



BEAULIEU ABBEY AUDIO TOUR COMMENTARY

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| | Introduction | <p><i>Welcome to Beaulieu Abbey. This tour will tell you the story of the abbey and the people who lived within its walls.</i></p> <p><i>The audio tour is divided into numbered sections from 1 to 17. You can either do them in numerical order, or skip to whichever section you want if you haven't got time to do the whole tour. Track 18 is the conclusion which you can read at the end of your tour. Each section is marked by a corresponding number on your map.</i></p> <p><i>The tour starts at the entrance to the abbey exhibition. You need to be standing in the open space known as the Drumway, just outside the doorway that leads into a building called the Domus.</i></p> |
| 1 | At entrance to Domus (Drumway) | <p><i>You should now be standing outside Beaulieu Abbey at point 1 on your map.</i></p> <p><i>This was once one of the biggest and most important abbeys in southern England. Beaulieu Abbey was founded in 1204 and closed 334 years later in 1538. It was home to monks of the Cistercian Order. The Cistercians were a group of unmarried religious men who lived strictly according to vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. They settled in remote places far from other people because they believed this was the best way to worship and talk to God.</i></p> <p><i>Beaulieu was founded by King John on the site of his hunting lodge in the New Forest near a place known in Latin as Bellus Locus Regis, the beautiful place of the king.</i></p> <p><i>If you enter the doorway to the building in front of you, this will take you into an exhibition about the abbey and a ten-minute film about the history of the abbey. You can either look round before you continue this tour, or leave it till later.</i></p> <p><i>Now go to point 2 on your map, and stand just inside the west entrance of the ruined Abbey Church.</i></p> |

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| 2 | West door of Abbey Church | <p><i>You should now be standing just inside the west entrance of the ruined Abbey Church at point 2.</i></p> <p>This was once the main door to the great Abbey Church, where processions would begin and proceed down the nave, or central walkway, to reach the altar at the far end.</p> <p>The Abbey Church was the most important building on the site and the first to be built. It took 42 years to complete, almost a lifetime in the 13th century.</p> <p>In its heyday, this church was one of the biggest in England, roughly equivalent to the size of a cathedral. Today, you can only really appreciate its size by the outlines in gravel on the grass-covered space where the pillars and walls of the church once stood.</p> <p>The position of the high altar is marked by a cross above a box-shaped hedge. Try to imagine the vast building that would have risen up in front of you: the huge aisled nave, the soaring pillars with their coloured shafts of Purbeck marble, the magnificent vaulted ceiling high above, and the elegant pointed windows. Beneath your feet would have been red and yellow patterned tiles. And there would have been silence ... broken only by occasional chanting and prayer.</p> <p><i>Walk forward to point 3 on your map with the raised information panel on your right.</i></p> |
| 3 | Nave, Abbey Church (near raised panel) | <p><i>You should now be standing next to the raised information panel in the nave of the Abbey Church at point 3.</i></p> <p>Like all Cistercian foundations, Beaulieu was built to a standard plan based on its mother house, or headquarters, in Cîteaux, France. Overland travel was slow and expensive, so all building materials, except timber, came up the Beaulieu River.</p> <p>The community started with 30 monks sent directly from Cîteaux in June 1204. By the end of the century, there were around 200 men living and working in Beaulieu Abbey.</p> <p><i>Now go through the archway near the panel. This will bring you into an alleyway called the Lane. Walk all the way down until you reach another raised information panel. This is point 4 on your map.</i></p> |
| 4 | The Lane (close to remains of wash basin) | <p><i>You should now be standing in the Lane next to the raised information panel at point 4.</i></p> <p>The Beaulieu monks devoted their time to doing God's work. This was a continuing round of worship, work, private prayer and study. It was a life of discipline and routine. Cistercian monks were either choir monks, whose work consisted of prayer, study and worship, or lay brothers, who did manual tasks such as farming, building and fishing.</p> |

