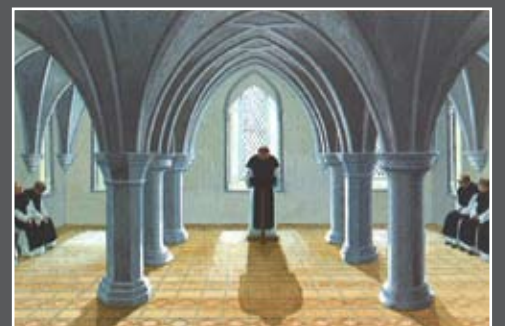


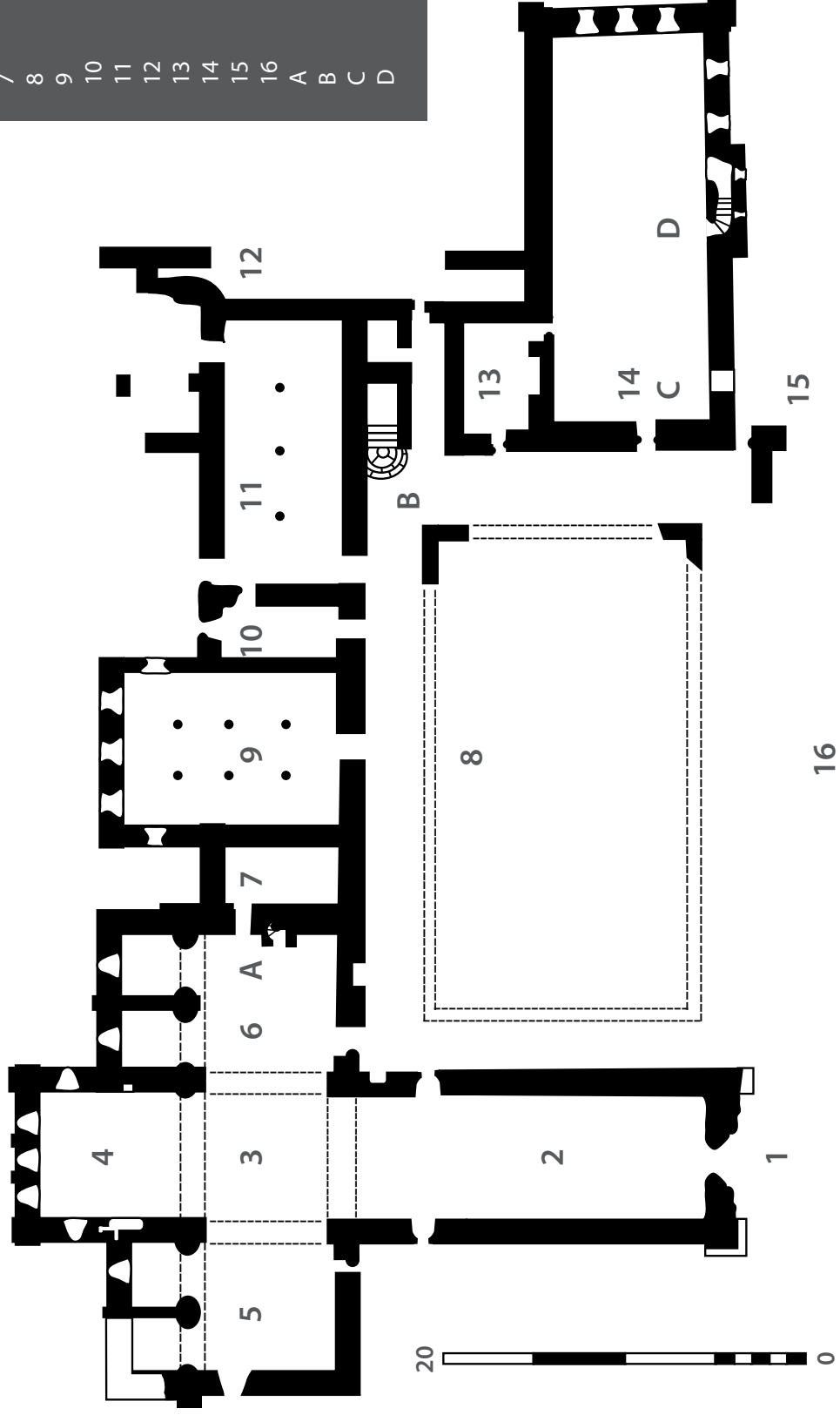


Grey Abbey

Information for teachers



Plan of Grey Abbey



KEY

Num	Room Name
1	West Door
2	Nave
3	Crossing/Choir
4	Chancel/Presbytery
5	North Transept
6	South Transept
7	Vestry
8	Cloister
9	Chapter House
10	Slype/Parlour
11	Day Room
12	Lavatory Block
13	Warming Room
14	Refectory
15	Kitchen
16	West Range
A	Night Stairs
B	Day Stairs
C	Serving Hatch
D	Pulpit

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The History of Grey Abbey



Grey Abbey Ruins

Grey Abbey was originally known as Lugum Dei or Yoke of God. It was founded by Lady Affreca in 1193. Affreca was the wife of John De Courcy the Norman Conqueror of Lecale and daughter of Godred King of the Isle of Man. It is said that Affreca built the abbey in thanksgiving for a safe passage home through a stormy sea.

Unfortunately the annals of Grey Abbey do not survive, making research on the monastery difficult at times. However, enough secondary sources remain to give us some intriguing glimpses into the rise and fall of this holy place.

Grey Abbey was a daughter house of Holm Cultram Abbey in Cumbria, a Cistercian House and, like Inch Abbey near Downpatrick, it exhibits early Gothic features at a time when late Romanesque work was still common in Ireland. The scale of building and the orderly planning were also in contrast to earlier Irish monasteries like Nendrum on Mahee Island across Strangford Lough, with its simple design of concentric cashels of dry stone walling. The building of a large monastery was a major undertaking, using the skills of the Anglo-Norman masons normally employed in military projects like Carrickfergus and Dundrum Castles.

