



Maritime master narratives in European national museums

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Abstract

Some national museums have produced narratives of the nation and its history around specifically maritime themes. To what extent are those presented histories ‘European’? Preliminary research was carried out in two areas: first, narratives based on exhibitions of Norse culture and history (which had an impact across Europe); and secondly, narratives in or about historic ships, vessels created in the context of European conflicts, and often sited on Europe’s littoral boundaries. In each case a photographic survey was undertaken to contribute to an overall record of the physical aspects of each gallery, focussing on specific exhibits and text panels to provide detail. Plans and sample publications were collected, and websites examined to obtain as comprehensive a view as possible of the way different institutions display their collections. Specific national themes were prominent, although the exhibits are about events which were shared European experiences.

Introduction

Narratives based on maritime themes in some European museums are considered here. To what extent are those presented histories 'European'? Two illustrative case studies are presented in the form of initial findings. The first is based on Viking galleries in Stockholm (Historiska Museet) and Dublin (National Museum of Ireland, Archaeology). The second concerns HMS *Victory* and its setting in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. Other collections studied will be referenced where comparisons are especially useful, including collections in: Berlin (Deutsches Technikmuseum, Neues Museum); Bremerhaven (Deutsches Schiffahrtsmuseum, Technikmuseum Wilhelm Bauer); Dublin (Collins Barracks); Gdansk/Gdynia (Centralne Muzeum Morskie, SS *Soldek*, ORP *Błyskawica*); London (British Museum, HMS *Belfast*); Oslo (Kulturhistorisk Museum); Portsmouth (Historic Dockyard, HMS *Warrior*, Mary Rose Museum, Royal Naval Museum); St Petersburg (*Aurora*); and Stockholm (Armémuseum, Sjöhistoriska Museet).

To map Norse activity comprehensively is to outline Europe (and to touch the New World); and later, sailing ships developed in European commerce and conflicts were to express one aspect of the continent's global reach. At a time when, it is claimed, 'nowhere is the issue of borderlands more salient than in the context of contemporary Europe' (Kaplan and Häkli, 2002: 3), and when historians are claiming that borders deserve 'sustained and detailed study' (Frank and Hadler, 2011: 4), it seems appropriate to indicate how these exhibits might relate to that context, or at least to show how most of these maritime stories are told at the edges of nations, not at the metropolitan centre. The research is also part of a collaborative project and parallels Dr. Sheila Watson's work on origins.

Stories at the edge of Europe: the Norse

Attempts to utilise aspects of European history in an effort to find commonalities have sometimes drawn on common cultural themes, including a putative 'Viking' past (Davies, 1996: 42–45; Halewood and Hannam, 2001: 569), leading to comments about 'the sanitized narration of the Vikings as benevolent merchants' in pursuit of a common European myth (Levy, Pensky and Torpey, 2005: xxvi). Here, galleries in Dublin (National Archaeological Museum) and Stockholm (Historiska Museet) will form the focus of an assessment of how the Norse are displayed.

There is a historiographical subtext here, for arguably the 'Viking Age' is a creation of nineteenth century nationalism. With the Christianisation of the Norse and the cessation of their raids (in the eleventh century), Europe largely forgot them. The exception was in Iceland, where Norse myths were recorded in the twelfth century, though O'Donoghue also traced early connections between Norse mythology and Anglo-Saxon culture, due either to shared (if distant) roots, or significant later Scandinavian settlement (2008: 85–102). By the sixteenth century, Scandinavians were exploring this Norse past in more detail, and the early Icelandic texts 'were a gift to Scandinavian historians and politicians... [who] felt very keenly the disdain of other European nations for its [Scandinavia's] supposed cultural backwardness' (O'Donoghue 2008: 107). Meanwhile, in Britain, from the Renaissance until at least the end of the nineteenth century, the Anglo-Saxons were seen as a founding element of the nation (Scragg and Weinberg 2000: 5). 'The struggles of Alfred the Great, perhaps 'the archetypal symbol of the nation's perception of itself' (Keynes, 1999: 225) against the 'Danes' was a well established story before

the (modern) 'Vikings' arrived, as the word 'Viking' was 'practically unknown' in Britain until it first appears in the 1807 *Oxford English Dictionary* (Wawn 2000: 304). The cult of Alfred, and the story of his conflict with what would become the Danes/Vikings was, by then, being drawn on heavily by the British in response to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars (Keynes, 1999: 289), as the Viking revival came about.

Wawn argues that the current popularity of Norse history owes much to this renewal of interest in the nineteenth century in Britain, suggesting that early Scandinavian publications provided the raw materials for the Victorians (Wawn 2000: 17). In this period, Wawn argued, 'Vikings' came to feature in a wide range of media, such as 'paraphrased sagas, prize essays, popular lectures, poems, plays, pious novels, papers in learned journals, and the like' (Wawn, 2011). For the Victorians, this Viking past 'becomes the acceptable face of constitutional monarchy, democratic accountability, social Darwinism, upward social mobility, and family values spirituality' (Wawn 2011). It also inspired academic research and influenced the academy (in the founding of the Viking Society for Northern Research in London in 1892, for example). The Norse myths went on to be 'moralised, allegorised, nationalised, imperialised, colonialised, politicised, sectarianised, regionalised and genderised' (Wawn 2000: 371).

