

## Key

**Period:** Viking

**Date:** c.800-1000 A.D.

**Material:** Bone

**Use:** Security

**Reproduction**



1. This key is for a tumbler lock. Tumbler locks had a number of holes on the bolt and this key was made so that it would push the tumblers out of the bolt that secured the door.
2. Most surviving examples of keys are made of metal but sometimes, like this one, they were made from other materials.
3. Doors and chests, which were used for storage, were kept secure by lock and key.

### **Fantastic Fact!**

In Viking times it was the women that were in charge of the keys. This was because they had to look after the house when the husband was away trading, raiding or hunting. The women would wear the keys at the front of their clothing, beside their waist. This helped show the women's important position in the society.

The Keys were only given to married women. Girls were often married between the ages of 12-15! They did not get to choose their husband instead their families picked who they would marry. However, if the wrong choice was made then they could divorce their husband!

In Viking Mythology, Thor, the God of Thunder, gets his hammer stolen by the giants. To steal it back he disguised himself in a bridal gown, complete with a

### **Activity Idea!**

A key was used to keep things safe, what sort of things do you think Vikings might have wanted to keep safe? Write a list. What kinds of things might you want to keep safe? Write another list and then compare yours and the Vikings'. Are they different

**ZY 122**

## Whetstone

**Period: Viking**

**Date: c. 800 – 1000 A.D.**

**Material: Phyllite**

**Use: Sharpening**

**Site: North Uist (McKenzie Collection)**



1. It is important to keep iron tools in good condition – this means keeping them sharp! Whetstones such as this one were used to sharpen a variety of blades like axes, swords, knives, awls, sickles or chisels.

2. Whetstones were made from very hard, abrasive rocks. To use a whetstone, the blade that needed sharpened was ground against the surface of the whetstone. The hard rock wore down the iron blade and created a sharp edge.

3. It was important to have whetstones around in the Viking Age and people may have worn them as pendants to keep them handy in case they needed to sharpen something.

This whetstone is a Viking 'haunch shaped' type, with a bulb of stone at one end to act as a handle.

### **Fantastic Facts!**

Viking tools were not just made of Iron – Bronze, stone, wood and bone were all still in use.

Tools were used for a wide range of purposes, axes were used to cut down trees and shape wood, ploughs for tilling the fields and many other uses. In times of war some tools may also have been used as weapons.

The sword was one of the most important weapons. The greater the warrior, then the better his sword would be. This helped to show status and rank in society. Vikings would often name their swords.

### **Activity Idea!**

Can you write a story about a day in the life of a Viking whetstone? When would it have been used and how would it have been used? What kind of things would it have seen whilst

## Comb

**Period:** Viking

**Date:** c.800-1000 A.D.

**Material:** Bone

**Use:** Decorative/ hygiene

**Reproduction**



1. The Vikings had two types of comb. This example is double sided comb but there were also single sided combs. The double sided comb would have had coarse teeth on one side for getting out tangles in the hair and fine teeth on the other for getting out pests such as headlice!
2. Both men and women would use the combs. Men would have had hair that was about shoulder length and so needed a comb to keep it looking good. Men and women would have used their comb every day.
3. A comb was a personal item and so many examples have been found in graves. Men often had a case with their combs to protect the teeth. Women would have carried theirs in a pouch.

### **Fantastic Fact!**

This example is made from bone but they could also be made out of antler and wood. Not many sites have been found where antler was used in Scotland so it may be that it was imported from Norway.

The Vikings were some of the cleanest people in early Europe as they had a wash every Saturday!

### **Activity Idea!**

You will notice that this comb has a pattern all over it. What do you think it means? What pattern would you put on your comb? Draw an example of it.

## Amber Beads

**Period:** Viking

**Date:** c.800-1000  
A.D.

**Material:** Amber

**Use:** Jewellery

**Reproduction**



1. Amber is a natural material created from the fossilised resin of ancient pine trees. The Vikings treasured it greatly and used it to make jewellery worn by women and men. Beads would have been made by roughly shaping the amber using a saw and then drilling a hole through it. Then it would be finely shaped on a lathe before it was polished and sanded.

