

Vikings

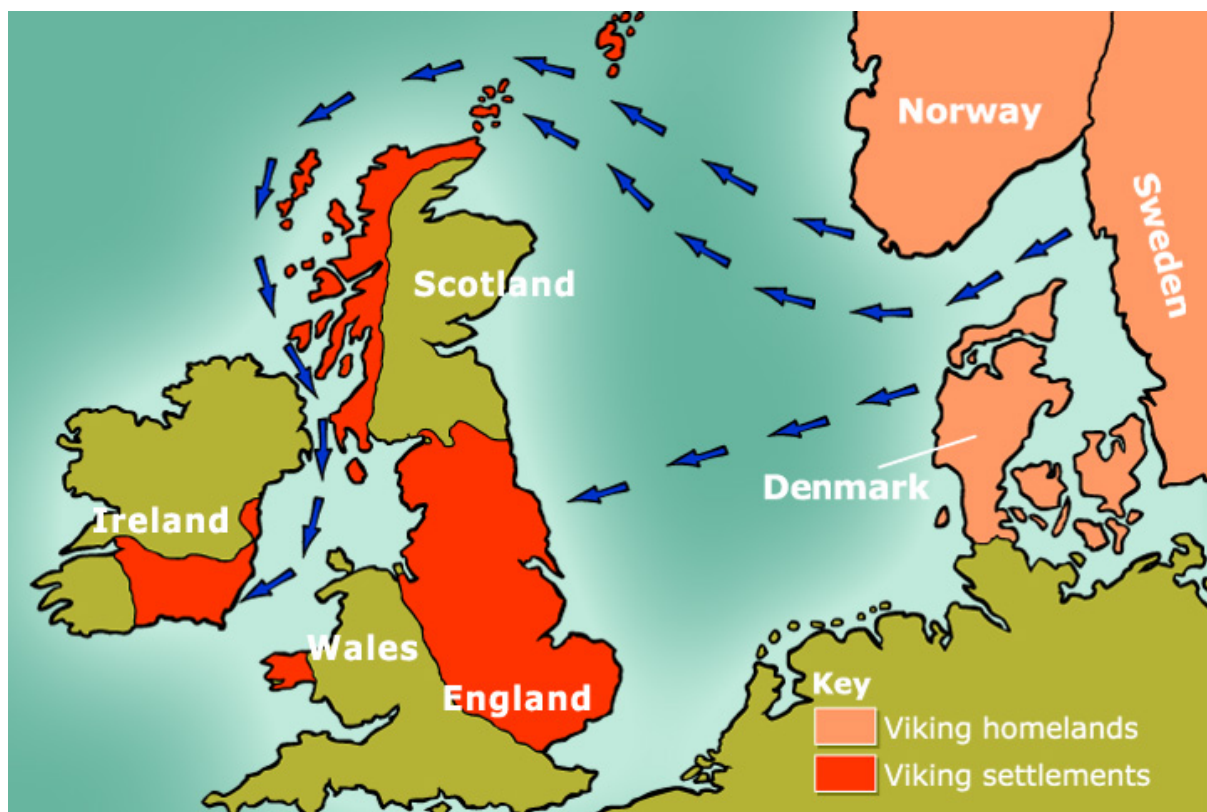
www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/vikings/



Where did the Vikings come from?

The Vikings came from three countries of Scandinavia: Denmark, Norway and Sweden. 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'.

The Viking age in European history was about AD 700 to 1100. During this period many Vikings left Scandinavia and travelled to other countries, such as Britain and Ireland. Some went to fight and steal treasure. Others settled in new lands as farmers, craftsmen or traders.



Using the blank map below colour in the parts of the UK where the Vikings landed.



The Vikings in Britain

Southern Britain (England) had been settled by the Anglo-Saxons. You can find out more on our Anglo-Saxons site. In AD 787 three Viking longships landed in southern England. The Vikings fought the local people, then sailed away. This first raid is recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. It was the start of a fierce struggle between English and Vikings. The English called the Viking invaders 'Danes' but they came from Norway as well as Denmark.



A raid on England



In 793, 'Northmen' (as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle calls them) attacked the Christian monastery at Lindisfarne in Northumbria, in north-east England. Northumbria was an English kingdom, and its monasteries were famous for books, art and treasures. On a January day, the longships arrived and the

Vikings attacked. They burned buildings, stole treasures, murdered monks, and terrified everyone. Some Christian Church leaders said the Vikings were sent by God, to punish people in England for doing wrong.

