

THE SCANDINAVIAN ELEMENT BEYOND THE DANELAW

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ABSTRACT

The Scandinavian element is present in English mainly due to the Viking invasions and later settlement of the Vikings in the British Isles. Hence, it has been usually assumed that the Scandinavian loanwords entered the English language in the areas where the number of Scandinavian settlers was the highest, i.e. the Danelaw, inhabited by the Danes and the northern counties (Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire) settled by the Norwegians. The present paper will present evidence that the Scandinavian loanwords not only were also common in the non-Scandinavian parts of England but in some cases occurred exclusively in the west and south of the country. Additionally, the evidence collected for the present study will be compared to the area of "the Great Scandinavian Belt" proposed by Samuels (1985), in order to check whether the distribution of the investigated items agrees with Samuels' focal area.

Most scholars who have dealt with Scandinavian loanwords in England, concentrated on those areas where the concentration of the Scandinavian settlement was the highest, i.e. the Danelaw, inhabited mostly by the Danes, and the northern counties of England occupied by the Norwegians (Westmoreland and parts of Lancashire). The rest of the country was by and large neglected, since it was assumed that even if some loanwords were present beyond the Scandinavian areas, they were scarce and were originally borrowed in Viking England and only later transferred to the other areas. Björkman (1900-02) implies that words included in West Midland texts are unlikely to be of Norse origin, since that area was beyond the Scandinavian influence. We will try to show that these views are not necessarily correct. Their incorrectness has already been noticed by Dance (2003), who writes:

Current knowledge of the diffusion of originally Norse elements still tends, indeed, to depend more upon assumptions as to the regions of primary Scandinavian settlement, and therefore a concomitant expectation about the areas in which

words of Norse origin are likely to be located, than upon any thorough analysis of the linguistic materials themselves

(Dance 2003: 10).

Moreover, scholars ascribe an infrequent occurrence of Scandinavian loanwords to their restricted appearance in local dialects. In Aertsen (1987: 171), who explored the history of the word *leik*, we read:

Its low frequency of occurrence is due to the fact that it is a borrowing from Old Norse (cf. ON *leikr*), and as such it shares with the majority of other Scandinavian loanwords the feature that it never gained general currency and was restricted to the area of Scandinavian settlement

(Aertsen 1987: 171).

The present paper concentrates on the Scandinavian element present in English in the area beyond the Danelaw, i.e. in the West Midlands and Southern parts of the country. It will be argued that the occurrence of the loanwords is not only frequent but that a number of them did enter the English language in the area beyond the Scandinavian settlement and only later spread to the other parts of the country. In the second part of the paper, we will compare the distribution of the investigated loanwords with the area of “the Great Scandinavian Belt” proposed by Samuels (1985).

The data collected for the present study comes from a larger corpus of obsolete and dialectal loanwords borrowed from Old Norse, found in *the Oxford English dictionary (OED)*, *the Middle English dictionary (MED)*, Wright’s *English dialect dictionary (EDD)*, Orton’s *survey of English dialects (SED)*, and McIntosh’s *LALME*.

Out of 15 loanwords I have selected three, i.e. *graith*, *lug* and *Sheer Thursday* for illustration because of their highest frequency of occurrence. The first of the discussed loans, i.e. *graith* is an adaptation of ON *greiðr* ‘ready’. It first occurred in English as a verb at the beginning of the 13th c. Next, the word was recorded as an adjective (1225), noun (1300), and adverb (1340). The *OED* states that both the adjective and adverb went out of use in the second half of the 15th c., while the verb and noun are marked “dialectal”, the latter being used exclusively in Scotland. Unfortunately, the distribution of neither the adjective nor the adverb can be unambiguously traced, hence, they will be left out of further consideration. However, the verb *graith* constitutes a very interesting case. Its distribution both in ME and ModE dialects is shown on Map I. From the number of its recordings it seems that the verb was adopted in the South West of the country, spread to the West Midland counties, and only then entered the East Midlands and Northern counties. Some of its occurrences beyond the Scandinavian part of the country with specific senses are the following:

