Scotland’s abbeys are amongst our oldest buildings. This resource takes a look at Scotland’s abbeys and priories and the people who lived and worked there.
How to use this resource

This resource is for teachers investigating abbeys and priories as part of a study of the Middle Ages in Scotland with their pupils. It aims to link ongoing classroom work with a visit to an abbey.

This resource aims to provide:

- An indication of how visits to historic sites can illuminate a study of abbeys and monastic life in the Middle Ages in Scotland
- support for the delivery of 5-14 National Guidelines: Environmental Studies Social Subjects - People in the Past
- background information for the non-specialist teacher about abbeys and monastic life
- maps and further information about key sites

Please note: this pack is aimed at teachers rather than pupils and it is not intended that it should be copied and distributed to pupils. It is intended to complement teachers’ own forward planning, rather than present a sequence of lessons or a plan in its entirety.

Bringing the past to life

The story of abbeys in Scotland begins a very long time ago and presents a challenge to teachers. How can the cloistered world of the 12th century monk be made real and interesting to the 21st century child? A lot can be done in the classroom but the topic is most likely to come to life if it is possible to visit a nearby historic site.

Visits to historic sites can fire the imagination, inspire learning and provoke further questioning. Some of the sites have replica objects or costumes for pupils to handle. Most of the sites are, however, ruinous and without much child-directed interpretation. Presented properly, this can be a way for pupils to engage actively with the building: what do you think this hole in the floor could have been used for? Can anyone see any clues as to what this room used to be?

However, without some prior knowledge, most pupils are unlikely to be able to do this effectively, and they will gain more from a visit if they come to the site with at least some knowledge of the period and of the site. Some ideas for preparatory activities can be found on p 3.

Booking a visit

Historic Scotland operates a year-round free admission scheme for educational visits. To book your class in to a site and to discuss your visit with the site steward, visit the education pages on the Historic Scotland website: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk or telephone 0131 668 8793. Many sites also have more detailed information for teachers or programmes of on-site activities. It may also be possible for the steward to give your class a guided tour.

Free Planning Visit

If possible, make a free planning visit before taking a class to your chosen site so that you feel comfortable with the layout of the site, practicalities and the evidence it offers. Planning visits can be booked when you contact the site.

A list of key sites with a brief description and a map showing their location is on p 32. This is intended to help you choose a site which best supports the angle you are taking on the topic and which is convenient for travel.
Integrating a visit with classroom studies

Educational visits have the greatest value if they are built into the original planning of the topic. We recommend visiting the historic site somewhere in the middle of the study, giving pupils time to become familiar with the structure and role of abbeys. Here are some suggestions which may help with this preparation.

Before the visit

The rubbish bin game

To introduce the idea of history as a process of learning from evidence, play the rubbish bin game with your pupils. Assemble a collection of objects, ideally belonging to a real person (i.e. another member of staff, yourself, a member of your family). These objects need not be anything special – it is worth just turning out your bag and seeing what is there! They could include a bus ticket, an apple core, a shoelace from a sports shoe, a birthday card, a photograph of a family, a copy of a timetable and so on.

Divide the class into groups and pass around the objects. Using the objects, the groups should try and draw conclusions as to what the owner of the objects might be like. In the case of the objects described, you could suggest that the owner sometimes travelled by bus, and therefore maybe lived in a city, had access to fresh fruit, maybe took part in a sporting activity, was involved in some way with a school and so on. The conclusions are likely to be a little different.

Point out that this is how historians work: they look at the evidence left by a person and try and work out what they can learn about that person, a bit like a jigsaw. Sometimes they might get it wrong. The more objects they have, the more complete a picture it is possible to build up about the person.

An abbey rubbish game

To introduce the topic, you could play another version of the rubbish game – an abbey rubbish game. Make a collection of objects relating to monastic life. These could include postcards of abbeys, contemporary pictures of abbeys, extracts from contemporary sources, images of objects found at abbeys, a picture of a monk’s habit and so on. What can the pupils deduce about the life in an abbey from these objects?

The SCRAN website (www.scran.ac.uk) is an excellent source of images for this; you can create your own page of their images and then project this using a data projector or the interactive whiteboard.

Reliable evidence

Discuss with pupils how we can find out about the lives of people in abbeys in the past. Help them to identify the following sources of primary evidence:

- words (letters, descriptions)
- pictures (portraits, contemporary drawings, carvings)
- objects (grave slabs, personal items)
- places (abbeys, churches, castles)

Which of these do pupils think is the most reliable source? Which is least reliable and why? It is easy not to tell the truth, or only to tell part of the truth in a letter or in a portrait, but if you can understand them, objects and buildings are more reliable. Can they sort the objects in the abbey rubbish game into these categories?
‘Read’ a building

Explain to pupils that it is possible to ‘read’ a building. Get them to go out into the playground and imagine that they are visitors from far away. What information could the visitors work out just from looking at the school building? What could it tell them about the lives of the people who use the building? If possible, get pupils to record their ideas in the format: I can see.... This might mean that the people who use the building..... (e.g. I can see a high fence around the building. This might mean that the people who use the building don’t want anyone to come in). Can they see any evidence for where the building has been altered? Schools are often adapted and remodelled so are a good way to ‘tune in’ pupils’ eyes to changes in buildings.

Making a timeline

Help pupils develop their understanding of time. One way to do this is with the pupils to construct a time line in the classroom. In advance, mark out ten centimetre intervals on a long strip of paper. With the pupils count backwards in decades and mark these decades on the paper strip. Help them become familiar with the idea of centuries; many pupils become confused over the fact that dates which start with the numbers 11 – are in fact known as the twelfth century. You can discard the more recent centuries – or roll them up and pin them out of the way.

As the project develops, pupils will build up a picture of the key events in the story of Scotland’s abbeys. The timeline on page 8 may help with this. Pupils can add pictures or key words to the class timeline, or you may wish them to develop their own individual time lines, perhaps as little ‘zig zag’ books.

Once you have decided which site you are going to visit, try and highlight events where it features on the class timeline. It is helpful if pupils are able to look at pictures of the site before they get there and know something about the people who used the site.

Research

Help pupils gain an understanding of everyday life in Scotland in the medieval period through assembling a collection of raw materials. Once pupils have identified what the materials are, they can then carry out further research to find what each material was used for, where it came from and why they were important in the medieval period. Here are some suggestions for materials:

Leather, untreated sheep’s wool, dyed wool, heather, rushes, logs or branches, oats, barley, herbs (lavender, rosemary, mint), spices (ginger, pepper, cloves), honey, fruit, vegetables, horseshoes, pieces of clay pottery, beeswax.

