CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE DIFFERENT EXPRESSIONS OF SCANDINAVIAN SETTLEMENT IN IRELAND, 840–1100

Patrick F. Wallace

Instead of speculating on what exactly the Irish chroniclers who described the mid-ninth-century Scandinavian fortresses in Ireland as *longphuirt* (literally 'ship fortresses') meant by the term, it is intended here merely to provide an overview of the archaeological evidence as it presently exists for the different types of Scandinavian-inspired settlements which existed in Viking Age Ireland.

Best understood and most enduring are the *towns* of Dublin, Waterford, Limerick and Wexford. In their developed form in the tenth-, eleventh- and early twelfth-century Hiberno-Norse phase, these consisted of large defended settlements at the tidal confluences of main rivers and their tributaries. They were located on high ground traversed by ascending streets which, together with laneways and intramural accesses, formed irregular rather than gridded networks. Boundary fences radiated from the streets forming rows of contiguous rectangular or trapezoid plots into which settlements were divided. The archaeological record preserves rich evidence for the buildings and layout of plots particularly at Dublin, Waterford and Wexford as well as at Cork where recent excavations have unearthed what had hitherto been regarded as urban houses of Hiberno-Norse type in an indigenous urban settlement of the later eleventh- and early twelfth-century period.

It appears that access through individual plots was controlled. Main buildings had their narrow ends to streets or laneways, had pathways leading to the entrances and from back entrances to lesser outbuildings and sheds in the yards at the back of the plots. Front and back entrances in the main buildings meant that access was through them although obviously this would have had to be at the behest of house/plot owners or their agents. It is likely that there would be widenings and crossings in the street network as well as outside town gates to facilitate markets and public gatherings, though evidence for these are inferential rather than evidential.

The only town gateway of the period excavated to date comes from Waterford where piers for such were identified. There is good evidence for defences and port facilities particularly at Dublin where a succession of two main palisaded earthen banks from the tenth and eleventh centuries respectively have been identified in succession to one another, each completely encircling the settlement. At Dublin and Waterford and probably also at Wexford and Limerick these were replaced by stone walls –

both freestanding and partly revetted fronts for earthen banks – in the later eleventh century.

A number of different house types have been identified in Ireland's Viking Age urban settlements and an overall national pattern has been suggested. By far the most numerous among these is the *type 1*, an Irish urban variant (built in local materials and in indigenous building methods to the dictates of local climate) of the more widespread north-west European rectangular three-sided building characteristic of the Norse in their western expansion.

The large-scale excavation campaigns at Dublin and Waterford have provided us with the most complete picture anywhere of the cramped urban atmosphere of the Viking town in the tenth, eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Commensurate volumes of animal bone and organic samples have provided detail on economy and everyday life and thousands of artefacts in different media form the subject of ongoing reports on trade and commerce and craft studies.

Over the past decade or so, however, new discoveries have led to the recognition of several other forms of Scandinavian settlement in Ireland, particularly from the early phase of contact around the mid-ninth century. Apart from the recognition by John Ó Néill of the first (of what must have been very many) farmsteads at Loughlinstown, south of Dublin, excavations in Dublin city's Parliament Street, Essex Street West, South Great Georges Street and Great Ship Street – mainly by Linzi Simpson – and a review of discoveries of burials and artefacts, particularly at Islandbridge and Kilmainham by Raghnall Ó Floinn, Elizabeth O'Brien and Stephen Harrison, contribute to our having to entertain possibly several different settlement forms of Scandinavian origin in the ninth century.

The coincidence of the 841 annalistic reference to the Scandinavian establishment of *longphuirt* has led historians such as Edel Bhreathnach and archaeologists such as Michael Gibbons to speculate on how this term can be applied to known ninth-century archaeological sites. Principal among such candidates is the seemingly remarkable site at Woodstown near Waterford, identified in April 2004. Much speculation has also centred on the nature of the Dunrally, Co. Laois and Athlunkard, Limerick sites by Eamonn Kelly, while John Sheehan's work on probable Scandinavian settlements in the Atlantic south-west also come into the reckoning.

The Essex Street West excavation showed that Dublin's main house type went back to the ninth century and the division of the settlement into plots also dated from well before the apparent 902 expulsion of some of the Scandinavians from Dublin. Georgina Scally's work at Parliament Street was the first to show that the focus of the earliest Scandinavian settlement may have been on the Poddle rather than on the Liffey along which the town may only have developed later. Ó Floinn suggested that burials and associated farmstead-type settlements were 'strung out' along both sides of the Liffey. It may have been such an early farmhouse that Simpson found at the south of her later urban Essex Street West site.

