

THE BARNS WERE LAIKING NEAR THE BECK

A STUDY OF OLD NORSE ORIGINS IN COLLOQUIAL
ENGLISH

Student: Ida Gustafsson

Halmstad University

English 61-90

Autumn 2012

Supervisor: Stuart Foster

Abstract

This is a small quantitative study with focus on colloquial English words with an Old Norse origin. The essay aims to study the history of the Viking invasion and its impact on the English language and to answer the question to what extent Old Norse has influenced modern English vocabulary. Also, the quantitative study aims to answer how well elderly British people are familiar with colloquial English words with Old Norse origins and their denotative meaning and also whether there is a difference in knowledge depending on where in Britain one lives.

A quantitative questionnaire was designed to research elderly British people's knowledge of fifteen different colloquial words with Old Norse origins and to see whether the respondents recognized the words and if they knew the words. This questionnaire was then sent to managers working for AgeUK. The managers in their turn distributed the questionnaire to elderly people in their municipality.

The results indicate that the elderly people living in parts of Britain that were part of the Danelaw have a better understanding of the words researched. The research has also shown that different spellings of the words exist and that the denotative meaning of the words might differ depending on from where in Britain one originates.

Key words: Language History, Colloquial English, Old Norse, Old English, Philology, Vikings

Acknowledgements

I would like to show my gratitude to my respondents and to the people I have been in contact with working for Age UK. It is your contribution that has made this essay possible. I would like to thank Mikael Højstedt for making me the illustrations. Also, I would like to show my gratitude to my supervisor Stuart Foster. Thank you for all your guidance and help.

Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction 6
 - 1.1 Aim of Study 6
 - 1.2 Structure of Essay 6
 - 1.3 Secondary Data Gathering 7
 - 1.4 Approaches 7
- 2. Historical Background..... 8
 - 2.1 The History of the Viking Age in Britain 8
 - 2.2 The Linguistic Influence by the Vikings on the English Language 13
- 3. Methodology 18
- 4. Results 21
 - 4.1 Question 1: Bait 21
 - 4.2 Question 2: Band 22
 - 4.3 Question 3: Barn 22
 - 4.4 Question 4: Beck 23
 - 4.5 Question 5: Cleg 24
 - 4.6 Question 6: Crake 25
 - 4.7 Question 7: Ding 25
 - 4.8 Question 8: Flit 26
 - 4.9 Question 9: Gawp 27
 - 4.10 Question 10: Greet..... 28

4.11 Question 11: Laik	29
4.12 Question 12: Ling	29
4.13 Question 13: Lop	30
4.14 Question 14: Lug	31
4.15 Question 15: Sile	32
5. Discussion	33
6. Conclusion.....	36
7. References	38
8. Appendices	40
8.1 Questionnaire.....	40

1. Introduction

1.1 Aim of Study

The English language has over the years borrowed many words from other languages. When the Vikings settled in Britain, the English language became strongly affected by Old Norse, which was the language of the Vikings. Even in modern English a substantial part of the vocabulary still has its origins from Old Norse. However, even though many words are found in the dictionaries, there are other words which only remain as colloquial. This research aims to study the history of the Viking invasion and its impact on the English language and aims to answer the following thesis questions:

- To what extent has Old Norse influenced modern English vocabulary?
- How well are elderly British people familiar with colloquial English words with Old Norse origins?
- Is there a difference in knowledge of colloquial English words with an Old Norse origin depending on where in Britain one lives?

1.2 Structure of Essay

This essay will be divided into several parts. First, there will be a historical background. This will provide the reader with relevant historical events, in order for her to understand how Old Norse came into the English language. This part of the essay will also cover examples of words that came into the language during this time. The second part of the essay will be a survey carried out by the use of a questionnaire, in which the British people's knowledge of these words will be tested. Moreover, the purpose of this questionnaire is to establish the extent and nature of any possible difference in knowledge depending on where in the UK one lives. The results will be presented and then discussed followed by a conclusion section which

will summarise and evaluate the findings, and where the thesis questions will be answered. At the end of the essay, references and appendices will be found.

1.3 Secondary Data Gathering

When it comes to my secondary data, various books on the subject of language history will be used. Since there might exist several theories of how Old Norse became a part of English, it would be appropriate to compare the different sources to ascertain whether they agree or disagree. Also, I will use a few sources focusing simply on the history and without the language historical aspect. This will be useful when writing the chapter called Historical Background. Since regional varieties of English will be examined, there will also be some sources on sociolinguistics.

1.4 Approaches

The main field for this study will be language history. However, it will contain aspects from fields such as philology, sociolinguistics and semantics. Also, history will be a major part of the essay.

2. Historical Background

Since historical events are crucial for understanding language change, I would like to start this chapter by quoting Janson:

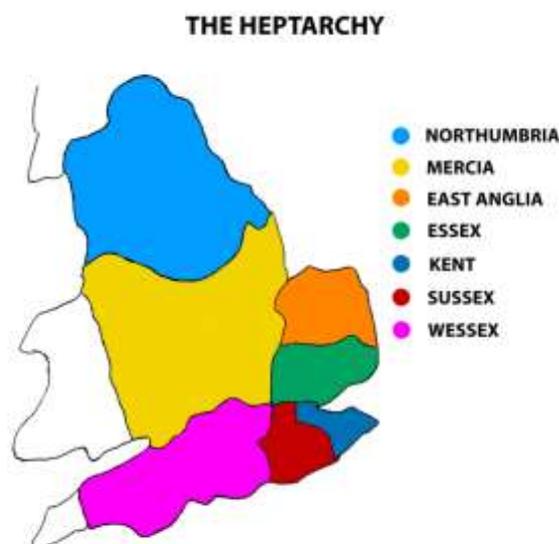
“If two groups with completely different languages have contact for a long period of time, their languages will start to resemble each other in several aspects. To start with, this occurs by borrowing words, but eventually other things will also occur. To what extent the changes will arise, and which one of the language that will see most changes, depends on the type of contact the groups will have, and on which one of the groups that has got the power. Consequently, language change depends on historical events” (Janson 25, translation mine).

