

# Year 7 Review 2 History

## Revision Resources

# Timeline of Saxon, Viking and Norman raiding, invading and settling

This timeline shows you the sequence of raiding, invading and settling events. Refer to it whenever you have a concern about where something fits in.

406

Roman army leaves Britain



477-95

Saxons settle in Sussex and Wessex



620s

Sutton Hoo burial



871

Alfred becomes King of Wessex



664

Synod of Whitby

## SAXONS

## VIKINGS



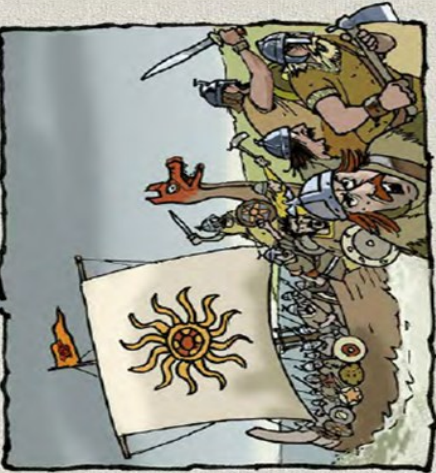
440s

Saxon raids begin



597

St Augustine's Christian mission arrives in Kent



793-5

Vikings raid Lindisfarne, Jarrow and Iona

865

Viking 'Great Army' arrives

878

Alfred defeats Danes (Vikings) at Edlington and Guthrum the Dane is baptised



1066

William of Normandy invades England and defeats Harold of Wessex



1070

Resistance of Hereward the Wake



1100

Entire Saxon ruling class has been replaced by Normans

## NORMANS

1042

Edward the Confessor becomes King of England



991

First Danegeld paid



1069

Harrying of the North by the Norman army



# Who were the Vikings?



**Viking travels:** The Vikings were great explorers and travellers. Viking ships reached **Britain, France, Spain, Italy and North Africa**.

Traders made long journeys overland through **Russia**, reaching as far south as **Constantinople** in modern-day Turkey. Some merchants travelled further east to **Baghdad** in Iraq.

A few daring explorers made voyages to Iceland and beyond, travelling across the Atlantic Ocean to **North America**.

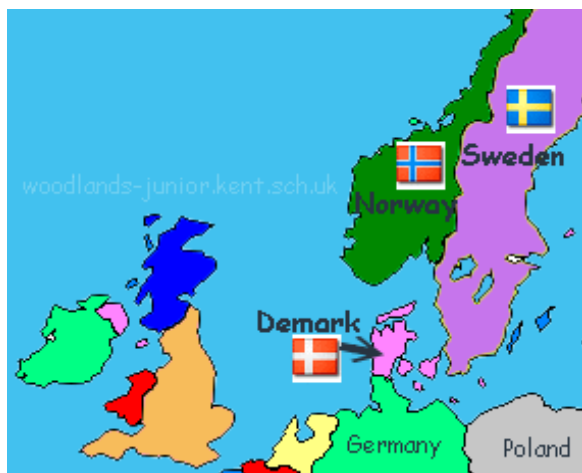
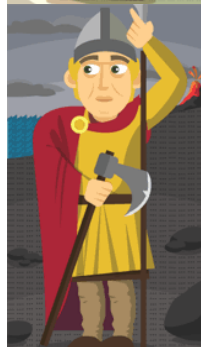
**Viking Ships:** The Vikings built fast 'dragon-ships' and 'long ships' for **raiding** and **war**.

They also had slower passenger and cargo ships called '**knorrs**'. They built smaller boats too, for fishing or short trips. A ship carried everything needed at sea - drinking water, dried meat to eat, tools, weapons, and furs to keep warm.

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.



This is the kind of balance scale a Viking trader used. They put the little weights



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.

The Vikings originally came from Norway, Denmark and Sweden but they were each very different from the other group and very independent of each other.

## **The Vikings were great sailors:**

Vikings sailed close to the coast whenever possible, watching for **land marks**.

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 skies and could use the position of the stars to determine which direction they were heading.

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.

**Viking traders:** 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 like honey, tin, wheat, wool, wood, iron, fur, leather, fish and walrus ivory. Everywhere they went, the Vikings **bought** and **sold** slaves too.

Viking traders carried a set of **folding scales** which they used to weigh coins to make sure they got a fair deal.

**Life as a Viking:** Many Vikings worked as **farmers**. Everything had to be done by hand on a Viking farm, so life was tough. Farmers grew oats, barley and wheat. Then they ground the grain to make flour, porridge and ale. They planted vegetables too, and kept animals like cows, sheep, pigs and chickens.

Other Vikings were **craft workers**. They made the things that people needed. Woodworkers and leatherworkers made plates, cups, belts and shoes. Jewellers made rings and brooches from precious metals. Blacksmiths hammered and twisted red-hot iron into tools, knives and swords. Potters baked clay pots in an oven heated by wood fires.

People took these goods to market to sell. Here a family could buy anything from amber beads and apples, to walrus tusks and wolf-skins. Viking traders sold their goods even further away. They sailed the seas to buy silver, silk, spices and furs to bring back home.



**Viking attacks:** The Vikings did use raids from the sea as a tactic. They would send a few ships to make surprise attacks on places in order to steal treasure, weapons, animals, and even capture slaves. They then used their fast dragon ships to escape before any resistance could be organised.

They also did get together in big armies to carry out wars but this was far rarer than raiding.

They would go raiding twice a year in between their normal everyday tasks and jobs like farming or fishing



**Viking warriors:** Viking warriors 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.

Vikings did not wear much armour. Some chieftains wore chain mail coats, but most relied on a round wooden shield for protection.

Some Viking warriors went into battle wearing wolf or bear skins. These warriors were called '**berserkers**' because they went 'berserk' (out of control) and charged fearlessly into battle. Berserkers believed that Odin, the god of war, gave them superhuman powers and that they didn't need to wear battle armour for protection.

They were farmers, and kept animals and grew crops. They were skilful at crafting, and made beautiful metalwork and wooden carvings. They were also skilled fishermen and sailors. Viking men (and in some cases women) trained to fight from an early age.



**Viking homes:** Many Viking families lived together in a longhouse. This was built from wood or stone and had a thatched or turf roof on top. With just one room for all the family to share with their animals, a longhouse would have been a crowded and smelly place to live. There was no bathroom inside, but the Vikings kept clean by washing in a wooden bucket or beside a stream. Instead of toilets, people used a cesspit, which was a hole outside dug for toilet waste.



