
Westminster Abbey

Learning



Tudors trail – teachers’ notes

Thank you for downloading this resource. We hope that it will be a useful teaching tool during your visit to Westminster Abbey.

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Tudor Family Tree



The dates on the family tree refer to the reign of each monarch.

From 1455 to 1487, England was gripped by a civil war between the House of York (white rose emblem) and the House of Lancaster (red rose emblem). In 1485, Henry Tudor claimed the English throne and then defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth, becoming Henry VII, and the first Tudor monarch. Upon his marriage to Elizabeth of York, he united York and Lancaster and created the Tudor rose as his emblem. Westminster Abbey was still being constructed during this time, and Henry ensured that the church was adorned with his emblem which can still be seen throughout the building, even in the Abbey’s coat of arms.

Henry died in 1509, and the throne passed to his son. Henry VIII is famous for having six wives, and three children, who all succeeded him as monarchs. The last of these, Elizabeth I, died without any children and the throne passed to James VI of Scotland, who became James I of England.

1) The Great West Door

Enter the Abbey and follow the route to stand with your back to the Great West Door.

What differences might there have been in the Abbey in Tudor times? Think about sounds, sights and smells. **Differences in the Abbey in the Tudor times include the presence of candlelight, side altars, painted stone, relics, incense and monks as well as fewer tombs and not as many visitors.**

At the start of the Tudor period, the Abbey was a Roman Catholic monastery (a place where monks live and worship). It would have been richly decorated with bright colours and gold. There would have been altars to saints around the sides and the smell of incense in the air. It would have been lit by candles so would have seemed quite dark and atmospheric. It would also have been much quieter inside than today.

You might like to remind students that they are standing where all the Tudor kings and queens stood when they came to the Abbey to be crowned.

The present Abbey building was begun in 1254 during the reign of Henry III. The long part of any church is called the nave, getting its name from the Latin *navis*, meaning ‘ship’. This part of the Abbey was completed during the reign of Henry VIII and golden Tudor roses can be seen in the vaulting of the roof. You could ask your students if they can spot any of them on the ceiling.

2) The Coronation Chair

On the right, behind glass, is the Coronation Chair.

It can get busy around the Coronation Chair, so you might want to suggest students look at the chair and then complete the activity where there is a bit more space.

Which of the following Tudors were NOT crowned during this time? **Jane Seymour, Lady Jane Grey, and Philip II of Spain.**

Jane Seymour, Henry VIII's third wife, was not crowned. One reason is possibly because there was plague in London at the time. Katherine of Aragon was crowned alongside her husband and Anne Boleyn was also crowned when she married Henry VIII, but none of his other wives were given this honour.

Lady Jane Grey, the Protestant heir named by Edward VI, was also never crowned. She was only queen for nine days and was executed on the orders of Mary I.

Philip II of Spain, the husband of Mary I and King of Spain, was never crowned King of England. You might like to ask your students why they think this was.

The Coronation Chair was made in 1300-1301. It has been used at the coronation of most monarchs since 1308. However, Mary I (who was Roman Catholic) refused to sit in the Coronation Chair following the coronation of her Protestant brother, Edward VI, believing he had 'tainted' it.

3) The nave

Ask a marshal to let you through the rope.

Why do you think Westminster Abbey was left intact? Revisit this question at the end of your visit.

- **Its importance to the royal family – this is a place of coronations and burials. Henry VII is buried here and his son didn't want to destroy the tombs of his ancestors.**
- **Relics (special objects of religious significance) of Edward the Confessor were kept here and the idea of a saintly king buried in the Abbey appealed to Henry VIII.**
- **The monks of Westminster Abbey didn't resist the closure of the monastery so there was no need to destroy the building as a punishment.**
- **Its location in central London and proximity to the royal palaces made it important.**

The Dissolution of the Monasteries

Henry VIII was married to Katherine of Aragon for 23 years. When the couple did not have a son, Henry tried to have the marriage annulled but the Pope, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, refused to allow it.

Henry decided to form the Church of England, with himself as the Head, and allowed himself to leave Katherine. Everything that had previously belonged to the Roman Catholic Church now belonged to the king, including the wealthy monastery of Westminster.

In 1539, Henry VIII closed down all the monasteries in the country and sent the monks away. This became known as the Dissolution of the Monasteries and many religious houses around the country were completely destroyed.

