## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Who were the Vikings?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The Viking Invasions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Viking Ships</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Life and Death on Viking Teesside</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The Vikings and their Gods</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Settlements and Place-names</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Christianity and the Church</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 The Community of St. Cuthbert</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 The truth about the Vikings</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Who were the Vikings?

‘Northmen’, or ‘Vikings’ as we call them today, came from the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The word ‘viking’ comes from the Old Norse language, meaning sea raiding, and when these groups of warriors set out on a raid, they were said to be going “a-viking”.

The Scandinavians had been trading and fighting around the Baltic Sea for centuries, but a shortage of land at home created by a rapidly increasing population led to the attacks on Britain.
2 The Viking Invasions

‘AD 793. This year came dreadful fore-warnings over the land of the Northumbrians, terrifying the people most woefully: these were immense sheets of light rushing through the air, and whirlwinds, and fiery dragons flying across the firmament. These tremendous tokens were soon followed by a great famine; and not long after, on the sixth day before the ides of January in the same year, the harrowing inroads of heathen men made lamentable havoc in the church of God in Holy-island.’ (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle)

These are the words which heralded the arrival of the Vikings in the North of England.
The first of many terrifying Viking raids started in the late 8th century, at a time when Anglo-Saxon England had converted to Christianity and the North of England was enjoying a relatively peaceful and prosperous period known as the ‘Golden Age of Northumbria’.
Summer raids
In the early raids, which took place during the fine summer months, the Vikings systematically attacked and looted all the major monasteries along the North-East coast.

The first to be destroyed was Lindisfarne in 793 AD, followed by Jarrow in 794 AD and later Monkwearmouth (left) and Whitby.
Conquest

The first deliberate attempt to conquer and colonise England took place in the mid-9th century at a time when two of England’s three main kingdoms, Northumbria and Mercia, had been weakened by civil war.

In 851 AD, for the first time a Danish army camped in southern England over the winter. Although probably only a few hundred men strong, there was no Anglo-Saxon force large enough to defeat it, leaving the Danes safe in their camp.

Avoiding major conflict with the much stronger kingdom of Wessex, the Danes now attacked Northumbria and Mercia and by 867 AD had captured York.

In 874 AD the Danish Great Army split in two. Halfdan led one part of this army north to the River Tyne, from where he looted Northumbria.

Returning to York, Halfdan established his base here while his army occupied the land and settled down to farming.
Viking Settlement
York changed hands again in 918 AD, when it was captured by new Scandinavian invaders, the Norwegian Ragnald and his followers, who had been forced out of their settlements in Ireland by the native Irish. Their reign was relatively short-lived and Scandinavian rule in York finally came to an end in 954 AD when Erik Bloodaxe was betrayed and killed, along with his son Haeric.

There followed a period of great disruption as the native Northumbrians, the Kings of Wessex and the Irish-Norse warlords fought for power. The situation did not settle down until William the Conqueror took control in 1085.
3 Viking Ships

The success of the Vikings was based on their superb sea-faring abilities and the excellence of their sea-craft. They were able to safely navigate far from home in some of the most treacherous waters in the world, including the North Atlantic, Baltic and North Sea.

Viking travels led to the discovery of America, the development of trade routes throughout northern Europe and through the heart of Europe to Byzantium (modern day Istanbul), in the Mediterranean.
The Viking ships were the first true sea-faring vessels of northern Europe and were of clinker construction, a technique still used today in the North-East of England to build fishing boats known as cobles. This involved the laying of a keel and then building-up the shape of the hull with overlapping planks. Frames, or ‘ribs’, were then added to create a flexible yet very strong vessel well suited to northern waters.

Longships are the best known type of Viking vessel and each could carry between 30 and 60 men. Long, narrow, fast and of shallow draught they allowed the raiders to attack coastal and river settlements and make their escape before a force could be raised to fight them.

Longships 29m long by 3.5m wide have been found by archaeologists while King Olaf Tryggvason’s enormous ship the *Long Serpent* built in 1000 AD was 37m long and could carry 200 men.

