



Institution: University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)		
Unit of Assessment: 27 Area Studies		
Title of case study:		
	<p>Raising Norse Spirits for Highland Park Distillery</p> <p>University of the Highlands and Islands (Centre for Nordic Studies)</p>	
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Scotch whisky is now Scotland’s largest international export (£4.23bn) ahead of refined petroleum (£3bn) and business services (£2.5bn). In early 2012 CNS entered discussions with Gerry Tosh, Global Development Manager with the Edrington Group, owners of Highland Park Distillery, on providing research to inform product and sub-brand development of a new range of whisky products drawing on the Viking heritage of the Orkney Islands, whose Mainland has been home to the Highland Park Distillery since 1798.</p> <p>The project, which draws upon research by staff in CNS, has achieved three key impacts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased sales of Highland Park whisky, safeguarding local jobs in Orkney (the distillery employs 25 in production and 5 in the visitor centre) 2. Informed the development of an authentic and unique new whisky product brand, inspired by the history of the Orkney Islands, and a new market for it in Russia 3. Encouraged growth of cultural heritage/business linkages 		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The CNS team as individuals have spent the past 20 years studying Viking society with an interdisciplinary focus. As a team we have worked together for 4 years to focus and coalesce this research into initiatives which benefit the communities we are studying. Society does not exist in isolation so should not be studied as such. It became apparent from our group research that current perceptions of Viking expansion, societal structure, and impact across the North Atlantic rim required revision and reevaluation. To facilitate this, we set up the Hjaltland network, funded by RSE in 2010. Our research is at the forefront of understanding the Vikings and their impact and thus Highland Park is accessing the most current thinking on the subject.</p> <p>The underpinning interdisciplinary research involved each team member selecting a number of profiles from the list of 20 we had devised upon the request of Highland Park. The research for this project was undertaken by Dr Donna Heddle, Dr Andrew Jennings, Dr Ragnhild Ljosland, Dr Alex Sanmark, and Dr Victoria Whitworth, drawing on their recognised areas of expertise within the Centre’s locative focus. They researched key figures in Norse mythology and the Viking expansion to the east.</p> <p>Jennings concentrated on supernatural entities and ethnic identities, drawing on his pioneering ethnographic research published as ‘The Ethnic Enigma’ (reference 1below), ‘From Dál Riata to the Gall-Ghàidheil.’ and as ‘One coast - three peoples: names and ethnicity in the Scottish west during the early Viking period’ (reference 5below).</p> <p>Heddle’s research into gods, goddesses, and supernatural beliefs and rituals drew on previous research undertaken in a Northern Periphery Programme project during 2004-6 and published in <i>Northern Heritage</i>, UHI Press, Inverness, 2006 (reference 4 below), and in “The Norse element in</p>		

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the Orkney dialect” in Millar, Robert McColl (ed.) 2010. *Northern Lights, Northern Words. Selected Papers from the FRLSU Conference, Kirkwall 2009.*

Ljosland focussed on the linguistic aspects of Scandinavian ritual and mythology, drawing on previous research published as *Chrissie's Bodle – Discovering Orkney's forgotten writer Christina M. Costie*, The Orcadian/Kirkwall Press 2011 and delivered as part of a range of conference papers on Nordic linguistic influences and as part of the Centre's KE activities in the form of the newspaper column *Mimir's Well*.

Sanmark's research into ritual practices in Scandinavia developed previous research published as *Power and Conversion. A Comparative Study of Christianization in Scandinavia*, (OPIA, Uppsala 2004, reference 2 below). Whitworth concentrated on the visual representations of Viking deities, drawing on research published as 'Memory, Salvation and Ambiguity: A Consideration of Some Anglo-Scandinavian Grave-stones from York' in *Archaeologies of Remembrance: Death and Memory in Past Societies*, ed. H. Williams. The project pulled together the team's past and ongoing research in literature, language, cultural history, Viking society, custom and belief, by identifying and developing a number of Viking characters and profiles which, in turn, further developed the team's existing research on the Viking expansion into the new area of Eastern Europe. The importance of interdisciplinary research, allied to community ownership and community involvement is central to the ethos and the strategic aims of CNS.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Selected peer reviewed publications by the CNS team on Norse society and legacy.

