

# Medieval Merseyside



## Factsheet and activities

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# Medieval Merseyside

During the medieval period Merseyside was a rural area with scattered villages and farms.

The medieval period is often split into two parts:

**Early medieval:** the period after the Romans left in AD 410 until the Norman invasion in AD 1066.

**Late medieval:** the period from the Norman invasion in AD 1066 until the start of the Tudor period in AD 1485.

What can we use to find out about medieval Merseyside?

- **Sculpture**
- **Artefacts**
- **Maps**
- **Documents**
- **Evidence from excavations**
- **Placenames**
- **Standing buildings**



## Question: Who lived in Early Medieval Merseyside?

Not everyone who lived in Roman Merseyside left with the Romans so we have evidence of local people continuing to live on the same settlements as before. People also came from tribes in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark often from tribes known as the Jutes, Saxons and Angles. The group who have left us the most archaeological evidence are the Vikings.



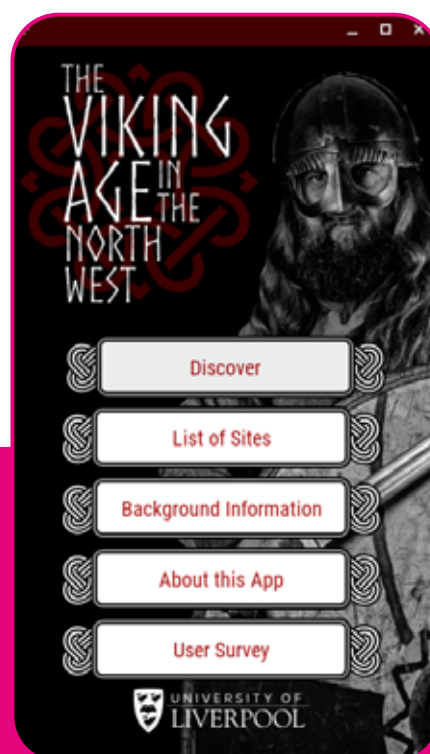
# Early Medieval - the Vikings

'Viking' is an Old Norse term which describes people who were active raiders, traders and settlers in other areas of Europe.

The word Viking is often translated to mean pirate but may come from the Old Norse term 'Vik' meaning bay or inlet, describing where these people travelled from.



This scale balance fitting was discovered at Meols on the north Wirral coast. The chains and plates from the scale are missing. The Vikings would have used them when trading.



**Research:** Find out about Viking placenames near you and explore the Viking age in the North West in this free app developed by the University of Liverpool

[www.liverpool.ac.uk/csd/app-directory/vikings](http://www.liverpool.ac.uk/csd/app-directory/vikings)

# Early Medieval - the Vikings



**Activity:** Use a paper plate to make your own Viking shield, attach a strip of card to the back as a handle.

colour  
me



Artwork by J Robert Travis, courtesy of University of Liverpool



# Early Medieval Sculpture

People carve sculpture for many reasons, including to commemorate, to celebrate or to identify a place in the landscape. When we study sculpture we often find out about the beliefs of

people in the past. Sculpture can tell us where people were living, about the skills of the craftspeople and about the sharing of styles between different places.



This collection of sculpture was found in St. Barnabas' churchyard, Bromborough, Wirral in the 1800s.

The stones were taken from their original position and placed in a pile in the rectory garden and eventually were lost.



This early medieval piece of sculpture carved between AD 900 and AD 1100 was recently found on an archaeological excavation in Bromborough.



**Question:** Can you spot the rediscovered fragment in the old photo of piled stone?



This is a hogback stone from St. Bridget's church, West Kirby, Wirral. Hogbacks may have been used as grave markers and are a distinctive early medieval sculpture associated with the Vikings. A replica is on display in the Museum of Liverpool.



**Activity:** Use clay, playdough or draw to create your own sculpture. What can it tell others about you?



# Early Medieval Irby

This incomplete ceramic spike lamp dates from between AD 900 and AD 1100 . It was found on a multi-period site at Mill Hill Road, Irby, Wirral.

Stratigraphy (layers built up over time) from the site tells us that some of the buildings belong to the early medieval period. From this important site we also have evidence for activity during the Iron Age and Roman periods.



