

# **St Robert of Knaresborough**



## **Knareborough Schools Project**

**2019**

**English and Art**

## **Robert of Knaresborough: ENGLISH AND ART**

There are many stories about the life of Robert of Knaresborough. On the pages below, there are some details about his life in ten sections. Each piece is on a separate sheet of paper.

Alternatively, the story could be told by the teacher or it could be done as a role play, possibly inviting people in to tell the story or to play the roles of Robert, John and other characters.

These characters could be 'hot-seated' for this activity, doing a short presentation and then answering questions while in role.

Extra details can be found online and in Peter Lacey's books on St Robert: 'The Knight who came home', 'A Mother's Regret' and 'Tales of the Celebrity Hermit'.

### **Activities**

The information could be printed (and laminated) and stuck up around the classroom. They could be put up chronologically or in a random order.

Pupils could work in small groups, in pairs or on their own. They then go around the room and read the sheets in any order. As they go, they should make notes about Robert by identifying any interesting or important details about him and others like King John, the monks and local people.

The pupils then discuss Robert's life. They could talk about things like:

- what sort of person Robert was
- what he thought was important in life
- why the church was so powerful at that time
- what were the big issues or concerns of the time
- why local people were so keen to talk to Robert and why he was popular
- why King John would have been interested in talking to Robert

**NOTE: Some key words from the list for Years 5 and 6 as identified in the Key Stage 2 curriculum have been highlighted.**

## Robert of Knaresborough 1

Robert Flower was born around 1160 during the **Twelfth** Century. He was born in the city of York. At the time Robert was born, Henry II was King of England, and his Queen was a French lady called Eleanor.

Robert was the eldest son of Tocklese and Siminina Flower. He had a younger brother called Walter.

Tocklese (or 'Took') was Mayor of York for one year during the reign of King Richard I of England (1189-1199). Richard was also known as 'Richard the Lionheart' and there is a statue of him in London near the Houses of Parliament.



Robert's family were wine merchants, buying and selling wine from England and France. His family were not very rich but they enjoyed a **privileged** life.

**Apparently**, Robert was happy with life in York, but he was **determined** to become a monk. **According** to the information we have, he said goodbye to his family in 1190 and ran away to join the Cistercian monks at Newminster Abbey in Morpeth, Northumberland.

The life of a Cistercian was very tough but it was **especially** popular at that time as they had set up several monasteries in Yorkshire and the north of England.

## Robert of Knaresborough 2

During Robert's life, nearly everyone in England was a Christian. All Christians in England were Catholics. The Catholic Church was led by the Pope in Rome.

Catholics had a strong belief in God, Jesus, life after death, Heaven and Hell, the power of saints to help people on earth, and the importance of prayer, the Bible and the sacraments. They believed that the devil was a very real danger.

The Church was **recognised** as the most powerful organisation in Europe and no one, not even Kings, Queens and Emperors, could ignore it. And no one could ignore the Pope, especially powerful ones like Pope Innocent III.



**Pope Innocent III (Pope from 1198-1216)**

Everyone had to listen to the Pope, Bishops and priests because they were the people who decided if you had lived a good or bad life. This decided whether you would go to heaven, purgatory or hell when you died.

When Robert of Knaresborough was alive, everyone believed that doing what the church told you could **guarantee** that you would not go to hell. But if you followed the devil, it would be **disastrous** as you would almost certainly go to hell.

People believed that only the Church could forgive your sins. If you had sinned, you could not get into heaven so being forgiven was incredibly important.

### Robert of Knaresborough 3

The Cistercians were an order of monks who chose a tough life of prayer and work in the service of God. They wanted to live far away from towns and cities, so they headed for the wild areas, like the dales and the moors in Yorkshire.

Abbeys like Fountains (set up in 1132), Rievaulx (1132), Newminster (1137) and Jervaulx (1156) were all quite new when Robert was growing up. They were important places that attracted lots of men to become monks.

The Cistercians were a very strict order who believed people had to live as much like Jesus as they could. They wanted to be totally holy and they did this by praying as much as possible, putting up with pain, tough conditions and eating and drinking as little as they could. They slept little, worked hard and had no possessions.