- a) ‘to prepare, arrange, make ready’
 - *Hali Meidenhad* (1225; SW)
 - *St Juliana of Cumae* (1225; SW)
 - Layamon’s *Brut* (1275, Callig.MS)
 - *Ancrene Riwe* (1230; SW)
 - Trevisa’s *Higden’s Polychronicon* (1387; SW, Gloucestershire)
 - *Assumption of the Virgin* (1485; SW)
- b) ‘to dress, array, ornament’
 - *South English Legendary* (unanalyzed portions) (1300) in Oxfordshire
 - In Gloucestershire:
 - i. *Havelok the Dane* (1300)
 - ii. Robert of Gloucester, *Chronicle*, version A (1325)
 - iii. *William of Palerne* (1375)
 - and in Devonshire in *Sir Firumbas* (1380)

The verb is also recorded with other meanings (despite the fact that these occurrences are occasional in the area beyond the Danelaw, it was in the South and West Midland counties that they appeared first, and only then spread to the East Midlands and Northern counties). These occurrences are:

- ‘to provide, give, pay’: in 1230 in *Ancrene Riwe* (South West) and 1325 in (Herefordshire);
- ‘to go, hasten’: in Gloucestershire – *William of Palerne* (1375);
- ‘to deal with, to handle roughly, treat harshly’: occurs in SW in Layamon’s *Brut* (1275; Callig.MS), then in Gloucestershire (1300, *Havelok*) and in Herefordshire (1325).

The last of its meanings, i.e. ‘to create, build, make, construct; cause, produce’, seems to have been adopted in Staffordshire (1225, *St. Katherine of Alexandria* (1)). Later it was recorded in 1275 (Layamon’s *Brut*).

The verb occurs occasionally in the East Midlands in the 14th c., whilst in the northern counties it is recorded as late as the 15th c. As far as the non-Scandinavian areas of England are concerned, the later usage of *graith* was sporadic, except for Cheshire, where it was common in the first half of the 15th c. Throughout the 15th c. it was recorded in SW in 1485 once, and in Hampshire in 1450 once. It became popular in the East Midlands (from the middle of the 14th c.) and later in the North (from the 15th c.), where, according to the *EDD*, it was still present in the 19th c.

It is worth noticing that the verb meaning ‘to get ready, prepare’ as well as ‘to clothe, dress’ adopted the prefix *a-*, with which it occurred throughout the

14th c. in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, as well as in Kent, where it was very popular in the middle of the 14th c.

To sum up, looking at the distribution of the verb *graith*, we could conclude that it surfaced in English in the South West at the beginning of the 13th c., then it moved northwards to the West Midlands, from where it spread eastwards to the East Midland counties and finally reached the northern parts of England, at the same time disappearing in the area where it originated.

Another verb of Scandinavian origin, which had the same meanings as the previous word, and was quite frequent in the non-Scandinavian areas, is *busk*, for the occurrences of the verb see Map II. *Busk* was recorded mostly in the West Midland counties (in the South it was recorded only four times, i.e. three times in Devonshire and once in Surrey, the occurrences are dated from the end of the 14th c. till the middle of the 15th c.). It was most popular in the 14th c. in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire. At the beginning of the 15th c. its use was restricted to Cheshire, where all its meanings occurred with high frequency. As far as the areas previously settled by the Scandinavians are concerned, the verb appeared occasionally, except for Middlesex, where it was frequent at the beginning of the 14th c., which could account for the single occurrence of the word in Surrey in the 15th c.

From the dates of the recorded occurrences of the verb, one could assume that it entered the English language in the southern part of the West Midlands, and then moved northwards to Shropshire (where it appeared from 1425 to 1500) and Cheshire (from the beginning of the 15th c. till the beginning of the next century). From Cheshire it was borrowed by people in Yorkshire, where single occurrences were recorded at the beginning of the 15th c. and where *busk* was very frequent until the beginning of the 16th c. Since then it has moved to Lancashire and Durham. Moreover, it could be assumed that the northern counties of the East Midlands took the verb from Yorkshire, since it occurred a number of times in Lincolnshire in the 2nd half of the 15th c. Additionally, at the beginning of the 16th c., the loan occurs in Rutland. Otherwise, single occurrences of the verb were recorded in Leicester (1500), Norfolk (1475) and Northampton (1475).

