

# The first Viking landing

The story is based on this entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. It describes the first recorded visit by the Vikings to Britain.

And in his [King Beorhtric's] days came first three ships from Hordaland [A county in Norway]: and then the reeve rode there and wanted to compel them to go to the king's town because he did not know who they were; and then they killed him. These were the first ships of the Danish men which sought out the land of the English race.



Image from: Getty Images/Heritage Images

## AD 789, Isle of Portland, near the coast of Wessex

The sky was full of the cries of hundreds of gulls and the wooden docks groaned in the strong wind. Anglo-Saxon watchmen stared out over the English Channel, weary after a long shift at their posts. Suddenly, one of the sentries spotted something in the distance.

‘There are three ships coming into the port. They must be merchants bringing their goods into Britain. Messenger, bring Beaduheard, the reeve of Dorchester. The ships are coming to land. If they are merchants or traders, the reeve will want to meet them before they can come onto the island.’ The messenger nodded and ran up the hill, towards the reeve’s house.

The ships came into view. The low, wide, wooden hulls of the longships skirted over the rocks of the coastline and large, dragon-headed prows sliced through the water. The sails billowed in the wind as the occupants came into view.

Beaduheard arrived on the dockside on horseback and was treated with great respect by the sentries. He was in charge of the whole district of Dorchester. He controlled trade in the area and had the power to say who could, and could not, enter the port.



The ships docked and armed Viking sailors poured out onto the shore. Beaduheard strode confidently to greet them. He knew that they were strangers, unseen visitors, and it was his job to find out who they were and to encourage them to make their way to the king's town.

Nobody really knows what happened next. Maybe the Vikings attacked without provocation, intent on killing. Maybe they thought that the reeve was coming to hurt them, or maybe a disagreement arose because they spoke different languages and the reeve's words were misunderstood. Only one fact is certain. Beaduheard was cut down on the shore, killed by the visitors that he had come to greet. The most important man in Dorchester had been slain by a new, unrecognised invading force.

No further deaths were mentioned, so it seems that the Vikings left the shores of Britain as quickly as they came. Their fast, efficient longships were easy to manoeuvre and escape would have been simple. It would be four years until the next recorded Viking raid on Britain. This first encounter served as a warning of the death and destruction that was to come.

## Questions

1. How do you think the Anglo-Saxons felt when they heard that the reeve of Dorchester had been killed by unknown invaders?

---

---

---

2. There is no evidence to tell us why the Vikings carried out this first raid. Can you think of **two** reasons why they came to Britain?

---

---

---



3. No reasons were given for the killing of the reeve in the evidence that we have. Imagine that you are a Viking that has come to shore. Why might the reeve have been killed?

---

---

---

4. What short-term and long-term effects do you think this attack had on the Anglo-Saxon people?

**Short term**

---

---

---

**Long term**

---

---

---

