Over a 1,000 years ago, on the 8 of June AD793, a small band of Vikings sailed down the eastern coast of England.

Their target was a monastery called Lindisfarne, and they decided to launch a surprise attack. It's likely that the first thing the monks saw was the outline of two or three ships on the horizon, but that would hardly have been unusual.

Living here, they would have been accustomed to the arrival of ships from all sorts of places. Maybe a few of the monks came down onto the beach to welcome the newcomers, with open arms.

But the monks weren't prepared for visitors like these… because these were Viking warriors. And they had come to kill the monks and steal the monastery's treasure.

Life in England was about to change forever, because the savage attack on Lindisfarne was just the beginning.

50 years after the attack on the Lindisfarne monastery, a huge force of around 3,000 Vikings arrived on our shores, and they wanted to conquer the whole of England.

This was truly a force to be reckoned with. The Anglo-Saxons called it the Great Heathen Army, and it wasn't just a raiding party intent on slaves and gold.

The Great Heathen Army wanted everything, and to get it, they would have to take on the Anglo Saxons.

The first Viking raid recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was around AD787. It was the start of a fierce struggle between the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings.

The Vikings were pagans, not Christians like most people living in Britain at the time. They did not think twice about raiding a monastery.

Christian monasteries in Britain were easy targets for the Vikings. The monks had no weapons and the buildings were filled with valuable treasures, like gold, jewels and books.

There was food, drink, cattle, clothes and tools too – all very tempting to a Viking raider.

Viking warriors fought using long swords and axes

The name 'Viking' comes from a language called 'Old Norse' and means ‘a pirate raid’. People who went off raiding in ships were said to be 'going Viking'. But not all the Vikings were bloodthirsty warriors.

Some came to fight, but others came peacefully, to settle. They were farmers, and kept animals and grew crops. They were skilful at crafting, and made beautiful metalwork and wooden carvings.

Vikings sailed the seas trading goods to buy silver, silks, spices, wine, jewellery, glass and pottery to bring back to their homes.

The Vikings were Norse people who came from an area called Scandinavia. You might know it better as Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

The word Viking means ‘a pirate raid’, which is a fitting name as they were fearsome warriors and often raided monasteries for treasure. But they weren’t all bad, bloodthirsty and violent - they also settled with their families and farmed the land peacefully for many years.

They were great explorers too and travelled all over the world. Vikings explored as far away as North America. They even travelled through Russia to trade in the Middle East.

‘The Thing’, was an early version of today’s parliament. The Norse people met to discuss new laws and solve arguments. They would argue over who owns your shoes.

Plus, we still use some of their Old Norse language today. Words like ‘egg’, ‘muck’ and ‘dirt’.

Even some modern town names are based on Viking words! York and places that end in ‘thorpe’, ‘by’ or ‘kirk’. So for example, the Viking word for deer is “djúr” and village is ‘bȳ’ - together making “Derby”.

In AD865 an army of Vikings sailed across the North Sea. This time they wanted to conquer land rather than just raid it. Over several years the army battled through northern England, taking control of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Northumbria, East Anglia and most of Mercia.

By AD874, almost all the kingdoms had fallen to the Vikings. All except for Wessex, which was ruled by Alfred the Great. King Alfred beat the Viking army in battle but wasn't able to drive the Vikings out of Britain. After years of fighting the Vikings and Alfred made a peace agreement. But even after this agreement, fighting went on for many more years. An imaginary dividing line was agreed to run across England, from London in the south towards Chester in the north west. The Anglo-Saxon lands were to the west and the Viking lands, known as the Danelaw, were roughly to the east.

**Where did the Vikings settle in Britain?**

Vikings travelled from Scandinavia to Britain. They mostly settled in the Danelaw, to the north and east of England. Some Norwegian Vikings or 'Norse' sailed to Scotland. They made settlements in the north, and on the Shetland and Orkney Islands. Vikings also settled on the Isle of Man and often raided Wales, but few made homes there. In Ireland, the Vikings founded the city of Dublin.

**Life in the Danelaw**

The Danelaw covered an area east of their line joining London and Chester. Everything to the east belonged to the Vikings. There were three main areas where Vikings lived - Northumbria (which included modern-day Yorkshire), East Anglia, and the Five Boroughs. A borough was a town and the five towns were Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, Stamford and Lincoln.

Viking families came to settle on these lands. Good farmland was scarce in the Vikings' own countries, and they were looking for a better life. The most important city in the Danelaw was the city of York, or ‘Jorvik’ (pronounced 'your-vick'), as the Vikings knew it. Over 10,000 people lived there and it was an important place to trade goods.

Many towns and cities in Britain that were founded by the Vikings can still be spotted today. Places that end in -by, -thorpe or -ay were almost certainly Viking towns.