

Defending Against Invaders

Timeline



By the late 8th century, Britain was attracting the attention of **raiders** from **Scandinavia**. The raiders were called **Vikings**.

Can you think why the Vikings wanted to attack Anglo-Saxon Britain?

Anglo-Saxon Britain was wealthy with treasures that the Vikings could steal. Later, some Vikings decided that they wanted to settle in Britain because of its fertile land.

The building of the burhs

In an attempt to defend themselves against the Vikings the Anglo-Saxons started to build **burhs**.

A burh was a fort or town surrounded by defensive walls and ditches for protection. Burhs were mainly built under the orders of Alfred the Great, a powerful Anglo-Saxon king.



The Vikings usually attacked ports and other places on the coast, so this is where lots of burhs were built. Burhs were either built from scratch on sites that would be easy to defend or put inside old Roman walled cities.

This picture below shows the ruins of **Portus Adurni** on the south coast of Britain. It was built by the Romans in the 3rd century. The Anglo-Saxons used it as a burh.

Do you think Portus Adurni would be hard to attack? Why or why not?

Is it in a good position to defend against Viking attack? Why or why not?



Towns at last

Larger burhs became the first real Anglo-Saxon towns. They were centres of trade, where people could come to buy and sell goods. They were also usually where important buildings were.

*What sort of important buildings do you think were built inside burhs?
Why do you think important buildings were built inside burhs?*

Mints are very important buildings — these are places where coins are made. It was useful to have mints inside the burhs because the people buying and selling goods needed coins.

Armouries are where weapons are made. Soldiers stationed inside burhs needed easy access to weapons, so it was useful to have armouries nearby. Having mints and armouries inside the walls of the burhs also helped to protect them from Viking attack.

This object was made in an Anglo-Saxon armoury.

*Can you tell what it is?**



Building over Britain

King Alfred didn't want any village to be more than 20 miles away from a burh, in case of a surprise attack from raiders, so lots of burhs were built.

An Anglo-Saxon document called the Burghal Hidage gives us a list of over 30 burhs in the south of Britain. Here are some.

How many of these place names do you recognise?



The Vikings are coming...

The Anglo-Saxons had started off as invaders. They settled in Britain, developed its culture and made it wealthy again. But after a few hundred years, the Anglo-Saxons became threatened by overseas raiders themselves — in the form of the Vikings.

*It's part of an Anglo-Saxon shield. The metal fittings would be stuck onto a wooden board.