Many people saw the Cistercians as holy monks whose prayers were so powerful that they could help other people get into heaven. Their abbeys grew quickly and attracted lots of money from people who wanted prayers and help.

The abbeys were huge and needed to make money to survive. They usually did this by farming and keeping sheep, because wool was the most valuable thing made in England.



## Robert of Knaresborough 4

Robert was impressed by the Cistercians. They were very holy and their way of life meant you would not go to hell when you died. Robert wanted to do what was right, so he joined the Cistercians at Newminster Abbey near Morpeth. It was a very tough way to live as they spent lots of time praying and working, ate very little and had almost no **leisure** time.

The Cistercians believed they were God's **soldiers** fighting a holy war against their own weakness and the devil. Robert believed there was nothing more important in life than to live for God, imitating Jesus and praying as much as possible so that he lived a holy life.

After a few months at Newminster, though, Robert decided that he did not want to be a monk. He might have thought the life was too tough – or maybe that it was not tough enough. He still wanted to give his life to God, though, so he became a hermit on the banks of the River Nidd close to Knaresborough.

A hermit was like a monk who lived on his own, following his own rules but still praying **frequently** and working every day to praise God.





## **Robert of Knaresborough 5**

Robert was very popular with the people of Knaresborough. They liked him because he helped the poor and they believed he was a wise, generous and kind man.

Robert lived in a cave by the River Nidd. Hermits usually lived a very lonely life and had little contact with people. Robert's life was not always like that, though.

He spent a lot of time on his own in prayer, reading and walking by the river or in the forest but he always found time for people. People often came to find him for advice, to ask him to pray for them or to receive money and food.

Robert had four servants to look after him. Stories about Robert say that two of his servants looked after his land, planting and caring for the crops. Another servant did general jobs like cooking, cleaning and looking after visitors. A fourth servant was often sent out into the countryside to collect money (called 'alms') from people so that Robert could look after the poor and sick. Some of these people actually stayed with Robert so that he could help them and give them food, clothes and shelter.

Robert was also very interested in nature and was fascinated by the animals, fish and plants in the local environment. Local people thought Robert had special powers over the animals of Knaresborough Forest. Some stories said he could even tame deer and get them to work for him.

## **Robert of Knaresborough 6**

Giving money to help the poor, sick and elderly was very important for Christians at the time of St Robert. Robert was given money (alms), gifts and land by rich people as he was trusted to help those in need.

Rich people often gave things to the church, and to holy men and women, in exchange for their prayers. It was believed that the prayers of monks and nuns were powerful in helping other people in life and even after they died.

Robert received land from two important local people: Helena, a noble woman from Plompton, and William de Stuteville, a landowner who was the Lord of Knaresborough Forest.

When King John visited Knaresborough in 1216, he gave Robert, 'Half a carucate of land in the wood of Swinesco as near to his hermitage as possible'. A carucate was an area of 100 acres but the gift was actually 40 acres. (Jacob Smith Park is about 30 acres.) At first, Robert said he did not want the land but he changed his mind and accepted it so that he could help more people. It is very likely that this land would have been quite close to the cave so it was probably near the River Nidd.



## Robert of Knaresborough 7

King John died on 19<sup>th</sup> October, 1216 and Robert died on 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1218. The new king was Henry, John's son. On 1<sup>st</sup> February 1219, Henry III gave Robert's cave to Alexander Dorset, the local priest at St. Mary's Church (now called St. John's) in Knaresborough.

At the end of 1227, Henry then gave Brother Ives, a hermit of the Holy Cross Abbey in Knaresborough, the 40 acres of land which King John had given to Robert when he had met him in 1215.

After Robert's death, he became more and more well-known in England and in **foreign** countries, too. He was mentioned in 1238 by a famous writer called Matthew Paris, who said there were reports that, 'a healing oil flows out of his tomb'.

There were **frequent** visitors to Robert's grave as people thought it was a holy place, a place of pilgrimage, where miracles could happen.

