



01 | c800–c1500 Migration in medieval England

In medieval times, people were drawn to England for all kinds of different reasons, but the main one was that England offered them the possibility of a better life. Hundreds of raiders became invaders, and thousands of invaders became settlers. As England became richer merchants and brewers, weavers, craft workers and bankers migrated from Europe into the growing towns and cities of England. They believed they would make more money working in England than in their home countries. This helped make England the most prosperous country in the whole of Europe.

But the lives of migrants didn't always live up to their hopes. Vikings in York prospered, and the Normans simply took over the country. However, Jews were only allowed to live in a handful of towns and were expelled in 1290. Merchants' lives could be precarious. A wrong investment or a move to a town that was not trading well, could spell disaster.

Migrants had a tremendous impact on England. King Alfred was forced to come to an arrangement with the Vikings as they took over a large part of eastern England; Norman castles and Norman troops subdued the Anglo-Saxons* and introduced the feudal system of landholding and obligation. Towns and cities grew because of the skill and abilities of merchants and tradespeople, who were often funded by Jewish moneylenders.

Medieval England was an exciting and sometimes uncertain place for migrants, with plenty of opportunities but also many dangers.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, you will:

- understand why people migrated to and within England
- understand the experiences of migrants in England
- understand the impact migrants had on England
- complete a case study on the city of York under the Vikings.

1.1 The reasons why people migrated

Learning outcomes

- Know about English society at the time of the migrations.
- Understand the reasons why different groups of people migrated to England.

The Vikings

Monks kept a record of events over hundreds of years in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. They recorded the first Viking* raid on England, when in 789 the Vikings attacked the kingdom of Wessex* on the south coast.

Source A

An extract from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for the year 789, describing the first Viking raid.

In this year there came three ships of Norwegians from Horthaland: and then the reeve [manager of the royal estates] rode thither and tried to compel them to go to the royal manor, for he did not know what they were: and then they slew him. These were the first ships of the Danes to come to England.

From raiding to invading

These three ships were the start of a terrifying wave of Viking raiders. They were searching for treasure – gold, silver and jewels – or anything that was valuable and easy to carry away on their ships. The rich, undefended monasteries and abbeys in the north, such as Lindisfarne which was raided in 793, provided the richest pickings.

Agriculture: The land in eastern England was rich and fertile*. Vikings and their families could settle, farm the land and live well.

Trade: Many English towns were important trading centres with Europe. Taking over these towns and their trade could make Vikings rich.

For over 70 years, Vikings terrorised, stole and slaughtered mostly along England's north and eastern shores. Then things began to change.

- 850 – a raiding party spends the winter camped on the island of Thanet, Kent.
- 854 – another raiding party spends the winter camped on the isle of Sheppey, in the Thames estuary.
- 865 – the raiding stops. The Vikings started to try to invade England. Why did they do this?

Key terms

Anglo-Saxon*

People who migrated from Europe and lived in England from the 5th century.

Viking*

People from the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden and Denmark) who raided and finally invaded England in the 9th century.

Wessex*

An Anglo-Saxon kingdom established in southern England in 519.

Fertile*

Land that is able to support farming and the growing of food.



Religion: Odin, the god of war and military victory, was the Vikings' most important god. To fight and to win meant that Odin would reward Viking warriors after death.

Figure 1.1 Why did the Vikings want to come to England?

Key term**Fortified***

Surrounded by defences against possible attacks.

From invading to conquest

In 865 the Viking army landed in East Anglia. Called the Great Army, it was in fact made up of several smaller armies, each with its own commander. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* claimed there were tens of thousands of Vikings, though it was probably exaggerating. Even so, it was a huge invasion and must have been terrifying for the Anglo-Saxons.

In 866 the Vikings captured the heavily fortified* city of York. They used the city as a base to attack and conquer most of eastern England. They spent 14 years campaigning against the four Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

By 878 the once great kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia and East Anglia were gone for ever, their kings killed or fled abroad. The Vikings took over: they brought over their families and settled, as farmers, manufacturers, craft workers and traders. Only Wessex, the last Anglo-Saxon kingdom, remained unconquered.