Everyday life in **Anglo Saxon England** was hard and rough even for the rich. Society was divided into three classes. At the top were the thanes, the Anglo Saxon upper class. They enjoyed hunting and feasting and they were expected to give their followers gifts like weapons. Below them were the churls. Some churls were reasonably well off. Others were very poor. However at least they were free. Below them were a class of slaves called thralls. Their lives were very hard.

Some churls owned their own land but many 'rented' land from a thane. They 'paid rent' by working on the thane's land for part of the week and by giving him part of their crops.

In early Anglo Saxon Times England was a very different place from what it is today. It was covered by forest. Wolves prowled in them and they were a danger to domestic animals. The human population was very small. There were perhaps one million people in England at that time. Almost all of them lived in tiny villages - many had less than 100 inhabitants. Each village was mainly self sufficient. The people needed only a few things from outside like salt and iron. They grew their own food and made their own clothes.

By the 11th century things had changed somewhat. The great majority of people still lived in the countryside but a significant minority (about 10%) lived in towns. Many new towns had been created and trade was flourishing. England had grown into a stable, civilized state with an efficient system of local government. In the monasteries learning and the arts flourished.

The Anglo Saxons also gave us most English place names. Saxon place name endings include: ham, a village or estate, tun (usually changed to ton), a farm or estate, hurst, a wooded hill and bury, which is derived from the Saxon word burh, meaning fortress or fortified settlement. The Anglo Saxons called groups of Roman buildings a caester. In time that word evolved into the place name ending chester, caster or cester.

#### A Lord's Life

We know little about how most people lived, for so little remains. The richer lords lived on estates, with a main rectangular hall surrounded by outlying buildings for various living, working, and storage purposes. Inside the hall a lord might mark his prestige by expensive wall hangings or even paintings. The hall was the scene of feasts for the lord's followers, and a lord was expected to be a lavish host.

Society was divided into several social classes, which might vary from place to place. At the top was the king. He was essentially a war leader. He was expected to provide opportunities for plunder and glory for his followers. The king who did not provide land, slaves, or plunder might wake up dead one fine morning.

Below the king there were two levels of freemen, the upper class thanes and the lower class ceorls (churls). The division between the two was strictly in terms of land owned. A man could only be a thane if he owned at least five hides of land (a hide was defined as the amount of land necessary to provide a living for one family). Aside from the ownership of land, a ceorl could actually be a richer man than the thane.

Below the thanes and ceorls were the slaves. Slavery was one of the biggest commercial enterprises of Anglo-Saxon life, and much depended on this involuntary labour force.

#### Clothing

The robe or tunic gathered at the waist was the common garment for a man, completed by hose and soft shoes. For a woman the robe or dress extended to the feet. The usual materials were linen and woollens, the more expensive outfits being marked by colourful dyes and exotic borders. Brooches were used to fasten clothing by rich and poor, and amulets of stones were worn for luck.

#### Weapons

In war the common weapon was the spear made with a seven foot long ash shaft and an iron head. It was both thrown and used to jab. Shields were round, made of wood covered with leather, and had an iron boss in the centre. Only the nobility used swords, which were about thirty inches long, made of iron with steel edges. The hilt was often elaborately carved and jeweled, and could be inscribed with good luck symbols.

#### Leisure

When they weren't fighting (one wonders when that was) the favourite pastimes of the Anglo-Saxon period were dice and board games such as chess. Elaborate riddles were popular, as was horse racing and hunting. At feasts the most common entertainment was the harp, which was also used in church music. In addition to the harp, scenes of juggling balls and knives have been found illustrating books of the period.

#### Travelling

Travel was not uncommon, and the main trade routes, often along the old Roman roads, were used frequently. However, off the main routes travel could be a risky business. Travellers were advised to shout, blow horns, and make lots of noise. Otherwise any strangers were assumed to be outlaws, and could be killed out of hand.

#### Administration

The land was divided into shires, mainly according to the territory of the first tribes. The shire was divided into hundreds. These were the basic units of administration and the court system.

To look after the king's interests (see that all the taxes were collected) and administer justice, were the ealdormen and shire-reeves (sheriffs). Within the shires were the towns, or burhs, which ranged in size from 5000 people at York to 500 at St. Albans. Initially only some of the towns were walled, and those often with earthworks reminiscent of the Bronze Age.

#### Farming

In the countryside the vast majority of the people lived by farming. At first most of the farms were owned outright. The ceorls worked co-operatively, sharing the expense of a team of oxen to plough the large common fields in narrow strips that were shared out alternately so that each farmer had an equal share of good and bad land.

Later much of this land was consolidated into the large estates of wealthy nobles. Ceorls might work the land in return for service or produce, or they might work the lord's land a given number of days per year. As time went on more and more of these large estates were established as integrated commercial enterprises, complete with water mill to grind the grain.

#### Food

The crops most frequently grown were wheat, oats, rye, and barley (both as a cereal and as the base for beer). Peas, beans, and lentils were also common. Honey was the only sweetener in use, and it was used to make the alcoholic beverage mead. Pigs were a major food animal, as were cattle, goats, and sheep. Horses and oxen were raised for heavy farm labour and transportation, though the stirrup had yet to make an appearance from the far east.



# What did the Anglo-Saxons do all day?

## Learning objectives

- Learn how people lived in Anglo-Saxon England.
- Know the ways in which Anglo-Saxons made England prosperous.

## Did you know?

In 1065, Anglo-Saxon villagers used vegetable dyes to make their clothes brightly coloured. They hadn't invented buttons and they used moss or grass as toilet paper.

## Key term

**Hide\*:** The amount needed to support a family.

## Working on the land

Most Anglo-Saxons lived in villages and worked on the land. There were ceorls, who were free men, and thralls, who were slaves. Each ceorl worked at least one hide\* of land in the great open fields that surrounded the villages. They grew barley, rye and wheat, along with peas, beans and flax. Barley was used in brewing beer, rye and wheat in bread-making, and flax was spun and woven into cloth. Sheep, pigs, hens and cows provided wool, meat, eggs and milk, while honey from bees was used for sweetening.

Most villages had a lord, usually a thegn (see page 20) who the villagers looked to for protection in times of trouble. In return for this protection, the village ceorls and thralls worked the lord's land for him and gave him 'food rent' – eggs, meat, peas or milk – whatever it was that they produced.



**Source A:** In about AD 1000, an unknown monk produced a chronology. This was a calendar with one page for each month. At the bottom of each page the monk drew a picture of the work villagers did in that month. These are two of those pictures.