**Activity:** Find out more about stratigraphy with the Young Archaeologists Club by making a stratigraphy cake [www.yac-uk.org/activity/make-a-stratigraphy-cake](http://www.yac-uk.org/activity/make-a-stratigraphy-cake) and stratigraphy jar [www.yac-uk.org/activity/make-a-stratigraphy-jar](http://www.yac-uk.org/activity/make-a-stratigraphy-jar)



Placename evidence for Irby also suggests a Viking presence. The name Irby is made of two Norse words Íri meaning 'Irishmen' and the suffix -býr, meaning 'farm of the Irish'.

Think about why people continue to live in the same places during different periods?

colour  
me



Artwork by J Robert Travis, courtesy of University of Liverpool

# Early Medieval - the Huxley Hoard

The Huxley Hoard is a collection of Viking silver that was buried for safekeeping, but the person or people who buried it did not return for it. The 21 bracelets and one ingot were discovered near Huxley in Cheshire in 2004 by a metal detector user.

Sixteen of the bracelets are decorated with stamped designs using a distinctive type of punch work.

The bracelets are a type made between AD 850 and AD 950. It is possible they came to Cheshire with a group of Vikings who were granted land 'near Chester' after being expelled from Dublin in AD 902.



The 1996 Treasure Act states that you must report any items of Treasure found to the coroner. This can be done

through the Portable Antiquities Scheme, where you can also record non-treasure finds. By recording what is found we can all learn more about the past.

Find out more: [finds.org.uk](https://finds.org.uk)



**Research:** Explore more about the hoard and have a closer look at the bracelets here

[www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/collections/archaeology/huxley-hoard](http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/collections/archaeology/huxley-hoard)



# Early Medieval - clothing

This early medieval glass bead was found on Hilbre Island, off the north coast of the Wirral in 1863.

Beads were usually worn on a string between a pair of brooches which were used as clothing fasteners however they could also be used on a necklace or as a toggle.

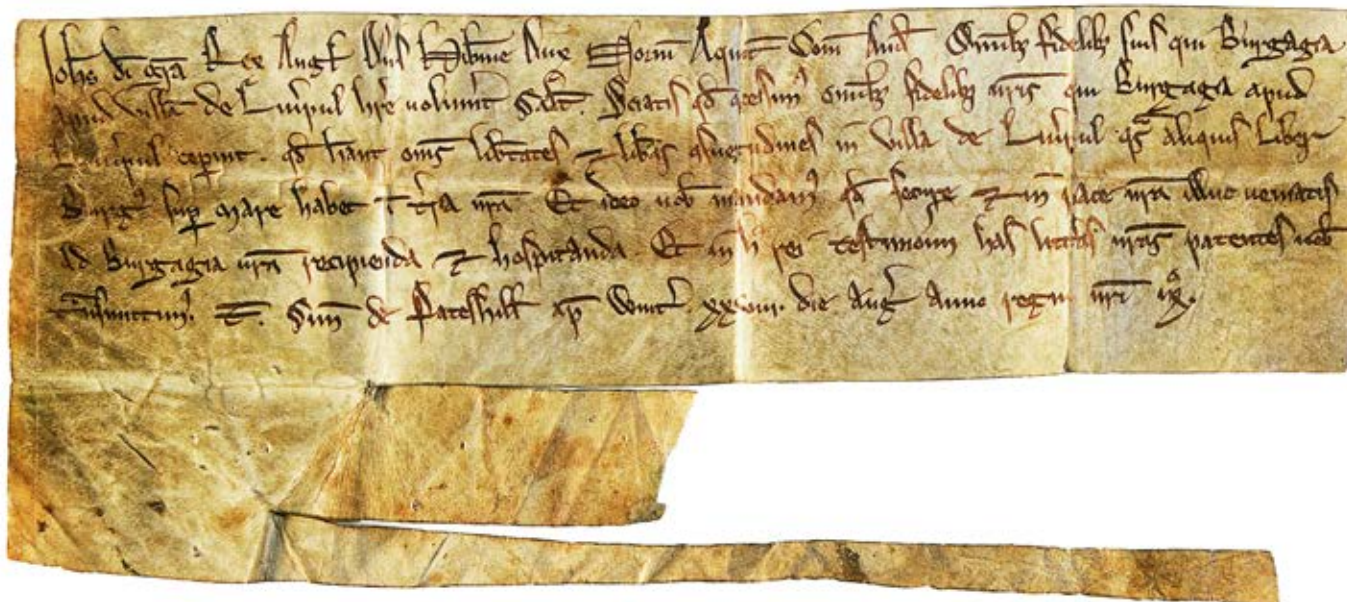


Artwork by J Robert Travis, courtesy of University of Liverpool



# Late Medieval - King John's Letters Patent

On the 28th of August 1207 King John signed a Letters Patent (legal document issued by a King or Queen) establishing Liverpool as a borough. This gave people the opportunity to trade. A new town was laid out near the Pool, a now-disappeared inlet of the river Mersey, consisting of seven streets. People came from nearby areas such as West Derby to live in the new borough.



