

Life as A Viking

Introduction

The audacious, seafaring Vikings, who inhabited Britain approximately 1,200 years ago, originated from the northern part of Europe called Scandinavia which is now Sweden, Norway and Denmark. The Vikings started raiding Britain in 793 and often brought their families along and they would stay for good. That is why there are places in Britain with Viking names.

Farming

Not all Vikings were bloodthirsty warriors, in fact most Vikings were farmers! Each farmer and his family lived in a single-storey house which was made of wood, stone or wattle and daub (a framework of twigs plastered with clay, straw and dung). Inside the house, there were no walls, so the family lived in one large, spacious room. The Viking farmers kept cows, sheep, goats, horses, pigs, chickens and geese; grew vegetables such as onions, leeks, cabbages and peas; and collected and gathered berries, nuts, and mushrooms from the woods. They would also grow lots of crops and plants. Where the Vikings lived in Scandinavia, the landscape was mountainous and uneven so if an area of good land ran out, they would have to relocate to a more suitable area.

Travelling

During the Viking era, the most sufficient way to travel was by boat! Vikings were extremely skilled shipbuilders, and most people are familiar with their iconic longship design. Longships (the Viking battleships) were light, thin and long. Their light design made it possible for the longships to be carried onto the shore or even carried overland. In shallow water and calm weather, oars were used to propel longships forwards or backwards and in windy weather the single sail would push the boat. Along the side of the wooden longship was a rack that the Vikings would place their shields on which gave the longship its recognisable look. Another type of boat was the knarr which was like the longship except it was broader and deeper. As the knarr was so wide, it made it easier to transport cargo and animals!

Clothing

Vikings wore vibrant, colourful clothes decorated with animal fur, metal and embroidery. Scandinavian women tended to wear long dresses covered with an embroidered apron and were decorated with metal clasps and brooches. After being wed, women would cover their hair with a white, plain scarf. Norsemen would wear short, coloured tunics with baggy, tight-fitting, or short trousers. Many men would wear cloaks decorated with animal fur and hats to keep them warm in the winter. Viking clothes were commonly coloured dark green, blue, orange, brown and red. Vikings would grow their hair long and grow beards then braid it or tie their hair and beards into pigtails.

Viking Entertainment

When Vikings were not farming or sailing, they would have lots of fun! They would sing, dance and play instruments made of bone such as harps and pipes around a campfire. Norsemen enjoyed playing board games like chess and Scandinavian children would play with toys made from wood carved by their parents. In the summer, Vikings would throw competitions to test their bravery and strength. They would wrestle each other and throw hefty stones as far as possible!

Viking Crafts

Not only were Vikings talented at boatbuilding, they also made beautiful items such as brooches, necklaces, bracelets, clothes and axe heads. Viking women would make the clothes for them and their families on a tall loom which was located on the wall in their house. Vikings loved to decorate metal items with intricate, detailed patterns and designs to decorate clothing or other belongings.

Weapons

The fearsome Vikings were probably most known for their raids and battles, but they did not just kill and raid with bare hands they had hand-crafted weapons made by the local metalsmith. The metalsmith was one of the busiest Vikings as there was always broken swords to mend and new ones to make. The average Viking sword was made by twisting then flattening strong strands of metal

together which had the after effect of them being more flexible yet strong. Valuable swords were often decorated with ornate grooves in the handle. These swords cost a lot of money and were often passed down from father to son. In battle, most Vikings would wear a chainmail coat for armour which would have been also made by their local metalsmith; shields were also carried as well as battle axes.

Norse Gods

Vikings and Norsemen were very loyal to their gods and worshipped them constantly; they would sacrifice expensive and valuable items and throw them into holy rivers as they believed it would please their gods and goddesses. Vikings would sacrifice themselves in battle to live in the afterlife they would call Valhalla and if they did not die bravely in battle, they would probably be sent to hell!

Vikings believed the Earth had been split into three parts each held up by a massive tree named “Yggdrasil”.

Level 1: Asgard

Asgard (Valhalla) was the home of most of the Norse gods and was classed as the Viking heaven. Asgard was ruled by the mighty god, Odin and Yggdrasil’s leaves and foliage blossomed in Asgard as it was the highest level.

Level 2: Midgard

Midgard was the home of humans and all living organisms. It was legend that evil giants, dwarves and worm-like sea monsters roamed the land and seas of Midgard.

Level 3: Niflheim

Niflheim was the Viking hell, it was the land of fire and darkness and was ruled by the two-faced goddess – Hela. Yggdrasil’s roots ran deep into Niflheim and were surrounded by ice.

Here are a few of the Viking gods:

Odin: Odin was the mighty king of Asgard and ruled almost everything. He was pictured with two ravens each one on his shoulders and would use the obedient ravens, which were called Hugin and Mugin, as spies.

Thor: Thor was the powerful, strong god of fighting and storms. He carried a large hammer around which would conduct thunder and lightning if smashed.

Frey: Frey strangely rode a chariot pulled by a wild boar. He was the god of the rain, sun, fields and forests.

Freya: Freya was the well-known goddess of love and death; she could shapeshift into many different shapes and animals.

Exploring

Vikings were seafaring, exploratory people and loved to travel. During spring, the bravest Vikings would lower themselves down cliffs by the stillness of the sea and cautiously gather the seabirds' finest eggs whilst during winter they skied and sledged to travel. They would also push themselves across the hazardous ice with a flexible yet strong pole. However, Vikings were a LOT more daring than just that; they loved to travel vast distances across the world in their seaworthy ships. A famous Nordic nicknamed Erik the red travelled further than anyone and settled in Greenland but then his son followed bravely in his father's footsteps and travelled even further to place we now call Canada.

The Raids

Vikings were well-known for their incredible raiding skills and resilience. Their first planned attacks were on the unprotected British monasteries and churches. The Vikings chose to raid the monasteries as they held valuable goods and treasures and, they were poorly protected as the residents of the churches did not know how to fight well. Once they had fought their way into the vulnerable monasteries, the Vikings would steal all the items that would be worth a trade. They would take items made of precious gold, silver and valuable stones. However, the Vikings not always sailed back away on their ships, sometimes they would settle into the area and integrate with the Anglo-Saxon citizens. They would stay because the land was much better for farming and the climate was drier, but some historians contradict this and say that the Norsemen and their

families were invited to England for reinforcement against the Scots and Irishmen.

Conclusion

To this day, we still follow Viking ways; their raids brought us many things that are important to this day. As the Vikings came and stayed their language began to integrate with the current language and brought us words, we use today also as the Vikings were skilled shipbuilders, they taught the Anglo-Saxon farmers how to build ships and carve from wood. All Vikings are miscalculated they were not all blood-thirsty warriors and berserkers, most were farmers, metalsmiths and traders. Anyhow, Vikings will always be remembered from their bravery in battle and resilience.