## Working in towns

Some villages grew into towns, and in AD 1000 about 10 per cent of the population of England lived in a town. Towns grew from markets where people from the surrounding countryside came to buy and sell; some towns specialised in, for example, leather-work or weaving or soap-making. Towns on the coast became busy ports. Ships would carry goods to other ports on the coast of England, or across the seas to Europe. By the 11th century, England was a prosperous country – a rich prize for any invader.

## Your turn!



1 Look at Source A.

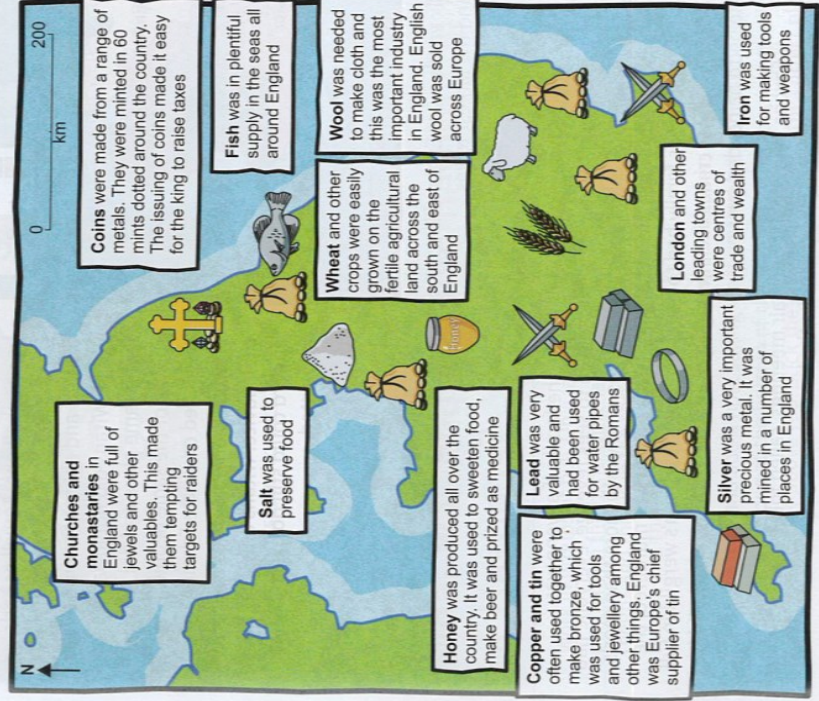
- What work is being done in these pictures?
- Why do you think a monk bothered to draw pictures of people working on the land?

2 a Can you solve the riddles in Source B?

- Write your own Saxon riddle and see if anyone in your class can solve it.
- Put together a class riddle book.

3 a Look at the map in Figure 1.1. With a partner, discuss why people would want to invade England. Put these reasons on a spider diagram with a centre labelled 'Pull factors'.

- Write a paragraph to explain why, by the 11th century, England was attractive to invaders.



**Source B:** Anglo-Saxons were fond of jokes and riddles. Here are two of them.

Multi-coloured, I flee the sky and the deep earth. There is no place for me on the ground, I make the world grow green with my tears. What am I?

I grow tall and am hairy underneath. Sometimes a beautiful girl grips me, rips off my head and puts me in a pan of water. I make her cry. What am I? (Answers on page 203.)

**Figure 1.1:** Map showing England's prosperity in the 11th century.





**Source C:** Anglo-Saxon painting of a Witan.

## Running the country

In 1043, Edward the Confessor was crowned king of England. He ruled England with the help of the Witan.

### Witans

The Witan was an assembly of 'wise men'. Edward could invite whoever he wanted to come to a Witan. However, it made good sense to invite the most powerful men in the kingdom. These were the earls, who helped Edward run large areas of England (see the map in Figure 1.2) in return for promising him military help if he needed it. To involve the earls meant they would be likely to support any decisions he made and there would be no rebellions. As well as earls, Edward sometimes invited thegns, bishops and abbots to come to a Witan. Witans did not always meet in the same place and did not always consist of the same people. It all depended on where Edward was and on what problem he was asking for their advice. Witans only gave advice: Edward could still do exactly what he wanted.



**Figure 1.2:** Map showing the six earldoms of England in 1065, the earls who ran them and the largest towns.

### Justice

Anglo-Saxon justice was based on the family. If anyone was wronged, their family was expected to seek revenge. Everyone had a life-price, called a 'wergild'. Thegns were worth more than ceorls, who were worth more than thralls. If a person was murdered, the murderer's family had to pay the murdered person's wergild in full. For lesser crimes like injuring someone, proportions of wergild had to be handed over.

Saxons held regular open-air meetings, called folk-moots, which dealt with people who broke the law.

## Reconstructing the past

Anglo-Saxon houses that were lived in by ordinary people have not survived, and there are no drawings or paintings to tell us what they looked like. So how can we find out?



**Interpretation 1:** A reconstruction of 11th-century Anglo-Saxon houses in Norwich, Norfolk.

## What was England like before the Battle of Hastings?

- Work in groups of five. On a large piece of paper, draw a diagram on the right. Write labels or draw pictures of thegns and thralls in the correct sections on the triangle and the least powerful at the bottom.
- Divide the five roles on the triangle between members of a slip of paper, and add a note saying what you expect your role is the one at the bottom of the triangle, and what to do for the role above you. Stick these slips of paper on the triangle.



## How did the Anglo-Saxons go to war? The Fyrd

Anglo-Saxon Kings had their own highly trained and professional household guard – the **Housekarls**. **Earls** also had their own household troops (as did richer **thegns**). **Thegns** (local landowners) were responsible for raising (levying) an army from the peasants on their lands and leading them into battle. This army was called the **Fyrd**. They were not well trained or professional soldiers on the whole although many of the passtimes of the Anglo-Saxons were based around training to fight.

**Ceorls** were liable for military service in the *fyrd* (army) (but by the 8th Century kings seem to have preferred to levy thegns who were better trained and equipped).

The Fyrd were called up when they were needed and the Ceorls returned to farming their land when they were not needed. Later laws meant that Ceorls had to have their own spear, shield, helmet and/or axe and sword.