Another word of Scandinavian origin, which is of interest is *lug*. The distribution of the verb both in ME dialects as well as ModE varieties is presented on Map III. The *MED* first records it in Worcestershire (1390), where it occurred as a verb, meaning 'to pull'. Later, it appeared in Staffordshire with the meaning extended to 'to drag'. The verb occurs throughout the 15th and 16th centuries with relatively low frequency (see Map III). However, from the records in, both the *SED* and the *EDD*, one could conclude that the verb, whose meaning has been narrowed to 'to pull someone's hair' has become very common in the West Midlands from the 19th c. onwards (see Map III). Moreover, it spread to

the South (where it was absent in the Middle English period), as far as Hampshire and the Isle of Wight; it moved also to the eastern parts of the country, where it mostly occurred in Nottinghamshire but reached also some of the easternmost counties. It also entered the Northern Modern English dialects, especially those of Yorkshire and Lancashire, but also, with lower frequency, the dialects of Durham (3 records), Westmorland (twice), Cumberland (once) and Scotland (3 times).

The nominal equivalent of the word, followed quite a different path of development. It first occurred at the end of the 15th c. with the meaning 'one of the flaps or lappets of a cap or bonnet, covering the ears' (*OED*). Already at the beginning of the 16th c. its meaning evolved to 'an ear'. Its distribution in the Middle English period is uncertain, since the noun has been recorded mostly by the *OED*, while the *MED* gives only few examples, all of which come from the non-Scandinavian part of England. However, the distribution of *lug* in the later period, relying on the *EDD* and the *SED*, shows that it is extremely common in the areas of previous Scandinavian settlement, whilst its appearance in the West Midlands and Southern counties is much less frequent (Map IV). The meaning further evolved into 'hair'. However, it was recorded only once in the *SED* and twice in the *EDD*. All the records come from Yorkshire. Additionally, according to the *SED*, in the Yorkshire, Staffordshire as well as the Lancashire dialects *lug* is also used with the meaning 'handles'.

The divergence between the distribution of the noun and the verb *lug* might suggest that the two words, despite having the same origin and being identical in form, entered the English language separately.

A Middle English phrase which has never reached the Northern part of the country is *Shere Thursday*. It is far more frequent in the West Midland counties than elsewhere (see Map V). It means either 'the day before the Crucifixion' or 'Maundy Thursday', both meanings have become obsolete. The word with the former meaning occurred almost exclusively in the West Midlands from the middle of the 13th c., when it was recorded in Worcestershire till the end of the 16th c. (Staffordshire). In the other areas it surfaced only occasionally:

- 1325 in Berkshire
- 1450 in Cambridgeshire
- 1500 East Midlands

The latter meaning of the phrase was first recorded in the Danelaw area at the beginning of the 13th c. (twice) and then three times in the 15th c. (East Midland dialect). However, it was transferred to the West Midlands, where it was frequently recorded in the 15th c. In addition, it occurred in Somerset once (1462).

Despite the fact that it first surfaced in the East Midland area, the number of occurrences recorded in the non-Scandinavian part of England and the few occurrences in the Danelaw area may suggest that *Shere Thursday* was a West Midland phrase rather than an East Midland one.

The distribution of Scandinavian loanwords in England has already been dealt with by Samuels (1985), who suggested that the area of the greatest Scandinavian influence, both in Middle English and Modern English dialects was in the north of England, the so called "Scandinavian Belt". "A belt stretching from Cumberland and Westmorland in the west to the North and East Riding of Yorkshire in the east, often including part of Lincolnshire but excluding the old kingdom of Bernicia in Durham and Northumberland" (Samuels 1985: 106). He claims that in the modern dialects of that focal area the Scandinavian influence is most visible due to the density of the past Scandinavian settlement. At the same time, he indicates that "[I]t is thus possible to prove fairly conclusively that the focal area (with Lincs, to a greater or lesser extent) was, from the period of the actual settlements onwards, an area of deeper Scandinavian linguistic penetration than the rest of the Danelaw" (Samuels 1985: 111).

The comparison of the distribution of the lexical items investigated in the present paper with the focal area suggested by Samuels (1985), shows that, at least to some degree, these two do not overlap (see Map VI). It seems that the occurrence of a number of Scandinavian loanwords was more frequent in the non-Scandinavian parts of England than in the area of the "Great Scandinavian Belt" in Middle English. The occurrence of the investigated loanwords in Modern English dialects basically agrees with the focal area suggested by Samuels (1985), see Map VII.