2. Much of the evidence for how the Vikings made amber beads comes from the excavation of Coppergate in York. There, archaeologists found evidence for many different crafts, including jewellery making. Lots of amber beads had been discarded because they had broken in the process of being made, evidence that amber bead making was quite tricky!

### **Fantastic Fact!**

The Vikings made beads and jewellery out of many different materials. This included silver, jet, copper and gold. Jet is a black material created from squashed, fossilised monkey puzzle trees.

### **Activity Idea!**

Research what Viking jewellery might have looked like. Do you think you could design or recreate a piece of Viking jewellery yourself? What kind of materials would you use?

**ZY 126**

**Pottery**

**Period: Viking**

**Date: c.800-1000 A.D.**

**Material: Clay**

**Use: Food consumption**

**Site: Freswick Links, Caithness**



1. This pottery is grass tempered which means that when it was being made grass was added into the clay to make it hold together better. If you look closely at the pottery you will see marks left by the grass on the pieces of pottery.

2. Pieces of pottery are called sherds. These sherds would originally have been part of a larger object, such as a plate, which would have been used by the Vikings to eat food from (just like we do today). Not many complete objects survive from the Viking period; it was such a long time ago that most are broken. Sometimes if an archaeologist can find enough of the sherds from one object they can piece them together again, which is a bit like doing a jigsaw puzzle!

### **Fantastic Fact!**

The Vikings didn't always use clay to make their pots; wood and soapstone were also used. They would make the pots out of what they could get locally otherwise they had to rely on costly imports!

To begin with clay pots were entirely made by hand. Later on the potter's wheel was introduced which meant that a nice even shape could be achieved. Once the pot had been made it was put into a kiln where it was baked for several hours to dry out the clay. (The grass would burn away at this time). Once this was done the pot was ready to use.

Sometimes some Viking food is found still inside the pots which are dug up by archaeologists! This food can be looked at by a scientist who will work out what it is. This helps to inform us about the type of food the Vikings were eating.

### **Activity idea!**

This pottery was made by hand. Why not use air drying clay and grass to make your own Viking pot?

**ZY 132**

## Spindle Whorl

**Period:** Viking

**Date:** c.800-1000 A.D.

**Material:** Steatite

**Use:** Spinning

**Site:** Unknown



1. Spindle whorls or drop spindles have been used for a very long time to help when spinning wool into yarn. Twisted thread was used to start spinning raw wool from a sheep which would be spun into a thread by dropping and spinning the spindle whorl. The fibres from the wool would twist together and be pulled tight by the weight of the whorl (the round stone on the spindle). These threads are then wound up and added to until a ball of yarn has been produced. The yarn would then be used to make clothes.

2. Viking women would often spin the wool as they were standing or walking about. This is why, when excavating a Viking house, archaeologists can find spindle whorls scattered about the floor as they have been lost or discarded.

### **Fantastic Fact!**

On the islands of Lewis and Skye, spindle whorls were called 'Clachan Nathrach', or adderstones. It was believed that snakes crawled through the hole to shed their skin. They would also use them to cure diseases in cattle which they believed were caused by snake bites. This belief probably started because spindle whorls were found lying on the ground by people who could see from their shape that they were not natural objects, but did not know what they had originally been used for. Some spindle whorls are decorated, often with runes. Runes were the alphabet that the Vikings used. We think runes were sometimes used in the past for magic and for trying to predict the future.

### **Activity Idea!**

Imagine you are decorating your own spindle whorl and draw the patterns you would use. Then, find out what Vikings runes looked like and try writing your own name using runes.