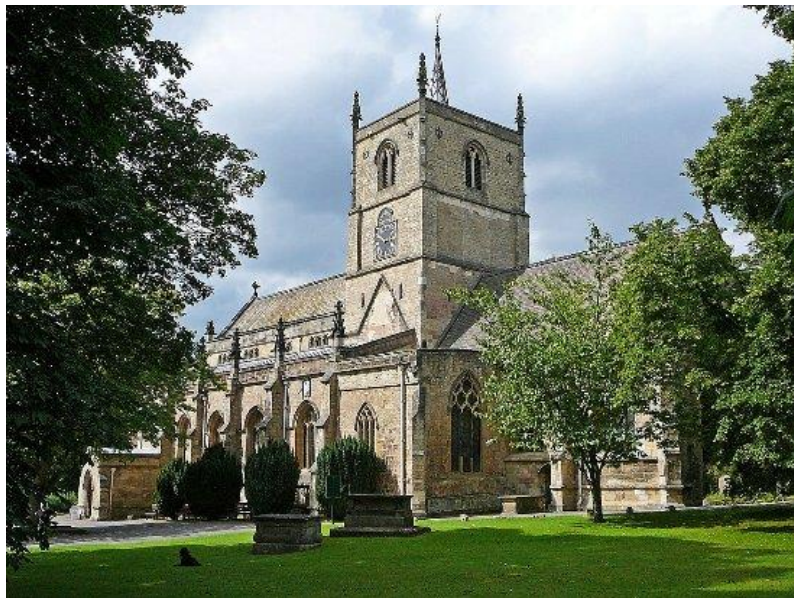
Some people believe that Robert was canonized by the Catholic Church, which means he was made a saint. In May, 1252, Pope Innocent IV offered a special reward called an 'indulgence' to anyone who helped to build the monastery of Robert of Knaresborough, in the town. The Pope would only have done this if Robert was already a saint.

In August 1255, King Henry III gave three special oak trees to the monks of Holy Trinity Priory to help with the building of the church of St. Robert. They were given as a **symbol** of how special Robert was and how he had lived a good and holy life. The king would only do this if he thought Robert was a saint.

## Robert of Knaresborough 8

There are records of a church on the site of St John's in Knaresborough going back a very long time. In 1114, King Henry I gave the "Church at Cnaresburgh" to the monks at Nostell Abbey near Wakefield. This means a church had been there for at least one hundred years before Robert arrived in the town.

After Robert moved into his cave on the River Nidd, he would certainly have gone to the church for some ceremonies and to see the local priest. When Robert was a hermit, the church was called 'St. Mary's' but its name was changed to "St. John's" in the 16th century.



## **Robert of Knaresborough 9**

We have no details about Robert's contact with the people and the town of Knaresborough. He lived in the cave for over twenty-five years, though, so he must have met lots of people. He would have known about life in the castle, the church and the town, although they would all have looked very different from how they are today.

Robert would have known about the four knights who murdered Archbishop Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral in 1174. Becket's murder was one of the most famous events of the century and all of Europe knew about it. It was such an important event that people were still talking about it many years later and some would have asked Robert about it because Knaresborough was involved in the story.

Hugh de Morville owned Knaresborough Castle in 1174 and he was one of the four knights who killed the Archbishop. After the murder, the knights rode to Knaresborough Castle as it was a safe place to hide. They did not escape, though, and were given very serious punishments.

The Pope decided that all four knights should be punished by going to Jerusalem on a crusade. They were ordered to fight with the Knights Templar for fourteen years. The journey to Jerusalem was long and dangerous and two of the knights died on the journey. The crusades saw terrible fighting between Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land and at least one of the knights died in the fighting. Some people believe Hugh de Morville may have survived and returned to England.

## Robert of Knaresborough 10

Another important event Robert would have known about was how Richard the Lionheart was captured and put in prison. In 1192, Richard was captured by one of his enemies, Duke Leopold of Austria, while he was travelling home from a Crusade. Richard was a prisoner until a huge ransom of £66 000 was paid. All the people in England had to help pay because it was about twice as much money as the whole country made in a year. A lot of people were really worried about King Richard but they were also angry about having to pay extra taxes to set him free. People in Knaresborough helped to pay for the release of the king.

It was around this time that Robert moved to Knaresborough so it is almost certain that people would have asked him for an **explanation** about what had happened to King Richard. People would probably have asked Robert to say prayers for the King as they thought this would help to keep him safe and, maybe, help to get him released from prison.