On the basis of the material presented above, we may conclude that Scandinavian settlement was not always a decisive factor as far as the frequency of Norse-derived loanwords in both Middle and Modern English is concerned. A number of borrowings which seem to have been adopted into English and which exhibited high frequency in the non-Scandinavian areas of the country only later may have been transferred to the Northern and East Midland counties. Similar conclusions have been reached by Moskowich-Spiegel Fandiño (1996), who says that: "[D]espite the tendency to believe that the dialects of the Danelaw area have been subject to a bigger influence from Norse dialects so that a corresponding higher number of loans should be found in them, the data from my corpus show that this assumption is not necessarily true" (Moskowich-Spiegel Fandiño 1996: 156).

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Map I

Middle English dialects:

graith:

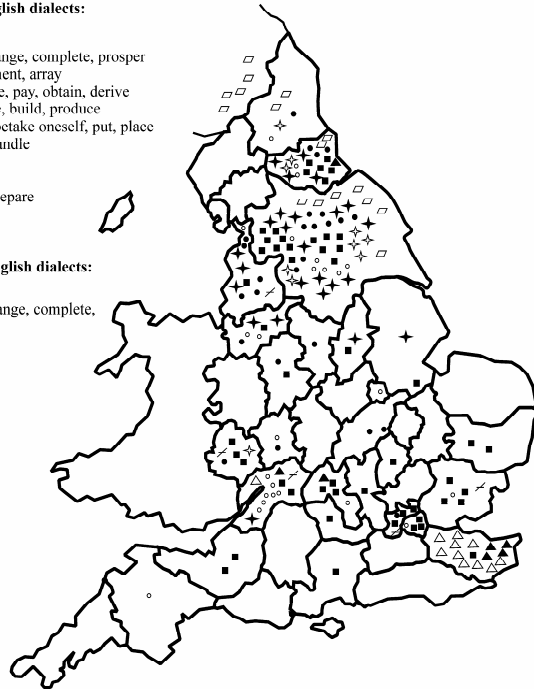
- prepare, arrange, complete, prosper
- dress, ornament, array
- ✦ provide, give, pay, obtain, derive
- make, create, build, produce
- ✦ hasten, go, betake oneself, put, place
- ⚡ deal with, handle

agraith:

- △ get ready, prepare
- ▲ clothe, dress

Modern English dialects:

- ◻ prepare, arrange, complete, prosper



Map II

Middle English dialects:

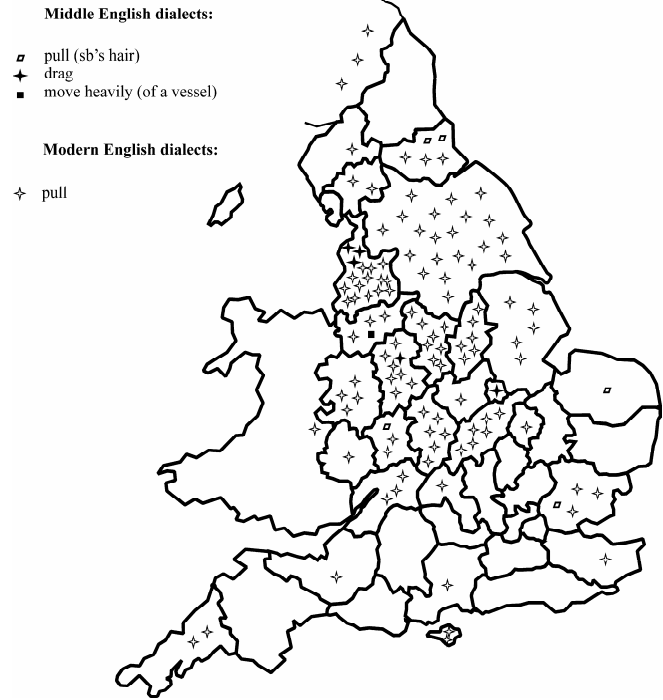
- ✦ prepare, get ready, arrange
- provide, furnish, get, obtain
- ▲ clothe, array, adorn, cover, get dressed
- go, betake oneself, hasten
- ⚡ hurry, be quick, hasten

Modern English dialects:

- ✦ prepare, get ready, arrange
- △ clothe, array, adorn, cover, get dressed
- hurry, be quick, hasten