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| | | <p>Each group had their own area of the abbey. This Lane divided the choir monks from the lay brothers. The buildings east of this walkway were reserved for choir monks, while the smaller ones to the west were for lay brothers. The archway you have just come through was the lay brothers' day entrance to the Abbey Church.</p> <p><i>Look for the large stone slab nearby and stand in front of it.</i></p> <p>This was once part of the lavatorium, or wash basin, where the monks washed their hands before eating. It used to stand outside the choir monks' Refectory or dining room in the Cloister. Look closely and you can see the remains of its shallow rim and the drainage hole at the back.</p> <p><i>Now go through the archway in front of you. Through this door lies a grass-covered square: the Cloister. Go and stand in the centre of the square which is point 5 on your map.</i></p> |
| 5 | The Cloister | <p><i>You should now be standing in the centre of the Cloister at point 5.</i></p> <p>At the heart of all Cistercian monasteries was the Cloister. It was situated to the south of the church to catch the sun.</p> <p>Now try to imagine the Cloister as it would have been. The four walkways that surrounded it are still visible today. Once they would have been covered with a lean-to roof supported along the walls by stone blocks called corbels. Here, the monks could study, read or sit in contemplation on the stone benches beneath the carrels (alcoves) on the north wall. The Cloister would have been a place of great tranquillity, the peace broken only by the bells announcing one of the nine offices, or services, of the day, and occasional footsteps as the monks went about their business.</p> <p>Many buildings and rooms led off from the Cloister. The blocked-off steps leading nowhere in the south-east corner would once have taken you to the choir monks' dormitory or sleeping area. This was on the first floor, above the 3 big arches in the east wall.</p> <p>On the south wall you can see the remains of the wash basins or lavatorium, where the choir monks washed their hands before going to eat. Next door is the entrance to the former Warming House, the only heated room in the Abbey.</p> <p>Planted around the Cloister are some of the herbs that would have been grown by the monks for cooking and medicines.</p> <p><i>You can now do a tour of the major rooms leading off the Cloister. These are described in sections 6 to 10. You can do as many as you wish. When you have finished, walk through the choir monks' day entrance into the church to the crossing at point 10 on your map.</i></p> <p><i>Start your tour of the rooms leading off the Cloister by going to point 6 on your map, the Choir Monks' Refectory. This is the present day parish</i></p> |

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| | | <i>church of Beaulieu. Stop just outside, in front of the glass doors.</i> |
| 6 | Outside the Choir Monks' Refectory | <p><i>You should now be standing outside the Choir Monks' Refectory at point 6.</i></p> <p>The choir monks' Refectory was converted into a church for the local population after the Abbey closed. It is still the parish church.</p> <p><i>If the door is unlocked and there is no service taking place, go in and look round. Otherwise, please continue listening.</i></p> <p>Above you is a red-painted ceiling dating from the 18th century. This is decorated with carved wooden bosses showing the heads of animals and people. In monastic times, this would have been a much simpler space, with no stained glass, memorial tablets or elaborate furniture.</p> <p>Try to imagine the monastic community eating here in silence at long wooden trestle tables. During the meal, one monk would stand in the pulpit to read aloud from the Bible or other religious works.</p> <p><i>Now go back to just inside the entrance to the Refectory.</i></p> <p>The monastic kitchens once stood to the west, although little now remains. The serving hatch still exists but is hidden inside the parish church walls by later building work.</p> <p><i>Now step outside into the Cloister again. Turn right and follow the Cloister walls round until you reach the first opening. Go through it and down a gravel path between yew hedges. Follow the signs to the Monks' Infirmary to reach point 7 on your map.</i></p> |
| 7 | The Infirmary | <p><i>You should now be standing in the Choir Monks' Infirmary or hospital at point 7.</i></p> <p>Today, only the outline of the Infirmary remains, marked out with yew hedges. When you reach the end of the path, you will be standing in the main ward, where sick and elderly monks would lie on the floor on straw mattresses. The infirmary had its own chapel, which is marked today by a simple wooden cross. Look for an opening in the hedge to its right – this marks the entrance to the infirmary kitchen.</p> <p>The monks grew lots of medicinal herbs within the abbey precinct walls. These included penny royal, taken to cure toothache and respiratory disorders, violets for lung ailments, and lavender, which was said to ease 'pains of the head'. Honey was used as a medicine <i>and</i> as a disinfectant.</p> <p>Luxuries such as almonds, cumin, liquorice, sugar and pepper were also available for the sick and elderly. They were allowed these normally prohibited foods, since they aided quick recovery.</p> <p><i>Now make your way back toward the Cloister.</i></p> |

