

Yorkshire Museum

Viking North: Teachers' Exhibition Pack



Image: Thor's Hammer Pendant © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

Chronology: The Vikings

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Section One: How to use this resource

This resource will help you get the most out of a visit to our Viking galleries at the Yorkshire Museum. It contains:

- An introduction to the **Viking York** exhibition.
- Information about ten **Star Objects** in the exhibition, which you **may wish** to look at with your pupils when visiting.

Each Star Object corresponds to one of the **themes** that can be found in the exhibition. These are:

- The Vikings as raiders
- The Vikings as makers and traders
- The Vikings as believers

You can use this resource to familiarise yourself with our Viking exhibition **before your visit**. You may also find it helpful to **share** these notes with the other **adults** who will be accompanying the class on your visit to the museum.

Flash Cards

A condensed version of these notes is available to borrow on the day of your visit in our **Viking York Discovery Box**. These come as a set of **flash cards**, which you can use to guide your pupils around the Star Objects in our Viking exhibition.



Image: The Viking North exhibition © Anthony Chappel-Ross, courtesy of York Museums Trust.

Curriculum links

A visit to our **Viking North** exhibition can be used to cover the following curriculum areas:

Key Stage Two

Pupils should be taught about:

- The Viking and Anglo-Saxon struggle for the Kingdom of England to the time of Edward the Confessor

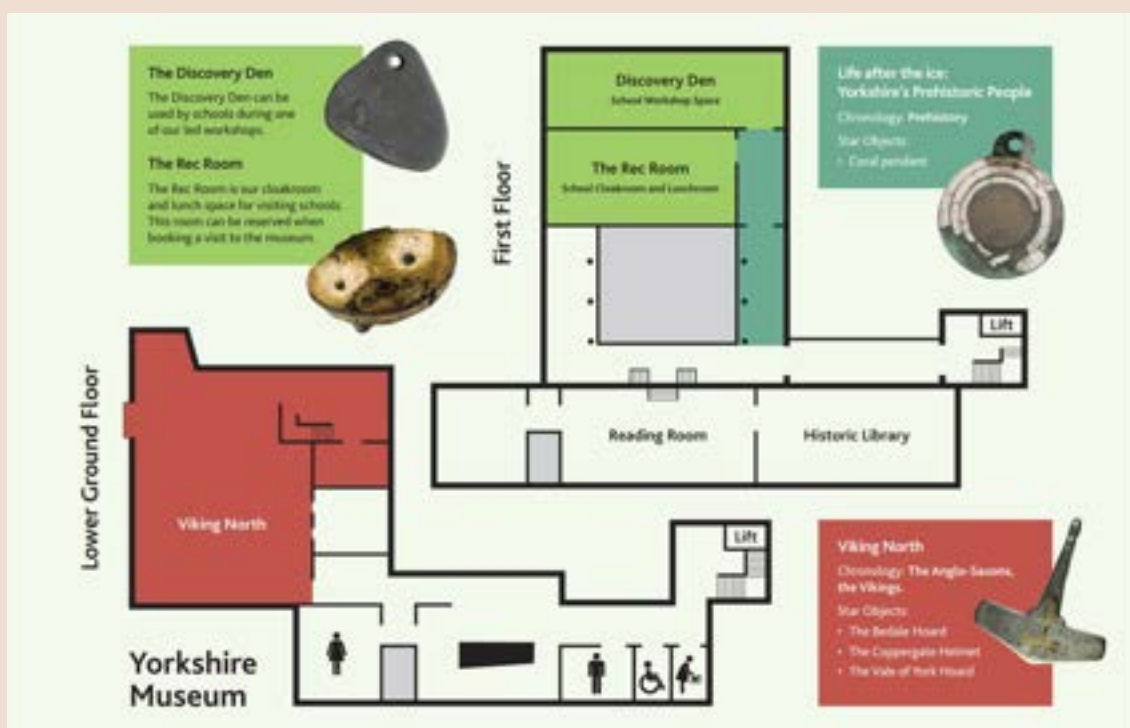
This could include:

- Viking raids and invasion
- Resistance by Alfred the Great and Athelstan, first king of England
- A local history study

Gallery Map

Our **Viking North** exhibition is located on the lower ground floor of the Yorkshire Museum.

You can download a copy of our **Yorkshire Museum: School Visit Map** from our [website](#).



Section Two: Introduction to the Viking north

Who were the Vikings?

