

Programme 8: Nendrum**History****THE SITE**

Monastic settlements laid the foundations for the spread of Christianity both in Ireland and abroad. Usually established in the 6th and 7th centuries, these became important centres of the community as no towns existed in that period. They attracted local craftsmen and farmers because they offered some degree of protection against Viking raids which were prevalent at the time. The custom was to build monasteries inside ring forts.

They consisted of tiny huts made of either stone or wood and wattle. The most important building was the small church which was built at the centre. This was because the worship of God was central to people's lives. In other huts were the kitchen, a dining room called the refectory and sometimes a library. The monks lived in individual cells usually called bee-hives because of their shape.

Nendrum is approached from the mainland by way of a causeway built in the nineteenth century; originally access was only by ford at low tide. Prior to excavation in the 1920s, all that was visible of Nendrum was the base of a round tower and the remains of a church. When the archaeologists dug deeper they discovered a monastic site of some importance.

It had a triple-walled cashel enclosing the buildings of a Celtic monastery. Within these three cashels was a school, workshops, a cemetery, a church and a round tower. These alone revealed that this was a site of considerable historical importance.

MONASTIC LIFE

The word monk comes from the Greek word "monachos", which means "alone". It was first used by early Christians to describe men who felt the need to go away by themselves to some lonely place to contemplate God and pray. The first monks, also called hermits, lived in caves or rough shelters. They ate little and went without all the things that ordinary people of the time wanted or needed.

The first monasteries grew up around these hermits because men who also felt the call to a religious life came to find the hermits in their lonely shelters, wanting to learn from them and to copy their way of life. One of the first hermits was a man called Benedict who at first lived in a cave. However, he realised that it might be better to start a community of like-minded men who loved each other like brothers rather than to struggle alone.

Saint Benedict, as he became later, founded the Benedictine religious order. He wrote down the things that he believed every monk should do and these became a blueprint for the many different orders that were to follow him.

It has never been easy to become a monk. A man wishing to enter an abbey must give away all that he owns and from the moment the door shuts behind him he must share everything with the community. A monk's life has always been hard and not everyone is suited to it.

He must first become a "novice" or beginner, under the tutelage of a senior monk. After two years, during which the novice is free to leave the order at any time, the other monks in the community vote on whether he will be allowed to take his vows, or promises to God, and become a monk.

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Monastic life today has changed little from its earliest beginnings. Monks still live in sparse cells and devote their lives to the service of God. Printing and literature still play a large role in their lives. Early monks used to copy and decorate beautiful religious books by hand. Today they use a printing press or computerised desktop publishing.

KEY WORDS USED DURING THE PROGRAMME

Monastery, Cashel, Monk, Manuscript, Round Tower, Vikings, Cell.

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1. CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES – Before the Programme

| Activity | Tasks | Worksheets | Relevance to NI Curriculum |
|--------------------|--|------------|--|
| Keyword discussion | <p>Discuss the meaning of the keywords</p> <p>Explore the pupils' understanding of how a monk lives today.</p> | | <p>Talking and Listening Taking part in discussion – obeying the conventions of discussion.</p> <p>HISTORY Life in the Early Times</p> |

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2. CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES – After the Programme

| Activity | Tasks | Worksheets | Relevance to NI Curriculum |
|----------------------------|--|------------|--|
| Monastic life discussion 1 | What are the differences between monastic life in early Christian Ireland and monastic life today? | | <p>Talking and Listening Taking part in group and class discussion sharing, responding to and evaluating ideas</p> <p>HISTORY Life in the Early Times</p> <p>Comparison of religious life past and present</p> |

| Activity | Tasks | Worksheets | Relevance to NI Curriculum |
|----------------------------|---|------------|---|
| Monastic life discussion 2 | The earliest monks lived alone as hermits and spent all their time thinking about God. If you wanted to be a hermit and live away from everyone else, where would you go and why? | | <p>Talking and Listening Taking part in group and class discussion sharing, responding to and evaluating ideas</p> |

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| Activity | Tasks | Worksheets | Relevance to NI Curriculum |
|-----------------------|---|------------|--|
| Threat of the Vikings | <p>Many monasteries had round towers. Why was the door so high off the ground?</p> <p>Why might monasteries have been attacked?</p> <p>Pupils could draw their own comic book depicting a Viking raid on a monastery.</p> | | <p>Talking and Listening Taking part in group and class discussion sharing, responding to and evaluating ideas</p> <p>History Viking expansion and settlement abroad</p> <p>Art & Design Paint and draw</p> |

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- Environment and Heritage Service website on Nendrum
<http://www.ehsni.gov.uk/education/monuments/nendrum.shtml>
- Information concerning school visits to The Ulster History Park can be obtained from:
The Education Officer
Ulster History Park
Cullion
Tel: 028 8164 8188