

Institution: University of Nottingham		
Unit of Assessment: UoA27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: <i>It wasn't all raging and rampaging: enhancing heritage organisations and improving public understanding of Viking influence in Britain through research on Viking-age gender, language and diaspora</i>		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Judith Jesch	Professor of Viking Studies	01/09/1985 –
Dr Paul Cavill	Associate Professor in Early English	01/09/1994 – 31/07/2020
Dr Christina Lee	Associate Professor in Viking Studies	01/09/2001 –
Dr Jayne Carroll	Associate Professor in History of English	01/09/2009 –
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Research in the Centre for Study of the Viking Age (CSVA) has transformed professional and public understanding of the Viking Age in the UK and for digital audiences worldwide. Providing new focus on gender, language, and the key concept of 'diaspora', the research has turned attention from the 'rape and pillage' cliché, and from a strictly archaeological view of the period, to a nuanced, interdisciplinary understanding of the Viking Age. Through collaboration with London, York, and Nottingham museums, development of an open-access digital museum and content for popular books, blogs, and educational outreach, the research has: i) enhanced the work of UK heritage professionals by changing curation approaches to, and providing new content for, presenting Vikings to the public; ii) increased capacity for, and sustainability of, Viking heritage collaboration in the East Midlands, and shared best practice worldwide; and iii) increased public engagement with and understanding of the Viking Age and its legacy in multicultural Britain, countering damaging misconceptions of Viking influence.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Vikings have often been perceived as violent and masculine, with images of rampaging warriors pervading the popular imagination. Such images limit understanding of Viking influence in Britain, and have been misappropriated by alt-right groups. CSVA research counters these perceptions, and thus the damaging alt-right narratives of British history that draw upon them, by providing new insight into the migration, settlement, and integration of Viking peoples in Britain. Going beyond an archaeo/historical focus on artefacts and recorded events, most of which are Viking raids and intrusions, CSVA research uses literary and linguistic evidence, including poetry (1, 2, 3) and runic inscriptions (1, 4c, 6), to pioneer alternative emphases on gender, language and diaspora.</p> <p>Jesch's work before and during the census period, supported by Lee (4b), has firmly established the female in Viking studies. It demonstrates the central role of women in the transmission of Old Norse language, myths and legends (4a, 5, 6), and in techniques of textile production (4b). Jesch's research also brings new, textual evidence to the ongoing worldwide debate about Viking women warriors; while archaeologists have extrapolated the existence of female Viking warriors from one grave in Sweden, Jesch's analysis of literary and linguistic evidence shows that such warriors were primarily figures of the Viking imagination and that their existence is not so easily proved (5).</p> <p>Studies of culture and language, often overlooked or misunderstood by archaeologists and historians, can expand and reconfigure understanding beyond recorded events and material objects. Against the traditional image of Vikings in Britain as occasional perpetrators of raiding and trading over a few centuries, research by Carroll (3), Cavill (4c) and Jesch (1, 2, 6) on poetry and runic inscriptions demonstrates that their impact was broader, longer-lasting, and cultural and linguistic as well as military and economic.</p> <p>The concept of the Viking Age and its aftermath as a 'diaspora' was launched in 2006 by Carroll, Jesch and Lee (with Chris Callow, Birmingham) in the AHRC-funded 'Viking Identities Network' (F4). Although widely used as a theoretical concept in the social sciences, 'diaspora' had never before been applied to the Viking phenomenon. This innovation was developed</p>		

further in Jesch's landmark monograph, *The Viking Diaspora* (2015) (**5; F3**), which led to the term being fully accepted and widely used in academic studies and public presentations of the Vikings (see Section 4). The diaspora framework opened up research questions into the nature of Viking influence in Britain and Ireland. Work by Cavill (**4c**), Jesch (**2, 4a, 6**) and Lee (**4b**) on textual and material culture showed that the modern cultural mix of Britain is dependent on the influx of immigrant groups throughout history and, through them, on contact with the wider world of their origins. This approach leads to greater public understanding of British history, and counters xenophobic narratives about immigration and identity, by emphasising thousand-year-old processes of integration and cultural exchange.