John de Courcy was exiled from Ireland by King John in 1205 and with him went Affreca's patronage of Grey Abbey. The exact date of de Courcy's death is still unknown although records indicate that Affreca received her dower lands in 1219, which would put his death approximately between 1216 and 1219. This lack of rich patronage would have meant that Grey Abbey's building programme would have been greatly curtailed. However a mystery does still surround the stone effigy of a woman found in the Abbey. Cistercians did not traditionally provide a burial place for their patrons but they had no reason to display an effigy of any other woman. Some historians have proposed that the effigy may have been a memorial created on the centenary anniversary of the abbey's foundation.



Affreca

After the Edward Bruce Wars (1315-18) and the waning of Anglo-Norman power the abbey was controlled by the O'Neill's of Clondeboye. At its height the community of Grey Abbey may have numbered forty to fifty people but at the Dissolution in 1541 the community must have been very small and poor with decaying buildings. The Abbey and its lands were then granted to the Earls of Kildare, but in 1572 Sir Brian O'Neill burned the buildings to the ground to prevent them being fortified by the English during the Elizabethan wars. In 1607, after the Flight of the Earls, O'Neill lands were seized and Grey Abbey was granted to Sir Hugh Montgomery. The church was re-roofed in the 17th century and used for parish worship until 1778 when a new church was built nearby.

In 1760, the Montgomery house, 'Rosemount' was built on an incline to the south west of Grey Abbey. It is surrounded by a landscaped garden which features the abbey ruins as a picturesque ornament. Inside the abbey church lie the grave stones and memorials to a number of the Montgomery family members. This includes Sir James Montgomery, who died in 1651 having been shot by pirates!

In 1907 the site was handed over by Major W.E. Montgomery to the Commissioners of Public Works. Some excavation and consolidation followed. It is now in the care of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.



