Basingwerk Abbey Teaching Resource
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3

HISTORY 4

ACTIVITIES

ABBEY ARCHITECT 7

FEATURE FINDER 8

POWER PLAY 9

TALL TALES 10

MINI MASONs 11

SECRET SHAPES 12

SIGNS AND CIPHERS 13

ABBEE ARTISTS 14
This resource has been designed and developed by volunteers from Greenfield Valley Heritage Park in partnership with Cadw, the National Library of Wales, the National Museum of Wales and Flintshire Archives. Basingwerk Abbey (managed by Cadw) is situated on the site of Greenfield Valley. Schools visit the Abbey along with other visitors every year and this resource has been designed to support self-led school visits with input from teachers which link to curriculum subjects. The resource is also an excellent way to develop and promote Cwricwlwm Cymreig. The activities have been designed for KS2 children but can be adapted by teachers for older/younger children. A grab box to support the activities is available for free (booking essential) from the Greenfield Valley Visitor Centre.

Follow in his footsteps

Children will follow the character of Pod, the novice monk as he learns how to be a medieval monk. The activities link to the history of the site and what life was like in Holywell and Greenfield at this time.

Visiting the Abbey

- Under 16s must be accompanied by an adult
- Teachers are responsible for children at all times
- Toilets are available at the Greenfield Valley Visitor Centre
- Children must respect the abbey and not climb on the walls/stone
- Picnics are allowed on site but all rubbish must be cleared away
- Booking is recommended to avoid overcrowding. It is essential if the grab box is required and if schools would like to use the shop. Please call: 01352 714172
- Coach parking: see appendix for instructions

Using the activities

- Each activity is numbered and colour coded
- Each activity has instructions, key subjects and skills
- Each activity has an equipment list
- A copy of any worksheets/information sheets will be in the appendix at the back of the resource and is linked in the activity
- Risk Assessments in appendix

The Grab Box

- Tape measures x 6
- Rope x 3
- Rulers x 10
The Abbey of St Mary at Basingwerk was founded by Ranulf II Earl of Chester c.1131. The Abbey was originally set up by the Order of Savigny from France. Later, in 1147 they joined the Cistercian Order and Basingwerk became a Cistercian house, a ‘daughter’ house of Buildwas Abbey, a monastery in Shropshire. In medieval times, the area around the Abbey was mostly woodland and Holywell as a town did not really exist yet. There were a few cottages made from wood with thatched roofs, inns, a church and a chapel near the Well. When Henry VIII separated the English church from Rome and the Pope, he set about disbanding the monasteries and abbeys to sell their valuable land. This was called the dissolution of the monasteries. Basingwerk Abbey was no exception and in 1536, the monks were forced to leave, its buildings were sold and partly demolished to prevent the monks returning. Over the years the remaining ruins were robbed for stone to build the nearby mills in Greenfield Valley.
Life as a Monk

The Cistercian community adopted a simple lifestyle following the Rule of St Benedict written in the 6th century by St Benedict of Nursia. They rejected all sources of excessive luxury and wealth. Their buildings and their books were plainly designed. The Cistercians wore habits of undyed wool, from which arose their popular name of the “white monks”. They followed a strict rule of silence and ate a vegetarian diet. The monks daily routine was ruled by two bells in the tower, which told them when to eat, sleep, work and pray.

The monks were self sufficient and supported themselves using the land, which was worked by an army of lay brothers. The Abbey made money by hosting many pilgrims and it was the job of the Cellarer lay brother to see to the comfort of visitors.

The monks assisted the people of Holywell, whether poor or wealthy, offering hospital facilities, food and alms.

The fast flowing Holywell stream provided the Abbey with a good water supply and also offered many commercial opportunities. The Cistercians became the first people to use the stream water on any significant scale to run the first industries here, such as fulling mills (cloth making) and corn mills (flour). In the 14th century, the monks grew barley and had a brewing industry, selling beer in Holywell as early as 1347. Merchants and farmers from surrounding areas also came to sell their produce. The monks took taxes and charges from stall-holders as income.

