



Shire Hall Walking Club: In the footsteps of Monks



Gloucestershire Archives

'A monk there was, one of the finest sort.'

Geoffrey Chaucer



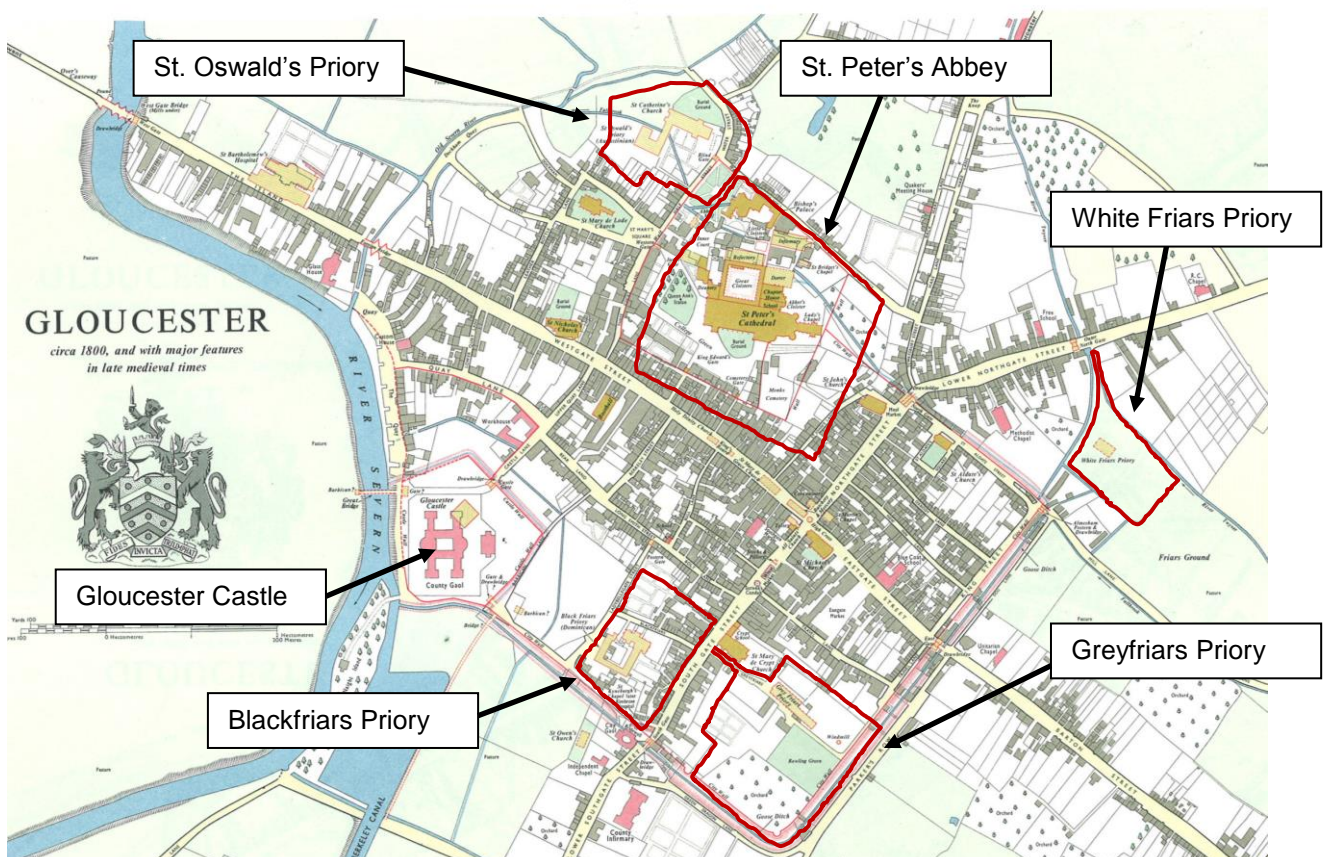
In the past, religion was far more important in peoples' lives than today.

At the top of the religious tree were the monasteries & friaries, which are among the most intriguing and enduring symbols of our national heritage.

The monasteries were especially influential in Gloucestershire because of all the land they owned or controlled.