3. References to the research

Outputs:

- 1) Jesch, J., (2001). *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse*. Boydell. ISBN 9780851158266.
- 2) Jesch, J., (2001). Skaldic verse in Scandinavian England. In: J. Graham-Campbell et al., eds. *Vikings and the Danelaw*. Oxbow Books. pp. 313-25. ISBN 9781785704444.
- 3) Clunies Ross, M. et al., eds. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*. Volumes I (2012) and II (2009). Brepols. Includes scholarly editions by Jesch, J. (vol. I, pp. 143-149, 532-556, 614-649, 663-698; vol. II, pp. 575-623, 626-8) and Carroll, J. (vol. I, pp. 486-513; vol. II, pp. 432-460). ISBN: 978-2-503-51896-1; ISBN: 978-2-503-51897-8.
- 4) Harding, S. E. et al. eds. (2015). *In Search of Vikings: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Scandinavian Heritage of North-West England*. Taylor & Francis. **4a) Jesch, J.**, Speaking Like a Viking: Language and Cultural Interaction in the Irish Sea Region, pp. 51-60; **4b) Lee, C.**, Viking Age Women, pp. 61-70; **4c) Cavill, P.**, Battle of Brunanburh in 937: Battlefield Dispatches, pp. 95-108. ISBN 9781138453562.
- 5) Jesch, J., (2015). *The Viking Diaspora*. Routledge. ISBN 9781138020764.
- 6) Jesch, J. (2020). Further thoughts on E18 Satfleethby. *Futhark: International Journal of Runic Studies*. 9-10, 201-13. DOI: 10.33063/diva-401054.

Selected grants:

- F1) AHRC Follow-on Funding, 'Bringing Vikings Back to the East Midlands' (2017-2018), £145,811, Jesch PI, AH/P013309/1.
- F2) AHRC Collaborative Skills Development, 'Languages, Myths and Finds: Translating Norse and Viking Cultures for the 21st Century' (2013-2014), £59,528, Jesch PI, AH/K004735/1.
- F3) AHRC Research Fellowship, 'The Viking Diaspora: A Monograph' (2013), £61,175, Jesch PI, AH/J007307/1.
- F4) AHRC Diaspora, Migration and Identities Strategic Initiative, 'Viking Identities Network' (2006-09), £19,905, Jesch PI, Carroll & Lee Co-I, 119471.
- F5) European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop, 'Migration and Transcultural Identities in the Viking Age' (2006), £7,589, Jesch PI, Lee Co-I, EW05-176.

4. Details of the impact

Museums are key destinations for cultural tourism and educational visits, and therefore prime channels through which to influence public understanding of the Vikings. CSVA research has enhanced exhibition content and associated activities (e.g. talks and activity days), enabling heritage professionals to present accurate and engaging content that challenges the outmoded, sometimes dangerous, perceptions of Vikings circulating in the public realm. This, together with research-informed popular books, social media engagement, and educational outreach, is galvanising a long-term shift in public understanding of the Viking Age. Key impacts include:

i) Enhancing the work of UK heritage professionals by changing curation approaches to, and developing new content for, presenting Vikings to the public

Jesch's research has improved Viking presentation and interpretation at museums in York, the UK's key tourist destination for Viking heritage (**b**). At Yorkshire Museum (approximately 100,000 visitors per year), Jesch's research on Viking gender (**5, 4a**) 'shaped and enhanced interpretation' of their permanent Medieval Gallery in 2013-14, 'overturning stereotypes and adding gender balance' to previously 'old fashioned and androcentric' displays (**a**). At Jorvik Viking Centre (approximately 400,000 visitors per year), Jesch's research on gender (**5, 4a**) 'informed the gendered interpretation' of archaeological materials and 'the representation of gender in the museum's reconstruction of Jorvik's Viking-era cityscape' (**b**). Jesch's linguistic

expertise (2, 4a, 5, 6) enabled Jorvik to 'diversify' its provision, adding 'Old Irish, Middle Welsh, Sogdian, and Latin' to their previously 'limited' display of Old English and Old Norse; this 'more historically-accurate interpretation has come from a greater awareness of the Viking diaspora and migration, as developed in Professor Jesch's research' (b).