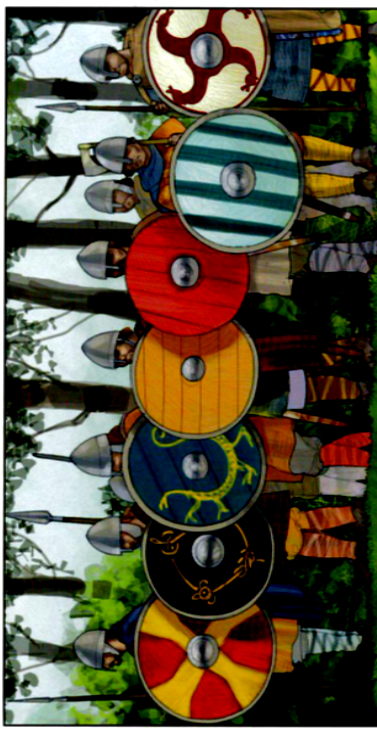
The main tactic was the Shield Wall. This could be a very effective tactic and was very, very difficult to breakthrough as all warriors interlinked their shields and poked their spears, swords and knives through the gaps in the shields. Everyone had to be very strong to fight in the shield wall – it was terrifying and relied on coordination and bravery.

In war the common weapon was the spear made with a seven foot long ash shaft and an iron head. It was both thrown and used to jab. Shields were round, made of wood covered with leather, and had an iron boss in the centre. Only the nobility used swords, which were about thirty inches long, made of iron with steel edges. The hilt was often elaborately carved and jeweled, and could be inscribed with good luck symbols.

## Armour and weapons

Warriors wore pointed metal helmets, with a panel to cover the nose. They dressed in chain-mail tunics and had wooden shields that were usually round in shape.

In battle, a line of soldiers often used their shields to form a wall to protect them.



Javelins and bows and arrows were used for long-range attacks, while soldiers relied on their spears, swords and axes in the heart of battle. The most feared weapon was the two-bladed battleaxe, which could do terrible damage, sometimes splitting a man's skull in half. Swords were highly prized and usually decorated with fine carvings. Some swords even had spells carved on them to protect the sword-bearer and bring him luck in battle.



# Sutton Hoo





## Clue B

## Where did this all happen?

This excavation took place over 70 years ago, in 1939.

There was a large mound close to the River Deben at a place called Sutton Hoo in Suffolk.

The archaeologists dug a long trench into the mound.

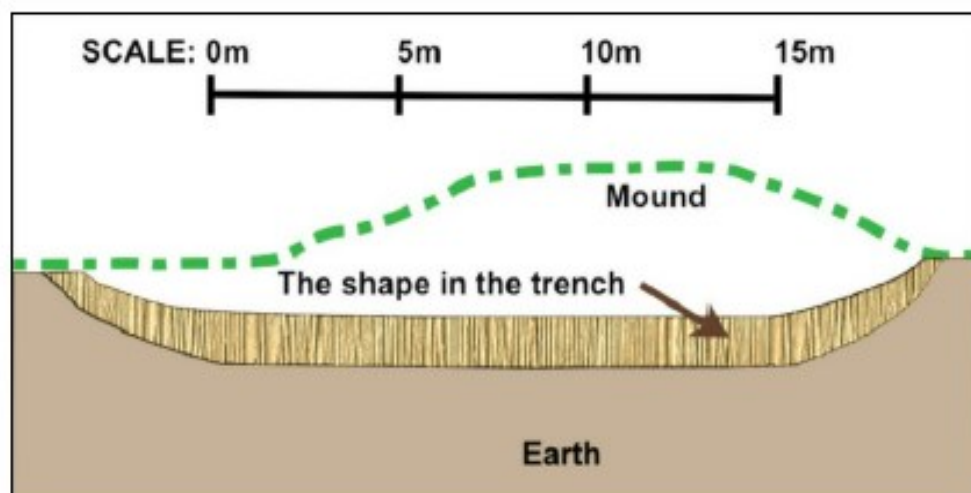
Clue A showed you a picture inside the trench.

The soil in the trench was a different colour from the surrounding soil because it contained rotted wood.

The long rows of 'dots' you saw in Clue A were iron rivets (a kind of nail).



**This is a lengthways section of the trench.**





## Clue C What did they find at Sutton Hoo?

Here are three objects found in the trench. Many objects were in pieces and were put together again carefully.



They also found:

- A shield, spears and a sword decorated with jewels and gold
- Drinking horns
- An iron axe and chain-mail armour
- Silver bowls and dishes
- A golden shoulder clasp decorated with jewels
- A stringed musical instrument like a harp



## Clue D      Beowulf – the burial of a hero

‘On a spot overlooking the sea, the lords of the people began to build Beowulf’s funeral fire, hanging on it his helmets, battle-shields and shining armour. In the centre they laid Beowulf’s body and all the time they were weeping at their hero’s death.

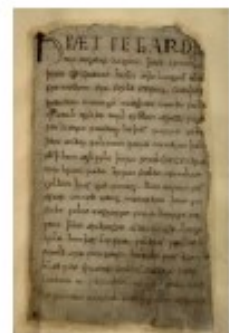
Black wood smoke began rising from the fire and then the sound of roaring flames and weeping men.

Then the lords built a burial mound, high and broad so it could be seen out at sea. It took ten days to finish this monument to their hero. Inside the mound they put rings and jewels and ornaments and all his gold and treasure.

Finally they rode round his grave mound, praising his greatness and all his brave deeds.’

These lines come from a poem called ‘Beowulf’, a story written around 700-750AD. They describe the burial of Beowulf.

This is a fictional story but the writer probably based this description on events he had seen.





## Clue E

## Discoveries in other places

In 1862 archaeologists found a ship buried under a mound at Snape, about ten miles north of Sutton Hoo. In the ship were spearheads, a gold ring, a glass beaker and coloured glass.

These things were often buried with wealthy people but there was no body in this ship burial at Snape.

Then, in 1904 a ship was found buried under a mound in Oseberg in Norway. It contained the bodies of two women. One may have been Asa, a Viking queen.

Alongside the bodies were many objects – beds, lamps, a cart, sledges and tapestries. Jewels and treasure had probably been buried too but they had been stolen sometime in the past.





## Clue F

## More finds at Sutton Hoo

37 gold coins and pieces of gold were found at Sutton Hoo. They came from the country we call France.



The pictures and faces on the coins help archaeologists work out how old they are. They come from the early 600s AD and must have been buried sometime between 610 and 635 AD.





## Clue H

## Who was buried there?

Here is some information about four kings of East Anglia, the Anglo-Saxon kingdom which included Sutton Hoo:

Most likely king buried at Sutton Hoo

### 1. **Raedwald:** king from 599 to 625 AD

Raedwald was a very rich and powerful king. He was overlord of all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the most powerful king in England.