2.1 The History of the Viking Age in Britain

According to McCrum, Cran and MacNeil, English has its origins in “three invasions and a cultural revolution” (46). Before the invasions started, Celts lived on the British Isles, whose most direct descendants nowadays can be found in Cornwall, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Brittany (48). Their native language was called *British* and has descendants such as Welsh, Breton, Cornish, Irish Gaelic and Scots Gaelic (Freeborn 9). Unfortunately, Britain was desirable for its minerals and agriculture and in 55 BC, Julius Caesar came to Britain and consequently, the country was to stay under Roman influence for over 400 years following a full-scale Roman invasion a century later (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil 52). In AD 499, following the departure of the Romans, the British Isles was again invaded, this time by the Angles, Saxons and Jutes (55) during what is referred to as the “Age

of Migrations” (Townend 20). These Germanic tribes came from “what is now southern Scandinavia northern Germany” (20) and had travelled across the sea to Britain to conquer the whole of England, which the Romans had earlier left (Janson 112). During the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, the Vikings came to the British Isles and started little by little to invade parts of the country.

For over four centuries, the Vikings figure in the history of Western Europe. In the eighth century, Scandinavians, mostly Norwegians and Danes, came as raiders to conquer and colonize the British Isles, the Frankish empire, the Iberian peninsula and even North Africa. During the ninth century they also conquered parts of the Irish coast, a large part of England, the Hebrides, the Orkney Islands and the Shetland Islands. Scandinavian men and women eventually emigrated and settled in the conquered areas on the British Isles. They also explored the Faeroes, Iceland, Greenland and North America (Sawyer 1). It is important to remember that during the 7th and 8th centuries, England did not consist of only one united kingdom. Sometimes the country is referred to as the *Heptarchy* since it consisted of seven kingdoms: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex and Wessex (Freeborn 35).



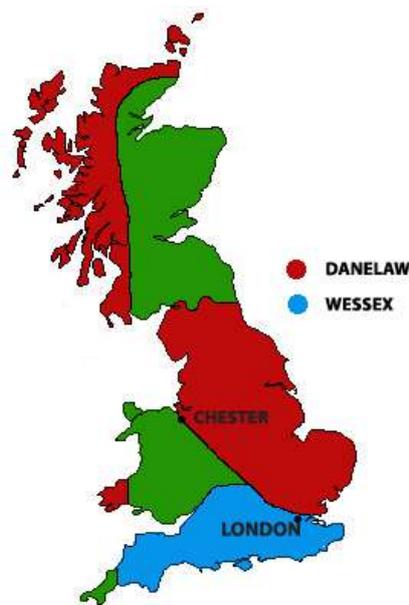
In the British Isles, the first Viking raid documented was in 793 at Lindisfarne in Northumberland, where an island monastery was plundered (Sawyer 2). Alcuin of York wrote a letter to the bishop of Lindisfarne and the King of Northumbria, where he bemoaned the Vikings having attacked the monastery (James, “Overview”). Sawyer declares the suggested reason for the Viking plundering: The “pressure of the increasing population in Scandinavia and the consequent shortage of land there” (3). He argues that this is only partly true since there are no signs of population pressure but in Norway, and the Vikings were most likely seeking wealth. Although many Scandinavians emigrated, they probably did not do so because of necessity, but because they were attracted by the thought of possessing a surplus of land (ibid).

The monastery plundering continued on the west coast and in the north. Since many of them were destroyed along with all records, there are no historical details left on the raids in Scotland, even though they most likely were far-reaching (James, “Overview”). It is probable that there were raids on south-east England during this time as well even though the first one is not reported until AD835 (Sawyer 3). However, in Portland, on the Dorset coast, a Viking raid is documented in the West Saxon Chronicle during the reign of King Beorhtric of Wessex in AD786-802. The reeve assumed that the men that were coming were traders and directed them to “a nearby royal estate” (50). However, they were raiders and they killed the reeve and all of his men. The West Saxon Chronicle wrote that ‘(t)hose were the first ships of Danish men which came to the land of the English’(ibid).

Until the 840s, the Viking attacks were only occasional. However, in the 850s, the Vikings began to winter in England and in the 860s they gathered their armies in order to conquer the country (James, “Overview”). In 866, on All Saints’ Day, York was conquered, which was to become the Viking capital in northern Britain (Logan 126). In the year after, southern Northumbria was conquered. One Viking leader worthy of mention is Ívarr the

Boneless (James, “Overview”). Ívarr is defined by Downham as “one of the leaders of ‘a great army’ which disembarked on the coast of East Anglia in 865/6” (63). During Ívarr’s dynasty the “Viking-warfare” was “intensive” and East Anglia, Mercia and Wessex were conquered (ibid).

When the fighting Scandinavians realized little by little that this country was a good place to live in because of the mild winters, they settled permanently in their part of the country which consisted of Northumbria, East Anglia and some parts of Essex and Mercia. In this area, Danish laws were enforced and therefore they called their area the *Danelaw*. The Danes and their families started to cultivate the ground and they eventually became upper class landowners (Ingelman-Sundström 61).



