



# Monks and Nuns



**A session for schools  
Experience being  
a Saxon monk or Nun**

Polesworth Abbey, High Street, Polesworth  
[www.polesworthabbey.co.uk](http://www.polesworthabbey.co.uk)

## The Project

Monks and Nuns will be a days' outing for your school. Your children experience being a monk or a nun in Saxon times and have the experience of the Abbey and of the Viking raiders.

New Monks Nuns has been reviewed and changed to help schools fulfill the Curriculum in history and RE. Our New Monks and Nuns at Polesworth program, like it's predecessor involves roll-play, plenary sessions and lots of small-group experiences. There are problems to be solved, things to be made, and items to take back to school, as well as worksheets and a Teachers Pack. The length of the day will depend on exactly when your school can arrive, usually between 9.00 am and 10.00 am.

A maximum of 60 children can participate in Monks and Nuns at Polesworth each day. There is provision within the timetable for lunch, we ask you to see that the children bring simple food – nothing pre packed – which is eaten Refectory-style. An audio-visual presentation replaces the 'lector', and provides the children with more background information, and also identifies how the present-day links to the values and community concerns of the Saxon nuns.

Monks and Nuns is usually available between Easter and October (till half-term) and your day will need to be booked in advance. We are aware that schools may be covering Vikings in their autumn term and can offer this project both in the late summer term and in the autumn too.

Polesworth Abbey is a Scheduled Site: parts of the Cloister Wall have been reconstructed and we have Family Trails engaging children and adults in discovery about the Abbey inside and out. There is the enigmatic mound and the results of archeology can be presented during the day for your school. There is a Medieval Gateway and this is used as part of the project. The children visit the Porter and learn about the Gatehouse as a fortification and as an entrance to Saint Editha's Shrine. Small group activities engage children with the Scriptorium, Apocathary and Infirmary.

## A VISIT TO Monks and Nuns at Polesworth

Monks and Nuns at Polesworth will exceed all your expectations for a School Visit:

The School's coach will be parked at Coach Park near to river Anker in Polesworth. Our visitors will walk over pedestrian river bridge to Church Walk – the way to the Abbey. Church Walk is picturesque, and as the children begin to see the Abbey buildings they will be met by a Sister in costume. The roll-play has already begun. They will enter the world of the ninth century and live the next hours learning their place and skills in the Benedictine life of the Abbey.....

Children leave their bags and coats in the Refectory and at the back of the Abbey Church receive their habit. They will be made aware of the Viking presence and possible threat. During the morning they will take part in three small groups activities, and during the afternoon there will be a further three activities. During the day they will return to the Church and Refectory, which will become their fortress when the Viking battle begins.

When the children leave they exchange their habit for the Monks and Nuns at Polesworth badge.

Roll-play activities: groups and plenaries

The small group activities will be:

writing in the Scriptorium – this activity takes place in the Abbey church, carrells provide the ma-



materials needed and the atmosphere is perfect in Abbey vestry. Children see aspects of the Lindesfarne Gospels and other texts, including the local Litchfield Gospels. Children will write and stamp on vellum. They will practice pen sharpening and especially focus on 'illumination'. They will also make soap from herbs in the medieval style.

A visit to the Herbs and the Physic Garden — this is situated outside in the Sensory Garden and includes the Abbey 'Carp' pond, important for a balanced diet. We consider Herbs and their uses, poisonous herbs, medicinal, and culinary uses. The development of medicinal herbs in the form of potions and poultices follows when children are challenged to make 'remedies' for various ailments in the Apothary.

the monastic cell — The Monastic cell is located in the Abbey grounds in the stables. Visitors will see the simple bed, and covers, the use of straw, prayers for a quiet night. The night is punctuated by prayers..

the infirmary — The Infirmary is also located in the Abbey grounds and is part of the Apothary. Here visitors will see cures, think about operations, and the potions that were brewed for the sick. You will meet Cedric who is a traveller, recently arrived at the Abbey and in need of your medical skills. Artefacts you will use include pestle and mortar etc

games — if time allows our presentation includes the opportunity for you to learn three genuine medieval games played in the Cloister. This is the Abbey 'recreation' and you will be able to challenge others and take back to School new ideas for playtime.

