



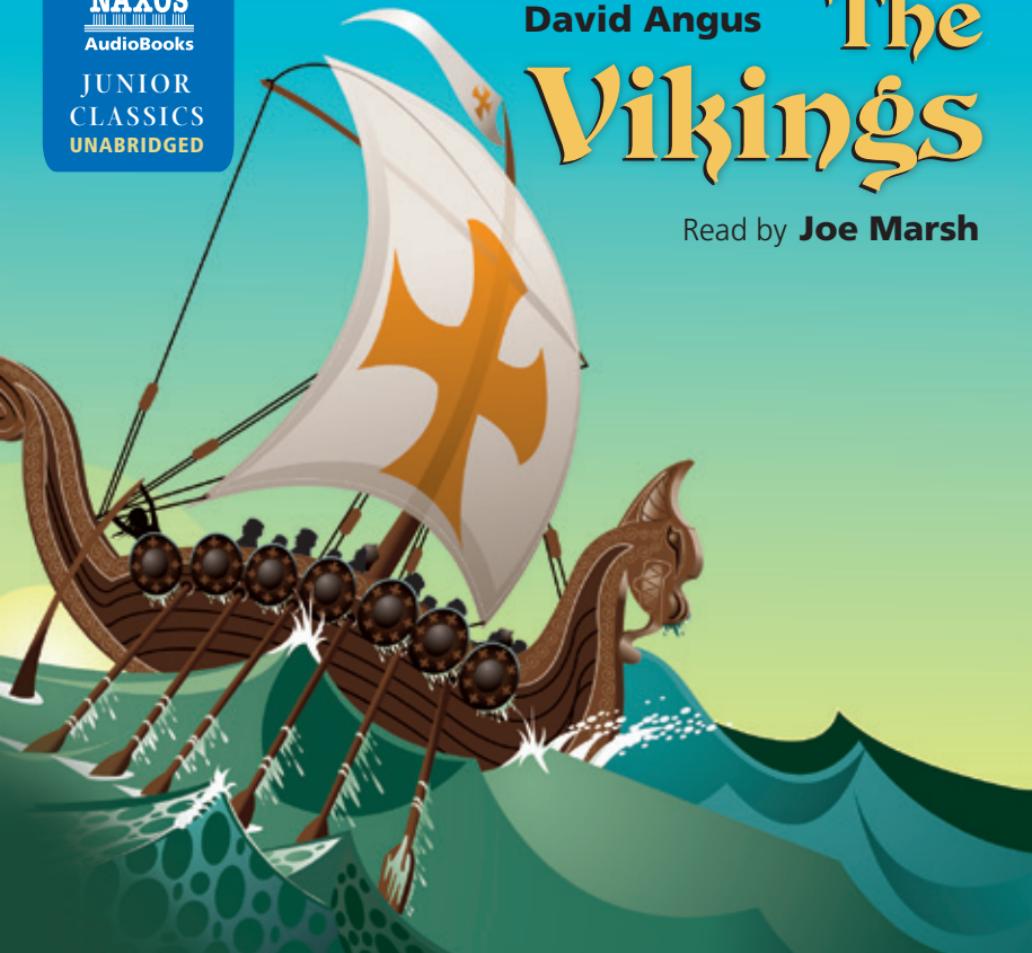
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David Angus

# The Vikings

Read by **Joe Marsh**



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- [1] Chapter 1: 'Preserve us, Oh Lord, from the fury of the Northmen' 5:36
  - [2] A great deal of what we know about the Vikings... 5:31
  - [3] Chapter 2: Raiders and Traders, Farmers and Lawmakers... 6:21
  - [4] This trade flourished for several hundred years. 6:04
  - [5] However, not all Scandinavians went a-viking. 4:44
  - [6] The next class up was freemen. 5:42
  - [7] At the very top of Viking society were the chieftains... 7:50
  - [8] Chapter 3: Skalds and Eddas 5:15
  - [9] After one raid, Egil somehow got left behind... 5:13
  - [10] Egil grew bored with his life as a farmer... 4:52
  - [11] The Myths of the Norsemen 5:54
  - [12] This is, more or less, how all the stories of the old Vikings... 6:34
  - [13] The most feared of Viking warriors were called Berserkers... 4:52

