

The Struggle for Power

The Anglo-Saxons had dominated English life for over three centuries when the Viking threat began. Organised into powerful kingdoms — Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, and Wessex — they were a Christian, literate society with skilled craftsmen and a rich oral tradition. Their monasteries preserved knowledge and produced extraordinary works of art.

The first significant Viking assault came in AD 793 at Lindisfarne, a monastery on a tidal island off Northumberland. The attack sent shockwaves across Christian Europe. Over the following decades, Norsemen from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden launched increasingly ambitious raids along the coast and deep into river valleys.

The real turning point came in AD 865, when the Great Heathen Army — a massive coalition of Viking forces — invaded with the aim of permanent conquest. Within years, three of the four major Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had fallen. Only Wessex, under the young King Alfred, held out.

Alfred's resilience was remarkable. After retreating into the Somerset marshes in the winter of AD 877–878, he rebuilt his army and delivered a decisive blow at the Battle of Edington. The subsequent Peace of Wedmore forced the Viking leader Guthrum to convert to Christianity, and the Danelaw — the Viking-controlled north and east — was formally recognised.

Over generations, the two peoples merged. Intermarriage, shared farming, and trade blurred the boundaries, and the Viking linguistic legacy lives on today in hundreds of common English words.

Questions

1. Name the four main Anglo-Saxon kingdoms mentioned in the article.
2. What made Anglo-Saxon society distinctive?
3. Why was the attack on Lindisfarne so shocking across Europe?
4. Where did the Viking raiders come from?
5. What was the purpose of the Great Heathen Army, and when did it arrive?
6. How many Anglo-Saxon kingdoms fell to the Vikings before Alfred resisted?
7. What did Alfred do during the winter of AD 877–878?
8. What was the outcome of the Battle of Edington?
9. What was one of the conditions of the Peace of Wedmore?
10. The article says the two peoples "merged" over generations. What evidence from the article supports the idea that this merging was genuine and lasting, rather than just a temporary peace?



Text D Quiz



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