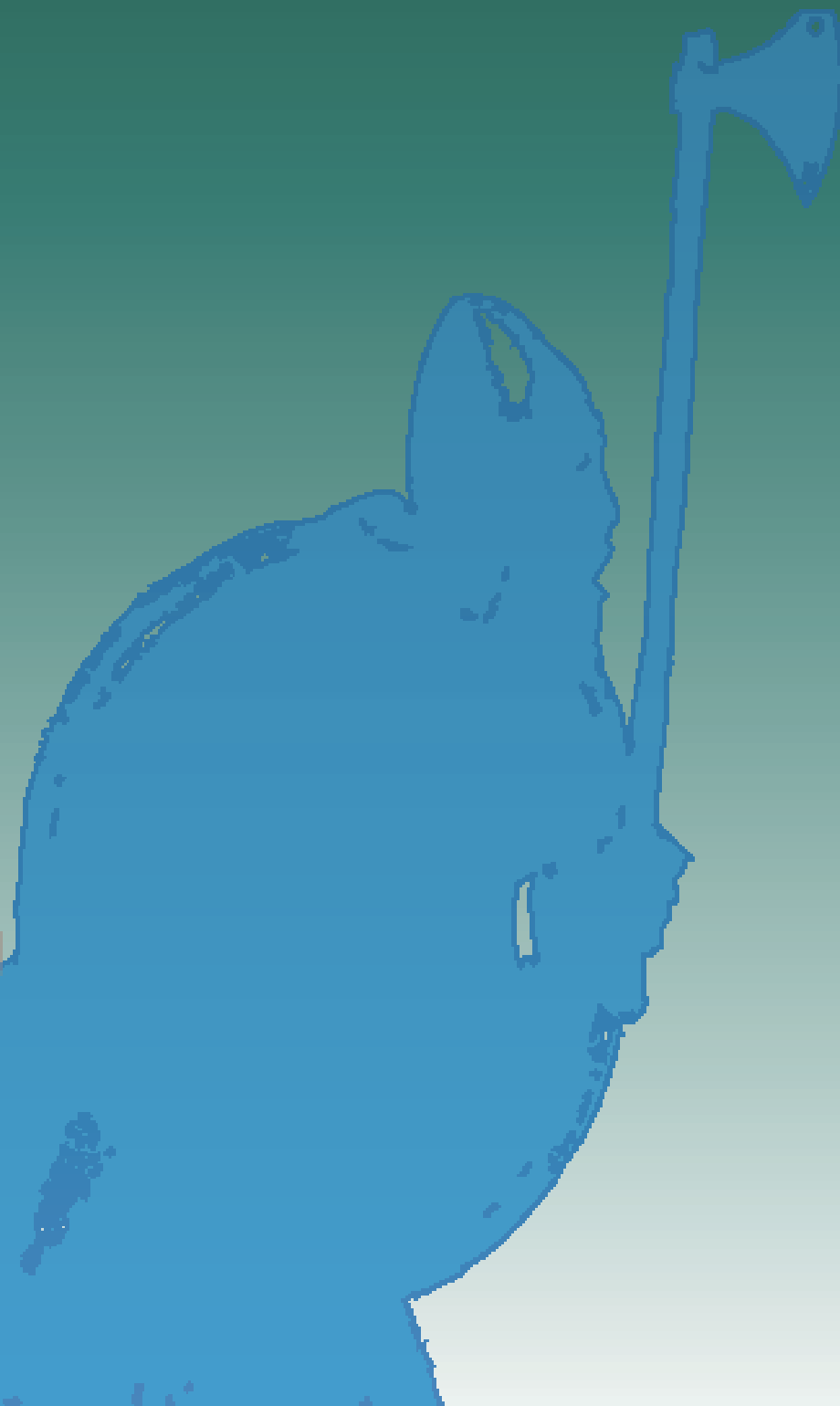


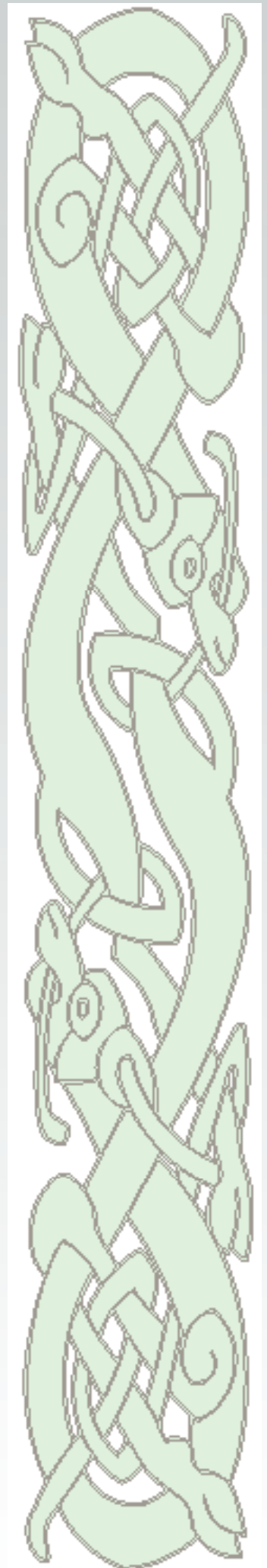
Viking 793

The Story of the Viking Invasion
in the year 793



He had been chosen. At first he had a feeling of elation and then apprehension; he did not speak of either of these emotions to his wife Arnstein or his son Bjorn. There was no doubt he was the strongest man in his village. He stood head and shoulders above his neighbours and was renowned for his fearless sojourns into the northern seas. He sat looking out over the fjord, his long red hair blown and tugged by the wind making him look more like a sea god than a simple fisherman. He tried to imagine what was being asked of him. Thorvald knew that he was needed not only for his strength, but also his skills of navigation both during the day and night. He had been trading regularly with the Anglo Saxons at Bamburgh now for many years and knew the coast line and the tides well, also the many dangers posed by the rocks and islands that guarded the harbours. He was a fine sailor and could navigate easily through to Lindisfarne, could fight with the best and bring them all safely back home.

There were perhaps several reasons why the raids began at this time. It could have been greed or the need to find other places to settle as the Norsemen's farmland could not support an ever-expanding population, or perhaps it was to pay the demands of foreign kings. Their trading forays were not going well as the Angles had suffered poor harvests, illness had blighted their families and they had little to trade with. The Norsemen knew however that there were riches to be had within the monastery of Lindisfarne and that it was completely unprotected from invasion from the sea. And so the first raid was planned and one person from each village was asked to take part.