The largest resistance against the Vikings was from King Alfred. In AD871, he became king of Wessex and will be known as Alfred the Great. By then, the Vikings had almost conquered the whole of England, not only the coastal areas. The new king wanted this to stop and wisely, when the Vikings wanted to invade Wessex, he offered them money and the Vikings gladly accepted his offerings instead of invading. On the other hand, when he saw

his chance in beating the Vikings, he faced them in battle (Ingelman-Sundström 60). In AD 884, the Vikings tried to invade Wessex. This time, Alfred managed to make a deal with Guthrum, the Viking leader, and they split England officially into two regions: Wessex and Danelaw, the Danish part of the country. The border was drawn along the old Roman road from London to Chester (61).

The Viking raids finally ended in 1016 when Cnut (or Canute) of Denmark became king of England. Consequently, he now was 'king of the whole of England, Denmark, Norway and of parts of Sweden' and he married Aethelred's widow, Emma, as a first attempt to reconcile with the English (James, "Overview"). He also sent away the Viking army and then he focused on uniting the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians that had settled in England. For example, he equated the Anglo-Saxons to the Scandinavians and both languages were used at the court of Winchester. He also saw the advantage of being generous to the monasteries and the church, which made him popular as king. This period was therefore peaceful but, when he died at the age of forty, the empire no longer remained united. The English and Scandinavian relationship ceased to exist and English started to focus on France (Ingelman-Sundström 64-65).

The last Scandinavian who tried to occupy England was Harald Hardrada, king of Norway. In 1066, he and his ally Tostig, who was the exiled brother of king Harold Godwinson of England, invaded Northumbria but were defeated by the king's army at the battle of Stamford Bridge (Sawyer 177).

In the Battle of Hastings in the same year, William of Normandy, who was a Viking descendant, won the battle against the English king Harold Godwinson. This event put a definitive end to the Viking invasions in England and a new era with French influences had begun. (Ingelman-Sundström 65).

2.2 The Linguistic Influence by the Vikings on the English Language

The Vikings came from Scandinavia where Old Norse was spoken. Old Norse eventually developed into several Scandinavian languages such as Swedish, Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic. Since Swedish has the largest number of speakers and also is the language that will be referred to in my research, it will be used in this chapter to compare its development to the development to the English language.

English and Swedish have a common origin, usually referred to as Proto-Germanic or Ur-Germanic. Nobody knows what this language sounded like and researchers are not entirely sure when it was spoken or by whom (Janson 25). However, it is known that the language has, over a long period of time, developed into several different languages as a result of the speakers of Proto-Germanic starting to spread all over the European continent (33). English and Swedish were eventually developed and they are referred to as the “Germanic languages”. However, the languages’ development look very different. The earliest sources of Old English that are known are around 1300 years old and, by using them, one can trace its development up until today (25). Swedish, on the other hand, has a different story. There are written sources of Swedish from the 13th century up until today, but before that time the language differs hugely from what we know as Swedish today. Earlier sources of written Swedish are written as runes, and are then most often not referred to as Swedish but as Norse or Old Norse, which is a common definition of all Scandinavian languages from that period since they were so similar that one hardly notices their difference (26). However, the “major source for our knowledge of Old Norse” does not come from the runes, but from the Old Icelandic canon that has been used to reconstruct the language of Old Norse (Dance, *Words derived from Old Norse in Early Middle English* 69). It needs to be taken into consideration that, by doing this, we have moved both culturally and geographically from the

Old Norse that was spoken by the Vikings in Britain during the Dark Ages, which raises questions about its credibility (ibid).

Sources from northern runic inscriptions and the eastern Gothic Bible reveal that before Germanic invasion of Britain there were two distinct dialects of the Germanic language (Townend 21). There is a shortage of sources of western Germanic, to which the Anglo-Saxon language belonged, and Townend emphasises the importance of this source shortage when comparing northern Germanic, from which Old Norse developed, to western Germanic, which developed into Old English (22). However, in 1955 a theory proposed by Hans Kuhn stated that there is no reason not to believe that the runic inscriptions were the ancestors of western Germanic as well. Therefore, the language became referred to as “North-West Germanic”; this is a mutual ancestor of both Old Norse and Old English (22).

Having invaded Britain, the major Germanic group, the Angles referred to their language as *Englisc*, and their language was probably similar to other Germanic languages spoken along the coast of Denmark to the Rhine (Burnley 1). The scribes, from whom our sources of Old English have come, wrote “a version of the language which they spoke every day” and this shows that different dialects of the same language existed (2).

Townend discusses the possibility of contact between the speakers of Old Norse and Old English after the migration period, but before the Viking Age. However, he believes that if even though this might be the case, the linguistic significance would probably be negligible (29-31). Thus, the languages of Old Norse and Old English had been isolated from each other for somewhere between two hundred to three hundred years when the Viking raids began (41). However, they were soon to assimilate again since it was time for the Vikings to conquer Britain.

One can easily see evidence of where the border of the Danelaw was situated by looking at place-names in the area. Saxon place-names often have endings with “*ham* (meaning a settlement), *ing* (as in Worthing), *stowe* (as in Hawkstowe), *sted* (as in Oxsted), and *ton* (as in Brighton)” (McCrum, Cran and MacNeil 70). On the other hand, typical Viking place-names are *by* (as in Whitby) and *wick* (as in Lerwick that means mud bay) (ibid). Another example is the Viking capital York that during this period was called Jorvik (“Viking York”).

Since Old Norse was cognate with Old English, meaning that they had a common ancestor of a Germanic language, there are different theories as to the extent to which the speakers of these languages understood each other. According to Freeborn, the people who spoke these languages could probably understand common words of the other language because of this, and therefore could communicate (46). Kastovsky, on the other hand, is not as persuaded as Freeborn on this matter. He is quoted by Townend:

“Given that at ca 900 at least 400 to 500 years had passed since the two languages had been direct neighbours and probably mutually intelligible in the same way as two not too distant dialects of the same language, it is indeed likely that the degree of mutual intelligibility now had become rather limited, though certainly not zero” (Townend 19).