Grey Abbey and Rosemount House

The Cistercian Order

The Cistercian Order was founded in 1098 by St. Robert, abbot of Molesme, in Cîteaux [Cistercium], north eastern France. They followed a rigorous set of rules for communal living based on the more 'moderate' rules of Saint Benedict of Nursia. The stricter nature of Cistercian life had come about because they felt St Benedict's rules had become open for abuse over the years since his death in 593 AD. The black habit of the Benedictines was changed to unbleached white and the Cistercians became known as White Monks. St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090?-1153) is often regarded as their "second founder," and his life and writings became the guiding influence of the order.



Cistercian Chapter House at Clairvaux Abbey

The rules required followers to...

- Abandon personal wealth
- Leave behind all family
- Live and pray with their brethren
- Wear the same simple white clothes
- Eat a largely vegetarian diet in a communal dining room
- Sleep in dormitories
- Obey the abbot without question
- Every hour of the day had to be occupied as 'idleness is the enemy of the soul'

The Cistercians: Daily Life and the Social Order

The Cistercians aimed for self sufficiency through farming. They believed that too much reliance on patronage had undermined the Benedictines so they looked for isolated sites like Inch Abbey on the banks of the river Quoile. While they criticised other orders for employing 'serfs' to manage the land they still employed a two tier system within the order themselves. Choir monks attended services seven times a day and devoted time to meditation and study, while the lay brothers or 'conversi' were expected to work the fields, clean and cook attending two religious services a day. Both sets of monks took holy orders but the lay brothers lodged separately from the choir monks in Grey Abbey, their cells located in the western range of the cloister and worshipping only in the nave of the church.



Lay Brother at Work



Choir Monk at Work

The Divine Offices

These were the services held throughout the day and night. Times varied according to the seasons, with, for example, daybreak offices much earlier during the summer months. There were seven services during the day, plus Vigils at night.

Lauds – Daybreak.
 Prime – Sunrise
 Terce – Mid Morning
 Sext – Midday

None – Mid afternoon
 Vespers – Dusk
 Compline – Before retiring to bed
 Vigils – During the night

Agriculture and Medicine

Currently Grey Abbey is home to a physic garden, here visitors can learn about the healing powers of herbs and their use in medieval times. This is appropriate for the site as Cistercian monks were pioneers in agriculture and medicine at the time due to the combination of agricultural labour and medical knowledge. More importantly their creation and sharing of written records led to improved animal breeds and high crop yields throughout the medieval period.



The Herb Garden



St. John's Wort



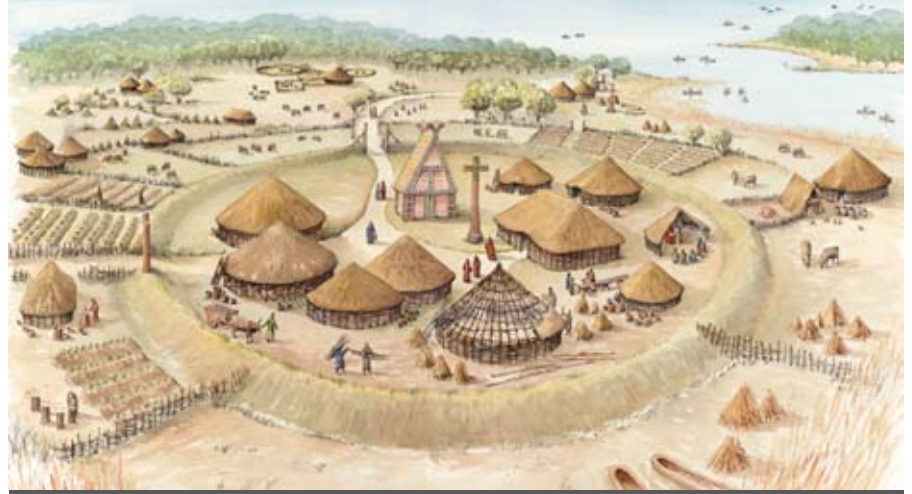
Yarrow

Design and Layout of Medieval Monasteries

Cistercians with their highly disciplined isolated communal life were a stark contrast to traditional Irish monasticism. Nowhere is this more vivid than when we juxtapose the Anglo-Norman sites of Grey and Inch Abbey in County Down to Nendrum Monastery on Magee Island in Strangford Lough or Devenish Monastery on Lough Erne.