Many of the food items can be found in health food shops. You could also discuss with pupils which materials survive, and which decay, and how this has a bearing on which objects have survived as sources of evidence for us today.

A selection of natural materials

Depending on the site to be visited, pupils can form groups and take on responsibility for researching different areas of interest (e.g. food and cooking, farming, domestic arrangements). Help pupils develop key questions before their visit, so that they arrive on site with a sense of ‘mission’ (e.g. I want to find out how high the abbey church tower was.)

Investigate daily life in Scotland in the Middle Ages. In particular, discuss with pupils the role of the church at that time. It is hard for us nowadays to comprehend the extent to which the church and beliefs dominated everyday life.

Pupils could investigate the daily lives of monks living at an abbey and discuss which elements are the same as and which are different from their lives.
Working on site

Whatever the site, pupils should be encouraged to look for physical evidence of the history of the site and also how it contributes to their understanding of life at the abbeys. You will probably want the pupils to have the chance to explore some of the building with you or, if site staff are available, to tour the building with them. If you are not closely familiar with the building yourself, then here are some useful starting points for discussion:

• What do you think this building/room was used for? How can you tell?
• Can you see if it has been changed anywhere? How?
• Can you see any clues that parts of the building have fallen down or rotted?
• How do you think it might have once looked? Why do you think that?
• Are there any mysteries in the building/room? Can anyone work out a solution?
• What does the site tell us about the lives of the people who lived here?
• What can we add to what we know about the monks? What can you imagine them doing here?

As pupils explore the building, they can compile an ‘evidence record’ about the site. The aim of the evidence record should be to encourage the development of observation, recording and interpretive skills, rather than to focus on finding answers to questions which might just as easily be found in books or on a website. For this reason encourage pupils to look at the site, rather than the site information panels, which often are not aimed at children and may end up discouraging pupils.

There are many ways of recording evidence. Pupils can:

• Write short descriptions of what they see
• Sketch what they can see
• Take photographs
• Use tape recorders to describe what they can see, hear, feel and smell

Help pupils draw conclusions from their evidence (e.g. I can see ............ This tells me that the people who used this building might.....). This could take place back at school and could be just as well done orally.

On the Historic Scotland website (www.historic-scotland.gov.uk) you can find an Evidence Record pro-forma which can be downloaded and copied for pupil use. There are also pro-formas for a range of writing activities.

Suggestions for follow up work

Following the visit pupils can pool their findings in groups to create a fuller record of the site and the lives of the people who lived and worked there. This could then form the basis for a range of presentation activities involving personal, functional and imaginative writing, for example:

• A guide book or promotional poster or leaflet for future visitors
• A slide show with commentary of their visit
• Imaginative writing or drama based on the lives of the inhabitants of the site

Using their evidence records, pupils can work out what they can definitely deduce from the site, what is uncertain and what is still unknown.

• Pupils could use photographs taken on site as the basis for reconstruction work – they could draw, cut out and stick on pictures showing what the site might have looked like when first constructed.
• Pupils could construct a collage or a model of the site, annotated with their own labels.
• Discuss with pupils the lives of the monks or nuns who lived in the abbey visited. What were the benefits of living at an abbey? What were the disadvantages? Pupils could hold a debate, arguing for or against the motion that life in the middle ages was better in an abbey than outside it.
Site visits: Supporting learning and teaching

This resource is designed to support the Social Subjects component of the 5-14 Environmental Studies Guidelines. It focuses on the attainment outcome People in the Past. The suggested activities can be differentiated as appropriate but are best suited to pupils at Levels C-E.

The following suggestions are designed to complement teachers’ forward planning. Learning activities focus on practical activities taking place on a visit to a historic site.

**Environmental Studies – Social Subjects: People in the Past**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Suggested Learning Activities</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for tasks</td>
<td>Pupils will identify in advance: • What they want to find out • Any materials which might help them collect evidence (e.g. jotter, digital camera, tape recorder)</td>
<td>Pupils can • Plan tasks in an organised way • Identify appropriate sources of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying out tasks</td>
<td>On site, pupils will • Search for and collect evidence • Work safely on site and with respect for the building</td>
<td>Pupils can • Select, process and evaluate relevant information collected on site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing and Reporting on tasks</td>
<td>After the visit, pupils will • Discuss their findings and conclusions • Discuss how they want to present their findings</td>
<td>Pupils can • Present findings in an appropriate and coherent way • Present relevant conclusions</td>
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**Developing Informed Attitudes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes</th>
<th>Suggested Learning Activities</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A commitment to learning</td>
<td>Through ongoing discussion and review...</td>
<td>...pupils can appreciate the different ways in which studying this topic has contributed to their understanding of their environment and their place within it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect and care for self and others</td>
<td>Through ongoing discussion and review...</td>
<td>...pupils are aware of their rights to access their cultural heritage and their responsibilities towards it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social and environmental responsibility</td>
<td>Through ongoing discussion and review...</td>
<td>...pupils are aware of their heritage and the need for conservation of the historic environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge and Understanding</td>
<td>Suggested Learning Activities</td>
<td>Learning Outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>People, events and society</td>
<td>Collect evidence about</td>
<td>Pupils can:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Life within the abbeys</td>
<td>• Describe features of life in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Every day life outside the</td>
<td>medieval Scotland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>abbeys</td>
<td>• Describe the diversity of life in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• The role of the church in</td>
<td>Scotland at this time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>medieval society</td>
<td>• Understand the values and actions</td>
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<td>which motivated people</td>
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<td>Change and continuity,</td>
<td>Collect evidence in order to</td>
<td>Pupils can:</td>
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<td>cause and effect</td>
<td>• Compare life then and now</td>
<td>• Make comparisons between</td>
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<td>(e.g. heating)</td>
<td>present and past lifestyles</td>
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<td>• Explain why some aspects of</td>
<td>• Explain the reasons for similarities</td>
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<td>life were different and</td>
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<td>some remain the same (i.e.</td>
<td>• Understand the key events in the</td>
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<td>same needs, different</td>
<td>story of abbeys in Scotland, give</td>
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<td>technologies)</td>
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<td>• Explain the causes and</td>
<td>consequences of them</td>
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<td>consequences of events (e.g.</td>
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<td>the destruction of abbeys</td>
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<td>after Reformation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time and historical sequence</td>
<td>Use evidence from the site to</td>
<td>Pupils can:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Add to a class timeline</td>
<td>• Sequence historical events</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Look for clues that the</td>
<td>• Talk with confidence about</td>
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<td>building may have changed</td>
<td>decades, centuries</td>
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<td>• Explain relationship between</td>
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<td>specific dates and the relevant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nature of historical evidence</td>
<td>On site, pupils will</td>
<td>Pupils can:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Search for sources of</td>
<td>• Recognise that buildings can be a</td>
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<td>evidence on a given subject</td>
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<td>(e.g. how were abbeys</td>
<td>past</td>
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<td></td>
<td>decorated?)</td>
<td>• Recognise that there may be a</td>
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<td>• Draw conclusions from</td>
<td>number of conclusions drawn</td>
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<td>• Describe ways in which people</td>
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<td>skilled stone masons at the</td>
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<td>and understand the word</td>
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<td>discuss why this is</td>
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Timeline: the rise and fall of abbeys and priories in Scotland