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| | | <p>On your right you will see the remains of the misericorde or infirmary dining hall, which was attached to the main Infirmary building. Sick monks dining here had special permission to eat white meat, which was not usually allowed.</p> <p><i>Now return to the Cloister and turn right, stopping in front of the row of 3 open arches at point 8 on your map.</i></p> |
| 8 | The Chapter House (in front of central arch) | <p><i>You should now be facing the middle of the row of 3 open arches at point 8.</i></p> <p>The Chapter House was where the senior monks met to manage the affairs of the community and consider questions of discipline. It was a meeting room where discussion took place and information was exchanged. Senior monks were given permission to break their vow of silence. To show that the meeting had started, the most senior monk present would read aloud a chapter of the Rule of the Cistercian Order. The room opened out onto the Cloister so that everybody could hear what was being said.</p> <p>In the Chapter House, the monks would have sat on stone benches that ran all round the room. The abbot, who headed the community, occupied a raised seat at the east end. The roof was vaulted, as shown by the surviving vaulting shafts on the upper bench.</p> <p>The piles of stone you can see mark the site of the pillars which supported the ceiling and roof. The more solid pieces are thought to mark the graves of abbots or senior choir monks, who were buried beneath the Chapter House floor.</p> <p><i>Continue along the Cloister wall in the direction of the ruined Abbey Church, stopping by the gates at point 9 on your map.</i></p> |
| 9 | The Vestry (in front of gates) | <p><i>You should now be standing in front of the Vestry at point 9.</i></p> <p>This room was once the Vestry, where the community kept the plate and vestments for special services. It was also used to store precious books and other valuables.</p> <p>The Vestry is now used as a private burial ground for the Montagu family. Two generations of the family have been laid to rest behind these gates: Henry, 1st Lord Montagu and his wife, and John, 2nd Lord Montagu and his two wives. On the right-hand wall are memorial inscriptions to other family members.</p> <p><i>Now carry on walking towards the Abbey Church, stopping at point 10 on your map, which is the next niche along.</i></p> |
| 10 | The Monastic Bookcase | <p><i>You should now be standing in front of the niche that once contained the Monastic Bookcase at point 10.</i></p> |

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| | | <p>The niche facing you was once a bookcase where the monks kept the books they used most often. These included Latin volumes describing the lives of the saints and religious commentaries, as well as the Bible and prayer books. The Cistercians were not known for producing elaborate manuscripts, but they would still have had to copy out books by hand.</p> <p>The memorial plaque on the back wall is more recent and commemorates a group of people who belonged to the Special Operations Executive or SOE. During World War II, SOE sent men and women on dangerous missions into Nazi-occupied Europe to further the Allied cause. Many of these people completed their training on the Beaulieu Estate. Their story is told in the Secret Army Exhibition, which you can visit on your way to Palace House.</p> <p><i>Now continue in the same direction, entering the former Abbey Church by the choir monks' day entrance up a small flight of steps.</i></p> <p><i>Keep walking until you reach point 11 on your map, the crossing of the Abbey Church. This is where the two transepts, or arms, intersected with the nave.</i></p> |
| 11 | The Crossing, Abbey Church | <p><i>You should now be standing at the crossing in the Abbey Church at point 11.</i></p> <p>Turn towards the high altar at the east end. Arranged behind it in a semi-circle was a series of small chapels. This area was known as the apse.</p> <p>To your left and right are the north and south transepts. This was where the choir monks worshipped. If you look to your right, you will see a staircase leading into the south transept. It led down from the choir monks' dormitory and was used to enter the church for night services. Near the bottom were special seats, warmed by a small charcoal burner, where elderly or infirm monks sat.</p> <p>Above your head would have risen the central bell tower – the highest point of the Abbey Church. Beaulieu would have had to get special permission from Citeaux to have it built. The tower would have made a handy lookout, so as well as calling the monks to prayer, the bell may also have been rung to warn of danger.</p> <p>The eastern end of the church was the spiritual hub of the whole abbey complex. Try to imagine the choir monks and lay brothers, in their different habits, filing in to worship, each through their own doorways to sit in their part of the church.</p> <p>The divine office, or schedule of services, divided up the monastic day. It began with Prime at sunrise, and was followed by eight other services at regular intervals. The day finished with Nocturnes and then Matins at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning.</p> <p><i>Walk back down the nave to the west door.</i></p> |