How Vikings attacked

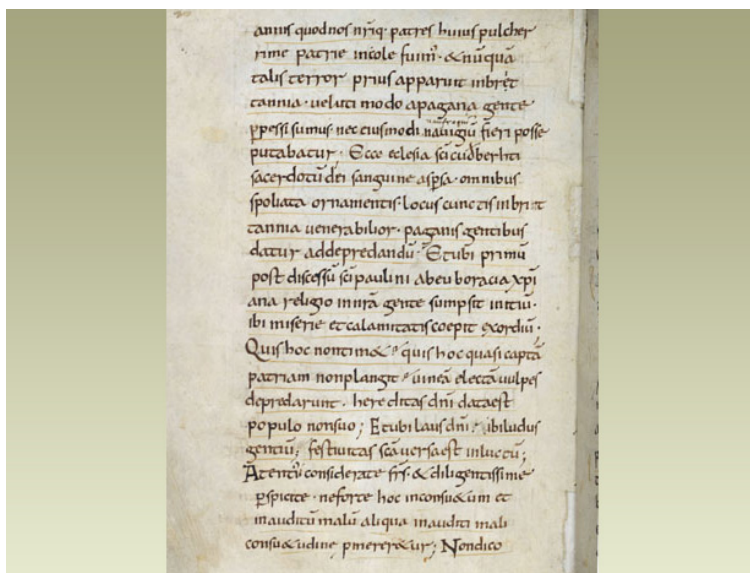
The Vikings did not send many ships on their first raids. They made surprise attacks on lonely places, like Lindisfarne. They knew



they would not have to fight a big English army. English kings were too busy fighting one another 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. After raiding a monastery, the ships sailed home loaded with treasures and captives.

Why did Vikings attack monasteries?

In 793 Vikings attacked the Christian monastery at Lindisfarne in Northumbria. They were pagans, not Christians like most people in Britain. A Viking robber did not think twice about robbing a Christian church. Christian monasteries in Britain were easy to attack, because the monks in the monasteries had no weapons. Churches and monasteries kept valuable treasures, such as gold, jewels and books. There were food, drink, cattle, clothes and tools too - tempting for greedy Vikings.



A letter about the Viking raid on Lindisfarne, written (in Latin) by Alcuin, an English monk. He wrote to the King of Northumbria, 'Never before has such terror appeared in Britain'.

Create a newspaper report about the Viking raid on Lindisfarne - include a picture.

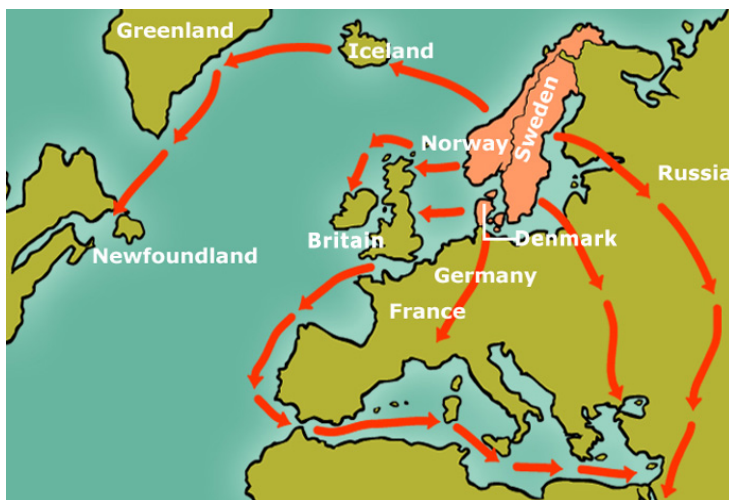
Where did Vikings settle?

Some Viking ships brought families to Britain looking for land to farm. Good farmland was scarce in the Vikings' own countries. The parts of Britain where most Vikings settled were northern Scotland and eastern England. For 500 years, from about AD 900, Vikings ruled the north of Scotland, the Orkney and Shetland isles and the Hebrides islands off the west coast. In Ireland, Vikings founded the city of Dublin.

Viking areas in east and northern England became known as the Danelaw. Viking settlements brought new words into the English

language, and new ideas about government too.

For a short time England had Danish kings (King Cnut and his sons, from 1016 to 1042).



How far did Vikings roam?

Norwegian Vikings sailed west across the Atlantic Ocean to Iceland and Greenland. About AD 1000, Vikings sailed to North America and started a settlement, though it did not last long. Danish Vikings went to France and founded Normandy ('Land of the North-men'). Danish Vikings also sailed south around Spain, and into the Mediterranean Sea. Swedish Vikings roamed along rivers into Russia. Viking traders could be found as far east as Constantinople (Turkey), where they met people from Africa, Arabia and Asia.

