Westminster Abbey
Learning

Tudor objects in focus – teachers' notes

Thank you for downloading this resource. We hope that it will be a useful teaching tool in your classroom.

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This resource poses a series of questions to help students explore five Tudor objects from the Westminster Abbey collection. The questions are split into KS1, KS2 and KS3 but can be re-grouped depending on the class's ability. These teachers' notes provide further information and context for each object as well as all the questions presented in the resource.

The monk's shoe

This monk's shoe dates from about 1400 and was found in the Westminster precincts during excavation works. This leather, front-laced boot would have served as simple, practical footwear for all aspects of monks' work, from worshipping inside the church to farming the land outside.

Westminster Abbey functioned as a Benedictine monastery for over 500 years until it was dissolved by King Henry VIII in 1540. The monks that lived at Westminster Abbey would have lived a simple life dedicated to serving God. They would have prayed eight times a day and obeyed rules of obedience and poverty – they were not allowed to own any property. The monks would have received a yearly allowance of winter and summer shoes which were made in workshops at the Abbey.

KS1

- Does this look like anything you own or wear?
- How do you think this feels to touch?
- Who do you think might have worn this?

KS2

- What is this object?
- How old do you think it is and why?
- What kind of person might have worn this? What might their life have been like?

KS3

- How does this compare to your shoes? What is different about it?
- How old do you think it is and why?

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- What kind of person might have worn this shoe and for what purpose? For work, travel, special occasions?

Essex ring

This ring is believed to have been given by Queen Elizabeth I to her favourite courtier, Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex. Queen Elizabeth I distributed portrait miniatures to her closest friends as a sign of her favour. People wore these miniatures to demonstrate their loyalty to her.

The ring is made from gold. The inside is enamelled with blue flowers, probably forget-me-nots, on a gold ground. A ring is both an intimate and a public piece of jewellery. Only the wearer knows what is engraved on the inside, but everyone can see from the outside.

The story goes that Elizabeth gave Essex the ring and told him that if he ever found himself in trouble, he should send her the ring with its message ‘forget-me-not’ and she would help him. The relationship fell apart over time with Essex finally attempting to overthrow the queen and her government. While awaiting execution in the Tower of London, in one last desperate bid for survival, he managed to smuggle his ring out of the Tower in the hope that it would reach the queen. Whether she would have helped him or not we will never know, as the ring fell into enemy hands and never reached her.

KS1

- What is this object?
- What colours, patterns and details can you see?
- Who might have worn it?

KS2

- What colours, patterns and details can you see?
- Do you think the owner was rich or poor? Do you think the owner was important?
- Who might have made this and why?

KS3

- Does it look old or new? Are there any clues to tell us when this might have been made?
- Who do you think the portrait depicts and why?
- Who might have made this? Why might someone would make or wear jewellery with someone's face on it?

Henry VIII’s charter

This document is Henry VIII's charter establishing Westminster Abbey as a cathedral church, dated 5th August 1542. The illuminated initial 'H' for Henry contains an illustration of this event. Dean William Benson, along with other Abbey priests, kneel to receive the charter from the king who sits upon a throne, holding the orb in his other hand. The king's courtiers surround him.

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William Benson became Abbot of the monastery at Westminster Abbey in 1532. In 1534, the 'Act of Supremacy' was passed into law which made King Henry VIII the Supreme Head of the Church of England and broke all ties with the Catholic Church in Rome. This Act had a significant impact on Christian practice in England. One of the most significant changes was the dissolution (shutting down) of the monasteries in England. The monastery at Westminster Abbey was dissolved in 1540, but rather than destroy the church and sell off the land as was happening to most Abbey churches, Westminster Abbey was included in a group of leading monasteries to be converted into new cathedrals. Benson went from Abbot to Dean and many of the monks became priests.

KS1

- What colours, patterns and shapes can you see?
- What different kinds of people can you spot in the image? What are they all wearing?
- What might be happening in the image?

KS2

- What do you think this object might be? What is its purpose?
- Who do you think the person in the centre of the image is and why?
- What might be happening in the image?

KS3

- Who do you think the person in the centre of the image is and why?
- Compare the figures at the back of the image to those kneeling at the front. Think about their clothes and size. What does it tell us about their place at the Tudor court?
- Why might this document have been made? What important event or decision was it made for?

St Margaret's Church East window

This stained-glass window stands in the east end of St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey. It is made from pre-Reformation Flemish glass, created between 1515 and 1526. However, it was not installed in St Margaret's Church until 1758 after being moved from New Hall in Essex. The origins of the window are debated but it is believed that it was made for the chapel at New Hall which was bought by Henry VIII in 1519. In the years following he spent several thousand pounds on its restoration, and it is suggested this window was commissioned to commemorate the wedding of King Henry VIII and Queen Catherine of Aragon.

The figures of Henry and Catherine kneel in the bottom left and right corners of the window, flanking a large and detailed depiction of the crucifixion. The original face of Catherine was replaced in 1906.

We do not know how the window survived after the couple's divorce and throughout the Reformation, or why it was specifically chosen to take such a prominent place in St Margaret's Church.

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KS1

- What is this object? What is it made from?
- What are the people in the image wearing? What objects can you see around them?
- Who might these people be?

KS2

- What is this object? What is it made from?
- Who do you think these people are? When did they live? How can we tell?
- What kind of building might these windows belong to? Why might these people be pictured in a window?

KS3

- What do the clothes and objects around these figures tell us about them?
- Thinking about other images of King Henry VIII, does this image look the same? Why might it be different?
- Why might these people be pictured in a window? What kind of building might these windows belong to?

Elizabeth I's tomb

This is the tomb of Queen Elizabeth I inside Westminster Abbey. The large white marble monument was erected by King James VI/I. Elizabeth's coffin was moved to the vault below this monument in 1606 and placed on top of the coffin of her half-sister, Mary I.

The effigy (statue) resembles portraits of the queen in old age. She is shown wearing traditional Tudor clothing with a large, gilded ruff. She is wearing a crown and holding an orb and sceptre – these are modern replacements from the 1970s as the originals were stolen centuries ago. The effigy is surrounded by statues of lions, symbols of royalty, power and courage. These are a visual reminder of her strength as a ruler and her commitment to the throne.

The railing around the tomb is another modern replacement and is covered in Tudor symbols such as the Tudor rose, fleur de lis and portcullis, as well as ER which stands for Elizabeth Regina (Queen Elizabeth).

KS1

- What is this object?
- What is the person wearing and holding?
- Who might this person be?

KS2

- What is this object? What material is it made from?

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- Who do you think this person is? How can we tell from what she is wearing and holding?
- Who might have made this and why?

KS3

- What is this object? Who might have made it and why?
- What is the person wearing and holding? Why might the creator have chosen to include these specific objects?
- Where might this statue be? What kind of building might it be inside?

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