Thorvald had now to tell his family. He looked up. His wife was calling to him, 'Thorvald, Thorvald, come. You promised to take Bjorn with you fishing. Where are you?' His fair blue-eyed son, how he enjoyed taking him out on the water. He had to tell his wife of the demand that had been made of him and turned to walk slowly back to his home. Arnstein was at her small upright loom. He spoke quietly to his wife. 'You know that I am no warrior by nature.' He paused, 'The call has come for me to go viking and take part in a raid on Lindisfarne'. There had been talk. Arnstein bowed her head in the certain knowledge that she was bound to accept this situation. She knew that Thorvald had to go, that he had been bidden. The feelings of the family counted as nothing, all she could do was to support him. She had to show him her courage and not her fears.

There was a gathering of all the Norsemen who were to be his companions on their mission. The group had been well chosen: two beserkers, warriors, sail-makers, carpenters and himself, their warrior-navigator, the best from each of the villages.

Within two months the boat had been built. Open to the elements, wide and flat with a keel that would steady the craft as it cut through the waves, its beauty was in the rounded hull and the long neck of the fierce dragon prow. The men were comforted by the knowledge that this craft was not only made of the finest wood but also that its design was tried and tested, it was fast and efficient.

Arnstein had made him a fine linen shirt to

wear for the expedition and he wore a beautifully made glass bead as a talisman around his neck. Thorvald had honed his precious axe and polished the delicate silver design embedded in the head till it shone. This time, the first time it would be used as a weapon. Good omens were found in the stars and Thorvald was sure that he would return safely.