Trading

The Vikings traded all over Europe, and as far east as Central Asia. They bought goods and materials such as silver, silk, spices, wine, jewellery, glass and pottery. In return, they sold items such as honey, tin, wheat, wool, wood, iron, fur, leather, fish and walrus ivory. Everywhere they went the Vikings bought and sold slaves. Traders carried folding scales, for weighing coins to make sure they got a fair deal.

Discovering new lands

The Vikings were brave sailors and explorers. Families were ready to risk their lives on long, dangerous journeys to find new land to farm. Vikings settled in Britain, but also sailed out into the north Atlantic Ocean and south to the Mediterranean Sea. They sailed to the Faeroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland. A Viking ship was small - only

This statue of Leif Ericsson is in Iceland's main city, Reykjavik.



about 20 tonnes compared with 100,000 tonnes or more for a big modern cargo ship. But bold Vikings sailed their ships far across the ocean. They found their way by looking for landmarks, such as islands and distant mountains.

From Iceland to Greenland

Vikings from Norway sailed to Iceland in the late 800s - about the same time as King Alfred was fighting Danish Vikings in England. In 930, the Vikings living in Iceland set up what is often called the world's first parliament, the Althing. One of the Iceland

Vikings was Eric the Red, and in AD 983 he sailed off west to

Greenland. Greenland is much bigger than Iceland, and much colder too. It is not much good for farming. Eric hoped the name 'Greenland' would attract farmers, but not many Vikings went there.

Vikings in America

A Viking called Bjarni Herjolfsson 'discovered' America by



This is a modern replica of the ship in which Leif Ericsson and his men sailed from Iceland to America.

accident in the year 985. He saw an unknown land, after his ship was blown off course on the way from Iceland to Greenland. In 1001, Leif Ericsson, son of Eric the Red, sailed west to find this new land.

Leif and his men were the first Europeans known to have landed in America. They spent the winter

in a place they named 'Vinland' (Wine-land). It was in Newfoundland, Canada. Soon afterwards, Thorfinn Karlsefni led a small group of Viking families to settle in the new land. But after fights with the local Native American people, the Vikings gave up their settlement.



A reconstruction of a Viking house at L'Anse Aux Meadows in Canada. This is where Vikings settled in North America.

Use the table to list the places where the Vikings travelled, traded and explored. Also what they traded.

Where they travelled	What they traded

Life in the Danelaw

Viking armies

In AD 865, a 'Great Army' of Vikings invaded England. The army stayed in England for 14 years, fighting the English kings. In AD 866 Vikings captured York. They captured King Edmund of East Anglia and shot him dead with arrows.

In AD 892, 300 Viking ships invaded to fight King Alfred of Wessex. No one knows how big the Viking armies were. If there were 20 men in each ship, the army of AD 892 numbered 6,000! That was a huge army for the time. Most Viking armies were probably smaller - perhaps 1,000 to 2,000 men.

The English king Alfred the Great beat the Viking army in battle in AD 878. Alfred then made a peace agreement with the Viking leader Guthrum, who agreed to become a Christian. Alfred allowed the Vikings to settle in part of England, which became known as the Danelaw.



However, even after this agreement, fighting

between English and Vikings went on for many years. More Vikings sailed across the North Sea from Norway and Denmark. The English built a navy to fight Viking ships at sea before they could land armies.

The Danelaw covered an area roughly east of a line on a map joining London and Chester. There were three main areas where Vikings lived. These areas were Northumbria (which included modern

Yorkshire), East Anglia, and the Five Boroughs (a borough was a town). The five towns were Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, Stamford and Lincoln. In the Danelaw people followed Viking laws, spoke Viking languages, and lived in much the same way as Vikings in Scandinavia. Most people were farmers.

Drama: Imagine a TV newscast covering the war between Alfred and the Danes, and the peace agreement. How might the news have been covered, by say, an English TV station and one on the Viking side? Explore the reasons why Alfred agreed to let the Vikings have such a large area of land.

Viking ships

The Vikings built fast ships for raiding and war. These ships were 'dragon-ships' or 'longships'. The Vikings also had slower passenger and cargo ships called knorr. They built small boats for fishing or short trips.



Viking longships could sail in shallow water. So they could travel up rivers as well as across the sea. In a raid, a ship could be hauled up on a beach. The Vikings could jump out and start fighting, and then make a quick getaway if they were chased.

