

Lindisfarne, also known as Holy Island, can be found off the coast of north-east England. It's a pretty, peaceful island – but that's only nowadays! In 793 CE, a devastating event occurred there.

Lindisfarne was named by the Anglo-Saxons, and it was developed by early Christians. By 793, it was home to a wealthy monastery. Unfortunately, the treasures inside it, and its remote location, made it an easy target for Viking raiders.

The Vikings attacked Lindisfarne in such a savage and unprovoked way that it shocked the Christian world. They killed or enslaved the monks who lived in the monastery and stole precious religious items.

This was only the beginning for the Vikings in Britain, though. The attack on Lindisfarne is considered to be the start of the Viking era.

Who were the Vikings?

Most Vikings came from an area of northern Europe now called Scandinavia, which includes the countries Sweden, Denmark and Norway. The word 'Viking' does not refer to a person from a particular place, but someone who sails, raids and explores.

The first raiders were master sailors. They travelled in longboats: long, narrow wooden boats ideal for sailing in both deep and shallow waters. They were also fearsome warriors. The Vikings' religion taught them that, to achieve the perfect afterlife, a Viking warrior had to die a grand death in battle. This made the Vikings fierce and brutal fighters, with little fear of death.



The Viking invasion

Initially, the Vikings came to Britain only to raid it. However, those who returned home took stories of fertile farmland and calm weather. More and more Vikings made the journey from Scandinavia to Britain. Most weren't warriors: they were fisherman or farmers in search of better lives.

By the end of the 800s, 100 years after Lindisfarne was attacked, Vikings had built or joined settlements all over Britain. Many of them lived peacefully alongside the Anglo-Saxons.

Vikings still struggled for power, though, and battles were fought regularly. In 878, after a defeat by King Alfred the Great, they were made to sign a treaty stating that they had to stay on their own land. This land was known as 'Danelaw', as it was subject to Danish laws. Negotiations continued nevertheless and, early in the 1000s, the king of Denmark became king of England as well.

Vikings among us

The Vikings who stayed in Britain became as much a part of its culture as the Anglo-Saxons. There are many places still named by them, such as York, which they called Jorvik, and anywhere that ends in -aby, like Derby and Grimsby, as 'by' meant 'village' in Norse. They also helped to develop shipbuilding and storytelling.

Of course, their destruction is still with us too. The ruins of the church of Saint Cuthbert still stand on Lindisfarne today and are visited regularly as a place of historical interest. If you visit the island, you could take the first steps those Scandinavian invaders did, all those years ago!