At last the time approached for them to leave, as the weather settled. The bearing plate was in place. Men loaded the cargo of weapons, provisions, shields and armour. Last of all the warriors, impatient to be off, climbed into the boat through the churning surf and took their places. They set forth leaving behind them their families to wonder at their bravery and longing for their safe return.

Once they had rowed out beyond the surf, they set the sail and the prow lifted out of the water cutting through the heaving sea. It was late in the day but they had many hours to go before night-fall. Darkness lasts for so short a time in the summer of the year. They drew further and further away from their land until there was nothing in view on any side other than the rolling waves. They were eventually enveloped in the night. Above them the aurora borealis danced in curtains of green, red and white and these fearless warriors now became fearful of the unknown. They had heard tell of giant sea monsters that would take them beneath the waves and were wary of every shadow on the dark seas. None dared to speak what was in his heart.

Finally, in the early morning, they caught sight of land. The Norse warriors cast the stone





anchor from the boat and moored in the lea of the land to wait. The tide had to be right before the attack on Lindisfarne. Also, rest and preparation was needed before the onslaught. The men, deep in their own thoughts, spoke little.

After a few hours, the time came for them to leave. Each man had drunk his fill of the beverage that roused and kindled blood lust. Then they set course for Lindisfarne. The wooden monastery on this island was built there for safety and security, the monks never expecting that an attack could come from the sea. Undefended and ignorant of the imminent piracy the small community was peacefully beginning the day.

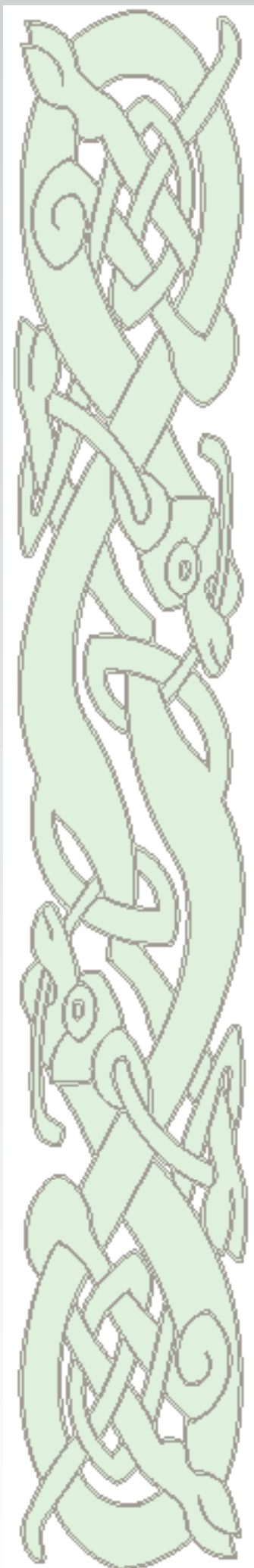


The day dawned with a strong and blustery wind blowing. Pendraed was up early. He had with him his woven basket to collect clams winkles and mussels that he could harvest from the rocks. He liked his job. His mother knew that he had young sharp eyes to spy the numerous crustaceans that could be collected and given to the monastery. There were many monks to feed and these gifts would ensure prayers and blessings for their family.

The crops this year had been poor and there were many portents that did not bode well for the islanders. They had seen fiery dragons in the sky, and many families had been stricken by illness.

It was dawn when he heard the splashing of oars. Pendraed made out a shape that was always welcome; the trading Norsemen had arrived. He recognised the prow of their boat. He was about to hail them. They were normally bound for Bamburgh. Were they off course? But, something made him stop. He peered closely at the men. Who were these people? He drew back and watched as they pulled on their oars and took in the sail. On each side of the long boat he made out rows of shields. The hairs on the back of his neck rose and his heart began to pound. What he had seen made his flesh creep. The men were wearing armour, each hand forged link catching the morning light. As the boat drew closer he gazed, horrified, at the spears, swords and axes. These men were ready for battle. He glimpsed their grim faces under their metal helmets as they looked fiercely about. The boat was fast approaching the shore now and the men were shipping their oars ready to disembark. He heard the foreign tongue and watched as they pointed in the direction of the monastery. Now





they were landing and jumping from the boat on to the shore passing their weapons down and shields from one to another.