How ships were built

A Viking ship was built beside a river or an inlet of the sea. A tall oak tree was cut to make the keel. The builders cut long planks of wood for the sides, and shorter pieces for supporting ribs and cross-beams. They used wooden pegs and iron rivets to fasten the wooden pieces together. Overlapping the side planks, known as 'clinker-building', made the ship very strong. People stuffed animal wool and sticky tar from pine trees into every join and crack, to keep out the water.

To launch the ship, the Vikings pushed it into the water. They slid it over log rollers to make the pushing easier.

Sails and oars

A Viking ship had one big square sail made of woven wool. In some ships, the mast for the sail could be folded down. When there

was not enough wind for the sail, the men rowed with long wooden oars. To steer the ship, one man worked a big steering oar at the back end, or stern. At the curved front end of the ship was a carved wooden figure-head.

A dragon-ship had room for between 40 and 60 men. The men slept and ate on deck. There was some space below deck for stores, but no cabins.



Finding the way

Vikings sailed close to the coast whenever possible, watching for landmarks. Out of sight of land, they looked for the sun: west (towards the sunset) meant they were headed for England; east (towards the sunrise) meant home to Denmark or Norway. The Vikings invented a kind of sun compass to help find their way. At night they watched the stars. Seamen knew a lot about winds and sea currents. By watching birds or even the colour of the water, an experienced sailor could tell when land was close.