3RD CENTURY
First monks appear in deserts in Egypt, Syria and Palestine

C430
St Ninian founds Christian community at Whithorn

6TH CENTURY
St Benedict of Nursia writes his Rule – a guide to monastic life

C650
St Aidan of Iona founds Celtic monastery at Old Melrose

563
St Columba founds Celtic monastery at Iona

597
St Augustine introduces Benedictine order to England

663
Synod of Whitby rules against Celtic church

795
First Viking attacks on Iona

1072
Queen Margaret founds Benedictine house at Dunfermline

1098
Cistercian order founded at Citeaux, France
1120
Alexander I introduces Augustinian order to Scone

1124-1153
Reign of David I; reforms organization of church in Scotland; founds over fifteen monasteries

1230
First Dominican and Franciscan friaries established in Scotland

1273
Sweetheart Abbey founded by Devorgilla; last Cistercian monastery in Scotland

1296-1356
Most abbeys attacked by English during Wars of Independence

1429
Last monastery founded – the Charterhouse at Perth – by James I

1540’s
Border abbeys attacked by English during ‘War of the Rough Wooing’

1560
Reformation Act declares Protestantism as the official religion of Scotland; end of monastic life in abbeys

1113
First reformed Benedictine abbey in British Isles set up at Selkirk (later Kelso)
Background information

What is an abbey?

Today, we tend, wrongly, to use the term ‘abbey’ to describe the church within a complex of religious buildings. However, strictly speaking an abbey is the name for a community of monks headed by an abbot. An abbey consists of a church, a cloister around which the living accommodation is placed, and an outer precinct for other buildings, all enclosed within a sturdy boundary wall. There are still abbeys today; however, the focus of this pack is on the abbeys and priories of Scotland which were founded before the Reformation of 1560.

Abbeys are religious centres where Christians dedicate their life to serving and worshipping God. Many of them were founded by members of royalty or the nobility, who hoped that the round of prayer offered up by the monks on their behalf would speed their passage to Heaven, freeing them to concentrate on worldly matters. Traditionally the members of an abbey lived literally a cloistered life – a life within the confines of the abbey precinct.

There were several other monastic institutions operating in a similar way to abbeys. Lower in status than the abbeys were the priories, headed by priors, and next in line were the collegiate churches. These were small ‘colleges’ of priests, often attached to an important noble house. Slightly different were the friaries, whose inmates went out into the world preaching, rather than devoting their lives to prayer within the cloister. All of these institutions – abbeys, priories, collegiate churches or friaries - could be known as monasteries, containing as they did communities of monks, or nunneries for the smaller number of parallel institutions for women.
When did abbeys start?

After the initial days of lone hermits isolating themselves from the world, early Christians set up loose communities in remote areas of Egypt, Syria and Palestine in the late third century. They wanted quiet places where they could focus on and worship God without distractions. These had become more formal by the sixth century when St Benedict wrote his Rule, a guide to the spiritual and administrative life in an abbey which is still followed today.

The first abbeys in Scotland were founded around the 6th century AD, following the foundation of the first Christian community at Whithorn by St Ninian in the fifth century. These abbeys were introduced by Christians from mainland Europe and from Ireland. St Columba brought one type of abbey to the island of Iona from Ireland around 563 AD. Around this time other communities were started by St Aidan at Lindisfarne and St Cuthbert continued the work by St Aidan’s followers at Old Melrose. These early abbeys were characterized by austerity, discipline and devotion to God.

By the 10th century these early abbeys were in decline. The meeting of leading church people at Whitby in the seventh century had ruled against the Columban, Celtic church in favour of the Benedictine church. Some abbeys, such as Iona, had been ravaged by marauding Vikings while others had slipped from their original high moral ideals. It took Queen Margaret, the wife of Malcolm Canmore to revitalize spiritual life in Scotland. She founded a Benedictine abbey at Dunfermline in 1072 and supported and encouraged pilgrimages to other religious centres such as St Andrews. Her son, David I continued her work and founded around fifteen religious houses during his years in power in the twelfth century, in the north of England as well as in Scotland. In addition to his own financial support of the monasteries, David encouraged other nobles to set up abbeys and priories, to impress God and demonstrate their wealth and power to their subjects.
What kind of abbeys were there?

There was a range of different types of abbey and different types of monk and nun, but they had many common characteristics. Many of the types or orders of abbey originated in France and from there spread to England and then to Scotland. Others, such as the Tironensian order came directly from France to Scotland.

**Benedictine Abbeys**

The first of the post-Celtic abbeys to be set up in Scotland were the Benedictine abbeys, for example, Dunfermline Abbey. Benedictine monks were also known as the Black Monks because of the black robes that they wore. They followed the Rule of St Benedict very strictly and placed a lot of emphasis on prayer in the early days; however, by the 10th century their standards had slipped a bit.

**Cistercian Abbeys**

Cistercian abbeys were established in an attempt to return to the idealism and austerity of the first abbeys and became popular in Scotland in the 12th century. The Cistercian monks were known as the White Monks because of their unbleached, white robes. In the early days they emphasised manual labour as well as prayer. The abbeys at Dundrennan, Sweetheart and Melrose were Cistercian.

**Augustinian Abbeys**

The abbeys at Holyrood, Jedburgh and on Inchcolm were founded as Augustinian abbeys. The inmates of these abbeys were not monks but canons (priests) although they were still bound by the monastic vows. Known as the Black Canons, the monks here engaged with the outside world, preaching to local people, although there can’t have been many on Inchcolm.
**Tironensian Abbeys**

A fourth order of abbey was the Tironensian order, unique in Scotland in coming directly from France, rather than via a settlement in England. The abbeys at Kelso and Arbroath were both Tironensian. The monks here were known as the Grey Monks.