Tackling Wessex

The Vikings had invaded Wessex way back in 871 and Alfred, King of Wessex, paid them to leave. Now, seven years later and with the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms gone for good, the Vikings finally turned their attention to Wessex. At first it looked good for the Vikings.

The Vikings make a surprise attack against King Alfred and his Anglo-Saxon army at Chippenham in January 878. Alfred retreats into the Somerset marshes at Athelney. Most of Wiltshire and Hampshire surrender to Guthrum, leader of the Viking army that attacked Wessex.

Alfred rallies local leaders and wins a great victory over the Vikings at the Battle of Edington four months later.

Both sides agreed the Treaty of Wedmore. A boundary between Wessex and the Viking lands, called the Danelaw, was agreed.

Guthrum was baptised a Christian and took his army into East Anglia to settle there.

Wessex remained independent: the only Anglo-Saxon kingdom to be left after the Viking campaigns.

Figure 1.2 The Vikings and Wessex

It was over. The Vikings, who had started out as fearsome raiders, were now settled in a large part of England. To find out how successful they were, you will need to go to Sections 1.2 and 1.3.



Figure 1.3 The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England and the boundary of the Danelaw in 880

Extend your knowledge

Archaeological evidence

Archaeologists excavated land at Torksey, in Lincolnshire, where the Viking army had spent the winter of 872–3. They found that it was not just warriors who had lived there, but also people involved in trade and manufacturing, as well as women and children.

Danegeld

A tax raised by Anglo-Saxon rulers and used to pay the Vikings to stop them devastating Saxon lands.

Activities

- 1** Read Source A.
 - a** What clues can you find there that the Vikings did not come peacefully to England?
 - b** Can the story this source tells be trusted?
- 2** Explain how the Vikings came to control most of northern and eastern England by the end of 878.
- 3** Start a mind map called 'Why was Britain attractive to migrants?'. Add in the reasons why the Vikings wanted to come to Britain. As you work through this section you will find out about other groups of migrants who moved into and inside Britain. Add them in as you go along. By the end, you will have an excellent idea of why Britain was so attractive to migrants.

Timeline

Viking campaigns

- | | |
|---|--|
| 865 Invade East Anglia; the king agrees terms | 866 Capture York and control the kingdom of Northumbria |
| 867 March into Mercia, where the king agrees terms | 869 Conquer East Anglia, killing its king |
| 871 March into Wessex; King Alfred pays them to leave | 873 Conquer Mercia; its king flees overseas |
| 878 Defeated by King Alfred at the Battle of Edington; treaty agreed where Vikings control much of northern and eastern England and Wessex remains independent | |

The Normans

Almost exactly 200 years after the Vikings invaded East Anglia, there was another invasion. This time it was by the Normans. They invaded England not from the east but from the south. Unlike the Vikings, they weren't looking for fertile land and trading centres; they were invading because of a promise, a promise that would bring power.

A succession* problem

On 5 January 1066 King Edward the Confessor died. He had been King of England for 24 years, and during this time England had been peaceful and prosperous. However he had no children to inherit the throne. There were no rules about what happened next only some generally accepted customs:

- The dying king had the right to say who should succeed him.
- The new king should ideally be a blood relative of the old king and an experienced warrior.

Edward had, several times and even, probably, on his deathbed, promised the throne to Harold Godwinson, the most powerful noble in England. The Witan* agreed, and on 6 January Harold was crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey; at the same time and in the same place, King Edward the Confessor was buried.

It seems clear that the nobles and clergy were happy with the situation. That should have been the end of the matter, but it wasn't.

Key terms

Succession* (to the throne)
The process that decided who should be the next king or queen and so 'succeed' to the throne.

Witan*
An Anglo-Saxon assembly of 'wise men' – nobles and clergy (churchmen) summoned by the king to advise him.

Normandy*
An independent dukedom in north-west France.

The Pope*
The leader of the Christian church. The Pope was based in Rome, Italy.

Bayeux Tapestry*
An embroidery made on the orders of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux and half-brother to William, Duke of Normandy. It tells the story of the Battle of Hastings.