Townend has researched the intelligibility between Old Norse and Old English speakers by studying the Scandinavisation of Old English place-names by the Old Norse speakers (43). By looking at 228 examples of different lexemes found in 220 different place-names, and by examining the Old Norse substitute for an Old English element, Townend has developed his theory (57): “Norse speakers recognised and understood the words they heard in the place-

names used by their English neighbours” (67). Consequently, there are few reasons to believe that the intelligibility of other cognate words was problematic (67-68).

After the border of the Danelaw had been drawn, “the Danes and the Saxons lived alongside each other for generations” (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil 67). Their language had the same roots from Germanic and according to McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil they developed a pidgin along the border (67). Poussa has developed this theory into what she refers to as *The Creolization Hypothesis*. She claims that the relation between the speakers of Old Norse and Old English created a creole language in order to speak to each other and that this creole later on developed into Middle English (69). She validates her theory by comparing Old English to Modern English where there are three features that resemble creolization: “ a) loss of grammatical gender; b) extreme simplification of inflexions; c) borrowing of common lexical words, and form-words” (70).

Looking in an etymological dictionary, it is easy to see that many Old English words have cognates in Old Norse and therefore one cannot be sure whether a Modern English word “has come from (Old English), or (Old Norse), or from both” (Freeborn 47). However, even though the Old Norse influence on Old English is frequently discussed, there is no reason to believe that there was only a one-way influence, but Old Norse was equally influenced by Old English (Dance, “North Sea Currents” 4), even though it is not within the scope of this essay to discuss this. Freeborn gives a list of Modern English words with Old English or/and Old Norse origins. Here are some of them:

bake	OE bacan ON baka
daughter	OE dohto ON dōttir
green	OE grēne ON groenn
knife/knives	OE cnif/cnifas ON knifr

lamb	OE lamb ON lamb
plum	OE plūma ON ploma
thing	OE þing ON ðing (Freeborn 47)

More evidence of the Old Norse influences can be seen when looking at surnames. Ending a surname with *-son*, as in *Williamson*, is a Scandinavian way of saying *son of William*. Nowadays, the *-son* has lost its meaning (Freeborn 49).

Poussa emphasises that the heritage in English from Old Norse does not “cluster around special fields of activity, but is mostly very common words”. Nowadays, they are not seen as loans, but are among the words children acquire very early. She gives the examples of the words *neck*, *leg*, *skin*, *want*, *take* and *kill*. Many words also still remain as colloquial words (Poussa 72) and to the extent to which some of these are known will now be researched further in this essay.

3. Methodology

The primary data of this thesis was gathered directly from British elderly people, where their knowledge of colloquial English words with an Old Norse origin was researched. The reason for focusing on elderly people is that they were most likely to know the words. In order to do this, a qualitative questionnaire was designed. There is a substantial number of words with influence of Viking language in dialects of northern and eastern England (Markham Rhodes), where the Danelaw was. Because of this, a webpage containing Yorkshire dialect words with Old Norse origin was used from which were selected 15 words that would be used for the questionnaire (“Yorkshire Dialect Words with Old Norse Origin”). Since the aim of the questionnaire was to research colloquial words, some of the words on the webpage were too standardised. With help from my supervisor, Stuart Foster, the 15 specific words were chosen bearing this in mind. At the same time, if there were words with a clear connection to modern Scandinavian language, they would be used. In this case, the words were compared to Swedish, since it is the Scandinavian language with the largest number of speakers. As a result, the words chosen were (column 1-3 qtd. from “Yorkshire Dialect Words with Old Norse Origin”, column 4 my Swedish connotation to the word):

Yorkshire Dialect	Generally accepted	Old Norse Source	Swedish
Word	meaning	Word	connotation
Bait	To feed, to offer food; a packed meal; contents of a lunchbox.	Beit	Bete = bait, lure
Band	String, rope, yarn, cord.	Band	Band = string

Barn	Child (especially a young child, infant)	Barn	Barn = child
Beck	A stream, a brook.	Bekkr	Bäck = stream
Cleg	Horse fly	Kleggi	? ¹
Crake	Crow	Kraka	Kråka = crow
Ding	To hit heavily, knock, throw down violently	?	Att dänga någon = to hit someone
Flit	To move house	Flytja	Att flytta = to move house
Gawp	To stare, to gape open-mouthed	Gapa	Att gapa = to gape open-mouthed
Greet	To weep, to cry continuously	?	Att gråta = to cry, to weep
Laik	To play	Leika	Att leka = to play
Ling	Heather	lyng	Ljung = heather
Lop	flea	?	Loppa = flea
Lug	1) to pull or carry 2) A knot or tangle in the hair	lugge	Att lugga någon = to pull someone in the hair
Sile	To rain heavily, as in “It’s siling down”	?	Att sila = to strain, to filter

In the questionnaire, the words were put in sentences and the participants would be asked to explain their understanding of the denotative meanings of the words presented to

¹ During disputation other students disclosed their knowledge of a similar dialectal word in Swedish that means horse fly.

them by choosing from three alternatives. To each question, the participants would also answer if they recognised the word used in this way and whether they knew the word or guessed. The questionnaire was forwarded to nominated individuals, working as managers for a charity called Age UK which works with the improvement of life for the elderly, in three geographically distant parts of the UK which have had different experiences of the Viking incursions. Those were: Doncaster (Yorkshire), Eden (Cumbria) and Surrey (South East England). Doncaster and Eden are situated in the part of England which came under Danelaw whereas Surrey was barely touched by the Viking invasions. The nominated individuals distributed the questionnaire to elderly people who were asked to fill in the questionnaire with their assistance. Being mindful of ethical considerations, both the managers and the respondents will remain anonymous during this essay and all the results are presented with their consent. The results of the questionnaire will show the extent to which elderly people in the UK are familiar with colloquial and obscure words in English with Old Norse origins and if so, to what extent they are aware of the meaning of the words. It will also show if there is a knowledge difference of these words between the different parts of the UK and depending on whether the town was situated in the Viking Danelaw.