Ships in a museum

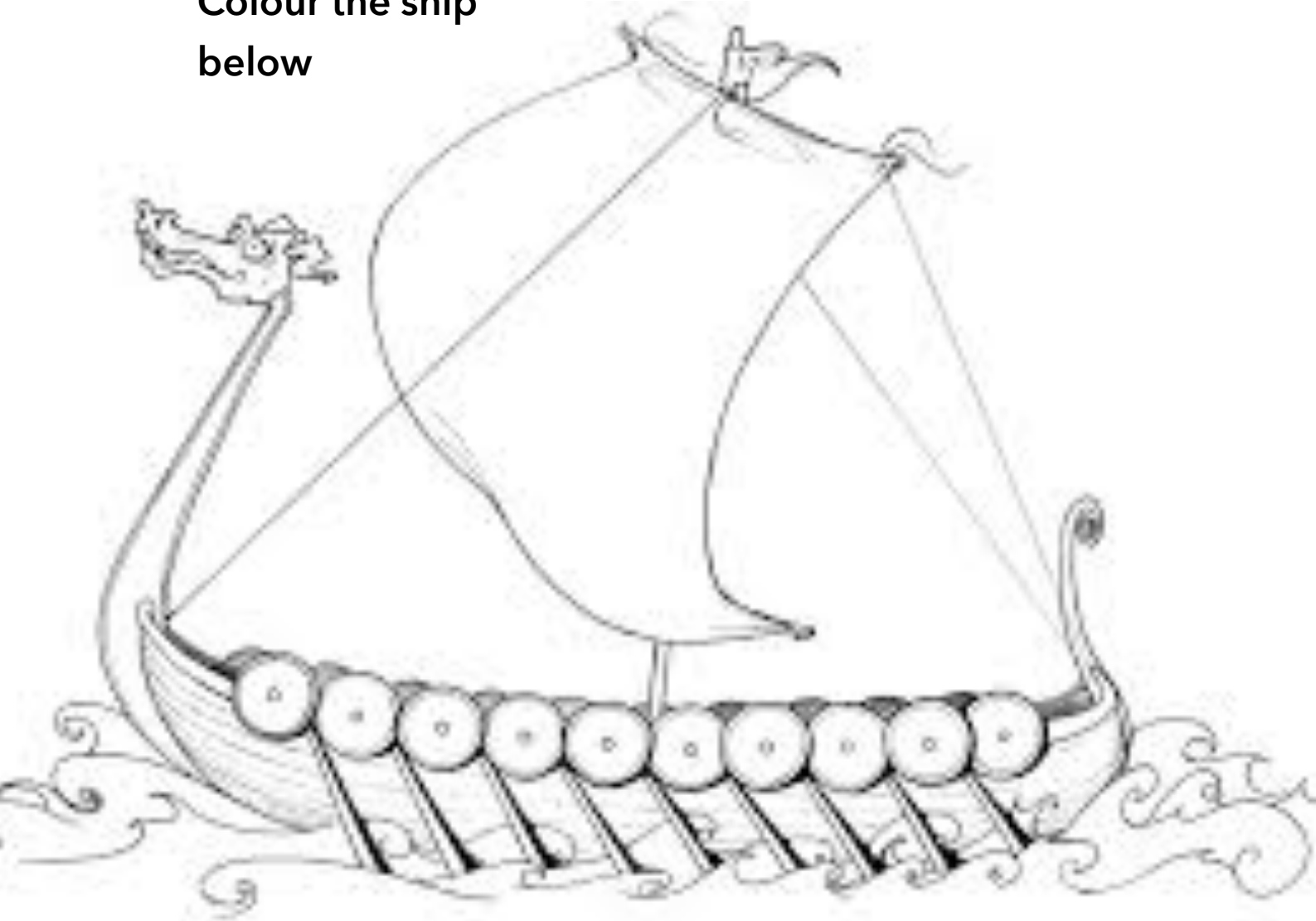


Two Viking ships were found by archaeologists in Norway. The Gokstad ship was dug up on a farm in 1880. The Oseberg ship was found on another farm in 1904. Both ships were buried in Viking funerals between AD 800 and 900. The Gokstad ship is 23

metres/76 ft long. It was big enough for 32 oarsmen - 16 oars each side.

These two ships are now in a museum in Oslo in Norway. In 1893, a copy of the Gokstad ship sailed across the Atlantic Ocean from Norway to America.