### 2. **Eorpwold:** king from 625 to 627 or 628 AD

Eorpwold was Raedwald's son. He only ruled for a very short time before he was murdered.

### 3. **Sigebert:** king from about 630 to 637 AD

Sigebert really wanted to be a monk and shared the kingship with Ecric, his cousin. Sigebert was probably buried near Ely, over 50 miles from Sutton Hoo.

### 4. **Ecric:** king from 634 to 637 AD

Soon after Ecric became king East Anglia was attacked by other kings. Ecric and Sigebert were killed in battle in 637.



# The Vikings – murderous invaders or peaceful settlers?

## Learning objectives

- Learn who the Vikings were, and where they came from.
- Understand the impact the Vikings had on England.
- Learn how the Vikings explored and settled other countries.

## Key term

**Danelaw\*:** The areas of Anglo-Saxon England that were populated by the descendants of Vikings. These areas followed Viking laws and customs.

In AD 793, monks working peacefully at their monastery in Lindisfarne, Northumbria, were surprised by the appearance of sails on the horizon. The ships drew closer and hordes of warriors came ashore. They ransacked the monastery, stole its gold and jewels, and killed its inhabitants. The monks, who carried no weapons, were defenceless.

Some at the time described the invaders as 'pagans', or people without religion. Others called them 'Danes' or the 'Northmen'. It wasn't until the 11th century that they received the name 'Vikings', which means 'pirate raiders'. The raid on Lindisfarne was only the first of many; soon, the Vikings attacked other targets, and in larger numbers. For the next 250 years, Britain faced repeated attacks from the Vikings.



Figure 6.8: Viking raiders.

## Who were the Vikings?

The Vikings were different groups of people who came from the modern-day countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Life at home was probably very hard, with too many people and not enough land. It's possible that merchants who had traded with the Anglo-Saxons returned home to the Viking homelands and spoke of the fertile lands and riches to the west. It's not surprising that many chose to risk the journey across the sea to Britain.

## What made the Vikings such effective raiders?

The Vikings were highly effective sailors. Their ships used a combination of sails and oars, allowing them to travel long distances. They were also able to navigate rivers that were too shallow for most ships, allowing them to penetrate deep inland where people least expected it.

## The Viking invasion

In AD 865, the Vikings changed tactics. Instead of small hit-and-run raids that aimed to carry away loot and plunder, the Vikings launched a full-scale invasion. One by one, the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were defeated, until only the kingdom of Wessex, ruled by Alfred, was left.

However, Alfred proved to be an impressive military leader and defeated the Viking army, forcing their leader to convert to Christianity. Because of his victory, Alfred gained the title by which he is commonly known – Alfred 'the Great'. However, he was unable to drive the Vikings completely from Britain. Instead, he divided the land into two kingdoms. The Anglo-Saxon kingdom covered most of southern England, while the Viking kingdom included much of northern England and East Anglia. This became known as the 'Danelaw\*'. Many Vikings settled there and, over time, became part of the general population, until it would have been difficult to tell who was a Viking and who was 'English'.

In Britain, the Vikings have had a lasting impact. The Viking city of Jorvik (modern-day York) had 10,000 inhabitants at its peak and was a major trading centre. You can still see the impact of the Vikings on place names today. Places with the suffixes '-by' or '-thorpe' (e.g. Whitby, Derby, Scunthorpe) were probably founded by the Vikings.



Figure 6.9: A Viking longboat.

## Did you know?

One recent study suggested that one million people in Britain today are direct descendants of the Vikings. In some areas, such as the Shetland Islands, as many as 30 per cent of the population are descended from Vikings.

**Source A:** An extract from the Peterborough Manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. This was written by monks from the ninth to the 12th centuries AD.

[Alfred]... made peace with the raiding-army, and they granted him as hostages the most distinguished men who were next to the king in the raiding-army, and they swore him oaths on the sacred ring, which earlier they would not do to any nation, that they would quickly go from his kingdom... And that year Halfdan divided up the land of Northumbria; and they were ploughing and were providing for themselves.

## Your turn!

- 1 Draw a 'push' and 'pull' diagram to show why the Vikings came to Britain. For 'push', include the reasons that made them want to leave their homeland. For 'pull', include what attracted them to Britain.
- 2 Read Source A. Suggest a reason why this source is useful to historians wanting to find out about the impact of the Vikings in Britain.
- 3 What else can you learn from Source A about:
  - a Alfred as a leader
  - b agreements Alfred made with the Vikings?
- 4 What evidence is there in Source A that the Vikings were not just raiders and plunderers, but instead settled in Britain? Pick a quote and explain it.
- 5 Explain how evidence such as place names and the remains of Jorvik also suggest that the Vikings eventually settled down.



# The Vikings as empire-builders

## Did you know?

Until recently, it was thought that Christopher Columbus was the first European to discover the Americas in 1492. However, the Vikings had arrived first, some 500 years earlier.

The reputation of the Vikings is of violent warriors who raided and pillaged the British Isles. However, the reality is more complicated; as you have already learned, many Vikings peacefully settled in Britain and became part of the general population over time.

Also, it's important to remember that England was just one of many places that the Vikings travelled to. They were fearless explorers and traders who managed to build a large empire. Below are some examples.

## The Vikings as explorers and state-builders

The Vikings colonised large parts of Scotland, the Orkney Islands and the Isle of Man, and founded the city of Dublin. They also took control of northern France. As they came from the north, they were known as the 'Nor(th)men', so this part of France became known as 'Normandy'. William the Conqueror was a descendant of Viking settlers. Therefore, in turn, the Norman invasion and conquest of England in 1066 can be seen as a further expansion of the Viking empire.

## The Vikings as traders and craftsmen

The Vikings did not just attack neighbouring settlements; they also traded with them. There is evidence of extensive trading networks, which exchanged goods such as silver, silks, spices, wine, jewellery, glass and pottery. Excavations have revealed that some Vikings were talented craftsmen, making sophisticated metalwork and wooden carvings.



Figure 6.10: A map of Viking exploration.

## Your turn

Read Interpretation 1 and answer these questions.

1 Summarise in a few sentences what interpretation the historian gives about the Vikings.

2 Using the information on these pages, and your notes, provide evidence both to support and to challenge the viewpoint of the historian.

3 How convincing do you find Interpretation 1? Explain your view, giving evidence to support your opinion.

## Checkpoint

- 1 Where did the Vikings come from?
- 2 Who was Alfred, and how did he help to manage the Viking threat?
- 3 What was the 'Danelaw'?
- 4 Explain how you think the Vikings should be remembered – as ruthless warriors or as settlers and explorers.

