

Lecture four: The Viking invasion of Britain (793-1066)

1. Historical Facts on the Viking

The Viking Age in Britain began about 1,200 years ago in the 9th Century AD and lasted for just over 200 years. The Vikings first invaded Britain in AD 793 and last until 1066 when William the Conqueror became King of England after the Battle of Hastings.

These bands of fierce raiders began to attack the British coasts. They were also called the Danes although they did not just come from Denmark. The Vikings came from the three countries in Scandinavia (in Northern Europe) Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Vikings were also known as the Norsemen. Norsemen means 'people from the North'. They were great travelers and sailed to other parts of Europe, where they traded, raided, and often settled.

The Vikings came across the North Sea, just as the Anglo-Saxons had done 400 years earlier. They drove the Saxons out of part of the country and took it for themselves. King Alfred, Saxon king of Wessex, fought them in a great battle, but he could not drive them right away and had to let them have part of the country after signing a treaty of peace; the area they settled in is called Danelaw.

The first place the Vikings raided in Britain was the monastery at Lindisfarne, a small holy island located off the northeast coast of England. This raid on Lindisfarne marks the start of the Viking migration from Scandinavia in 793. Some of the monks were drowned in the sea, others killed or taken away as slaves along with many treasures of the church.

In the years that followed, villages near the sea, monasteries, and even cities found themselves dominated by these sea-based foreign intruders. Soon no region of the British Isles (Britain and nearby islands) was safe from the Vikings. They attacked

villages and towns in Wales, Scotland, Ireland, the Isle of Man, and England. By 866 the Vikings had arrived in York. They made York (or Jorvik as they called it) the second biggest city in the country after London.

Danelaw areas

The areas the Viking settled in were known as Danelaw. It covered an area roughly east of a line on a map joining London and Chester. The Saxons lived south of the line mainly in Wessex which was governed by Alfred the Great

The Vikings settled in:

- Islands off the coast of Scotland - Shetland, Orkney, and The Hebrides
- Around the north and northwest coast of Scotland
- Parts of Ireland - Dublin is a Viking city
- The Isle of Man
- Small parts of Wales
- Northumbria (which included modern Yorkshire)
- East Anglia
- Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, Stamford, and Lincoln

2. Cultural Facts on the Vikings

Vikings Religion

Like the type of religion in ancient Greece or Rome, the Vikings worshiped many different Gods and Goddesses. Their religion was an important part of everyday life.

The three most important Viking Gods are:

- **Odin** is the leader of the gods. The god of magic, poetry, and war. His wife was Frigg
- **Thor** (Tor in Scandinavian languages) was the god of thunder. Thor had iron gloves, a magic belt, and a hammer. He was also the god of protection. He protected them from cold hunger, giants, and other dangers.

- **Freyr** (or Frej in Swedish) is the god of agriculture and fertility. Frey was worshipped regularly all through-out the year for future prosperity. He was the twin of Freyja (goddess of love and fertility). Freyja wept golden tears when she was unhappy.

Norse Myths (Sagas)

The Vikings told many stories about gods, giants, trolls, and dragons. They were full of magic, adventure, dishonesty, and trouble. They describe people living in Midgard (Middle Earth) and gods and goddesses living in a sky world called Asgard. A beautiful rainbow bridge linked Midgard with Asgard.

Viking Houses and Food

Vikings lived in a long, narrow building called a longhouse. They were built of wood. The longhouses had curved walls in the plan, forming a ship-like outline. The walls were lined with clay or consisted of wooden planks.

The Vikings were also farmers and people of agriculture. Therefore, they ate fruits, vegetables, and cereals for bread and kept animals for meat, milk, cheese, and eggs. They had plenty of fish as they were sea-fairer and hunters. The bread was made using quern stones, stone tools for hand-grinding grain.

Vikings Cloths

Viking clothes were made from wool, linen, and animal skins. The Vikings were skillful weavers and made their clothes. Women, with the help of children, made the wool into yarn (thread) and used natural dyes from plants to give it color. Men wore tunics and trousers and women wore a long dress with a pinafore over it

Vikings Timeline

The Vikings came to Britain in two waves the first wave in 793 and the second one in 980.

793	The first invasion by the Vikings. They raided monasteries on the coast including Lindisfarne,
794	First raids on Scotland and Ireland.
820	Viking raids continued around the English coast
821	Wessex reigned by Alfred the Great became the Supreme Kingdom
865	Great Viking Army from Denmark Invades England
866	Danes capture York (which the Vikings called Jorvik) and make it their kingdom (land ruled by a king)
871	King Ethelred, the West Saxon king, and his brother Alfred defeat the Viking army at the Battle of Ashdown (in Berkshire).
876	Vikings from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden settle permanently in England.
886	King Alfred the Great defeats the Vikings but allows them to settle in Eastern England (the Kingdoms of York and East Anglia) This area of England becomes known as Danelaw and is ruled by the Viking King Guthrum.
901-937	Eastern England (Danelaw) is conquered by the English
950	Vikings from Ireland, the Isle of Man, and the Hebrides raid Wales, particularly the coastal monasteries.
954	Eric Bloodaxe, the last Viking King of Jorvik, is thrown out of York.
980	New Viking Raids on England
994	Olaf of Norway and Sven 'Forkbeard', son of the Danish king, lead an invading Danish army in an unsuccessful siege of London and subsequently ravage the south-east.
1014	King Canute (Cnut) of Denmark captures the English Crown (became king)
1042	Edward the Confessor becomes King (A Saxon King)