

St Robert of Knaresborough



Knarborough Schools Project 2019

The Cistercians

ROBERT AT NEWMINSTER ABBEY

When he was just a teenager, Robert Flower ran away from his home in York and travelled to Newminster Abbey near the town of Morpeth in Northumberland. He stayed there for a few months as he thought he would become a monk. The monks at Newminster were called Cistercians and they followed a very tough way of life. Robert only stayed at Newminster for a few months before leaving. Later on, he decided to become a hermit and that is when he moved to live near Knaresborough.

While he was at Newminster Abbey, Robert followed the timetable that was followed each day by the monks. This is what it would his normal day would have been like.

LINK: A short introduction to the daily life of the Cistercians based at Kirkstall Abbey
<http://viewpure.com/HPvUQwW-Y9w?start=0&end=0>

LINK: English Heritage - A Day in the Life of a Monk:
<http://viewpure.com/ewbjWSAVDLI?start=0&end=0>

THE LIFE OF A CISTERCIAN MONK

2.00 am	The day began with prayers called 'Matins' or the 'Night Office'. The monks got up and went into church while it was still dark. Two monks led the singing and kept their eyes on the other monks to make sure no one nodded off to sleep.
2.45 am	After 'Matins', the monks could rest in the cloister, a covered square in the monastery, but could not go back to bed.
3.00 am	The monks returned to church for 'Lauds', the second prayers of the day, that celebrated daybreak.
3.15 am	The monks returned to the cloister to read for 45 minutes.
4.00 am	Third prayers, 'Prime', marked the sunrise, which was seen as the first hour of the day.
4.15 am	<p>The 'Chapter meeting'. The Monks met in the Chapter House every day. They sat on benches and listened to the Abbot, the senior monk, as he said a prayer and read a chapter from a book called the Rule of St Benedict.</p> <p>After listening to the Abbot, all the monks had to confess their sins or failings from the last 24 hours. They would then be punished for these sins, possibly missing a meal, doing extra work or prayers, or having to lie flat on the ground in front of the other monks during a meal or a meeting.</p> <p>Announcements and instructions were given, tasks were given out for the day and then they said a final prayer.</p>
4.45 am	The monks worked at their jobs for about two and a half hours.
7.30 am	The monks returned to the cloister for readings from the Bible or the Lives of the Saints.
8.00 am	'Terce' was the fourth prayer service of the day. 'Terce' was Latin for 'Third', the third hour of the day. This was followed by the celebration of the Mass or Eucharist. ('Eucharist' is a Greek word for 'Thanksgiving'.) Mass was led by the Abbot or another monk and, once a week, the holy bread was eaten to symbolize the body and blood of Jesus.
9.00 am	Monks returned to work although sometimes they did eat a small breakfast. No one was allowed to eat before Mass and Communion. They could not eat (fasting) after midnight so that the holy bread was the first thing they ate. 'Breakfast' means to 'break your fast', the first thing you eat in the day.
11.00 am	'Sext' was the fifth prayer service of the day. 'Sext' comes from the Latin for six and marked the sixth hour of the day. Regular prayers gave a routine to the day and reminded the monks of the importance of God and their faith.

11.30 am	Dinner. This was the main meal of the day. The monks ate in a room called the refectory. They stood for the blessing or grace before the meal. No meat was eaten but they sometimes had fish. Bread with vegetables or beans in vegetable juice was a normal meal. During the meal, a monk read aloud from the Bible. The monks did not talk although they did use a type of sign language if they needed anything. In daily life, they had to be silent at all times, only speaking when absolutely necessary.
12.00 pm	After the meal, the monks gave thanks to God for their food by praying in the church. They could then read or have a short sleep in the dormitories.
2.00 pm	'Nones' was another prayer service, marking the ninth hour.
2.30 pm	The monks returned to their work on the farm, in the orchard, in the kitchen, the herb gardens or caring for the animals. This lasted for three and a half hours.
6.00 pm	After work, the monks returned to church for 'Vespers', the seventh service of the day. This was their 'Evening Prayer'.
6.30 pm	During the summer, the monks were allowed another small meal of vegetables and fruit with any bread they had left.
7.15 pm	Monks gathered in the cloister and listened to a reading by a monk.
7.30 pm	'Compline' or 'Night Prayer' was the last prayer service of the day. At the end of this, the abbot sprinkled the monks with Holy Water as a reminder of their baptism. It was also seen as a way to protect them as they slept.
8.00 pm	After a long day of work, reading, praying and singing the monks returned to bed for six hours until the day began again at 2 o'clock. They wore the same clothes or habit at all times, changing it only when it was worn out, badly damaged or seriously dirty – and they slept in their habit too.