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[14]	Loki is the most mysterious of the Norse Gods.	5:57
[15]	The death of Baldur was the beginning of the end.	4:10
[16]	Chapter 4: The Conquest of England, the 'Great Army'...	6:09
[17]	At the same time, Viking raids on the islands of Orkney...	6:41
[18]	Bjorn parted with Hastein now...	5:24
[19]	When the Ragnarssons arrived in England...	6:23
[20]	Chapter 5: To the East, The Birth of Russia...	3:48
[21]	The trade route from Ladoga...	5:21
[22]	Chapter 6: Across the Atlantic, Iceland, Greenland...	5:59
[23]	Eric took to sea in a long ship...	6:22
[24]	Chapter 7: Harald Hardrada The Last Viking	4:58
[25]	Eventually, according to the saga, he caught the eye...	6:00
[26]	Chapter 8: Kings and Kingdoms, Christianity...	3:28

**Total time: 2:25:23**

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**David Angus**

# The Vikings

What do we know about the Vikings? When you even say the word 'Viking', what picture instantly springs to mind? For most of us it is a bearded pirate in a shaggy outfit, a horned helmet on his head, battle-axe in one hand and looted treasure in the other: a sort of pantomime villain.

The problem is that, traditionally, most of what we think we know about these people comes from two very different sources. The first of these is historic: the letters and chronicles of Christian monks, who were the victims of Viking raids. Naturally they looked on the Vikings with horror and their descriptions are, to say the least, not very flattering. The other traditional view comes from the 19th century, when the idea of Vikings became popular in Germany and Scandinavia, as these countries wanted to create their own recognisable national identities.

Fashionable people wore 'Viking' outfits to fancy-dress balls, people began to write poetry in what they imagined were 'Viking' styles, and clubs and societies that modelled themselves on 'Vikings' became very popular. These people really did not want to be identified with drunken pirates, so they concentrated on what they believed to be the more noble traditions of Old Nordic history: courage, honour and loyalty.

Neither of these points of view is likely to give us an accurate picture of who the Vikings really were. In fact they tend to create a very false impression. To take just one example, the horned helmet was invented by costume designers for the first performance in the theatre of *The Ring of the Nibelung* by Richard Wagner in 1876. The stories in the *Ring* cycle were based on old Norse mythology, and Wagner wanted something that looked noble and

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fine. If you think about it, a horned helmet would be an incredibly impractical piece of armour, useless in a fight and always getting in the way the rest of the time. No one has ever found one dating from the Viking era, and there has been a great deal of archaeological discovery from this period. In 793 AD the Christian monastery at Lindisfarne was looted and the monks either murdered or carried off into slavery. For most historians this event marks the beginning of the period known as 'The Age of the Vikings'. It was to be a time of great turmoil and it lasted until the battle of Hastings in 1066.

It is from the work of archaeologists, particularly in the last 50 years, that we have begun to re-assess the Vikings and to look more carefully, and over a wider period, at the reasons for their turbulent relations with their neighbours. Archaeological excavations at ancient sites have revealed a whole pattern of Viking trade, warfare and settlement across the north of Europe dating right back to the fifth century. Later archaeological sites, from the 250-year period of the traditional 'Viking Age', show us that they

were not just raiders. They settled down and intermarried with local populations. They had their own traditions of art and fine craftwork. They were shipbuilders and carpenters, farmers and fishermen, stone carvers and weavers. Above all they were explorers and traders and they built towns and provinces in Europe, the British Isles, across the North Atlantic to Iceland, Greenland, and even North America.

The general public tends to get excited by archaeology when it involves the discovery of buried treasure and fortunately the Vikings are a wonderful source of such finds. Not only did they like to be buried with their possessions, they left buried treasure in such an abundance that these discoveries have come to be known as 'Viking hoards': usually silver coins and ornaments, stashed in a box or sack, and buried in the ground. One can only speculate as to the reasons for this, but most likely they were hidden by people who feared an attack, and the owners either lost their lives, or were driven away before they could retrieve their treasure. Hundreds of these hoards have been found all over Scandinavia, Great Britain

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and in the north of Germany. They must have been turbulent times indeed, and we can see from this that the Vikings were just as likely to raid each other as they were to seek plunder overseas.

However, although it may be romantic to unearth buried treasure, archaeologists are generally interested in more prosaic discoveries, which teach us about how people actually lived their day-to-day lives. There are magnificent archaeological sites in Scandinavia and the Netherlands which show how the Vikings built up great trading centres: Hedeby in Denmark, Birka in Sweden (which today is a Unesco World Heritage site), and Dorestad in the Netherlands are all splendid examples of the wealth of Viking trade.

