



Binham Priory in Norfolk and Schools



The Priory church of St Mary and the Holy Cross in Binham, is a village parish church, but its ruins, precinct walls and gatehouse tell a different story. This was the site of a Benedictine monastery, founded in 1091 as a cell of St Albans Abbey by Peter de Valoines, a nephew of William the Conqueror.

The Priory has had an amazing history, its priors were often unscrupulous and irresponsible, quarrelling with the abbot of St Albans Abbey, selling the Priory silver for the pursuit of alchemy, and wasting money on expensive lawsuits. In 1212 the Priory was besieged and the monks only saved from starvation by the intervention of King John himself.

The monastic precinct built on the Benedictine plan was a glorious collection of buildings, built around the open garth and its cloisters. It would have been a smaller version Norwich Cathedral. Great wealth was lavished on these buildings with the master masons perhaps coming from Normandy.

The Binham Priory Access and Conservation project funded primarily by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has made these buildings and their history accessible to everyone. The permanent exhibition in the church and north aisle, using graphics and interactive activities tell the story of Binham Priory, its history, and the lives of the monks, religious and political change over the years and how these all affected worship in this building. There is tangible evidence within the church of these years of tumultuous change. Artefacts excavated in the precincts in the 1930's have been returned and are now displayed.

For the first time the Priory is able to welcome parties of schoolchildren.

What can we offer schools?

- An introductory session to Binham Priory for teachers.
- A welcome and introduction to Binham Priory for visiting schoolchildren.
- An opportunity to experience a spiritual place where there has been Christian worship for over 900 years.
- 'Starting with a picture', explore how the church and monastic buildings may have been in medieval times.
- Brass rubbings with their accompanying interactive 'Discovery sheets'.
- A range of activities for small groups of KS2 children.
- Beautiful carvings in stone and wood.
- A site which is inspirational for art or photographic work.
- An interior space with a wonderful acoustic for music making.
- A place for contemplation.
- A ruined monastic precinct based on the plan common to all Benedictine monasteries.
- A website which will support students learning – www.binhampriory.org
- Binham Priory is a wheelchair friendly site, complying with DDA requirements.
- There are toilet facilities in the north aisle of the Priory.
- Risk Assessment has been completed.
- Parking is free in the church car park.
- Schools may picnic by prior arrangement.
- A donation, towards our maintenance costs, of £10 for each school visit would be welcomed.

For further information contact Pauline Scott pauline@scotthome2.fsnet.co.uk, or to book a visit contact Maureen Frost, Tel: 01328 830362.



Plan of Binham Priory Church

The plan is a bird's eye view of Binham church. It is shown with its north and south side aisles. The children may have entered the church through the new porch in the north aisle. The south aisle is now in ruins and can be seen only from the outside.

We are offering the children an opportunity to find and name different parts of the church and its furnishings. The children first need to orientate themselves to the points of the compass marked on the plan.

This worksheet provides the opportunity for children to reinforce their classroom learning about the parts of a church using the specific language.

The nave is the central aisle flanked by seats on either side for the congregation. The word comes from the Latin *navis*, meaning ship. The association of the church with a ship, and the congregation as passengers in the ship, indicates the priest and people travelling together towards God. In medieval times there would have been no seats in the church, the elderly or infirm sat against a pillar with their 'backs to the wall'.

The altar is the holy heart of the church used for the preparation of the eucharist – repeating the Last Supper when Jesus shared a meal with his disciples. It is a wooden table with a cross on it.

The font is used for baptisms and is at the back of the church. At baptism an individual is welcomed into the church community. This is a Seven Sacrament Font unique to East Anglia. The heads were purposely broken at the time of the Reformation, when all images were destroyed inside churches.

The lectern holds the bible.

The Rood Screen has been moved to the back of the church on the south side of the nave. It would have been in two sections across the whole church close to the Rood Stairs in the south wall. The screen was painted with medieval saints, during the Reformation they were whitewashed and text from Cranmer's bible written over the top. The white paint is flaking off and once again the saints are visible.

An Arch separates the pillars, rounded arches are Norman and pointed arches are Early English.

A monk's doorway, there are two, one on either side of the altar, they connected this church with the monk's church.

Binham Priory church has no pulpit – the place where a priest stands to give the sermon (talk) at a service. The children might like to discuss this.



Features to Find

When the children have experienced the 'awe and wonder' that all new visitors have as they step inside the Priory church, they might like to focus on the 500 year old oak benches. These have wonderful carved 'poppyheads' (from the French word for a doll- poupée) at both ends of each bench.