This popularity was affected by two world wars (and in particular the links between Norse myth, racism and Nazi culture), but it has since recovered, and the Historiska Museet in Stockholm has an exhibit ('Vem Berättar din Historia/Who Tells Your History'), which illustrates some popular modern uses of the Viking 'brand' in Sweden and beyond. Halewood and Hannam (2001: 566) noted a significant expansion in Viking related tourism since the 1970s, claiming as a result, 'a heritage tourism phenomenon that fosters a degree of European integration'. However, 'Vikings' and aspects of Norse mythology are also exploited among racist white supremacists (O'Donoghue, 2008: 163; Gardell, 2003).

Do museums present the Norse past as a European or a national story? It is noticeable that conventional history books, popular works and especially maps of Norse history will almost always be heavily marked around the edges of Europe, with Norse voyages around the coast in the north, west and south, and along the great rivers linking the Baltic and the Black and Caspian seas, relating to modern geopolitical perceptions of Europe.

This may be reflected in museums which present the story of the Norse in different ways, in their use of maps of Norse activity. The Archaeology Museum in Dublin shows information clustered richly around Europe's north-west littoral and the Baltic, that is with most Viking activity charted in Western Europe. This links to and builds on finds and historical references connected to Dublin's trade, in a wall panel, 'Archaeological excavation of Dublin' with its map, 'Dublin and the Viking World'. Here the focus is on the Norse contribution to Ireland's past. Oslo's Kuturhistorisk museum's Norsk forhistorie section, including the Vikings, lacks a significant map of Norse activity in Europe, presenting them largely as a Norwegian cultural phenomenon, as 'us'. By contrast, in Stockholm's Historiska Museet, an audio-visual display (*Den Europeiska Scenen* in gallery 2, Vikingar), focuses on Europe and Iceland in a series of frames on 'Anfallen mot Europa 900-talet e. Kr.' Here Norse activity in Europe is set in the context of attacks by Arabic and Magyar invasions, in a museum with a more complex relationship with the Viking Age, and where the association of the Vikings with 'us' is far from sure.

A more extensive map of Viking activity is in Berlin's Neues Museum (room 206, case 14 map 'Die Wikinger') including Norse journeys from Russia and the Black Sea in the east to North America in the west. A similar wide perspective is taken in Gdansk's Centralne Muzeum Morskie, where the map 'Podróże Wikingów VIII – XI w.' (room 1, case 3) is centred on Europe, but includes the Caspian and beyond in the east, and Greenland and North America in the west.



Figure 1: Europe outlined by Norse activity: Gdansk, Centralne Muzeum Morskie (© The Author).

In both Berlin and Gdansk, we could argue that the Norse are seen as the 'other'. London's British Museum has a map of Norse activity (room 41, information panel 'The Viking World AD 750-100'), which is very extensive, with large parts of north America, Eurasia and north Africa framing Viking journeys. These more inclusive maps (in terms of geographic scope) are wider ranging and in the case of London, seem appropriate for a museum, which claims to be a 'world museum' and to have a 'totally unique collection' (MacGregor, 2009). Here, whether the Vikings are 'us' or not may be less important. Even though Norse settlement in eastern and north-western England had a significant impact on Britain, the museum is about a wider, global story. These maps suggest that although the Vikings are often seen as a Europe-wide phenomenon, the Norse are used differently in different museums.

The galleries in Dublin and Stockholm, examined in more detail, serve to illustrate this. Currently, Ireland's national museums display the country's history at two main sites. The Archaeological Museum in Kildare Street exhibits prehistoric and medieval Ireland (including the Vikings). The Early Modern period onwards is covered in displays in the Museum's Collins Barracks site. Another key institution for 1916 is Kilmainham Gaol, which is funded separately by the Office of Public Works.

There had been growing interest in the island's Celtic, Gaelic past, reflected in the Museum in the 1900s (Bourke, 2011: 324-5). This had the status of a 'Golden Age' in the emergent nation, and Irish leaders in the struggle for independence, such as Collins and Pearse, greatly valued this Gaelic past, perhaps because it showed a vision of a 'Golden Age' which 'told modern Irish men and women what was "authentically theirs" and how to be "themselves" once again in a free

Ireland' (Smith, 1991: 67). Arguably, the Gaelic past was deployed to put distance between Irishness and Britishness. This is explored by Wallace (currently Director of the National Museum), who noted that until the 1960s, prehistoric archaeology, especially Ireland's ancient Celtic culture, was privileged at the expense of medieval historical archaeology (Wallace 2008: 168-70).