There were three main religious groups: the **Monastic Orders**, **Mendicant Orders** and **Canons**. The **Monastic Orders** were monks & nuns – Benedictines, Cistercians and Carthusians – who sought lives of devotion and self-denial so established their abbeys & monasteries in inhospitable locations and didn't interact greatly with people. The **Mendicants** – Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and Augustinian Friars – also took vows, but their friaries were in towns, where the friars could withdraw from the world in spirit but still interact with people. The **Canons** were not true monks but priests who lived communally and shared their wealth and property (note: the military monastic orders, such as the Knights Templar, were laymen who took monastic vows including one to protect Christianity).





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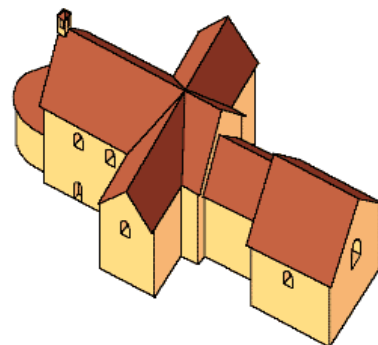


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Gloucester's Religious Houses

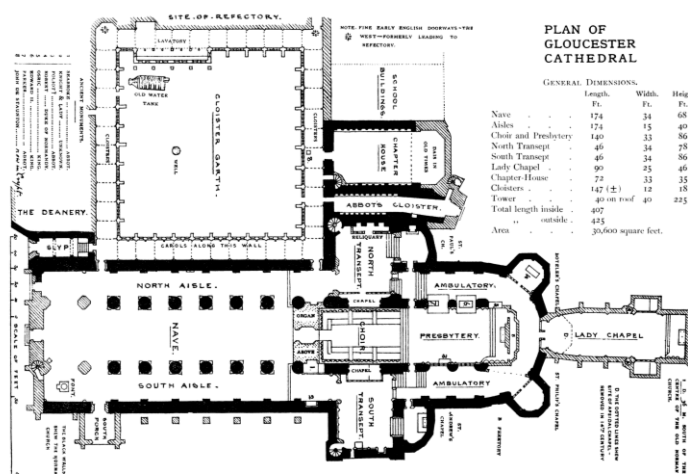
Priory of St. Oswald's

- This was originally founded c660 as a canon church dedicated to St. Peter by a son of Penda, King of Mercia.
- It was refounded c890 as a minster church by Æthelflæd, Queen of Mercia (daughter of Alfred the Great) and is seen as the 'last of the Saxon minsters'
- While the church was built of stone, the conventual buildings were probably built of timber.
- In 909 it came to prominence when the relics of St Oswald (7th century King of Northumbria) were brought to the site and it subsequently became a major pilgrimage centre.
- By the Conquest it was in decline and in 1153 it was refounded again, this time as a priory of Augustinian Canons, but in doing so became the subject of a 200 year long dispute between the Dioceses of Worcester, Canterbury and York – at one point, the Bishop of Worcester excommunicated the canons and forbade local people from selling them food!
- After the Dissolution, it became the Parish Church of St Catherine's Parish until it was destroyed in the civil war.
- The current remains are the north arcade of the nave of the priory church – the small cloister is marked out by the box hedges on the south side.



The Abbey of St. Peter (now Gloucester Cathedral)

- This was founded c681 by Osric of the Hwicce as a convent of nuns dedicated to St Peter & St Paul.
- In 823 it became a church for secular canons, until refounded as a Benedictine monastery in 1022 by Cnut.
- In 1073, William I appointed Serlo (a monk from Mont St Michel) abbot and he started a huge rebuilding programme; by 1104, the number of monks had risen from 2 to over 100.
- In 1216, the 9 year-old Henry III was crowned King in the abbey.
- In 1327, Abbot Thoky took a political risk and received the body of Edward II for burial – it was a shrewd decision as the abbey became a place of pilgrimage as a result and income from pilgrims funded much new building work.
- The abbey annual rent income from lands it owned was over £5,000 (over £2.5 million in today's prices!).
- It also owned lots of sheep – in the 1270s it had over 10,000 animals generating about 46 sacks of wool per year, typically earning the abbey £180,000 at today's prices.
- The abbey survived the Dissolution by becoming Gloucester's Cathedral church.



[From a Drawing by F. S. Waller, F.R.S.E.A.]





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White Friars

- Little is known of the house of the Carmelite Friars (a contemplative silent order) except that it was situated on the NE side of the city's North gate.
- It was founded c.1260 with the patronage of Queen Eleanor (El's wife), Sir Thomas Giffard and Thomas of Berkeley.
- In 1337, there were 31 friars and the friary grounds had been extended out to Bruton Way.
- In 1347 the friary had piped water from the spring called 'Gosewhytewell'.
- At the Dissolution in 1538, there were just 3 friars and the house '*was small, and in decay,*'



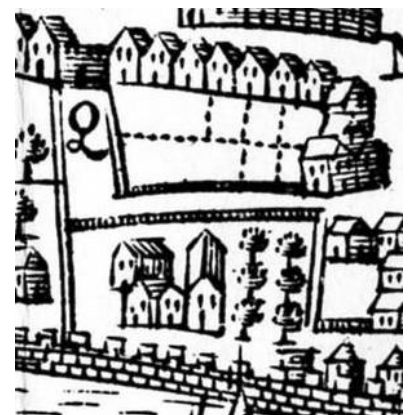
Grey Friars

- This was founded as a friary of Conventual Franciscans (Friars Minor) in 1231 on land given to the Borough by Thomas, Lord Berkeley.
- The friary buildings were on the south side of church, but their layout is unknown.
- The friary was enlarged several times – once simply to provide land to grow food to stop the friars begging!
- In 1285, a dispute arose with St. Peters Abbey after the monks forcibly removed a body from the friary and took it to the abbey for burial.
- In 1357, they two groups clashed again over the water supply from Robinswood Hill. The dispute was settled by the Black Prince who was visiting the city and he found in favour of the friars.
- In 1438, the friars gave the city $\frac{3}{4}$'s of their share of this water (the city's first accessible supply).
- The church was rebuilt in the 1400s with Berkeley money – these are the surviving remains.
- At the Dissolution, the friary was converted into workshops and a brewery but the buildings were badly damaged in the Civil War and ultimately demolished in the 1720s.



Blackfriars

- This was a Dominican Friary founded in 1239 on land given by the Lord of Harnhill with Henry III being a major benefactor.
- It was built like a monastery with a quadrangle of ranges around a central cloister/courtyard.
- On the north side was the church; on the east was a chapter house & dormitory; on the south a Library & Scriptorium while a refectory was on the west.
- A cemetery of over 140 graves lies to the north and the bodies of women and children found here suggests the friary also acted as a hospital to the city's inhabitants.
- It was dissolved in 1538 and bought by the Mayor of Gloucester Sir Thomas Bell, the wealthy capper and clothier who remodelled the church into a mansion and the rest of the buildings into workshops.
- The south range is the oldest surviving purpose-built library in the country.





Further Reading/Book List



Medieval Monasteries (Shire Library) by Roger Rosewell (2012, Shire, ISBN-13: 978-0747811466) – *Typically informative Shire publication.*

Monasteries in the Landscape by Michael Aston (2000, The History Press Ltd, ISBN-13: 978-0752414911) – *Scholarly yet easily readable, as you'd expect from the late, great Mick Aston of Time Team fame.*

Life in the Medieval Cloister by Julie Kerr (2009, Bloomsbury, ISBN: 9781847251619) – *a fascinating glimpse into monastic life, outlining some of the practical problems that impinged on a monk's daily routine.*

How to Read a Church by R Taylor (2003 Rider ISBN: 1844130533) – *Invaluable for anyone who likes meandering around churches and cathedrals.*

Discovering Church Architecture by M Child (1996, Shire, ISBN: 0852633289) – *Great for slipping into a pocket or camera bag.*

The Good Gloucestershire Abbey/Monastery/Friary Guide!

With a few exceptions, Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries has left us with ruins but we have some good ones!

Cirencester Abbey – a few stumpy pillars and the outline of this Augustinian abbey can be seen in the gardens behind the town church, but the gatehouse is a fine standing structure.

Deerhurst Priory – this priory church was once a Benedictine Abbey.

Hailes Abbey – this now ruined Cistercian house was most famous for its relic; a phial of the blood of Christ.

Llanthony Secunda Priory – this was a daughter cell of Augustinian Canons from Llanthony Prima in Wales (itself well worth a visit), but only a grange, gateway and ruined walls now survives. It recently received HLF funding to help secure its future.

Kingswood Abbey – nothing remains of this Cistercian abbey apart from a magnificent gatehouse.

Tewkesbury Abbey – this Benedictine abbey is now the town's parish church.

Flaxley Abbey – this Cistercian house is now a private residence.

Leonard Stanley Abbey – this Benedictine abbey became a priory for Augustinian Canons but survives as the parish church.