Other monastic orders in Scotland included the Cluniacs, the Valliscaulians (Pluscarden) and the Premonstratensians (at Dryburgh and Fearn).

There were also the friaries of mendicant or begging friars. The Dominican friars were known as the Blackfriars and the Franciscan friars were the Greyfriars. Because they settled in towns, they were a particular target during the unrest of the Reformation and few of their houses survive.

**Where were the abbeys built?**

Abbeys were built in a range of locations – within urban areas, in remote valleys or attached to an important seat of the nobility. Cistercian abbeys were generally built in isolated areas, far from worldly distractions. Water supply generally determined where exactly the abbey would be built, together with local availability of building stone. The monks made the most of their wild locations to become expert sheep farmers and wool exporters, and also applied their knowledge to develop the farmland around them. Communities often grew up around the abbeys, so it can be difficult now to appreciate their original isolation. The Premonstratensian abbey at Dryburgh, however, still gives an impression of the tranquility of the abbeys in their early days.

Some types of abbey, particularly the Augustinian abbeys, were set up near or in towns - for example, Jedburgh and Holyrood - in order to make the most of preaching opportunities.

The map on page 32 shows the distribution of abbeys across Scotland.
What were the buildings of an abbey like?

The abbeys we can see today are mostly in ruins. When they were first built, however, they would have been wonderfully impressive, far and away the biggest and most beautiful buildings to be found anywhere in Scotland.

The abbey building

Interior of church

Church This was the largest and most important building. It was where all services were held. Abbey churches were built in a cross shape and were decorated with tiled pavements, painted walls and stained glass.

Nave The west end of the church, for the exclusive use of the lay brothers in Cistercian abbeys and for lay use in others.

Pulpitum Stone screen which separated nave from the rest of the church.

Monks' choir Area for the monks with carved wooden choir stalls between the pulpitum and the crossing.

Crossing The point at the centre of the cross shape of the church, often topped by a bell tower.

Transepts The two cross-arms of the church, either side of the central crossing. Often contained side chapels with altars dedicated to lesser saints.

Presbytery The eastern part of the church, housing the high altar and the sacristy.

Sacristy Small room where the church robes and sacramental vessels were kept.

Living Areas

Refectory This was a long open dining room. Also known as the frater. Included a pulpit for readings during meals.

Lavatorium There was always a washplace close to the refectory. This had a spiritual as well as a hygienic dimension; monks would ‘purify’ themselves before consuming ‘god’s fruits’.

Kitchen Food was prepared here. This was the only room which had a fire, other than the warming house.

Dormitory This was a long open room where the monks slept on simple bunks. It was linked to the church by a separate stair for easy access at nights.

Latrine This was the monks’ toilet. It was often situated at the end of the dormitory and was flushed with running water. Also known as the reredorter.

Warming House This was the only place in the abbey where there was a fire purely for warmth. It was like a common room for monks – although there was no talking permitted and monks were only allowed to gather here for short periods. Also known as the calefactory.

This plan of Melrose Abbey shows the typical layout of an abbey
Inner and Outer Parlour These were the only rooms in which monks were allowed to talk – and even then, only on business matters. The inner parlour was for abbey business, the outer for infrequent meetings with friends or family outwith the abbey.

Lay Brothers’ Range Accommodation for the lay brothers in Cistercian abbeys.

Infirmary The sick and elderly members of the abbey were cared for here. All monks were regularly ‘bled’ here by leeches.

Abbot’s house The abbot was in charge of the abbey. His house was nearly always a large building and was used as a meeting place for the abbot to entertain important visitors.

Guest house Important visitors to the abbey were accommodated in guest accommodation on the west side of the cloister.

Precinct wall The boundaries of most abbeys was marked by a huge precinct wall.

Working Areas

Chapter House This was the main meeting room where the monks met every day. As well as listening to a chapter from the Rule of St Benedict, the monks would also discuss abbey business and deal with any disciplinary measures.

Treasury This was where the abbey’s considerable valuables were kept. This included valuable silver and gold decorations and the abbot’s seals for signing documents.

Cloister This was a covered walkway around a square garden. The monks would use the walkway to study or for silent thought.

Garth This was the name for the garden in the cloister. It was used to grow herbs for cooking and medicine and also flowers for the altar.

Scriptorium A room where books were written, copied and decorated.

Grange The abbey farm

Water mill The mill was used to grind grain produced on the farm or received as rent.

Teind barn Rent – or teinds – paid by tenants was in the form of grain rather than money. This was kept in a barn.
Abbeys were generally built to a standard layout, which included a church and all domestic buildings. Because the monks were not permitted to leave the abbey precinct unless on abbey business, everything they needed was provided within the abbey walls. The abbey was designed for efficient organization and easy movement between areas with minimum disruption.

The first ‘building’ encountered by a visitor to the abbey was the *precinct wall*. Sturdy and several metres high, this wall surrounded and enclosed the monastery and was often constructed of stones cleared from the site where the abbey was built. This acted as a physical barrier marking the extent of the abbey and demarcating the boundaries for the monks within the monastery. It also played a symbolic role, marking the border between the spiritual life within the abbey and the temporal world beyond. The precinct wall had a *gatehouse* with a gatekeeper who monitored and restricted all entrances and exits. You can see good examples of precinct walls and gatehouses at St Andrews Cathedral and a great wall survives at Sweetheart, where evidently the wall also served as a repository for all the boulders which had previously strewn the site.

Within the walls, the most important building was the *church*. The walls of an abbey church could be more than 50 metres high and two metres thick. Abbeys were at the cutting edge of architecture and often included innovative building and design features. They included carved columns, soaring vaulted roofs, richly coloured stained glass windows, decorative paving made from baked clay tiles and devotional statues. Some abbeys included playful touches such as water spouts in the shape of gargoyles and on the roof of Melrose Abbey you can see a carving of a pig playing the bagpipes!

Within the abbey, there were areas for worshipping God, for dining, sleeping, studying and for quiet thought. All were linked by covered walkways. Away from the main abbey buildings there might be abbey farms called granges, fish ponds with eel traps and water mills.

