



Bring the world of Medieval  
Abbeys to life through an  
exploration of replica objects  
based on surviving evidence from  
the period.

# INVESTIGATING OBJECTS FROM THE PAST

## MEDIEVAL ABBEY LIFE





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## About this resource

### Introduction

The *Medieval Abbey Life Handling Box* has been created to support a group visit to a Historic Scotland site. The replica objects contained in the box will help learners to explore the world of medieval abbey life through some of the things that would have been used during the period.

### Using the Handling Box

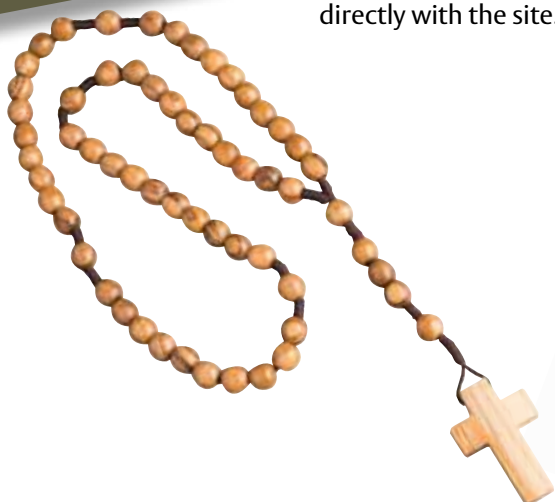
The *Medieval Abbey Life Handling Box* is available at:

- Arbroath Abbey (tel: 01241 878756)
- Dunfermline Abbey (tel: 01383 739026)
- Elgin Cathedral (tel: 01343 547171)
- Inchcolm Abbey (tel: 01383 823332)
- Iona Abbey (tel: 01681 700512)
- Melrose Abbey (tel: 01896 822562)

Other locations may be added. Check the Historic Scotland website for other participating sites: [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/learning](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/learning)

The Handling Box should be booked directly with the site.

The Handling Box is designed to allow the group leader the flexibility to use it as appropriate to the needs of learners. Some suggestions for activities using the box are included in this booklet.







## Supporting learning and teaching

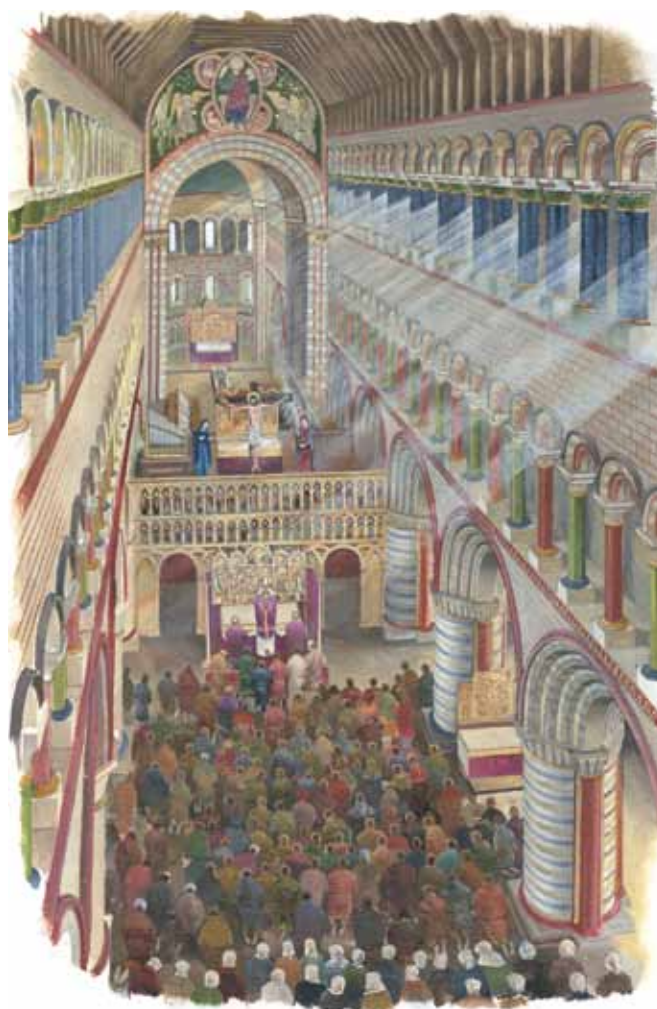
Use of the Handling Box, as part of a visit to a Historic Scotland site, will help learners to develop in the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence.