Through the medieval period Liverpool was a small settlement where people made a living by fishing and farming. The Letters Patent are held in Liverpool Central Library and a replica of the Letters Patent is on display in the Museum of Liverpool.

Find out: more about Medieval Liverpool in this short film

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7Kb8jPlzWQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7Kb8jPlzWQ)



**Research:** Find out more about King John's Letters Patent and what it says at [www.liverpool.gov.uk/libraries/archives-family-history/our-collections/letters-patent-of-king-john/](http://www.liverpool.gov.uk/libraries/archives-family-history/our-collections/letters-patent-of-king-john/)



**Activity:** Plan a new medieval town, what would you include? Would we be able to see what you have included 800 years later?



**Question:** What are the names of Liverpool's first seven streets?

# Late Medieval - Liverpool Castle

Liverpool Castle once stood in Derby square, Liverpool where the Queen Victoria monument now stands. It was built in the 1200s to protect the new port for King John.

The most detailed medieval account about Liverpool Castle was made in 1347 which described the castle as having 'four towers, a hall, chamber, chapel, brewhouse and bakehouse, with a well therein, a certain orchard and a dovecot'. It was surrounded by a dry moat.



An inventory of the 1200s describes the size and some of the contents of castle:

- **186 pallet beds**
- **107 spears**
- **39 lances**
- **15 great catapults for hurling stones**
- **A vat for brewing**
- **Two tables**
- **One large and two small brass pots**
- **One ewer with a basin for washing**

A model of Liverpool Castle is on display in the Museum of Liverpool while a scale replica of Liverpool castle can be found in Rivington, Lancashire. It was commissioned in 1912 by Lord Leverhulme.



**Activity:** Draw or create your own medieval castle



**Question:** Which of the items listed in the castle inventory might archaeologist find evidence for today?



**Activity:** Build your own trebuchet with the Mersey and Dee Young Archaeologists Club  
[www.yac-uk.org/activity/make-a-trebuchet](http://www.yac-uk.org/activity/make-a-trebuchet)



# Late Medieval - Daily Life

Religion was very important in people's lives in the medieval period, most people were Roman Catholic. Personal religious items like this pilgrim's flask to carry holy water are not very common finds in Merseyside, but this item suggests someone has made a pilgrimage (religious journey). The scallop shaped design is linked to Santiago da Compostela in Spain, while pilgrimages to English and Welsh holy sites were also common.



These pieces of pottery, excavated from South Castle Street, are rare medieval remains from Liverpool city centre. Some evidence of medieval Liverpool was destroyed when deep Victorian cellars were cut through the medieval layers.



This coin is a silver halfgroat of Henry VI found in Thingwall, Wirral. The obverse (heads side) shows the king and the reverse (tails side) has a long cross. The legend (writing) on the reverse tells us that it was minted in Calais.



**Activity: Design your own medieval coin**



Small chance finds discovered at Meols on the north Wirral coast tell us about what people wore in medieval Merseyside. While fabrics don't survive, around 1 in 5 of the finds from Meols are clothing accessories such as buckles and pins.



Fishing hooks like this one found at Meols, animal bones and seashells provide evidence of what people were eating.

# Late Medieval - Coats of arms

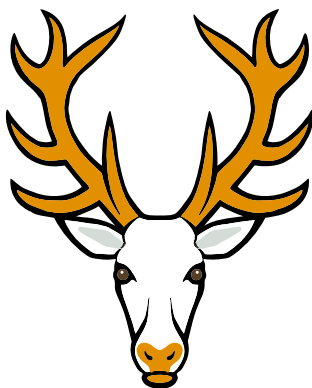
Wealthy and powerful families use coats of arms to express their identity. Shapes, decorations and colour are used to make each coat of arms individual. Animals often represent different personalities. What would your coat of arms be? Think about what symbols or animals might represent your personality or hobbies.