- The Vikings came from an area that we know as **Scandinavia**, which is made up of **Denmark, Norway** and **Sweden**. Most of the Vikings who came to England originated from Denmark and Norway.
- The word **Viking** comes from an **Old Norse** word which means 'pirate raid'. As such, people who went off raiding in ships were said to be 'going Viking'.
- Whilst **skill in battle** and acquiring **plunder** was an important way for a man to build a **reputation** in Scandinavia, not all the people who we call Vikings were warriors. Many were **farmers** who kept animals and grew crops, whilst others were **craftsmen** who created beautiful objects such as decorated **combs** and **jewellery**.

Early raids

- The first Viking raid on England took place on **8 June AD 793**. The target was the **monastery** at **Lindisfarne** in the **kingdom of Northumbria**.
- Northumbria was one of the four main **Anglo-Saxon kingdoms** in England at the time, with the other three being **Mercia, East Anglia** and **Wessex**. The principal city in Northumbria was York, or **Eoforwic** as it was known by the Anglo-Saxons.
- The **churches** and **monasteries** in Northumbria were famed for their gold and silver **treasures**. For the **Christian** Anglo-Saxons, these treasures were offerings to the glory of God. For the **pagan** Vikings – who worshipped many gods and goddesses such as **Thor** (god of thunder and farming) and **Freya** (goddess of love and fertility) - they made easy targets.
- The Anglo-Saxons were shocked by the attack on Lindisfarne, but this was only the first of many Viking raids over the coming years

The Viking Great Army

- In **AD 865**, a great force of Vikings landed in East Anglia. Known as the **Viking Great Army**, these Vikings had come to **conquer** English lands.
- Some historians think that a **growth of population in Scandinavia**, which meant there were no longer enough **resources** for everyone, pushed the Vikings to try and take land in England. England's **wealth** and **rich farmlands** must have been very attractive.
- In **AD 866**, the Viking Great Army attacked York and put their own king on the throne. The army spent the next few years moving around England, defeating English kings in battle and seizing their lands.

- The Vikings eventually moved to attack **Wessex**, the last surviving Anglo-Saxon kingdom. After a long struggle, they were defeated by the king of Wessex – now famously known as **Alfred the Great** – at the **Battle of Edington** in **AD 878**.
- Alfred and the Viking leader **Guthrum** struck a deal which divided England between the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. The territory controlled by the Vikings became known as the **Danelaw**.

Life in the Danelaw

- Vikings from Norway and Denmark arrived in England to **settle** the land conquered by the Viking Great Army. Many of these settlers became **farmers (Star Object Five)**.
- York, or **Jorvik** as the Vikings called it, was a hive of activity. A series of Viking kings ruled from the city, many of whom **minted** (made) **coins** to demonstrate their power. Jorvik was an important **trading hub** with exotic materials and goods, such as a **hood** made from **silk (Star Object Four)**, arriving from faraway places. The city was also home to skilled craftsmen who made beautiful objects such as jewellery (**Star Object Eight**).
- Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon ideas **mixed** in the **Danelaw**. For example, many of the objects on display in our **Viking North** exhibition show us how some Vikings **converted** to **Christianity (Star Object Seven)**, whilst other settlers continued to follow their old **pagan** beliefs (**Star Object Nine**).

The end of Viking York

- Viking rule in York lasted less than 100 years. In **AD 927**, the English king **Athelstan** - the **first** king of **England** - marched an army to York and took the city and kingdom of Northumbria from the Vikings.
- Following the **death** of Athelstan in **AD 939**, **Olaf Guthrithson**, the Viking **king of Dublin**, sailed to York and **returned** it to Viking control. The return of the Vikings was **short-lived** though and in **AD 954** the last Viking king of York, **Erik Bloodaxe**, was driven from the city.
- Despite this, many Scandinavian settlers continued to live in England. and Viking culture continued to have an important **influence**. For example, we have evidence for a tax collector with a **Danish name** living in the north of England over a hundred years after York returned to Anglo-Saxon rule.

Section Three: Star Objects

The **Star Objects** listed below have been chosen because they can provide us with an intriguing insight into life in the **Danelaw**.

Each Star Object comes with:

- A brief **description** of the object, the **materials** used to make it, and why we think it is **important**.
- Suggested **enquiry questions** which you can use to lead a discussion with your pupils.

The Star Objects are listed in the **order** in which they can be found in our **Viking North** exhibition.