The monks of 6th and 7th century Ireland lived as individuals in separate cells with separate tasks, they came together only for work and religious services. Furthermore, rather than being isolated from the rest of the world, they often enjoyed a lively relationship with local people, especially the Irish chiefs who supported the monasteries in return for the education of their sons and care of their hostages. Traditional Irish monasteries had no formal plan. They consisted largely of several small buildings grouped together around one or more churches. The Cistercian and Augustine monasteries of the medieval period on the other hand were laid out in a strikingly similar way to each other. The design consisted of a large central church with important smaller buildings attached, often with a central cloister.

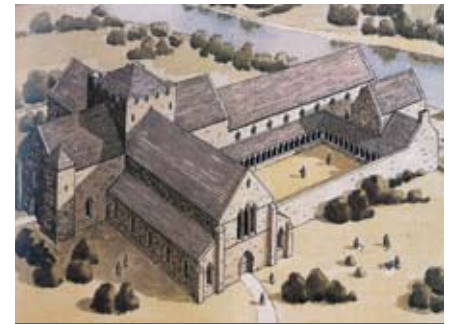
This plan was repeated throughout England, Ireland and France with the Cistercian monasteries distinguishing themselves in their extreme simplicity. Ornaments were seen as a distraction from study and a waste of money. The reconstruction of Inch and Grey Abbey below highlight the uniformity of the Cistercian design.



Reconstruction of Devenish Monastery



Reconstruction of Grey Abbey



Reconstruction of Inch Abbey

Cistercians in Ireland

Malachy of Armagh first visited the Cistercian monastery of Clairvaux, near Dijon in Burgundy in 1140. He was so impressed by the way of life that Malachy sent some Irish monks to France to learn first hand the Cistercian way of life. The first Cistercian monastery was then founded in Ireland in 1142 at Mellifont in the Boyne Valley. In total forty-one Cistercian monasteries were built in Ireland during the middle ages, though not all took their mother house from Mellifont or France. Some like Inch and Grey Abbey had links to the North of England.

Time Line

- 543:** St Benedict of Nursia dies
- 1098:** The Cistercian Order founded by St. Robert, abbot of Molesme, in Cîteaux (Cistercium).
- 1140:** Malachy of Armagh visits the Cistercian house of Clairvaux, near Burgundy
- 1142:** The first Cistercian Monastery in Ireland was founded near Mellifont in the Boyne Valley
- 1177:** Anglo-Norman invasion of Ulster.
- 1193:** Grey Abbey is founded by Affreca wife of John de Courcy and daughter of King Godred of the Isle of Man
- 1205:** John de Courcy chased out of Ulster
- 1219:** Affreca applies for her dower land as a widow
- 1318:** Grey Abbey comes under the protection of the O'Neill's of Clondeboye after the wars of Edward Bruce
- 1541:** Grey Abbey was formally dissolved and its property auctioned, coming under the control of Gerald, Lord of Kildare.
- 1572:** Sir Brian O'Neill burns the Abbey to prevent it being fortified by the English
- 1607:** All O'Neill lands are seized; Grey Abbey and its estates are granted to Sir Hugh Montgomery
- 1760:** Rosemount House is built within the grounds of Grey Abbey
- 1907:** Major W E Montgomery hands the Abbey over to the Commissioners of Public Work

A Tour of Grey Abbey

When taking a tour of Grey Abbey the modern approach is from the north west through the physic garden and across the stream. The NIEA created a physic garden on the site using plants indicative of medieval period. These herbs would supply the monastery with natural remedies for themselves, their animals and visitors. The site, in its beautiful parkland surroundings, preserves much of the calm which the Cistercians were eager to find.

Once across the stream you face the western end of the church. As you approach note the beam holes, corbels and high set windows in the external north wall of the church, all signs of where a 'pentice' or covered way once stood. The path leads to the abbey's most striking feature, the west door (1), weathered and partly reconstructed but still impressive. The door is elaborately shafted and moulded, with a distinctive pyramidal 'dog tooth' decoration. It has been dated as 1220 to 1230. It is also worth noting that despite its imposing presence the doorway itself was rarely used. The church itself was almost exclusively for use by the monks themselves who would have entered via a doorway on the south wall.