Pendraed's heart was racing as his fear grew. He knew in an instant what he must do. Some of the monks would be at Morning Prayer in the Greater Church. He had to warn them. He leapt to his feet. His legs trembled as he ran. Keeping close to the ground he sped as fast as he could across the field and through the monastery garden where he saw monks bent on their task of tending the herbs and vegetables growing there. Brother Egric glanced up and saw the terrified face of Pendraed.

Dropping his spade he clutched him with both hands 'Whatever is troubling you Pendraed?' But Pendraed could not immediately find his voice. He was shaking and breathless. After a second or two he blurted out his horror. Brother Egric's face changed and he looked fearfully over his shoulder towards the beach. 'Show me boy.' There was no time. Pendraed broke away and ran to the Church where the monks were in prayer.

He pulled at the door and ran in, disturbing the peaceful fathers. But Pendraed was fuelled by fear and desperately he called out to them paying no regard to the sanctity of the place. He shouted to them, 'Many Norsemen are approaching with swords and axes. They are ready for battle!'

The fathers stared at him in disbelief, 'They are our friends Pendraed. What are you saying?' asked one of the fathers sternly. Others saw the

urgency of the boy. They looked around, seeing their precious books, relics, silver candlesticks, gold plate and the beautiful tapestries hanging from the walls. How vulnerable they were! They had trusted the Norsemen!

They heard much shouting and roaring and the approach of many men. The fathers looked to the open doors as the ferocious raiders ran towards the Church brandishing their swords and axes. Father Osuald went quickly to close the doors and bar the way, praying that God and His saints would take care of them. Some of the precious relics and possessions were hastily hidden inside an ivory chest. The monks were all in confusion. Father Sebbi retreated out of the back of the Church and threw several precious items into a water barrel. Following him, Pendraed shouted, 'We must warn the others,' and they both ran towards the outer buildings. Their urgent shouts awakened fear in the hearts of those who were working nearby.

It was then that Pendraed and Father Sebbi froze for a second as they heard banging on the Church door and the forced entry. The shouting, the violence of the axe as it splintered the wood. The first blood curdling screams and sounds of clashing metal. The berserkers were creating mayhem and murder. There was little resistance, there was no defence. Many fathers were struck down and immediately died. Others lay in pools of blood, with ghastly wounds.

Father Wihfred was forced at spear point to show the Norsemen where the treasured relics and silver were hidden. The wonderful illuminated manuscripts with their jewel-encrusted bindings lay in the writing rooms. Using their daggers the





raiders prised out the jewels. Chests were forced open and looted.

Father Landis had managed to escape through the rear door with some of the monastery's precious relics held in a leather pouch. He saw Pendraed and shouted to him. 'Take these Pendraed and try to hide them.' Pendraed's pallid face twisted with anguish. Father Sebbi shouted urgently, 'Hurry boy and run before you are caught.'

Pendraed fled down towards his village. At one point he stopped to arm himself with a stone and as he did so, turned. To his horror he saw one of the Norse-warriors thrusting his sword through the leg of Father Sebbi who screamed out in his agony. Pendraed, tears coming fast, gasped for breath as he ran towards a large rock. He hid there, holding the leather pouch tightly against his thin coarse shirt. He pleaded to God for help. He could not get to his village to warn them, it was too late. Then he saw his sister Elflede coming towards him. She was calling to him. 'Pendraed what is happening? What is going on?' He wanted to cry out to her but no sound came. In vain he signalled to her to go back but could not make her understand the danger. She stopped suddenly and stood motionless. In shock she watched as many warriors, with bloodied



swords and axes, were leaving the monastery. Some were dragging monks back to the boat, others were coming towards the village.

Elfede's eyes were wide and fearful now but still she didn't or couldn't move. Brother Osbert came running out of the monastery but following him and gaining on him was a large and terrifying warrior who carried a silvered axe that caught the early sun. Now the warrior had hold of Brother Osbert's tunic and was wielding his axe and yelling. Elfede gasped and held out her hand as if to stop the weapon. She stared wordlessly at them.