#### YOUR DAY AT POLSWORTH ABBEY

- — YOUR ENCOUNTER WITH THE VIKING RAIDERS
- The year is 874, the Vikings have overwintered ... nearby
- 9.30 dress ready for
- 9.45 am plenary... see 'Opening' below
- 10.30 Sript/Inf, Apoc, Candles/Gatehouse
- your day will be interrupted by summons to The Hall [the bells sound the warning] 12 noon
- Raid.... Skirmish battle – injured...
- 12.45 pm into Abbey:
- •we should take the dane geld with us into the Abbey, in case the raiders come — we can pay them to go away..
- we should light candles — the ones that (some of us ) have made
- the wounded Viking is brought in
- do we have medicine, balm for him — the dilemma of treating or not treating an enemy
- read a prayer that we have written 'illuminated' (about all our enemies.. reconcile... aspirational: something we heard in the Scriptorium..)
- and then lunch in Refectory...
- 1.15 pm everyone goes back to their small group activities, wondering what is going to happen. [Claxon sounds again...]
- 2.00 pm no battle, arrival of Jarl Guthrun... with some warriors...also King Alfred .... danegald,
- — telling the story of what happened and bringing the day to a close. We hint that the dane provinces will be won back in the years to come by Aethelflaed of Mercia and Edward the Elder of Wessex during 916 and 917.
- pm disrobe and depart



- Script for Introduction – first plenary session
- this should take 40-45 minutes
- A presentation: (10 minutes)
- time and Sacred time – Christian ideas of reverence
- a few things about monastic life: artifacts to be shown briefly expressing humility, service, and justice
- foundation and leadership, service – pictures of sisters, and Abbess... also Abbey buildings, illustrating monastic family, servant leadership, service and patient endurance
- location and threat of Viking raids, captured weapons... Apocathary, Infirmary... illustrating about peacefulness, wisdom, friendship, hope, and touching on trust, forgiveness, and koinonia
- Summary – show drawing of Abbessess, King Aetherlred, illuminated texts... and Dane geld – compassion and prudence
- A brief plenary activity: (5 minutes)

A dialogue presentation which includes a discussion about ‘the knife’ and weapons (5 minutes)

- The first presenter describes the day to the children and inviting participation, including support if the raiders come today (2 minutes)
- Leaders explain about the activities, how the monastery contributes to the welfare and values of the community (2 minutes each = 10 mins)
- Mother Editha speaks briefly and invites everyone to consider about treatment of wounded Vikings (8 minutes)
- Children and staff, leaders and small activity helpers move off to their first activity.
- A guided tour is available focusing on how learning from this site can inform students about heritage here at Polesworth and communicate skills for appreciating heritage in other places.
- Shop
- There will be an opportunity for children and adults to purchase items from the day’s experience including quills and herbs, soap etc.... You can let us know if you want to have the shop open, usually near the end of your day with us at Polesworth.
- Saxon Building
- Ideally there would be a small Saxon building on the site to provide a contrasting experience about what life would be like in Saxon times outside the safety of the monastery. At the present time the present-day Abbey is in the process of constructing a medieval building. The plan is to build a 2 post peoples’ dwelling with thatched roof employing traditional skills.
- Figures below based on similar project at The Bishop’s Wood Study Centre, Worcestershire.

#### National Curriculum

- The activities provide experiences within the provisions of the National Curriculum. Curriculum Statement: “Through this visit pupils will engage with a faith community at Polesworth Abbey and experience aspects of the way of life current in Saxon times but reflected
- today in the life of the parish community – concern for others, everyone in the community; welcome and integration; a truly life-embracing and world-extensive view of life’s purpose.
- They will learn about Saxon times, Danelaw, Viking raids and invasion; Alfred the Great and Athelstan, Danegeld, and Anglo-Saxon laws and justice.



- They will be encouraged to be curious and ask questions about belief, meaning and identity.
- The visit covers aspects of the Local Agreed Syllabus for RE... and narratives in the Key Stage 2 History Curriculum including Anglo-Saxon art and Culture and ‘the Viking and Anglo-Saxon struggle for the Kingdom of England to the time of Edward the Confessor.’
- Monks and Nuns also links with English; Geography; Mathematics; PE; Science; Design/Technology; Art/design; Music; PSHE/Citizenship. At KS3 local history is targeted by the project.
- The Teachers’ Pack fully identifies and cross-references the curriculum areas.
- We have an Equal Opportunities policy and seek to do all we can to be inclusive for all who wish to visit Polesworth Abbey.
- Arranging a visit to Polesworth Abbey
- Schools groups will arrange their visit to Monks and Nuns at Polesworth directly with the Abbey whose Families Support worker will make the arrangements and may be pleased to visit you at School. The Families Support worker will help with the choice of small group activities for your children and organize a program that is most suited your needs. We can discuss any special needs and make all the necessary preliminary arrangements including providing you with the Teachers pack and information about food for lunchtime.

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