Turbulent Times

As it was near the border with England, Basingwerk had to play host to both the Welsh and English. There were many battles fought in this area during medieval times. However, the Abbey’s economy depended on grants of property and land from both English and Welsh kings.
Royal benefactors included Henry II, Prince Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (d. 1240), Prince Dafydd ap Llywelyn (d. 1246) and Edward I.
In 1157, Owain Gwynedd rested his army at Basingwerk before facing the forces of Henry II at the Battle of Ewloe. The Welsh Prince stopped at the Abbey because of its strategic importance as it blocked the route Henry II had to take to reach Rhuddlan castle.
In the 12th Century Richard son of the Earl of Chester, was attacked by the Welsh, and was forced to take shelter in Basingwerk Abbey. During the preparation for the conquest of Wales, Basingwerk Abbey was under the protection of the English, providing that the monks had no interaction with those described as “Welsh rebels”.
One of the last Abbots, Thomas Pennant (1481 – 1522), transformed the fortunes of the Abbey by encouraging wealthy visitors and charging them to stay whilst they visited St Winefride’s Holy Well. The Abbey was recorded as having a scriptorium, which is a special room dedicated to writing and copying manuscripts. In the 15th century the Welsh poet Gutun Owain was based there and was responsible for writing a portion of the Black Book of Basingwerk. When Thomas Pennant married and fathered children he was no longer allowed to be a monk. Eventually his son Nicholas became Basingwerk’s last Abbot in the 1520s.
Nicholas foresaw the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536 and gifted land and buildings to his family. The buildings were stripped and the materials were used to repair other churches, including some in Ireland. In 1923 Basingwerk Abbey and its lands were placed under the guardianship of the state and some conservation work took place. It is now owned by Cadw.
Activity 1

Abbey Architect

Abbeys like Basingwerk were made up of lots of different buildings and spaces including the cloister, the refectory and most importantly the church. Pod needs your help to work out where the church is and what shape it is by becoming an Abbey Architect. It is important that you take your time, measure everything correctly and work as a team.

Instructions:

Use the graph paper (Appendix 1) to mark out the shape of the church.

- Locate the Church section of the Abbey.
- Start at the cross marked on the graph paper and measure each wall of the church section of the Abbey using a measuring tape.
- Mark your findings on the graph paper.
- Each square represents two metres.

Advanced Architect

- Include any interior features by measuring from the interior wall to the feature. Mark your findings on the graph paper.
- What have you found?

Equipment

- Copies of Appendix 1
- Pencils
- Clipboards
- Measuring Tapes
- Rulers

Subjects

- Maths
- History
- RE
- Geography

Skills

- Investigation
- Communication
- Observation
- Mapping

Answer:

On completion the shape on the graph paper should resemble that of a cross.

Advanced Answer:

Columns and tiled areas.

Starting Point
Activity 2

Feature Finder

Basingwerk Abbey is made up of different types of arches, doorways, pillars, fireplaces and special features. Pod needs to learn all about these features as he trains as a monk. Help Pod by finding all the special features and note down any interesting things you spot along the way that you can share.

Instructions:

Younger Groups

• Use the numbered map to find the 11 special features (appendix 2A page 1).
• Mark the number from the map in the box under each special feature when you have found it (appendix 2A page 2).

