How did the Reformation affect Westminster Abbey?

The Tudor period was a turbulent time for faith. Beginning with the dissolution of the monasteries, individual monarchs guided the faith of the country from Catholicism to Protestantism, ending with Elizabeth I's 'via media'.

Using Westminster Abbey as a case study, explore:

- Monastic life before the dissolution
- A primary source from the Abbey showing the impact of the Reformation
- What happened after the dissolution of the monasteries
- Change and continuity in the Abbey in relation to burials, coronations and pilgrimage

Task

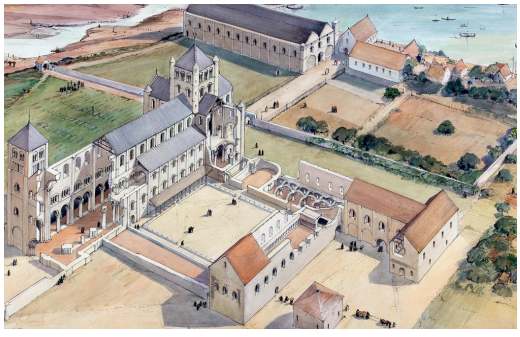
- Work through this document to build up evidence about the ways that Westminster Abbey was affected by the Reformation. What changed and what stayed the same?
- Discuss the question at the bottom of the page in pairs or in small groups, and note down the key points on either side of the argument.
- Use these notes, and the evidence you have gathered, to plan your answer to the big question at the end.

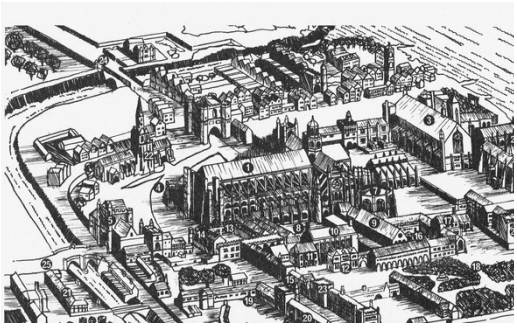
10 mark question

How did the Reformation affect Westminster Abbey?

Westminster Abbey

- It was founded in 960AD as a Catholic Benedictine monastery.
- In the 1200s it was rebuilt in the new Gothic style.
- By the 1500s, it was one of the wealthiest monasteries in England.
- Today, it is a working Anglican church in central London.



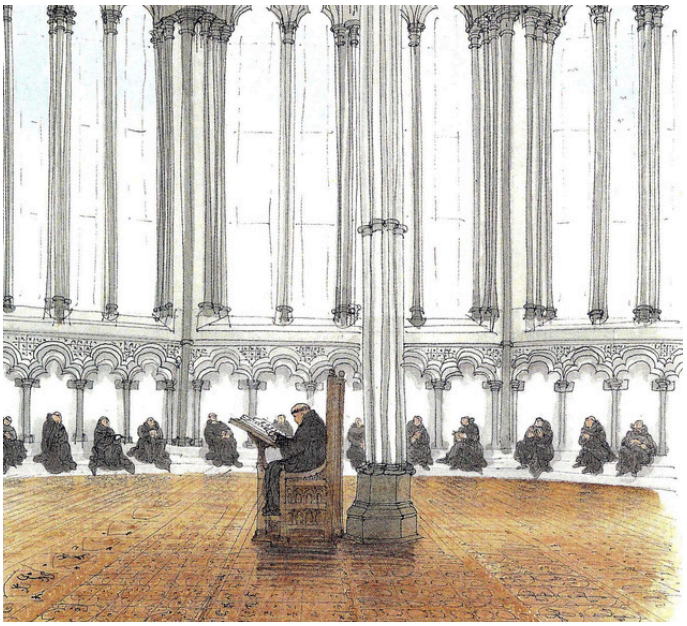




Reconstruction drawing of Norman monastery; drawing of 16th century Abbey; Westminster Abbey today.

Before the dissolution of the monasteries

The monks of Westminster began the cycle of daily prayer with Matins at midnight and ended with Compline around 8.00pm. Every morning the monks gathered in the Abbey's Chapter House to hear the Rule of St Benedict read aloud before 'Ora et Labora' (prayer and work) began.





The number of monks fluctuated but typically there were between 40 and 60, led by the Abbot. The Abbot of Westminster was answerable directly to the Pope in Rome, but he also acted as a special advisor to the king and host to the king's visiting dignitaries. This was partly due to the proximity of the Abbey to the Palace of Westminster and partly due to its unique status as the coronation church.