In the recent past, Simpson's sites on either side of the Pool – the 'Black Pool' or *Dubh Linn* from which Dublin gets its name and which was near a pre-Viking indigenous monastic settlement – on the Poddle watercourse at South Great Georges Street and Ship Street Great (west bank) both revealed early Viking burial remains mainly of warriors and the former 'an inlet of the Pool and a good stretch of the southern bank'. The burials were found on the south-east shore of the Black Pool on the east side of an

islet. Ships' rivets were recovered from the gravel of the Pool along with a bearded axe. What Simpson took to be evidence for a palisade, possibly to control flooding along the eastern edge of her islet, she suggests may have been a landing stage to link the Pool with the eastern part of the later Viking town which, thanks to the Parliament Street and Essex Street excavations and their early layers, now looks like the earliest part of the town. Simpson goes beyond this to suggest that the Pool may have been where boats laid up during the winter, in what in effect was the *longphort*. The apparently early and relatively pure content of the Scandinavian warrior burials found here seem to enhance the possibility that this was the *longphort*. It seems right to link the Poddle channel and the Pool as central to understanding the earliest Scandinavian settlement in Dublin, though to prove that the *longphort* (whatever it was!) 'must be on the western side . . . in an area later subsumed by the tenth-century settlement' is probably impossible to be fully confident about. Simpson suggests that it was at least 300 m north–south, protected on three sides by water and 'including the naturally defensive ground at the extreme southern end' where Dublin Castle 'always a contender for the site of the *longphort*' was later built. Simpson poses an alternate possibility that the Poddle is the western protection of a *longphort* that existed east of the Pool with burials close to or within the fortress, as has been speculated for Woodstown. There is little doubt that with the advantage of dating evidence Simpson is right about a settlement and probable landing activity around the Pool, followed somewhat later by more concerted habitation nearer the mouth of the Poddle to the north. After this, in the tenth century, there was an expansion northwards and westwards with the building of earthen defensive banks and the development of the Dublin we know so well from our forty-year excavation campaign.

Considerable speculation has centred on the nature of Viking settlement in the mid-830s and 840s when it appears bases were first established in Ireland as a result of the intensification of Scandinavian interest. We cannot be sure about what exactly the 840 Lough Neagh or the 841 Dublin and Annagassan bases looked like, upon what Scandinavian prototypes they were based, or that they even resembled one another. It is not without relevance that the word *Linn* ('Pool') also occurs in the Annagassen place name Linn Duchail; the *longphort* in question also occurs at the confluence of two rivers with the possible (as yet unexcavated) settlement incorporating a D-shaped island and a separate high citadel (?) feature.

The 840s saw the proliferation of bases on Carlingford Lough, the Boyne Estuary, Narrow Water, Lough Swilly, the Shannon and Lough Ree. In the 850s and early 860s a Norse Viking leader, Rodulf or Rothlaibh, became active in the Nore and Barrow river systems 'attacking Laois from a base probably located in the Waterford harbour area', a prophetic remark now that an apparently major site of the era has been identified at Woodstown near Waterford. Rodulf may have been the son of a former king of Denmark and was later active in Friesia until his death in 873.

Rodulf's '*longphort*' may have been deep inland at Dunrally, Co. Laois, which is west of the junction of the Barrow and its tributary, the Glasha. This appears to have been destroyed in 862 along with the fleet it protected by the combined armies of the kings of Ossory and Laois. It is possible that originally this foundation had been established by the Dublin Vikings for their own political purposes being in line with the kind of bases then being established by the Vikings on some of the main rivers of mainland Europe and England.

Dunrally fort survives as a 360 m × 150 m area enclosed by a large D-shaped rampart with an outer ditch, 5.3 m wide and 1.8 m deep. According to Kelly and Maas (1995) 'the enclosure was sufficiently large to ensure that the biggest of Viking fleets could have been protected on-shore and . . . there was a pool on the river Barrow, immediately adjacent where ships could have anchored'. Dunrally has a smaller 52 m × 41 m (citadel?) enclosure within the larger *enceinte*. Kelly and Maas believe construction of a *longphort* at Dunrally would have been consistent with known Viking practice elsewhere including within the Carolingian Empire. They suggest Dunrally belongs 'to a class of Viking inland forts chosen for their defendable terrain of marsh and river', but suggest that the choice of location of the fort is similar to that of the Irish Viking towns. Only excavation will really tell.

It is possible that the mid-ninth-century Viking *longphuirt* in Ireland were all long D-shaped enclosures like Dunrally. Linn Duchail (Annagassan), Co. Louth and Athlunkard (Limerick), Co. Clare – the latter 75 m × 30 m and also with an enclosed feature internally – and maybe the original *longphort* on the Poddle fit a pattern which is discernible at sites (like Repton) in England and in the north-west of the Continent.