**Interpretation 1:** From *The Age of the Vikings* by Anders Winroth, a historian who has aimed to change public perception of the Vikings.

The Vikings were violent, even ferociously so. They hunted slaves, killed, maimed and plundered over much of Europe... [but] the Middle Ages were a violent time overall... the Viking Age was also a moment of great cultural, religious and political achievement... Literature flourished... Scandinavians experienced a great boom in decorative art... trade and exchange, bought not only untold riches... but also all kinds of exotic trade goods. Chieftains impressed people by drinking [German] wine from Egyptian glasses, by [gaining] the strongest steel in the world for their swords from central Asia and India, by wearing Chinese silk and Indian gems, and by offering those they counted as friends a share in all that wealth.

## Who were the first English people?

As you can see, it's hard to establish who really were the first English people. Who do you think has the best claim to the title? Is it about who was there first, or who had the greatest impact?

In your class, divide into groups of four. Each person in the group should take on the role of one of the groups of people you have learned about – either the Celts, Romans, Anglo-Saxons or Vikings. Each person should think about the following.

- Why you came to the British Isles.
- What important contributions you have made to this part of the world.
- Why you deserve to be remembered as part of the story of England.

When you have prepared, discuss the points above in your groups. Can you come to an agreement on who deserves the title?



### The invasion of the Great Heathen Army, 865

The **Great Heathen Army**, also called the **Great Danish Army** or **The Great Viking Army**, was a large force of Danish Vikings that attacked Anglo-Saxon England. This army appeared in East Anglia in 865. Unlike earlier Vikings who made brief raids on England and returned to their homeland, the Great army stayed for many years in an attempt to conquer all of England. The army was led by the sons of Ragnar Lothbrok – Ubba, Halfdan and Ivar the Boneless.

In 865 a large viking army made up of many smaller bands landed in East Anglia. For over a decade they remained in England destroying entire kingdoms as they went. The Danes spent the winter of 865 in East Anglia. The local people bought peace with the Vikings by supplying them with horses.

After a year, they moved northwards to Northumbria now a mounted army (866). They captured York and defeated two rival Northumbrian kings, Aella and Osbert, who had joined forces to try and repel the Danes. Both kings were killed.

In 867 they appointed a puppet-king named Egberht over the Northumbrians. In the fall of that year they moved south into Mercia. The Danes made their winter camp at Nottingham.

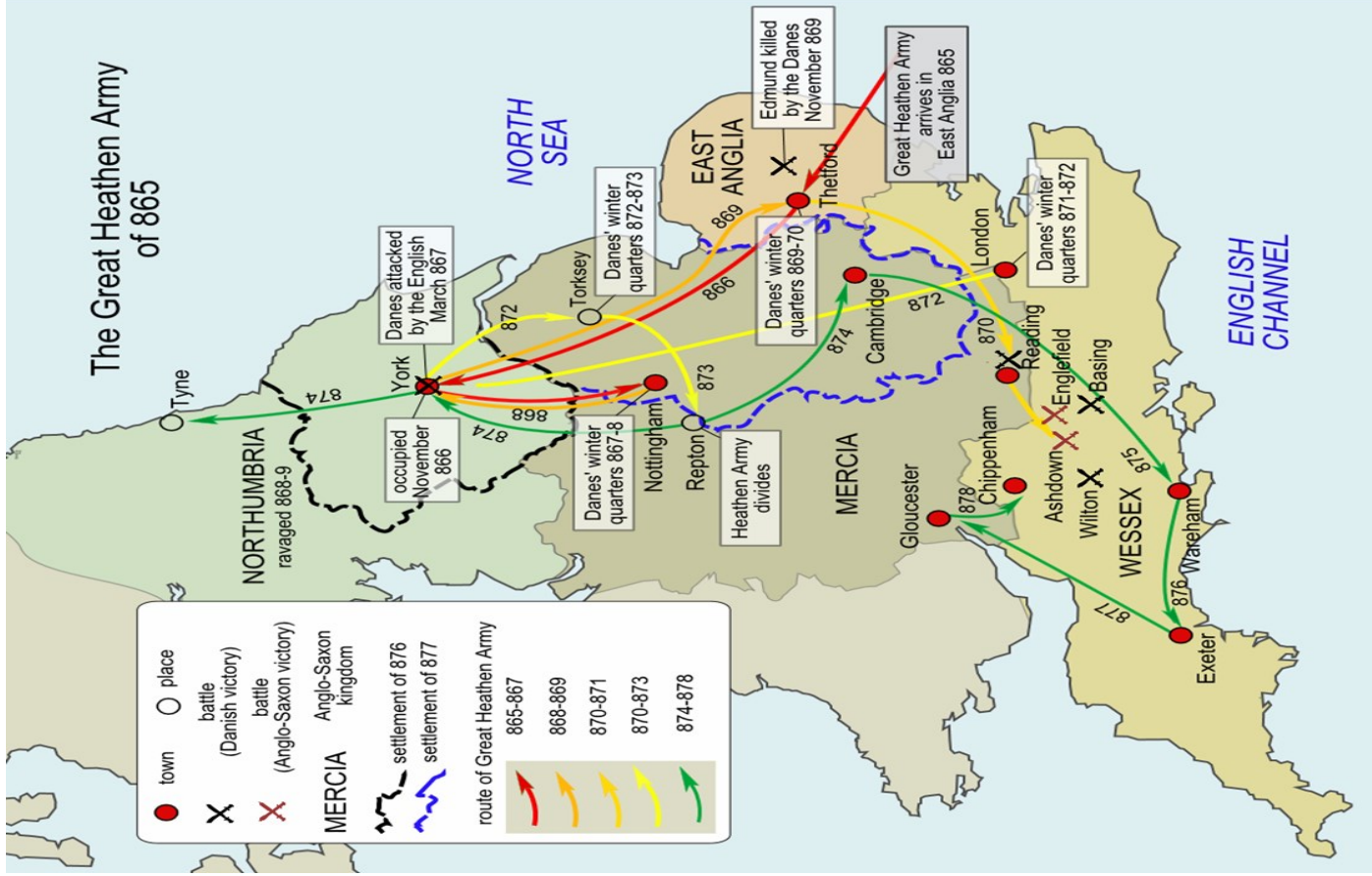
In 868 Burgred, the King of Mercia, asked King Ethelred of Wessex and his brother Alfred for their help against the Danes. The Danes did not fight but allowed the Mercians to pay them off for peace. The Vikings withdrew to York.