As for popular perceptions of the Vikings, the Irish medievalist Clarke summed up Irish attitudes in 1995, saying the Vikings were regarded as 'inveterate plunderers and psychopathic thugs who terrorised the Irish, and Irish monks in particular, until that outsize heroic figure, Brian Bóruma, denied them their conquest of Ireland by his noble victory at Clontarf in 1014.' (Clarke 1995:7). Since then, a new Viking past has been introduced to the national narrative. Clarke noted that the museum played a role here: A.T. Lucas (director of the National Museum from 1954 to 1976) highlighted collaboration between the Norse and the native Irish, and Wallace built on that legacy (Clarke 1995), aided by the discovery of a major Norse site in the Wood Quay area of Dublin. This became a centre of attention when, in 1975, the area was earmarked for development as new council offices. There were large-scale public protests against the destruction this would cause to the Norse archaeology of the area. Protests and a campaign by the Friends of Medieval Dublin failed to preserve the site, but, together with a rescue excavation led by Wallace, it did at least help restore Viking history to Ireland's story, and it preserved many valuable finds, for on investigation, the site seemed likely to have been the most important of its kind in Europe. Wallace goes on to say that its importance was not fully appreciated at the time, and the excavation led to some criticism, which his team found difficult to confront. Years later, Wallace reflected that the museum might have done more:

'we should have faced up to the commitment of our heritage. Philosophically we should have accepted the Vikings and the heritage of urbanisation as much a part of Ireland as the Celts or as any of the prehistoric peoples. I think there were philosophical difficulties, there were administrative difficulties, and there was a kind of bureaucratic shyness in facing up to our responsibilities' (Wallace 1989: 24)

However, since then, the Archaeology Museum in Kildare Street has gained a Viking gallery (called 'Viking Ireland') in 1995, and a medieval gallery (called 'Medieval Ireland 1150-1550'), marking a significant extension to a somewhat monolithic, ancient Celtic past. The Medieval gallery recognises the intervention of Anglo-Norman adventurers in Ireland, an event which was to set a trend for the next seven centuries of English and British involvement in, and usually domination of, Ireland.

The museum at Kildare Street is laid out on a loosely chronological basis. From the entrance, the visitor enters the ground floor galleries about pre-historic Ireland, including a Treasury, which includes Celtic designs in gold, silver and jewels. Finds in peat bogs are linked to similar discoveries in England, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark, a wider European context. There is also a display on the Hill of Tara, an important prehistoric site, which played a significant role in Irish history. It was associated with St Patrick and the Christianisation of the island, and with the tradition of the 'High King' of the island. Here, stepping out of its prehistoric context for a moment, the museum explains more recent events connected with Irish nationalism which happened at the Hill of Tara, for example how in the 1590s the Irish O'Neil

chieftain celebrated successes against the English here, and how in 1843 Daniel O'Connell led a great rally demanding repeal of the Union of Irish and British parliaments.



Figure 2: 'Viking Dublin' gallery. At the far end, a room showing Christian art from the period 'closes' the Viking age, and visitors exit to the right to the Anglo-Norman exhibits (© The Author).

The Viking gallery covers the period c.795-1170 and the entrance to the gallery is marked by a replica of a small Viking trading vessel, a recognisable icon. The gallery commences with a video describing how Ireland's 'Golden Age' was shattered by the arrival of the Norse. It goes on to address several themes, in particular the coming of the Norse and their conquests in Ireland, around burials and weapons; then the culture of the Norse settlers, including textiles, jewellery and slavery; and displays around craftsmanship, especially from the Wood Quay site. The emphasis here is on the development of early medieval civic life, with many domestic exhibits and reconstructions of Viking homes in Dublin. Whilst violent aspects of Norse life are illustrated, with weapons, a slave chain and a skull showing signs of a violent attack for example, this is set in a much wider context. Although the exhibit focuses on Ireland, the detailed labelling of objects indicates that the Norse settlers had wide-ranging connections with Britain, Scandinavia and the rest of Europe. The gallery shows how, by the end of the tenth century, Christianity had been adopted by the settlers and a Hiberno-Norse culture had developed. Towards the end of the exhibition, a panel sums up the Norse legacy: they founded the capital of Ireland, introduced the first use of money, greatly increased and extended trading links, introduced changes in dress, developed improved weapons (and iron work generally), introduced spurs and stirrups, and contributed to the Irish language.

Overall then, the gallery makes a positive case for the Norse contribution to the development of the island. However, the text also notes that 'one of the most lasting legacies of the Vikings in Ireland was their unconscious contribution to interesting England, its clergy and rulers, in

Ireland' (Anon, a, n.d.), which explains that this led to Anglo-Norman intervention in Ireland. The gallery closes with a room on the church in early Ireland, incorporating Norse work, since the Vikings became Christianised, bringing the period to a close. The visitor is now primed for the next gallery, Medieval Ireland, where the impact of Anglo-Norman colonisation is explored.

The gallery relates the story of Viking Ireland closely to a large number of well-preserved finds, mainly from Wood Quay, leaning on the agency of 'science' (in as much as archaeological practise represents scientific methodologies) to present an authoritative, professional interpretation. By introducing new pasts to what had been a largely Gaelic preserve, the museum was instrumental in changing what was, to some extent, a monolithic Gaelic story. The richness of the site at Wood Quay aids the museum in presenting a strongly Irish version of the Norse. This is echoed in the 'Treasury, where 'Viking Art Styles' are incorporated into the Irish artistic tradition. The Cross of Cong, a famous ornamented processional cross is on display here, and its decoration reflects both native Irish Romanesque and Scandinavian Urnes styles. By the end of the tenth century, for this museum, the Vikings have almost become 'us' rather than the 'other'. This is not a European story, it belongs to Ireland, validated by archaeology and contextualised and related carefully to the preceding Gaelic era and the future Anglo-Norman dominance.



Figure 3: Stockholm, Historiska Museet, exterior showing the use of Vikings in sculptures, bronze doors and posters (© The Author).

Stockholm's Historiska Museet covers Sweden's history from prehistoric times until the modern day, in a series of galleries: Forntider, Vikingar, Medeltida Konst, Textilkammaren, and Sveriges Historia (Prehistory, Vikings, Medieval Art, the Textile Room and History of Sweden).

In addition there is a treasury (the Guldrummet/Gold Room) and space for temporary exhibitions. However, the Vikings have strayed from their home in the Viking gallery. Indeed, the museum's logo, the Norse god Odin on his eight-legged horse, features on its publicity, including the web page header. The austere facade of the museum features sculptures and bronze doors, both the work of Bror Marklund, with a Viking theme, but almost as a dark warning rather than a celebration (Odelburg, 1983). A replica of a carved lion with Norse graffiti (the real statue is in Venice), and (in 2011) a banner showing a child dressed as a Viking, are in the foyer, whilst the shop includes many Viking themed gifts.

The Vikings also appear in the Forntider galleries. In an imaginative display modelled on an airport departure lounge, the museum explores the role of archaeology in modern life ('Vem Berättar din Historia/Who Tells Your History') and here shows popular examples of the use of the Viking 'brand'. The (English) text of the panel explains that:

'It was not until the 1870s that leading archaeologists such as Oscar Montelius started to call the period between 800 and 1050 the Viking period. This period was seen as the high point of Old Norse development by the archaeologists of that time, a high point enjoyed by the Swedes but not by the Finns, Sami, Estonians or Slavs who lived in neighbouring countries.'
(Anon, b, n.d.)

The exhibits here deconstruct the 'Viking Age' from this emergence to the current wide use of the Vikings in a range of popular media, as for example in the logo of the 'Boro Vikings' (a club for Swedish supporters of the English football club Middlesbrough), in advertising, and in entertainment.

In fact the 'proper' Viking gallery itself is fairly conventional, organised mainly around the themes of aristocrats, crafts and life in the Viking period (and some modern interpretations of it) and the initial coexistence of paganism and Christianity. It has a model of a Viking ship (the Gokstad ship), audiovisual displays of the age of migrations (which provides a Europe-wide context for the Vikings), and a wealth of other artefacts. There is a small display illustrating the adoption of the Viking myth by the Nazis, the one moment when the gallery steps firmly aside from 'just' display and makes a judgement, offers an opinion. There are also reconstructions of Viking clothing and a model of the Viking town of Birkby, and exhibits of domestic life and agriculture, as well as the exploration of social hierarchies and examples and descriptions of the significant role of women in Viking society.

However, because the museum has invited visitors to 'deconstruct' the stories it tells, some visitors may be wondering if these really are the real Vikings, or whether Vikingar is just a museum version of Vikings – just what happens when you let curators use the Norse in their displays.



Figure 4: 'Real Vikings Monoski'. Stockholm, Historiska Museet, an example of modern commercial exploitation of the Vikings (© The Author).

In thinking about the Historiska Museet, it seems ambivalent about the Norse. In 'Who tells your history?' it frankly discusses the creation of the past, and the Viking myth in particular. But then it presents a musealised version of the Norse, and here the usual battery of techniques is used, based on the preservation and exhibition of objects. It is almost as though the Viking myth is a stage on which the museum can enact a series of plays about our relationship to the Norse.

The layout of the museum is also significant here: pre-history is grouped on the ground floor and can be approached in different ways (physically but also intellectually), whereas on the first floor (upstairs), there is a new gallery (Sveriges Historia), which has a very coherent, linear 'factual' story of the past, starting where the Vikings stopped – with the introduction of Christianity – and taking Sweden's history to the present day.

We have seen that the Vikings permeate the museum more than other times and cultures. They are almost always present. In many ways they seem to function as a 'founding myth' for Sweden. However, as the Viking gallery reminds us, there was no place called Sweden in that

period. Whilst the geographic extent of Norse activity indicates that it was a European story, large sections of this are inevitably missing from the museum: it does not explore in any depth the role of the Norse in Russia, the history of the Principality of Kiev, of the lucrative slave trade with Islamic markets around the Caspian, or of intrigues in the palaces of Byzantium, which are also part of the story of the Norse from what is now Sweden. Perhaps also the Vikings are an uncomfortable founding myth (see also Aronsson, forthcoming 2012): the messages from, for example, Stockholm's military and naval museums are very much about the futility of war, the benefits of peace, the role of Swedish forces in UN peacekeeping, and in combating piracy around the Horn of Africa. This is in tune with a country that has invested heavily in neutrality, a strong theme in both the Armémuseum and the Sjöhistoriska museet in Stockholm.

Sited at the edge of Europe: historic ships

Ships are usually large objects in their own right, usually built for specific purposes, for example the *Cutty Sark* was built in 1869 to serve the tea trade between India and Britain. Also, they are often strongly associated with specific historic events and often sited away from national centres, for example the *Aurora*, preserved in St Petersburg is linked to its role in triggering the October Revolution in 1917 and still preserved in Russia's 'window on the West'. We might therefore expect them to stamp their own shape on any narrative, but research suggests that this is not always the case, and museums are able to use master narratives (which are not always obvious) to shape the stories told by and on historic ships.

The example considered here is HMS *Victory*. It can be regarded as an iconic ship for the British, probably for two reasons: it took part in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, a significant victory over European opponents; and Admiral Nelson, regarded as a hero at the time and since, was killed during the battle, on board this ship. In addition, the ship itself is a typical, if large example of the impressive sailing warships used when Britain achieved a naval dominance that lasted until the early twentieth century. It represents European warship design from 'the great age of sail', an impressive example of the technology used in the age when Britain competed with other European powers, especially France and Spain, for global domination.



Figure 5: HMS *Victory* in dry dock at Portsmouth Dockyard, showing the complex rigging and guns mounted on three decks (© The Author).

The ship itself was launched in 1765 in Chatham, Kent, and was extensively overhauled around 1800. Repaired after Trafalgar, it saw further service until 1812, when it was moored in Portsmouth Harbour as a depot ship. Later, it was used as a training school, until 1906. By 1920, the ship was in very poor condition. At this point, the SNR (Society for Nautical Research, a UK based group) campaigned for its restoration, raising funds and supervising the work, and getting the ship moved into dry dock where it remains, as a major visitor attraction in Portsmouth. It had to be repaired following damage during an air raid in 1941, and a recent overhaul, restoring it as

closely as possible to its condition in 1805, was completed in 2005 (in time for the anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar).

The ship is funded by the Ministry of Defence, as it is still technically a commissioned ship of the Royal Navy, is used from time to time by Naval staff, and has a commanding officer as well as a curator and other staff. The SNR oversees its preservation and contributes around sixty thousand pounds annually on this and interpretation (Anon c, n.d). The *Victory*'s story is also told in some of the galleries in the Royal Naval Museum nearby. This is run by Trustees, assisted by a grant-in-aid from the Ministry of Defence. It has four main galleries: the '20th Century Gallery'; the 'Trafalgar Sail Gallery'; 'Nelson's Gallery'; and the 'Victory Gallery'. The Navy has three other museums: the Royal Marines Museum (in Portsmouth), the Royal Navy Submarine Museum (in Gosport, nearby), and the Fleet Air Arm Museum, some eighty miles to the west. The National Museum of the Royal Navy is the coordinating organisation for these collections.

It is important to note the physical position of the ship and the Dockyard. A few miles to the north of the Dockyard, and overlooking the city, is Fort Nelson, one of five large forts built in the nineteenth century to defend Portsmouth. Now part of the Royal Armouries (a national collection), and open to the public, its displays include a 'Turkish cannon from 1464 which once protected the Dardanelles, and parts of the Iraqi 'super gun' commissioned by Saddam Hussein of Iraq in the 1980s. Also nearby is Portchester Castle, the well-preserved remains of a Roman fortress built to defend the coast in the last years of Roman rule, set at the far end of the harbour, open to visitors and managed by English Heritage. Spitbank Fort, a stone fortification set in the sea outside the harbour, can also be seen. It was completed in 1878, is currently privately owned, and can be hired for parties and celebrations. (Less well-known are dozens of other fortifications around the city and the Isle of Wight, many built in the 1860s in response to fear of an attack by France, and designed to protect the naval base). *Victory* is at the centre of a range of maritime heritage.

On entering the Historic Dockyard, the Visitor Reception Centre for the complex encourages visitors to buy a combined ticket, giving access to six attractions. Although the attractions are run by a variety of organisations, they are presented to the visitor in a unified way as one major venue. As well as HMS *Victory*, 'Action Stations' is an 'interactive experience', actually a series of displays based around life on one of the UK's Type 23 frigates, and centred on a short action film, *Command Approved* (Moore, 2000). The Harbour Tour is a forty-five minute boat tour of the harbour, taking visitors very close to modern warships. HMS *Warrior* is a sail and steam powered, screw driven Victorian era 'ironclad' launched in 1860. The Mary Rose Museum is dedicated to preserving and displaying the relics of the *Mary Rose*, a Tudor warship built for Henry VIII (whose iconic portrait confronts visitors at the entrance). These other attractions are not national museums, but draw funding from trusts (and in fact often have a complex range of sources of funding).