Answers

Drain=9, Fireplace=8, Cupboard=7, Doorway=5, Beam Hole=11, Tiles=10, Windows=2, Pillars=4, Church Columns=3, Kitchen Hatch=6

Older Groups

• Find the 11 special features as you explore Basingwerk Abbey.
• Mark where you have found them on the map (appendix 2B page 1).
• Write down by the photos (appendix 2B page 2) what you think the special feature is and any interesting facts (what it is made from, what shape it is)

Answers

1=Drain, 2=Fireplace, 3=Cupboard, 4=Doorway, 5=Beam Hole, 6=Tiles, 7=Windows, 8=Pillars, 9=Church Columns, 10=Kitchen Hatch 11=Day Steps

Equipment

• Copies of Appendix 2A or Appendix 2B
• Pencils
• Clipboards

Subjects

• Maths
• RE
• History

Skills

• Investigation
• Communication
• Observation

Feature Finder
ACTIVITY 3

POWER PLAY

The Abbey was made up of lots of different types of monks, from the Abbot to the Infirmary. Important people would also have visited the Abbey in medieval times including King Henry V and pilgrims who stayed at the Abbey when coming to visit St Winefride's Well. Help Pod to get to know all the different roles the other monks have and work out who is the most important, what jobs they do and help him decide what type of monk he will be when he is a fully trained monk. As a novice monk Pod should know all this information.

INSTRUCTIONS:

On site

- Use the character information from Appendix 3 and take on the characters to create a role play of the individuals who lived and worked at the Abbey.

- Use the map of Basingwerk Abbey to imagine which rooms they would be in, what they would be doing and who they would talk to.

Back At School

- Working in teams use the list of characters from Appendix 3 to create your own game

- List what type of attributes and qualities each person would have had and choose five (for example Knowledge, Wealth, Power, Status)

- Score each character on a scale of 1 – 100.

- Make your own cards using the template for each character including a picture (You can draw each one individually or you can create your game on the computer)

- Try out your game:
- Shuffle the cards and deal them out to the players.
- Taking it in turns each player on their turn must choose an attribute to compare with the others and the person with the highest score wins the card from the other person.
- The person with the most cards at the end wins.

- Use these cards for other activities including drama activities, creative writing, poetry and story telling

EQUIPMENT

- COPIES OF APPENDIX 3
- PENCILS
- PAPER
- COLOURING PENCILS
- COMPUTER

SUBJECTS

- ENGLISH
- ICT
- RE

SKILLS

- INVESTIGATION
- COMMUNICATION
- OBSERVATION
- READING
- WRITING
- ORACY

POWER PLAY
Since Medieval times people have been writing tales about the Abbey. These were passed down over the years and help us learn more about life at the Abbey and about the people who visited. Some of these tales included ghost stories. Find out and investigate these stories to report back how they can help Pod learn about Basingwerk.

INSTRUCTIONS:

In School

• Choose one of the tales that are listed in appendix 4
• Write a play based on this story set at the Abbey
• (Visit the site if needed to pick which rooms you will use or use the map provided)

On Site

• Use the Abbey as your stage!

EQUIPMENT

• Copies of Appendix 4
• Paper
• Pencil
• Props
• Costumes

SUBJECTS

• English

SKILLS

• Investigation
• Communication
• Observation
• Reading
• Writing
• Oracy
MINI MASONs

The Abbey is made up of many different shapes from the carved arches to the rectangular bricks. Basingwerk Abbey was built over four hundred years with buildings added as time went on. The monks would have helped with instructing what needed to be built. Help Pod discover the different shapes and materials used so he can help with the building.

INSTRUCTIONS:

On Site

• Explore the Abbey using the map from Appendix 5
• Take photos, notes and measurements of the different shapes and building materials you can see

Back At School

Build your own Abbey.
You could use:
• Lego
• Wooden blocks
• Paper
• Card
• Minecraft

EQUIPMENT

• Map of the Abbey (Appendix 5)
• Cameras
• Paper
• Pencil
• Measuring Tape
• Material to build the Abbey

SUBJECTS

• ICT
• Design & Technology
• Maths
• Art

SKILLS

• Investigation
• Communication
• Observation
• Photography
Sacred geometry was important in medieval times and was used to design and construct religious structures such as churches, altars and temples. It was the belief that shapes were sacred. Cistercian monks, like Pod, learnt all about these evocative secret shapes and used them in their buildings. Help Pod to learn all about one of these shapes called ‘The Vesica Piscis.’ Using this shape help Pod make the basis of a new statue.

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

**In School**

- Using the Compasses, draw a circle of any size with the centre of this circle as point A
- Choose any point on the circumference of this circle as Point B and without changing the compass points distance draw another circle from this point
- The space included within both circles is called the Vesica Piscis
- To create a triangle draw a line from point A to point B and then from point A and B to a point where the circle circumference overlaps (C)

**On Site**

- Try to replicate the creation of the Vesica Piscis on a much larger scale in the grounds of the Abbey
- Figure out a way to make the most accurate representation you can using rope and anything else you can think of

**EQUIPMENT**

- Copies of Appendix 6
- Compasses
- Pencil
- Rope

**SUBJECTS**

- Maths
- Art
- RE
- History

**SKILLS**

- Investigation
- Communication
- Observation
- Numeracy
- Angles
- Measuring

**Extra In School**

Use what you have learnt about the Vesica Piscis to try and recreate the Flower of Life
Activity 7

Signs and Ciphers

The monks had to follow a number of rules. One very important rule of being a monk is that you cannot speak. Monks would come up with their own secret sign language to communicate with each other. Help Pod to be able to communicate with the other monks without speaking.

Instructions:

In School
- Learn the sign language Alphabet
- Learn the Monks secret number ciphers
- Work out the ciphers for the numbers provided

On Site
- Use the sheet (Appendix 7) to order food for a feast for the King
- Use the Sheet (Appendix 7) to apply the cipher numbers to a letter of the alphabet and send your own code to your partner from one side of the Abbey to the other without it being intercepted and decoded

Equipment
- Copies of appendix 7
- Pencil
- Clipboard

Subjects
- English
- Maths

Skills
- Investigation
- Communication
- Observation
- Reading
- Writing
- Oracy

604 = the symbol for 600 combined with the symbol for 4
2012 = The symbol for 2000, the symbol for 10 and the symbol for 2
7538 = The symbol for 7000, the symbol for 500, the symbol for 30 and the symbol for 8
Many artists over the years have tried to capture Basingwerk Abbey. This is a very important way to learn about what the Abbey and the surrounding area looked like over time. Help Pod to create his own art work of the Abbey.

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

**Art ideas**

- Collect natural materials from the woodland and around the Abbey to create a Natural collage on the ground in the Abbey from sticks, leaves etc. Take a picture to take back to school and leave your art work to decompose naturally.

- Use the art work provided to do your own painting or drawing of the Abbey. *(Appendix 8)*

- Finish the painting that has been started. *(Appendix 8)*

**EQUIPMENT**

- Copies of appendix 8
- Pencils
- Paints
- Colouring pencils
- Clipboard

**SUBJECTS**

- Art
- Science

**SKILLS**

- Investigation
- Communication
- Observation
- Creativity
Use the graph paper to mark out the shape of the church

- Locate the Church section of the Abbey
- Start at the cross marked on the graph paper and measure each wall of the church section of the Abbey using a measuring tape.
- Mark your findings on the graph paper
- Each square represents two metres (round to nearest metre)
• Use the numbered map below to find the 11 special features

• When you reach a number find which feature you can see from the photos and mark that photo with the number
Feature Finder A, Photos

- Drain
- Fireplace
- Cupboard
- Doorway
- Beam Hole
- Tiles
- Windows
- Pillars
- Church Columns
- Kitchen Hatch
- Day Steps

Appendix 2A
- Find the 11 special features from the photos as you explore Basingwerk Abbey.
- Mark where you have found them on the map
- Write down what you think the special feature is and any interesting facts (what it is made from, what shape it is)
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</table>
Use the character information below and take on the characters to create a role play of the individuals who lived and worked at the Abbey.

Use the map of Basingwerk Abbey to imagine which rooms they would be in, what they would be doing and who they would talk to.

**ABBOT**
Head of the Abbey. He had absolute power over the monks and they had to obey his orders. To be elected as Abbot, he had to be at least 30 years old, of good family and have been a monk for 10 years.

**THOMAS PENNANT - Abbot 1481-1522**
One of the last Abbots, he was renowned for his generosity and restored the fortunes of the Abbey. He made Basingwerk a centre for Welsh poets. Although he wasn’t supposed to, he got married and had a number of children. His son Nicholas Pennant was the last Abbot of Basingwerk Abbey.

**MONK**
There were different types of Abbeys with different rules, called Orders. The Order at Basingwerk were called the Cistercians. Their clothes, called Habits, were different from other Orders of monks. The Cistercians chose to use undyed white wool for their Habits so they became known as the “white monks”. (Benedictine monks had black robes and so were known as the “black monks”.) They took a vow of silence. Their day was divided into worship, reading and manual labour. The Abbey bells sounded to tell them when the next activity was to begin.

**NOVICE MONK**
This is a trainee monk. He is often the second or third sons of a rich family, with no prospects of inheriting the family fortune. Some even joined the Order as children and were called “Oblates”. They first had to spend time doing basic tasks like cooking, cleaning and looking after the other monks. This is called a Postulant. After this he can wear the Habit and begin his training. Girls could not become monks. The Novices had to successfully complete their training and prove they could be a good monk by making a promise to obey the rules, called Vows.

**CANTOR**
The monk who led the choir. Monks like to sing together as part of their prayer. It is a particular type of singing without music or instruments called the Gregorian chant.

**ALMONER**
The monk who welcomed pilgrims and who gave out money, called Alms, to the poor and sick.

**INFIRMARIAN**
The monk in charge of the infirmary. This is like a hospital or rest home where people could come to get healed or for monks who were too sick or old to take part in Abbey life.

**SACRIST**
He is like a caretaker and looks after the Abbey buildings, the ceremonial robes and vessels and has the important job of safekeeping the Abbey books.

**LAY BROTHER**
They were responsible for the manual work in and around the Abbey, such as farming and growing food. Although they took Vows they were not the same as the other monks and did not have the same status or rights. The lay brothers could live at the Abbey but they were only allowed to use certain areas and had a separate doorway into the church.

**PILGRIM**
Pilgrims are people who travel to a place for religious reasons. Most people in medieval times would make a pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. Sometimes people visited these places to be healed. One of these special places was St Winefride’s Well near Holywell, which has been a religious shrine for over a thousand years. The Abbey was set up here at Basingwerk to look after pilgrims and give them somewhere to stay.

**HENRY V KING OF ENGLAND 1413-1422**
After King Henry defeated the French at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, he made a thanksgiving visit on foot from Shrewsbury to St Winifred’s Well near Holywell.

**HERBALIST**
Without modern medicine and hospitals, the herbalist was essential to the health of the monks. He used herbs and plants from the ‘physic’ garden at the Abbey, which was stocked with the most common and useful plants to create medicines to cure complaints and illnesses.

**TUDUR ALED (1465-1525) MEDIEVAL WELSH POET**
He was born in Llansannan, Denbighshire. He is known particularly for poems in honour of noblemen as well as love poems. One of his finest poems, a cywydd, was composed for Thomas Pennant, Abbot of Basingwerk.

**GUTUN OWAIN (1451-1498) MEDIEVAL WELSH POET**
One of the most talented Welsh bards of the late 15th century. He often visited Basingwerk Abbey and composed a poem in honour of the Abbot Thomas Pennant. He is famous for writing a portion of the Black Book of Basingwerk, which is now preserved in the National Library of Wales.
• Use the character information and take on the characters to create a role play of the individuals who lived and worked at the Abbey.