## Ship rivet

**Period:** Viking

**Date:** c.800-1000 A.D.

**Material:** Iron

**Use:** shipbuilding

**Reproduction**



1. A boat would be built with several planks of wood which would be held together by rivets like this one. The boat had to be made waterproof or it would sink. This was done by making rope from animal hair that would then be covered in tar and put between the planks.

2. Rivets are often all that is found in excavations of Viking ships. This is because the ship would have been made of wood which rots away when it is buried. Metal takes a much longer time to rot.

### **Fantastic Fact!**

The Vikings had many different types of ship to suit different purposes. The best known of these is the Viking longship. The longship was shallow and light which allowed it to be used at sea and in rivers. The design of the ship made it easy to take it on to and off a beach which helped the Vikings when they went raiding!

The Vikings would store their boats over winter as it was too cold and dangerous to go on the sea. The buildings they would store the boats in were called 'noust'.

Sometimes the soil can actually help to preserve objects. This has meant we have been able to find some complete longships that have provided lots of information about Viking ships. One example is the Gokstad ship which was found in Norway and was used as the burial for a man in 900AD.

### **Activity Idea!**

Viking longships would have an animal or human figurehead carved at the front. You have to design your own figurehead to frighten your enemies!

## ZY 251

### Bone pin

Period: Viking

Date: c.800-1000 A.D.

Material: Bone/antler

Use: Decorative

Site: Unknown



1. These pins would have been used as dress pins or hair pins. They come in a range of sizes and styles. Many have an animal head design on the top.
2. The hole in the pins would perhaps have been used to attach a cord to it, which would then be tied around the point of the pin to keep it in place.
3. These pins are made from bone but other materials, such as antler and metals such as silver, would also have been used.

### **Fantastic Fact!**

The two smaller pins are made from a type of bone called antler which comes from red deer. The antlers are mostly collected when the deer shed them at the beginning of spring every year.

They Vikings were keen recyclers! They ate animals such as sheep, pigs and goats. Every part of the animal would be used and the bones could be used to make pins like these. The largest pin is made from the leg bone of a sheep.

### **Activity Idea!**

Vikings used bone and antler for making tools and decorative items. They also made use of other parts of an animal – hide, horn, meat, sinew, teeth. How many uses can you think of for these things?

## Bone pin

Period: Viking

Date: c.800-1000  
A.D.

Material: Bone (rib)



Use: To hold clothes together

### Reproduction

1. This pin would have been worn to hold together a cloak. The hole in the pins would have been used to attach a cord to it, which would then be tied around the point of the pin in a figure of eight to keep it in place.
2. This example is made from bone but other materials, such as silver or antler, would also have been used.

### Fantastic Fact!

This pin is made from the rib of a cow or a sheep. Think of the shape of your own rib. Can you see how the craftsman used the natural curve of the bone to help him make the pin?

### Activity Idea!

Can you work out how the cord would have been threaded through the pin to keep it in place? Find a piece of string or cord and have a go at pinning together a piece of material! Archaeologists often make modern replicas of objects which they can use in different ways to try and understand how people might have used them in the past. This is called experimental archaeology.

## Needle case and needle

**Period:** Viking

**Date:** c.800-1000 A.D.

**Material:** bone

**Use:** Sewing

**Reproduction**



1. Viking women performed the important task of making clothes. Needle cases like this were made to hold needles to ensure they did not get lost. The one inside this case is made of bone but usually they were made from bronze or iron, which meant they were valuable.

2. This needle case has a cap on it to stop the needles from falling out. Instead of a cap, un-spun wool could be placed inside the case to ensure the needles stayed in place.

3. Women usually carried personal items and frequently used things around with them everywhere they went. These items were often carried by hanging them from beads that would be strung between the two oval brooches the women wore. As well as needle cases; tweezers, scissors and knives could all be carried in this way.

### **Fantastic Fact!**

Bone needles were often used to make fishing nets. The needle in this case would have been used for sewing cloth, as they are too small to be used on nets. The fishing nets could be made from plant or animal fibres.