Suddenly, without thinking, Pendraed leapt up and, running towards the Norseman, shouted at him to stop. The mighty warrior halted his action and turned towards him. Pendraed threw his stone with all force that he could muster, catching the warrior on the side of his face. The Norse-warrior loosed his hold on Brother Osbert and in a fury made a grab for the boy. Catching him by the hair he threw him on to the ground. He raised his axe ready to crush him with one mighty blow. They stared directly at each other. The look of defiance in Pendraed's blue eyes made the Norseman falter. In that long slow second of time Thorvald had seen his own son looking back at him. He cursed and shouted at the boy and kicked him out of the way.

Pendraed still clutched the leather pouch with the precious relics in his hand, and now some spilled out on to the ground. His heart was beating wildly. Brother Osbert sank on to his knees as he watched Elfede run to Pendraed. Thorvald saw the maiden and seized her. Neither of them could stop him. They shouted and screamed at





him. Pendraed hit him again and again with his bare hands. Elflede kicked and wrestled but Thorvald managed to tie her wrists behind her. Again he pushed Pendraed to the ground and dragged her roughly away towards the longboat. Pendraed was helpless to save her. He screamed 'Elflede, Elflede,' his voice taken by the wind. Brother Osbert gathered up the scattered relics and returned them to the distraught boy.

Some of the other warriors were still ransacking the village and Pendraed smelt and heard burning, screaming. He turned towards his home. His eyes clouded with pain as he watched his house being put to the torch. His mother stood there clutching the baby. She watched in terror and then fled. The whole village was in uproar and turmoil as the Norsemen began their slaughter. Some warriors were capturing those whom they felt would be worth taking as slaves. There was such mayhem. Shouts and screams of suffering and death were coming from his village. He was shocked once more into silence.

Brother Osbert pulled Pendraed down behind the rock and hid the boy's face from the horror.

The cry went up from a beserker to torch the monastery but Thorvald pulled him back. 'Let them regroup and gather more riches and next year we will come again.' They laughed. 'We have slaves and treasures.' 'And people and strange relics we can ransom. Yes, we have done well.'

Thorvald summoned the raiders with a blast on his horn. Then as suddenly as it had begun

it was ended. The Norsemen were making their way back to the beach and their longboat. Rapidly they forced and dragged their captives up into the boat and then stowed the stolen riches. All was complete and the boat was pushed out into the North Sea. The oars splashed noisily in the water until the sail was raised and then they were gone.

Brother Osbert and Pendraed stayed where they were, speechless and unable to move. The acrid smell from the village carried on the wind and the smoke followed the longboat out to sea. There was much wailing and sobbing from all sides. They slowly made their way back to the monastery, meeting other monks who had avoided the death and destruction that had rained down on their community. They stood and were sorely shocked. The floor of the monastery was slick with slaughter. The metallic smell of blood caught in their throats. Some fell to their knees. Others searched amongst the dead for any living soul, but who could survive such extreme violence? They found two of the fathers whose breath came in shallow gasps who, when moved, cried out for mercy. They carried them gently from this the Greater Church and carefully tended them night and day with healing herbal potions. The dead were blessed. Many graves were dug. Blood was washed from the Church and monastery floor and all the time prayers were said for their lost ones.

Bishop Hegbald had been told of the raid and returned from his travels as quickly as he could. He was much saddened and shocked to see so many graves. He said special prayers for all who had lost their lives and blessings for those who had suffered so terribly and yet somehow





managed to survive this onslaught. Pendraed presented the leather pouch with its precious contents to Bishop Hegbald who thanked him for his great care and courage. He was much acclaimed for being so courageous in saving the life of Brother Osbert and protecting the precious relics. Pendraed's warning had given the monks the opportunity to hide some of their treasures, but nothing could have stopped the death and destruction that the monastery and the community had suffered. No-one could take in what had happened to them. Pendraed never saw his sister again. That day of slaughter and destruction on this Holy Island of Lindisfarne will not be forgotten. The first ever raid on Britain by the 'Vikings'.

The day, June 8th in the year 793.





written and produced by Rural Arts
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