



Nordic News

240 Sparks Street, PO Box 55023, Ottawa, ON K1P 1A1

How the Vikings Changed the English Language

by Hilde Huus

Dr. Ian MacKay had so much to tell us about how the Vikings changed the English language, at our Distinguished Speaker Series evening on November 16, it's hard to know where to begin. I am always curious about the origins of words, so it was great fun to learn that the word “muggy” - a word I use pretty often in our humid Ottawa summers, comes from the Old Norse word “mugge”, which actually meant “drizzle”. And who would have thought that the very scientific-sounding “litmus” comes from the Old Norse word for a kind of moss that was used for dyeing? As a Norwegian speaker, I was not at all surprised to learn that the word “egg” comes from the Old Norse word “egg.” (I have always found the Norwegian word for fraternal twins - “toeggede” - literally “two-egged” - very practical but quite funny).



*An exhibit at the Roskilde Viking Museum of Viking-era clothing styles,
origin of our “shirts” and “skirts”*

Dr. MacKay told us that there are about 400 words in the vast vocabulary of the English language that are definitely borrowed from Old Norse, and those words are common, everyday words that we use all the time. Words like dirty, ugly, husband, shirt and skirt (both borrowed from a single Old Norse word), die, yard and garden (again, both borrowed from one Old Norse word). Old Norse also had a major impact on English grammar, for example by replacing their existing verb forms of “to be”, as well as some of their pronouns.

In giving us an overview of the arrival of the Norse to the British Isles, he helped us understand how and why Old Norse had such an effect on English. By the time the Viking Age Norse settled in England in the 8th and 9th centuries AD, there was already an established population of Germanic peoples who had migrated from Jutland, Angeln (also known as Anglia), and Saxony by the 5th century AD. They spoke Old English, which was related to and similar to Old Norse. In fact, there were huge overlaps in their vocabularies. After the Viking Age Norse settled in England, contact with the Scandinavian countries was not cut off. Travel back and forth between the British Isles and Scandinavia continued.

Dr. MacKay explained that it is absolutely normal behaviour when two linguistic groups live together to engage in what he called “code-switching”. Those of us who grew up in immigrant families will recognize this scenario. Half way through a conversation in their maternal language, the speaker will suddenly throw in a word or two, or perhaps a sentence or two, in their second language. Sometimes a conversation will progress for a few minutes in one language, switch to the second language for a while, and then switch back to the first language. If you did not grow up in an immigrant household, you will no doubt have heard similar conversations among bilingual francophones who often mix in some English while they are speaking French, especially if there is an anglophone present. This is apparently completely normal human behaviour that has existed as long as there have been speakers of more than one language conversing together.

When languages are in such close daily contact, it is natural to borrow words from each other, but the meanings of those words usually shifts a little. Sometimes the meaning of a borrowed word becomes more narrow than in its original language. Dr. MacKay used the example of the word “fleck”, which meant “spot” in Old Norse, but in English has come to mean a particular kind of spot - one that is very small and made up of colour or light. Or a word may take on a wider, more general meaning when it is borrowed. So the Old Norse word “drit” meant specifically “sh__” but its meaning has broadened as it evolved into the more general English word “dirt.”

The audience was very appreciative and had lots of questions for Dr. MacKay. It is so intriguing to learn about how history makes its mark down through the centuries, and how we humans go about changing and evolving language without meaning to or even being aware of it. Dr. MacKay mentioned that there is a whole other story to be told about the influence of the Norman French on the English language after the invasion of 1066, and judging by the audience reaction to his talk, I suspect we will be inviting him back to tell us more.

Distinguished Speaker Series

Shamanism in the Icelandic Sagas: the Case of Seiðr

Our Distinguished Speaker Series resumes on Wednesday, **January 18**, 2017, when Dr. Céline Leduc will address the CNS on “Shamanism in the Icelandic Sagas: the Case of Seiðr.” Shamanism refers to practices used to connect with the spirit world. The best-known incident in the sagas takes place in The Saga of Eric the Red. The saga thought to have been written in the 13th century and describes the exploration of North America by the Norse.



Reconstruction of Eric the Red's Home in Iceland

Dr. Leduc is a graduate student in Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa. Her thesis studies have focused on the interpretation of female anthropomorphic artefacts from the Viking era as they relate to Icelandic mythology, and on comparing the shamanism of the Viking era in Scandinavia with that practised by the Saami.