**Colour the ship
below**

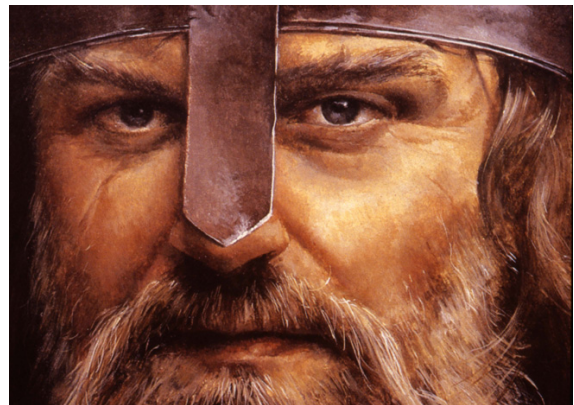


Viking weapons

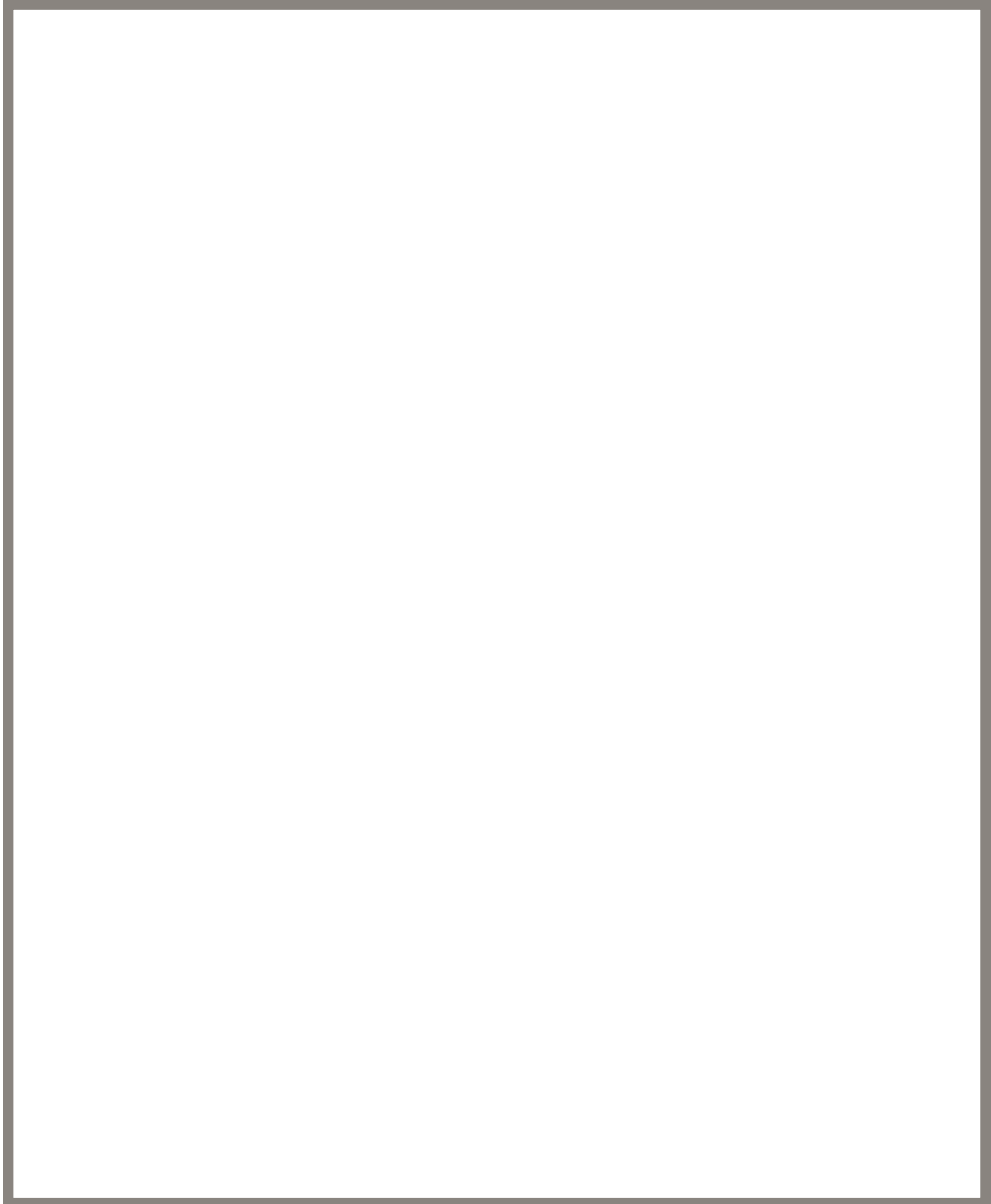


The Vikings fought using long swords and axes. A good sword was handed down from father to son, but Vikings also buried weapons with their owner when he died. Wood rots and metal rusts away after a thousand years or more in the ground, but some remains show what the weapons

were like. Vikings did not wear much armour, though some chieftains wore mail coats. Most relied on a round wooden shield for protection. On their heads, they wore helmets made of leather or iron. A Viking saying was, 'Never leave your weapons behind when you go to work in the fields - you may need them'.



Using the pictures and descriptions in your notes draw a picture of a Viking warrior with his weapons.



Viking Life

Pictures from "Yorvik Centre" in York

Men and women

Most Viking men were all-round handymen, but some had special skills. There were boat-builders, for example and potters, leather-workers and smiths. Most Viking men knew how to handle a boat. And most could fight if they had to, to protect the family or to support their chieftain.



Women baked bread. They did spinning and weaving to turn sheep wool into cloth. They looked after the children, made the family's clothes and cooked the two meals a day most families ate. On the farm, women milked the cows and made cheese.

Children

Babies were given little Thor's-hammer charms, to protect them from evil spirits and sickness. A boy usually took his father's name too - so Eric, son of Karl, became Eric Karlsson. Girls often took the same name as their mother or grandmother.

Viking children did not go to school. They helped their parents at work, and learned Viking history, religion and law from spoken stories and songs, not from books. By 15 or 16 they were adult. It was

common for a girl's father to choose her husband.

Roving and trading

A young Viking man might go off on a trading voyage, or become a raider. He hoped to come home rich so he could buy a farm. Vikings met at

markets, like the markets at Hedeby in Denmark and Jorvik in England. They traded by exchanging goods (a wolf skin for a pair of shoes, perhaps) but also used gold and silver coins. Traders valued coins by weight, and carried small folding scales to weigh a customer's coins.



Slaves

Not everyone was free to come and go as he or she liked. Some people were slaves or 'thralls'. Slaves did the hardest, dirtiest jobs. People could be born slaves. The child of a slave mother and father was a slave too, but the child of a slave mother and a free father was free. Many slaves were people captured in a Viking raid. Viking traders sold slaves in markets, but slave-trading in England was stopped in 1102.

Daily life

Jobs such as collecting wood for the fire, weaving cloth and baking bread took up a lot of time. Vikings did not have much furniture - perhaps a wooden table and benches for sitting on and sleeping on.

There were no bathrooms in Viking homes. Most people probably washed in a wooden bucket, or at the nearest stream. Instead of toilets, people used cess-pits - holes outside dug for toilet waste. The pit was usually screened by a fence. Slimy muddy cess-pits have

been found by archaeologists studying the remains of the Viking town of Jorvik (modern York).

What did a blacksmith make?

Blacksmiths sweated over fires, hammering red-hot iron. They made iron tools, knives and swords. To make a sword, the smith twisted and hammered iron rods until he had made a gleaming, sharp-edged blade. A good sword would not snap in battle.