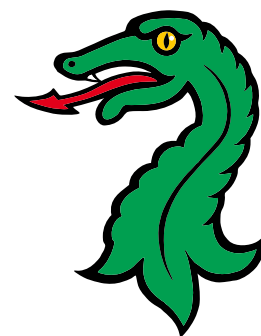
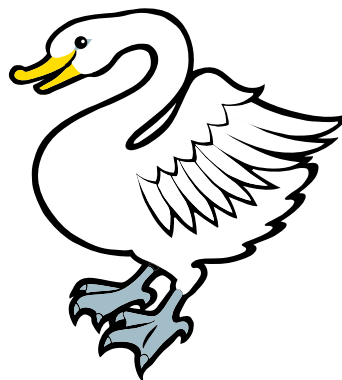
**Activity:** Design and create your coat of arms with the help of the symbols below and the shield outline on the next page.



The stag head represents peace

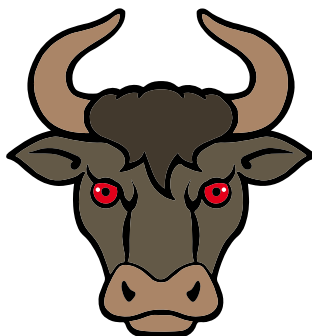


The swan represents poetry, learning, grace and sincerity

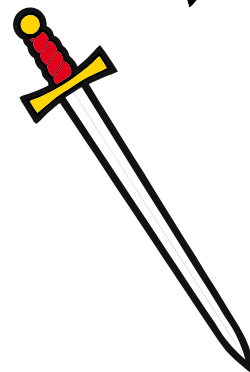
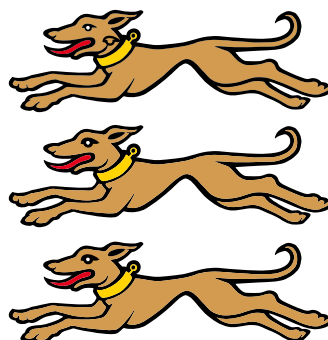


The lizard head represents wisdom

The bull head represents bravery and generosity

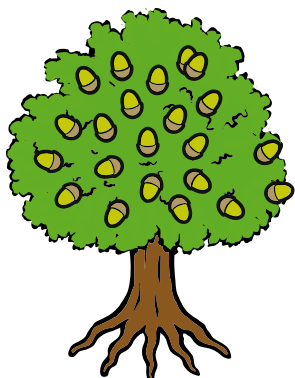


The dog represents courage, vigilance and loyalty

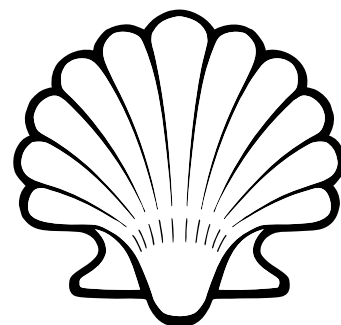


The sword represents justice and honour

The tree represents life

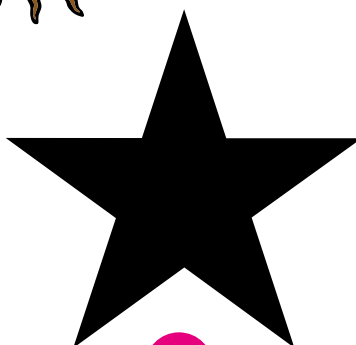


The wheat sheaf represents the harvest of foods



The shell represents pilgrimage

The star represents goodness, nobility and excellence.