Each Star Object corresponds to one, or more, **themes** that can be found in the exhibition. These are:

- The Vikings as **raiders**
- The Vikings as **makers** and **traders**
- The Vikings as **believers**

Flash cards

A condensed version of these notes is available to borrow on the day of your visit in our **Viking North Discovery Box**. These come as a set of **flash cards**, which you can use to guide your pupils around the Star Objects in our Viking exhibition.

Star Object One: The York Helmet

Materials: Iron, copper alloy; **Theme:** Raiders

What is it?

- This helmet was owned by an **Anglo-Saxon**. It was **hidden** by its owner inside a **well** in York. The object was later discovered by **archaeologists** in **Coppergate** in York.
- The helmet is decorated with **animal designs** on the **nose-guard**. A copper-alloy band running over the top of the helmet has been inscribed with a phrase in **Latin**. The words translate as:

'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and God; and to all we say amen. Oshere'.

- This inscription tells us that the helmet's original owner was called **Oshere**. He may have been a member of the **royal family** in the **kingdom of Northumbria**, which was one of the most **powerful** kingdoms in Anglo-Saxon England.

Why is it important?

- We think the helmet was **hidden** in a well to stop it being **stolen** by the **Viking Great Army** which attacked York in **AD 866**. This provides us with evidence for how people **feared** the Vikings.
- Many Vikings believed that owning and wearing important objects like this was a way of showing their **power**, **status**, and **wealth**.

Enquiry question

- The Vikings had a reputation as fierce warriors. Can you **find** examples of some of the **weapons** they used in a nearby case?



Image: The Coppergate Helmet. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

Star Object Two: The Ormside Bowl

Materials: Gilded silver and bronze; **Theme:** Raiders

What is it?

- This silver-gilt bowl was found buried with a Viking warrior at **Ormside** in Cumbria.
- The bowl has been decorated with pictures of **birds, animals, and vines**. This was a popular **artistic style** in the **kingdom of Northumbria**.
- We think the bowl was **stolen** by the Vikings from a **holy site** such as a **church** or **monastery**. These places were often filled with precious objects which made them a perfect target for Viking raids.
- The object has an **inner bowl** which was added at a later date. We don't know for sure, but this **may** have been done by the Vikings - perhaps they wanted to turn the bowl into a **drinking vessel**?

Why is it important?

- The Ormside Bowl is typical of the **valuable loot** that the Viking Great Army looked for as it raided its way across England. It also provides us with evidence for how **important** Viking warriors liked to be **buried** with some of the **expensive objects** they owned.
- The bowl is one of the most **beautiful** pieces of **Anglo-Saxon silverwork** to be discovered in England.

Enquiry question

- Some Vikings **melted** down gold to make **finger rings**. These made it easier for them to **carry** their wealth with them. Can you **find** a **gold finger ring** in this room?



Image: The Ormside Bowl (interior). © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

Image: The Ormside Bowl (exterior). © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

Star Object Three: The Bedale Hoard

Material: Silver, gold and iron; **Theme:** Makers and traders

What is it?

- The Bedale Hoard is a collection of 48 silver, gold, and iron objects **buried** together in a field in North Yorkshire between **AD 890-900**.
- A hoard is a collection of valuable objects that have been **hidden** in the ground for safekeeping.
- The hoard contains **silver necklaces** and **arm rings**, **silver ingots** and the remains of an **Anglo-Saxon sword pommel** made from iron and gold.
- We think these objects represent the **wealth** of an important person.

Why is it important?

- The hoard provides evidence for how the Vikings would **cut up** precious objects – like silver jewellery – into **small fragments** which we call **hacksilver**. The Vikings would then use the hacksilver to **buy** the things they wanted instead of using coins. It is thought that most of the **jewellery** in the hoard would have been cut up in this way.
- Many of the objects tell us about the Vikings' success as **traders**. For example, the hoard contains a **silver neck ring** which was originally made in **Russia**, as well as a **brooch** from **Ireland**.

Enquiry questions

- We think that the person who hid these objects **marked** the spot they were buried with a **flat stone**. **Why** do you think they did this?



Image: The Bedale Hoard. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

Star Object Four: Silk Hood

Material: Silk; **Theme:** Makers and traders

What is it?

