

November 866 and an unexpected attack occurred in our city. Smoke wreathed the spires of Eoforwic Cathedral following a brutal raid on the city led by legendary Viking chieftain Ivar the Boneless (the notorious berserker) and his Great Heathen Army, all hell bent on their quest to conquer the land of the Angles.

The marauders rode in on steeds no doubt supplied by their allies in East Anglia. The city has long been a focal point for the celebration of All Saints' Day and, as usual, it was packed with visiting nobles and merchants; most of the city's leaders were worshipping in the cathedral when the raiders mounted their carefully timed attack. Shocked eyewitnesses spoke of the fear and panic that ensued as the three thousand strong army terrorised the Christian festival-goers, who were overwhelmed by the speed and the ferocity of the barbarian army. Desecrating Eoforwic Minster, the pagans slaughtered thousands and ransacked the library, setting light to priceless manuscripts dating back to Roman times.

A terrified eye witness, Aldred Annon, who hid beneath an altar cloth in a side chapel, reported about the noise of hooves and screaming. In a scene of unthinkable carnage, many were killed as they knelt in prayer. Other eye witnesses claimed huge, menacing dragonships – bigger than any seen before – were spotted on the River Ouse, carrying Viking warriors armed to the teeth with swords and axes. One man, actually witnessed the invaders getting off the boats like mad men: uncontrollable, foaming at the mouth - crazed as dogs or wolves and as strong as bears or bulls.

Meanwhile, the bloodletting continued at the monastery, with the Holy Men no better able to defend themselves than the townsfolk - scores were felled as they fled for cover. Relics were burnt and sacred treasures plundered.

Timing the raid for All Saints' Day was clearly no coincidence – Ivar and his brothers knew the city would be packed with pilgrims at prayer. The civil war between rival Saxon Kings Aella and Osbert, fighting for supremacy in Northumbria, also made Eoforwic an ideal target. Fortunately, neither were captured in the attack. It is said that the city is henceforth to be known as Jorvik since the Vikings - who have a ten thousand strong encampment in East Anglia - intend to use it as their base in the north.

Ivar the Boneless, eldest son of Ragnar “Hairy Breeches” Lodbrok, is renowned for his ruthlessness and cruelty. Hailed by his countrymen as one of the wisest men who has ever lived, he has earned his nickname for his snake like ability to move in battle. A man of a sly and cunning nature, he is reputed to be physically huge with extraordinary strength. He and his brothers swore vengeance for their father's murder on King Aella, who captured and tortured Ragnar, sentencing him to death in a pit of poisonous snakes.

Eoforwic – now Jorvik – is a city in mourning. It remains to be seen whether Aella or Osbert are able to respond to the invasion by mounting a counter offensive to reclaim this once proud Saxon stronghold.