

Peel Vikings Triumph in Ireland



A liberal dose of Sanatogen may well have helped provide a winning boost to the Manx Viking rowing team in Northern Ireland recently, according to their spokesman Ernie Baker, when they won the Mixed Class event at the annual Viking Boat Races. With two of the Manx rowing team having to leave the event early before the races commenced, ironically due to a warning of bad weather in the Irish Sea, their involvement looked to be in some doubt. But landscape gardener Averil Morton stepped into the breach and helped win the day.

Held as part of the long running Magnus Barelegs Festival amidst the picturesque setting of Killyleagh Bay and scenic splendour of Delamont Country Park in County Down, the Manx team who travel under the banner of 'Young Vikings Again', has a combined age in excess of 500 years! Reputed to be the oldest, continuous rowing team in existence (according to their manager) the Peel based team is well known in the Irish fishing port. Renewing old friendships, discussing rowing techniques and perhaps most importantly checking the quality of the beer, the Manx boys soon adopted the generosity of the local people. With the Manx national flag draped decorously over their unofficial headquarters at the

Dufferin Arms and a cosy bed and breakfast in the twelfth century Killyleagh Castle a short distance away, is it any wonder that the competitions attract them like ducks to water?

But this isn't the only Manx connection to the area. Killyleagh Castle, with its striking Loire style architecture, is believed to have been built as a wedding present for Auffrica, the daughter of Godred the Black, formerly King of Mann and the Isles. Thought to be the oldest inhabited castle in Ireland and said to be haunted by a previous occupant who poisoned her husband for his wealth, this stronghold played an important part in Ulster-Scots history, and if any of the Manx lads misbehaved during their stay they might find their accommodation downgraded to the less salubrious dungeon.

Seen as the greatest Viking festival in Ireland, the event incorporates School Education Days, Living History days and provides a good excuse for a mass invasion of adrenaline-fuelled warriors ready for battle.



Magnus Barelegs, after whom the festival is named, lies just a few miles away from this annual mayhem. After heading numerous military campaigns and remembered as the last Norse King of the Irish Sea, he was brutally murdered and buried in a common grave, although his famous sword 'Legbiter' was salvaged and returned to Norway. His nickname of 'barelegs' came about after

Magnus took a liking for the ankle-length tunics worn by the Hebridean men, but his adaptation of wearing a knee-length version in Bergen inevitably raised a few eye-brows.

Also known as Magnus Barefoot, he was likewise attracted to the Isle of Man not least because of its military value for his projected attack on Ireland, and is said to have built a fort and residence on St Patrick's Isle.

Valerie Caine
© October 2011

(Courtesy of Manx Tails)