The next year, 869, the great Viking army grew much larger. After twelve months in York, the great army moved south again into East Anglia, where they defeated King Edmund of East Anglia.

In the autumn of 870 they moved to Reading and built defences. Athelred with his brother Alfred arrived with their army to meet the new threat. They Danes were victorious but later Wessex won a decisive battle at Ashdown.

By 870 the only one of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms that had not been defeated and conquered by the Viking army was Wessex - Athelred, his brother Alfred and their army was all that stood between the Great Heathen Army and total domination of England.

During April 871, Athelred died and Alfred his brother replaced him. The defence of Wessex and the future of England hinged on King Alfred of Wessex, who over the next year went on to fight 9 more battles against the Danes. Alfred was doing well but the Danes were not beaten for good....



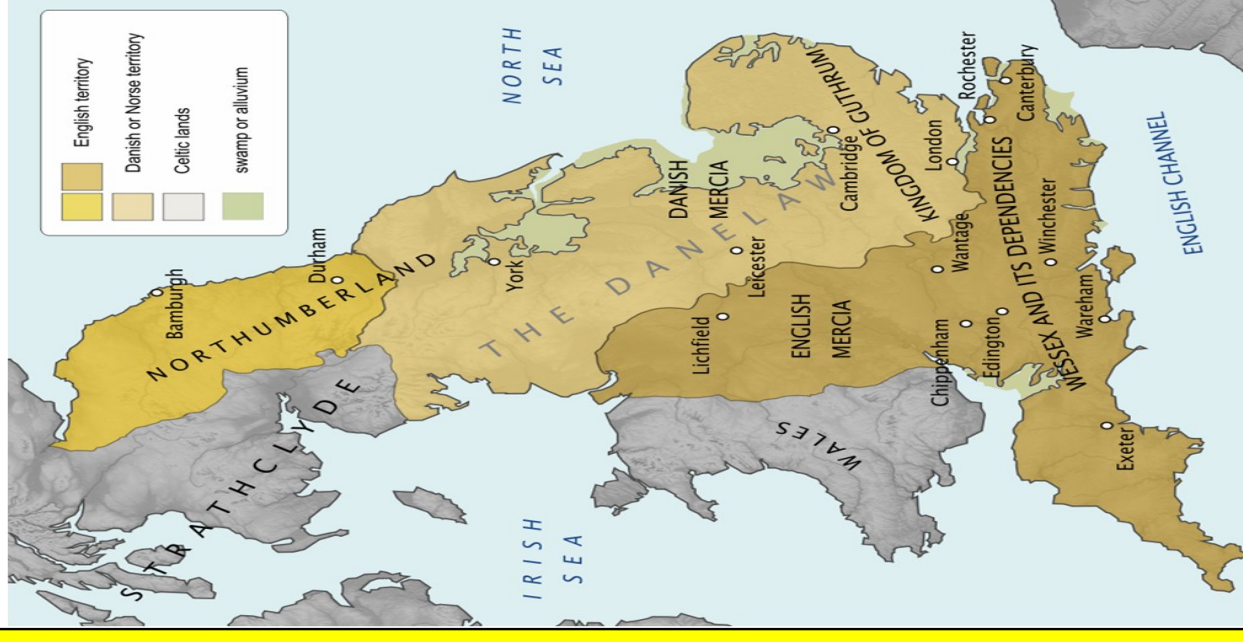
In 886 Alfred entered London where he was acclaimed as the sovereign lord **'all the English people not under subjection to the Danes'**.

He became the most important ruler of the Anglo-Saxons and the 1<sup>st</sup> to call himself 'King of the Anglo-Saxons'.

However by the 890s the Vikings had returned. Alfred continued to fight them off and many settled relatively peacefully. The area controlled by the Vikings became known as the *Danelaw* and 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 (Dane Laws), spoke Norse, and lived in much the same way as Vikings in Scandinavia. Most people were farmers.

**How English was England at this point?**

## Danelaw





### **King Alfred of Wessex**

Alfred was born at Wantage in Oxfordshire in 849, fourth or fifth son of Aethelwulf, king of the West Saxons. Following the wishes of their father, the sons succeeded to the kingship in turn. At a time when the country was under threat from Danish raids, this was aimed at preventing a child inheriting the throne with the related weaknesses in leadership. Alfred was deeply religious and had accompanied his father on pilgrimage to Rome when he was a boy. He also learned to read before his much older brothers after his mother set her sons a challenge – the 1<sup>st</sup> to learn to read would receive a poetry book. Alfred was an enthusiastic hunter with incomparable hunting skills. He carried around a small pocket book of prayers so that he could always read from it – he was a deeply Christian man.

In 870 the Danes attacked the only remaining independent Anglo-Saxon kingdom, Wessex, whose forces were commanded by Alfred's older brother, King Aethelred, and Alfred himself.

In 871 AD, Alfred defeated the Danes at the Battle of Ashdown in Berkshire. Later that year, he succeeded his brother as king. Despite his success at Ashdown, the Danes continued to devastate Wessex and Alfred was forced to withdraw to the Somerset marshes, where he continued guerrilla warfare against his enemies. This is when the famous story of Alfred burning cakes occurred. Travelling in disguise, he was asked to watch the bread which was cooking in the fire of a house he stopped at. He burned the bread of a peasant woman as he was so engrossed in thought about what to do about the Vikings.

In 878 AD, he again defeated the Danes in the Battle of Edington. They made peace and Guthrum, their king, was baptised with Alfred as his sponsor. In 886 AD, Alfred negotiated a treaty with the Danes. England was divided, with the north and the east (between the Rivers Thames and Tees) declared to be Danish territory – later known as the 'Danelaw'. Alfred therefore gained control of areas of West Mercia and Kent which had been beyond the boundaries of Wessex. The Danelaw was an effect way to achieve peace which was important during his lifetime and largely kept the Vikings out of Wessex. Alfred had a dream of expanding Wessex to take over all of England under one king.

Alfred built up the defences of his kingdom to ensure that it was not threatened by the Danes again. He reorganised his army and kept a standing army. He built a series of well-defended, fortified settlements across southern England called *burghs*. He ensured that no-one in Wessex was more than 20 miles from a burgh. He gave the people land so they could set up business and could trade. This encouraged greater wealth and the Wessex economy to grow.

He also established a navy for use against the Danish raiders who continued to harass the coast, designing his own long-ships and hiring Danish mercenaries to man them.