Promises, promises, promises

William, Duke of Normandy*, believed that promises made to him by Edward and Harold meant that he was the rightful King of England. What were these promises?

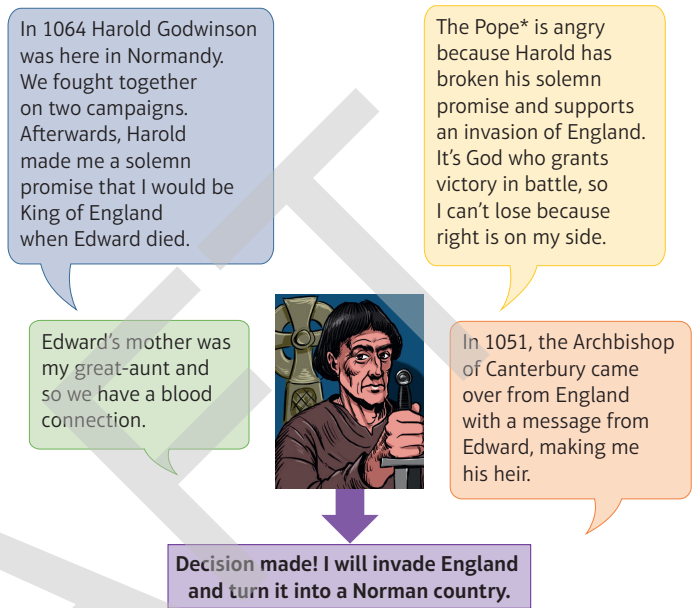


Figure 1.4 Promises made to William, Duke of Normandy, by Edward the Confessor and Harold Godwinson

Source B

The Bayeux Tapestry* was made in the 11th century, a few years after the Battle of Hastings. This part of the Bayeux Tapestry shows us a different sort of promise. On his deathbed, Edward is holding out his hand to Harold.

SIC EDWARDVS REX
SELECTO ALLOQVIT EIDE
C: DEFVNC TVS
EST

Invasion and victory

William prepared well for the invasion of England. He didn't want just to fight Harold and take over a small part of the country. He wanted to be crowned King of England and take over the whole country. He would fill it with Normans and run it his way.

- William's army was superbly fit and well equipped.
- William ordered specially designed ships to be built and filled them with soldiers and horses.
- William brought castles with him. They were prepared in sections so they could be put together quickly. This meant that he could immediately establish Norman rule in England.

On 14 October 1066 the two armies faced each other. Harold Godwinson, King of England, was defending his country against foreign invaders. William, Duke of Normandy was fighting for the throne of England that he believed was rightly his.

William, Duke of Normandy, was crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day 1066. During his coronation there was hand-to-hand fighting between Normans and Anglo-Saxons in the streets around the Abbey. This was not a good start to the Norman take-over. Would the Norman migration to England be successful? To find out you will need to go to Sections 1.2 and 1.3.

Extend your knowledge

The Bayeux Tapestry

This is an embroidery approximately 70 metres long and 50 centimetres tall. Historians think it was probably stitched in England in about 1070 by women working in Kent, England. It is the earliest source of information we have about the Conquest. However, it tells the story of the Norman Conquest from the Norman point of view. There is nothing similar that tells the story from the Anglo-Saxon viewpoint.

The battle of Hastings takes place on Senlac Hill, seven miles from the town of Hastings. It lasts all day and ends in a decisive Norman victory. Harold and his brothers are killed.

William goes to Hastings and waits for the Anglo-Saxon nobles to come and surrender to him. No one comes.

William sends troops to seize Winchester, where England's royal treasury is held.

William marches towards London, burning farms and villages and destroying crops on the way. The terrified people of the towns and villages surrender to the Normans.

William reaches Berkhamsted, north-west of London. England's leading nobles submit to him and swear oaths of loyalty. They invite him to accept the crown of England.

Activities

- 1 On slips of paper, write down the reasons William had for Invading England. Now arrange them in order of importance.
 - a Which was the most important? Which was the least important?
 - b Compare your order with the person sitting next to you. Do you agree? If not, why not? Have either of you changed your mind?
 - c Now write a paragraph explaining why the Normans went to England.
- 2 Remember to add to the mind map you started when you worked on the Viking invasion.