Trygve Ringereide, the story of one young Norwegian airman

On **February 15**, CNS member Trygve Ringereide will tell us about his father's eventful life in a talk entitled “Trygve Ringereide, the story of one young Norwegian airman, and two countries in war and peace, as told by his son, Trygve John.”

Our Speaker Series takes place at the Officers' Mess, 149 Somerset Street West at 7:30 PM, but we recommend arriving a little early so you can get your name tag and socialize a little if you wish. Speaker events are free for members, with a \$5 charge for non-members. There is some parking available at the mess itself in the evenings.

Other Upcoming Events of Interest

- Join the Embassy of Denmark for the annual Winter Celebration at Rideau Hall hosted by Governor General David Johnston and Mrs. Sharon Johnston on **Thursday, January 28**. There will be Nordic activities for the whole family. The Danish Embassy will continue the tradition of creating a space of “hygge” – a traditional word for a warm, cozy feeling and atmosphere. The Ambassador and other embassy staff members will read fairy tales by the famous Danish author Hans Christian Andersen while you sip a on a complimentary hot drink.
- Not only does Canada celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2017 - Finland celebrates 100 years of independence. The CNS hopes to work with other Finnish-related organizations to mark the occasion. More information will follow. If you would like to help please contact CNS President Tim Mark (president@canadiannordicsociety.com or (613) 733-1744)

Past Presidents Ninan and Peter Glynn

(by Hilde Huus)

A few issues back, I wrote a little article about our first president, Daniel G. Harris. It seems about time I followed up with more information about the people who have served in that role over the years!

Ninan Glynn was the 2nd president of the CNS, serving in 1967-68. “Ninan” was actually her nickname. She was born Anne Margrethe Knudsen in Norway in 1919. She married Peter Glynn in 1946 and they moved to Canada in 1952, where they raised two sons. They were all avid cross-country skiers. Ninan was also active in the Gatineau Ski Club where she organized the annual fun races for the children.



From 1963 to 1968 Ninan and Peter rented the tiny cabin on Gatineau Ski Trail #1 called “Shilly Shally.” I found a delightful photo blog that explains the history of Shilly Shally and gives a real flavour of what the cabin was like (<http://shillyshally>). The photo above was taken from that blog. It’s possible that the woman in the photo is Ninan herself. I’m sure one of our members will be able to tell us!

(Many CNS members, especially those of Norwegian heritage, have been and are keen skiers, both downhill and cross-country. Our vice-president, Karin Birnbaum, is very active in both. Member Hjørdis Weibust has also done a lot of skiing in her life. During his lifetime her husband, Thorstein Weibust, ran the Ottawa Ski Club's program for children, with 100 instructors and 600 kids. And of course it was a Norwegian, the famous Herman “Jack Rabbit” Johannsen who first really got cross-country skiing going in Canada.)

Ninan’s husband Peter Glynn was the 7th president, serving in 1972-73. Peter was born in Germany, but he and his family moved to Norway in the 1930’s, when he was in his teens. During the German invasion of 1940, Peter led his mother, brother and sister in a month-long escape through the mountains of Norway, culminating in their evacuation on the last British naval vessel to leave southern Norway. He then joined the British Army, where he served for the duration of the war. After he and Ninan moved to Canada in 1952, he had a career in paper research.

After Ninan’s death in 1986, Peter continued his great interest in the Arctic, travel and nature. At the age of 83, he fulfilled his life-long ambition of visiting the Everest base camp and Rongbuk Monastery in Tibet. He died in Ottawa on April 11, 2003 at the age of 88.

Recently Recommended

CNS Council member Trygve Ringereide recommends Ingebretsen’s (<http://www.ingebretsens.com>) as a great place to shop for interesting gifts for all Scandinavians. It is based in Minneapolis but ships to Canada and Trygve reports being impressed with their products and their delivery service.

Contributions to Nordic News

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By mail

Please print and complete the membership form below, enclose a cheque payable to the Canadian Nordic Society and mail to:

Canadian Nordic Society

240 Sparks Street

Box 55023

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K1P 1A1

In person

You can join in person when you attend one of our luncheons or speaker events. Please speak to any one of our Council members



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