Figure 6: Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. On the left, the entrance kiosk and access to HMS *Warrior*. In the background, access to the Harbour Tour, and in the distant red brick building, the Royal Naval Museum. On the right, the Mary Rose Museum, Action Stations, cafes and shops, and in the background, the masts of HMS *Victory* (© The Author).

The Historic Dockyard is also the base for several other less well known historic craft. These include a high speed launch (HSL 102) built in the 1930s and used by the Royal Air force for rescuing downed pilots in the Second World War, and MGB 81, a Motor Gunboat launched in 1942, both normally moored close to the visitor route. HMS M33, built in 1915, is in a dry dock near the Victory. In addition, an hourly 'waterbus' runs from the Dockyard to two nearby museums: the 'Explosion!' Museum of Naval Firepower, and to the Royal Navy Submarine Museum. Shops and cafes sell maritime themed goods and food.

The Royal Naval Museum and HMS Victory are at the far end of the publicly accessible part of the dockyard, adjoining the quayside where current Royal Navy ships tie up when in port. Often, the berth nearest HMS Victory and the museum is occupied by one of the Navy's Type 45 warships. These are the Navy's newest ships and are sometimes referred to by the Navy as 'aircraft carrier escorts'. Nearby, the Mary Rose itself is being preserved and will be open to visitors when the building housing it has been redeveloped. So, Victory is at the heart of a very patriotic setting, surrounded by reminders of Britain's past greatness as a naval power, and by some of the most potent of the Royal Navy's current warships.



Figure 7: A patriotic setting for HMS *Victory*, Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. To the left is the Trafalgar Gallery of the Royal Naval Museum, and HMS M33, just visible. In the background, HMS *Diamond*, one of the Royal Navy's latest warships, is berthed (© The Author).

The *Victory* is at first glance a technical exhibit: the complexity of eighteenth century warship design is very evident, together with some idea of the skill required to work the ship. It is divided into seven levels or 'decks' and visitors can access most areas. Highlights include the Great Cabin, where the admiral would have lived and worked, the Quarter Deck, from which the ship would have been controlled when in action, and the recently restored Grand Magazine, a complex area where around thirty five tons of gunpowder was stored, which had to be kept dry and safe from fire. During the tour, the social conditions of the crew are explored, with displays showing how the decks were used for working, living and sleeping, and how a crew of around eight hundred were provided with food. Other displays cover discipline and punishment, and health care for the crew.

However, it is more than a technical and social exhibit. There is a brass plaque on the Quarter Deck marking the spot where Nelson was mortally wounded. The lowest deck, the Orlop Deck, formed a medical station during battles, and is the part of the ship where Nelson was brought, and where he died. A painting (a copy of Nevis, *The Death of Nelson, 21 October 1805*, 1807), showing Nelson's last moments, surrounded by his officers, is displayed here. The significance of this place is indicated in the leaflet, which notes that photography is 'permitted throughout the ship with the exception of the Shrine' (Anon, d, n.d). Visitors board the ship via an entrance on the Middle Gun Deck, and this leads almost immediately to the Ward Room. This space was reserved for the commissioned officers of the ship and was where they dined and relaxed, an area with its own etiquette. Information panels here list some of the officers: Bligh, who was wounded and with Nelson when the admiral died; Pasco, the signal lieutenant responsible for hoisting Nelson's famous message that 'England expects that every man will do his duty'; and Adair, the captain of Marines, killed during the battle. Near the Great Cabin, a wooden plaque lists sixteen 'Flag Officers' (admirals) based on *Victory* between 1778 and 1812. Several other biographical references appear in the labelling around this area. This biographical focus is reinforced in the

Souvenir Guide to the Dockyard (Anon, e, 2010): the sections on HMS *Victory*, 'The World's Greatest Warship' (18), start with a cutaway drawing of the ship, and shows the position of Nelson's cabin, followed by a section on 'Lord Nelson's Flagship' (21), with the spot where Nelson was wounded, and so on.

The Royal Naval Museum, a few steps away, features several galleries including the 'Nelson's Gallery', which looks at Nelson the man and Nelson the 'hero', and the 'Sailing Navy gallery', the latter including an exhibit called 'The Professional Navy'. The *Victory* and the nearby museum are perhaps as much about the professionalism, courage and traditions of the Royal Navy's officers as about the ship itself.