Building generally started with temporary accommodation for the monks and then as quickly as possibly work began on the abbey church. Building work would have progressed over many years, the sound of the mason’s mell and the joiners’ saws a constant disturbance. Work was often set back by storm damage or attack; this was often seen as a chance to update buildings in the latest architectural style. Master masons and their workforces might move from one abbey to another, providing a physical link between abbeys many miles apart.

Nunneries were built to a very similar if more modest design. The ruined thirteenth century Augustinian nunnery on Iona is among the best preserved in Britain.
Who lived in an abbey?

Traditionally it took thirteen people to establish an abbey, representing Jesus and the twelve disciples. These monks or nuns would be sent from an existing abbey to form a new community and recruit novice monks or nuns.

These new recruits came from a range of sectors of society. As there was often a requirement to donate a small endowment of land, generally they came from local noble families, often the second son. Others might be wealthy burgesses who felt they had a ‘calling’. It was possible to be married with children and still join an abbey; you could arrange for food and clothes to be supplied to the family you left behind. Sometimes young children were ‘donated’ to abbeys by their parents, who knew that their children would receive a good education and upbringing at the abbey. It was also regarded as an investment, increasing the spiritual stock of the family. Such children were known as oblates. Others joined abbeys in their retirement years, attempting a strong spiritual finish to their lives. Occasionally women who were unable or unwilling to find husbands were made to join abbeys.

In addition to the monks or nuns, Cistercian abbeys also included a community of lay brothers, sometimes known as conversi. These were men who lived within the abbey in their own accommodation and took monastic vows but undertook to carry out more of the manual labour and less of the devotional aspects of abbey life. They worked on the abbey farms, were involved with construction work and carried out other physical work. They were entitled to more food and more sleep. Remains of the lay brothers accommodation can be seen at Melrose.

The number of monks or nuns living in an abbey varied enormously. At its peak in the thirteenth century, there were about forty canons at Jedburgh, dwindling to eight by 1545. Nunneries tended to be smaller.
What did monks and nuns look like?

Monks and nuns were easy to recognise because of their style of clothing and their characteristic hairstyle. All monks had the crown of their heads shaved, leaving a band of hair below the ears, known as the tonsure, which symbolised the Crown of Thorns worn by Jesus.

This was performed for the first time before he took his vows in the church. Subsequent shaving occurred in the cloister about nine times a year.

Generally monks’ clothes consisted of a simple loose tunic known as a habit. Some kinds of monk wore a linen shirt under the habit, but the Cistercians wore their habit next to the skin — no warming vest or breeches! The Cistercians’ habits were undyed to emphasise their poverty; dyes were expensive. Monks also had a black apron-like garment called a scapular for working, and a cowl, a deep hood. The Cistercians stuck strictly to the Rule, with each monk having only two tunics, two cowls, a scapular for work, shoes and socks. It was finally agreed that in winter, Scottish Cistercians were allowed to wear their entire wardrobe all at once for warmth. Some monks wore a leather belt. Augustinian canons wore white surplices over their black habits when in church.

Nuns wore similar garments — a loose tunic, topped with either a cloak or a cowl. Veils were worn down to the eyebrows, with the forehead covered. Veils were black, whereas those worn by the lay-sisters were white, and were to be worn down to the eye-brows, covering the forehead. Just like the monks, Cistercian nuns wore a black apron-like garment known as the scapular, when working. However, these rules were not always strictly adhered to — there are records of nuns in Rosedale Priory in Yorkshire being reprimanded in 1315 for wearing colourful clothing. Nuns cut and covered their hair.

At Dundrennan you can see carved stone slabs clearly showing the clothes worn by an abbot and a nun and at Iona there is a carved slab showing the clothing of the Prioress Anna Maclean.

An abbess cuts the hair of a novice nun
What happened when you became a monk or a nun?

After a probationary period lasting about a year, successful novices were invited to take the following three vows:

• Poverty – to own no property
• Chastity – never to marry
• Obedience – to obey the orders of the abbot or abbess

These were serious, lifelong promises, committing the novice to a life time in the service of God, away from worldly pleasures. Monks were bound to their vows by the fear of the spiritual consequences of breaking them.

Monks and nuns also took a vow of stability, promising to stay in the same religious house for the rest of their lives. This ensured a stable and secure community, in which ties of affection were doubtless very strong.

Monks spent much of their lives in silence, speaking only on official matters or when absolutely necessary.

Unless on abbey business, monks and nuns were supposed to spend their lives within the abbey compound. In certain priories, nuns were permitted to visit their homes and families for a certain number of days per year and visits by family were sometimes permitted; you can see the remains of the outer parlour, the room for such meetings at Jedburgh.

Again, though, depending on the style of the abbot, this rule may or may not have been strictly enforced. There are numerous recorded cases of nuns escaping from their nunneries for nocturnal adventures – Isobel Bennet, treasurer of Catesby Priory in the 15th century slipped out of the priory into town and spent a riotous evening carousing with the Augustinian friars. Another case, however, around 1143 describes how a monk at Revesby Abbey in Lincolnshire begged to be freed from the order. When the abbot opened the door to release him, it is reported that he ‘felt the empty air as though it were a wall of iron’ and returned to his cloistered life.

From the moment the monk or nun took their vows they were subject to the rules of the order which governed every aspect of their lives, from how they spent their days to how they folded their habits at night time. These are interesting issues to discuss with pupils – could they manage to give up aspects of their lives which they find pleasurable? How would giving things up make them feel?
Life in an abbey

Many activities took place in an abbey.

Can you see where......
- Monks or nuns worshipped and prayed?
- Monks or nuns lived, slept and worked?
- Sheep were farmed for their wool?
- Travellers and poor people could stay?
- Plants and vegetables were grown?
- Bees were kept?
- Bread was baked, and food was prepared?
- Beer was brewed?
- Holy relics were kept and rent from local churches was collected?
Worship

Monks and nuns attended eight church services a day, known as offices. They started at night with the sung service Nocturns. A bell would ring to wake the community, telling the monks it was time to file to the church to pray. As they slept in their habits, the monks needed only to put on their hoods or cowls and night shoes before descending the night stair which led from the dormitory directly to the church. Monks stood in the choir stalls, leaning against small carved ledges known as misericords. Throughout the service an official known as a circator paced up and down with a lamp, perhaps like the cresset on display at Jedburgh, which he shone in the face of any poor monk who had nodded off.

All prayers were sung unaccompanied in a form known as plainsong or Gregorian chant. This would have been one of the constant sounds underscoring life in the abbeys. They may have been accompanied by music on simple portable organs.

