

History

Enquiry: How “dark” were the Dark Ages?

# **The Viking Invasion**

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# Who were the Vikings?

In 793 AD, **the monastery** at Lindisfarne was attacked by a group of terrifying warriors. These warriors seemed to appear out of nowhere. They murdered the monks, took some as slaves and stole the gold from the church. They became known as the Vikings and were feared by people in Britain and Europe for many years.



# Who were the Vikings?

Originally from an area known as **Scandinavia**, they travelled huge distances across the oceans in ships called **longboats**. They were pagans, not Christian. For around 70 years, the Vikings **raided** areas near the coast or big rivers and then sailed away. However in the 860s, the Great Heathen Army arrived in the south of England. This time the Vikings were here to stay.



# The invasion

The Great Heathen Army spent the next 25 years destroying Anglo-Saxon England. At this time, England was divided into different Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Despite sharing a similar Christian culture, the Anglo-Saxons did not work with each other effectively to fight back against the Vikings. The Vikings destroyed many of these kingdoms, including East Anglia and Northumbria. When the kings were captured, they were brutally murdered.



# The invasion

Eventually the Great Heathen Army made its base in the Northumbrian town of York, which became known as Jorvik. From there, they raided the kingdom of Mercia, which had **dominated** England for centuries. It seemed that even Wessex, the last Anglo-Saxon kingdom to remain free of the Vikings, would fall.



# Horror at Repton

Some historians have argued that the Vikings were not that much more violent than most kings at the time. They say that the people describing the Viking attacks were **exaggerating** what happened because they were Christian and the Vikings were pagan. However archaeology has shown that the Vikings were likely to be very unpleasant indeed.



# Horror at Repton

At Repton there was once a very important and wealthy monastery. Archaeologists dug up the site and found that the Vikings had destroyed the old building. They also found unusual graves: in one, a skeleton was found that showed he had died from horrific wounds. In another grave, a Viking skeleton was found which was surrounded by the bones of around 250 bodies. These graves suggest the Vikings were proud of the violence they caused.



# Glossary

A monastery: A place where holy men and women lived and prayed.

Scandinavia: The area where the Vikings came from, now Norway, Denmark and Sweden.

A longboat: A special type of ship that allowed long distance travel.

To raid: To quickly attack somewhere.

To dominate: To be in charge of.

To exaggerate: To make something seem worse than it actually is.





# Comprehension Questions

1. What happened at Lindisfarne in 793 AD?
2. What made longboats so useful?
3. Which Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were destroyed?
4. Why do some historians think that people exaggerated how bad the Vikings were?
5. What does the archaeology of Repton tell us about what the Vikings were like?