**TASK: ENGLISH**

Pupils could write and perform a play about Robert's life, or parts of his life, using the information above. Some pupils might also use Peter Lacey's books or their own research to add extra details.

Pupils might like to include characters like the local people who Robert spoke with and helped, Robert's four servants, the people who received the Maundy Money, members of Robert's family, John's servants and important people who travelled with the King, people like the Archbishop of York and some of the barons and knights.

**TASK: ENGLISH AND MUSIC**

Pupils could write poems, raps or songs about Robert's life using some of the stories and ideas above, by using sections from Peter Lacey's books or doing their own research.

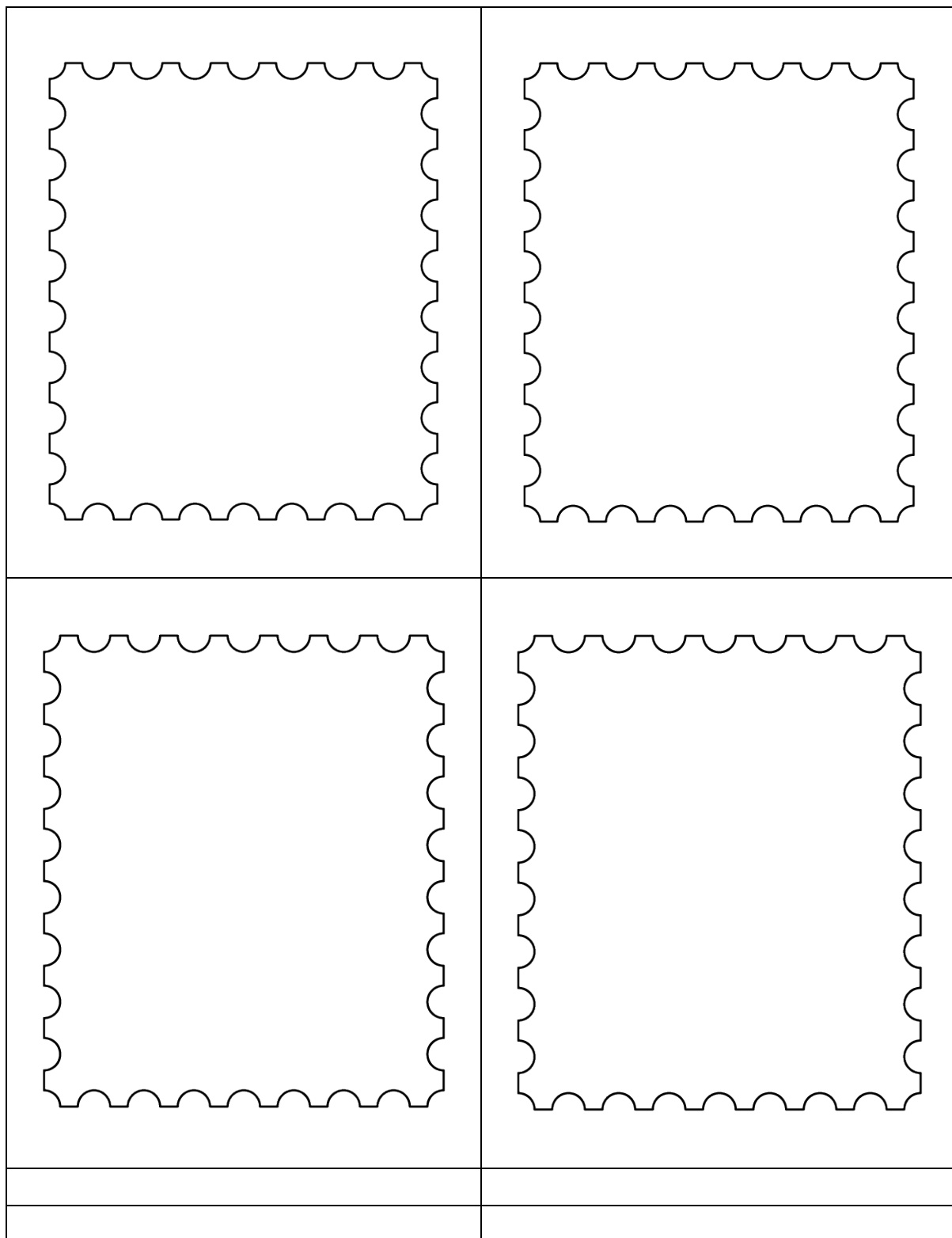
The stories written by local children in 'The Knight who came home' might be especially helpful.

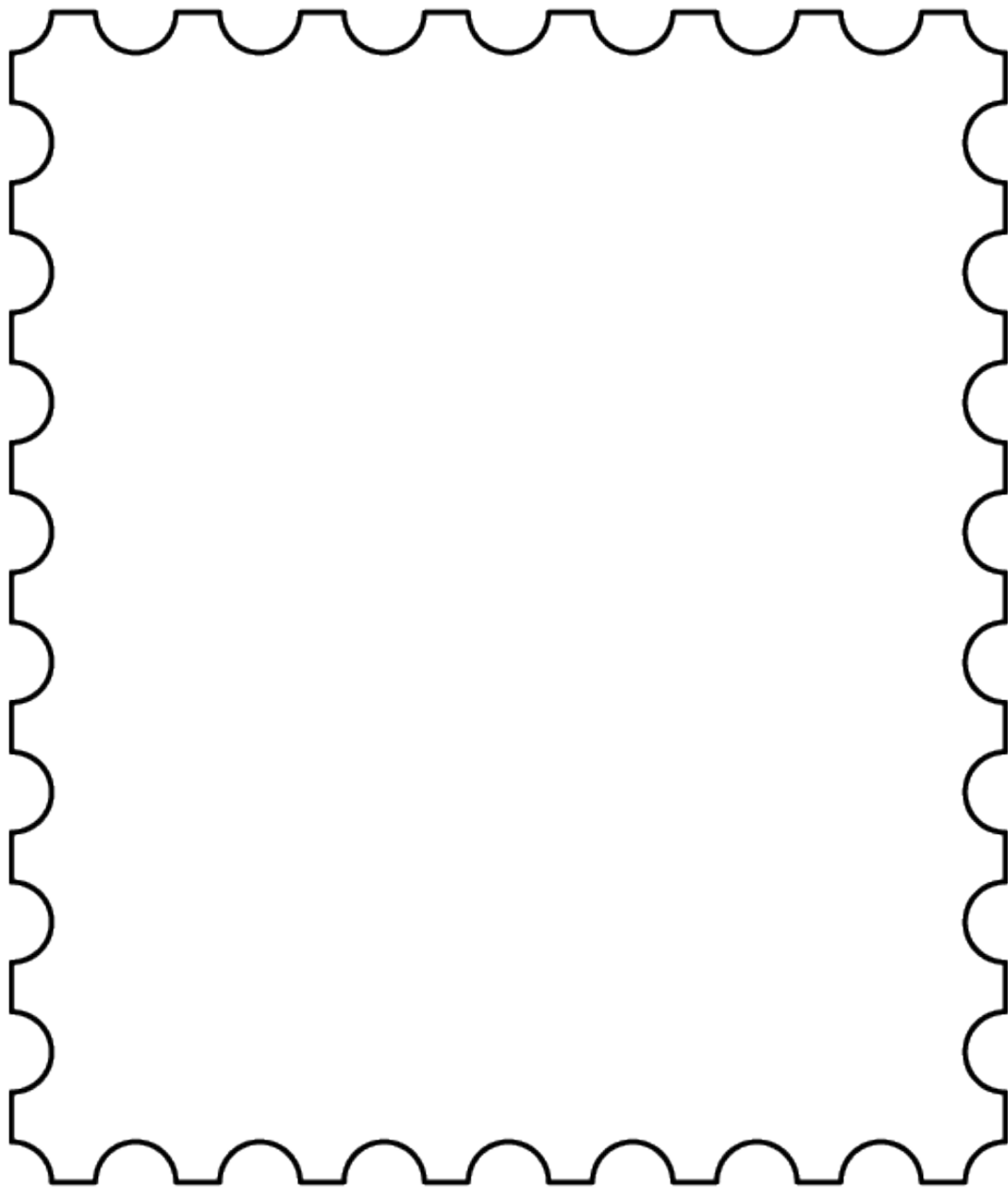
They might also write an obituary for Robert or a guide book for people visiting Knaresborough and the cave.