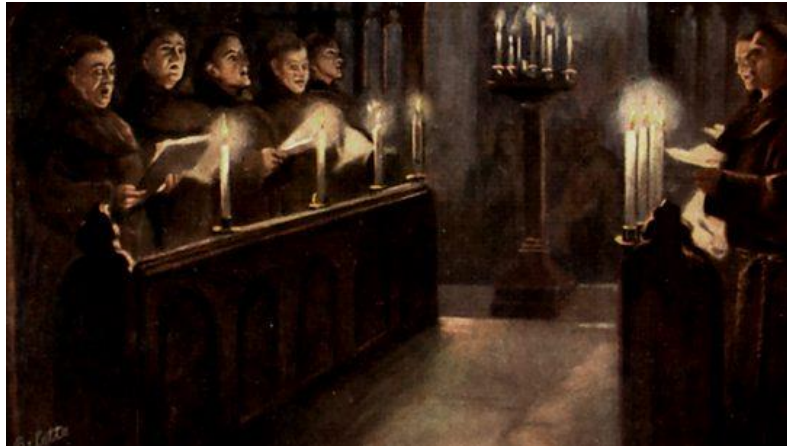
A TOUGH WAY OF LIFE: The Cistercian Way

1. The rule of silence was strict for Cistercians. They all took a vow of silence so that they never spoke except in prayer and at meetings. In some religious orders, things were more relaxed and monks had some leisure time and had simple conversations after dinner. The Cistercians were very serious and strict, though, and they preferred to concentrate on their prayers.
2. The rule of silence was more relaxed if monks were ill in the infirmary or hospital. It was also OK for monks like the abbot, the prior, the cellarer and the kitchener to speak because they had to deal with visitors, officials, or traders so that they could run the Abbey. But they were still only supposed to speak when it was needed and not just to have a chat or gossip.



3. When someone became a Cistercian monk, he gave up everything he owned and had no possessions of his own. He gave up his clothes, money, property and possessions. If he needed special clothes to do a job or for a trip, he would give them back after it was done.
4. Every monk took a vow of poverty and of obedience. They gave up all their money and they agreed to do whatever they were told to do by the senior monks, like the abbot. They gave up everything to follow God and trusted the people in charge to do the right thing.
5. The Cistercians spent a lot of time praying and singing in church. This was the heart of their daily lives and they tended to be very sensitive to what happened while they prayed. Falling asleep during prayers was very bad. They also believed the devil would try to stop or ruin their prayers so if someone started coughing or

sneezing, if they lost their voice or got a sore throat, they believed it was the work of Satan. Their prayers and rituals were a battle ground with the devil.



6. The Cistercians wore habits made of very cheap and rough material. They had two tunics each and two cowls (pointed hats or hoods), a pair of shoes and some long socks. The extra tunic was needed if the other one was being washed. Some monks did change their habits at night. They had nothing made of fur or fine linen but, by the time of St Robert, they were actually allowed to wear both habits at night during the winter to keep a bit warmer. There were no pillows, sheets, blankets or duvets for their beds.



7. The Cistercians wore habits of plain wool as a sign of poverty. They did not worry about being smart, fashionable or attractive. Their habits were a greyish-white, so they were called the White Monks. The Cistercians also refused to wear trousers, which most monks did in cold weather. They only wore trousers when they were travelling on a long journey.



8. The Cistercians shaved the hair off the top of their heads. This was called a tonsure and left them with a band of hair, just above their ears. This was a reminder of the Crown of Thorns worn by Jesus when he was crucified. Monks first shaved their heads when they became a full part of the community and then shaved their heads about once a month. Robert did not become a monk so he never shaved his head.



TASKS

1. Create a character, a Cistercian Monk, and give him a name. You can draw him and use him as the monk who will guide you around the monastery and tell you what is going on. You could do this as a display or to show people at home what life would have been like for Robert during his months as a monk.



2. You could use your character to write a diary about a day in Robert's life when he was at Newinster Abbey. Think about how to make it interesting: maybe add bits about monks falling asleep or snoring during prayers, monks rushing in late from work, the food being a bit dull but no one can complain or how he dreams of favourite food that he doesn't eat anymore, about not having wine or beer, the beauty of the Abbey, the importance of the prayer services, about the monk reading really well – or maybe not reading well – and how he no longer sees any of his family or friends from before he entered. You could say where he came from, how old he was, what family he had left behind – and why he entered the monastery, why the Cistercians were such a powerful group of monks and what he enjoyed about his life, with sections about his work, on the farm or in the kitchens. And you could think about how cold it was at night and how itchy the clothing got when they had no underwear and the material was so rough.

3. For each section of the Way of Life, do a drawing, cartoon or poster giving an instruction to the monks, a bit like 'No Entry' or 'Silence' signs.

4. Design an advert or a poster to encourage someone to become a Cistercian Monk. What skills and talents did they need, what sort of life would they live, what would be the challenges and what would be the great rewards?

5. Draw a series of cartoons to show some of the jobs done by the monks. You could add a little bit of dialogue or conversation to help illustrate these – and maybe try to add a bit of fun or a joke to make them easier to remember.