

Victorious Vikings

The Vikings came from the area of the modern Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden). They set out in boats called longships to 'go Viking' (which meant to go travelling around looking for resources and land). The Vikings first arrived in Britain around AD 787 and in AD 793 they raided the monastery at Lindisfarne in Northumbria and stole many items from it.

The Vikings came to Britain looking for new items to steal and trade. In addition to this they wanted land that they could take and use for themselves. The Vikings particularly liked to raid monasteries, like the one at Lindisfarne. The monasteries were not very well protected and contained important goods like gold, jewels and food. The Vikings also stole manuscripts (handwritten books) and bibles, which they later sold back to the monasteries!

When the Vikings first came to Britain they raided, took what they could and then went home again. However, in AD 850 some Vikings stayed in Britain over winter for the first time on the island of Thanet. They enjoyed the milder climate and made use of the rich natural resources.

Later the Vikings started to look for places they could take for their own and settle in for good. By AD 866 they had captured the city of York that eventually became a successful and important Viking city.

The Anglo-Saxon king of Wessex, Alfred the Great, fought against the Vikings in AD 878 and forced them out of the South of England, but this did not last long. Later that year the Vikings took over Wessex and forced King Alfred into hiding. They then went on to capture more places and many Vikings decided to live in Britain forever.

Viking Warriors

The Vikings are probably best known for their fierce warriors. They were expert fighters, very organised and brave in battle.

Viking warriors are often shown in pictures wearing helmets with horns but they did not really wear horned helmets in battle. Instead, the Vikings' helmets, which were made of leather or metal, would have been smooth and close fitting to the head. It is thought that horned helmets were worn only in religious ceremonies.

The Viking warriors carried large shields (about 80-90cm in diameter), which were made of wood and covered in leather. Sometimes the shields would be made with metal as well. They were held using a single hand grip on the back as this made them easier to move around.

The axe was a Viking warrior's main weapon but they also used spears and swords. Swords were very special weapons as they were often given to brave warriors who had done well in many battles. Swords were often double edged with a ridge running down the full length of the centre of the blade.

The Vikings believed that brave warriors who died in battle would go to Valhalla. This was like a heaven for warriors and the place where their chief god, Odin, lived.