In addition to the communal services, monks were expected to spend time every day in private prayer, in one of the small chapels usually found in the church transepts and nave aisles.

Any abbey business was discussed as part of the daily Chapter Meeting. Taking place in the Chapter House, the most important element was the reading aloud of a chapter of St Benedict’s Rule – the guidelines for monastic life, set down by St Benedict in the 6th century. After this would be confessions, discussion of the day’s work and any disciplinary matters to be dealt with.

Study

A key element of the monk’s life was study of religious texts and silent contemplation. This often took place in the shelter of the cloister. The religious communities were among the few literate people at this time, so although physically cut off and cloistered from the outside world, through reading and study the monks were in fact more widely informed and educated about the world than most. The first water powered mills, for example, were in the abbeys.
Work

All but the most elderly or infirm monks or nuns were expected to spend some of each day carrying out work for the abbey.

Some monks worked in the scriptorium, copying out and decorating religious manuscripts, illustrating them in glowing colours and with beautiful designs. The magnificent gospel-book now known as the Book of Kells is thought to have been created at the abbey of Iona before being taken to Kells in Ireland for greater safety. Other monks created Latin grammars to educate the novices. You can see inkpots used by monks at Arbroath and at Melrose. Abbeys were the centres of literacy at this time; it was hardly surprising that it was Abbot Bernard of Arbroath who was asked to draft the famous Declaration of Arbroath, possessing as he did both the skills of writing and the education to phrase the letter appropriately. Walter Bower, the author of Scotichronicon, a history of the Scots which he began writing in 1441 was abbot at Inchcolm Abbey at the time. Abbots in fact spent much of their time away from the abbeys carrying out secretarial tasks at court.

Other monks worked in the cloister garden or on the grange – the abbey farm. Some of the abbeys became very wealthy through sheep farming and the wool industry. Melrose Abbey, for example had 15000 sheep in the fourteenth century – more than almost anyone else in Europe! The monks here traded wool with Europe, their ships docking at a special harbour in Bruges.

As time passed, monks spent less time doing manual labour and more time studying.
**How were abbeys organised?**

In the larger abbeys, it was quite a job to ensure that the abbey ran smoothly and effectively.

The most senior figures were the abbot or abbess and the prior or prioresse.

The abbot headed the abbey and had overall responsibility for everything which happened there. In theory, the abbot was elected by the monks but in practice this was usually a political appointment made by the king and confirmed by the Pope. The quality of the leadership of the abbot made a huge difference to the status and ethos of the abbey and the monks within it. Some were exemplary, following the Benedictine doctrine of leading by example. Others were like Abbot Beaton of Arbroath who found little time for abbey life at Arbroath, perhaps because he was busy with his mistress, his seven children and being Archbishop of St Andrews at the same time.

Beyond the abbey walls, the abbot held the position of a substantial landowning lord and often played a role in politics. Abbot Bernard of Arbroath, for example, not only inspired the troops at Bannockburn by marching at their head with the Brecbennoch reliquary (now on display in the Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh), but also drafted the famous political letter to the Pope, the Declaration of Arbroath - see image on back cover.

The prior was the second in command at the abbey after the abbot. He was responsible for the day to day running of the abbey, and often deputised in the abbot’s absence.

The **abbot** and **prior** were assisted in their roles by a number of key positions held by obedientaries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Precentor</td>
<td>The precentor oversaw all church services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrist</td>
<td>The sacrist took care of all the church items – the vessels used in services for example, the shrines and ornaments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cellarer</td>
<td>The cellarer was responsible for the supply of food drink and fuel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infirmarian</td>
<td>The infirmarian and his assistants took care of any sick or elderly monks in the abbey infirmary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roundsmen or circatores</td>
<td>These people toured the abbey during periods of work to check that there was no gossiping or bad behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almoner</td>
<td>The almoner organised the distribution of ‘alms’ – donations to the needy of the surrounding community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamberlain</td>
<td>The chamberlain was the housekeeper. He organised the washing of habits and the cleaning of the abbey rooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraterer</td>
<td>The fraterer was in charge of the refectory where people ate. He was responsible for the table linen, the crockery and the lavatorium, where the monks washed their hands before eating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice Master</td>
<td>The novice master supervised the training of monks new to the abbey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchener</td>
<td>The kitchener and his assistants cooked the food and made sure it was fairly distributed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest master</td>
<td>The guest master looked after any visitors to the abbey and acted as a go-between to the abbot.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Domestic arrangements

Life in the abbeys was communal. The monks did everything together – slept communally in a dormitory, ate together in a refectory; prayed, worked and studied together. All of this took place in silence.

The main meal of the day was usually taken around midday. After washing their hands outside the refectory, the monks would file through in silence; grace would be said, a gong would sound and then the meal could begin. Throughout the main meal a monk would read from a religious text. Meals were eaten in total silence and in an atmosphere of great solemnity.

Food was generally vegetarian and frugal, at least in the early days, consisting mainly of bread, vegetables and eggs, washed down with weak ale. Fish was served on a Friday and important visitors would be offered meat on other days. One source states that nuns in a fifteenth century English priory were entitled to a daily ration of a loaf of bread, two herrings and half a gallon of ale. Over the course of the year these nuns could look forward to a pig each, two stone of cheese and eighteen penceworth of beef.

What was life like for nuns?

There were only a few nunneryes in Scotland, and those which did exist tended to be small and not wealthy. There was a Benedictine priory at Lincluden by Dumfries, an Augustinian priory on Iona and the Cistercians had nunneryes at Berwick, Coldstream, Elcho, Haddington and Manuel. Their lives would have followed a similar pattern to their male counterparts. Male lay brothers would have been employed to perform some of the harder physical tasks, but much of the work was done by the nuns themselves. Nunneryes were headed by an abbess. Despite similarities between the monasteries and nunneryes, there were some fundamental differences. An important aspect of female religious life was the incorporation of men, who were needed to tend to the nuns’ spiritual needs, since women were not permitted to take religious orders.
What happened to the abbeys?

We look around the abbeys today, and we step among ruins. In many cases not even foundations of buildings remain. What happened?

Through out their history, despite their benign intentions, the abbeys frequently came under attack. Relatively wealthy places, they were targets for all kinds of raiders. In the ninth and tenth centuries, for example, abbeys were raided and plundered by Vikings after the gold and silver church plate. By 849 AD Iona Abbey had been attacked so frequently that many of its treasures were removed permanently to Kells in Ireland for safety.