There were however many other types of vessels and the most common are likely to have been much broader trading vessels designed to carry cargoes. One excavated example was 16.3m long and 4.6m wide and had a central hold for cargo with short sections of decking in the bow and the stern.

All of these Viking ships cost a great deal to build and to equip and this could only have been done by people of wealth and power.
Farming
The Saxon farmers on Teesside continued to cultivate and work the land in much the same way as their Iron Age predecessors, growing crops of wheat, oats and barley and raising livestock including cattle, sheep and pigs.

The new Scandinavian settlers brought with them the knowledge of how to farm in harsh upland landscapes and evidence of their settlements can be found in the high Pennine Dales and on the North York Moors.

Archaeological investigations have been carried out at three such farmsteads at Simy Folds in Teesdale (below). These investigations have shown that each farmstead comprised two buildings set at right angles to each other with a wall creating an enclosed yard, beyond which was a larger enclosure containing at least one additional building.
Houses
Anglo-Scandinavian houses were rectangular and usually had only one room, with a doorway either in the long wall or at the end of the building. Farmhouses probably had low walls with the roof coming down almost to the ground. The fire was in the centre of the building and smoke would have drifted out through a small opening in the roof.

The larger long-house was introduced by the Scandinavians. This was a long rectangular building with living quarters at one end and space for animals at the other. A light screen might separate the two. This type of house continued in use into the 18th century.
Clothing
Scandinavians wore colourful clothes of wool dyed in bright reds, purples, blues, yellows and greens, over simple linen undergarments for extra comfort. The men wore trousers and a tunic with a jacket over the top for extra warmth and a cloak was pinned to the tunic with decorative brooches. The women wore a full length linen smock with a woollen gown over the top. This was often decorated with braid or embroidery. An ‘apron-dress’ was worn over the gown, protecting it from becoming dirty or torn, and over this a full-length, long-sleeved coat.

Both men and women wore various types of headgear including caps, and like the Anglo-Saxons, were very fond of jewellery. This tended to comprise various brooches and finger rings, while men would also have carried knives for general use and women keys, indicating their control of the household.
**Burials**

The only known Viking burials close to the Teesside area came from Kildale Church on the edge of the North York Moors. These burials were found in 1867 and comprised the remains of seven or eight people. The finds included a set of balance scales, sword, spearhead and axe, a hone for sharpening knives, and a number of belt buckles. The nature of this group of finds emphasises the trading activities of the Vikings as much as their fighting instincts.
5 The Vikings and their Gods

The Scandinavians brought with them beliefs in great gods, giants (trolls), dwarves and elves. These beliefs were very similar to those of the Anglo-Saxons and the great gods were very similar, the Anglo-Saxon Woden, Donar and Tiw, being matched by Odin (below), Thor and Tyr.

The Vikings believed that there were two races of gods, the warlike Aesir who lived in Asgard and were led by Odin, seated in his great hall of Valhalla and the peaceful Vanir of whom the best known were Frey and Freyja.

Beneath Asgard was Midgard where people lived and beneath this was Niflheim, the mist-world or abode of the dead, presided over by the goddess Hel.

Many stories were told of the gods and their war with the giants, the marvellous metalworking of the dwarves and the beautiful elves, stories of swords that could only be removed from trees by great heroes and of powerful rings and dragons.

These stories were echoed in the sculpture produced when the Scandinavians came to England and are familiar today in tales like Lord of the Rings.

The gods of the Scandinavians also left their mark on the landscape of Cleveland (the Viking name meaning ‘land of cliffs’). Roseberry Topping is a corruption of Odinsbeorg, Odin’s mountain and Freeborough Hill may mean Frey or Freyja’s beorg.
With the exception of the Simy Folds excavations, there is very little archaeological evidence of how many Scandinavian farmers and their families settled in the area. Much of what we know is based on historical records, place-names and surviving stone sculpture, however, the extent to which Scandinavian words entered the local dialect does suggest a fairly sizeable community.