It will enable learners to:

- develop an understanding of how Scotland has developed as a nation, resulting in an appreciation of their local and national heritage within the global community
- broaden their understanding of the world by learning about human activities and achievements in the past
- develop their understanding of their own values, beliefs and cultures
- learn how to locate, explore and link periods, people and events in time and place
- learn how to locate, explore and link features and places locally and further afield

It will also contribute to the development of the following Social Studies skills:

- observing, describing and recording
- comparing and contrasting to draw valid conclusions
- exploring different types of evidence
- curiosity and problem-solving
- interacting with others and developing an awareness of self and others
- capacity for critical thinking through accessing, analysing and using information from a variety of sources
- discussion and debate
- putting forward reasoned and justified points of view
- awareness of sequence and chronology



*A reconstruction drawing of the church nave at Kelso Abbey in medieval times*



## The contents of the Handling Box: Layer 1



Icon  
(triptych)



Reliquary



Stained glass

## The contents of the Handling Box: Layer 2

Mosaic tile  
fragment



Ink well



Abbey  
seal



Feather  
quills



Personal seal  
(in box)



Illuminated  
manuscript



Chalice



## The contents of the Handling Box: Layer 3



## The contents of the Handling Box: Layer 4







## Integrating the Handling Box with classroom studies

Before leading a handling session using the box, you might want to prepare learners with a couple of simple activities to get them thinking about how to look at evidence and what objects can tell us about people's lives.

### The rubbish game

Bring in a selection of some of your own personal, everyday objects. Be careful not to choose anything that is obviously yours, though; the idea is that learners have to build up the picture of a character from the objects.

Feel free to use your own imagination when selecting items, but some that can work well include:

- a bus/train ticket
- an ear-ring
- an empty drink bottle
- a food wrapper
- an old book
- an item of clothing (for example, a shoe)
- a cinema/theatre ticket (or similar)

Organise learners into small groups and pass the objects around. Ask the groups to consider each item in turn and discuss what they think the objects tell us about the owner. They can then report back their conclusions to the wider group.

After they have looked at several objects they will have built up a picture of the type of person that the evidence points to, for example their sex, hobbies, nationality, where they live, occupation, etc. You might actually be surprised by some of their conclusions! In the end you can reveal the identity of the mystery person (you).

The important point to emphasise here is that this is just how an archaeologist works by piecing together evidence from people's lives and coming to informed conclusions about the lives they led.



### Mystery object

Another good way of getting learners to really think about an object is to give them a 'mystery' object to investigate.

Bring in objects that learners are unlikely to be familiar with. Organise learners into groups. The groups can discuss each object and come up with their best idea as to what it might be.

Encourage the groups to think carefully about each object in front of them, consider all of its possible uses and agree on their best idea.

Finish with a feedback session with the whole group and open up all the ideas to debate. Each group can contribute their own ideas as to what each object might be, and perhaps even persuade others around to their point of view.



# Object investigation sheet

Make a sketch of the object.

What do you think the object is made of?

Does it look like anything that we have today?

What might the object have been used for?

Is there any decoration on the object?  
What does it show?

Do you think this was a valuable object?

Does the object tell us anything about the people who used it?

Describe the colour.



## Handling guidelines

Most of the objects in the Handling Box are replicas and are fairly robust. However, by following the simple guidelines listed in the next column you will help to ensure that any damage or wear to the objects is kept to a minimum.

You could even ask learners to think up their own set of handling rules before starting a session.



### Guidelines

- Before a handling session examine the objects and assess any potential risks to the members of your group. This might, for example, involve careful monitoring of delicate or sharp objects.
- Take care when carrying the Handling Box. Use both hands and always ensure the box is the correct way up.
- Supervise the handling of the objects at all times.
- Ideally, handle the objects using both hands over a firm, clean surface such as a tabletop.
- If the box is being used on the floor, seat learners in a circle and pass the objects one at a time to and from the facilitator.
- Before returning the box after a session, please check that all the objects, and any accompanying material, are placed correctly in the box.
- Accidents do happen and the objects are replaceable. Please report any missing or damaged objects to Historic Scotland immediately. Please do not attempt to repair a broken object, but do return all the broken pieces.







## Suggested handling session

There are various ways that you can organise a handling session using the box, depending on the size and ability of your group. Of course, it is entirely up to you how you want to use the resource, but the following suggestions might provide some useful pointers.

- Organise learners into small groups – ideally with no more than five to a group.
- Each group could concentrate on a different theme, for example Worship, Work, Daily Life.
- Then you can either give each group three or four objects to look at and discuss, or give each group one object to look at and discuss in detail.
- Allow each group 5–10 minutes to talk about and/or draw the objects.
- You can help to lead discussion by getting learners to list for each object:

◆ What they **see/feel**, for example:

What shape is it?

What colour is it?

Are there any patterns or decorations on it?

Is it heavy or light?

Is it rough or smooth?

Does it smell of anything?

◆ What they **think**, for example:

Who might have used it?

How does it work?

What might it have been used for?

What is it made of?

Is it broken? Is there anything missing? If so, how did it happen?

What is it?

◆ What they **wonder**, that is, any questions they still have about an object, for example:

Who owned it/used it?

What would you be doing if you were using this object?

Why is it made of these materials?

What is it?

How was it made?

Where might it be used?

- Of course, learners will often ask their own questions about the objects and this should be encouraged. It might be useful to get someone to make a note of these questions so that they can carry out their own research, either on-site or back at school.
- The objects can then be rotated around each group.
- You can follow this up with a group discussion session where learners can share their ideas, discoveries and thoughts about the objects.





## Notes on the objects

The following notes are intended to help group leaders to run a handling session. They provide information on each of the objects in the Handling Box.

The objects can be grouped into three main themes:

- worship
- work
- daily life



### Worship

#### Chalice

The chalice was one of the most precious and important objects of ritual in the abbey. It was used to hold sacramental wine during the Eucharist, just as it is today. Often made of precious metal, and sometimes richly enamelled and jewelled, the chalice was treated with great reverence.

The chalice, along with other sacred and important church furnishings, would have been kept in a special room in the abbey. This room, known as the sacristy, would usually have been behind or to the side of the main altar.



#### Icon

Icons were highly ornamented images of religious subjects: the holy family, scenes from the Bible and of the life of Christ. They were one of the great art forms of the Middle Ages.

Icons were often made up of more than one piece. The pieces were hinged and, when folded shut, the images were protected. The example in the box is in three hinged parts and is known as a triptych. There would often have been a triptych at the High Altar in a medieval abbey and the abbot would have faced it during religious ceremonies.

Smaller, portable icons were used to create temporary places of worship, such as in the private chambers of royalty and the nobility.



### Reliquary

Belief in the power of relics in the form of the physical remains of a holy person, or objects with which the person had come into contact, is a long-held belief. Relics were believed to have healing powers. The holiest of relics were those associated with Christ and his mother; the most common relics are associated with the apostles and local saints.

The possession of relics bestowed honour and privileges, and attracted pilgrims and donations. They were often gifted to religious establishments.

Relics were kept in specially crafted caskets, known as reliquaries. The caskets were often made of, or covered with, gold, silver, ivory, gems, and enamel. These precious objects were a major form of artistic expression across Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Many were destroyed during the Reformation.

The best-known reliquary in Scotland is probably the Monymusk Reliquary, or Breckennoch, which housed bones of St Columba. It was used to bless the Scottish army before the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314.

### Stained glass

Stained glass, as an art form, reached its height in medieval times when it was mainly used to illustrate stories from the Bible at a time when most people were unable to read. Therefore, as well as allowing beautiful coloured light into the abbey, the windows were used to teach people about religion.

The example in the Handling Box is a replica copy of the 'Wren and Spider' quarry from a stained glass window in York Minster, believed to have been made in the late 14th century by a French craftsman. (Permission to make replica copies was granted by the Dean and Chapter of York. The image copyright belongs to the Dean and Chapter of York and the image is reproduced here by their kind permission.)

The colours in the glass were achieved by adding metal oxides to molten glass. The painting of the wren and spider web is a mixture of metal oxides made into a paint and applied with a brush, then fired onto the surface of the glass in a kiln. The individual pieces are assembled in a frame of lead strips, known as cames.







## Work

As well as being places of worship, medieval abbeys were centres of creativity and industry. This took many forms, such as scholarship and learning, artistic expression, traditional crafts, working the land and animal husbandry.

## Illuminated manuscript

Abbeys were the centres of literacy in the medieval period and churchmen were amongst the few who could read and write. Monks worked in the scriptorium copying religious manuscripts, illustrating them in glowing colours and designs, and illuminating them with gold. The most lavish examples were Books of Hours (prayer books) made for royalty and the nobility.

Much of the visual information we have of medieval life comes from the detailed illustrations in medieval manuscripts. They show religious scenes, life in castles and abbeys, and also ordinary people at work and play.

Scribes are usually shown holding a quill pen in one hand and a small knife in the other and seated at a sloping desk equipped with an inkhorn. Manuscripts were generally written on treated animal skins, either vellum (the whole skin) or parchment (skin which has been split). Both are strong and long-lasting.

This example shows Latin text and musical notation, which is quite different from modern notation. It is a fragment of the Hawick Missal, dating from the 12th century, and is a piece of processional music with performance directions. Composed for Holy Week, it would have been performed at the High Altar in the church during the service. (Permission to make replica copies of the manuscript and to reproduce the image here was kindly granted by Scottish Borders Council Archives, Heritage Hub, Heart of Hawick, Hawick.)

## Feather quills

Manuscripts were written using quill pens similar to the two in the Handling Box. The large wing feathers from geese, owls, or swans were buried in hot sand to make them firmer and stronger, and usually the flights were removed to make them easier to handle. The nib was cut to shape with a small knife and split like the end of a modern fountain pen.



### Ink well

Archaeologists found an ink well like the one in the Handling Box in the great drain at Melrose Abbey. It is made from pottery and has two small lugs that would have allowed it to be carried on a leather thong.

Medieval ink was often gall ink. Galls are growths that grow on the bark of oak trees. These were soaked in water, wine, or vinegar and the resulting solution formed the basis of ink. Gum was added to thicken it and carbon or iron salts added to colour the ink.

The scribe would have scattered fine, dry sand on the writing to help the ink to dry.



### Seals

The main purpose of a seal in the Middle Ages was to authenticate a document – just like a modern signature – at a time when the majority of people could neither read nor write. In an abbey, the abbot, prior and precentor were the three guardians of the seal.

The vesica (pointed oval) shape of this personal seal is formed by the intersection of two circles and is common in Christian art and architecture. The round seal is a less typical shape but it is a good example of an abbey seal.



### Mosaic tile

The building and maintenance of abbeys was usually undertaken by laymen, such as masons, carpenters, glaziers and tilers. Skilled workers often travelled significant distances to work on different buildings.

Tiled pavements became popular in the 13th century and were only used in the finest and most important buildings such as royal residences and the churches and chapter houses of the wealthier monasteries.

Tiles were made of clay, rolled out and cut into the required shape. The colours were usually yellow and either dark-green or brown. The yellow colour was achieved by spreading a layer of white clay over a red clay quarry tile then coating this with lead glaze. When a lead glaze is fired in a kiln, the glaze goes brown; adding copper gives a dark green.

The piece of tile in the Handling Box is not a replica. It comes from Melrose Abbey and dates from the 13th century.



### Medicinal herbs

Gardening was an important feature of life in the abbey. All the vegetables required to feed the monks and lay brothers and all the medicinal herbs used in the infirmary were grown within the grounds around the abbey. There would have been orchards to provide fruit for the needs of the abbey, as well as to support the abbey in trade. The canons at Jedburgh, for instance, were renowned for the pears they grew.

Illness and death were ever present in medieval times and many types of herbs were grown in the cloister garden for use as cures for illness or to bring relief from ailments. Different parts of the plants – roots, flowers and leaves – had different properties.

Monks who were gravely ill, or elderly and frail, were cared for in the infirmary and there the infirmerer would administer the appropriate herb. He would also permit strengthening foods, such as meat and fish.

The herbs were used in a variety of ways. They were dried and made into a tea-like infusion and drunk, or distilled into a tincture to extract the essential oils, or perhaps used fresh and pounded into a paste which was applied to the body as a poultice.

A few examples of herbs are contained in the Handling Box:

- **Wormwood:** Because of its insecticidal properties, wormwood was taken as an infusion to treat internal parasites, such as tapeworms and thread worms.
- **Lungwort:** Taken as an infusion, this was used to treat chest infections, coughs and catarrh. It has leaves that are shaped like lungs.
- **Feverfew:** Used to treat headaches, just as it is today, feverfew made a nasty-tasting infusion.
- **Marjoram:** Ground to a paste and applied as a poultice, marjoram was used to treat bruises and swellings.





### Beeswax candles

Beekeeping was central to the monks' gardening activities. Monks knew the importance of bees in the garden, and the honey they took from them was the only source of sweetness in medieval times.

A by-product of beekeeping was beeswax. This had many uses, including strengthening thread, protecting leather and metal, waterproofing bowstrings, and candle making.

Because the cleaning and preparation of beeswax was complex and time-consuming, candles made from it were considered precious and were only used in the church; candles used elsewhere would have burned tallow. Beeswax candles give off a sweet honey aroma when burned.

### Raw fleece

Beyond the precinct wall would have been the abbey farm or grange. Lay brothers worked on the farm providing for the abbey. Some abbeys became extremely wealthy from their farming enterprises. Melrose Abbey, for example, became the richest in Scotland largely from the sale of wool from its vast flocks of sheep. In medieval times, everyone, including the monks, wore woollen clothing.

Raw fleece is the first stage in the sheep-to-cloth process. The shorn fleece is a tangle of raw fibres.

### Skein of wool

The next stages in the process are washing the raw fleece then spinning the clean fleece into yarn.

### Woven cloth

The final stage is weaving the yarn into cloth.

The example in the Handling Box is typical of the cloth used to make the monks' habits. It is very coarse in texture.

The Rule of St Benedict dictated that Cistercian monks should wear only undyed wool, although other holy orders allowed dyes and wore black or grey habits.



## Daily life

### Rosary and Cross

These are both personal devotional objects and are unadorned, befitting the monks' simple lifestyle.

Rosary beads are used to count a series of prayers. The prayers consist of repeated sequences, each known as a decade. The praying of each decade is accompanied by meditation on the life of Jesus.

The cross is venerated as the symbol of the sacrifice of Christ and the monks would have prayed in front of a cross.

People of high status would have had more elaborate rosaries and crosses, made from precious metals and embellished with jewels and enamel. There would have been a more ornate cross on the High Altar in the abbey church.

### Turn shoes

It is likely that the majority of ordinary people went barefoot in medieval times. St Benedict's Rule stated that monks should wear simple cowhide shoes like those in the Handling Box to provide some protection against the cold and damp. The cowhide leather they were made from was a by-product of farming, and tanneries were a common, if smelly, feature of medieval life. Tanning pits can be seen at Melrose Abbey.

The shoes were made from only two pieces of leather: one for the sole and the other for the upper, with a leather thong to lace them. The shoemaker would have stitched them inside out when the newly tanned leather was still wet and then turned them right side out, protecting the stitches from wear, hence the name turn shoes. They would have become soft and comfortable with use but would not have been as strong and hardwearing as the shoes we wear today.

The monks' other clothing consisted of a tunic, a cowl, a scapular (originally for the purpose of an apron) and woollen socks. Some religious orders allowed the monks to wear a linen shift beneath their tunic. They wore the same clothes during the day as they did at night and, because it was so cold, Scottish monks were allowed to wear their whole wardrobe (two sets of clothing) in the winter.





### Urinal

The urinal, or pis-pot as it was known in medieval times, was made from clay. This example was clearly designed for a man. It had a fairly obvious purpose and the handle on top made it easy to transport and empty into the latrines.

Rather than tiptoe down the dormitory stairs to the draughty reredorter (toilet) in the freezing night, a monk would have clutched the urinal beneath his habit and discreetly answered nature's call.



### Wooden plate

In keeping with their modest lifestyle, the monks ate together and in silence in the refectory. Their food was served on wooden plates like the plate in the Handling Box. Important guests at the abbey, and people of high status in the secular world, used pewter plates. Ordinary people used the hard outside crust from a loaf of bread as a plate!

Apart from Fridays, when they had fish, and on the very rare occasions when meat was allowed, a monk's diet consisted of vegetable pottage (a soupy stew) and bread.

In medieval times, when there was no guarantee of clean drinking water, the whole population drank weak ale.



### Cresset lamp

The lamp in the Handling Box is a copy of a lamp found by archaeologists at Jedburgh Abbey. We can see from the ridges on it that it was made on a potter's wheel. The handle would have allowed it to be placed in a sconce and it is hollow to prevent it from becoming too hot to carry. It would have burned tallow (rendered animal fat).





## Suggestions for follow-up activities

The following suggestions can be used as ideas for further work back in the classroom.

### Creative writing

A visit to a medieval abbey and use of the Handling Box can inspire opportunities for creative writing exercises. Possible topics could include:

- **The pilgrim**

Learners can imagine that they have come to the abbey on a pilgrimage because they know it has important relics. They can be a poor pilgrim, a noble person, or royalty. What other pilgrims do they meet? What do they think when they first see the abbey? They could describe seeing the reliquary and what they felt like. Who looks after them, and what do they eat?

- **A gargoyle's-eye view**

Learners can imagine that they are a stone carving high up on the abbey. What can they see below? They can describe the monks and lay brothers at work within the precinct, or the land around the abbey. Or perhaps they see craftsmen building a new part of the abbey.

- **Learning a trade**

Learners can imagine being a lay brother and watching a craftsman at work – he has come to help rebuild the abbey. What has damaged the abbey? Where did the craftsman come from? What is his special skill – is he a stonemason, a carpenter, or is he making stained glass for the windows? Who is paying for this work?

- **Attack!**

The abbeys in the Scottish Borders were frequently attacked during the Wars of Independence. Learners can imagine that they are a monk watching an army approaching the monastery. Is the army approaching in peace or anger? How do the monks feel at this time? What do they do – defend? run? hide sacred relics? Whose side are they on and why? What is the outcome?

Learners might want to present their writing in the style of a medieval manuscript and illuminate capital letters at the beginning of paragraphs.



*The Monymusk Reliquary, or Brechbennoch, which housed bones of St Columba*

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*An illustration from an old manuscript showing medieval masons at work*



## Role play

A visit and use of the Handling Box might inspire plenty of group role-play ideas. You can possibly use the ideas in the creative writing section to get learners to create and perform their own role plays.

## Drawing and writing

Encourage learners to make a record of one of the objects that they have worked with. They can choose a favourite object and record it by:

- making a detailed sketch of it and perhaps recreating it in a similar medium
- researching information and creating their own interpretation label
- writing a short descriptive piece about it, for example:  
My favourite object was the ...  
I liked it because ...  
I thought it was interesting because ...

An alternative might be to create a postcard for a gift shop with their favourite object as the subject. This requires a detailed drawing of the object and a short sentence to describe what it is. Or, the whole group can design an information leaflet about the object.



*Learners role play Cistercian monks at Melrose Abbey.*

## Class museum

Learners can set up their own mini-museum in the classroom, based on their drawings and what they have learned about medieval abbeys. Groups can decide on their own theme for presentation, for example Making a Manuscript or A Craftsman and his Tools.

Using the Handling Box as inspiration, they can even make their own artefacts and organise their displays with supporting labels, diagrams and photographs.



*This triptych is on display in the Royal Apartments at Stirling Castle. There would often have been a triptych at the High Altar in a medieval abbey.*



### Did you know?

Many religious orders were silent so the monks devised an extensive sign language to communicate with one another.

## Background information for teachers

St Ninian founded a Christian community at Whithorn in the early 5th century, and the founding and building of abbeys flourished between the 11th and 15th centuries. Most abbeys were attacked by English armies during the Wars of Independence and the Border abbeys suffered again at the hands of the English during the War of the Rough Wooing in the 1540s. By this time, abbey life was already in decline. It finally came to an end during the 1560s, when Protestantism became the official religion of Scotland.

### Who built the abbeys and why?

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 prayers offered up by the monks on their behalf would speed their passage to Heaven.

The first abbeys in Scotland were founded around the 6th century, following the foundation of the first Christian community at Whithorn by St Ninian in the 5th 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 AD 563. 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 of the Celtic Church were characterised by austerity, discipline and devotion to God.

By the 10th century some of the Celtic abbeys, such as Iona and Lindisfarne, had been ravaged by marauding Vikings while others had slipped from their original ideals. The Benedictine Church now came into favour. Queen Margaret, the wife of Malcolm Canmore, founded a Benedictine abbey at Dunfermline in 1072 and she supported and encouraged pilgrimages to other religious centres, such as St Andrews. Her son, David I, continued her work and he founded around 15 religious houses during his reign in the 12th century. He also encouraged other nobles to support abbeys and priories.

This next generation of abbeys strictly adhered to the Rule of St Benedict, which provided guidelines for living, working, praying, dressing and building.

### How were they built?

Abbeys were generally built to a standard layout, which included a church and domestic buildings. Because the monks were often 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 organisation and for easy movement between areas. Areas for worshipping God, for dining, sleeping, studying and for quiet thought were all linked by covered walkways. Away from the main abbey buildings there might be abbey farms (called granges), orchards, fish ponds with eel traps and water mills.



*This figure of King David by Anne Carrick can be seen in the Commendator's House Museum at Melrose Abbey.*





## Who lived there?

Thirteen people, representing Jesus and his twelve disciples, were needed to establish an abbey and the inhabitants of an abbey came from all sectors of society. The abbot was at the head of the abbey followed by the prior, then a number of monks who held key positions in running the abbey. In addition to monks there were lay brothers who carried out much of the manual work around the abbey. Many abbeys also had novices, people who were training to be monks.

## Religious orders

There were a number of religious orders in medieval Scotland. The main ones included:

### The Benedictines

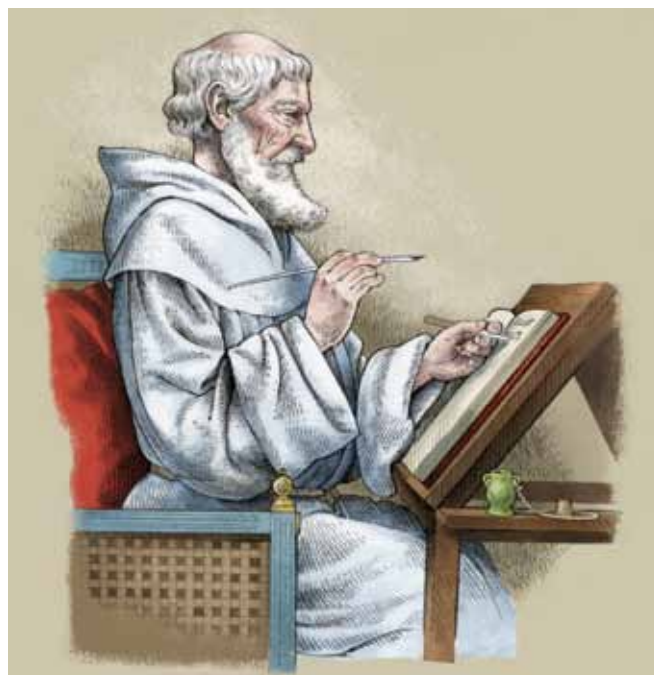
The first post-Celtic abbeys to be set up in Scotland were the Benedictine abbeys. Benedictine monks followed the Rule of St Benedict, which gave detailed instructions on how abbeys should be run and how monks should live: it stressed poverty, chastity and obedience. The Benedictines were known as Black Monks because of their black robes. Dunfermline Abbey was a Benedictine abbey.

### The Cluniacs

This order took its name from the abbey of Cluny, in Burgundy, and placed particular emphasis on its members offering the best they could to God. As a result, Cluniac abbeys were often richly decorated and the monks were very dedicated to church services. In fact, they spent a good deal of their time in church. The abbey at Crossraguel was a Cluniac abbey.



**Monks ate very simply, often just vegetable pottage and bread served on wooden plates.**



***A scribe at work on an illuminated manuscript***

### The Cistercians

This order became popular in Scotland in the 12th century and held the values of humility and poverty. The monks practised self-denial and there was a strong emphasis on manual labour as well as prayer. The Cistercians tended to have simpler buildings in quite isolated areas, where there were fewer distractions. The Cistercians were known as the White Monks because of their unbleached white robes. The abbeys at Melrose, Dundrennan and Sweetheart were Cistercian.

### The Tironensians

The Tironensian order took its name from the abbey of Tiron near Chartres and was unique in Scotland as it came directly from France, rather than via a settlement in England. The Tironensians were known as the Grey Monks. Kelso and Arbroath abbeys were Tironensian.

