

Frequently Asked Questions about Vikings

Why are they called 'Vikings'?

The word 'Viking' is an Old Norse adjective meaning 'to go on an adventure'. People who travelled overseas from their native land were called Vikings.

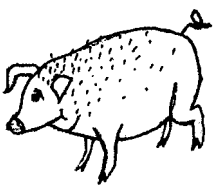


Did they have horns on their helmets?

No. When a Pagan Viking was buried he would possibly have had a helmet and drinking horns buried with him for use in the afterlife. When the Victorians dug these skeletons up, they believed that the horns had fallen off the helmet and this is why it is believed that they had horned helmets!

Did the children go to school?

Only children from very rich families learned to read and write. Generally boys would learn their fathers' trade (such as farming or metal working) whereas girls were taught crafts by their mother and helped with household tasks.



What did they eat?

The Vikings ate food they grew, reared, could gather in the countryside (or steal from their neighbours). They ate meat mainly beef, pork, chicken, game and fish, but as this was expensive, vegetables and bread made up their staple diet.

What did they use to wash themselves?

Vikings used soap made from animal fat mixed with potash, which would be very harsh on the skin! Vikings washed on Saturdays. This washday is called Lordag in Scandinavia.



How did they get married?

Viking parents would choose partners for their children. Weddings would happen when the girls were aged between 12 and 15, and when the boys were about 13 years old. In the ceremony the couple would join hands and drink bridal ale before witnesses. A large feast would follow these celebrations.

Did women ever fight in battle?

Yes, there is some evidence that they did. This was especially common for women from royal backgrounds, such as Thyru, Queen of Denmark.

What happened to the Vikings?

The Vikings lived alongside the English until 1066–7, when William the Conqueror invaded with his Norman Army. This army devastated the North of England and destroyed the Viking towns and villages.



How do you sex a skeleton?

With an adult skeleton, there are several indicators:

- The eyebrow ridge is more pronounced in men.
- The bump on the back of the head is bigger on a male skull.
- Women have flatter and much wider pelvises (hip bones).

It is impossible to determine whether a child's skeleton belonged to a boy or girl as the human skeleton does not develop fully until around the age of 18.

