

## The Dawn of The Vikings

The oar creaked, groaning under the pressure of the rough waters of the open sea. It was a hardwood oar, with cracks running down the side, and stained with the constant salt and water of the sea. If one were to look down the side, they would've seen 24 of these, rhythmic pounding the water to pull the ship along, the majestic wings of the lords of the sea. Looking further down the ship, one would've seen a delicately carved dragon head sitting atop the crest of the ship, a powerful symbol of a powerful crew. Finally, if they were to look upon the ship itself, they would have noticed the large square sail that dominated to the middle of the ship, and the near fifty five gruff men sitting aboard, weary but also intimidating, with large shoulders, blond hair, pale skin and blue eyes.

Vikings.

Not just one ship however, no, eight more ships trailed the first, all filled to the brim with more of the gruff raiders. It was the ninth of June, 793, friday, or fredag for them. It was windy, cold, and late afternoon. Everyone was tired after a long day of rowing, for the wind had been uncooperative the whole journey, leaving it to them to rely almost entirely on rowing. Eventually, as the day began to darken, the crew stored the oars and dropped anchor, before laying out in animal skin blankets for a restless night, on the ocean.

It was still dark when Bjørn woke up. The sea calm, both a blessing and a curse on board made for smooth sailing. Not quite sailing though, as there was no wind either, leaving it up to the crew to row the ship to shore. Bjørn sat up with a groan, the prospect of another day in the rowing benches disheartening. At the rate they were going, the normal six day journey to England was taking almost ten days, due the fact there had been little to no wind the whole journey, leaving it entirely to the rowing crew to get them there. They were meant to arrive tomorrow, given there were no disturbances, but they would be tired, weary and sick of the sea.

Not the best fighting force.

For they weren't trading, as most norsemen did. No, their Jarl, Erik the Blooded after his recent loss against the Danes, was seeking redemption in battle. As he was part of his army, Bjørn was required to follow him in battle, which led him here. The Vikings, or Norsemen as they were referred to at the time, were headed to Lindisfarne, or 'the holy island' off the coast of Ireland, where a monastery was situated, filled with gold and jewels. Bjørn shook his head, dispelling daydreams. He didn't know much. They were heading to Ireland, where there was a monastery they were going to raid, filled with gold to redeem their honour. He thought back to home, his cosy little farm in the valley, where his wife Revna lived, tending to their farm. He thought back to before the failed ambush, before he signed up to find honour. Before he lost his status and was forced to go on this cold, wet and miserable journey. He groaned, pulling the oar back again. And again. And again. Over and over again he

pulled, for the remainder of the day, and beyond, into the hours of darkness, until finally they could stop, and sleep.

That was the plan at least. Upcoming battles, worry... sleep wasn't going to be kind. Bjørn lay, watching the stars make their path throughout the sky, from the great bear, to the bright northern star.

I suppose we should describe our main protagonist in this story, Bjørn. He was what you would call a stereotypical viking, with pale skin, long brown hair, and the beginnings of a beard. He was average size, but his shoulders bulged from a lifetime of cutting down trees and tilling the soil for his family. At twenty two years old, he was about halfway through the average lifespan of a viking, and was already married to a nordic woman called Revna, meaning raven. She was much the same, with jet black hair and a master at the houscrafts, they had a child on the way. Bjørn had started his life as most norsemen did, born to a farming family and set up with an arranged marriage at nineteen. He had joined Erik's army at twenty one, when they had tried to take land from the Danes at the south, in hopes of finding better farmland. Following the failure of that, in order to restore his honour and the honour of his Jarl, they had set off the expedition he was currently on.

Bjørn was jolted awake by the calls of helmsman and the Skipari called for the crew to ready themselves for rowing. Surprised he managed to drift off in the night, he quickly got himself up and into the rowing benches. It wasn't long until the call of 'land!' came from the forefront of the ship, and like a practised, well oiled machine, they stowed their oars and awaited Erik's orders. 'Prepare your weapons and get ready for battle' He said. 'We go in quietly and hit 'em with a surprise attack, coming in from all sides' A simple plan, not Bjørn's preferred method, but the simpler it is, the less there was to go wrong, and Erik liked that.

It took another three hours to reach the shore following that, and another hour getting ready before that. By the time they pulled in, it was mid-morning. Now silence was of the essence. They dropped the land anchor, dragging it up into the rocks, and after a few quiet signals from Erik, they dropped quietly to the ground and worked their way up the path. It was a few miles down the path, and there it stood, the pride of the holy island, the monastery. A bit underwhelming, Bjørn thought but after spending a week anticipating this moment, it was only to be expected. They watched, for an hour, watching the movements of those inside, the monks.