Between 1517 and 1519 Henry VIII completed two massive building projects at the Abbey: the stunning Lady Chapel at the east end, and the nave of the main church at the west end. The Tudor rose is proudly displayed in both. With so much money and attention focused on it, the Abbey's future must have felt secure.



Question: To what extent did the wealthy monasteries (such as Westminster Abbey) pose a threat to the authority of the monarch?

Looking at a primary source from Westminster Abbey

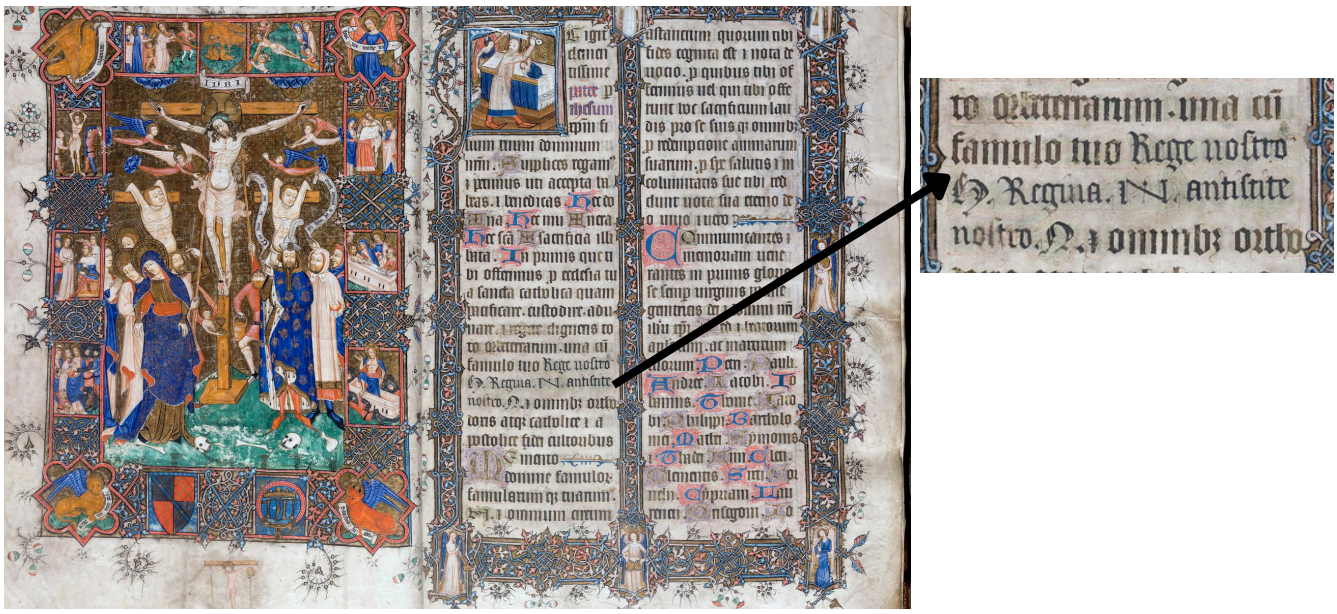
Ruined monasteries can be found all over the country. Westminster Abbey survived, but we can still see the impact of the dissolution of the monasteries through an illustrated manuscript found at the Abbey - the Litlyngton Missal.

- The Litlyngton Missal is a 14th century illustrated service book.
- It was made to sit on the Abbey's High Altar, for use by the Abbot and monks.
- It was handmade - from the parchment paper to the stunning hand-painted illuminations.
- It was written in Latin.



Spot the change

Nine lines up on the left-hand column of this page, you may notice that the original text has been rubbed away and a scribe has overwritten something in a different hand. The word Pope has been scrubbed out and the words Rege (from Rex, meaning King) and Regina (Queen) have been added instead.



Question: 'Changing the word 'Pope' to 'Rege' was a purely political move'. Discuss.

After the dissolution of the monasteries

The Supremacy Act of 1534 granted Henry VIII the title Supreme Head of the Church. This meant that the authority of the Pope was replaced by the monarch.



It became common practice (as with the Litlyngton Missal) for readers and scribes to erase references to the Pope in manuscripts and printed books. Prayers would have been said at every mass and to most non-readers the prayers would have been learned by rote. Many would have accepted the slight change in the liturgical response without giving it much thought. But what looks at first glance like a tiny change in the text would have huge ramifications for centuries to come as the 600-year-old tradition of monastic life in England came crashing down.

How did things change at Westminster Abbey after the dissolution of the monasteries?