Easter 2004 witnessed acknowledgement of the discovery of the rich and apparently ninth-century Viking riverine site at Woodstown. Although still only trenched in advance of road construction and awaiting full archaeological excavation, it seems to predate the Hiberno-Norse town of Waterford a couple of miles downriver which, unlike Woodstown, was to endure. Metal finds including lead weights, a sword pommel and several pieces of hack-silver indicate a seemingly strong Scandinavian presence which seems to fulfil Eamonn Kelly's prophecy about Rodulph having such a place near the mouth of the River Barrow in Waterford harbour. Woodstown is located on the sister river Suir but is otherwise in the right place. Geophysical indications are that this is a large elongated D-shaped enclosure in line with what we have been thinking may constitute a *longphort*, or at least a mid- to later ninth-century fortified base in Ireland. The only problem is that trial excavation of the suggested ditch gives a much earlier (sixth–seventh-century) date for the lowest ditch infill which cautions against acceptance of the site as a Scandinavian foundation and suggests more a reuse and a possible expansion in an undoubted Viking Age heyday. Again, large-scale excavation is necessary.

The discovery at Woodstown raises questions of the extent to which the ninth-century settlement relates to the later town of Waterford. Was it a short-lived earlier precursor, did it overlap with its neighbour and how was it managed in relation to the town that endured? When, why and by whom was Woodstown established? Was it related to the possible inland sister fortress at Dunrally and like the latter was it abandoned after being destroyed by native forces? Only excavation will tell. And are Waterford and maybe Dublin's two names related to each having pairs of Scandinavian settlements in which case it can be asked if Port Láirge is Woodstown and not Waterford?

The excitement of the recent work in Ireland means that physical evidence for the forms which Scandinavian settlement took is more varied and inevitably of more military character than the impressions of more developed urban character which forty years' excavation of the great urban sites at Dublin, Waterford and to a lesser extent Limerick, Wexford and in its way Cork have hitherto provided us with. When recent discoveries at Dumore Cave, Co. Kilkenny, Cloghermore, Co. Kerry and the exotic

burial at Finglas near Dublin are added, the growing rush of evidence for the complicated and seemingly varied physical nature of Scandinavian presence in Ireland becomes stronger. And this is before even admitting to the possibility of as many as nine or ten Hiberno-Scandinavian maritime havens or way-stations as a recent reassessment of the Viking presence at Beginish island off the south-west coast 'on the sea route between Cork and Limerick' has it. Similar way-stations for coasts between Ireland's other main Viking town settlements are postulated along with the idea of a stubborn adherence to their cultural identity on the part of the Scandinavians! Not bad for a people of whom it used to be thought came to Ireland in small numbers effecting a legacy disproportionate to those numbers. A rush to see Scandinavian settlements in more places than they may have been may not be unrelated to modern Irish society's desire to be seen as welcoming of the new waves of strangers currently arriving on its shores.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archaeology Ireland, 9(3) (1995) [An issue devoted to Viking archaeology.]

Clarke, H. (ed.) (1990) *Medieval Dublin. The Making of a Metropolis*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press.

Clarke, H.B., Ní Mhaonaigh, M. and Ó Floinn, R. (eds) (1998) *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Holm, P. (1986) 'The slavetrade in Dublin: ninth to twelfth centuries', *Peritia*, 6: 317–45.

Hurley, M.F. (1998) 'Viking Age towns: archaeological evidence from Waterford and Cork', in M. Monk and J. Sheehan (eds) *Early Medieval Munster*, Cork: Cork University Press.

Kelly, E.P. and Maas, J. (1995) 'Vikings on the Barrow', *Archaeology Ireland*, 9(3): 30–2.

Kelly, E.P. and O'Donavan, E. (1998) 'A Viking *longphort* near Athlunkard, Co. Clare', *Archaeology Ireland*, 12(4): 13–16.

Larsen, A.-Ch. (ed.) (2001) *The Vikings in Ireland*, Roskilde: The Viking Ship Museum.

Mytum, H. (2003) 'The Vikings and Ireland: ethnicity, identity, and culture change', in J. Barrett (ed.) *Contact, Continuity, and Collapse. The Norse Colonization of the North Atlantic*, Turnhout: Brepols.

Ó Néill, J. (1999) 'A Norse settlement in rural County Dublin', *Archaeology Ireland*, 13(4): 8–10.

Sheehan, J. (2000) 'Ireland's early Viking-Age silver hoards: components, structure, and classification', *Acta Archaeologica*, 71: 49–63.

Simpson, L. (1994) *Excavations at Isolde's Tower, Dublin* (Temple Bar archaeological report 1), Dublin: Temple Bar Properties Ltd.

—— (1995) *Excavations at Essex Street West, Dublin* (Temple Bar archaeological report 2), Dublin: Temple Bar Properties Ltd.

Wallace, P. (1985) 'The archaeology of Viking Dublin', in H.B. Clarke and A. Simms (eds) *The Comparative History of Urban Origins in Non-Roman Europe* (British Archaeological Reports. International Series 255), Oxford: British Archaeological Reports.

—— (1992) *The Viking Age Buildings of Dublin*, 2 vols, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy.