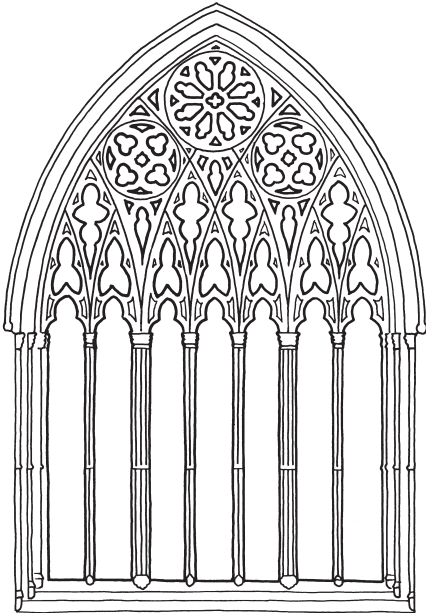


Tintern Abbey



The window in the west front, about 1300.

History

Tintern Abbey was founded in 1131 by the Anglo-Norman lord of Chepstow, Walter fitz Richard de Clare. He granted land to a small group of monks from the Cistercian abbey of l'Aumône in France. The position of Tintern Abbey is typical of the remote sites chosen for their monasteries by the Cistercians.

At first, the monks probably lived and worshipped in temporary timber buildings, though by the mid-twelfth century they had erected a stone church and cloisters. The community grew, and during the first half of the thirteenth century the abbey buildings were expanded. The superb Gothic church that still stands, though in ruins, was begun in 1269. It was consecrated in 1301, almost certainly in the presence of Roger Bigod, fifth earl of Norfolk, who supported the abbey.

The monks farmed their large estates with the help of lay brothers. The land was organized into farms known as granges, and they worked hard to improve the land and increase productivity.

Tintern continued to grow through the later Middle Ages despite the effects of the Black Death, a great plague that struck Britain in 1348, and the Welsh uprising led by Owain Glyn Dŵr against the English King and parliament between 1400 and 1415. Further small-scale building projects were carried out up until the reign of King Henry VIII.

Then, in September 1536, Tintern surrendered to the King during the suppression of the monasteries, when Henry VIII seized all their land and wealth. The buildings and land were given to Henry Somerset, the earl of Worcester. He began to rent out parts of the land to local people and soon the area around the abbey was crowded with cottages, workshops and industrial buildings. Iron wire was produced here and further up the valley. The buildings fell into disrepair, and the church was used for playing quoits.

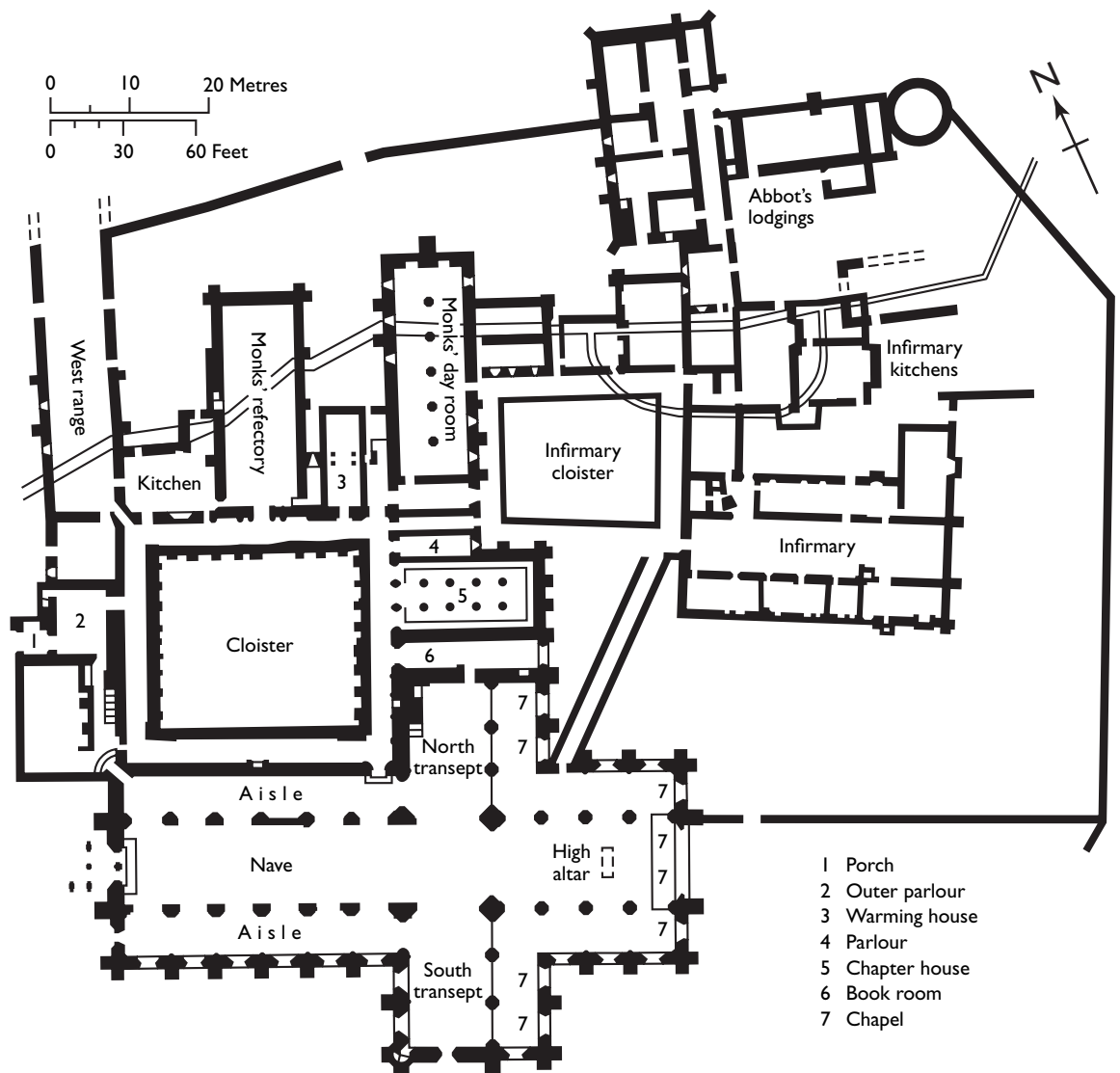
Tintern lay forgotten until the late eighteenth century, when it became fashionable to search out wild landscapes and beautiful ruins. Poets (including Wordsworth) and artists (including Turner) of the Romantic movement came in search of the 'sublime' and the 'picturesque'. Travellers flocked to the area, and were able to reach Tintern by boat from Ross-on-Wye. The railway brought still more tourists after 1876.

In 1901 the site was saved for the nation when it was purchased by the Crown. Major programmes of conservation were first carried out between 1901 and 1928. In 1984 Tintern Abbey came into the care of Cadw, part of the Welsh Assembly Government. Researching and maintaining the ruins and improving facilities for visitors are an ongoing process.

 **Cadw**



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



Looking at the buildings

The **abbey buildings** covered a larger area than the present Cadw site. The foundations of other buildings — probably guest accommodation — and the original entrance can be seen near the car park.

The magnificent **church** was built at the expense of Roger Bigod, Lord of Chepstow and was finished about 1330. The position of the smaller earlier church is marked with lines of stone in the ground. The west front was highly decorated and in the niche over the door was a statue of the Virgin Mary, to whom the church was dedicated. The interior of the church was divided up by stone screens, and the nave, aisles, monks' choir and high altar were all separate areas. In the transepts were chapels, also screened off. The monks worshipped in the church several times a day, and in the north transept are the stairs from the monks' dormitory for use at night. The door in the north aisle is decorated because it is the processional entrance from the cloister:

In the **cloister** the monks walked and worked at desks. On the east wall is a twelfth-century book cupboard (partly blocked by later alterations) and on the church wall is a seat where the abbot sat for the evening

readings of the Bible. Corbels (stone supports) in the cloister walls show that the covered walkways were rebuilt at least once.

The **chapter house** was the abbey's business centre. Note the remains of seating round the walls and pillars. In the parlour next to it, essential conversation was allowed.

The **monks day room** had a stone vaulted roof supported by central pillars. At right angles was the latrine. This had access from the monks' dormitory above. The scar of the end wall of the dormitory can be seen on the end of the north transept.

The **monks' refectory** (dining hall) has a decorated doorway and windows, showing its importance. The doorway in the west wall led to a pulpit from which a monk read during meals. The kitchen and warming house lie either side of the refectory, with the prior's apartments above. In the central fireplace in the warming house — the only heated room — a fire was kept from November 1 until Good Friday.

The **west range** was built as accommodation for the lay brothers, with a dining hall on the ground floor and a dormitory above. Later this was converted into private apartments. At the south end of this range is the original entrance through the porch and outer parlour.

The **infirmary** was originally an open hall, but in the fifteenth century it was divided to give extra privacy. Next door is the kitchen where nourishing food for the old and sick would be cooked. They were the only monks allowed to eat meat.

Next to the infirmary is the original **abbot's house**. A more palatial house was built to the north in the fourteenth century as the abbot rose in status.

Some ideas for site activities

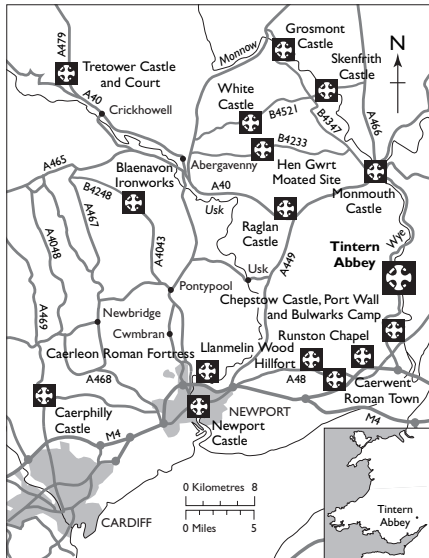
Roleplay

- Recreate the monks' day by moving round the buildings in the correct sequence. This will help you to understand the monks' activities and how the buildings were used.
- Use a variety of perspectives — monk, novice, abbot, sick monk, lay brother, servant — and find the rooms they would have used. How were their lives different? When would they have met?
- Recreate their procession, chanting simple music.

Looking for clues

- Why do some of the pillars in the church have a flattened side?
- Find the remains of decoration. How has the church changed since it was in use?
- In the chapter house, where did the monks sit?
- What evidence is there that life in the infirmary was more comfortable?

The new-style **Tintern Abbey** guidebook contains information about the monks' lives and reconstruction drawings. It is available at 25% discount for educational use from Cadw Sales. Tel 01443 336 092/094 Email cadw.sales@wales.gsi.gov.uk



Sketching and measuring

- How can you record the size and height of the church? How much larger is the present church than the first? Many of the windows have lost some of their tracery: choose one and draw it as it might have been.
- Is the cloister a square?
- Only about sixty monks lived at Tintern at any one time. How many monks could sit in the chapter house and the dining room?

Leisure and tourism

- Should Tintern be left as a ruin or rebuilt?
- How would you improve the presentation of the site for visitors?
- Prepare a brief guide for a foreign visitor.

Your visit

Location

Tintern Abbey lies beside the A466 between Chepstow and Monmouth on the west bank of the river Wye, 5 miles (8km) from junction 2 of the M48.

Facilities

Shop, toilets, parking for cars and coaches, audio tour.

Access

A plan of the abbey is given to visitors which includes a recommended route for wheelchair users. A Braille plan with an audio tour is available, by arrangement with the custodian. The grounds at this site are laid to grass with some firm, level paths. The entrance to the shop/pay desk is level. There are information panels and an exhibition. Benches are provided.

The abbey car park has five wheelchair symbol spaces. The public toilets include a disabled toilet though these are not fully adapted. There is also a radar key toilet in the car park.

Disabled visitors and their assisting companion will be admitted free of charge to all monuments. Please note that, for health reasons, dogs are not allowed on Cadw sites, but guide dogs and hearing dogs for the deaf are welcome.

Further information, help and advice on visiting the site is available from the custodian at the monument, who can also arrange a **free planning visit** for group leaders.

The Custodian, Tintern Abbey, Tintern, Monmouthshire NP16 6SE
Tel/fax 01291 689251 Email tintern.abbey@cadw.co.uk

**Buy the new-style guidebook at 25% discount price for educational use from Tintern Abbey shop or Cadw Sales at the main Cadw address. Tel 01443 336 092/094
Email cadw.sales@wales.gsi.gov.uk**

Cadw
Plas Carew
Unit 5/7 Cefn Coed
Parc Nantgarw
Cardiff CF15 7QQ
Tel 01443 33 6000
Fax 01443 33 6001
Email cadw.education@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Web www.cadw.wales.gov.uk



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government