

A RAID ON LINDISFARNE

June 9th, 793

Earlier this week, a small group of 'Northmen' devastated life in one of the most peaceful parts of England. The marauding men attacked the Christian monks at Lindisfarne. The monastery is on a small island off the coast of Northumbria, called Holy Island, making it an easy target for the Viking longships, intent upon destruction.

This Viking raid on Holy Island is not the first in England, however, feelings of anger and fear are stronger as news spread quickly through nearby villages. Assaulting Lindisfarne monastery is different because it has attacked the heart of the Christian faith, the very place where Saint Cuthbert had been bishop, and where his body was buried in 687 AD; fortunately the tomb is intact.

It is believed that the longships, with terrifying crew, were able to move close into the shore. They were seen as fast, streamlined boats that were powered by paddles, with, at the front, a terrifying dragon like head. The monks were caught unaware: it was early on Tuesday morning - many were at prayer or in the fields - when the raiders arrived.

One monk was fortunate to escape. Brother Simeon retold the events, with fear still in his voice.

“They reached the church of Lindisfarne, where they miserably ravaged and pillaged everything; they trod the holy things under their polluted feet and plundered all the treasures of the church. Some of the monks they killed; some they carried off in chains, insulted, and cast out of the doors; and some they even drowned in the sea.”

It is reported that the Vikings fought using long swords and axes. Although most did not wear much armour, some wore chain mail coats, with helmets made of leather or iron, and most relied on a round wooden shield for protection. With no means of defending themselves, the monks had no weapons and were not warriors - they were an easy target for the Viking raiders.

Alfred, a distraught local farmer and friend of the monks, witnessed the aftermath at the scene: “The church of St Cuthbert is spattered with the blood of the priests of God, stripped of all its treasures, and left unprotected from these plundering pagans.”

Rumours are abounding about warnings ignored earlier in the year. Immense whirlwinds, flashes of lightning and reports of fiery dragons flying in the air. Could this weather be a sign of danger to come?

The country is now watchful, and on high alert of more raids.