1. Jennings, 'The Ethnic Enigma', in Andras Mortensen and Símun V. Arge, eds., *Viking and Norse in the North Atlantic. Selected papers from the Proceedings of the Fourteenth Viking Congress* (Torshavn 2005). The Viking Congress is an invitation only conference at the highest levels of the field. The volume contributions are peer reviewed and judged the best of the conference output.
2. Sanmark, *Power and Conversion. A Comparative Study of Christianization in Scandinavia*, (OPIA, Uppsala 2004). This significant monograph has received excellent reviews, e.g. *Early Medieval Europe* 14:3 (2006), and has been referenced in other articles 32 times.
3. Ljosland, *Chrissie's Bodle – Discovering Orkney's forgotten writer Christina M. Costie*, The Orcadian/Kirkwall Press 2011. One external peer reviewer commented as follows: "Extensive investigation and review of life and work of Costie. An innovative piece of research."
4. Heddle, 'The History of the Northern Periphery'. In Heddle, D. *Northern Heritage* (UHI Press, Inverness, 2006). *Northern Heritage* is a substantive survey which is a key text at UHI and at the University of Umea in Sweden. It was the result of funded research and was evaluated as an excellent output of the NPP project noted below.
5. Jennings, 'One coast - three peoples: names and ethnicity in the Scottish west during the early Viking period'. In Woolf A. (ed.) *Scandinavian Scotland - Twenty Years On* (St. John's House Papers 12, St Andrews 2009) (Co-authored with Dr A.Kruse). One external peer reviewer commented as follows: "Strong conceptual and empirical analysis, presenting discursive and well-justified conclusions with extensive reference to the literature".

Research grants which fed into the underpinning research

- Hjaltland Research Network Funding from Royal Society of Edinburgh 2011-13 £17,400
- Innovation Voucher for DVD development from Scottish Funding Council 2009 £5,000

- Northern Peripheries Programme Northern Heritage project 2002-6 £333,000

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The Raising Norse Spirits project is part of the CNS ethos of community engagement and Knowledge Exchange and represents an innovative collaboration between a university cultural studies research centre and a commercial business. Highland Park distillers had originally considered the name “Valhalla Collection” for a new collection of whiskies, but had not really explored how to direct this idea or which gods, characters or symbols to use. While they had gathered some basic information, it soon became clear to them that they required considerably more. In view of this, the company sought to engage with the CNS to provide research-based advice and guidance with respect to their plans. This initial engagement has flourished subsequently into a strong partnership. In our initial role, we were able to confirm that much of the information originally secured by the company was actually inaccurate. We went on to provide guidance on the choice of relevant figures, e.g. starting with “Thor”, who was more generally worshipped in settlement areas like Orkney and had a more drink specific back story, than “Odin”, the king of the Norse gods, who was seen as an altogether more remote and ambiguous figure. “Freya” was also chosen to reflect the particular importance the Norse gave to their womenfolk.

However, the underpinning research into the mythology of the Norse Gods and their surrounding stories and legend went significantly beyond the issue of selecting suitable candidates for the special collections and extended to the point where the Centre was able to advise Highland Park distillers on the colour and character of the whiskies that should be produced. Hence “Thor” is an earthy, robust, very vivid whisky in keeping with Thor’s status as son of Earth and uncomplicated hero of the Aesir whereas “Loki” is darker and more complex in character as befits the archetypal Norse mischief maker. The whiskies that are being produced for the final 2 Gods in the current series are being similarly designed and promoted, under the advice of the Centre. There has also been close working with respect to the design, presentation and packaging of the bottles, and the motifs embossed on them, which have once again been specially created to reflect the true character and symbols of the Gods the whiskies represent.

