

# The Vikings in Britain



## 1. Choose the correct subtitle for each paragraph.

*A short history of the Vikings in Britain*

*King Alfred and the Danes*

*The Viking Age*

### *The Vikings in Britain: a brief history*

#### A. \_\_\_\_\_

The Vikings' homeland was Scandinavia: modern Norway, Sweden and Denmark. From here they travelled great distances, mainly by sea and river – as far as North America to the west, Russia to the east, Lapland to the north and the Mediterranean World (Constantinople) and Iraq (Baghdad) to the south.

We know about them through archaeology, poetry, sagas and proverbs, treaties, and the writings of people in Europe and Asia whom they encountered. They left very little written evidence themselves. As well as warriors, they were skilled craftsmen and boat-builders, adventurous explorers and wide-ranging traders.

During this period, around 200,000 people left Scandinavia to settle in other lands, mainly Newfoundland (Canada), Greenland, Iceland, Ireland, England, Scotland, the islands around Britain, France (where they became the Normans), Russia and Sicily. They traded extensively with the Muslim world and fought as mercenaries for the Byzantine emperors of Constantinople (Istanbul). However, by the end of the 11th century the great days of Viking expansion were over.

#### B. \_\_\_\_\_

In 793 came the first recorded Viking raid, where 'on the Ides of June the harrying of the heathen destroyed God's church on Lindisfarne, bringing ruin and slaughter' (The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle).

These ruthless pirates continued to make regular raids around the coasts of England, looting treasure and other goods, and capturing people as slaves. Monasteries were often targeted, for their precious silver or gold chalices, plates, bowls and crucifixes.

Outside Anglo-Saxon England, to the north of Britain, the Vikings took over and settled Iceland, the Faroes and Orkney, becoming farmers and fishermen, and sometimes going on summer trading or raiding voyages. Orkney became powerful, and from there the Earls of Orkney ruled most of Scotland. To this day, especially on the north-east coast, many Scots still bear Viking names.

To the west of Britain, the Isle of Man became a Viking kingdom. The island still has its Tynwald, or ting-vollr (assembly field), a reminder of Viking rule. In Ireland, the Vikings raided around the coasts and up the rivers. They founded the cities of Dublin, Cork and Limerick as Viking strongholds.

Meanwhile, back in England, the Vikings took over Northumbria, East Anglia and parts of Mercia. In 866 they captured modern York (Viking name: Jorvik) and made it their capital. They continued to press south and west. The kings of Mercia and Wessex resisted as best they could, but with little success until the time of Alfred of Wessex, the only king of England to be called 'the Great'.

#### C. \_\_\_\_\_

King Alfred ruled from 871-899 and after many trials and tribulations (including the famous story of the burning of the cakes!) he defeated the Vikings at the Battle of Edington in 878. After the battle the Viking leader Guthrum converted to Christianity. In 886 Alfred took London from the Vikings and fortified it. The same year he signed a treaty with Guthrum. The treaty partitioned England between Vikings and English. The Viking territory became known as the Danelaw. It comprised the north-west, the north-east and east of England. Here, people would be subject to Danish laws. Alfred became king of the rest.

Alfred's grandson, Athelstan, became the first true King of England. He led an English victory over the Vikings at the Battle of Brunaburh in 937, and his kingdom for the first time included the Danelaw. In 954, Eirik Bloodaxe, the last Viking king of York, was killed and his kingdom was taken over by English earls.

**2. Read the text below and write the correct form of the word given.**

*What was Britain like before the arrival of the Vikings?*

When the Vikings 1. \_\_\_\_\_ in the British Isles at the end of the eighth century, England did not exist. Instead, the parts of the island that now fall within England's modern boundaries comprised a number of 2. \_\_\_\_\_ of various sizes.

The most 3. \_\_\_\_\_ of them were Wessex in the south west, Mercia in the Midlands, Northumbria in the north of England (extending into southern Scotland) and East Anglia (covering the present-day counties of Norfolk and Suffolk).

These kingdoms had developed as a result of the social, political and 4. \_\_\_\_\_ changes brought about by the withdrawal of Roman authority at the beginning of the fifth century and substantial 5. \_\_\_\_\_ from northern Europe and Scandinavia. They are generally known to us as the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

**APPEAR**

**KING**

**SIGNIFY**

**ECONOMY**

**MIGRATE**



**KNOW**

**LEGEND**

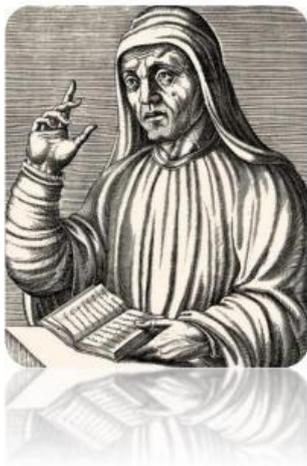
**SEEK**

**RELATION**

**WRITE**

The Vikings, who often took to predatory sea-borne raids against their largely Christian neighbours, were not 6. \_\_\_\_\_ to the inhabitants of Britain: many Anglo-Saxon kings counted 7. \_\_\_\_\_ Scandinavian heroes amongst their ancestors and shared cultural points of contact across the North Sea.

The Northumbrian cleric Alcuin even criticised the monks of Lindisfarne Priory for 8. \_\_\_\_\_ to 'resemble pagans' in their 'beard and hair'. If a fair characterisation, it implies some prior interaction between Vikings and the British that didn't involve being on the wrong end of a swinging axe. But if there was a peaceful 9. \_\_\_\_\_ in the years leading up to the first Viking raids, no one took the trouble to write about it. Instead, the Vikings entered 10. \_\_\_\_\_ history in a maelstrom of fire and blood.



3. Complete the text with one word that best fits in each gap.

### VIKING INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH CULTURE

In the areas that the Vikings 1. \_\_\_\_\_ over, the resulting influence of Scandinavian culture was profound. The place names 2. \_\_\_\_\_ northern and eastern England are a testament to 3. \_\_\_\_\_ the impact of the Vikings' language (Old Norse) and the individuals 4. \_\_\_\_\_ put down roots. Take Grimsby, the farm ('by') of a man named Grimr and Scunthorpe, the hamlet ('thorpe') of someone called Skuma.

In addition, a number of northern dialectal words – e.g. 'dale' (valley), 'beck' (stream) and 'fell' (mountain) – 5. \_\_\_\_\_ Old Norse origins, as do a great many 6. \_\_\_\_\_ English words (e.g. window, husband, egg, skull).

Another area of life in 7. \_\_\_\_\_ Scandinavian settlers had a lasting impact was in the development of urban economies. Towns that 8. \_\_\_\_\_ seen only modest trade, manufacture and settlement prior to the Viking arrival boomed in the century 9. \_\_\_\_\_ followed. Places 10. \_\_\_\_\_ Lincoln, Stamford, Derby, Leicester and Nottingham became important centres. In particular, archaeological evidence from York demonstrates a thriving and densely populated town 11. \_\_\_\_\_ craft industries and imported goods that plainly demonstrate a taste for fashions that spanned the North Sea.