These older benches inside the Priory church, are a rich source of carvings and patterns and the following worksheet invites pupils to find particular features, and then use their imagination.

- A good way to start this activity with a small group of children is by looking at the poppyheads together and trying to identify the animals, people and birds. There are additional figures that were armrests at the end of the benches. Don't forget to look at both ends of the benches!
- An additional sheet of blank paper might be useful for the children's drawings.
- The children, depending on their age and ability could draw just the figure itself or within the poppyhead.
- The children might be encouraged to look at patterns in the stone, around the base of the font, around the Norman arches, or outside on the west front of the Priory.
- Having looked at regular patterns at Binham Priory the children might develop this activity in the classroom creating their own regular patterns.
- The final activity, 'Designing your own seat' could be a classroom activity.

This activity sheet takes about 1 hour.



Looking at documentary evidence

You may wish to use the plan reproduced on the next sheet and explore the Monastic Precinct before doing this activity. The English Heritage boards will provide additional visual and textual information.

This is an activity to encourage children's close observational skills and then to hypothesise on what has happened.

To do this activity you will need to be in the Monastic Precinct possibly near the Refectory. (refer to plan)

The excavations and reconstruction of the Monastic buildings took place in the 20th century. This engraving was made in the 19th century by the Norfolk artist John Cotman 1782-1842. A large collection of his watercolours may be seen at the Castle Museum in Norwich.

It took 150 years for the masons to build Binham Priory church and they started at the east- end. There must have been many years when the building work was at a standstill.

The rounded arches are Norman and those with pointed tops are Early English.

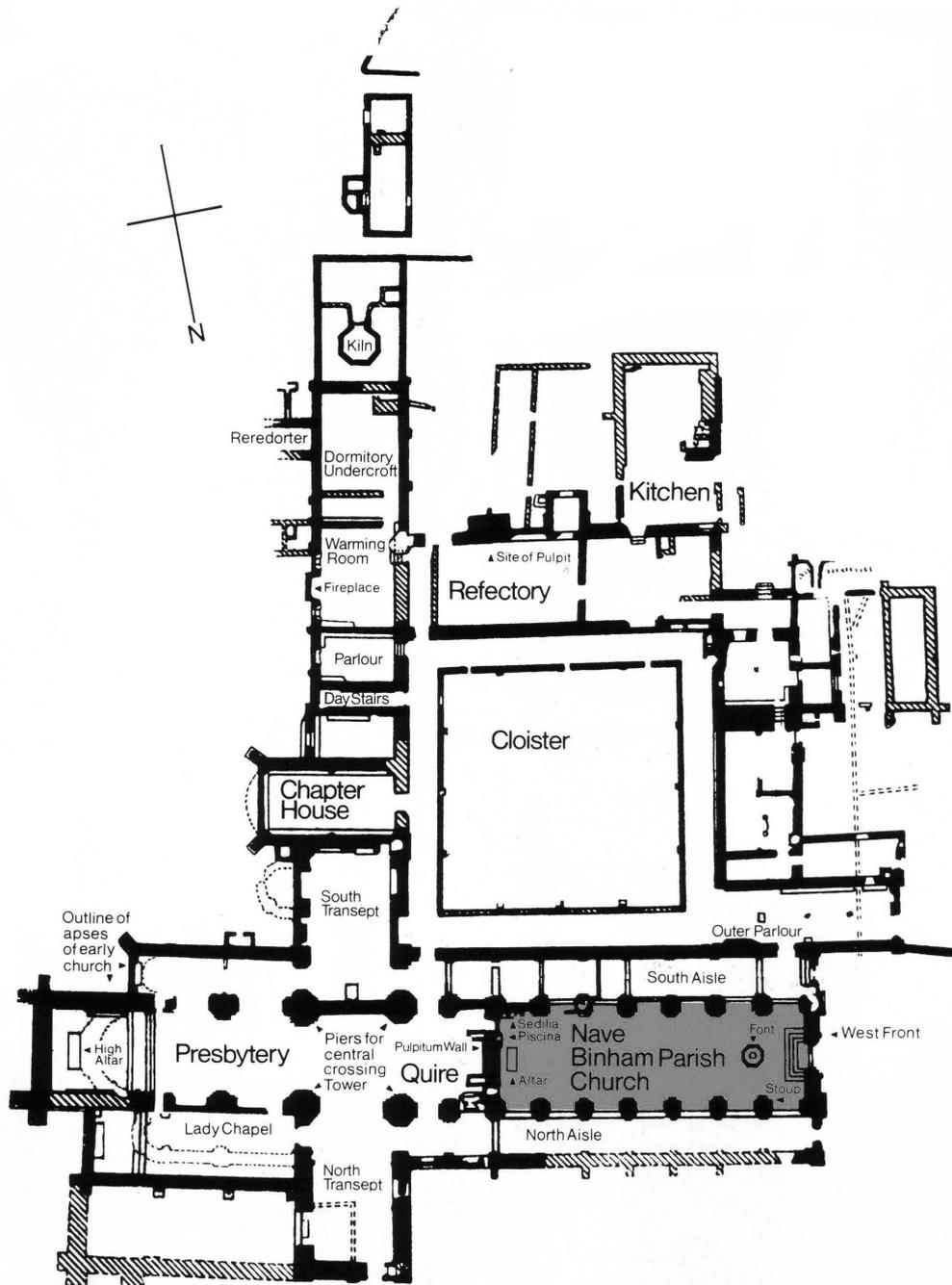
The windows from the outer south wall have been moved into the existing south wall of the church, the squared windows are Tudor.