As an administrator Alfred advocated justice and order and established a code of laws and a reformed coinage. He re-planned Winchester, his capital in a grid pattern along the same lines as a Roman city. He had a strong belief in the importance of education and learnt Latin in his late thirties. He then arranged, and himself took part in, the translation of books from Latin to Anglo-Saxon. He invited scholars from Europe to come to England and half of the nobles went to church schools. He did much to encourage the spread of the written language in England. Alfred kept extensive records and was a very learned man.

By the 890s, Alfred's charters and coins were referring to him as 'King of the English'. He died in October 899 AD and was buried at his capital city of Winchester.

Alfred's grandson, Athelstan was the 1<sup>st</sup> King of England after he united the old Saxon kingdoms under his crown – he was crowned 'King of the English' after he defeated the Viking Kingdom of Jorvik and then later a combined Scottish and Viking army in the Battle of Brunanburgh. His daughter, Ethelfleda, was a warrior in her own right and ruled in Mercia on the death of her husband. She was nicknamed the 'Lady of Mercia' and built a series of hill forts across Mercia to defend against the Vikings including along the Sandstone ridge of Cheshire.

Details and stories from Alfred's life were written down by his biographer, a Welsh monk called Asser in Alfred's lifetime. He was the first king to have this done.



## When did the Viking threat to England stop? Alfred's children and grandchildren

**King Edward the Elder** was well trained by his father, Alfred the Great.

He was a bold soldier who won large portions of land from the Danes in the east and the north.

Much of his success was thanks to the help of his sister, the mighty Aethelflaed.

Edward set up his court in the city of Winchester and built a fine cathedral there. He was married three times and had at least fourteen children.

Some say he was a great supporter of the Church. Others say he was scolded by the Pope for neglecting his faith.

Edward died as he would have wished - at the head of his army, leading his men into battle against a band of rebels. He was laid to rest in his new cathedral at Winchester.

Edward proved he was a fearless soldier and strong leader. With the help of his sister, Aethelflaed, he defeated the Vikings to conquer lands in the southeast and Midlands of England.

**Aethelflaed** was the eldest child of King Alfred . She jointly ruled Mercia with her husband, leading the battle against the Danes in the Midlands and the North and working to unite England. After her husband's death in 911, she became the sole ruler of Mercia and became known as 'The Lady of the Mercians'.

She personally led expeditions against the Vikings. The threat that the Danes would take over all of Mercia and Wessex was very real and, without her input, all could have been lost. The military alliance between Aethelflaed and her brother King Edward was an outstanding success.

Like her father, she proved to be an objective and discerning leader, raising fortifications, refortifying crumbling Roman strongholds and building a number of fortified towns along the border. The association of Aethelflaed and her brother Edward saw the Saxon forces push further into Danish-held territory, until little of Mercia remained under Viking control.

She was not only a great warrior but also a clever tactician and negotiator. Formidable and warrior-like but just and fair, she won the admiration and respect of the people of Wessex and Mercia. Both English and Danes mourned her death.

**King Athelstan** was Edward's oldest son (Alfred the Great's grandson). He reigned between AD925 and AD939 and was the very first 'King of all England'.

Athelstan was a daring soldier who fought many battles. But his greatest triumph was the Battle of Brunanburh, when he was faced with an army of Scots and Welsh and Danes.

After this great victory, he seized control of York - the last of the Viking strongholds. Then he forced the kings of Scotland and Wales to pay him large sums of money.

Athelstan wasn't just a soldier. He worked hard to make his kingdom strong, writing laws and encouraging trade.

Athelstan was buried at Malmesbury. At the time of his death he was recognised as the very first King of All England.



### Harold Sigurdson, Harald III, Harald Hardrada

Harald was born in 1015 AD, the youngest half-brother of the recently elected King Olaf II of Norway. His brother's rule was unstable, since these were changing times for the Scandinavian Lands. Olaf was trying to convert his subjects to Christianity, and meanwhile the Danes, losing ground in England, were looking to lands closer to home for conquest. In 1028 AD the alliance of the King of Denmark, Cnut the Great, with rebellious nobles in Norway forced Olaf and his brother into exile. Not until 1030 did he return, making a last effort to reclaim his throne. The effort came to war, and at the Battle of Stiklestad in 1030, Olaf was killed. Harald, only a boy of barely fifteen, fought alongside his brother in the battle too and was badly wounded.

Harald barely escaped with his life, and with the scattered warriors still loyal to him, he fled to the land of the Kievan Rus (what would later come to be called Russia). Harald and his retinue served the Grand Prince in his wars against Poland as hired mercenaries for several years, before their wanderings took them South, to Byzantium and the Byzantine Empire. The Emperor, mistrusting his own Greek bodyguards, who had felled many a ruler before him when they felt their pay was inadequate, formed a new guard composed of exiled northerners from the Viking and Saxon realms. This would later become the feared élite corps of the Byzantine army, the Varangian Guard. Harald and about five hundred survivors came before the Emperor Michael IV and the Empress Zoe and pledged their service. The Empress accepted immediately the pledge of so noble a man. His charisma, valour and ingenious stratagems soon won the admiration of the Varangians (and Roman chroniclers), and before long, Harald himself had risen in the Byzantine court to a command of the Guard. Again and again he proved his bravery, in campaigns as far away as Sicily, Italy and Bulgaria in the Emperor's service. Soon Harald was a wealthy man, and could at last try to reclaim his rightful place as King of a faraway land.

In 1042, Harald appealed to the Emperor for release from service. The Empress Zoe was angered, as she had hoped that Harald would have wed her, and tried to prevent his escape. But with the loyalty of the Varangians, Harald was not to be stopped. He stole away from Byzantium, sailed up the Bosphorus and travelled back to Scandinavia through the Eastern Kingdoms. He found Norway under the rule of his illegitimate brother, Magnus the Good. The two shared power, until in 1047, Magnus died and Harald was at last crowned King Harald III of Norway.

The next fifteen years passed with constant war with Denmark, until Harald at last gave up his claim on the Danish throne in 1062. But not long after, suddenly, a new opportunity presented itself. Arriving in Harald's court, a man by the name of Tostig brought news of the death in England of King Edward the Confessor. Tostig revealed to Harald that he was brother to the new King Harold Godwinsson, and pledged his support and that of the majority of the chieftains of England should Harald seek the English throne. It transpired that Tostig had actually put the same offer to King Svein of Denmark, only days before, but was turned down. Harald, initially uneasy about the venture, soon gave in to Tostig's persuasion, and agreed to once again open Norway's claim on the throne of England.