Many abbeys, particularly those in the Scottish Borders suffered during the intermittent wars with England between 1296 and 1550. Melrose and Dryburgh Abbeys were both badly damaged during the wars of the 14th century while Jedburgh was devastated by the English invasions of the 1540s. At Jedburgh the raids led to the collapse of the roof, forcing the monks to hole up and build a makeshift smaller church within the shell of the original church. Other abbeys were not financially able to rebuild; the days of noble and royal largesse to the abbeys were long gone and they no longer commanded the respect of former times.

Those abbeys which did survive the raids found themselves out of political favour when it came to the Reformation of the Church in the sixteenth century. As bastions of the established Church, and in many cases bastions of the kind of idolatry and dissolute life against which reformers such as John Knox railed, the abbeys were in some cases invaded by angry mobs. Statues and images were decapitated, rich hangings were ripped to shreds and stained glass windows smashed. Melrose Abbey is unique in having so many surviving stone statues – though some of them are headless. When Protestantism was declared the official and exclusive religion of Scotland in 1560, abbeys' days were numbered.
In some cases, for example at Jedburgh and Dryburgh, the abbeys and their remaining monks embraced the reformed religion and the abbots were replaced by lay commendators. No new monks joined the abbeys and the monks were in most cases allowed to live out their remaining days in the crumbling abbey ruins.

In some cases the abbey churches were remodelled to become the parish kirk; in most cases, however, the abbeys were regarded as a useful source of shaped stone, reused in other, secular buildings. A window lintel in a house in St Andrews, for example, was discovered to be a split effigy of a bishop, obviously from the nearby cathedral.

In the nineteenth centuries the abbeys were ‘rediscovered’ as romantic ruins by tourists or concerned locals who in some cases mounted campaigns for their restoration. At Sweetheart Abbey, for example, a group of local people banded together in 1779 to raise funds to preserve what was left of the old abbey church, one of the earliest examples of conservation work for its own sake.

Nowadays the abbeys are peaceful tourist attractions.
What objects survive from the time of the abbeys?

Following the decline of the abbeys with the Reformation, little of their former glory and richness survives.

We are left to imagine how dazzling the abbey churches must have been, helped by eyewitness accounts such as that recorded by Arthur Boece, a clerk in the diocese of Brechin who described the interior of Arbroath abbey to an Italian cardinal in 1517:

*The sacristy, at the south side of the choir, possesses a silver cross, very many chalice, other vessels and silver images of the saints, also many suits of vestments, of gold and silk. At the right side of the church is a large and most beautiful organ.*

Their wealth was plundered, either destroyed or melted down and sold. A few items can be seen today, such as the Brecbennoch, also known as the Monymusk reliquary. This tiny casket is said to have contained relics of St Columba, and was carried by Abbot Bernard of Arbroath at the Battle of Bannockburn. It is now on display in the Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

A handful of everyday items have survived by chance or because they were carefully hidden. Some can be seen in museums around the country and some at the abbeys where they were once in everyday use. The best place to see a number of items from abbeys of this time is in the Medieval Church displays in the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. They are a useful source of physical evidence, bringing us closer to the monks of eight hundred years ago.
Wooden Choir Stalls and Misericords

Carved wooden choir stalls rarely survive. In the Museum of Scotland, you can see well preserved wooden choir stalls from Lincluden Collegiate Church and a set of misericords (seat shelves) dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Pee pots

Abbeys were large places and so some monks kept ‘pee pots’ like this under their beds, rather than having to run out to the reredorter (toilet) in the night! These ones were found at Melrose Abbey and can be seen there.

Clay and metal cooking pots

These metal cooking pots sat over the fire for the Kitchener to cook up pottage for the monks. The pottery vessels were used for serving ale or water. All can be seen at Melrose. The monks would also have had wooden bowls and platters which have long since rotted away.

Ink well

This ink well, on display at Arbroath Abbey, has two small holes in the ‘lugs’ or handles. This would have enabled the monk to carry the inkwell around with him on a thong. The monks used pens made from goose quills.
Seal matrix

This brass seal matrix belonged to a monk at Arbroath Abbey in the 13th century. His name was W. Matthew. It was used to stamp and seal official documents.

Cresset lamp

This lamp, known as a cresset can be seen at Jedburgh Abbey. It used wax as a fuel and could be hung, held in the hand or slotted into a socket.

Merelles Board

Versions of this board game can be found scratched into stones at Jedburgh, Dryburgh and Arbroath Abbeys. Also known as Nine Men’s Morris, it is a more complicated version of noughts and crosses and was probably played in their breaks by bored stone masons who built the abbeys.

Horn buckle

This buckle, probably for a cloth or leather pouch has been skillfully carved out of animal horn. It was found at Jedburgh but may not necessarily have belonged to one of the canons there; it could have belonged to a visitor to the abbey.
Investigating an abbey

Visit the Historic Scotland website to download free resources which will help you and your pupils investigate your local site. This map shows selected abbeys, priories and other medieval religious buildings in the care of Historic Scotland.

1 Abroath Abbey
2 Cambuskeneth Abbey
3 Crossraguel Abbey
4 Culross Abbey
5 Dryburgh Abbey
6 Dunfermline Abbey
7 Dundrennan Abbey
8 Glenluce Abbey
9 Holyrood Abbey
10 Inchcolm Abbey
11 Inchmahome Priory
12 Iona Abbey and Nunnery
13 Jedburgh Abbey
14 Kelso Abbey
15 Kilwinning Abbey
16 Lincluden Collegiate Church
17 Melrose Abbey
18 Restenneth Priory
19 St Andrews Cathedral
20 Sweetheart Abbey
21 Whithorn Priory
The following sites are all in the care of Historic Scotland. Downloadable images of many Historic Scotland sites are available for educational use from www.scran.ac.uk.

**Arbroath Abbey**
Founded in 1178 for monks of the Tironensian order. Famous for association with the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath. Excellent modern visitor centre and exhibition about the Declaration. Well preserved abbot’s house with some artefacts on display.

**Cambuskenneth Abbey**
House of Augustinian canons, scene of Robert the Bruce’s parliament in 1326. Ruined remains, visible from the outside only.

**Crossraguel Abbey**
Founded early in the 12th century. Remains include church, cloister, chapter house and domestic premises.

**Culross Abbey**

**Dryburgh Abbey**
Premonstratensian abbey founded in 1150. Idyllic setting and remarkably complete ruins – church, cloister, dormitory, chapter house, refectory etc.