The monastery and all its buildings were pulled down in 1539 on the orders of Henry VIII, at the time of the Dissolution of the monasteries. The church was left standing as it was the village church, with its own vicar.



BINHAM PRIORY, NORFOLK

The ground plan of the Priory of St Mary and the church of the Holy Cross



The nave (indicated in grey on the plan) is of seven bays and according to Benedictine custom was used as the parish church. To this it owes its survival.



Materials

At first sight the predominant materials are grey stones and red bricks, in sharp contrast to the dominance of glass and steel in large modern buildings.

However the 'pupil materials detective' will be able to discover many different materials in use in Binham Priory, and the same materials used in different applications.

Some of the materials have been in place for 900 years and are still fit for purpose. Others have lasted less well and been replaced. If we were building Binham Priory today we might use different materials.

- The children may need to discuss the meaning of the word 'materials' before you start this activity.
- The more able children should be encouraged to find more than one place where each material is used.
- Children who have difficulty recording may find this activity easier to do orally.
- The qualities of different materials could be discussed together first, before the children attempt this part of the activity.

This activity takes 20-30 minutes.



The Rule of St Benedict and your rules at school

Should the language in these rules be difficult for the children to understand then perhaps you should read and discuss each one first as a group.

Chapter 3 On Summoning the Brethren to Council – focuses on the Abbot sharing a problem with all the monks and then listening to their ideas and suggestions for how the community should proceed. Perhaps this could be linked to your School Council. The Abbot's role can be likened to that of the school head teacher.

Chapter 35 The weekly servers in the kitchen – has ideas within it often put into practice in the classroom when looking after equipment. It also focuses on the idea of having a rota and sharing the everyday routines.

Chapter 66 The Doorkeepers of the monastery – the children might discuss 'why a wise old man', should be suggested for this role. The value in the monastery being self-sufficient might be likened to each classroom within a school, or each school.

The suggested activities might be discussed further as a follow up activity in the classroom.



A list of items which each novice monk had to bring to the monastery

The monks would all take the vows of poverty, obedience and chastity when they entered the monastery. Theirs would have been a life of prayer with 9 services every day this was the most important part of their lives. The monastery would offer hospitality to travellers and visitors, care for the sick and elderly, many of the monks were very scholarly and the monasteries were important centres of learning and education, some monks would have copied manuscripts and illustrated them. Many of them would have come from wealthy families and would have been used to very comfortable lives with servants and private tutors.

St. Benedict who founded the Benedictine order of monks had a rule in chapter 55 about clothing and footwear. Monks who received new clothes had to return the old ones immediately so that they would be given to the poor. Any monk found hiding any private possessions would be punished. They could only have what they had been given by the Prior.

This list of clothing is gender specific but a girl entering a nunnery would have had a similar list of possessions for her use.

Life at the monastery

What would the monk have used this equipment for?

Binham Priory only had 1 fireplace for the monks in the Warming Room.

What might prevent some from joining the monastery – only the rich would have had a silver spoon.

The possessions which children today have are strongly influenced by the pressures of advertising and their peers and reflect the material world that we live in.

This worksheet might provide an opportunity for children to consider what they have and why they want it to be replaced or renewed even if it still works or fits.

Children might notice the complete lack of digital, electrical equipment – do monasteries today use technological equipment or monks and nuns wear watches?