraige — in this case Cerball's younger brother and successor Ríacán mac Dúngaile. Those defeated in 892 comprised a joint force of the *Gallaibh Puirt Láirge, Locha Garman ocus Tighe Moling* 'Foreigners of Waterford, Wexford and St Mullins' and 200 of them were killed. St Mullins is about 20 miles up the Barrow valley and was presumably a subordinate base of the Waterford Vikings. We may suppose that the Viking base at Wexford, to which this is the earliest reference, was also subordinate to that at Waterford. The defeats of the Waterfordmen by the Osraige in 860 and 892 are significant. One might say, perhaps a little unkindly, that Waterford was already coming to terms with defeat by Kilkenny as early as the ninth century! More seriously, however, these events show that the Waterford Vikings were an established part of the scene in the southeast by the second half of the ninth century at the latest. Waterford was probably the leading Viking settlement in the region. It was evidently capable of leading other regional Viking bases on a campaign during a period, in the late 880s and 890s, when the main Viking stronghold in Ireland, at Dublin, was riven and weakened by internal squabbles among its leadership. A further possible reference to the Vikings of Waterford in 898, if such it be, would suggest the continuing importance of the settlement at the end of the ninth century. In this year the annals report that the Déisi joined a force of 'Foreigners' to support the men of Osraige (now led by Cerball's son Cellach) to defeat the Leinstermen at Gowran. Given the composition of this alliance and the fact that the joint force travelled across Osraige territory (*tar Osraighibh*) to Gowran, it is very likely that the 'Foreigners' involved were the Waterford Vikings.

These hints in the annals suffice to show the existence of a ninth-century Viking base or settlement at Waterford. This appears to have been of regional importance and was sufficiently established to ally, as well as fight, with its regional neighbours, the Déisi and Osraige. We can but speculate as to the precise character, size and socio-economic profile of this early settlement. The Woodstown site may shed indirect light on this, however. If it is permitted to yield up all its archaeological secrets, we may learn much about a ninth-century Viking settlement that was close to, but apparently distinct from the main Waterford base. After 898, we read no more of Waterford in

the annals for almost 20 years. It is not clear if the Viking settlement survived. The Dublin base was overrun by the Irish of the east in 902 and at least the leadership at Dublin was expelled. Perhaps the Waterford base suffered a similar fate, or it may have survived. The annals have no evidence either way. In 914, however, after a twelve-year lull in reported Viking activity in Ireland as a whole, a massive fleet of Vikings appeared on Waterford Harbour, which is called in the contemporary annals *Loch Da Cháech*. Further large fleets of Vikings arrived on Waterford Harbour in 915 and 917. They invaded and plundered widely in both Munster and Leinster, and seemingly resumed where the Vikings of ninth-century Waterford had left off. They are reported to have seized livestock and captives from the Osraige of Kilkenny, perhaps as early as 914. On the other hand, by 916 the Vikings are seen to have resumed their alliance of 898 with the Osraige: in that year, Vikings, together with Díarmait mac Cerbaill, then king of Osraige, defeated the Uí Cheinnselaig of Co. Wexford. By 917, the fleets on Waterford Harbour were controlled by the heirs of the former Viking leadership that had been expelled from Dublin in 902. In 917, Dublin itself was re-taken by Vikings. Thus Waterford was the bridgehead for the second Viking invasion of Ireland, between 914 and 917. Thereafter Waterford, like Dublin, remained in unbroken Viking control until the twelfth century.

Until the mid tenth century, the restored Dublin Viking leadership was chiefly pre-occupied with its external ambitions. The Dublin Viking royal dynasty intermittently ruled the north of England from York, while Dublin itself was the chief centre of Vikings in Ireland. Waterford, as the springboard from which the Vikings were restored to Dublin, was subordinate to Dublin, at least initially. An independent Viking base was established or re-established at Limerick by 922. Limerick challenged Dublin's supremacy among Irish Vikings in the 920s and 930s and there is evidence that Waterford sided with Dublin in this dispute. Waterford hostility to Limerick is witnessed by the establishment of a Waterford advance base on Lough Gur, in east Co. Limerick, in 926. The Waterfordmen were defeated by the Limerick Vikings and their Irish allies, apparently at Kilmallock, in 927. However, the Limerick Vikings were forced to submit to Dublin in 937 and from the mid tenth century, Limerick was more or less permanently subordinated to the rising Dál Cais dynasty of east Clare, of which Brian Boru was later to be the most famous representative. From the later

tenth century, therefore, Waterford was unchallenged as the second most important Viking settlement in Ireland. Waterford alone, apart from Dublin, maintained its own king in the later tenth century and into the eleventh.