CSVA research (F1, F2) enhanced two high-volume Viking exhibitions in collaboration with the British Museum. The first, *Vikings: Life and Legend*, exhibited in London in 2014, drawing in approximately 300,000 (inter)national visitors over four months (c). Jesch and Carroll's research on poetry and runic inscriptions (1, 2, 3) underpinned how the museum 'presented the significance of Viking literary heritage to the public' (c). Jesch contributed translations for textual wall displays and audio content, providing 'the most authentic possible experience', and her 'concept of the multicultural Viking diaspora' (5) 'influenced [the museum's] approach to explaining and displaying the Viking Age' (c). Both Jesch and Carroll had 'vital intellectual input' into the exhibition's public engagement programme, writing content on runes and place-names for the exhibition website and blog, and featuring in the exhibition's national cinema broadcast, *Vikings Live* (approximately 30,000 viewers). They wrote popular books for the British Museum Press (*Viking Poetry of Love and War*, 2013; *Vikings in Britain and Ireland*, 2014), which have sold 3,650 and 7,400 copies and are 'some of the most popular publications of the Museum in the Viking Medieval category and have provided the exhibition with a permanent legacy, giving our audiences an accessible source of information on the subject' (c).

The second exhibition, *Viking: Rediscover the Legend* (co-curated: British Museum/York Museums Trust) toured the UK in 2017-19 (225,681 total visitors in York, Nottingham, Southport and Norwich). York Museums Trust confirm that Jesch's research 'influenced the design and content' to 'provide a more nuanced and engaging exhibition narrative' in three key ways: i) the 'initial design focus on Viking boats' was changed so that 'boats became one element within a much wider whole', thus avoiding 'stereotypical caricature' and offering a 'rounded understanding' of the period; ii) Jesch's work on Viking women and families (5, 4a) 'underpinned' the 'central section' of the exhibition to 'get beyond the elite male perspective'; iii) Jesch's research on diaspora (5) provided 'more complex ideas about Viking movement and settlement over time and across geographical locations' (a). York Museums Trust note that this 'research-led content' has 'upskilled staff at each venue', enabling them to reassess gendered material 'like we have done at Yorkshire Museum' (a).

The CSVA's 'deep regional expertise were pivotal' in Nottingham Lakeside Arts becoming a venue for *Viking: Rediscover*. With support from the CSVA's AHRC-funded 'Bringing Vikings Back to the East Midlands' project (F1, F3), the Nottingham exhibition 'proved to be a cultural moment for the city', and 'impacted on [the British Museum's] ways of collaborating with regional partners to deliver high quality cultural experiences outside of London' (c). The CSVA increased the capacity of Lakeside to host the international-quality exhibition locally and interpret its specialist Viking offer; their research was 'key' to Lakeside's ability 'to understand the exhibition content' and 'unpack the narrative told by the objects and documents on display' (d). The CSVA worked with UoN Manuscripts and Special Collections to broaden Lakeside's offer through curating an additional, East Midlands-focused exhibition, *Danelaw Saga*, for which they secured texts and artefacts from museums in Derby and Lincoln and replicas from SME Blueaxe Reproductions. CSVA research 'underpinned the selection and interpretation of items', 'provided content for the display boards', and ensured that the objects 'complemented' the textual collections 'to bring the exhibition narrative alive' (e). This innovative, multi-media approach to curation was a 'new departure' for the Manuscripts team, who 'lacked specialist knowledge of the Viking period' and had little experience of working with objects (e). The collaboration was for them 'an invaluable learning experience' that has 'improved our knowledge and understanding of our medieval collections' and 'increased our capacity to present them to the public' (e).

ii) Increasing the capacity for and sustainability of Viking heritage collaboration in the East Midlands, and sharing best practice worldwide

Prior to *Danelaw Saga*, East Midlands heritage organisations had limited capacity for collaboration and shared use of their collections. In curating *Danelaw Saga*, the CSVA created 'a network of expertise' that has made regional collaboration 'easier and more sustainable' (f). At Derby Museums, 'being able to build relationships between organisations and draw on expertise from across the region has increased our capacity to present and interpret collections' and 'cope

with reduced resources due to funding cuts in the sector' (f). For Manuscripts and Special Collections, these 'new connections with regional museums' have 'changed our approach to curation' and 'led to the expansion of our exhibition offer' (e). Having 'rarely exhibited objects' prior to *Danelaw Saga*, '[object] loans both to and from these partners are now a regular part of our exhibition practice' (e).