4. Results

The following chapter will present the results from the quantitative questionnaire carried out for this research. For each question, the results will be presented for each alternative and for all the three towns researched: Doncaster, Carlisle and Surrey. Also, *if the question was answered correctly*, it is presented if these persons recognized the word or not and if they knew the word or guessed. It is notable that, in some cases, the questions have not been answered. This might mean that the respondent did not know the word. However, it might also mean that she did not have enough time to complete the questionnaire.

4.1 Question 1: Bait

Correct answer: b) meal

	a) soft drink	b) meal	c) book	No answer	Total
Doncaster		12		3	15
Carlisle		14			14
Surrey		9	1		10
Total		35	1	3	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	6	6	5	7
Carlisle	14		14	
Surrey	3	6	2	7
Total	23	12	21	14

The word *bait* was understood by most respondents as another word for *meal*, which is the correct answer. Only one respondent from Surrey thought the word meant *book* and three respondents from Doncaster did not answer the question. Out of the respondents who answered correctly, all persons living in Carlisle both recognized and knew the word whereas the people living in Doncaster and Surrey half of the respondents or more said that they did not recognize the word nor knew it and simply guessed.

4.2 Question 2: Band

Correct answer: a) string

	a) string	b) chain	c) catch	No answer	Total
Doncaster	10	2		3	15
Carlisle	13	1			14
Surrey	8		1	1	10
Total	31	3	1	4	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	8	2	7	3
Carlisle	13		13	
Surrey	3	5	1	7
Total	24	7	21	10

The word *band* was answered correctly by the majority of the respondents as meaning *string*. Only eight people in total have answered something else or not at all. Out of the people who answered correctly all respondents in Carlisle both recognized and knew the word. In Doncaster the majority recognized and knew the word. In Surrey, on the other hand, the word was guessed by seven persons out of eight.

4.3 Question 3: Barn

Correct answer: c) child

	a) adult	b) animal	c) child	No answer	Total
Doncaster			15		15
Carlisle	1	5	7	1	14
Surrey		1	8	1	10
Total	1	6	30	2	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	13	2	13	2
Carlisle	7		7	
Surrey	3	5	3	5
Total	23	7	23	7

On this question, thirty persons out of thirty-nine believed the word *barn* meant *child* and twenty-three of these both recognized and knew the word. The most impressive

number of correct answers came from Doncaster, where all respondents answered correctly. However, two respondents from Doncaster have commented on the questionnaire that they think it should be spelled *bairns*. Another interesting remark on this question, which is not represented in the table, is that in the answers from Carlisle as much as five respondents have answered that the word means *animal* and four out of these have said that they both recognized and knew the word! This might mean that there is another definition of the word in their dialect.

4.4 Question 4: Beck

Correct answer: c) stream

	a) house	b) tree	c) stream	No answer	Total
Doncaster			14	1	15
Carlisle			14		14
Surrey	1		8	1	10
Total	1		36	2	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	14		14	
Carlisle	14		14	
Surrey	6	2	6	2
Total	34	2	34	2

Also in this question there were few doubts on what the word *beck* means regardless of which town examined. Thirty-six respondents out of thirty-nine have answered correctly that the word means *stream*. Out of these thirty-six, thirty-four respondents have said that they recognized the word and also knew it. Only in Surrey there were two persons who had guessed the word without recognizing it.

4.5 Question 5: Cleg

Correct answer: b) horse fly

	a) worm	b) horse fly	c) beetle	No answer	Total
Doncaster	1	3	3	8	15
Carlisle	1	12	1		14
Surrey		6	2	2	10
Total	2	21	6	10	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster		3		3
Carlisle	12		11	1
Surrey		6		6
Total	12	9	11	10

In this question the word *cleg* was best understood by the respondents from Carlisle where twelve out of fourteen answered correctly. Also in Surrey the majority answered correctly (six out of ten) that the word means *horse fly*. However, when looking further on the two towns, it is visible that Carlisle had a better understanding of the word; twelve out of the twelve who answered correctly recognized the word and eleven of them knew the word, whereas in Surrey all the persons who answered correctly only guessed.

When looking at Doncaster, the majority did not answer the question and out of the three who answered correctly, no one recognized or knew the word.

4.6 Question 6: Crake

Correct answer: a) crow

	a) crow	b) swallow	c) robin	No answer	Total
Doncaster	11			4	15
Carlisle	9	3	2		14
Surrey	6	2	1	1	10
Total	26	5	3	5	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	3	8	3	8
Carlisle	4	5	4	5
Surrey	1	5	1	5
Total	8	18	8	18

The word *crake*, which means *crow*, was answered correctly by twenty-six out of thirty-nine respondents. In Doncaster, for example, there were only four people out of fifteen who did not answer correctly but gave no answer at all. However, the correct answers seem to have been a coincidence since only eight people out of the twenty-six who answered correctly have said that they recognized and knew the word. In Surrey, there was only one person who knew this word.

4.7 Question 7: Ding

Correct answer: c) to strike

	a) to rob	b) to kill	c) to strike	No answer	Total
Doncaster	5		4	6	15
Carlisle	10	3	1		14
Surrey	5	2	2	1	9
Total	20	5	7	7	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	1	3		4
Carlisle		1		1
Surrey	1	1	1	1
Total	2	5	1	6

In this question, twenty respondents out of thirty-nine answered incorrectly believing that *to ding* means *to rob*. In Doncaster, six respondents did not even answer the question and out of the seven respondents who in total answered correctly that the word means *to strike* and only one of them both recognized and knew the word.