Churches were usually built from east to west, so the west front would have been one of the last parts to be finished. Higher in the west gable are a 15th Century window and a bell turret added in the 17th Century when the church was re-roofed for parish use.



Model of West Door and Pentice



West Door Detail



Grey Abbey West Door

Once through the door you enter the Nave of the church (2). The nave itself bears no markings of aisles; this is unusual for the time of its construction. Aisleless naves were common in early Cistercian churches but by the late 12th Century aisles were usual as they were important for processions. The present open access eastwards does not reflect the original arrangements: the lay brothers' area would have been closed from the choir to the east by a screen against which an altar stood. A blocked door led to their quarters in the cloisters west range. The piscina in the south wall of the nave was used for washing the vessels from the lay brothers' altar.



The Nave



Reconstruction of a Cistercian Nave

Beyond the now vanished screen, in the east part of the church moving towards the high altar you enter the crossing above which a square tower rose(3). The crossing was once furnished with wooden stalls for use by the 'choir' or 'white' monks. The chancel (4) is situated to the east end of the church building above where the high altar stood. You will notice the impressive set of long narrow windows with pointed arches repeated on the north, south and east sides. These are known as 'gothic lancet windows' and were possibly the first ever built in Ireland. In the south wall are a piscina, a small sink for washing service vessels, and a 'sedile', a seat for the priest. The long recess opposite may have been used for storage. Restoration early in the 20th century is responsible for the concrete much in evidence in the chancel.



Chancel Piscina



Chancel Sedile



Gothic Lancet Windows on East Wall

The north transept (5) has doors to west and north and two east facing chapels. The most northerly of these two chapels has largely disappeared and the parish graveyard wall now runs across it. The south chapel is well preserved, with a pointed barrel vault with a piscina in the south wall. Each of these smaller chapels would have had an altar, making six in total throughout the Abbey. Each of these would be visited in procession by the monks as part of their services. From the south transept (6) with its two east facing chapels, doors lead west to the cloister and south to the vestry or sacristy (7) where vestments and service equipment were kept, while the stair in the south wall may have led to a wall passage. It is often called the night stair (A) as it led to the choir monks dormitory.



North Transept

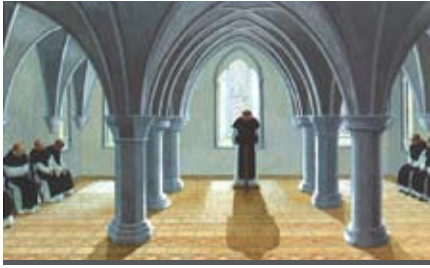


South Transept and Night Stairs

The Cloister (8) south of the nave was a secluded area with buildings on each side. Cistercian planning was very regular, the same rooms being found in the same positions in abbeys all over Europe. So even when buildings are ruined it is usually possible to identify them with confidence. The visitor must imagine the covered alleys or walks around the edge of the cloister: the positions of the south east and south west angles are shown in concrete and marks of the cloister roof can be seen on the south wall of the church.



Reconstruction of Cloister Walkway



Chapter House Reconstruction



Chapter House

The north walk of the cloister (which runs against the south wall of the nave) was used for study and there was usually a book cupboard in the cloister's north east corner. Three massive buttresses partly obscure the line of the north walk, built early in the last century to prop the leaning wall. The cloister in Grey Abbey is, rectangular rather than square, but in other respects the plan is the 'normal' Cistercian one. This rectangular shape may have come about due to issues with time or money. The refectory would normally indicate the middle of the south range so we must use our imaginations to visualise the scale of the original plans for Grey Abbey. It is likely that Affreca's early widowhood in 1219 put pay to these larger plans. South of the vestry in the east walk is the chapter house (9), once aisled and vaulted in stone, where daily meetings of the monks were held. Its importance is emphasised by once grand west door and triple east windows.

Next to the chapter house we find the 'slype' (10) or parlour, the only place where monks were allowed to talk to each other. The parlour led to an alley which gave access to the east range, which held further buildings belonging to the monastery although their purpose is unknown. The monks' cemetery was probably east and north east of the chancel in part of the area now occupied by the parish graveyard.

The functions of the long day-room (11) with its central row of columns are less certain: training novices and indoor work by the monks are possibilities. Originally it was divided into eight bays by three columns and a stone vault.

Connected to the day room we find the washing and lavatory block, (12) now largely disappeared. This provided washing and latrine facilities at first floor level and was served by the main drain, now open but originally covered.



Reconstruction Day Stairs



Day Stairs



Grey Abbey Parlour

In the south range we find the warming-house (13) the only place off the cloister with a fireplace for monks to warm themselves. The warming room leads on to the principal room in the southern range known as the frater or refectory (14). The refectory's impressive south gable with triple lancet windows still stands to full height.



Grey Abbey Refectory

The refectory at Grey abbey is the biggest and finest in Ireland. It is here that the community met at set times each day to eat together. In the west wall of the refectory we find the serving hatch (C) which led through to the now vanished kitchen (15). We can also see a set of steps which led to a pulpit (D) from which one of the monks would read to the silent diners at their wooden benches and tables.



Reconstruction of the Refectory



The Serving Hatch

The west range (16) has disappeared. However it is possible to see the outline on the ground when the weather is very dry. It is possible that it may have been made of wood. It usually contained the lay brothers' refectory, dormitory and storage accommodation. To complete the picture the visitor must imagine barns and byres, gardens, orchards and fields with stock and crops. Our reconstruction from the south east inevitably includes points of uncertainty but it is a guide to what the building once looked like, roofed and peopled.



The West Range

Reconstruction of Grey Abbey





Educational Approaches

These educational approaches include some suggested activities for before, during and after a visit. Grey Abbey's long and complex history, beautiful surroundings and religious significance make it a great place to visit for pupils studying a variety of subjects. KS2 pupils will benefit immensely from the cross-curricular possibilities of the site and teachers of KS3 students are encouraged to consider the educational approaches across all subject areas below.

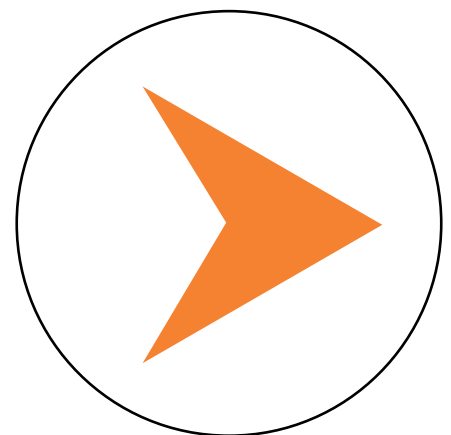
Preparing for a visit

Preparation for a visit should include an understanding of:

- the way of life of a monastic community based on the Rule of St Benedict
- the layout and function of the church and its associated buildings
- the sources of revenue to support such an existence (The Cistercian ideal was to return to self-sufficiency, but gifts of land could be farmed by lay brothers)
- the reasons which contributed to the dissolution of the abbey and the subsequent demise of the building.
- The University of Sheffield has produced an excellent online resource on the Cistercians which can be used for research. <http://hri.shef.ac.uk/cistercians/index.php>

To maximise learning opportunities and make full use of your time on site, pupils should practice at school those skills which you would expect them to use on their visit. This will most likely involve:

- written work in the form of site descriptions and note-taking
- observation – looking for evidence of change
- drawing skills – for diagrams or detailed sketches
- using a plan
- use of measuring, recording or photographic equipment.



History

Grey Abbey's place in the Anglo-Norman conquest of East Ulster makes it an ideal site to visit for KS3 pupils studying the 'Norman Impact on the Medieval World'. Ideally a trip to the abbey should be combined with visits to other medieval sites in the area, such as Carrickfergus, Dundrum and Clough Castles, to allow a full appreciation of the dramatic impact the conquest had on the area. In addition the abbey's decline and dissolution serve as a useful introduction to the Reformation study unit of 'Rivalry and Conflict'.

Role-play work could involve aspects of the daily routine of the monks such as a meeting in the Chapter House, or an event in the abbey's history such as its surrender at the time of the Dissolution.

One of the best ways of learning about a site is to interpret it for other people.

Tell your pupils that they have been asked to produce an audio-tour for tourists. You may wish to specify a particular group – for example children, or visually impaired visitors. Set a time for the audio tour to last – about twenty minutes will probably be a manageable length for your pupils. Ask them to devise a route around the site, linking what they consider to be the most important features in a logical order. Then ask them to write or tape a few descriptive sentences at each key point. This activity is probably best done in small groups, and can lead to follow-up work in a variety of subject areas. For example, your pupils can edit and record their guide back at school. They might compose music or devise sound effects to enliven the tour. An accompanying leaflet for the audio-tour could be designed and printed.

Cross-Curricular Opportunities

English



You can include literacy development in your visit by introducing target language, and by allowing pupils to work in pairs or small groups you will also be enhancing their oral skills. Tasks can easily be set which support learning in history while at the same time allowing pupils to communicate their findings to different audiences and to write for a variety of purposes.

Pupils should be aware of their task beforehand so that they can plan in advance. They could produce:

- A guidebook for younger children which explains how the monks lived and worked in the monastery during the medieval period.
- A health and safety report on health and hygiene in the monastery.
- A press advert, poster, radio commercial or leaflet which publicises the site. It should appeal to different groups of people, persuading them to visit the castle.
- A leaflet produced by an estate agent trying to sell the monastery after dissolution. Giving accurate descriptions and explanations of the features and uses of the buildings and the surrounding land.
- The evocative atmosphere of the site can be used as a stimulus for creative writing, poetry and storytelling.

A site visit will extend pupils' vocabulary and refine their descriptive skills, particularly if working in groups. Prior to the visit inform pupils what they will be doing as follow-up work to provide a focus for their investigations on site.

Provide a list of words to describe areas of the site such as lonely, peaceful, important, holy, beautiful, dominant, busy or sad. Ask pupils to find where these words would apply.

Once they have identified the area you could ask them to analyse why they thought these words were applicable and then think of other words to describe their impressions.

Pupils could imagine they were a monk who, having lived in the abbey before its dissolution, has revisited his former home. Ask pupils to describe what he would see, how he would feel and what he would think about the state of such a sacred building.

Art & Design

The site is an ideal subject for observational drawing, and can be used to develop awareness of line, tone, texture, shape, colour, pattern and form. Work of a two or three-dimensional nature using a variety of media can be developed from sketches taken from the site.

Rather than expect pupils to produce a panoramic study of the site ask them to focus on individual parts. This can be done by asking pupils to draw through doorways or windows or, failing that, by using viewfinders. Light and shadow can be expressed through silhouettes and lino prints.

In terms of larger display work for the classroom try creating a large interpretive map of the abbey. Pupils could be placed in groups to create sections of the map, before putting it together at the end. The idea would be to link this display map into a literacy or communications project with each group creating a presentation based on their area.

Illuminated lettering - in medieval times the printing press had yet to be developed which meant manuscripts had to be painstakingly hand copied. This led to a very intricate art form; the most famous manuscript in Ireland is probably 'The Book of Kells.' Show your pupils copies of some of these manuscripts and ask them to design their own. These could be used to develop personal souvenirs of the site based on their own interpretations.

Geography & Environment

The isolation of Grey Abbey was a key factor in the choice of site for the Cistercian monks. Pupils could be encouraged to study the site and situation of the abbey, and by looking at old maps to consider how the site and its immediate neighbouring settlements have changed over the years.