Pupils could, of course, read their work out for themselves but some might prefer to get someone else to do it for them. The class might invite the Town Crier or the Head Teacher in to read them aloud.

**TASK: ART - STAMPS**

Pupils produce a series of stamps that show important events from Robert's life. They choose the events that they think are most important or interesting. They could work alone or as part of a group and the stamps can be enlarged to be A5 or A4 size.



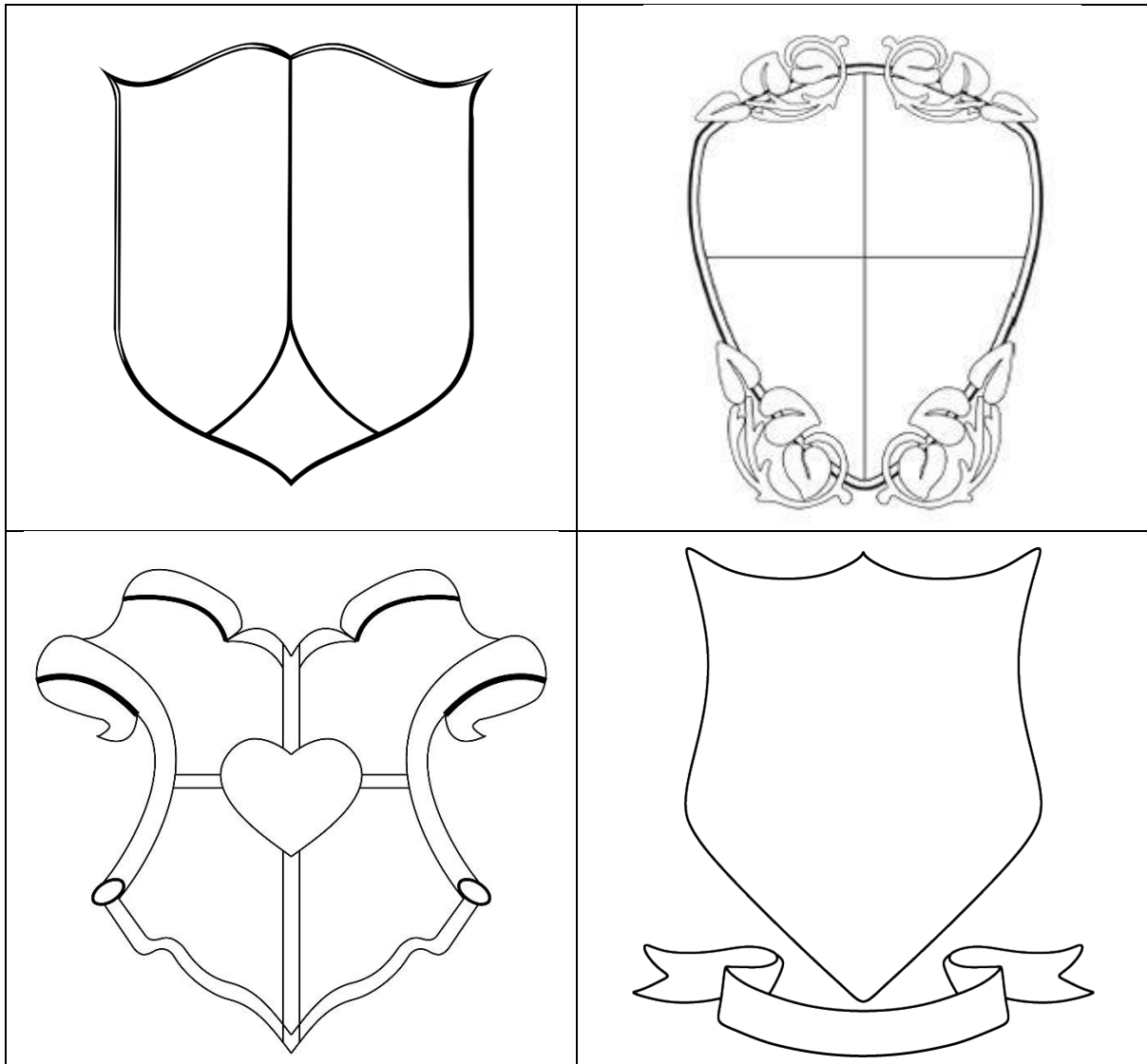


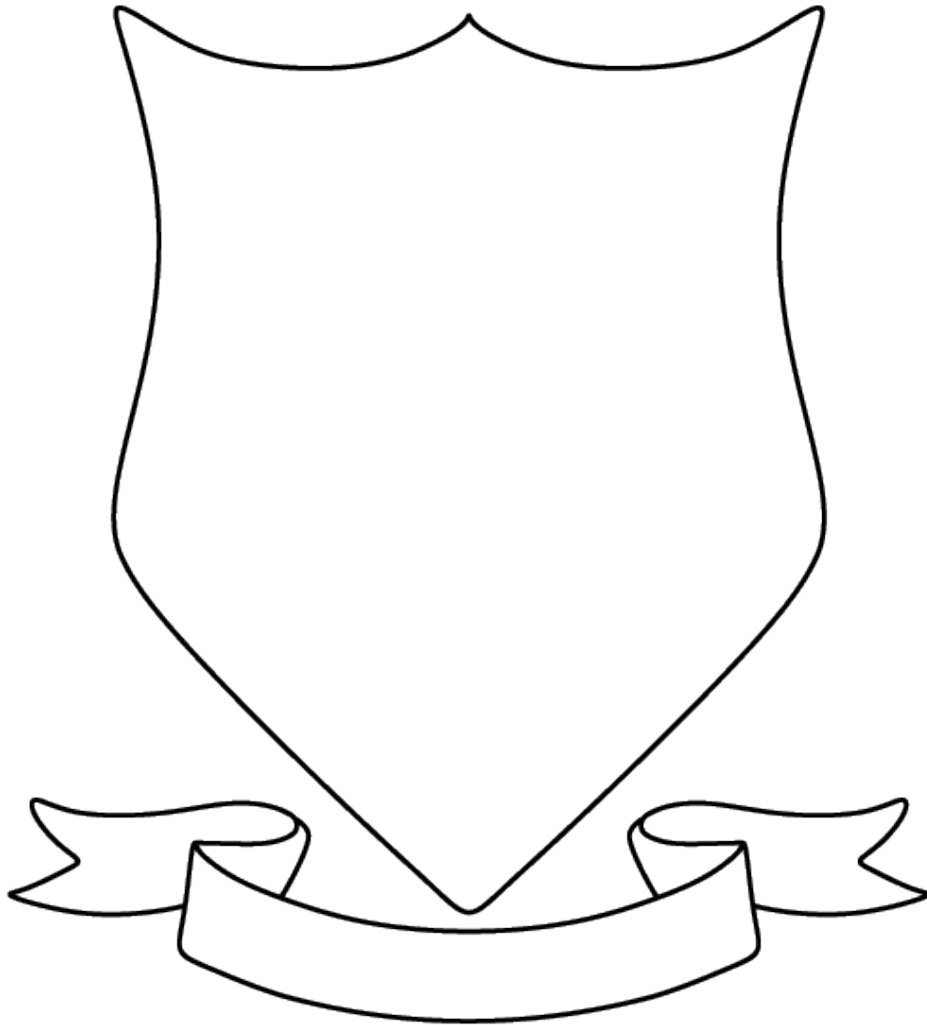


**TASK: ART – COAT OF ARMS**

Design a 'Coat of Arms' that include important symbols from Robert's life in York, the monastery and Knaresborough. Some pupils might focus on events while others might look at his characteristics and talents.

Templates for a Coat of Arms. The outline chosen should be enlarged at least to A4 size. Pupils might just want to draw their own shield outline having used these as ideas. They could then make a display of the ones they produce.



**TASK: ART**

Pupils could produce a collage or mural about Robert. This could include scenes from his life (York, the abbey and Knaresborough); his cave and the River Nidd; meeting the local people; meeting King John; working with his servants; the animals, fish and trees that he knew so well; St. Mary's/St. John's Church; Knaresborough Castle.

Some pupils might prefer to produce a number of cartoons or sketches that tell the story of Robert's life. They might try to show how what Robert believed, his values, affected what he did.