

## St Sunniva - patron Saint of Bergen and western Norway

The legend of St Sunniva, as told in the sagas and literary sources, concerns the daughter of an Irish king, said to have lived in late tenth century Ireland. On her father's death, Sunniva succeeded him as the ruler of the territory and was pursued by a pagan Viking leader for her hand in marriage. Being a devout Christian she refused to marry, and the Viking proceeded to attack and ravage her kingdom. Sunniva and her subjects then put to sea. Trusting in God to guide and steer their course, they came to land safely on the island of Selja on the western coast of Norway. On hearing of the newcomers, the local people called upon Håkon Jarl to attack them with his army. Sunniva and the men and women of Selja sought refuge in the island's caves and prayed for their eternal salvation, where they were killed by falling rocks. Not long afterwards, a beautiful light was often seen at Selja. The recently converted King Olaf and Bishop Sigurd travelled to Selja to investigate the strange events and they found the body of Sunniva intact. In 1170 her remains were transferred to a shrine in Bergen.

These events are part of a collaboration between partners Dublin City Council working through the City Archaeologist and Dublin City Libraries, the National University of Ireland, the University of Bergen, and the Norwegian Embassy in Ireland. This collaboration is part of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 and the Dublin Festival of History, supported by Creative Ireland.

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### Cover Image

*Sunniva and the Seljumen on their way from Ireland* Drawing by Gösta af Geijerstam.  
From the series *Den hellige Sunniva* ©Gösta af Geijerstam, Bono Norway/IVARO  
Dublin, 2018

