Why was Barrow-in-Furness so important in the Middle Ages?

How would you describe the lives of monks at Furness Abbey?

Imagine that you are a pilgrim visiting Furness Abbey, when it was rich and powerful. Write a letter to a family member describing what you see while you are there. What do the monks look like? How do they spend most of their time? What jobs are they doing? How did it feel to reach the abbey?

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Teacher's Pet | Historic England

CUMBRIA Barrow-in-Furness

A Day at Furness Abbey- Example piece

Dear Mother,

After the long and difficult journey we finally arrived. Towering stone walls stretched high above, their windows filled with coloured glass. I could hear chanting, quiet and peaceful, drifting through the air like a song on the breeze.

Monks walked slowly through the courtyard in long robes. Some wore brown with ropes tied around their waists. Others wore white tunics with black aprons, their wooden prayer beads clicking gently as they passed. No one noticed me–I felt like a ghost in the middle of history.
One group of monks moved together into the church. I followed them. Inside, it was cool and dim. Candles flickered beside the stone walls, and the smell of wax and herbs filled the air. The monks knelt in silence while the Abbot, a tall man with a calm face, read aloud in Latin.

When the prayers ended, the monks stood and quietly left the church. I trailed behind as they headed to the Cloister. Here, some of the monks sat and read, their noses buried in heavy books. Others wrote carefully with quills, copying out words in neat lines. These monks were scribes, keeping records and copying holy texts.

After a while, the bell rang for dinner. Everyone walked to the Frater, the dining hall. Long wooden tables were set out, and the monks sat side by side, eating in silence. Their lunch was simple–bread, fish, and vegetables from the garden. A single monk stood at the front, reading from a book while the others ate. I noticed no one talked; the silence was part of their devotion.

Later, I wandered to the kitchen. It was warm and busy, with pots bubbling and the scent of herbs and baking bread filling the air. Monks worked together, chopping, stirring, and preparing food. I even saw one carefully peeling apples for a pie!

Outside, in the garden, a few monks were tending the plants–pulling weeds, picking vegetables, and checking on the herbs used to make medicine. Another monk carried water to the animals in the small abbey farm nearby.
Before I knew it, the sky was turning golden. The monks headed back to the church for evening prayers. As they began to sing, the sound surrounded me, soft and beautiful.

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Local History

Historic England and Teacher's Pet have come together to bring you a collection of free resources that you can use in your local history teaching.

Historic England | Teacher's Pet

Who are Teacher's Pet?

Teacher's Pet have been providing downloadable and playable educational content to early years and primary school teachers for over 14 years. We cover all areas of the curriculum and use a team of in-house teachers and designers to create engaging and memorable concepts, that the children will love.

Why local history?

At Teacher's Pet we want to empower primary school teachers by giving them the tools they need to deliver inspiring and thoughtful lessons about the local area and its history. We believe local history teaching has such an important part to play in a child's wellbeing – helping to give children a sense of pride in where they live.

Our Local History project is designed to provide teachers across the UK with everything they need to successfully carry out a full scheme of teaching about their local area, through key enquiry questions and source led activities.

Working with Historic England gives us access to archived maps and photos for resources and information from knowledgeable local historians, as well helping us to provide the content to you free of charge.

For more information about our Local History project or to find out more about Teacher's Pet Classroom Resources, please visit our website.

www.tpet.co.uk