

HISTORICAL ENQUIRY

HOW RELIGIOUS WERE PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE AGES?

Some men decided to devote their whole lives to God. They left their families, homes and possessions and moved into a **monastery** as a **monk**. But what did they do when they got there? What rules did they live by to please God? How did they help the rest of society? And what made so many men become monks?

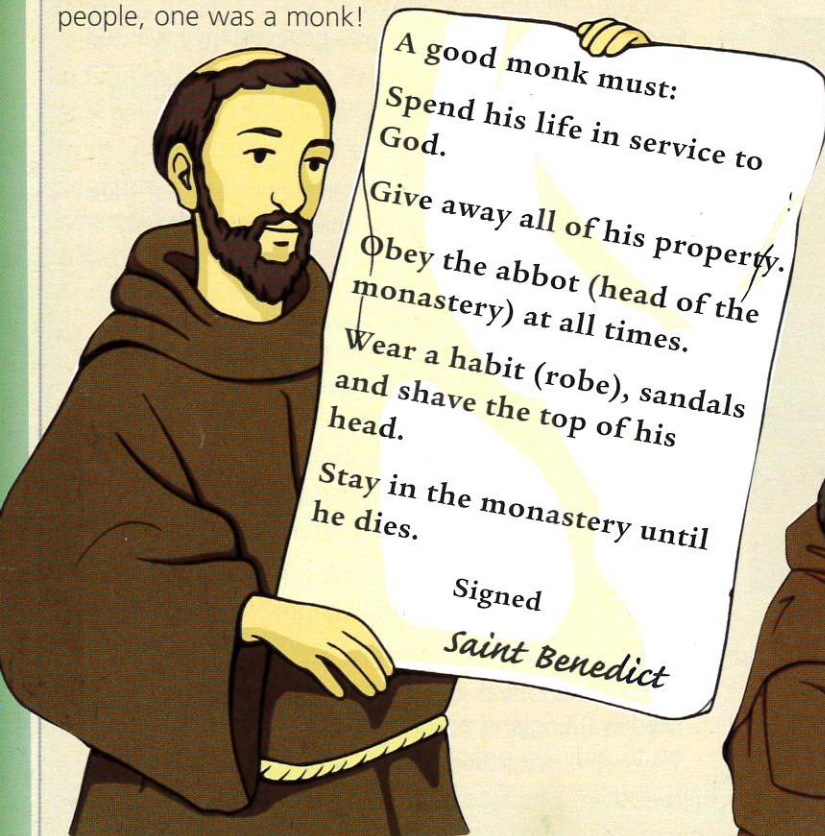
2: A day in the life of a monk

MISSION OBJECTIVES

- To understand how and why religion affected everyday life in medieval England.
- To understand how powerful the Church was and how it used its power.

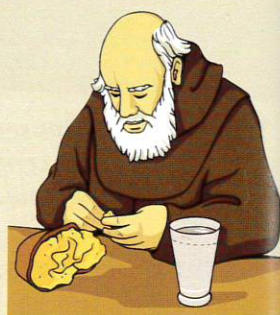
Why take up the habit?

Monks first arrived in England in the sixth century, when Saint Benedict built the first monastery. In 1066, there were around 1000 monks in England – but this number quickly increased after William’s invasion. By 1300, there were over 12 000 monks in England – meaning that out of every 150 people, one was a monk!



A monk’s life was not an easy one. It was dominated by prayer – every three hours – day and night! They had to live by a strict set of rules set down by Saint Benedict.

Midnight	
1	Sleep
2	
3	Prayers
4	
5	Sleep
6	
7	Prayers
8	Breakfast
9	
10	Work
11	
Noon	Prayers
13	Dinner
14	
15	
16	Work
17	
18	
19	Supper
20	Prayers
21	Chores
22	
23	Sleep
Midnight	



+ Hungry for MORE

Not all monks followed the rules laid down by Saint Benedict. As well as Benedictines, there were Cistercians, Cluniacs, Augustinians, Premonstrations and Carthusians. Franciscan friars arrived in England in the thirteenth century. They were monks who did not live in monasteries but spent their time travelling around. See if you can find out more about the rules that these different orders lived by.

SOURCE A: To us, the life of a medieval monk seems pretty tough. But to many monks, joining the monastery was an escape from everyday pressures. Read Source B.

‘Here everything is peaceful and quiet. We are free from all the noise and worry of the world. All the monks are very friendly and no one is selfish.’

SOURCE B: By a monk from Rievaulx Abbey in 1170.



SOURCE C: Large monasteries like this housed dozens of monks and were called abbeys.

Illuminating work

Monks were probably the best educated people in medieval society and monasteries were important centres of learning. They acted as libraries for ancient books and **manuscripts**. Monks not only read these books but made sure the knowledge wasn’t lost by copying them. This took place in a special room called a **scriptorium**, a long narrow hall with booths placed against windows to help the monks see what they were doing. Valuable books were chained to the desk to prevent them being damaged if they were knocked off. Sometimes monks wrote their own books called **chronicles**. They also often **illuminated** their books with tiny, beautiful paintings around the edges of the page and on the capital letters.

SOURCE D: This example of an illuminated manuscript comes from the Lindisfarne Gospels.



FACT What’s that in the back of the picture? Most art was religious. The illuminated manuscripts, painted by the monks, mostly showed Bible stories – although sometimes they doodled scenes from everyday life. Rich families sometimes paid artists to paint pictures especially for them but these usually showed religious scenes too. It was not unknown for an artist to be paid to paint the birth of Jesus – and put the rich nobleman’s family in the background.

WISE-UP Words

chronicles
illuminated manuscripts
monastery monk
scriptorium

Work

- Give as many reasons as you can to explain why some men became monks.
- Look at the typical monk’s day, and then answer the following questions.
 - At what time:
 - did monks get up for prayers?
 - did they go to bed?
 - Look at Source B. Explain why some men were tempted to become monks.
- Using Source D as a guide, make your own illuminated manuscript. On the manuscript, explain why monks copied books out by hand and why this was important.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED?

- Can you tell somebody why some men decided to become monks?
- Do you know how a monk spent an average day?
- Could you explain how monasteries preserved and spread knowledge?