### **Activity Idea!**

Find out what clothes the Vikings would have worn and draw a picture of yourself dressed as a Viking child. What material did Vikings make their clothes from? How did they make different colours of cloth? Do you think you would have been comfortable wearing Viking clothes?

## Ring money

**Period:** Viking

**Date:** c.800-1000 A.D.

**Material:** Silver

**Use:** Exchange

**Reproduction**



1. Ring money is the name given to the simplest type of silver arm ring which is usually plain. It gets its name because it was often cut up to be given in exchange for goods. It is common in Scotland but not in other Viking areas.
2. Ring money is often found with small cuts in it. This is where they have been checked to test how pure the silver is. The purer the silver the more valuable it is!
3. The ring money would be weighed to see how heavy it was and this would affect how much it was worth.

### **Fantastic Fact!**

Most examples of ring money that have been found come from hoards. In times of trouble a person would take all their valuables and bury them in the ground where they would be safe from enemies. People were not always able to go back and dig up their hoards, which is why we find them today. Hoards are not just found in Viking times but have been used throughout history to hide valuables.

In hoards in Scotland very few coins are found, but plenty of complete and incomplete examples of ring money have been which has helped archaeologists to figure out their use.

### **Activity Idea!**

Imagine you have to assemble your own hoard of precious items. Just like a Viking you have to protect your valuables from enemies. You can only pick 5 items to hide. What items would you choose and why? These items only have to be valuable to you, it does not matter what they actually cost!

## Brooch

**Period:** Viking

**Date:** pre – 1000 A.D.

**Material:** Silver

**Use:** Decoration on clothes

**Reproduction**



1. These brooches would be worn in pairs by Viking women. One would be fastened to each shoulder to hold up pinafores. The pinafore would be worn over a shift. While this example is silver plated, other materials such as gold were also used.
2. Brooches were important to women in Viking society. Apart from their functional use, the brooches were also very decorative. The type of material used to make a brooch and the amount of decoration was a good indication of status within Viking society. The more impressive the brooch is, then the greater the importance of the person. Brooches like this one are often found in burials.
3. This brooch is oval shaped which was a style that was produced on a large scale in Scandinavia and copied elsewhere. It is also known as a 'tortoise brooch.'

### **Fantastic Fact!**

The oval brooch is not found much at sites after 1000AD. This could be because of a change in fashion or because the influence of Christianity meant that fewer grave goods were buried.

Men also wore brooches to fasten their cloaks. These were of a different style to the female ones and were known as penannular brooches. They were round and looked more like the kilt pins which we have today.

### **Activity idea!**

See if you can find the following decorations on the brooch: a dragon, a cross, a swirl. What other patterns can you see?

## Soapstone Oil Lamp

**Period:** Viking

**Date:** c.800-1000 A.D.

**Material:** Soapstone

**Use:** Lighting

**Reproduction**



1. Every house would have had a hearth fire, which provided warmth and light, but in addition, the Vikings used lamps. Lamps like these were one of the more common ways in which a Viking house would have been lit. Oil or animal fat would have been poured into the lamp and a wick would have been added, simply floating on the top. The wick would have been made of many different materials, often as simple as a piece of twisted moss. The lamp would then be suspended, most likely from one of the beams of the house. Not all lamps were made of soapstone – sometimes the Vikings used scallop shells.

2. Soapstone is very soft and easily carved. It is thought that the soapstone was hewn from the rock face and then carved into vessels and lamps and sold. Soapstone lamps have been found wherever the Vikings went.

### **Fantastic Fact!**

Soapstone has had many different uses. The Vikings also used it for net weights, as moulds for casting metal, cooking pots and spindle whorls. Native Americans used to make pipes from soapstone as it is a good insulator, so they didn't burn their fingers!

### **Activity Idea!**

Think about all the different materials that the Vikings could have used for wicks for their lamps. Construct an experiment to test different wicks – which is the best?