

The Vikings

The Viking Age in Britain began about the end of the 8th century AD and lasted for just over 200 years. About the year 800, bands of fierce raiders began to attack the British coasts. They were the Vikings (also called the Danes although they didn't just come from Denmark).

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, called Danelaw (the land where the law of the Danes ruled).

Who were the Vikings?

Vikings were also known as the Norsemen. Norsemen means 'people from the North'. They were great travellers and sailed to other parts of Europe, where they traded, raided, and often settled.

To find out which direction to travel, Viking sailors would sometimes release ravens. The birds flew towards land and the longships followed them.

The Vikings were also farmers, fishermen, trappers and traders. Viking craftsmen made beautiful objects out of wood, metal and bone; Viking women were skilful weavers, produced fine, warm textiles.

When did they come?

The first place the Vikings raided in Britain was the monastery at **Lindisfarne**, a small holy island located off the northeast coast of England. Some of the monks were drowned in the sea, others killed or taken away as slaves along with many treasures of the church.

The raid on Lindisfarne marks the start of the Viking migration from Scandinavia in 793.

Why did the Vikings travel to Britain?

The Vikings travelled thousands of miles across the sea from their homeland of Scandinavia where they were farmers, fishermen, seafarers and traders.

Better land

Most Vikings were simply searching for better land for their farms. Their land was not very good for growing crops or rearing animals:

Norway was very hilly,

Sweden was covered in forests, and Denmark had a lot of sandy soil.

More Land

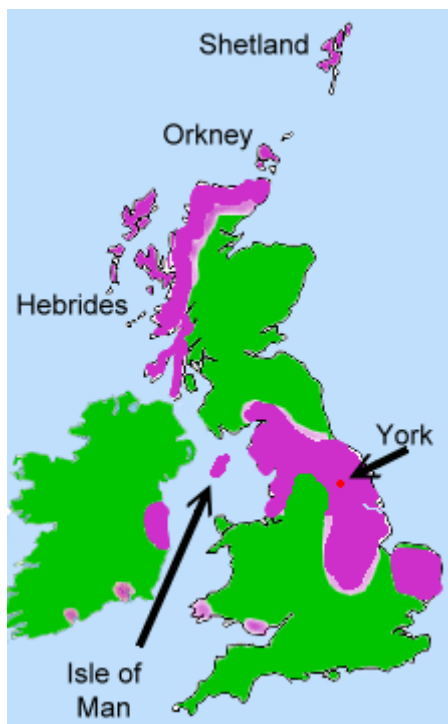
Some historians believe the Vikings left their homes because of over crowding. There was not enough good land for everyone to share.

In a Viking family only the eldest son inherited the family farm so younger brothers had to make their living elsewhere.

Treasures

The Vikings searched for treasures to make them rich. Britain was particularly a good place to raid, as there was much to steal. The Vikings were attracted by the wealth of the Monasteries and the easy treasure to be found within

Where did the Vikings settle in Britain?



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.

The Vikings settled in:

- Islands off the coast of Scotland - Shetland, Orkney and The Hebrides
- Around the north and north west 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

Danish money: the Saxon king Ethelred decided to pay the Viking to stay away. To find money he set a tax on his people called Danegeld. The effects of this tax were most heavily felt by the ordinary villagers.

King Cnut or (Canute 995-1035) : the leader of the Danish Vikings much of England. He become king of England in 1016 for one simple reason is that the king's council (Witan) feared disorder and a rule by a Danish king was far better than by no one at all.