On 16th January 1540, the 24 monks of Westminster Abbey, led by Abbot William Boston, processed into the Chapter House and signed their names on the Deed of Surrender, handing over control of the Abbey to Henry VIII's ministers. The monastery closed and the monks were dispersed in an act that was repeated right across the country's monastic foundations. Many monasteries were physically pulled down.



Why did Westminster Abbey survive?

We don't know the whole reason. We suspect the building survived probably because of its status as the coronation church - Henry VIII was crowned in the Abbey, like monarchs before him. It's also a place of royal burial, with Henry VIII's parents, Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, both buried there.

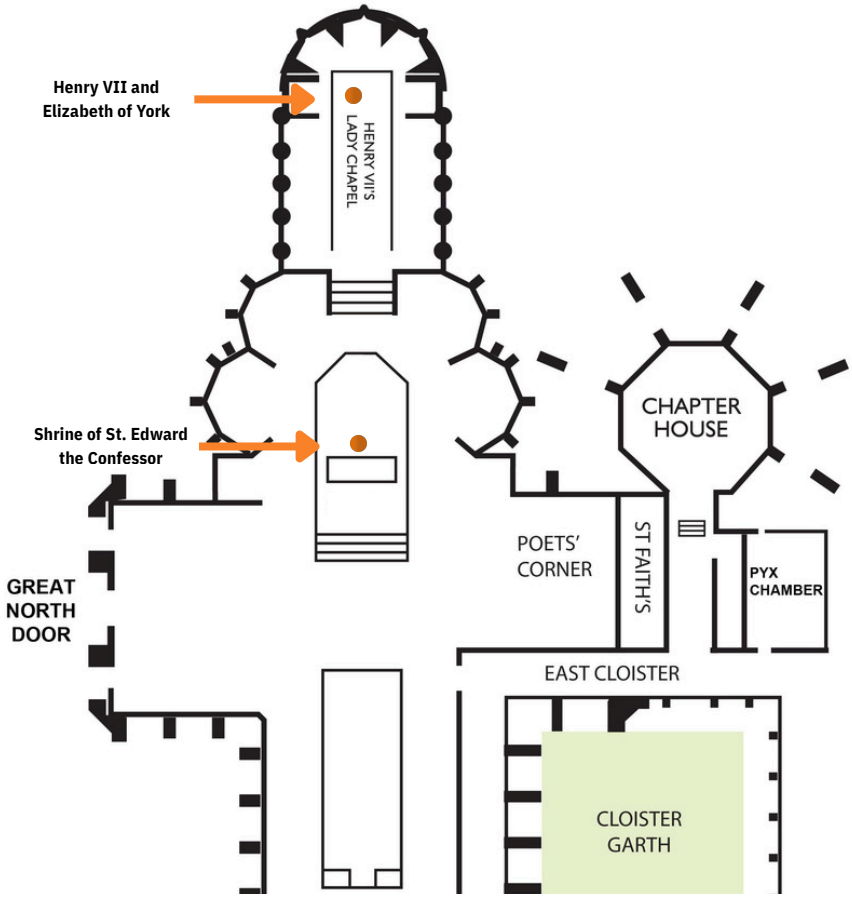


Question: Who would have been impacted by the closure of Westminster Abbey in 1540?

Burials - change and continuity

After building the first stone Abbey, King Edward the Confessor was buried there in 1066. In 1161 he was canonised (made a saint). The Abbey became the royal mausoleum, with the most prestigious place for royal burial around St Edward's Shrine. Many of the most famous medieval kings are buried there; Edward I, Richard II and Henry V to name but a few. By the late 14th century, there was no more room for royal burials around St Edward.





When Henry Tudor became king, he was forced to seek an alternative final resting place. Henry VII decided to build a new Lady Chapel at the east end of Westminster Abbey that would surpass the glories of the 13th century church in terms of beauty and architectural splendour, where he would be buried with his wife Elizabeth of York. Their tomb is situated directly in line with the Shrine of St Edward, as a carefully managed piece of Tudor propaganda to show the visual line of continuity.

While Henry VIII chose to be buried elsewhere, Westminster Abbey is the burial place for his children, Edward VI, Mary I and Elizabeth I, among with other Tudor nobility, including his fourth wife Anne of Cleeves.



Question: To what extent did Henry VII achieve his ambition for Westminster Abbey to be the final resting place of the new Tudor dynasty?

Coronations - change and continuity

Westminster Abbey has been the site of coronations since 1066. Explore how this Christian service was influenced by the faith and political priorities of Tudor monarchs.