In Carlisle, ten people out of fourteen answered that the word meant *to rob*. What is also interesting but not presented in the table is that four of these respondents have marked that they both recognized the word and that they knew that the word meant this. This might mean that in their dialect the word *ding* has another meaning than the one I was looking for here.

4.8 Question 8: Flit

Correct answer: a) to move house

	a) to move house	b) to travel	c) to fly	No answer	Total
Doncaster	14	1			15
Carlisle	9		5		14
Surrey	2	4	4		10
Total	25	5	9		39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	13	1	13	1
Carlisle	7	2	7	2
Surrey		2		2
Total	20	5	20	5

In this question, it was clear that Doncaster had the best knowledge of the meaning of *to flit*, which means *to move house*. Fourteen out of fifteen answered correctly and thirteen of these both recognized and knew the word. Also in Carlisle the knowledge was high and nine respondents out of fourteen answered correctly. Out of these, seven recognized and knew the word.

In Surrey, the number of correct answers was fewer and only two out of ten gave the right answer. Also, these two did not recognize the word and guessed it. What the table does not show is that among the four respondents in Surrey who answered that the word meant *to travel*, three of them said that they both recognized and knew the word. Also, there were two respondents from Surrey who had answered *to fly* who declared that they recognized and knew the word. Also in Carlisle, there was a respondent who said he knew that the word meant *to fly*. This might mean that *to flit* has different interpretations depending on from where in the UK one originates.

4.9 Question 9: Gawp

Correct answer: a) to stare/gape open-mouthed

	a) to stare/gape open-mouthed	b) to blush	c) to laugh/giggle	No answer	Total
Doncaster	13			2	15
Carlisle	14				14
Surrey	10				10
Total	37			2	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	13		13	
Carlisle	14		14	
Surrey	10		9	1
Total	37		36	1

In this question a clear majority answered correctly that *to gawp* means *to stare/gape open-mouthed*, regardless of the town researched. Only in Doncaster there were two respondents who did not answer the question. Otherwise, all respondents answered correctly. Out of the thirty-seven persons who answered correctly, all have said that they recognized the word, and everybody but one knew the word.

4.10 Question 10: Greet

Correct answer: c) to weep

	a) to stare	b) to laugh	c) to weep	No answer	Total
Doncaster	3	1	5	6	15
Carlisle	1	5	8		14
Surrey	1	3	4	2	10
Total	5	9	17	8	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	4	1	4	1
Carlisle	7	1	7	1
Surrey	2	2	2	2
Total	13	4	13	4

The word *greet* was not very known among the respondents in all three towns. Even though there were most answers on alternative c, that the word means *to weep*, they were only seventeen out of thirty-nine, which does not even represent half of the respondents. Looking at only Doncaster, there were six respondents out of fifteen who did not even answer the question.

Out of the seventeen who answered correctly, thirteen of these both recognized and knew the word. Most of these people were found in Carlisle who represented seven of them.

4.11 Question 11: Laik

Correct answer: a) to play

	a) to play	b) to sing	c) to laugh	No answer	Total
Doncaster	10		1	4	15
Carlisle	11	2	1		14
Surrey	7	1	2		10
Total	28	3	4	4	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	7	3	7	3
Carlisle	6	5	6	5
Surrey	3	4	1	6
Total	16	12	14	14

To laik was known by the majority of the respondents in all towns. In total, twenty-eight persons out of thirty-nine answered correctly: *To play*. In Doncaster and Carlisle, the majority of the ones that answered correctly both recognized and knew the word, whereas in Surrey only three out of the seven persons who answered correctly recognized the word, and only one person knew it.

4.12 Question 12: Ling

Correct answer: a) heather

	a) heather	b) daisy	c) bluebell	No answer	Total
Doncaster	2		4	9	15
Carlisle	7	2	5		14
Surrey	4	1	3	2	10
Total	13	3	12	11	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	2		2	
Carlisle	2	5	2	5
Surrey	1	3	1	3
Total	5	8	5	8

The word *ling*, which means *heather*, was answered correctly by thirteen out of thirty-nine and it was in Carlisle that the number of correct answers was the highest with

seven out of fourteen. Twelve respondents out of thirty-nine believed that bluebell was the correct answer and eleven gave no answer. Among the persons who answered correctly only five in total recognized and knew the answer.

4.13 Question 13: Lop

Correct answer: b) flea

	a) spider	b) flea	c) ladybug	No answer	Total
Doncaster		7	2	6	15
Carlisle	4	10			14
Surrey	3	1	4	2	10
Total	7	18	6	8	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	3	4	3	4
Carlisle	2	8	2	8
Surrey		1		1
Total	5	13	5	13

In this question Doncaster and Carlisle knew better than Surrey that the word *lop* means *flea*. Seven persons from Doncaster and ten from Carlisle answered correctly whereas in Surrey there was only one. However, among the respondents who had answered correctly only three out of seven in Doncaster and two out of ten in Carlisle recognized and knew the word. The rest only guessed. The respondent from Surrey did not know the word either but guessed.

4.14 Question 14: Lug

Correct answer: b) tangle in the hair

	a) hair ribbon	b) tangle in the hair	c) hair slide	No answer	Total
Doncaster		13		2	15
Carlisle		7	7		14
Surrey	3	4	1	2	10
Total	3	24	8	4	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	11	2	11	2
Carlisle	7		7	
Surrey	2	2	1	3
Total	19	5	19	5

In Doncaster, the respondents agreed that the word *lug* means *tangle in the hair*.