- This hood is made from **silk**. We think it was worn by a **female resident** of Viking York.
- A Viking **trader** would have brought the silk to York along **trading routes** from the east. The silk would have then been taken into a local **workshop**, or perhaps someone's **home**, before being **made** into a hood.
- Silk was a **luxury** material, so it is likely the hood's owner was very **wealthy**.
- The silk on the cap is **undyed**. However, we know that the Vikings **dyed** items of clothing using plants like **woad** (for the colour **blue**) and **madder** (for the colour **red**).

Why is it important?

- This object tells us about the Vikings' success as **traders**. In the Viking Age, silk would have had to have come from a place like **Persia** (now Iran), **North Africa**, or **Spain**.
- The cap was found by archaeologists in 1980, during a major **excavation** carried out at **Coppergate**. Objects made from **natural materials**, like silk, don't tend to survive from Viking York. However, the **waterlogged** conditions of the ground helped to preserve the hood.

Enquiry question

- Can you **find** any other objects that a Viking would have **worn** in this case?



Image: Silk Hood. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

Star Object Five: Quernstone

Material: Lava stone; **Theme:** Makers and traders

What is it?

- This quernstone was discovered by **archaeologists** at the site of a Viking **farmstead** at **Cottam**, in the modern-day **East Riding of Yorkshire**.
- People at Cottam used quernstones to grind **grain** into **flour**. The flour would then be used to make **bread**. **Grit** from the stones would have made its way into the bread. This would have **worn people's teeth** down over time.

Why is it important?

- This object provides evidence for how, after the **conquests** made by the **Viking Great Army**, land was distributed to **settlers** from Scandinavia. Many of these settlers then took up **farming** as their livelihood.
- The quernstone is made from a block of **lava stone** which was brought to England from the **Rhineland** (in modern-day **Germany**). This gives us information about **trade links** between the Viking north and **mainland Europe**.

Enquiry question

- Can you **find** another object in this case which the people who lived at Cottam **used** to **make** something?



Image: Quernstone., courtesy of Hull and East Riding Museum of Archaeology.

Star Object Six: Silver Cup (Vale of York Hoard)

Material: Silver, gold; **Theme:** Raiders; Makers and traders

What is it?

- The Vale of York Hoard is a collection of nearly **70 pieces of silver** and **jewellery**, and **617 silver coins** found packed inside a **silver cup**. These were **buried** in the ground near modern-day **Harrogate** between **AD 927-928**.
- A hoard is a collection of valuable objects that have been **hidden** in the ground for safekeeping.

Why is it important?

- The hoard can tell us a lot about **links** between the **Vikings** and other parts of the **world**. The silver cup has been beautifully **decorated** with **animals, grapes and vines**. The **style of decoration** makes us think it was made in **Carolingian Frankia** (modern day **France**). It may have been stolen during a **raid** on a wealthy **monastery or church**.
- Many of the coins in the hoard are **dirhams**. These are silver coins that came from the **Middle East** and have **Arabic inscriptions** on them. Viking traders received dirhams from **Islamic merchants** in return for goods like **fur, amber, and slaves**.
- One particular dirham was **minted** (made) in the city of **Samarkand** in modern **Uzbekistan**. That's over **4000 miles** from York!

Enquiry question

- The Vikings **cut up** jewellery made from precious metals into small **pieces**. We call these pieces **hacksilver**. The Vikings used hacksilver to **buy** things they wanted. Can you **find** any pieces of hacksilver in this case?



Image: Silver bowl.
© York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum) / The Trustees of the British Museum. Purchased with the aid of grants from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Art Fund (with a contribution from the Wolfson Foundation), British Museum Challenge Fund and Public Appeal, 2009.

Star Object Seven: Stone Grave Marker

Material: Stone; **Theme:** Believers; Makers and traders

What is it?

- This stone grave marker was found on the site of a **Christian cemetery** where **York Minster** now stands. It was used to mark the **grave** of an important **Viking**.
- Even though this Viking seems to have been given a **Christian burial**, this stone has been decorated with a famous scene from a **Scandinavian story** in which **Sigurd**, a mighty hero, slays the **dragon Fafnir** with his sword.
- The stone may have originally been **painted in bright colours**, but none of these have survived.

Why is it important?

- This object provides evidence for how, whilst many Viking settlers in the Danelaw **converted to Christianity**, others remained attached to their **Scandinavian background and beliefs**.
- The **decoration** on the stone suggests there was a community of **craftsmen** in York, who were **skilled** in decorating stone monuments.