• Use the map of Basingwerk Abbey below to imagine which rooms they would be in, what they would be doing and who they would talk to.
King Henry V

Kindness: 64
Knowledge: 56
Wealth: 100
Power: 96
Free Will: 47
Choose one of the tales below
• Write a play based on this story set at the Abbey
• Use the map provided to pick which rooms you will use

Basingwerk’s history goes back nearly a thousand years to 1132, so it is no surprise that there have been many stories and myths told about the site. There have been many sightings of dark shadowy figures seen around the Abbey.

The Floating Monk
One of these sightings was of a monk floating in the air on which would have been the upper storey of the Abbey. This monk was said to be colourful and had what was described as a ‘gentle glow’. Reports of an unnerving presence are plentiful and it is told that people would run for their lives after such scary experiences.

The Vanishing Monk
One legend says that a 12th century Basingwerk Abbey monk was lured into a nearby wood by the singing of a nightingale. He thought he had only been listening for a short while, but when he returned, the Abbey was in ruins. When he realised he had been gone for hundreds of years, he crumbled to dust. Another version tells of the Monk being held in a trance for several hundred years. Upon returning to the ruined Abbey he was confused and when touching the food offered to him he turned to dust.

The Future Foretold
Two centuries before the dissolution of the Abbey, a Welsh seer, Robin Ddu (“Robin the Dark”), predicted that the roof on the refectory would eventually go to another church. Many years later, during the dissolution when the Abbey was sold, parts of the roof were taken apart and taken to St Mary’s Church in Cilcain. So Robin Ddu’s prediction had become true!

Secret Buried Treasure
A woman from Holywell, living in London, could not sleep; as she was frightened each night by some terrific vision, calling upon her to go to Basingwerk Abbey, where, under a certain stone, in a certain place, she was to find something of value. Unable to rest, she went to Basingwerk. She told her story to the land owners and asked for permission to make the search to find the mysterious thing she had dreamed of for years. But they would not give her permission to dig. However, this did not deter her. She kept looking for the stone and eventually she knew she had found the right spot from her dream. She took a stone mason to help her lift the stone and opened it to reveal a secret treasure. The next morning she returned to London, taking the treasure with her and never told anybody what it was.
- Explore the Abbey using the map below
- Take photos, notes and measurements of the different shapes and building materials you can see ready for when you build the Abbey back at school
Using the Compasses, draw a circle of any size with the centre of this circle as point A (See Example 1)
Choose any point on the circumference of this circle as Point B and without changing the compass points distance draw another circle from this point
The space included within both circles is called the Vesica Piscis
To create a triangle draw a line from point A to point B and then from point A and B to a point where the circle circumference overlaps (C) (See Example 2)
- Learn the sign language alphabet (Below)
- Have a go at spelling out your own name using the sign language alphabet

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### Signs and Ciphers

- Learn the number ciphers (Below)
- Follow and understand the examples
- Turn the numbers provided below into ciphers

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#### Examples
- **604** = the symbol for 600 combined with the symbol for 4
- **2012** = The symbol for 2000, the symbol for 10 and the symbol for 2

#### Turn the following numbers into ciphers

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Signs and Ciphers

- Use the sign language Alphabet to order food for a feast for the King.
- Use the numbers and ciphers sheet to apply the cipher numbers to a letter of the alphabet and send your own code to your partner from one side of the Abbey to the other without it being intercepted and decoded.

Orders For the Feast:
- Pork
- Cabbage
- Rabbit
- Venison
- Carrots
- Peas
- Mutton

There are conspiracies to end the King's reign. Send a message to his court using the secret ciphers of the monks.
RESOURCE CREDITS

DESIGN - WILLIAM EVERS-SWINDELL
MONK ARTWORK - GARVAN
PHOTOGRAPHY - EMILY HODGSON
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POD THE MONK - WILLIAM EVERS-SWINDELL
Stern Monk - WILLIAM EVERS-SWINDELL
Girlfriend of Pod - LORNA KERNAHAN
VISITOR - SARAH PEVELY