Only two persons out of fifteen gave no answer and the rest answered correctly. Out of the thirteen that gave the correct answer, eleven stated that they recognized and knew the answer.

In Carlisle the result was split between *tangle in the hair* and *hair slide* and each alternative got seven answers each out of fourteen. The respondents who answered *tangle in the hair* all recognized and knew the word. However, what the table does not reveal is that among the seven respondents who answered *hair slide* no less than five answered that they knew the word. This might mean that the word *lug* has several meanings in the dialect of Carlisle.

In Surrey only four people out of ten gave the correct answer. Two out of these recognized the word but only one knew its meaning.

4.15 Question 15: Sile

Correct answer: b) to rain heavily

	a) to snow heavily	b) to rain heavily	c) to hail heavily	No answer	Total
Doncaster		13		2	15
Carlisle	2	11	1		14
Surrey	1	6	2	1	10
Total	3	30	3	3	39

	Yes	No	Knew	Guessed
Doncaster	13		13	
Carlisle	6	5	6	5
Surrey		6		6
Total	19	11	19	11

The word *sile* was answered as meaning *to rain heavily* by the majority of the respondents in each town. In Doncaster thirteen persons out of fifteen answered correctly and all of them both recognized and knew the word. In Carlisle eleven out of fourteen answered correctly. Six out of the eleven recognized the word and the same persons knew the word. In Doncaster thirteen persons answered correctly and all of them both recognized and knew the word. In Surrey the understanding of the word was not as evident: Six respondents out of ten answered correctly but none of them recognized the word and simply guessed.

5. Discussion

This chapter aims to discuss the results from my research. I will do this by dividing the words into different groups depending on their results. I will discuss what the results might prove with reference to earlier knowledge about the Vikings in Britain and the Danelaw and how words might have different meanings and spellings depending upon from where in Britain one originates.

By looking at the results from my research, most words, with a few exceptions as *ding*, *gawp*, and *ling*, are best known by elderly people living in Doncaster or Carlisle when comparing the three localities. The words *bait*, *band*, *cleg* and *greet* were clearly best known by the respondents from Carlisle where they showed that they did not only answer correctly but also recognized and knew the word more often than the respondents from Doncaster and Surrey. However, the results from Doncaster's respondents came in second place, except with regard to the word *cleg* where nobody from Doncaster nor Surrey recognized or knew the word.

The words *barn*, *flit*, *lug* and *sile* were best known by the respondents from Doncaster. Carlisle came in second place but there is no doubt that Doncaster's respondents had a better understanding of the words when looking at the tables. Surrey came in third place in all these cases, and had either few persons or nobody at all who recognized and knew the words.

Some words were equally understood by the respondents from Doncaster and Carlisle. Those were *beck*, *crake*, *laik* and *lop*. The word *crake* was the only case where Surrey was not far behind in recognition and knowledge of the word.

The words *ding* and *ling* had an equally low knowledge in all three towns and only a few persons or none from each town recognized and knew the word. By contrast, the word *gawp* had an equally high degree of recognition in all three towns.

Looking at the full picture, Surrey had a low knowledge in the words researched, whereas Doncaster and Carlisle had a great understanding of them. Given that Doncaster was a part of the Danelaw and that the words researched came from the Yorkshire Dialect, this result was expected. However, the results from Carlisle were not as expected. Even though the area where Carlisle is situated was part of the Danelaw, the words researched were not chosen from a list of their dialectal vocabulary and bearing this in mind, they had a surprisingly high knowledge of many words and what is even more striking is that they also had a greater understanding of some words than Doncaster had.

This research has shown that there is a difference in knowledge of Old Norse-derived colloquial words depending on where in the UK one lives. The respondents from parts of the UK where the Danelaw was situated have a better understanding of this kind of words. However, there are respondents from southern England, where the Danelaw was not situated, who know these words. This might be due to the fact that some of the words are becoming more standardized and do not only exist in dialects.

The research has also shown that some of the words researched might differ in meaning depending on where in the UK one lives. It has been proven, especially with regard to Carlisle, that many respondents have had a different understanding on what the words mean. From this town, many respondents have answered that *lug* means *hair slide*, *ding* means *to rob* and that *barn* means *animal* and the number of respondents who have indicated this makes it difficult to believe that it simply occurred by chance. Also, the number of respondents from Surrey who have answered that the word *flit* means *to travel* or *to fly* and

also have marked that they recognized and knew the word indicates a dialectal difference in meaning, depending upon from where is the UK one originates. Also, it has been shown that different spellings might exist for the words as some respondents from Doncaster wanted to change the spelling of *barn* to *bairn*.

It has to be conceded that the sample sizes involved are small and, as such, the validity of the study is limited. However, the fact remains that Doncaster and Carlisle had higher recognition results than Surrey when looking at their understanding of the words. In a more elaborate research study with a higher number of respondents, the contrast may well have been more manifest.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was to research the Viking's impact on the English language. I wanted to see how many Old Norse words that still were being used in colloquial English dialects among the elderly and if there was any difference between the parts of the UK which were ruled under Danelaw and the parts outside the Danelaw. With focus on colloquial words, a quantitative research study was carried out to discover how well elderly British people know colloquial words with an Old Norse origin and if there was a difference in knowledge depending on where in the country one lives.

When the Vikings conquered the British Isles, they could hardly have known the great impact they were to have on the Anglo-Saxons, and probably they did not even care, and that their presence was to have such a huge effect on the English language that would still be visible over a thousand years later. In modern English, this heritage is still seen even though most people are not aware of the origin of the words. The type of vocabulary that has remained in the English language consists of words that are used often in everyday language and, as Poussa remarked, they are acquired early by children (Poussa 72). There is also a great number of colloquial words with origins in Old Norse whose definitions in most cases are well known by the British people. However, it seems that some words are disappearing and in the next generation the knowledge of these words might not exist to the same extent since language is constantly developing and is becoming more standardized due to education, the impact of media and people's developing opportunities to travel.