The CSVA's new virtual museum, *Vikings in the East Midlands* (emidsvikings.ac.uk) (F1), enables global users (50,892 from 142 countries; g) to download photographs of the artefacts and replicas displayed at Lakeside, and access interpretive material from *Danelaw Saga*. The website provides greater 'digital exposure' for the collections of Derby, Lincoln, and SME Blueaxe Reproductions, who 'do not have the capacity to produce [their] own online offer' (f); their work, previously 'seen by local audiences' or 'national visitors', now reaches 'a new global audience' (g, f), which is 'a fantastic [long-lasting] outcome' (f). The digital museum has also increased the capacity of local heritage volunteers and re-enactors to engage their audiences: 'Love being able to read more about objects we show schools doing #Vikings sessions @derbymuseums'; 'We've really enjoyed using the objects section and blog to help induct people into our re-enactment society (<https://vikingsof.me>). We get a wide range of people who may not have any prior knowledge of the Vikings beyond KS2 20 years ago! Super helpful' (h). The digital museum is sustaining the 'comprehensive [regional] approach' (f) to Viking heritage developed for *Danelaw Saga* and is showcasing this collaborative best practice worldwide.

iii) Increasing public engagement with and understanding of the Viking Age and its legacy in present-day multicultural Britain

The public's appetite for new interpretations of Vikings is evidenced by 'record-breaking visitor uplift' at all four venues of *Viking: Rediscover* (a). Yorkshire Museum confirms that CSVA research 'was important for raising the profile of the event' and increasing public engagement, which was 'hugely beneficial in financial terms' (a). In York, the exhibition 'attracted 28,000 additional visitors, over and above [...] the same period in previous years', with visitors 'from across much of Northern England' and 'a small but notable increase in international audiences' (a). In Nottingham, CSVA research 'informed the copy and imagery' of Lakeside's marketing, enabling them 'to challenge stereotypes and contribute to a more complex and factual public perception of the Viking Age' (d). Expert content on the Viking East Midlands facilitated 'targeted online campaigns to attract specific regional audiences, which wouldn't have been [otherwise] possible' (d). The CSVA's specialist linking of *Danelaw Saga* with *Viking: Rediscover* enabled for the 'first time in [Lakeside's] history' two related exhibitions to run in parallel, resulting in 'record-breaking visitor upturn: *Viking: Rediscover* was the second most visited exhibition in the near 30-year history of the Djanogly Gallery (22,851 visitors), and *Danelaw Saga* was the most visited exhibition ever held in the Weston Gallery (10,883 visitors)' (d).

Lakeside emphasise that the CSVA's curated displays for *Danelaw Saga* 'successfully overturned' the 'stereotypical image of the rampaging Viking warrior' through alternative focus on migration and settlement (5), gender and family life (4a, 4b, 5), language and runes (1-3, 4c, 6), and religious beliefs and trade (4a, 5) (d). Manuscripts and Special Collections note that the display on the Viking diaspora legacy (5) drew public attention towards 'contemporary discussions of immigration and what it means to be British'; 'it was clear from visitor feedback that the exhibition changed people's perceptions of Vikings in Britain and helped them learn about a new part of their history and heritage' (e). Visitor feedback further evidences these changes in public understanding: 'Such a pleasure to visit an exhibition that doesn't perpetuate the Vikings as merely raiders narrative'; 'So we're not English! We're Anglo-Saxon Vikings, Danes, Germans & lot more multicultural' (i).

Similar benefits to public understanding resulted from 14 CSVA-organised public talks (F1), which produced 'phenomenal' (d) engagement (2,559 attendees; 92% of 503 respondents reported 'increased understanding of Viking culture') (i). Visitor feedback indicates a 'Major change in understanding of Vikings away from "rape and pillage" image'; 'It is evident from the talk that the average Viking was a lot more than just a jingoistic violent warrior that he is generally portrayed as!' (i). CSVA funding (F1) enabled Lakeside to live-stream the talks (26,338 online viewers from 41 countries), which has had 'long-term' impact on their audience engagement strategy; they 'now livestream all talks' with 'particular benefits during the current pandemic' (d). The CSVA further increased engagement through delivery (F1) of five Viking

activity days (509-1,024 visitors per day), which '*more than doubled the average daily footfall (266 people) in the Djanogly Gallery during the exhibition run*' (d). Dressing-up stations, object handling sessions, and poetry/rune workshops had '*multi-generational appeal*' and '*made the exhibition narratives much more accessible and engaging for younger audiences*' (d). Lakeside note that the CSVA provided '*specialist interpretation that we wouldn't otherwise have had*', enabling '*a depth of experience that simply would not have been possible had we presented the touring exhibition alone*' (d).