For the local people already living here, a mixture of Britons and Saxons, life under Scandinavian rule would have continued much as before. The only major change taking place was in the organisation of their settlements and the land they farmed into the groups and estates that would eventually form the Medieval Parishes.
Historical Records
William the Conqueror’s Domesday Book of 1086 provides detailed records of all the land ownership in England at this time, including the type of land, such as meadows or woodland, how many people lived there and even which land had been given as ‘gift’. Unfortunately, the survey stopped at the River Tees so there are no Domesday records for Durham or Northumberland.

‘Raegnald, a Viking, shares out the eastern lands of St Cuthbert, which he has won by conquest. The southern half, between Iodene (Castle Eden) and Billingham is given to Scule, and the other half, between Castle Eden and the River Wear, to Onlafball’. (913-915 AD). This is the same Ragnald who had been forced out of Ireland; Scule gave his name to School Aycliffe.

‘Earl Copsi to St Cuthbert, in perpetuity. The church of St Germain in Merscum (Marske) with its endowment, comprising 10½ carucates in Marske, 2 carucates in Thornton, 10 bovates in Theostcota (Tocketts), ½ carucates in Readeclive (Redcar?) and 1 carucate in Gisburham (Guisborough)’. (1042-1056 AD)

The Domesday book clearly shows that people with Scandinavian names represented a substantial number of those who held the land, people such as Torchil (Kilton near Brotton) and Ulchel (Guisborough, Marton).

Scandinavian Place-names
Four types of place-name are associated with the Scandinavians:-

- names ending in ‘–by’ meaning large settlement.
- *thorpe* meaning lesser settlement.
- *thwaite* meaning farmstead.
- names ending in ‘–ing’ meaning newly farmed land.

*–by* is often combined with a personal name for example Ormesby (Ormr’s
settlement) and Tollesby (Tollr’s settlement). Other local combinations include, Yearby which means high settlement and Lazenby – settlement of the freedmen.

Thorpe and thwaite names were used for smaller settlements. There are many Thorpe names recorded in the Domesday Book and in order to tell the difference, the name of the overlord was often added such as Pinzun to create Pinchinthorpe.

The Scandinavian place-names to the north of the River Tees show a strong Danish influence, while to the south there is a strong Irish-Norse influence.
**Estates**
The historical records and place-names show that groups of settlements and areas of lands had now been formed into administrative units, or estates, each with its own ‘centre’ where the lord would live. The Parishes of Norton and Kirklevington are good examples of such estates:

For Norton there is a charter dated to 994AD.

*‘Ulfketel, son of Osulf to St Cuthbert. Norton with sake and soke’*

This shows that Ulfketel had given the estate of Norton with all its inhabitants and produce and with full legal control to the Community of St Cuthbert. This Scandinavian estate had its administrative and religious headquarters at Norton and included the lesser settlements of Stockton, Preston, Hartburn, Roseworth and Blakiston.

Kirklevington gets its name from the River Leven and at the time of the Domesday Book it was known as Leventun. However it was soon called Kirklevington to differentiate between it and ‘the other Leventon’ later Castle Levington. Kirk is Scandinavian for church so there must have been a church here in the 11th century. More importantly Kirklevington has a large and impressive collection of Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture which confirms that it was a wealthy and important administrative centre.
Sculpture
The Scandinavians adopted the Anglo-Saxon tradition of creating stone sculptures for religious purposes, particularly large, free standing crosses and incised slabs.

This sculpture would have been made locally for the wealthy nobility and takes two main forms, crosses and hogbacks. Both types were intended to mark the grave of, and commemorate, individuals and both would originally have been painted to provide an even more striking impression than they do today.

