

Our main information about the Viking raid on Lindisfarne is from the Anglo – Saxon Chronicle, which was written about 100 years after the raid.

It says:

AD. 793. This year came dreadful fore-warnings over the land of the Northumbrians, terrifying the people most woefully: these were immense sheets of light rushing through the air, and whirlwinds, and fiery dragons flying across the firmament. These tremendous tokens were soon followed by a great famine: and not long after, on the sixth day before the ides of January (this is probably a mistake and should be June) in the same year, the harrowing inroads of heathen men made lamentable havoc in the church of God in Holy-island, by ransacking and slaughter."

A raid on England

Northumbria was an English kingdom, and its monasteries were famous for books, art and treasures. On a January day, the Viking longships arrived and the Vikings attacked. They burned buildings, stole treasures, murdered monks, and terrified everyone. They took some monks captive so that they could be sold as slaves. Monks were valuable because they could read and write. As well as stealing riches, the Vikings were attacking a religion that they believed to be false. Some Christian Church leaders said the Vikings were sent by God, to punish people in England for doing wrong.

Alcuin, a wise man at the time, wrote

"Consider carefully, brothers, and examine diligently, lest perchance this unaccustomed and un-heard of evil was merited by some unheard-of evil practice... Consider the dress, the way of wearing the hair, the luxurious habits of the princes and people."

The Vikings robbed the monastery of all the valuables they could get their hands on, but there were two important treasures they overlooked – the beautiful, handwritten Bible – “The Lindisfarne Gospels” – and the carved oak coffin containing the bones of Saint Cuthbert.