The team therefore acted as research advisors for brand development, product packaging design, labelling, packaging and the website, for which the team have provided content and games – engaging customers not only in the product but the heritage of the Scottish island on which it is made, and giving Orkney’s Nordic heritage an international reach.

The success of the range has been so great that the company is continuing its engagement with the Centre in an even closer relationship, and there is exploration underway of options for new whiskies using other characters and symbols from Norse mythology and life, derived from the Centre’s research.

The product has attracted a high degree of global interest and “Thor” won an IWSC Gold Award in 2012. Gerry O’Donnell, Public Affairs Director for the Edrington Group, which owns Highland Park Distillery, noted in a letter of commendation to CNS that “The international development of Scotch whisky has been built on the success of distinctive brands. Highland Park’s Valhalla collection recognises the need to stand out from the crowd by creating an exciting, premium initiative that adds value to the brand”.

The project further aimed to disseminate cultural knowledge and understanding of the Viking period through the marketing material available on the Highland Park Valhalla website. The project also aimed to improve cultural knowledge within Highland Park Distillery’s marketing team by offering CPD opportunities for the guiding team in particular.

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The project has achieved 3 key impacts so far:

1. The launch in 2012 of a limited edition (23000 bottles priced IRO £120) of the first Valhalla whisky “Thor” with annual launches planned for the next three whiskies in the range. The second, “Loki”, (21,000 bottles) was launched in spring 2013 and the third, “Freya” (19,000 bottles) will be launched in 2014. All bottles of “Thor” and “Loki” have now been sold.
2. An enhancement of the role of cultural heritage research in the development of cultural heritage businesses, products and services. The information provided by the CNS was absolutely fundamental in the development of the products in the following ways:
 - a) The nature of the whisky itself was determined by the information we were able to provide re the antecedents, nature, defining features, and habits of the particular god selected from a short list of 20 profiles.
 - b) The packaging was also based on our information – Thor is the guardian of ships and the most popular god for sailors so the whisky was presented in a specially crafted longboat container made of oak.
 - c) The target area for “Thor” was identified by us using our knowledge of Viking diaspora. This opened up new marketing areas to target such as Russia, which was founded by the Norse.
 - d) The background information has also been used to create concomitant products such as drinking glasses and to provide the information and character profiles required by the customers, including the supernatural aspects of the featured gods.
3. The development of knowledge exchange mechanisms to allow Highland Park personnel at a number of levels to access the information we have provided. We will be adding a knowledge quiz and Did You Know? Sections to the Valhalla whisky website and will be accessing metadata from this. A system for metadata collection is in operation on the site already, which notes 30,000 hits so far..

“Thor” was chosen as the first launch to coincide with the launch of the Hollywood blockbuster of the same name. The product was covered extensively in the press, receiving excellent reviews, a selection of which can be accessed below. The team has recently been approached by the Edrington Group to undertake research to develop whisky products inspired by “Mythic Beasts”.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Weblink for Valhalla whisky collection: <http://www.whiskyofthegods.com/lda/>
2. Reviews of the launch of “Thor” and “Loki”
<http://www.harpers.co.uk/news/news-headlines/11686-highland-park-releases-thor-whisky.html>
<http://www.masterofmalt.com/whiskies/highland-park-thor-16-year-old-whisky/>
http://www.highlandpark.co.uk/Content/documents/press_releases/HP-Loki-Launch-Press-Release.pdf
3. Statement from Public Affairs Director, Edrington Group
4. Edrington Group: Sales figures and website statistics
5. Corroboration on efficacy of Russian target market by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
6. Corroboration from Global Brand Advocate, Edrington Group/Highland Park on the quality and relevance of the research undertaken by CNS
7. CNS Economic Impact Survey commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise