Croxden Abbey revision

Who were the Cistercians?



The Cistercians were known as white monks because of their white habits (robes).
The Cistercians believed…

- The other monks had not followed the rules of Saint Benedict (the hermit whose teachings led to monasteries and monks) and had become sinful and corrupted
- That they would set up their monasteries far away from civilisation (and therefore temptation) and be self-sufficient
- In uniformity. They should all wear the same and behave the same way and their monasteries should all be the same.

Because they were so pure and holy, people thought their prayers were worth more in getting to heaven- therefore many Cistercian monasteries were set up across the country

A typical day in the life of a monk	
2am	Prayers in the abbey church
3am	Back to bed in the dormitory
6am	Get up at sunrise Prayers in the abbey church Breakfast of bread and ale in the refectory
7am	Meeting in the chapter house to organise work for the day
8am	Walk in the cloisters to relax and think
11am	Prayers in the abbey church
12noon	Main dinner eaten in the refectory
12.30pm	Prayers in the abbey church
1pm	Work at the farm or mill
6pm	Prayers in the abbey church
7pm	Supper in the refectory
8pm	Prayers in the abbey church
9pm	Bedtime in the dormitory

The Monk's vows

- Chastity
- Poverty
- Obedience

They remembered by the three knots in their rope belts



Abbot	In charge of abbey
Prior	Assistant to abbot and in charge of discipline
Lector	Read lessons
Sacrist	Looked after holy books
Lay brothers	Wore dark robes. Not trained. Mainly there to do manual work, farming etc. Had western part of church

Setting up of the Abbey

When?

1179 (though the monks had originally arrived at Cotton in 1176 and taken three years to choose their perfect site).

Why?

Bertram de Verdun wanted an abbey set up to pray for the souls of him and his family.

Who?

Cistercian monks from the abbey Aunay sur Odon in Normandy (the motherhouse) come over to England to set up an abbey on the de Verdun lands based around Alton.

Where?

The monks chose Croxden because it was part of the de Verdun lands but also because

- a river (the Dove) running through (for hygiene, cooking, fishing)
- woodland nearby (for firewood and to make and sell charcoal
- Fertile land to grow food and graze animals

The Early History of the Abbey

1179- set up
1181- start of the building of the stone abbey
1199- given land by King John
13th CENTURY- PERIOD OF PROSPERITY.
AS MANY AS 70 MONKS LIVING THERE
1253- church with five chapels completed
1315- produce more wool than any other Staffordshire monastery
1316- patronage turns to de Furnival family
1319- argument with patron leads monks to protest by barricading themselves in. Patron gives in
1320-1370 TIME OF GREAT DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY THE ABBEY
1335-6- abbot's house built
1348- plague
1368- debts of over £165
1372- violent storms damage abbey
1377- Abbot and only 6 other monks living in abbey

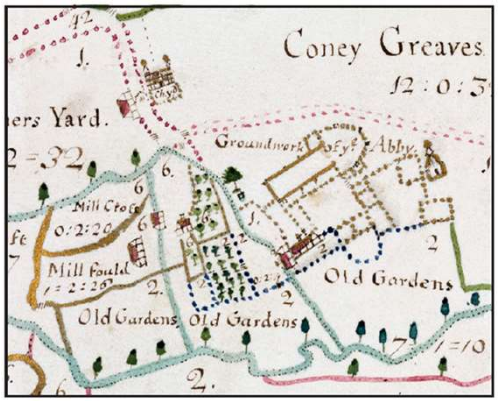
THE TURNING POINT- DISSOLUTION 1538

King Henry VIII started the Church of England so he could have a divorce from his first wife and marry Anne Boleyn who he hoped would give him a child. As monasteries were not needed in the Church of England and their wealth could fund war with France, he had them closed down.

1537- Croxden Abbey paid £100 to stay open
1538- Croxden Abbey was closed down. The roof was taken off, the land sold off and the monks had to leave (though they were given pensions)



After the Dissolution



As **1722 map** shows, the grounds became an estate with gardens and an orchard after the dissolution and then became a farm. Stone from the walls of the abbey was either sold or taken by local people.

A track was driven through the church which was then turned into a road.

1911- Charles Lynam, local architect did first site survey.

The site was passed over to English Heritage in 20th century and was preserved as a site of historical interest.

2008- English Heritage site survey find evidence of original wooden buildings, mills, fishponds, water management.

THE CROXDEN CHRONICLE

What?

An account of the history of Croxden Abbey.

When?

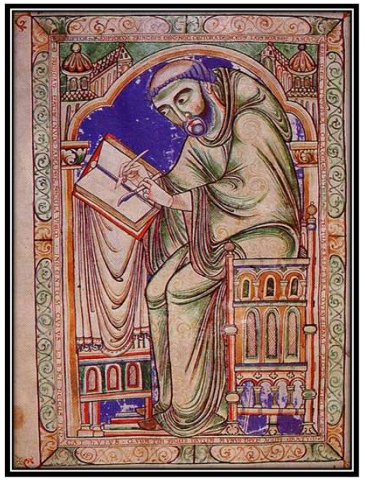
Started in 1288 and continued until 1374. But also deals with earlier history from 1066 onwards including the abbey's founding.

Who?

William de Shepisheved, a monk at the monastery.

What did it say?

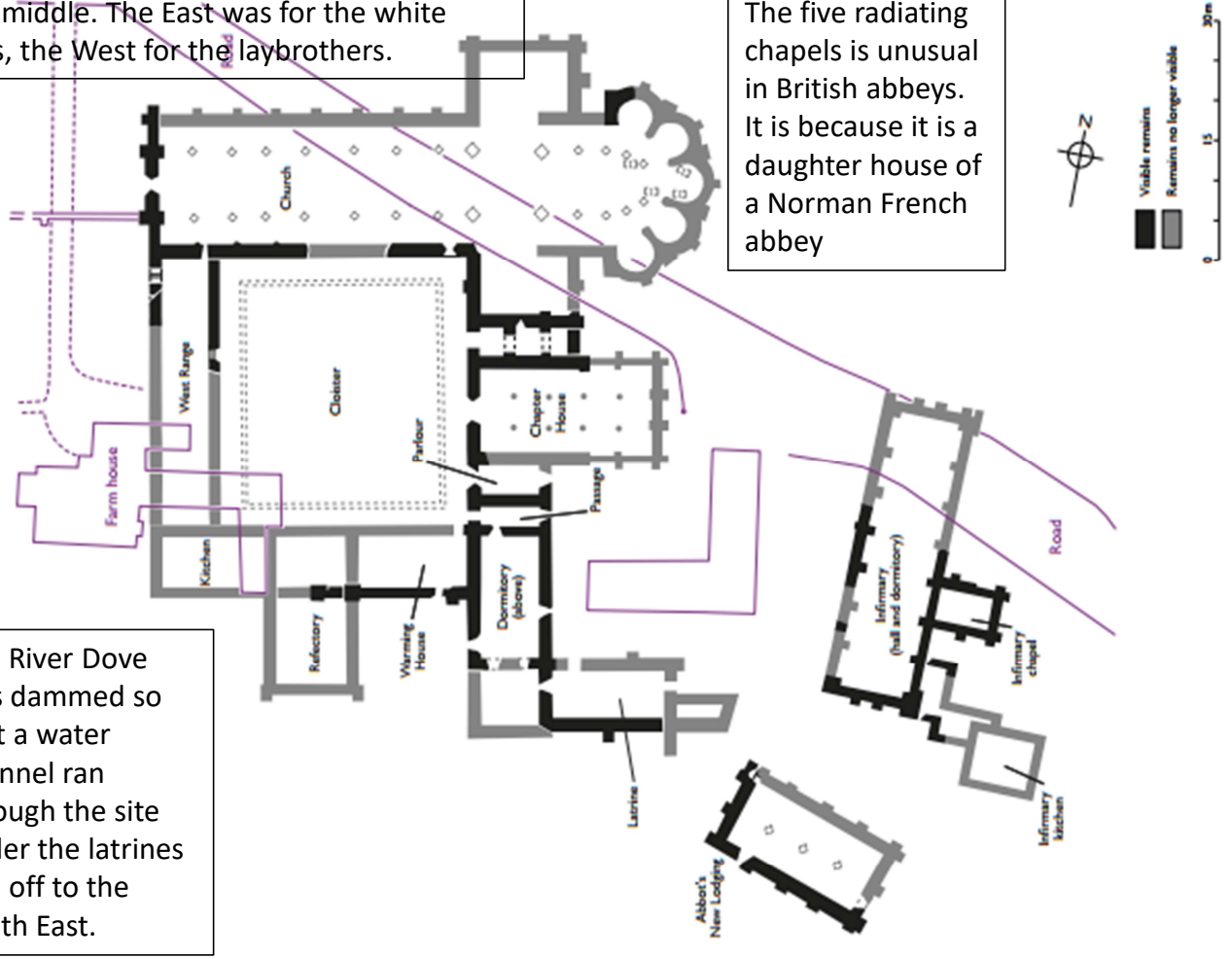
The Chronicle contains some description of the weather, events such as solar eclipses, comets and the Northern Lights were seen as omens by the chronicler. It also mentions why the monastery was founded though there is no mention of what the monks did on a daily basis.



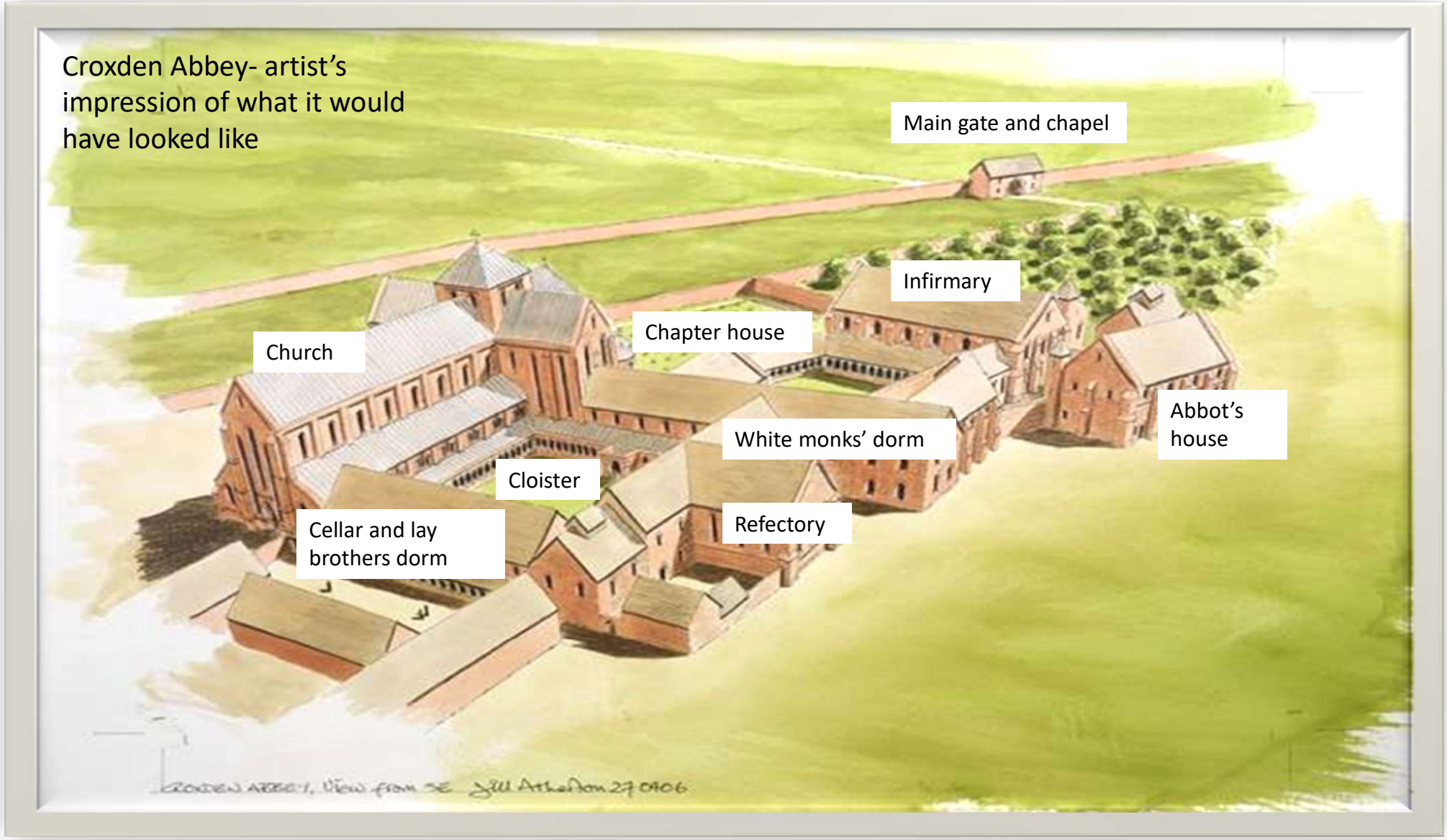
The layout of Croxden Abbey

The church was separated by the rood screen in the middle. The East was for the white monks, the West for the laybrothers.

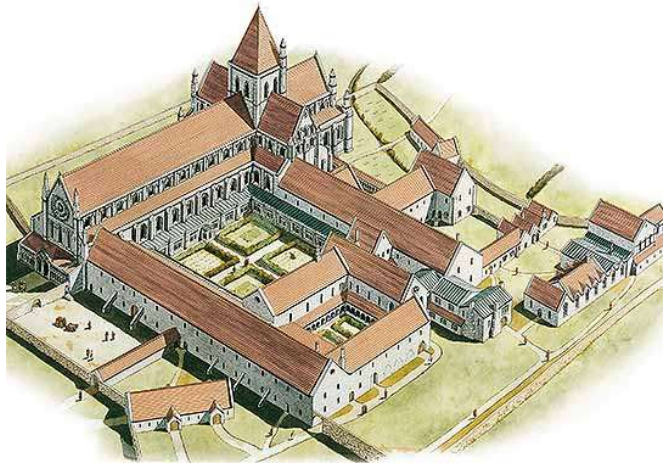
The five radiating chapels is unusual in British abbeys. It is because it is a daughter house of a Norman French abbey

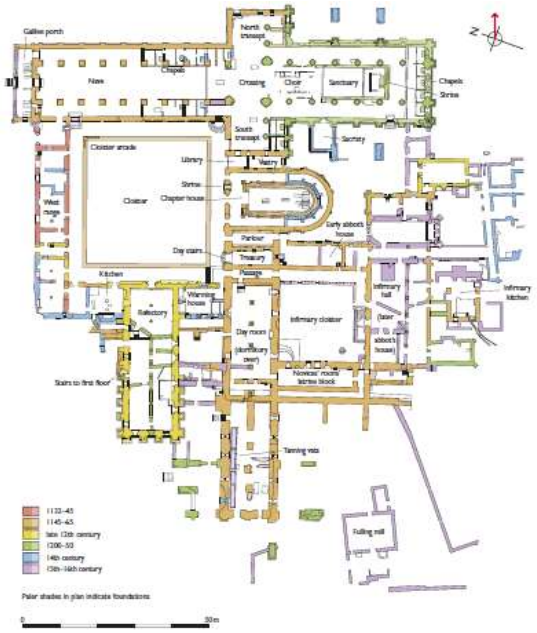


The River Dove was dammed so that a water channel ran through the site under the latrines and off to the South East.