Figure 1.5 William of Normandy: from Hastings to coronation

The Jews

Before the Norman conquest there were very few, if any, Jews in England. After about 1070 they arrived in ones and twos and then as whole families. They came because they were needed. How had that happened?

Religious beliefs and migration

Jews and Christians share many beliefs. However, there are some important differences and these set them apart from each other.

From about 70 CE, the Romans began driving the Jews out of their traditional homelands in the Middle East.

Jewish people migrated far and wide, but they settled mostly in lands around the Mediterranean Sea. This is called the Jewish diaspora*. There are no records of any Jews coming to England. What happened, a thousand years later, that drew Jews to England?

Invitation, migration and settlement

William I planned to build stone castles and cathedrals to establish Norman control over England. This was going to be very expensive. William needed to borrow vast sums of money. The only people from whom he could borrow, were the Jews. Why was this?

Key terms

Old Testament*
The first part of the Bible.

Diaspora*
The scattering of a population that had once lived in one place.

Usury*
Charging interest on a loan; in medieval times Christians were told by the Pope that this was a sin.

Table 1.1 Beliefs and important celebrations of Jews and Christians

Religious view	Jews	Christians
God	Only one God	Only one God
Jesus	Important prophet	Son of God
The Bible	Old testament* only	Both the Old Testament* and the New Testament
Important celebrations	Pesachv (Passover)	Christmas
	Yom Kippur	Easter
	Rosh Hashanah	Whitsun

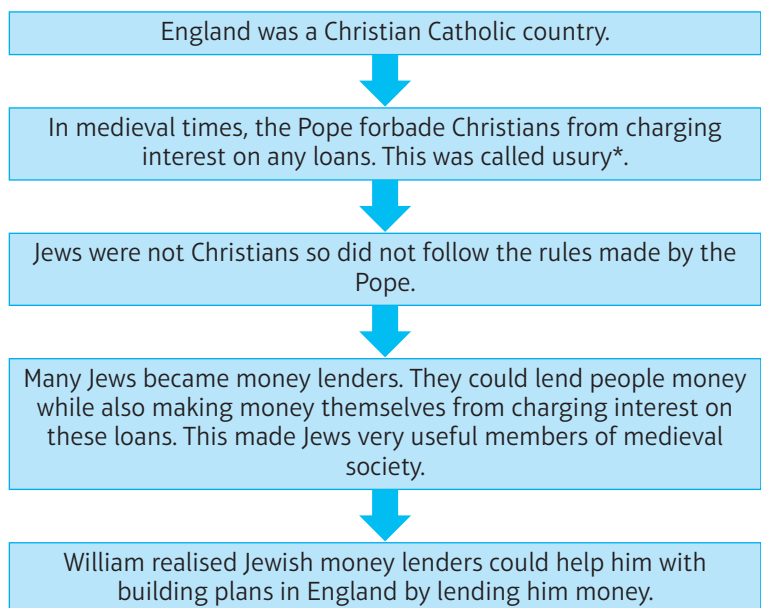


Figure 1.6 The Jews become important money lenders

In 1070, William invited a group of Jewish merchants from Rouen, in Normandy, to come to England. William believed their commercial skills would help him make England prosperous. The Jewish merchants would then share in this prosperity. William first asked the merchants to lend him money, which they did.

The first Jews from Rouen were followed by others. Jewish families did not settle outside London until after about 1135. But gradually, as towns and trade grew, they migrated until there were Jewish communities in many English towns a hundred years later.

Source C



A modern photograph of the 'Jew's House' in Lincoln, which was built in 1170–80. The doorway was probably the entrance to a synagogue*, which stood behind the house.

Key term

Synagogue*

A building where Jewish people met for worship and teaching.

Activities



- 1 Explain why Jewish people would want to migrate to England after 1070.
- 2 Look at Source C. What conclusions can you draw from the photograph about the Jewish community in Lincoln at the time?
- 3 Remember to carry on adding to your mind map. You should, by now, be able to make connections between the different reasons for migration.