Viking smiths also made iron nails, rivets to hold a ship together, spurs for horse-riding, locks and keys, arrowheads and belt buckles. Smiths travelled from village to village, repairing tools and cooking pans. Kings and chieftains had their own smiths. Many people thought smiths were wizards, making magic out of smoke and flames.

Choose to be Viking man, woman, child or slave and write a short story about your life.

Look at pictures A, B and C. What do you think the people are doing each of the pictures?

A: _____

B: _____

C: _____

Viking Houses



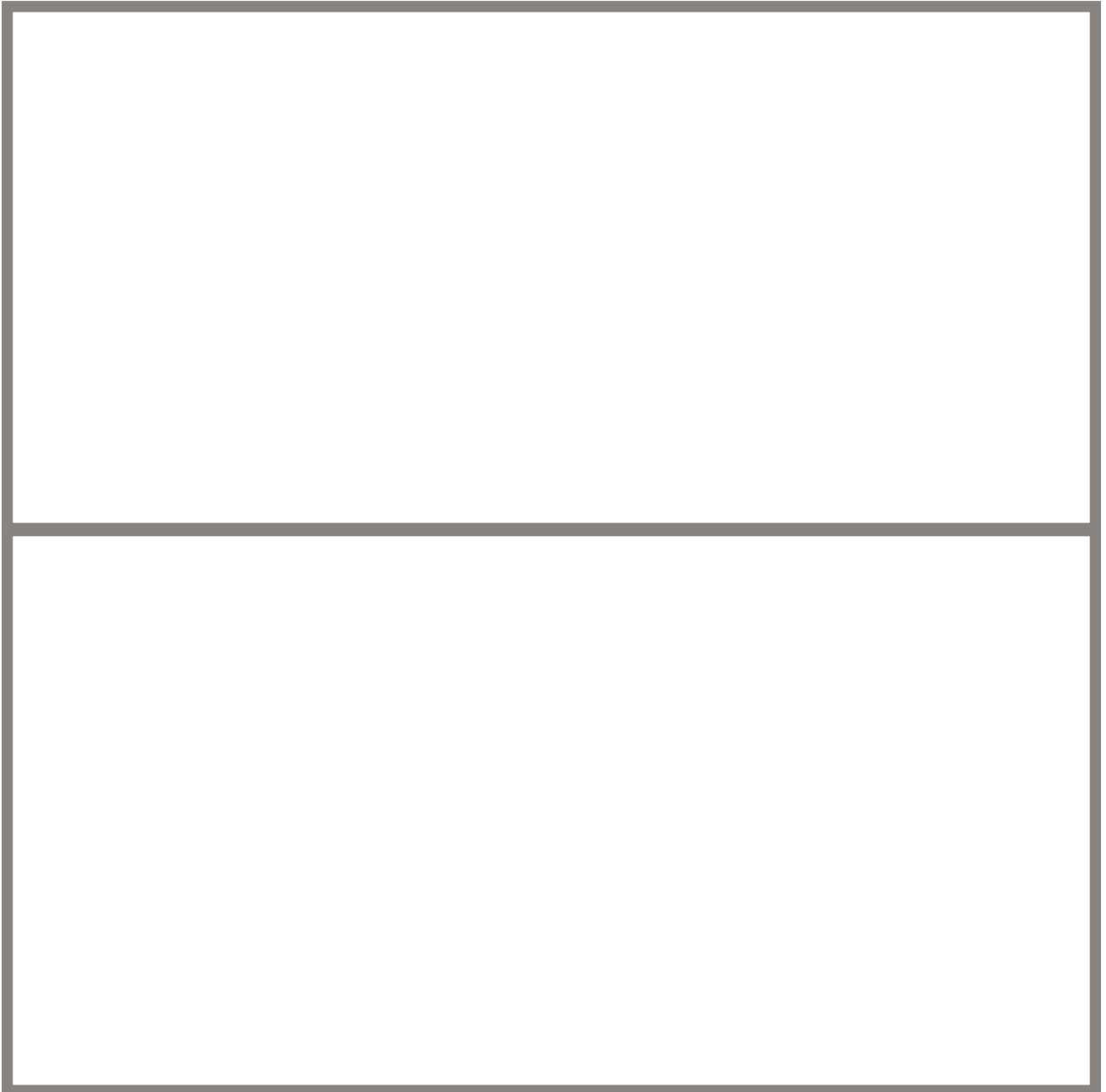
Viking houses were built of wood, stone or blocks of turf - depending on local materials. The houses were long box-shapes with sloping thatched or turf roofs. The walls were made of wattle (woven sticks, covered with mud to keep out the wind and rain). The floor of a Viking house was often dug below ground-level; perhaps this helped keep out draughts.



