

## *The Viking Invasion of Britain*

The Vikings were the third group of people who invaded Britain.

**It is important to keep in mind that:**

- \* The Viking age in England began in AD793 and ended in 1066.

### *What does the Name Viking Mean?*

- \* The name 'Viking' comes from a language now called 'Old Norse', and means 'a pirate raid.' People who went off raiding in ships were said to be 'going Viking'.

### *Who Were the Vikings? Where did they Come from?*

- \* The Vikings were Norse people. They originally came from a region of northern Europe called Scandinavia. This region includes Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. The Vikings, in other words, were Norwegians, Swedes, and Danes.
- \* The seafaring Vikings were incredibly talented ship-builders. They built dragon-headed longboats and sailed all around Europe and even to Africa. They, precisely, raided, pirated, traded and settled throughout parts of Europe and beyond.
- \* They were pagans, not Christians like most people living in Britain at the time.
- \* They were fearsome warriors. Fighting, hence, was very important for the Vikings. They attacked settlements to plunder (steal=rob=loot=pillage) treasures and bring people to enslave, that is, to make them slaves. They fought wars to take control of more lands, using longbows and arrows, spears, long swords, and axes.

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The Shetland and Orkney islands are Scottish islands.  
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\* Anglo-Saxon writers called these invaders 'Danes', 'Norsemen', 'the Great Heathen Army', 'sea rovers', or 'sea wolves.'

**However,**

Not all the Vikings were bloodthirsty warriors. While some came to fight, some others came, peacefully, to settle. They were farmers; they raised animals and grew crops. They were skillful at crafting, and made beautiful metalwork and wooden carvings.

**It is equally important to remember that:**

\* In AD 793, the Vikings attacked and destroyed the Christian monastery at Lindisfarne (an island located along the north-eastern coast of England). They killed the monks and looted (stole) precious ornaments. Many historians consider this raid (attack) as the beginning of the Viking era in England.

**Remark 1:**

Christian monasteries were easy targets for the Vikings. The monks living there had no weapons, and the buildings were filled with valuable treasures, like, gold, jewels, and books. There were also drinks, food, cattle, and clothes.

### ***The Anglo-Saxons and Vikings: The Warring Invaders***

\* The Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings fought to control England: In AD865, a large Viking army called the "Great Heathen Army" sailed across the North Sea. In the past, the Vikings had sailed to England for raids. They terrorized the Anglo-Saxons, stole riches, and took people as slaves. Afterwards, they returned home to Scandinavia. But in AD865, the Great Heathen Army came to settle as the land in England was much better for farming than back in Scandinavia. The Vikings, consequently, planned to make England their new home. Over several years, this army battled the Anglo-Saxons. By AD878, all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, with the exception of Wessex, were destroyed by the Vikings. Alfred the Great, King of Wessex, fought and won many battles against the Vikings, but he was unable to push them out of England. After many bloody fights, Alfred and the Viking King Guthrum signed a peace agreement.

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## Consequently, keep in mind, too, that:

The peace agreement resulted in the division of England into two parts: the Anglo-Saxons occupied the South-West whereas the Vikings settled the North-East. This North-East area controlled by the Vikings was called the Danelaw.

\* **Danelaw** included three main areas of England: Northumbria (which comprised modern-day Yorkshire), East Anglia and the five boroughs ('Borough' was the Viking name for fortified towns). These five boroughs or towns were: Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, Stamford, and Lincoln).

\* **Jorvik (York)** as it is known today) was the most important city in the Danelaw, and was a centre for trade.

### Remark 2:

In addition to Danelaw in England, the Vikings settled in Scotland, and on Shetland and Orkney Islands. They also occupied the Isle of Man. In Ireland, they founded the city of Dublin. However, despite multiple raids, they failed to control Wales.

### The Vikings' Traces in Britain

Like the Romans and the Anglo-Saxons, the Vikings' conquest of Britain left behind indelible marks most obvious in place names and the English language.

\* Place names of Viking origin are most common in the Danelaw.

Places that end in the suffix **-by**, like the towns of Selby, Grimsby and Whitby, and the suffix **-thorpe**, such as Copmanthorpe, and Mablethorpe were almost certainly Viking places.

\* The Vikings' invasion of Britain also affected the English language.

So many Norse words amalgamated into the English language: 'window', 'foot', 'egg', 'knife', 'gun', 'anger', 'hug', 'cake' are just few examples of words that come from the Old Norse language.

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\* The Vikings also gave the English language verbs like 'get', 'want', 'give', and 'take' as well as the pronouns 'they', 'their', and 'them'.

**Sources:**

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