Waterford kings are occasionally named in the annals from the mid tenth century onwards. Typically, they appear as participants in the never ending squabbles between native Irish kings. The best documented of these figures is Ívarr (Irish *Ímar*), who was king of Waterford in the last third of the tenth century. He is first mentioned in the annals in 969 and died in 1000. In Ívarr's era, Waterford sometimes found itself in alliances which placed the Waterford and Dublin Ostmen on opposing sides. In 984, for example, Waterford was where a major alliance was formed between Brian Boru, then king of Munster and a challenger for the kingship of Ireland, and the Vikings of the Scottish Hebrides, whose kings had interests in Ireland, the Isle of Man and Wales. The immediate aim of this alliance was to attack Dublin. In this the allies were unsuccessful, but it is noteworthy that Waterford was involved in Brian Boru's plans to use external Viking forces to further his political ambitions. In the late tenth century and early eleventh, the annals mention the Waterfordmen as a component of Brian's armies that travelled about the country to secure his authority as king of Ireland. In this period there are also indications of Waterford's ongoing relations, both hostile and friendly, with the local lordships of the southeast, the Déisi and the Osraige.

There are other significant indications of the Waterford Ostmen's integration into the Irish scene. At least two sons of Ívarr, king of Waterford, bore Irish names: Gilla Pátraic (†983) and Dondubán (†996). These names are indicative of the partial Gaelicisation of the Waterford Ostmen, presumably by the mid tenth century, when these two were born (since both died in battle and, therefore, as adults). The first of these names is also indicative of christianisation, since it means 'servant/devotee of (St) Patrick'. Christianisation of the Waterford Ostmen is also reflected in the name Mac Gilla Muire. This was the family name borne by twelfth-century rulers of Waterford. It is first attested in the annals for 1013, when otherwise unknown *meicc Gillai Maire* were involved in a Viking expedition in conjunction with the Ostmen of Dublin. This name, then, denotes devotion to the cult of the Virgin Mary among the

Waterford Ostmen, seemingly by the late tenth century. St Mary's church in medieval Waterford has usually been assumed by scholars to be a foundation of the Anglo-Norman period. However, the church was located in a part of the Ostman town and we should bear in mind that St Mary's Abbey in Dublin pre-dates the Anglo-Normans.

It is unclear if Waterford Ostmen participated on either side at the battle of Clontarf in 1014. As we have seen, they had been consistent supporters of Brian Boru in the late tenth century and early eleventh, and were, as often as not, at odds with the Dubliners in the same period. On the other hand, as we have just observed, the meic Gilla Muire of Waterford allied with the Dubliners in 1013, by which time Brian's power was already waning and he may not have been able to count on the support of the Waterfordmen. Records of the battle of Clontarf make no reference to an identifiably Waterford element fighting on either side. In any event Waterford, like Dublin itself, survived into the middle of the eleventh century as an autonomous political entity with its own king. Indeed, rivalry between Waterford and Dublin was resumed and resulted in the death of Ragnall ua Ímair (Røgnvaldr or, perhaps more likely, Ragnaldr), king of Waterford, who is reported to have been killed treacherously in Dublin in 1035. The autonomy of both Waterford and Dublin may have largely ended in the mid eleventh century. Certainly Dublin came under the control of the ambitious Leinster king, Díarmait mac Maíl-na-mBó, of the Uí Chennselaig of Co. Wexford, in 1052. In 1037 Díarmait attacked and perhaps seized control of Waterford. One scholar has suggested that it was under Díarmait's postulated control that coins were minted at Waterford. Dublin had been minting its own coins for trading purposes since the late tenth century and the practice had apparently spread from there to the Isle of Man, also inhabited by Ostmen, in the mid eleventh. In the later eleventh century, the overlords of Waterford were the O'Brien kings of Munster, descendants of Brian Boru. It was during this period that an Irishman, with connections with Lismore, was consecrated bishop of Waterford at Canterbury in 1096. In the twelfth century Waterford was sometimes subject to the O'Briens, and at other times to their rivals, the MacCarthy of Cork.

At the time of the fall of Waterford to the Anglo-Normans in 1170, the leading figure among the Ostmen was apparently Ragnall Mac Gilla Muire, who was taken captive by the Anglo-Normans. He is described in the Irish annals not as king, but as 'steward' or perhaps 'constable' of the fort or castle (*ármand an dúine*). This title is of interest because *ármand* is, in fact, a word borrowed into Irish from the Old Norse *ármann*. In Scandinavia this was the title of a royal steward, an official who was apparently charged both with collecting taxes and tributes for the king and with being a kind of law enforcer or police chief constable. It is to be presumed that Ragnall acted in some such capacity on behalf of his Irish overlords, the autonomy of Ostman Waterford having long since been ended. The *dún* 'fort, castle' associated with him was doubtless a precursor of Reginald's Tower, perhaps the Dundory of later records.

Some brief and necessarily speculative comments on how Woodstown might fit into the bigger picture

The evidence of the annals, only a selection of which has been discussed here, permits us to plot Viking Waterford's history, from the ninth century to the twelfth. The task of researching fully and writing that history is one of many that remains to be performed by modern scholars of the Irish middle ages. On the basis of the preliminary essay attempted here, however, we can conclude that Waterford was a significant Viking enclave. It participated in the politics and military campaigns of the southeast and, indeed, of Ireland as a whole, during four centuries. Ostman Waterford both befriended and squabbled with its immediate Irish neighbours. Its period of greatest political and military significance was between 914 and 917, when it was the bridgehead for the second Viking invasion of Ireland and the establishment, for a generation or more, of a Dublin-York Viking imperial project, that linked both sides of the Irish Sea. Our evidence for ninth and tenth-century Waterford heretofore is exclusively documentary, the stuff of history, in the strict sense. The Waterford excavations of the 1980s and 1990s revealed archaeological evidence of a significant town, with substantial houses, industry and trade. This evidence relates only to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, however, probably because excavations did not occur in what is likely to have been the earliest focus of Ostman settlement in Waterford, between the cathedral and Reginald's Tower.

The Woodstown site promises the prospect of archaeological evidence for a much earlier phase. The indications so far are only provisional, but they point to ninth-century and perhaps tenth-century occupation. Some have already conjectured that the Woodstown site might be the original ninth-century location of the Waterford settlement itself. The case is strikingly like one that used to be voiced commonly about Dublin until recent years. There, excavations from the 1960s to the 1980s in the vicinity of Christ Church Cathedral and Dublin Castle produced evidence for tenth-to-twelfth-century Ostman Dublin, but nothing for the ninth century. Yet, there is irrefutable evidence in the annals for settlement already in the ninth century. Moreover, ninth-century Viking burials had been discovered in the Kilmainham-Islandbridge area in the nineteenth century. Accordingly, the suggestion was that ninth-century Viking Dublin lay here, a mile or so up-river from the later focus of the town around Christ Church. Documentary evidence for the expulsion of the ninth-century Viking leadership from Dublin in 902, and for Dublin's re-conquest in 917 seemed to support a 're-foundation' hypothesis: the 'second coming' of the Vikings to Dublin involved selection of a different site for settlement, further down the Liffey. Two considerations require a rethink of this model in respect of Dublin. Firstly, ninth-century material seems to have come to light of late in the heart of the town, in the area today known as Temple Bar. Secondly, reconsideration of the distribution of Viking-age archaeological finds in Dublin suggest that there was not one, but several foci of early settlement along the lower Liffey valley. The distance (three and a half miles) of Woodstown from the heart of Ostman Waterford is considerably greater than that between the heart of Dublin and the Kilmainham-Islandbridge foci. We should, accordingly, be cautious about assuming that Woodstown is the original settlement designated *Port Láirge* in the ninth-century annals. It could just as well be a separate focus of Viking-age settlement, but no less fascinating or important for that. Its apparently early date and its failure to develop into a later centre of settlement, unlike Waterford itself, offer the prospect of an unprecedented insight into the first phase of Irish Viking settlement.

