

Medieval Pilgrimage in Wales

Learning Objectives

At the end of this activity pupils should be able to:

- Define 'pilgrimage' and 'pilgrims'.
- Give some reasons why people went on pilgrimages.
- List 3 places in Wales where people could go on pilgrimages.
- Think about your own pilgrimage or special journey.



Pilgrimage in Wales goes back centuries. In North Wales, there is evidence of people visiting holy sites from as early as the 7th century! When we think of pilgrimage in Britain, we usually think of people like this man here – Christian monks.

But anyone could go on a pilgrimage, not just nuns, monks and other religious people.

Going on a pilgrimage meant going on a journey, usually on foot, to a sacred religious place.

Medieval Pilgrimage in Wales

One of the most important pilgrimage sites in Wales is St David's in Pembrokeshire.



As you know already, St David is the patron saint of Wales and St David's Cathedral is where he was buried when he died in 589AD. People during the medieval period believed that being close to a saint, even the remains of one, brought them closer to God. They often believed that items and places associated with the saint had healing powers.



St David's wasn't the only place people visited on pilgrimages in Wales.

The Cistercian order of monks set up numerous monasteries and churches across Wales which are today linked by a walking route called the Cistercian Way. Some of the places you can walk to along this route are local to your schools.

Medieval Pilgrimage in Wales

Do you recognise any of these places?



Task 1

Do some research on the internet to find out the answers to these questions.

You could have a look at cadw.gov.uk, cistercianway.wales or monasticwales.org

- Are there any shrines, abbeys, or monasteries near where you live?
- When were they built, and by who?
- Do you know the names of any churches near you? If they are named after a saint (e.g. St Illtyd's, St. Paul's, St. Cadoc's) find out who they are. Quite often these saints have very interesting stories.

Medieval Pilgrimage in Wales

Task 2

All sorts of people chose to go on pilgrimages. Rich or poor, old or young, everyone had their own reason for taking the journey. People who were sick or hurt might go in the hopes of being healed. Criminals or those who felt they had done wrong might go in search of God's forgiveness. Some went to demonstrate their faith in God. A woman might go on a pilgrimage to try to increase her chances of having a baby, while others might go on a pilgrimage to try and reduce the time spent in Purgatory once they die.

Imagine a person living in the 1200s. They have decided to go on a pilgrimage to a shrine.

The first part of this task is to create your medieval character and think about why they want to go on a pilgrimage. We have drawn some examples that could help you think about what your character could look like. Think about whether you are a man or woman, old or young, rich or poor. What sort of job do you do? Do you have any family? Where do you live (city or countryside?)

You might also want to do some research on clothing in the thirteenth century (1200s) using the internet or library books. Pilgrims' clothes would need to be practical and weatherproof, particularly in Wales! You will find some useful information here:

<https://www.medievalists.net/2011/11/pilgrims-and-fashion-the-functions-of-pilgrims-garments/>

Medieval Pilgrimage in Wales



Once you have your character, think about the reasons he or she might choose to go on a pilgrimage. Write a diary entry or a letter explaining those reasons. See if you can describe your character's feelings about going on the journey – are they nervous or excited? Are they worried that the pilgrimage might not help or are they convinced that it will work? How do they feel about the long walk? Will they travel alone or with others?

You might also like to think about the things you might take on your journey. Sometimes people in the past would carry relics (relics could be a part of a holy person's body or belongings) or perhaps a cross and you would need tools to eat and drink.

Medieval Pilgrimage in Wales

Task 3

During task 1 you looked at shrines, monasteries and churches near you. Your character is going to go on a pilgrimage to one of the shrines you found. Draw a simple map showing how your character would get there from where you live. Include some pictures or symbols to represent things you might pass on the way.

Underneath your map, write a short explanation of why you think this shrine is important or interesting. Why do you think people would have gone on a pilgrimage there? Would any of the things you passed along the way (churches, villages, monasteries) have made the journey more special?

Task 4



Lots of religions around the world have pilgrimages. For example, Muslims travel to Mecca in Saudi Arabia during the Hajj, while Sikhs might do pilgrimage to the Harmandir Sahib, the Golden Temple in Amritsar

Mecca



The Golden Temple, Amritsar

Medieval Pilgrimage in Wales

But pilgrimage isn't always a religious activity. Some people might go on a spiritual pilgrimage, while others might go on a pilgrimage to a place that means a lot to them. Perhaps you might go on a pilgrimage to the birthplace of someone you admire, or to a place that was important to you when you were a little child. Others might go on a 'pilgrimage' to a place of historic importance. Here are some examples for you:



Medieval Pilgrimage in Wales



One dictionary definition of pilgrimage is ‘a visit to a place that is considered special, where you go to show your respect’.

Your task is to think of a place that is important to you that you might visit on a pilgrimage. You might want to draw a picture of it and write about why you have chosen this place and why it is special to you.

Think about the following questions as you write:

- How would you make your journey special? Would you take anything with you (like a relic)?
- Would you walk or go in the car? Why?
- Would you wear special clothes, or would you need to dress in something practical?
- Would you visit any special places along the way?

Medieval Pilgrimage in Wales

Other Ideas

1. At some sites of pilgrimage, pilgrim badges were sold as souvenirs.



Have a go at designing your own for your special place of pilgrimage.

2. Make a video diary of a special journey and talk about how you prepared for it, what makes it special, and how it makes you feel.

3. Create a pilgrimage route and shrine or church on Minecraft!

You can visit www.explorechurches.org/kids-fun-stuff for more ideas like this and activities which will help you to explore historic churches across the UK.