It was at midday when Erik gave the order.

It took a while for the thought to register in everyone's heads after so long of waiting, but when it did, the reaction was explosive. They charged, going forward in wedge, with the strongest attackers in front, yelling and screaming so much that from an onlookers perspective, they would've thought a wave of fury and rage was heading towards them. They smashed their way towards the monastery, giving the monks inside little time for reaction, before they hit, and spread off in different directions, each one hoping to gain a little wealth and gold for themselves. Bjørn himself went

left, around the complex, cutting down anyone in his path and feeling no remorse. He bashed down a door before charging in, seeing nothing of value, but a doorway to the left. Unthinkingly he charged down it, again seeing nothing. He rounded the corner in the doorway with a fury unmatched, but once again seeing nothing, swung his axe around in a fury, and in his anger, snapping his spear shaft. At the time he saw this as a mild annoyance. However, as he turned the next corner and found a few feeble monks, he began to regret his anger. For while the monks were untrained and feeble fighters, filled with fear, in the bottleneck corridor, even a few could be dangerous with the right weapons. These monks in particular wielded spears, likely some of the only weapons on the premises. The problem with this however, was that with his spear gone, and his small one handed axe, designed to be used with a shield, left him very open, as to attack the monks, he would have to get past the spears. The monk on the left jabbed at him, snapping him back to reality, and he quickly began to contemplate ways to escape with his life. The two in front again both jabbed at him, forcing him backwards once more. Again they jabbed, and the one on the left, clearly the superior one caught him on the arm, nothing fatal, but a decent gash with the risk of blood loss. Ignoring it however, Bjørn quickly reached with his other hand, grabbing the spear shaft and pulling, and being clearly stronger than the weak monk, pulled it out of their hands, flipped it, and jabbed at them in turn. He killed the first monk with a quick jab to the chest, and when the third one moved in to take his place, he caught that one in the lower stomach, hitting the artery there and killing him also. The last one stood there, quivering, before he turned tail and ran, only to be thrown to the ground by Bjørn's tackle. Unarmed and scared, the monk refused to meet Bjørn's eyes. 'Where is it? Where's the gold?!' Bjørn growled. The monk however, was unfazed and unchanged; he refused to meet his eyes, with his hands together and chanting some sort of prayer. Bjørn repeated himself, before finally realising he couldn't understand him, and dispatched him with a quick cut to the neck. Groaning with pain, he turned and continued down the corridor, the sounds of the battle quieting down outside. Finally, after turning one final corner, he ran into the main chapel.

Beautiful was the first word that came to Bjørn's mind after walking in. Wooden was the next. The centre of the room was dominated by a large altar upon which sat an average pile of gold. It wasn't an overwhelming amount, but enough to get noticed. Surrounding it were large wooden benches, and at the back a stage where priests would've stood. Higher up, amazing stained windows dominated the walls, depicting various moments from the christian history. After a few moments of unmasked amazement, Bjørn quickly dashed forward, and grabbing the gold and jewels, returned the way he came, running back to the ship. He made it out, feeling faint, but not understanding why, he ran to the leaders where they were grouping after the battle, getting various looks from his comrades. He gave the gold to the pile nearby, and wide eyed, Erik exclaiming his amazement. He looked back at them proudly, and everyone was staring at him. It wasn't until Frode, an older member of the raid crew said what everyone was thinking. 'Why my boy, what on earth happened to you?'

Uncomprehending, Bjørn looked to him, surprised, before looking down, realising he was covered in blood and deathly pale. The wound on his arm was worse than it had seemed, and had the power to kill him without medical attention. Seeing this, Bjørn for a few seconds, still uncomprehending, before promptly fainting.

Bjørn remembered little of the trip back, only blurry flashes filled with red, the worries of Frode who had been appointed to heal him, and the immense pain in his arm. He pulled through however, and by the time they docked back in Norway his arm was all but healed, with the only sign towards it the sling wrapped around his shoulder and the faint paleness of his face the lasted. What he did remember however, was the cries of his Jarl at the celebrations afterwards, the tears of joy he felt at being awarded for bringing back the most gold, and the happiness in Revna's eyes at his return. His life had turned around, and with gold awarded him he set himself towards a new life.

What they had started there, that trip to Ireland, none of them would have known the consequences. It was the first raid in many, and it marked the dawn of a new age, one where norsemen were now feared, an age of settlement, an age of conquest and an age of raiding.

The viking age had begun.

Finn Devereux



The event was recorded on a piece of stone by a local community on Lindisfarne.



Example of a viking longship.



Viking Helmet.