I'd like to conclude by commenting rather speculatively on possible links between the Woodstown site and some largely overlooked documentary evidence for a very early Viking landfall in Co. Waterford. This is found in *Cogad Gáedel re Gallaib*, that

literary account of the doings of Brian Boru mentioned already. This is, as I have pointed out, not a reliable guide to the significance of the Viking Age, being designed to promote the fame of Brian in the interests of his descendants, the O'Brien kings of Munster, around 1100. But the author was an accomplished propagandist, who based his case on genuine historical research. He constructed his narrative partly from his access to the genuine annalistic records of the Viking Age, albeit that he embellished and distorted. *Cogad* uniquely preserves genuine records of Viking activity, especially in Munster, that do not otherwise survive. Among these may be a reference to the arrival of a 120-ship Viking fleet at a place called *Cammas Ua Fothaid Tíre* 'Cammás (in the territory) of the Uí Fothaid Tíre'. This is said to have occurred in the same year as other events, in different parts of Munster, which are recorded in the 'genuine' annals, and point to a date of about 811/812. This is a very early date for so large a Viking force. The conventional annals begin to specify the size of Viking fleets only in the 830s and fleets of 100 or more ships are not reported until 849. We must treat the claim of *Cogad* with circumspection, therefore, but it would be rash to reject it out of hand.

The precise location of the fleet's landfall (*Cammas*) is unidentified. The word is a place-name-element that denotes a bend in a river (and, by extension, in Modern Irish at least, a bay) and is derived from the Irish word *cam* 'bent'. We can identify the Uí Fothaid, in whose territory was this *Cammas*, as a branch of Déisi, who are mentioned several times in the annals between 817 and 939. They seem to be associated — though not necessarily exclusively — with the eastern part of modern Co. Waterford, and their name is evidently preserved in that of the Anglo-Norman period cantred, or land division, of Offath. The Uí Fothaid find mention a second time in *Cogad*, in that text's account of the second coming of Vikings to Waterford Harbour in 914. This account uniquely names one Hákon as the leader of the incomers, who are said to have faced resistance by the Uí Fothaid, one of the pointers to their location in eastern Co. Waterford. This Hákon may, in fact, be the first leader of Viking Waterford who is known to us by name (assuming the mid ninth-century Rodulb led an independent force of Vikings). Hákon's Waterford connections are indicated by a later reference in the regular annals, which report a raid on the Irish midlands by the forces of the king of Munster in 939. The Waterford

Vikings participated in this campaign and their leader is identified simply as the 'son of Hákon'. His own personal name is not noted, but he was most likely a son of that Hákon who had come to Waterford in 914. Furthermore, the account of the expedition of 939 shows that the Uí Fothaid were also participants. Having apparently suffered the brunt of an early ninth-century Viking landfall in Co. Waterford, and having resisted the return of the Vikings there in 914, the local Uí Fothaid had come to terms with their Scandinavian neighbours by 939. This exemplifies, at a local Waterford level, the complex process of interaction between native Irish and Ostman newcomer during the Viking Age. Could it be that there is a connection between the placename Woodstown (also borne by only four other townlands in Ireland, three of them in the medieval cantred of Offath, Co. Waterford) and the Uí Fothaid? Should we postulate a **Baile Ua Fothaid*, that was originally Anglicised as **Wothadstown*, or the like, finally giving Woodstown? In advance of systematic study of Waterford place-name data, this can be no more than speculation.

Dr Colmán Etchingham

Dr Etchingham is a national authority on Irish medieval history. Best known for his monograph on the church organisation in Ireland 650 to 1000 (1999), he has also published a book on Viking raids on Irish church settlements (1996) and has another book in preparation on the Vikings in Ireland in the ninth and tenth centuries. He has also lectured and published on Irish/Viking studies in Britain, France, Norway and Sweden.

These notes are from the first lecture in a series of presentations on Viking Woodstown which was held in the Granville Hotel, Waterford on 07/10/2004