**Dunfermline Abbey**
Founded in 11th century by Queen Margaret. The last resting place of many Scottish kings and queens. Extensive – though much altered – ruins and a museum within the visitor centre.

**Dundrennan Abbey**
Cistercian abbey founded in late 12th century. Hosted Mary Queen of Scots on her last night in Scotland. Ruined church and remains of cloister buildings. Good carved grave slabs.

**Glenluce Abbey**
Founded around 1292. Intact chapter house. Exhibition of objects excavated on site.

**Holyrood Abbey**
Ruined nave of 12th and 13th century abbey church, built for Augustinian canons.

**Inchcolm Abbey**
Established as a priory by David I, it became an abbey in 1235. Best preserved group of monastic buildings in Scotland.

**Inchmahome Priory**
Idyllic island setting. Augustinian monastery dating from 1238. Much of the 13th century building remains.

**Iona Abbey and Nunnery**

**Jedburgh Abbey**
Founded in 1138 as an Augustinian priory. Extensive ruins of abbey church. Interesting visitor centre with artefacts on display and multimedia points.

**Kelso Abbey**
Tironensian abbey founded in 1128 by David I. West end of church remaining.

**Kilwinning Abbey**
Remains of a Tironensian-Benedictine Abbey from 13th century.

**Melrose Abbey**

**Restenneth Priory**
Chancel and tower of priory church of Augustinian canons.

**St Andrews Cathedral**
Impressive remains of pilgrim destination cathedral and Augustinian priory buildings. Museum with collection of medieval sculpture. Visitor Centre in nearby St Andrews Castle has excellent displays about Reformation.

**Sweetheart Abbey**
Remains of the last Cistercian abbey to be established in Scotland. Tomb of the founder, Lady Devorgilla is impressive and huge precinct wall.

**Whithorn Priory**
**Glossary**

**Abbot/Abbess** – the man or woman in charge of the abbey

**Almoner** – abbey official responsible for looking after the poor

**Calefactory** – the warming room where monks could warm up

**Canon** – a member of a body of churchmen serving a cathedral and living under a rule; similar to monks

**Cellarer** – official in charge of food and drink in an abbey

**Chamberlain** – official in charge of housekeeping in an abbey

**Chapter house** – meeting room in an abbey

**Choir** – the area for the monks in the abbey church

**Circator** – monks who ensured that all monks were obeying abbey rules

**Cloister** – a square courtyard with a garden around which lay all the domestic accommodation in an abbey

**Conversi** – another term for lay brothers

**Cowl** – the hood worn by monks

**Cresset** – an oil lamp

**Frater** – another word for the dining area

**Friary** – a religious house similar to an abbey but not separate from the world; friars went out and preached to communities

**Garth** – the cloister garden

**Grange** – an abbey farm

**Habit** – tunic worn by monks and nuns

**Lavatorium** – area for washing hands before entering the refectory

**Lay brothers** - men who lived within the abbey, took monastic vows but undertook to carry out more of the manual labour and less of the devotional aspects of abbey life

**Misericord** – a small ledge in the monks’ choir area of the church, which the monks could rest against

**Nave** – the central aisle of the abbey church

**Obediency** – an office bearer beneath the abbot and prior

**Opus Dei** – the work of God

**Pee pot** – a clay chamber pot used by monks

**Piscina** – alcove in a church for washing vessels used in services

**Plainsong** – unaccompanied choral prayer

**Precentor** – abbey official in charge of church services

**Prior** – second in command to the abbot

**Priory** – a monastery or nunnery headed by a Prior or Prioress

**Pulpitum** – a stone and wooden screen separating the lay people from the monks in a church

**Reredorter** – toilet area for monks

**Refectory** – the dining area

**Reliquary** – container for ‘relics’ – bones of holy people

**Presbytery** – the easternmost end of the abbey church

**Sacristy** – the treasury, where the valuable silver plate and garments used in church services were kept

**Scapular** – an apron-like work garment worn on top of the habit

**Scriptorium** - room for writing and copying holy texts

**Teind** – the tax payable by local churches to an abbey – a tenth/tithe/teind of one’s income

**Transept** – the ‘cross arms’ of the church, extending north and south of the nave
Further Resources

For teachers

Site Guidebooks – Historic Scotland
Guidebooks for all the sites mentioned are available from the site itself or from Historic Scotland (0131 668 8600 www.historic-scotland.gov.uk). These provide detailed background and architectural information and are mostly illustrated in colour.

Look at the Border Abbeys
This pamphlet is available at Kelso, Dryburgh, Jedburgh and Melrose Abbey. It includes selected information and things to look for on these sites. Ample illustrated with drawings. It is intended for children to use, but may be more useful to teachers planning a visit.

Hebron, S Life in a Monastery 1998 Pitkin
Though slanted towards English sites, this is an extremely useful guide to life in monasteries with plenty of photographs and contemporary drawings.

Fawcett R Scottish Abbeys and Priorities 1994 Batsford/ Historic Scotland
Detailed and more specialist architectural and historical information.

Coventry C and Miller J Churches and Abbeys of Scotland, 2003 Goblinshead
A useful guidebook to two hundred of Scotland’s abbeys and churches. Useful historical and architectural summaries.

S Cruden Scottish Abbeys 1960 HMSO
Out of print but available in libraries, this is a very readable overview of the history of the abbeys in Scotland and what can be seen today.

www.bbc.co.uk/history/scottishhistory
A clear overview of the period with helpful essays on the Medieval Church and Reformation.

www.scran.ac.uk
Images of sites and objects associated with the medieval church.

http://cistercians.shef.ac.uk
This excellent and very comprehensive website has all the information you could possibly need about the Cistercian abbeys and the monks and nuns who lived in them.

http://www.osb.org
The official website of the Benedictine order; useful to find out more about the Rule.

For pupils

Deary, T Horrible Histories: Bloody Scotland, 1998 Scholastic

Newbery, E Lookout! Mostly Monks 1999 Pitkin
A lively pocket sized booklet (with stickers); useful pictures and information

McKichan, F A Separate Kingdom Hodder & Stoughton, 1996
This history of Scotland has some good pages on life in the abbeys. Suitable for levels C-E.

www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/education/sysm/scots/index_choice.shtml
This website linked to the BBC See you See me series looks at the life of monks in pre-Reformation Scotland.

www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/education/as/burghlife/
This website explores life in the Scottish burghs in 1566.

www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishhistory
An excellent library of resources with some good pages on the Medieval Church and the Reformation.

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