Free Admission

UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN



Ollscoil na hÉireann  
National University of Ireland

Clár Éire Ildánach  
Creative Ireland  
Programme  
2017-2022



DUBLIN  
FESTIVAL OF  
HISTORY 2018

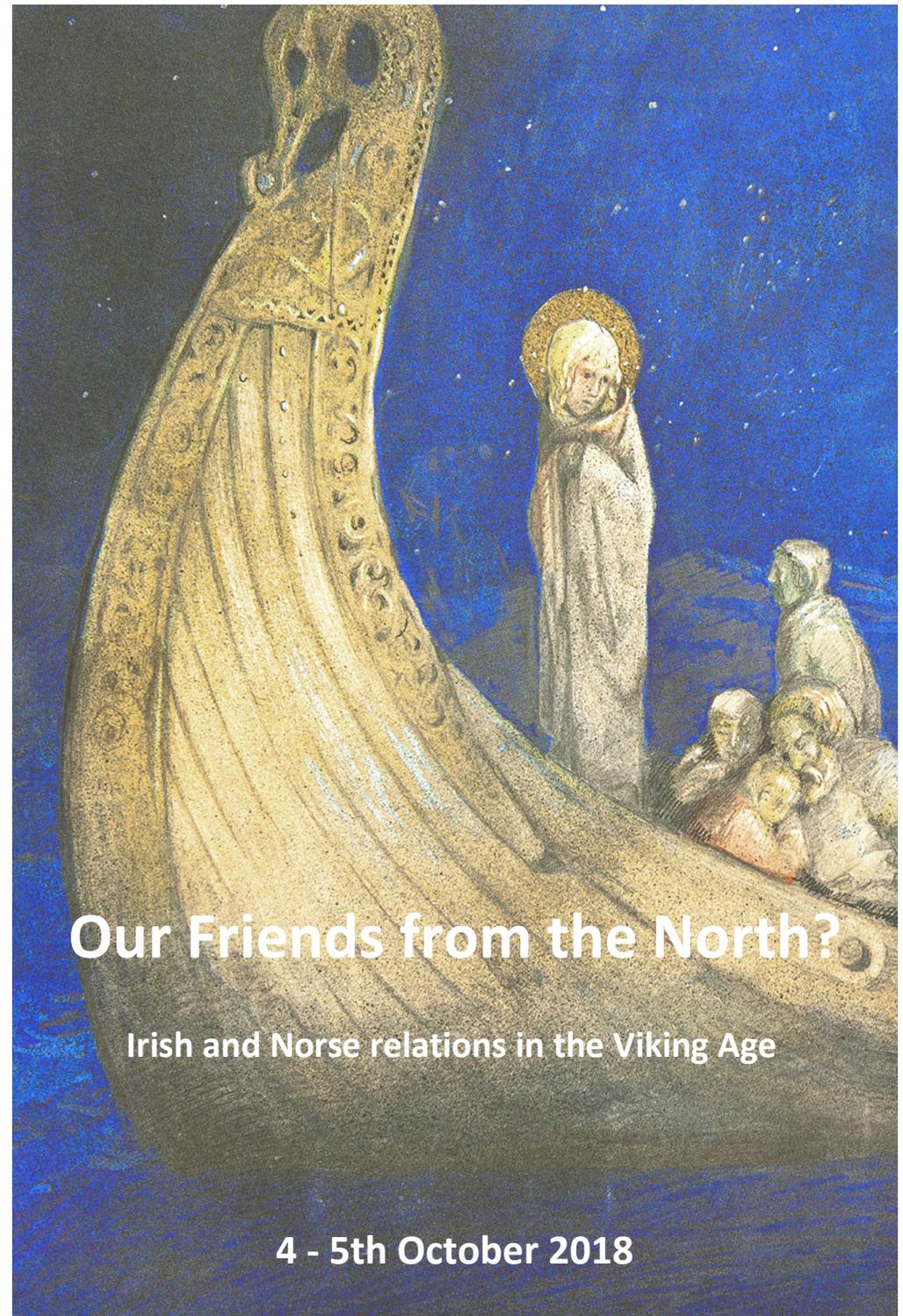


Norwegian Embassy



Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City Council

4 - 5th October 2018



**Wood Quay Venue  
4th October 10am**

**Our Friends from the North?  
Irish and Norse in the Viking Age**

A one-day symposium to celebrate Ireland and Norway's shared Viking heritage with particular focus on the legend of St Sunniva, patron saint of Bergen.

**Treasures from the Grave: exploring Irish Norse connections through artefacts in the University Museum of Bergen.**

The exhibition provides an introduction to the archaeology of western Norway in the Viking age and highlights connections with Ireland.

Nine panels cover topics such as the Viking Age in Norway, home life in western Norway, furnished female burials containing Irish artefacts, the contents of a chieftain's burial, towns and trade, the influence of Christianity and conversion, shared Viking art styles and the legend of St Sunniva.

**Christ Church Cathedral Evensong  
4th October 6pm**

Christ Church Cathedral will hold an ecumenical service at evensong with Bishop Halvor of Bergen in celebration of St Sunniva, patron saint of Bergen, and commemorating the 950 year anniversary of the establishment of a bishopric in western Norway in 1068. The music will be a mixture of Irish traditional, Norwegian folk and traditional choral pieces.

**Session 2**

**Vikings in Ireland and their influence on Scandinavian society  
*Irene Baug, University of Bergen***

Around AD 800, Scandinavians began setting off on Viking raids across the North Sea, an activity that continued over more than two centuries. What possible causes can be found for this activity? And what did the Vikings bring back home? Buried Irish loot from around 800 in western parts of Norway bear witness to pillaging in Ireland. However, loot was not the only thing the Vikings returned with. Contacts across the North Sea influenced both society and religion in Scandinavia.

**Viking-Age Silver Hoards: Ireland and Norway  
*John Sheehan, University College Cork***

This paper will broadly outline the Viking-age silver hoards from Ireland, focusing on a number of aspects of particular interest that relates them to hoards from Norway. These include the similarities and differences between the types of silver artefacts found in these hoards and the relationships between power and silver in Norway and Ireland.

**Plenary Paper 2**

**Christ Church Cathedral and its relics  
*Raghnall Ó Floinn, Former Director, National Museum of Ireland***

The Martyrology of Christ Church contains a list of relics purported to have been collected by Dublin's first bishop, Dúnán (Donatus). An examination of the relics listed throws light on the wider European connections of Dublin in the decades before it came under the control of Canterbury. The augmentation of the cathedral treasury in subsequent centuries and the fate of its relics will also be considered.

## Session 1

**Slaves, masters and horses in Viking Dublin:  
the study of Norse and Irish DNA in the North Atlantic**  
*Cathy Swift, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick*

Norway, Ireland and Iceland are all countries with a shared Viking past, internationally-renowned literary traditions and important diaspora populations in the US and elsewhere. It is thus not surprising that some of the ground-breaking research in DNA studies of historical migrations have been based on data collected from the modern inhabitants of all three countries. One such study argues that that male colonisers from Norway travelled to Iceland via Ireland, picking up female Irish-speaking slaves along the way and this is now a standard interpretation found in Icelandic school books. However, the original paper proposing this idea is now some fifteen years old and originated in the very early days of DNA research. This paper evaluates the original arguments in the light of more recent developments in DNA studies, both of humans and the domestic animals which sailed with the Viking colonists.