Croxden Abbey- artist's impression of what it would have looked like
Main gate and chapel
Infirmary
Chapter house
Church
Abbot's house
White monks' dorm
Cloister
Refectory
Cellar and lay brothers dorm

Rievaulx Abbey in North Yorkshire





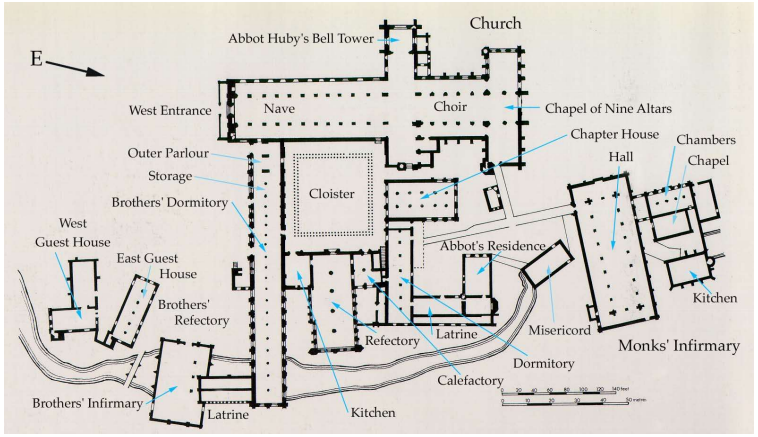
How similar is Croxden to these other two larger abbeys?





Fountains Abbey in North Yorkshire



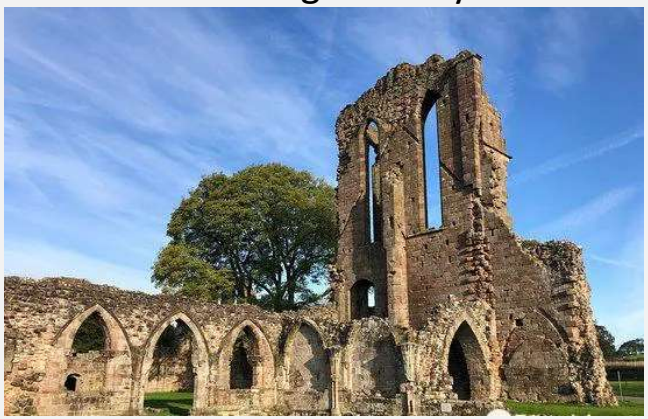


Rievaulx Abbey in North Yorkshire





How similar is Croxden to these other two larger abbeys?





Fountains Abbey in North Yorkshire







The sacristy

Side of the church. See the remains of the roof of the white monks' dormitory

The chapter house- windows, column bases, floor tiles- signs of an important building



Remains of the Abbot's house. The large window and the column bases plus stairs showing that this was two storeys high indicate that this was an important building and cost a lot to build



This is at the eastern end of the church. In the background are remains of the five radiating chapes. On the floor are the stone coffins of the patrons and his families- the de Verduns and the Furnivals- evidence of the purpose of the abbey to pray for their souls.



The west end of the church. This give us an idea of its full height. The large windows shows the importance of the building. The glass would have been plain as Cistercians believed in purity and simplicity



This is on the southern range of the site which was used for functional buildings like the kitchens, warming house and the refectory. We can see that the kitchens were here as there is the remains of a large fireplace. The larger hole in the wall to the left of it was the entrance to the refectory



Standing in the cloister- the centre of the site where the monks spent time meditating and copying manuscripts. The doorway on the far left the white monks went through about 8 times a day to get into the church to pray.