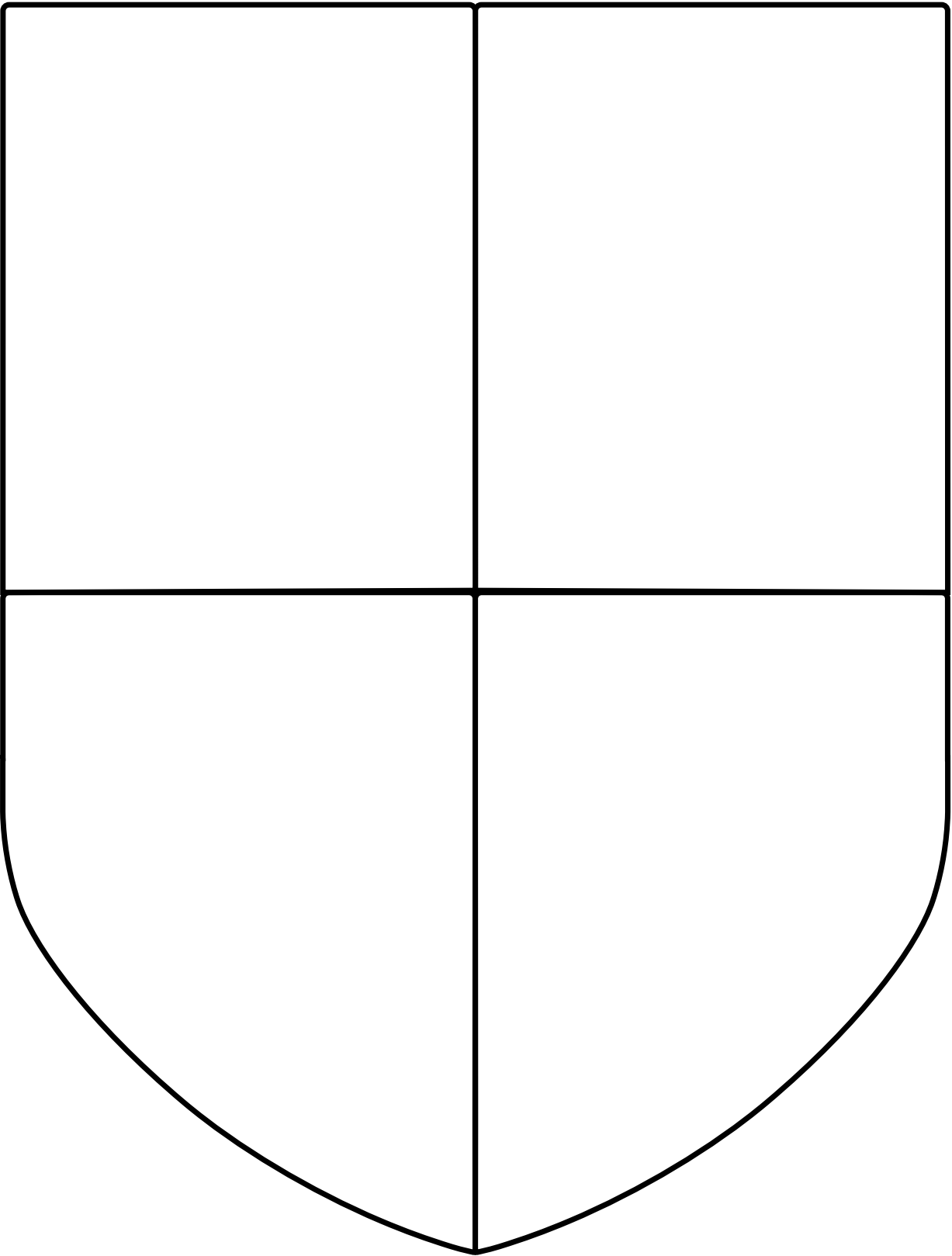
The rampant lion represents courage and ferocity





# Late Medieval - Coats of arms

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# Answers

**Page 2:** People lived in the same locations throughout different periods for the same reasons they often do today. Good access to resources such water, food, firewood. Good defenses and perhaps also a sense of place.



**Page 4:** Can you spot the rediscovered fragment in the old photo of piled stone?

**Page 8:** Castle Street, Chapel Street, Dale Street, Juggler Street (now High Street), Moor Street (now Tithebarn Street) Bank Street (now Water Street), and Whiteacre Street (now Old Hall Street).

**Page 9:** Archaeologists are able to find evidence of stone, brick, pottery and some metal objects easily however many of the objects made from wood or other organic material such as leather do not survive. These organic materials rot away unless conditions in the ground such as waterlogging preserve them. So we might find the metal tip of a spear but not the wooden handle.

Cover image: the earliest known painting of Liverpool depicting the town in about 1680 with Liverpool castle on the right ©National Museums Liverpool



**We look forward to  
seeing you at the  
Museum of Liverpool  
to discover more  
about the past!**