Henry VII - 1485

- In 1485, Henry Tudor became king by defeating Richard III at Bosworth.
- Despite being crowned at the battle site, it was essential for Henry to have a formal coronation at Westminster Abbey to help legitimise his claim.
- Henry was careful to ensure that his coronation took place before his marriage to Elizabeth of York to avoid being seen as reliant on his wife for his authority.

Henry VIII - 1509

- Henry VIII was given a full Catholic coronation ceremony alongside his new wife, Catherine of Aragon.

Break with Rome

Edward VI - 1547

- He was just nine years old when he succeeded his father and was crowned.
- As a minor, his uncle Edward Seymour (later Duke of Somerset) became Protector, ruling on his behalf.
- During his reign, England moved towards Protestantism.

Mary I - 1553

- She didn't sit on the Coronation Chair, used in coronations since 1308, believing it had been 'polluted' by Edward VI.
- A new supply of coronation oil was made to avoid 'tainted' oil used by her Protestant brother.
- Ceremony conducted by the Bishop of Windsor, as the Archbishop of Canterbury was imprisoned in the Tower of London.

Elizabeth I - 1559

- She insisted Gospel readings were in English and Latin - a 'via media' approach.
- Ceremony conducted by the Bishop of Carlisle. There was no Archbishop of Canterbury at the time of her coronation, and the Archbishop of York refused.
- It was the country's last Catholic coronation ceremony.

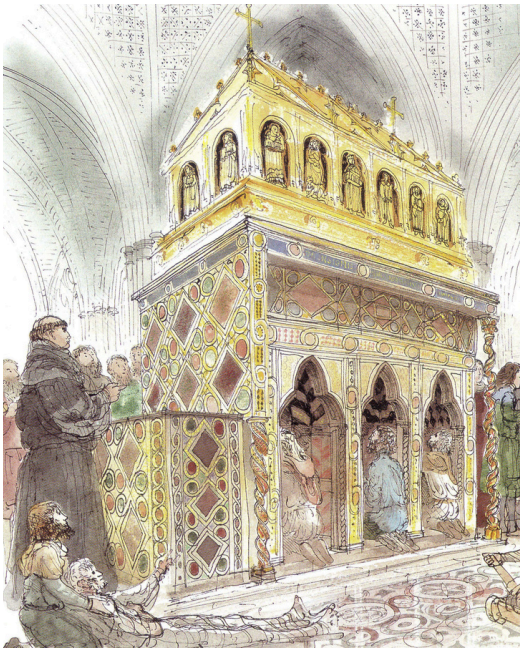
Question: To what extent did Elizabeth's policy of 'via media' secure a lasting religious stability in England?

Pilgrimage - change and continuity

With different monarchs having different beliefs and priorities, explore how changes in Tudor faith impacted pilgrimage at Westminster Abbey.

Before

St Edward the Confessor was canonised (made a saint) in 1161. In the 13th century, his body was moved to a new golden shrine. This became an important place of pilgrimage during the medieval period, supported by the Benedictine monks who lived at the Abbey.



Henry VIII

During the Reformation, shrines and holy relics across England were destroyed as part of the new Protestant reaction to Catholic practices. The monks of Westminster must have foreseen this turn of events because they hid the bones of St Edward just before the monastery was dissolved under Henry VIII's orders in 1540.

Edward VI

As a Protestant, Edward VI continued his father's efforts to strip the country of relics and shrines. The practice of pilgrimage was officially prohibited, as Protestantism focused on God rather than holy places.

Mary I

As a Catholic, pilgrimage was a very important part of her worship. During her five-year reign, she reopened Westminster Abbey as a Benedictine monastery and restored the Shrine of St Edward. His bones were brought back and reburied inside the Abbey.

Elizabeth I

Elizabeth's policy of finding the 'via media', or middle way, between Protestantism and Catholicism meant that although she was responsible for finally closing the monastery at Westminster, she did permit St Edward's Shrine to remain.

After

Pilgrimage continued at Westminster Abbey; today the shrine is open twice a day for prayer. Pilgrims still visit and pray in St Edward's Shrine. In October, during Edwartide, the Abbey celebrates the life of St Edward the Confessor with special services and a day of pilgrimage.

Question: Despite religious change, pilgrimage remains at the heart of Westminster Abbey. What does this tell us about the impact of the Reformation on everyday faith?

10-mark question

How did the Reformation affect Westminster Abbey?

Plan your response:

Introduction
Which points are you going to talk about and how will they answer the question?

Point 1 using PEEL:

Point:

Evidence:

Explain:

Link:

Point 2 using PEEL:

Point:

Evidence:

Explain:

Link:

Conclusion
What is your answer to the question and how will you justify this?