Enquiry question

- Some Viking stone carvings provide **evidence** for what people **looked** like. Can you **find** a **stone cross fragment** which shows a seated Viking with a forked **beard**?



Image: Stone grave marker. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

Star Object Eight: Jellinge style brooch

Material: Copper-alloy; **Theme:** Makers and traders

What is it?

- The **decoration** on this brooch is known as the **Jellinge style**. This style of art came from **Scandinavia** and features **animals** with **long bodies** that are decorated with **spirals**.
- Jellinge style brooches have been found throughout the Viking north. Some of these were **brought** to England by **Scandinavian settlers**, whilst others were made **locally**.

Why is it important?

- This object provides evidence for how **new fashions travelled** from Scandinavia to England with the Vikings.
- Brooches in the Jellinge style **continued** to be **made** in York even after the rule of the city's last Viking king, **Erik Bloodaxe**, ended in **AD 954**.

Enquiry question

- Can you **find** any other **brooches** in this case?



Image: Jellinge style brooch. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

Star Object Nine: Thor's Hammer Pendant

Material: Silver, gold; **Theme:** Believers

What is it?

- **Thor**, god of **thunder** and **farming**, was the most **popular** of the Viking gods. He was often represented by his hammer, **Mjollnir**.
- Some Vikings in the Danelaw wore pendants in the shape of Thor's hammer. They did this after seeing **Christians** in England wearing pendants in the shape of a **cross**.
- The Vikings were **pagans** because they didn't believe in the Christian God. Instead, they worshipped many **gods** and **goddesses**. As well as Thor, these include **Odin**, god of **wisdom** and **war**, and **Freyja**, goddess of **love**, **beauty** and **fertility**.

Why is it important?

- This pendant provides us with evidence about Viking **beliefs** in the north of England. Objects like this tell us that whilst many Scandinavian settlers **converted** to **Christianity**, others remained **attached** to their **pagan** beliefs.

Enquiry question

- What small gold object can you **see** at the centre of the pendant?



Image: Thor's Hammer Pendant. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

Star Object Ten: Comb with case

Material: Bone, antler; **Theme:** Makers and traders

What is it?

- Making **decorated** combs from **bone** and **antler** was an important trade in Viking York. Viking men would **wear** decorated combs on their **belts** as a way of showing off their **wealth** and **status**.
- Bone cases were made to **protect** the delicate **teeth** of the combs and to stop them from **breaking**.
- Some of the combs have been decorated with patterns of **dots**. This is a style of decoration that was popular in **Scandinavia**.

Why is it important?

- Bone combs that were **made** in **Scandinavia** have been found throughout the north of England. These may provide **evidence** for Vikings **travelling** from Scandinavia to England.
- The fact that people in York made combs that were decorated in a **Scandinavian style**, tells us that many Viking settlers remained **attached** to their **Scandinavian past**.

Enquiry question

- Making combs from bone and antler was one of several **trades** in Viking York. Can you **find** any other objects that were **made** in the city?

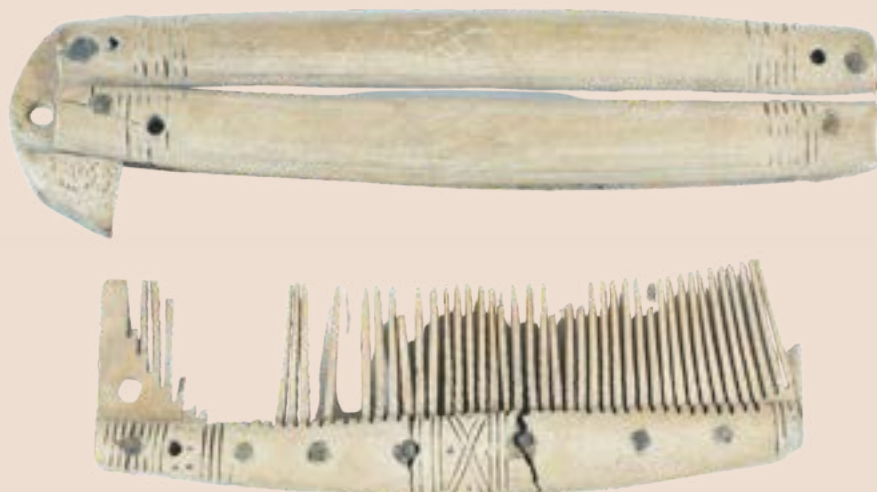


Image: Comb with accompanying case. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).