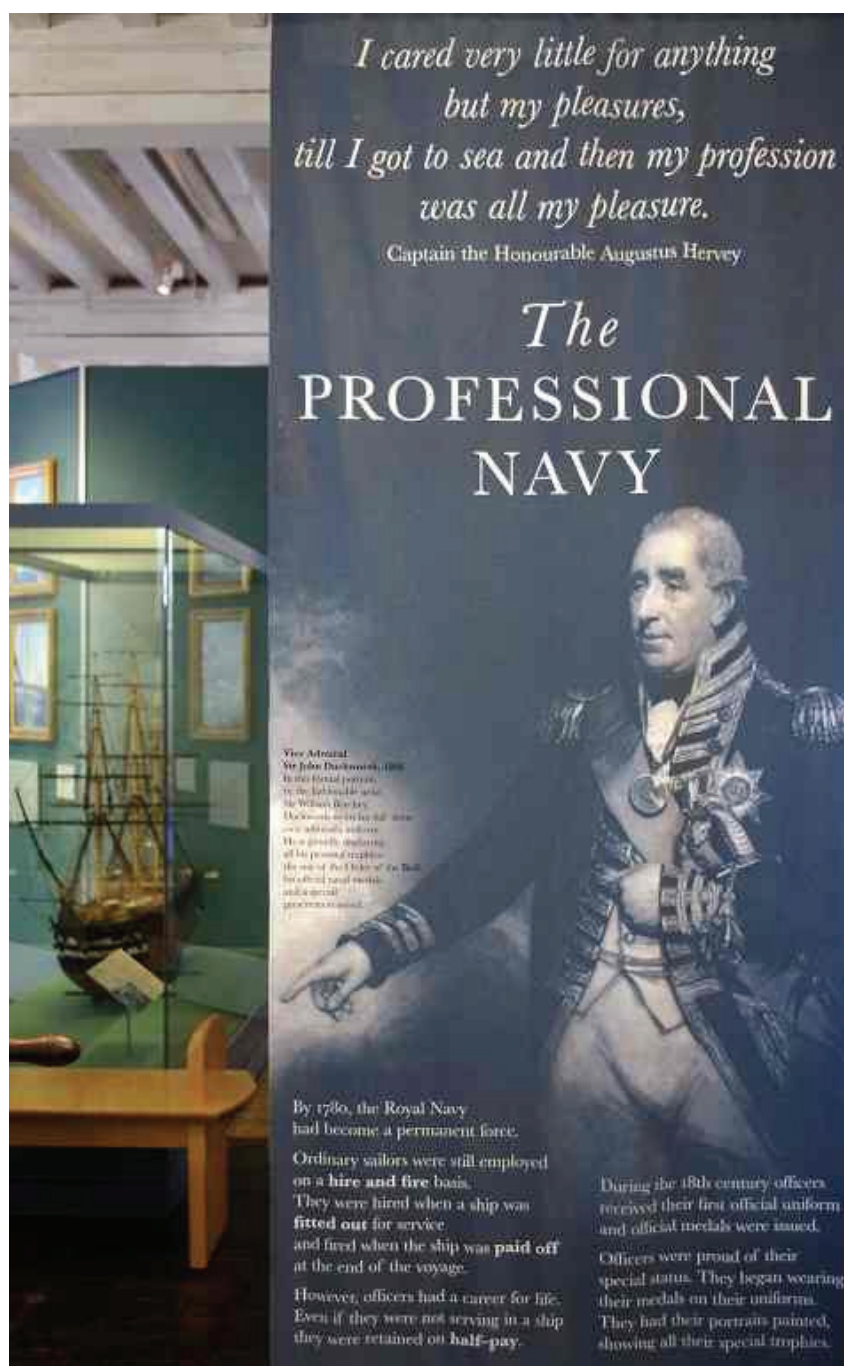


Figure 8: The Professional Navy. Banner introducing a display in the Royal Naval Museum's 'Sailing Navy' gallery (© The Author).

Moreover, the exhibits are not really concerned with Europe. There is very little about Nelson's French and Spanish opponents at Trafalgar, or analysis of how and why Britain became involved in a European conflict. The 'Victory Gallery' includes an exhibit on the Navy's work suppressing the transatlantic slave trade ('Chasing Freedom'), a global mission touched on in other galleries. The '20th Century Gallery' is divided into three sections: 'The Navy's People', 'The Navy at Home and Abroad' and 'Conflict and Change'. Although loosely chronological, and including items from the First and Second World Wars, the gallery takes a global view and stresses the role of submarines in the Cold War and the Fleet Air Arm in the Falklands conflict, with exhibits explaining and stressing the role of two new aircraft carriers currently under construction. Other exhibits explain what roles are available to naval recruits in today's Navy.

This is in a political context where the requirement (and cost) of nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers are subject to a great deal of criticism. On the one hand, nations tend to see possession of nuclear submarines and carriers as a mark of a 'blue water navy' capable of operating beyond its immediate littoral; on the other hand, recent UK governments have not been sure that they can afford such a navy. Hence, perhaps, the Royal Navy's concerns are echoed elsewhere in the Dockyard: for example, in the 'Action Stations' attraction, the film *Command Approved* explains the role of the modern navy through a (fictitious) operation. At one point, there is a close up image of the ship's commander as he endeavours to face a crisis in the operations. He says to himself (and by implication to the audience) 'I need air cover'. Meanwhile, on the Harbour Tour boat, the guide points out the docks where parts of the UK's new aircraft carriers will be built. The narratives here are about defence and identity, but with a very selective use of history, to support the Navy's need for recruits, ships (especially aircraft carriers), and a global role (an underlying, somewhat political narrative which may also be detected on HMS *Belfast* in London).