Migrants from the Low Countries and Lombardy

- The 'Low Countries' is the name given to modern Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. In medieval times the Low Countries were several small independent states, each with its own ruler.
- Lombardy is the name given to a collection of powerful city-states in the north of Italy. The main ones were Florence, Genoa, Lucca and Venice.

Both the Low Countries and Lombardy were generally prosperous regions, with skilled people working in many different occupations. However, in the years 1337–1453 a series of conflicts broke out in western Europe, later called the Hundred Years' War. Sometimes these disrupted people's work. But why would they want to emigrate to England?

Key term

Black Death*

A pandemic more accurately called the Bubonic plague. It reached England in 1348, killing between 40% and 60% of the population.

Skilled workers from the Low Countries

Most migrants from the Low Countries found work in south-east England, although many established themselves and their families further afield.

- Labouring work, whether in industries such as brick-making or in farming, was easy to find, especially after the Black Death* of 1348–51.
- Many migrants were skilled craftsmen. Many saddlers, tailors, brewers and shoemakers either found work with established companies or set up on their own.

Weavers were a special group of migrants. English sheep produced excellent wool. This was exported to the Low Countries where it was woven into high-quality cloth.

Although English kings taxed every woosack (literally a sack of wool) exported, they realised they would make more money if the weavers from the Low Countries were invited to weave cloth in England. There was more money to be made exporting high-quality cloth!

In 1270, King Henry III was the first monarch to invite weavers from the Low Countries to come and work in England.

I've been to England many times. The sea crossing is quick and easy; much better than making a difficult and dangerous overland journey to somewhere I don't know.

The Black Death wiped out over half of the population of England. There will be plenty of work.

These riots and rebellions mean I can't be sure of regular work. I would do better setting up somewhere else.

Wages in England are high because there aren't enough people to do the work.



Figure 1.7 The attraction of England for skilled workers from the Low Countries

Extend your knowledge

In the 1330s large numbers of weavers emigrated to England from the Low Countries. This was for two main reasons: Edward III allowed them to set up their own guild* if the English weavers proved difficult; and he temporarily banned the export of English wool so that weavers from the Low Countries would have to come to England if they wanted to carry on weaving high-quality cloth.

Key term

Guild*

An association of merchants or tradesmen who all work in the same trade. The guild works together to create local rules for its members. You had to be a member of your trade's guild to sell your goods or services.

Bankers from Lombardy

Rich banking families from Lombardy began arriving in England in the 1220s, settling with their families.

They had heard that there were problems with the Jewish moneylenders. So they planned to take over from them, lending money to kings and businesses. In doing so, they intended to make huge profits because of the interest they would charge.

Source D

A picture of bankers from a medieval manuscript.



1.1 The reasons why people migrated

But there was a problem (see page XXX). The Lombardy bankers were Christians and medieval popes banned usury. How had they got round this in Italy and what were they going to do in England?

The bankers simply used a loophole in the ruling that allowed them to pay a fine for charging interest on loans. The fine was far less than the interest they charged. Finally, in 1265, the Pope allowed Christians to charge interest. Lombardy bankers and their families looked forward to living very prosperous lives in England.

Activities



- 1 Put yourself in the place of a weaver working in the Low Countries. How could a weaver persuade his family that migrating to England would be a good idea? Write out the dialogue.
- 2 Update your mind map and don't forget to make connections.

Exam-style question, Section B



Explain **one** difference between the Viking and the Norman invasions of England. **(6 marks)**

Exam tip



For this question you should identify one difference and add information from both the Viking and Norman periods to support it.

1.1 The reasons why people migrated: summary



- England was a good place for migrants because they could settle and do well there.
- Vikings raided and eventually came to farm and trade.
- Normans came to run the country their way.
- Jews were invited to set up as moneylenders.
- European craftsmen came to set up their own businesses.

Checkpoint



Strengthen

- S1** How did the Vikings gain control of eastern England?
- S2** In what ways did King William I encourage migration to England?
- S3** Why did many European weavers go to England after 1270?

Challenge

- C1** Use the mind map you have made to explain why England was attractive to migrants in the years 800–1500.