Hogbacks are commonly found in the north-west of Cumbria and north-east Yorkshire with a distinct concentration in the Tees valley, all of which are areas of large-scale Irish-Norse settlement. These stone slabs are long and narrow, with sloping sides and a bowed shape like a hog’s back. Bears are often depicted clasping each end of the stone like this one from Stainton (below).
The most common type of sculpture is the freestanding cross and many fragments of these have been found. The shafts and heads are decorated with interlace patterns and scenes from the Bible and Norse mythology. There are sometimes images of warriors, perhaps the person who was being remembered.

All of these carvings were made in just a few specialist workshops, and there was even a school of sculpture in the Tees valley probably based at either Brompton or Kirklevington. The crosses were often mass-produced by using a template of a specific design. Knowing this, it is possible to trace a sculpture back to the very workshop that produced it!
7 Christianity and the Church

We associate the Vikings with the destruction of Anglo-Saxon Monasteries and they are depicted as bloodthirsty pagans by the monks who wrote the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and other accounts. However once they settled in this country they quickly adopted Christianity and many of the churches we call ‘Saxon’ were in fact built under Scandinavian lordship.

Most would have been constructed of timber, however, some were built in stone, emphasising the importance of Christianity.

As the Scandinavians had little tradition of stone working they used Saxon craftsmen who built in the Saxon architectural style, examples of which can still be seen in parts of the two large and complex churches at Norton (below) and St. Cuthbert’s, Billingham.
8 The Community of St. Cuthbert

While Scandinavian, Northumbrian and Wessex warlords fought for control of the area they all had to take account of an equally powerful force, the ‘Community of St Cuthbert’. This comprised the monks of Lindisfarne, who in 875 AD abandoned their monastery because of the Viking threat. They took the body of St Cuthbert and the Lindisfarne Gospels with them and between 882-884 AD established themselves at Chester le Street. Here they remained for a hundred years before further disturbances saw them move on to Durham in 995 AD.

In 1083, following the Norman Conquest, the Community of St Cuthbert was again forced to move, this time being dispersed to three separate locations at Chester le Street, Darlington and Norton, being replaced at Durham by Benedictine monks.

The Cult of St Cuthbert had developed and grown ever since his death in 687 AD and as a result his successors had acquired lands, wealth and great religious and political influence. The first Christian Scandinavian King of York, Guthfrith owed his crown to the influence of the Community and the leaders regularly gave lands to St Cuthbert and visited his shrine wherever it rested.

While the Viking raids had destroyed the great Anglo-Saxon monasteries of Lindisfarne, Jarrow, Monkwearmouth and Whitby the survival of the Community of St Cuthbert ensured that a strong Christian presence remained in the area. This was instrumental in the speedy conversion to Christianity of the pagan Scandinavians who moved into the area.
9 The truth about the Vikings

While the early Viking raiders certainly brought with them death and disruption, those who settled and stayed in this country made a great contribution to its developing wealth. The far flung trade routes of the Scandinavian world gave access to a wide range of goods and led to the development of the great trading centres such as York and London.

The Vikings may unknowingly have also helped by re-distributing the large amounts of land held by the Saxon church. Transferring this land into private hands seems to have helped in the development of settlements and the wealthy and prosperous country that we see depicted in the Domesday Book is as much a product of the Scandinavians as it was the Saxons.
Further Reading

If you have enjoyed this booklet the following sources of information are also available:-

Archaeological Booklet No 1. **Anglo-Saxon Teesside**.

Archaeological Booklet No 2. **Iron Age Teesside**

Archaeological Booklet No 3. **Roman Teesside**

Archaeological Booklet No 5. **Medieval Teesside**

Site Guide 1. **Archaeological Excavations at Catcote, Hartlepool**

These booklets are available to borrow from local libraries or can be downloaded free of charge from our website (see below).

To buy copies of our booklets please contact us for current prices and availability.

You can find further information on archaeology in the area on our website: [www.teesarchaeology.com](http://www.teesarchaeology.com)
Tees Archaeology
Sir William Gray House,
Clarence Road,
Hartlepool,
TS24 8BT

Telephone: 01429 523455
E-mail: tees-archaeology@hartlepool.gov.uk
www.teesarchaeology.com