

Podcast Title: The Viking Invasions of Britain

Introduction

Today, we're sailing back in time to the era of Viking invasions in Britain. It's a story of warriors seeking conquest and riches, and lasting influence.

We'll explore the early raids, the Great Danish Army, and how the Vikings left their mark on Britain. Let's dive in.

Segment 1: Early Viking Raids

The Viking Age in Britain began in 793 AD with a brutal raid on the monastery of Lindisfarne, an island off the coast of north-east England and home to a famous monastery. This marked the start of a series of raids on coastal villages and towns.

Nick: Vikings were skilled sailors who used longships to travel quickly and strike unexpectedly. Their ships allowed them to navigate rivers and raid far inland, spreading fear across Britain. It was difficult for the Saxons to defend against such guerrilla raids, and the targets the Vikings chose were easy, undefended targets with valuables, such as monasteries with jewelled bibles, goblets and the like. The Vikings were warrior peoples who wanted to show that they could commit daring deeds. They forced many coastal monasteries to relocate inland.

Segment 2: Danish and Norse Invasions

While England faced guerrilla attacks mainly from Danish Vikings, Scotland had to deal with Norse

Vikings. For the first half century of these attacks, the Vikings simply raided and then sailed back home. But during this time it became clear to them that Britain was a land that was under settled and so could be a place to build villages and raise crops. This was important because Viking homelands had poor soils with very limited chances for expanding their farms. So raids transitioned to colonisation.

In 865 the Danes formed a force of several thousand men. It was known as the Great Danish Army. It landed near London and within months had captured large parts of England, establishing control over an area and setting the laws. That is why this area became known as the the Danelaw - the land over which Danes set the laws.

Segment 3: Jorvik and Viking Influence

Raiding and invasion soon changed to farming and trade. One of the most significant Viking settlements was Jorvik, known today as York. It became a thriving trade center under Viking control.

The Vikings did not build many structures that have stood the test of time. But they left their mark in history through place names. For example, towns ending in “-by” or “-thorpe”, like Grimsby and Scunthorpe, show where they settled and took over.

Segment 4: The Danelaw and Resistance

This army had taken the Saxon kingdoms by surprise. Large parts of Mercia and Northumbria were taken over. But they found it much harder to take land of Wessex in the south. At first they fell back while they figured out what to do. Their king was Alfred of Wessex, known as Alfred the Great. They resisted fiercely, while developing an army and tactics for advancing. In particular, Alfred designed a series of fortified towns that were close enough to give each other help in case of attack. They were enclosed by great earthen walls with wooden palisades of stakes on top. Some of these earthen walls still curve, such as Wareham in Dorset. Then Alfred began to advance. He was not strong enough to take over the whole of the Danelaw so he had to compromise. Through a combination of battles and treaties, he managed to reclaim much of the land.

After this, and over the following centuries, the distinction between Saxon and Viking England blurred and the country became one kingdom.

Segment 5: The End of Viking Times

The Norse Vikings in Norway still believed they had a claim to the English throne, and finally, in 1066 they invaded near York. By this time, England was ruled by powerful King Harold. He took his army to York and defeated a Viking army led by Harald Hardrada at the Battle of Stamford Bridge. Thus all hope of the Viking Age in Britain ended in 1066. But that was to be a year of dramatic change. Just

weeks later, Harold faced another invasion—this time from William the Conqueror coming from Normandy in France. He took his army south and the two armies met at The Battle of Hastings. William won, and so Anglo-Saxon England also ended in 1066 and it was the beginning of Norman rule. And, of course the Normans were people who were descendants of the Norse because Normandy means Norse men, so in a way, the blood line of the Norse did succeed, through the Normans. What a curious twist of fate.