Beyond the exhibitions, CSVA research has transformed knowledge and understanding of local Viking heritage for adults and children in the East Midlands through inspiring a new book series and a long-standing educational outreach programme. CSVA research underpins Nottingham Five Leaves Publications' popular books on *Viking Nottinghamshire* (Dec 2017) and *Viking Leicestershire* (Nov 2020), which have sold 1000 and 100 copies in the UK and abroad and '*filled a gap in [Five Leaves] local/regional history provision*' (j). With *Viking Nottinghamshire* reprinted to meet user demand and *Viking Leicestershire* topping Five Leaves' best-sellers chart in December 2020 (despite bookshop closures due to Covid-19), the books are '*enhancing public knowledge and understanding of Viking presence in the East Midlands*' (j). Since 2014, the CSVA's 'Vikings for Schools' programme has stimulated and enriched the learning of approximately 1200 pupils from 23 Nottinghamshire schools (k). Teachers emphasise the value of the '*great resources*' and '*[h]aving Viking experts teach the children about their area of expertise*' (k). Pupils' feedback indicates their improved, historically-informed understanding of Vikings as people who '*wrote in runes*' and '*were buried with precious things [sic]*' (k).

Jesch's research on Viking women warriors (5) has increased public awareness of and challenged problematic assumptions about their existence in the Viking Age. In a 2017 blogpost, Jesch queried the conclusions of a widely-cited article on the 'real' Birka female Viking warrior by drawing on her research into the literary evidence showing that female warriors were largely a product of the Viking imagination and cannot so easily be proven as 'real'. The post reached a wide audience (89,515 page views) and sparked controversial debate (referenced 44 times in the media in 13 countries) (l). A recent academic study of the media controversy emphasises that Jesch's contribution to the debate '*proved to be a pivotal point in the story of the Birka warrior*' that '*changed the conversation patterns in the media*' and '*generated a new form of story*': a '*debate for and against the idea of actual female warriors in the Viking Age*' (m, p. 78).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- a) Letter from York Museums Trust/Yorkshire Museum regarding enhanced heritage provision and interpretation for *Viking: Rediscover the Legend* and in the permanent Medieval Gallery.
- b) Letter from Jorvik Viking Centre, York regarding enhanced heritage provision and interpretation practices.
- c) Letter from the British Museum regarding enhanced Viking interpretation and presentation for *Vikings: Life and Legend* and *Viking: Rediscover the Legend*.
- d) Letter from Nottingham Lakeside Arts regarding enhanced marketing for, and increased public engagement with, the Vikings programme.
- e) Letter from UoN Manuscripts and Special Collections regarding improved Viking presentation, interpretation and regional collaboration for the *Danelaw Saga* exhibition.
- f) Letter from Derby Museums regarding enhanced regional heritage collaboration and benefits of featuring in the *Vikings in the East Midlands* digital museum.
- g) Letter from Blueaxe Reproductions regarding benefits of featuring in the *Vikings in the East Midlands* digital museum.
- h) Summary report for *Vikings in the East Midlands* digital museum website: key user engagement statistics and user comments from Twitter.
- i) Dossier of Lakeside visitor feedback: excerpt from the *Danelaw Saga* exhibition visitors' book and public lectures evaluation forms summary report.
- j) Letter from Five Leaves Publications regarding enhanced history provision and improved public understanding of regional Viking heritage.
- k) Summary report for Vikings for Schools: key statistics and teacher/pupil feedback
- l) Dossier for Jesch's blog post on the Viking woman warrior debate: key user engagement statistics and media reach report.
- m) Media debate analysis in Källén et al. (2019). DOI: 10.37718/CSA.2019.04.