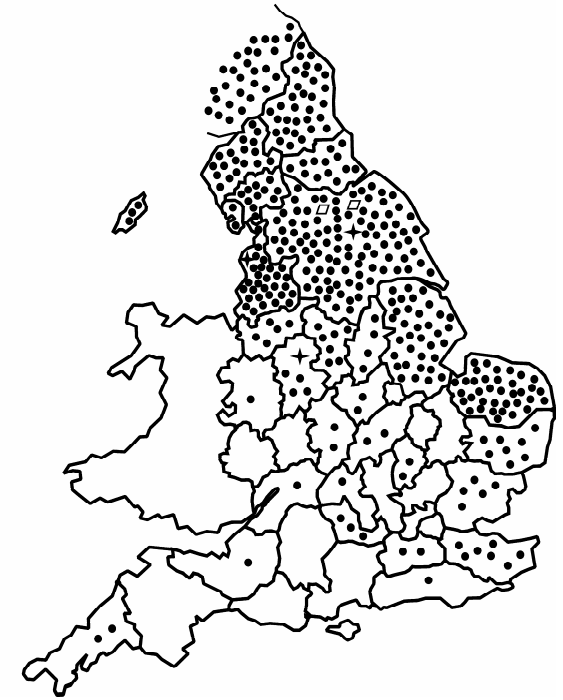


Map III



Map IV

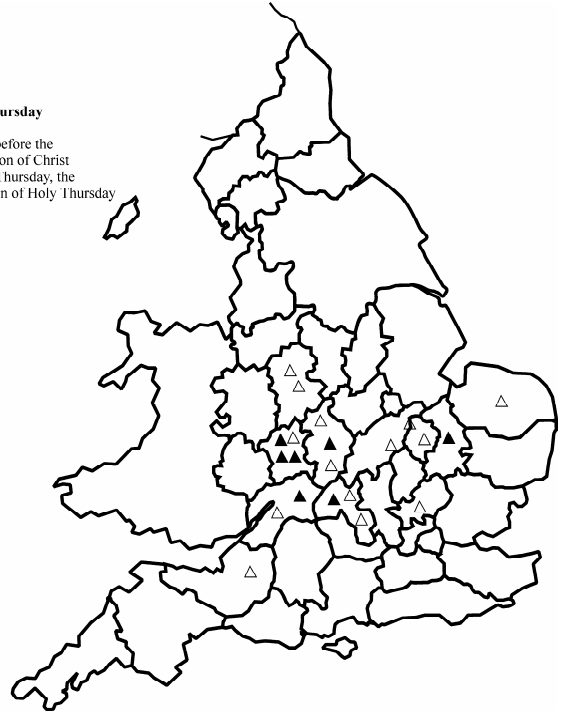
- an ear
- ▣ hair
- + handles



Map V

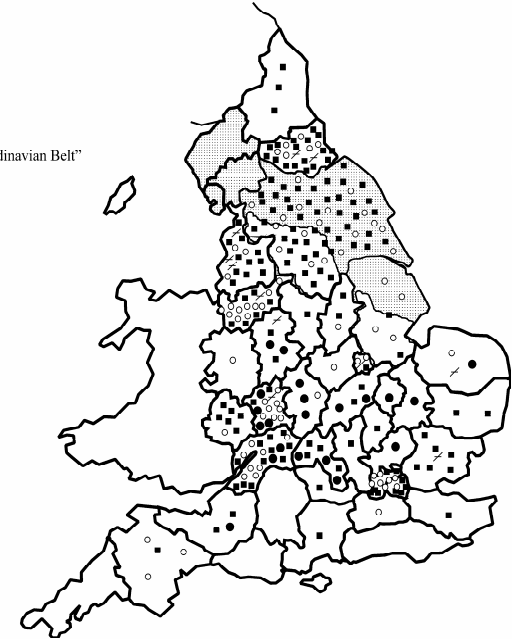
Shere Thursday

- ▲ The day before the Crucifixion of Christ
- △ Maundy Thursday, the celebration of Holy Thursday




Map VI

- graith
- busk
- / lug (v)
- Shere Thursday
- ▨ the "Great Scandinavian Belt"



Map VII

- graith
- busk
- ∕ lug (v)
- △ lug (n)

 The "Great Scandinavian Belt"