One of the best examples of Viking life outside Scandinavia is to be found in the north of England at the old capital of the kingdom of Northumbria: York, where Viking kings ruled for over 150 years. The name York comes from the Viking word Jorvik, which means the 'chieftain's harbour'. The excavation at Coppergate in York in the 1970s unearthed the foundations of Viking houses, the

remains of metal workings, amber carving, ornaments, weapons and pottery. Owing to the area's peaty soil, which preserves organic material, there were even fragments of fabrics and leather shoes. 'Gate' is actually a Viking word that means street, so the Coppergate was the street where metal workers had their forges. Today it is a very popular site for tourists and students who want to learn about real life in the Viking Age.

But the most extraordinary discovery of all Viking remains must be at L'Anse aux Meadows, on the northernmost tip of Newfoundland. The dig uncovered the remains of eight Viking houses. Among the finds was a small bronze cloak pin of a design used by Norse men and women of the 11th century: proof that Vikings had inhabited North America 500 years before Christopher Columbus.

## Notes by David Angus



**Joe Marsh** graduated from Bristol Old Vic Theatre School in 2008, having previously read English at the University of Cambridge. His theatre credits include Alexander Onassis in *Aristo* (Chichester Festival Theatre) and Olivia in *Twelfth Night* (Lord Chamberlain's Men). His television credits include *Silent Witness* (BBC) and *Above Suspicion* (La Plante Productions). Other audio credits include *Pierrot Lunaire* (NMC Recordings). He has also read *Cousin Phillis* for Naxos AudioBooks.



**David Angus** read Anthropology at University and then trained as an actor at the Drama Studio, London. In between acting jobs he began to write scripts and books and he has now written the texts for more than thirty audiobooks, including *Ballet Stories* for Naxos AudioBooks. This was both an AudioFile Earphone Award winner, and a 2002 Audie Award winner for Best Children's Titles for Ages 0–7.

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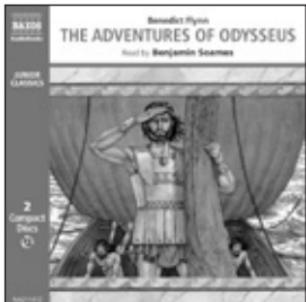


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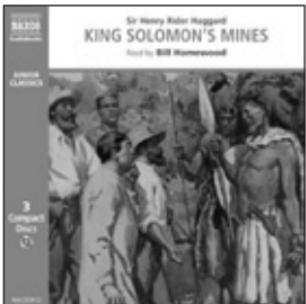
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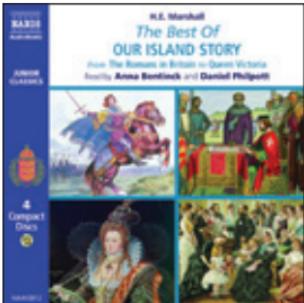
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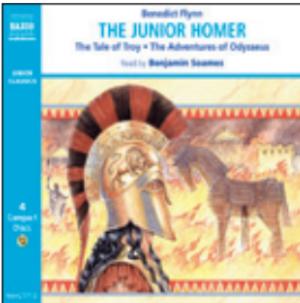
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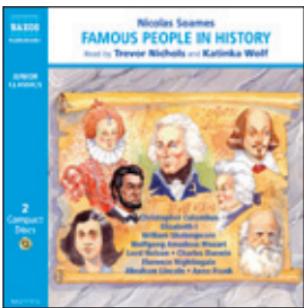
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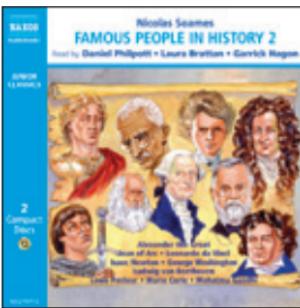
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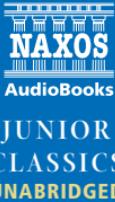
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**David Angus**

# The Vikings

Read by **Joe Marsh**

*Wealth dies, kinsmen die, a man himself must likewise die. Only fame never dies.*  
*(From the Edda 'Hávamál')*

Between the 8th and 11th centuries Vikings stormed out of their Scandinavian homelands to raid and loot along the coasts of Europe. In old Norse to 'go a-viking' meant to go on an adventure - to seek wealth and fame. Vikings would take to the sea in a long ship, sometimes for a trading trip, sometimes a piratical raid. Often it was both. Explorers and traders, warriors and poets, they ranged between Byzantium in the south and Iceland, and even North America, in the North. Their fame lives on.



**Joe Marsh** graduated from Bristol Old Vic Theatre School in 2008. His theatre credits include *Aristo* (Chichester Festival Theatre) and *Twelfth Night* (Lord Chamberlain's Men). His television credits include *Silent Witness* and *Above Suspicion*. He has also read *Cousin Phillis* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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