### The Augustinians

The Augustinians followed the teachings of St Augustine of Hippo and were not quite so rigid as some of the other orders. They would have cared for the spiritual needs of the people living outside their abbeys. They were known as the Black Canons. The abbeys of Holyrood and Jedburgh were Augustinian.



### Did you know?

It would take the skins from a whole flock of sheep to produce enough parchment to make a Bible.

### The Premonstratensians

Like the Cistercians, Premonstratensians led a disciplined and strict life. However, as well as a disciplined programme of prayers, they were also active preachers outside the abbey and sometimes ran hospitals. They were known as the White Canons. The abbey at Dryburgh was Premonstratensian.

### What was life like in an abbey?

Monks 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. All prayers were sung unaccompanied in a form known as plainsong or Gregorian chant. By day the monks were expected to spend time in private prayer, in carrying out work for the abbey and in undertaking study.

Monks were well educated and, although often physically cut off from the outside world, through reading and studying they were in fact more widely informed about the world than most.

The lay brothers took the same vows as monks but were engaged more in manual labour and less in daily prayers. The lay brothers were allowed extra clothing to protect them in their work, for example in sheep herding or as blacksmiths. They were also given extra food as their work needed more energy.

### More information on abbeys

More detailed information on medieval abbeys in Scotland is included in the Historic Scotland *Investigating ...* series. Learners will find the series of Homework Helpers a useful resource on medieval life. These resources can be found on the Historic Scotland website at:

[www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/learning](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/learning)



*This illuminated opening from a medieval Book of Hours shows lay brothers as shepherds.*



*A reconstruction drawing of a monk at prayer in an aisle chapel at Melrose Abbey around 1500*



## Additional resources

### For teachers

#### BOOKS

Historic Scotland guidebooks are essential reading for group leaders. These provide further details on the architecture and history of our sites.

Historic Scotland *Investigating Abbeys & Priors in Scotland* Historic Scotland 2007

Lots of background on abbey life and suggestions for class activities.

Historic Scotland *Investigating The Wars of Independence: 1296–1357* Historic Scotland 2005

An informative overview with suggestions for sites to visit and class activities.

*Hands On. Learning from Objects and Paintings: A Teacher's Guide* Museums Galleries Scotland 2008

This excellent guide to working with objects in the classroom can be purchased from Glasgow Museums, Communications Section, Martyrs' School, Parson Street, Townhead, Glasgow G4 0PX Tel: 0141 271 8307.

Richard Fawcett *Scottish Abbeys and Priors* Batsford Ltd/Historic Scotland 1994

Looks at the architecture and archaeology of the abbeys and priors of Scotland with the help of maps, plans, photographs and reconstructions.

Tony McAleavy *Life in a Medieval Abbey* English Heritage 1996

Focuses on life as it really was within a medieval abbey.

Stephen Hebron *Life in a Monastery* Pitkin Guides 2007

Explores the day to day duties and life of a monk.

#### WEBSITES

[www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/learning](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/learning)

Further information about visits, activities and resources. Downloadable tours for several Historic Scotland sites in the *Investigating . . .* series of publications.

[www.guedelon.fr/en/](http://www.guedelon.fr/en/)

A living history project focusing on building a medieval castle using traditional methods and techniques.

### For learners

#### BOOKS

John Bowker *World Religions* Dorling Kindersley 2006

Key faiths are explained clearly with detailed annotations and full colour illustrations.

Terry Deary *Bloody Scotland* Scholastic 1998

One of the ever-popular *Horrible Histories* series. Lively, engaging and provocative.

Andrew Langley *Eyewitness Guide Medieval Life* Dorling Kindersley 2002, updated 2011

Covers all facets of the medieval period – people, social structure, food, architecture and music.

#### WEBSITES

[www.bbc.co.uk/history/scottishhistory/earlychurch](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/scottishhistory/earlychurch)

Simple information on the early church in Scotland.

### Acknowledgements

**Author:** Jane Gaze

**Series editor:** Sue Mitchell

**Copy editor:** Jackie Henrie

**Photographic credits:** All images © Crown copyright Historic Scotland unless otherwise credited

**Layout and print production:** APS Group (Scotland)

**With special thanks to:** Adrian Cox, Rachael Dickson, Elspeth Mackay and Calum Price for individual contributions

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