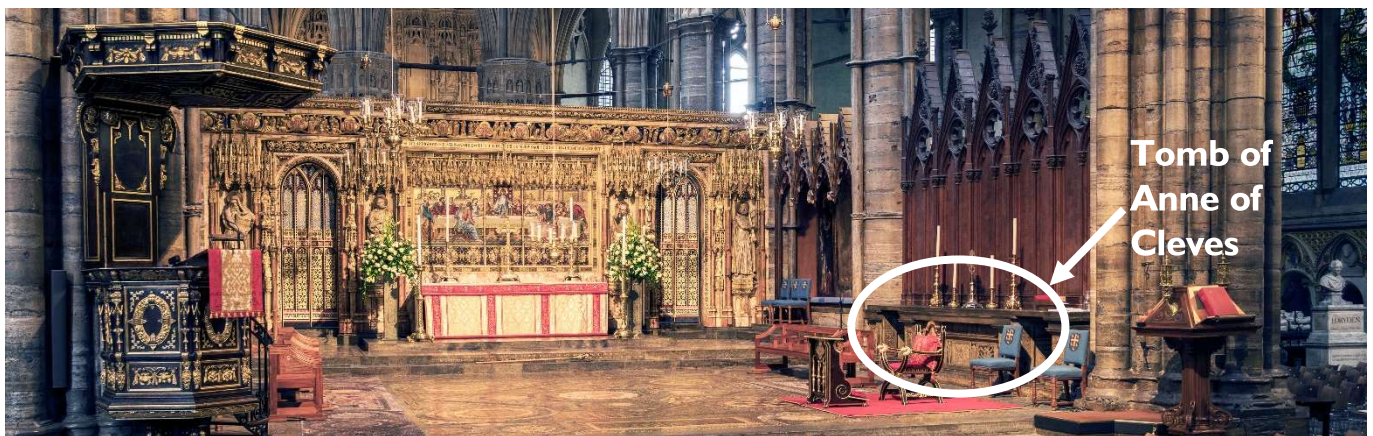
Go through the doorway in the brightly coloured screen ahead to enter the quire.

Today, the choir of Westminster Abbey sits here, made up of children aged between 7 and 13. When monks worshipped here, this is where they sang and prayed.

4) The High Altar

Why do you think she (Anne of Cleves) was the only one of Henry's wives to be buried in the Abbey? **Anne was a good friend to Mary I, in whose reign she died, and was rewarded with a burial at the Abbey. Mary also ordered a magnificent funeral.**

Anne of Cleves was Henry VIII's fourth wife. His marriage to her lasted just a few weeks, but she lived out her life in luxury, known as, "The King's Beloved Sister".



5) The Chapel of St. Michael

Go through the gates on the left and turn through the narrow opening on the left.

What do you think these clothes and the poses of the effigies (figures) were trying to show? **They showed off the riches of the person by displaying their fine, beautiful clothes and jewels. The relaxed pose is used to show that death is not frightening, as a reminder that all of us will die.**

Catherine, Lady St John of Bletso, was buried in Westminster Abbey in March 1615 and only her reclining alabaster effigy remains. She leans her head on her right hand and wears a ruff, stomacher and full skirt.

Leave this area and turn left. Go past the wooden stairs and enter the next chapel on the left.

6) Chapel of St. Paul

How many children did he (Sir John Puckering) have? **Eight: three sons and five daughters.**
How many of them died as children? **Two.**

How can you tell? **They are holding skulls, to represent death.**

Why do you think so many of them died young? **Poor sanitation particularly in childbirth, lack of medical knowledge, dubious or unreliable 'cures' which often made illnesses worse, no vaccinations or antibiotics, malnutrition and starvation following poor harvests.**

The life expectancy in Tudor England was 35 years, with a very high child mortality rate: 25% of children died before their first birthday, and 50% before their tenth.

Leave the chapel and go up the stairs and through the small doorway on the left.

7) The Lady Chapel

It can get crowded around the tomb of Mary I and Elizabeth I, so you might want to ask students the questions as they look closely at the tomb and then complete the activity outside.

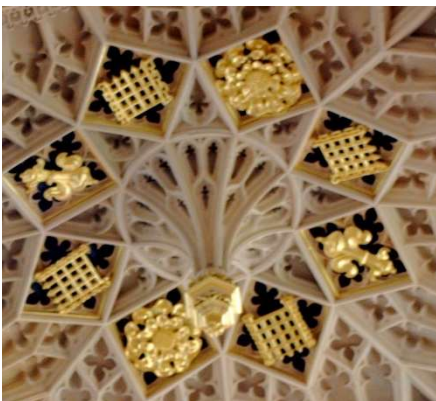
Two women are buried here. What were their names? **Mary I and Elizabeth I.**

You can only see the statue of one of them. Who is it? **Elizabeth I.**

Look carefully at the effigy and describe what she is holding and wearing. **She is holding an orb and sceptre, which are part of the Crown Jewels and are used during coronations. She is also wearing a crown and a necklace of pearls, and is dressed in fine robes.**

Mary and Elizabeth are buried together in the vault under the Lady Chapel. Elizabeth never erected a monument to her sister so what we see today was constructed by James I and only Elizabeth has an effigy. The face of this effigy was based on the death mask made of the queen.

8) Leave this area and turn left into the main part of the Lady Chapel.



Draw three different symbols



Tomb of Henry VII



Greyhound



Look at the floor, can you see another Tudor king buried here? What is the name of the school he founded? **The king buried here is Edward VI. The name of the school he founded is Christ's Hospital.**

9) Leave this area of the Lady Chapel and go through the small door on the left at the top of the stairs.

It can get crowded around the tomb of Margaret Beaufort. You might want to ask students to get close to the tomb as they look closely, so that other visitors can pass around them.

The third tomb at the end of this area is Lady Margaret Beaufort's, the mother of Henry VII. Discuss as a group: What sort of person do you think she was? **She was religious (her hands are held in prayer and she is dressed like a nun). Her bronze effigy suggests she was important. She was also quite old.**

Lady Margaret Beaufort was an intelligent and pious (deeply religious) woman. She founded two Cambridge University colleges, and was a patron of William Caxton, the pioneer of printing.



She attended her grandson Henry VIII's coronation at the Abbey, but was taken ill shortly afterwards and died in the Abbot's house in 1509 at the age of 66.

The other tombs in here are:

- Margaret Douglas – Countess of Lennox, the grandmother of James I.
- Mary, Queen of Scots – the mother of James I and cousin to Elizabeth I.

Mary, Queen of Scots, as a Roman Catholic, was the focus of several plots to oust her Protestant cousin Elizabeth. In 1587, she was executed on Elizabeth's orders, and buried at Peterborough Cathedral. When he became king, James I had her moved to Westminster Abbey and erected the tomb in her honour.

10) Poets' Corner

Find the large memorial to William Shakespeare. He wrote plays and poetry during the reign of Elizabeth I. Can you name any of his plays? **Shakespeare wrote at least 37 plays including histories such as *Richard III*, comedies, such as *Twelfth Night* and tragedies such as *Hamlet*.**

Which Tudor monarch is shown on this memorial? **Elizabeth I.**

This area of the Abbey is the place where poets, writers and musicians are buried. You could ask your students if they can find anyone they recognise. Key names to look for are C.S. Lewis, Lewis Carroll, the Bronte Sisters, Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. William Shakespeare is buried at Holy Trinity, Stratford-Upon-Avon, but has a large memorial here. This shows him writing a sonnet, and the heads of Elizabeth I, Richard III and Henry V can be seen on the writing stand.

11) The Chapter House

Look at the stained-glass windows, which Tudors can you see? **Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.**

As you enter the Chapter House:

- The window of Henry VIII is on the top right-hand side, second from the left.
- The window of Elizabeth I is above the main entrance, first on the left.

The monks used to meet here daily to listen to a reading from the Rule of St. Benedict, the founder of their order. The stained glass in here was replaced after World War I and shows benefactors to the Abbey including Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. During their reigns, the Chapter House was used as a meeting place for Parliament and several key Acts were signed here, including the Elizabethan Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity.

12) The cloisters

Leave the Chapter House, turn left and follow the square around until you come to the memorial dedicated to three sailors.



Sir Francis Drake circumnavigated the globe in 1577-80. His route is shown in red on the map. Drake's reputation as a trader in enslaved African people has recently come under scrutiny and you may like to look more carefully at his life back at school to raise the wider issue of the beginnings of empire and exploitation in the Tudor period. The memorial also shows the route of Captain James Cook, another controversial figure in the history of New Zealand and Australia. Sir Francis Chichester was a British/New Zealand aviator and yachtsman. He was the first sail solo around the world, only stopping once in Sydney.

Allow time for students to return to the question about the Dissolution of the Monasteries on page two: Why do you think Westminster Abbey was left intact? Do they have different ideas now they have visited the whole of the Abbey?

You are welcome to sit in the cloisters to do the final task. If you have time at the end of your visit, you could also ask students to reflect on their time in the Abbey. They could write down the most interesting thing they have learnt, something that surprised them or something they want to find out more about.