Most houses had just one room for a family to share. Rich people's farmhouses might have a small entrance hall, a large main room, a kitchen, a bedroom and a store room. In a Viking town, houses were crowded close together along narrow streets.



Draw the outside and inside of a Viking house.



Making things

Skilled craftworkers in Jorvik made things that Vikings needed. A family could buy a cooking pot, a pair of shoes, a new padlock for the family store-chest, or a brooch. Woodworkers and leatherworkers were busy making plates, cups, belts and shoes. Jewellers made rings and brooches from amber, silver, gold, jet and copper. Potters baked clay pots in kilns (ovens), heated by wood fires. Pots were used for cooking and storing food. Most cups and plates were made from wood or from soapstone, a soft stone from Scandinavia.

Match the description to the artefact

These are metal 'strap ends'. They were fitted onto belts and other leather goods made in a Viking town like Jorvik.

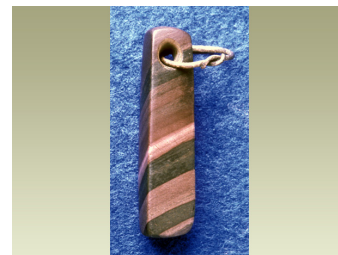
A leather boot. Can you see how it was fastened? This boot was found at Coppergate (York).

Vikings kept their knives and weapons sharp. This is a whetstone or sharpening-stone. It's made of a mineral called schist, and was brought from Norway to be traded at Jorvik.

This photo shows evidence that the Vikings of Jorvik went horse-riding and hunting. These are stirrups, weapon-points, and a horseshoe.

A silver penny made for Sihtric Silkbeard, Viking ruler of Dublin in Ireland. Irish Vikings traded with England, and this coin is a copy of English coins of the time.

These disc-shaped brooches were found by archaeologists at Jorvik. Viking men and women used brooches to fasten cloaks and other clothing.



What happened to the Vikings?

Jorvik's last king

Throughout the Viking Age, there were many battles between the Vikings and the English. In the 9th century, the English king Alfred the Great stopped the Vikings taking over all of England. In the 10th century the English reconquered much of the land held by Vikings. In 954, they drove out Eric Bloodaxe, the last Viking king of Jorvik. After Eric was killed in battle, the Vikings in England agreed to be ruled by England's king.

King Cnut

In Viking times, a king had to be strong to fight and keep his land. In the early AD 1000s, England had a weak king. His name was Ethelred 'the Unready'. Ethelred gave Viking raiders gold to stop their attacks. This money was called 'Danegeld'. The Vikings took the gold, but still attacked anyway. So in 1002, Ethelred's soldiers killed Viking families in the Danelaw. This made King Sweyn of Denmark so angry he invaded England. Ethelred had to run away. In 1016 Sweyn's son Cnut became king of England. Cnut (also known as Canute) was a Christian and a strong ruler. For the next few years England was part of his Viking empire, along with Denmark and Norway.

The Norman Conquest

In 1066 England was conquered by William, Duke of Normandy. The Normans were the descendants of Vikings who had settled in France. They took over all of England, including the Danelaw. In 1069 the Normans burned Jorvik. This was the end of the Viking Age in England.

In Scotland, Viking earls went on ruling some islands for hundreds of years. They were driven from the mainland of Scotland by 1100, but remained 'lords of the isles' (the Western Isles) until the 1200s. The islands of Orkney and Shetland were more Norwegian than Scottish. They did not officially become part of Scotland until 1469.

What the Vikings left behind

Archaeologists find the remains of Viking houses, burial sites, treasure hoards, carvings on stones, and writing carved in runes. Vikings left their mark on Britain in other ways too, such as language. Lots of familiar English words originally came from the Vikings' Norse language. Examples are 'husband', 'egg', 'law' and 'knife'.



Place names show where Vikings once lived. A place with a name ending in -by, -thorpe or -ay was almost certainly settled by Vikings. The Vikings also left behind many stories about real people, called 'sagas'. Scotland has its own saga from the Viking Age, called 'Orkneyinga Saga' or 'The History of the Earls of Orkney'.

Find some examples on a map of Viking towns that are still here today. Why might they mostly be found in the East of England?

Complete Viking quizzes at BBC website:

ICT Room required.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/vikings/>