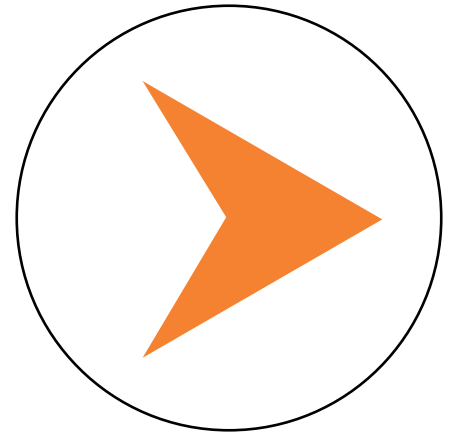
Map reading, is a key skill in the geography curriculum; aerial photographs and maps of the site are available on the NIEA website (<http://maps.ehsni.gov.uk/MapView/Default.aspx>). These could be downloaded and used to record the location of key features of the site.

The site itself is home to a mature physic garden. This would make an excellent starting point when talking about our environment and the plant life cycle. This could lead to a class project through the creation of your own gardens in the grounds of the school, providing opportunity for out door work and discussion of soil, garden lay out, composting etc

Mathematics

Take measurements and use estimation and calculation skills for reconstructions of various parts of the monastery.

- Groups of pupils could be assigned different areas such as the cloister or the church. They will then take measurements of the dimensions using different forms of measurement, i.e. pacing, metric, and imperial
- Measure or estimate the dimensions of the different types of windows.



Glossary

Abbot: The senior monk of the Abbey

Anglo-Norman: Normans who lived in England after the Norman Conquest of 1066

Annals: A narrative history

Arcaded: A range of arches.

Cashels: A ring fort which is enclosed by a stone wall rather than an earthen bank.

Cruciform: Cross shaped.

Dressed stone: Cut or carved stone

Dower: This was a provision accorded by law to a wife for her support in the event that she should survive her husband. It was settled on the bride by agreement at the time of the wedding, or provided by law.

Ecclesiastical: Relating to the church or clergy.

Gothic Architecture: Originating in 12th-century France and lasting into the 16th century. Its characteristic features include the pointed arch, the ribbed vault and the flying buttress.

Infirmary: The abbey hospital.

Lancet: A pointed gothic arch.

Mother House: An abbey which founded another Cistercian community (its daughter-house) was known as the mother-house.

Nave: The main body of a church in which the congregation sits.

Physic garden: A garden where medicinal herbs and plants are grown.

Piscina: A small stone sink used for washing communion vessels.

Precinct: The area within the abbey's boundary.

Romanesque Architecture: A building style from the early medieval period (between the 6th and 10th century). Its characteristic feature was the semi circular arch windows.

Sedilia: Seats (usually three) in the chancel, reserved for the use of the officiating clergy.

Serfs: A form of bonded labour resembling slavery.

Transept: The parts of a cruciform church that cross the nave at right angles.

Vaulted: Having a stone roof.

Vestments: Clergy robes.

Wattled: Constructed with a woven wooden wall.

Recommended Reading

An Archaeological Survey of County Down (H.M.S.O. 1966), 279-82; Gwynn, A. and Hadcock, R. N.

Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland (1970); Hamlin, A. in Ulster J. Archaeol. 41 (1978).

Grey Abbey Facilities

- Guided Tours Available
- Visitor Centre
- Exhibition about monastic life
- Toilets / Disabled Toilets
- Picnic Area
- Parking

Access & Booking

Easter - end September: 10am to 6pm daily

October – Easter: Sundays only from 12 to 4pm.

Pedestrian and wheelchair access from car park to visitor centre, herb garden and abbey church. Gravel paths and grass areas may make other parts of the site difficult or inaccessible for some visitors. There is informal car parking at the monument.

Getting Here

Situated in Church Street, Greyabbey in County Down.

Signposted from the main street. Bus service from Belfast to Greyabbey.

Contact Us

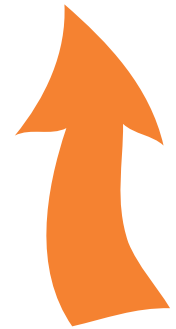
Greyabbey

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Teachers Notes

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www.ni-environment.gov.uk

Our aim is to protect, conserve and promote the natural environment and built heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.



An Agency within the Department of the

Environment

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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