Especially in the parts where the Danelaw was situated knowledge of these words is still in evidence, at least among the elderly. This thesis has proven that there is a difference in knowledge of colloquial words with an Old Norse origin depending on where in Britain one lives. However, the differences were not always distinctive and a larger research

with more respondents from a larger number of towns could have given more elaborated evidence to this fact.

A problem that was faced during the process of writing this essay was that there were few sources that discussed the Viking's impact on colloquial English. There were many sources on the how Old Norse influenced Standard English and from there the chapter entitled "*Historical Background*" chapter had to be written with limited focus on colloquial English. With more background information on the subject the questionnaire would have been more accurate in design and it would also have been easier to discuss its results with reference to earlier research.

I am really pleased that the questionnaires gave a visible result that answered my thesis question as to whether there was a difference in knowledge depending on location. I am also pleased and surprised that my contact persons at Age UK were willing to help me and were genuinely interested in my topic.

For further research, it would be interesting to conduct a larger research study with more respondents from other towns than the ones used for my research in this essay to obtain more reliable evidence as to the Danelaw's impact on colloquial words and expressions. Also, it would be interesting to discover whether there is a difference depending on generation when looking at the knowledge of these colloquial words. It would also be interesting to research the development of these colloquial words: for example, are they on their way to becoming part of Standard English? Will they remain colloquial and in use? Or are they destined to die out as older speakers pass away?

7. References

- Burnley, David. *The History of the English Language*. 2nd ed. 1992. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000. Print.
- Dance, Richard. *Words Derived from Old Norse in the Early Middle English: Studies in the Vocabulary of the South-West Midland Texts*. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval Renaissance Studies, 2003. Print.
- Dance, Richard. "North Sea Currents: Old English-Old Norse Relations, Literary and Linguistic." *Literature Compass* 1.1 (2004): 1-10. Web. 20 Sep. 2012.
- Downham, Clare. *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland: The Dynasty of Ivarr to AD 1014*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2008. Print.
- Freeborn, Dennis. *From Old English to Standard English*. 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998. Print.
- Ingelman-Sundberg, Catharina. *Boken om Vikingarna (The Book of the Vikings, translation mine)*. Stockholm: Rabén Prisma, 2004.
- Janson, Tore. *Språken och Historien (Languages and History, translation mine)*. Stockholm: Nordstedts Förlag Ab, 1997. Print.
- James, Edward. "Overview: The Vikings, 800 to 1066". *BBC History*. 29 Mar. 2011. Web. 26 Sep. 2012.
- Logan, F. Donald. *The Vikings in History*. London: Routledge, 2005. Print
- Markham Rhodes, Barrie. "Yorkshire Dialect Words of Old Norse Origin: Introduction." *The Viking Network*. The Viking Network, 14 Aug. 2004. Web. 21 Nov. 2012.

McCrum, Robert, et al. *The Story of English*. 1986. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1992. Print.

Poussa, Patricia. "The Evolution of Early Standard English: The Creolization Hypothesis." *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia: An International Review of English Studies* 14 (1982): 69-85. Print.

Townend, Matthew. *Language and History in Viking Age England: Linguistic Relation between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2002. Print.

Sawyer, Peter. *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.

"Viking York." *Vikings: Viking Towns*. BBC, n.d. Web. 19 Nov. 2012.

"Yorkshire Dialect Words of Old Norse Origin." *The Viking Network*. The Viking Network, 14 Aug. 2004. Web. 21 Nov. 2012.

8. Appendices

8.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Please mark the answer you believe is correct.

1. The pupils brought their own *bait* to school.

The word *bait* means:

a) soft drink b) meal c) book

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

2. He fastened the box with a *band*.

The word *band* means:

a) string b) chain c) catch

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

3. In the room there were three *barns*.

The word *barn* means:

a) adult b) animal c) child

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

4. In the forest there was a *beck*.

The word *beck* means:

a) house b) tree c) stream

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

5. In the stable there were many *clegs*.

The word *cleg* means:

a) worm b) horse fly c) beetle

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

6. There is a *crake* sitting in the tree.

The word *crake* means:

a) crow b) swallow c) robin

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

7. She was about to get *dinged*, but luckily somebody came to her rescue.

The word *ding* means:

a) to rob b) to kill c) to strike

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

8. Lisa will *flit* to Italy in a few months.

The word *flit* means:

a) to move house b) to travel c) to fly

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

9. She was so beautiful that Peter couldn't help but *gawp*.

The word *gawp* means:

a) to stare/gape open-mouthed b) to blush c) to laugh/giggle

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

10. It was impossible for Tom to stop *greeting*.

The word *greet* means:

a) to stare b) to laugh c) to weep

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

11. The children were *laiking* in the garden.

The word *laik* means:

a) to play b) to sing c) to laugh

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

12. The *ling* is common in the British Isles.

The word *ling* means:

a) heather b) daisy c) bluebell

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

13. Female *lops* lay up to 600 eggs in their lifetime!

The word *lop* means:

a) spider b) flea c) ladybug

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

14. The little girl had a *lug* in her hair.

The word *lug* means:

a) hair ribbon b) tangle in the hair c) hair slide

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

15. It's *siling* down outside!

The word *sile* means?

a) to snow heavily b) to rain heavily c) to hail heavily

Did you recognize this word used in this way? Yes No

Did you know the word or did you guess? Knew Guessed

Finally could you give me a few bits of information about yourself so that I can put your other replies in greater context.

Age:

Sex M/F:

If you are British, please say from which county/city you originate _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!