**Viking Dublin: evidence from Temple Bar West**  
*Linzi Simpson, Archaeologist*

This paper traces the archaeological evidence to date for the Viking settlement of Dublin, from the first traces of embryonic settlement on the banks of both the Liffey and the Poddle rivers, to the establishment of the great dún of Dublin in the early 10th century, a massive embanked fortification, which was walled by c. 1100. The paper will focus on the Temple Bar West excavations in the north-east corner of the dún, a site which, perhaps, best captures Dublin's evolution, from early enigmatic settlement features in the crook of both rivers, to the development of an industrial quarter along the banks of the Poddle.

### Plenary Paper 1

**Ideas from the West: an Irish Queen as a Norwegian Patron Saint**  
*Alf Tore Hommedal, University of Bergen*

The Patron Saint of the town and diocese of Bergen is the former Irish Queen Sunniva. According to the legend, Sunniva and her entourage fled Ireland in the mid-10th century due to pagan Viking pressure. They found refuge on the island of Selja on the far western coast of Norway. There the Irish were martyred by the grace of God and a sanctuary developed in the 11th and 12th century. In AD 1170 the relic of St. Sunniva herself was transferred to the Christ Church Cathedral in Bergen. The paper presents and discusses the Selja saints and the sanctuaries at Selja and in Bergen with a focus on the legend's Irish connection.

**Mansion House**  
**5th October 1pm**

**The Legend of St. Sunniva and its  
Representation of Christianisation of Norway**  
*by Professor Jan Erik Rekdal,  
University of Oslo*

Jan Erik Rekdal's research interests focus on the Christian tradition of Norse settlers in both Ireland and Scotland. He has written extensively on St Sunniva and on parallels between the Norwegian legend of the saint and Irish Voyage Tales.

St Sunniva is the patron saint of Bergen. Tradition holds that she was an Irish princess who led the unwanted attention of the Vikings, eventually to settle on the island of Selja, of the coast of Norway. This lecture will explore the legend of St Sunniva and how it represents the Christianisation of Norway.

## Schedule

### Wood Quay Venue: 4th October 2018

Owen Keegan,  
Chief Executive,  
Dublin City Council

10.00 Registration

Else Berit Eikeland,  
Norwegian  
Ambassador

10.15 Welcome Address

10.20 Opening Address

**Session 1** Chair: Ruth Johnson  
*Dublin City Council*

10.30 **Slaves, Masters and Horses in Viking Dublin:  
the study of Norse and Irish DNA in the  
North Atlantic**  
*Cathy Swift, Mary Immaculate  
College, Limerick*

11.00 **Viking Dublin:  
Evidence from Temple Bar West**  
*Linzi Simpson, Archaeologist*

11.30 Coffee

**Plenary Paper 1** Chair: Kenneth Milne,  
*Christ Church Cathedral*

12.00 **Ideas from the West:  
an Irish Queen as a Norwegian Patron Saint**  
*Alf Tore Hommedal*  
*Museum of Bergen, University of Bergen*

12.45 Discussion

13.00 Lunch

## Schedule

**Session 2** Chair: Emer Purcell  
*National University of Ireland*

14.00 **Vikings in Ireland and their influence on  
Scandinavian society**  
*Irene Baug, University of Bergen*

14.30 **Viking-Age Silver Hoards:  
Ireland and Norway**  
*John Sheehan, University College Cork*

15.00 Comfort Break

**Plenary Paper 2** Chair: Jan Erik Rekdal  
*Oslo University*

15.15 **Christ Church Cathedral and its relics**  
**Ragnall Ó Floinn, Former Director,**  
*National Museum of Ireland*

16.00 Discussion

16.15 **Closing Remarks**  
**Howard Clarke**

16.30 Launch  
**Exhibition - Treasures from the Grave**

18.00 **Evensong at Christ Church Cathedral**

Lord Mayor  
Nial Ring and  
Liv Helga Dommasnes  
Dr Maurice Manning,  
Chancellor of NUI