

## Viking Raid on Lindisfarne (793 AD)

On the 6th of June 793 AD, '**Northmen**' (as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle calls them) attacked the Christian **monastery** at **Lindisfarne** in **Northumbria**. The monastery was on a small island off the coast called **Holy Island**, making it an easy target for the Viking **longships**.

Northumbria was an English kingdom, and its unprotected monasteries were famous for **expensive books, art and treasures**. It was this attack that made people realise how dangerous the Vikings were.

The first few months of the year **793 AD** were worrying times. Anglo-Saxon writers in north England wrote about how 'immense whirlwinds, flashes of lightning and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air'. They thought this weather was a **sign of danger** to come.

This Viking raid on **Holy Island**, just off the Northumbrian coast, was not the first in England. But the raid on Lindisfarne monastery was different because it attacked '**the very place where the Christian religion began in our nation**'. It was where Saint Cuthbert had been bishop, and where his body was buried in 687 AD.

**Alcuin**, an Anglo-Saxon man in Northumbria, wrote that:

"The church of St Cuthbert is spattered with the blood of the priests of God, stripped of all its treasures, and left unprotected from these plundering pagans."

**Alcuin** calls the Vikings **pagans** because they were not Christian like the Anglo-Saxons were. The Vikings believed in many **different gods** who had different purposes, e.g. Thor was the god of war. The Vikings therefore had no respect for the Christian monastery or its monks.

The Vikings travelled to England on wooden **longships**. These were fast, streamlined boats that were powered by paddles. They were light enough to be carried over land, and could turn direction quickly.

They burned buildings, stole treasures, murdered monks, and terrified everyone. Some Anglo-Saxon Christian leaders said God had sent the Vikings, to punish people in England for their sins. **Alcuin** was particularly worried about why God had allowed such a holy place to be attacked: "**Is this the outcome of the sins of those who live there?**" he asked, wondering if the monks had disobeyed God.



The monastery at Lindisfarne

The Vikings did not send many ships on their first raids. They made **surprise attacks** on unprotected places, like Lindisfarne. They knew they would not have to fight a big Anglo-Saxon army. Saxon kings were too busy fighting each other to join forces against the Vikings. There was no English navy to guard the coasts, so it was easy for Vikings to land on a beach or sail up a river.

The Vikings fought using long **swords** and **axes**. Vikings did not wear much armour, though some wore chain mail coats, and most relied on a **round wooden shield** for protection. On their heads, they wore **helmets** made of leather or iron. The monks had no weapons and no warriors of their own to protect them against the Viking raiders.



**Monk Simeon**, an Anglo-Saxon monk in Durham, wrote that:

“On the sixth of June, they reached the church of Lindisfarne, where they miserably ravaged and pillaged everything; they trod the holy things under their polluted feet and plundered all the treasures of the church. Some of the monks they killed, some they carried off in chains, most of them they stripped naked, insulted, and cast out of the doors, and some they even drowned in the sea.”

After raiding the monastery, the ships sailed home with their new treasures and slaves. The parts of the monastery that were made of wood were burned down before they left.



Questions for EVERYONE:

1. Why did the Anglo-Saxons think something bad was going to happen in 793 AD?
2. How did the Vikings get to England?
3. What did the Vikings do when they got to England?
4. When did the Viking raid on Lindisfarne happen?
5. Why was the monastery an easy place to attack? (Give 2 reasons)
6. What did the Vikings do to the monks?
7. What did the Vikings take back with them?

CHALLENGE Questions:

1. Why were the Vikings able to beat the monks in the monastery so easily? (Give 2 reasons)
2. Why did the Vikings have no respect for the monastery?
3. Who did Alcuin blame for the attack? Why did he say this?
4. Can you trust what Monk Simeon and Alcuin wrote as being the truth? Give reasons for yes and no.

## Suggested Answers

1. Why did the Anglo-Saxons think something bad was going to happen in 793 AD?  
*They noticed changes in the weather (e.g. world winds, lightning) that they thought was a sign of danger.*
2. How did the Vikings get to England? *In wooden long-ships.*
3. What did the Vikings do when they got to England? *They burned buildings, stole treasures, murdered monks, and terrified everyone.*
4. When did the Viking raid on Lindisfarne happen? *6th of June 793 AD*
5. Why was the monastery an easy place to attack? (Give 2 reasons) *Possible reasons include: it was unprotected; it was on an island so could be easily reached by boat; monks were peaceful people so would not fight back; Vikings did not respect the Christian religion.*
6. What did the Vikings do to the monks? *Some of the monks they killed, some they carried off in chains, most of them they stripped naked, insulted, and cast out of the doors, and some they even drowned in the sea.*
7. What did the Vikings take back with them? *Treasure stolen from the monastery and slaves.*

### CHALLENGE Questions:

1. Why were the Vikings able to beat the monks in the monastery so easily? (Give 2 reasons) *Possible reasons include: the monasteries were unprotected; monks were peaceful and did not fight back; they had no warriors or army to protect them; the monks had no weapons whereas the Vikings has swords and axes.*
2. Why did the Vikings have no respect for the monastery? *They were not Christians and believed in many different gods.*
3. Who did Alcuin blame for the attack? Why did he say this? *He wondered if the monks were to blame for disobeying God. He thought this because the monastery was a holy place and God wouldn't allow it to be attacked unless the people there needed punishing.*
4. Can you trust what Monk Simeon and Alcuin wrote as being the truth? Give reasons for yes and no.  
*Possible answers:*  
*Yes because they were Anglo-Saxons so were alive at the time and could have heard what had happened from other Anglo-Saxons.*  
*No because they were not actually in the monastery when it happened. All the monks were killed or taken by the Vikings so no-one would know exactly what happened.*  
*No because they are Anglo-Saxons they may have exaggerated how bad the Vikings were.*