Of course visitors will have their own perceptions of HMS *Victory* and her setting. But the online review of a visitor to 'Action Stations!' who saw the film *Command Approved* suggests that these deeper narratives at Portsmouth are perceived by some at least:

'the producers presumably had a bit of a balancing act in making this film; attempting to make a good film, a realistic portrayal of Britain's modern Royal Navy and a suitable recruitment tool at the same time [...] the Captain (Jo Dow) slams his fist down and in his best Gene Hackman voice growls "I need air support!" [...] presumably to give an insight into how the navy likes to fight its wars [...]

But I find it difficult to dislike *Command Approved* [...] You can let it off for being a bit corny because, well, the guys up on the screen are pretty close portrayals of the guys you know and love who really are serving at sea [...] It's like watching your buddy in the navy at work.

All right, Captain, you can have your air support.' (Anon, f, 2004)

The anonymous reviewer's final comment acknowledges the effectiveness of the film and, perhaps, the Navy's desire for aircraft carriers. However, at Portsmouth, these concerns (funding, recruitment), are contextualised in a wider story about the Britain's traditional global outlook. This is in tune with some other UK national museums, but here the focus is on British naval power, and explaining the significance of that global outlook in a context where other nations

now 'rule the waves'. It is as though for Britain, the sea is a boundary, not just to Europe, but to a much bigger stage.

It may also be significant that maritime museums, including naval museums, are naturally located on the coast: although Paris has the Musée National de la Marine, its naval history is also told in annexes in Brest, Port-Louis, Rochefort and Toulon; Berlin has naval galleries in the Deutsche Technikmuseum, but naval history and ships such as the *Wilhelm Bauer*, (which touches on European history from the late nineteenth century to the end of the Cold War), are mainly displayed in Bremerhaven. In Poland, the national maritime museum is in Gdansk, with ships including the *Soldek*, a complex symbol of Polish recovery from the devastation of the Second World War, and at Gdynia, where the *Błyskawica*, something of an icon of Polish resistance in the Second World War, is moored.

In the UK's case, national funding for *Victory* and the Naval Museum are indirect (via the Ministry of Defence) and supplemented by other bodies (SNR, the Heritage Lottery Fund, and Hampshire County Council). They are geographically and administratively distant from London. For example, the MOD funded Royal Naval Museum is not subject to the funding agreements between the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and other national museums, used instrumentally by the 1997-2010 Labour government in an unusually interventionist approach to museums and culture (Babbidge 2000, 4-5). Even outside of such exceptional moments (for usually, UK governments display little interest in museums), institutions at the periphery may be less influenced by informal social networking among London's elites. These museums and ships are often found at the boundaries of Europe.

Conclusion

Exhibits of Norse life and culture in different countries thus provide examples of how different nations shape what was in part a European experience to national ends. Presented as exhibitions about the Vikings, these displays usually co-opt the Norse as part of their own stories of origins. The ways in which these stories are told provides some contrasts: in Dublin, a conventional narrative is underpinned by rich archaeological exhibits to provide an authoritative description of the Norse in Ireland. This helped re-orient the Irish narrative of the past from a pastoral, poetic, and almost timeless, Celtic 'Golden Age', which had been closely allied to the needs of Irish nationalism. The opening video acknowledges the impact of Norse activity on Irish life, whilst the exhibition explains its contribution and ultimately its Christianisation and incorporation into Irish culture. In Stockholm, the Historiska Museet cannot escape the Norse, who appear in many places besides the Vikingar gallery, but by deconstructing the Viking Age and modern representations of the Vikings, as well as presenting the Norse in a conventional gallery, it gives visitors the tools to critique a culture whose more warlike aspects are out of tune in a nation with a strong commitment to neutrality. It is argued that both Dublin and Stockholm engage with the Viking myth in ways which reflect national, rather than European concerns.

Historic ships are often preserved at the borders of Europe, and sited in or near maritime museums. Although their purpose and the events to which they are linked may be evident, the example of HMS *Victory* suggests they can nonetheless be used as a platform or focus for narratives which reflect current concerns. The *Victory*, the *Mary Rose*, the *Warrior* and other vessels there were all the products of conflicts with other European powers, principally France

and Germany. But the underlying narrative here, it is suggested, reflects the concerns of the UK's naval forces: recruitment, ships (and the funding to support them), the desire for a global role, and the presentation of a sense of pride in a navy with a track record of professionalism. Europe is subsumed in a global story. Behind these concerns we may detect a sense of Britain's traditional concern with a wider world. Based on a review of a number of national museums and some historic ships in Europe, this report has also indicated the ways in which maritime exhibits touch on boundaries and notions of the 'edge' of Europe.

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