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| | | <p>The red crosses on the paving stones mark the position of graves found during archaeological excavations.</p> <p><i>Turn left after you have passed through the west entrance and go to point 12 on your map.</i></p> |
| 12 | The Domus (just in front of Drumway outside) | <p><i>You should now be standing in the Drumway at the entrance to the Domus at point 12.</i></p> <p>This building, the Domus Conversorum, housed the living quarters of the lay brothers.</p> <p><i>Go inside and stand in the lobby area facing the figure of the abbot.</i></p> <p>The Domus is a two-storey building, and was originally twice its present length. To your right is what remains of the lay brothers' refectory. It is now home to a short film presentation on the story of Beaulieu Abbey.</p> <p>To your left is what used to be the cellar. This space now contains an exhibition on monastic life, including a model of what the abbey may have looked like. Locate the Domus on the model which shows the size of the buildings that once stood here.</p> <p><i>Now go to the far end of the cellar. If the door is open climb the stairs to the lay brother's dormitory to see a set of embroideries depicting the abbey's history. This is point 13 on your map.</i></p> <p><i>If the door is closed then skip point 13 on your map. The embroideries can be seen by looking at the illustrated book in the Abbey Exhibition. When you have finished looking at the book and Exhibition, leave the Domus by the Drumway entrance. Turn left and walk towards and past Palace House. Position yourself at point 14 on the gravel to the south side of Palace House with the small Clock House behind you.</i></p> |
| 13 | Upstairs: Lay Brothers' Dormitory & Embroideries | <p><i>You should now be standing in the Lay Brothers' Dormitory upstairs at point 13.</i></p> <p>On the walls around you is a set of embroideries by Belinda, Lady Montagu recounting some of the landmarks in the history of the abbey. Pick up and read one of the leaflets to find out more about the individual embroideries. This wonderful room is currently used for banquets and receptions on a regular basis.</p> <p><i>This concludes the tour of the main abbey complex. Now leave the Domus by the Drumway entrance. Turn left and walk towards and past Palace House. Position yourself at point 14 on your map on the gravel to the south side of Palace House with the small Clock House behind you.</i></p> |
| 14 | The Great Gatehouse – exterior (looking | <p><i>You should now be standing on the gravel on the south side of Palace House at point 14.</i></p> |

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| | <p>at the south front)</p> | <p>The building we know today as Palace House began life as the Great Gatehouse of Beaulieu Abbey. It was here that visitors were received once they had entered the inner courtyard through a series of huge archways. Looking up to the first floor, you can see the pointed windows of the rooms that housed 2 chapels for the use of guests. Below these windows is a niche where a statue of the Virgin Mary once stood.</p> <p>In 1538, Beaulieu Abbey was closed, together with all the other monasteries in England. This event was known as the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and was ordered by King Henry VIII. It transferred the power and wealth of all these religious communities to the Crown.</p> <p>The monks who were here when the abbey closed were given pensions. Some went elsewhere to become parish priests. Most of the buildings were demolished and the stone used to construct castles at nearby Hurst, Cowes and Calshot. Henry then sold the entire monastic estate to Sir Thomas Wriothesley, 1st Earl of Southampton, for the sum of 1,368 pounds 6 shillings and 8 pence.</p> <p>The Beaulieu Estate has remained with the Earl's family ever since: Lord Montagu is his 13 times great grandson.</p> <p><i>Now go inside to discover more about the Gatehouse and its development into Palace House, the family home of the Montagus. Or you can go straight to the Outer Gatehouse, point 15 on your map.</i></p> |
| 15 | <p>The Outer Gatehouse</p> | <p><i>You should now be standing in front of the Outer Gatehouse at point 15.</i></p> <p>Now known as Clock House, this small 14th century building was once the Outer Gatehouse to Beaulieu Abbey. This was where the porter, or gatekeeper, handed out food, clothing and fuel to the poor. Visitors to the abbey were also received here, and passed on through the Great Gatehouse to the abbey itself.</p> <p>The clock tower on top was added in 1885 by Henry, 1st Lord Montagu of Beaulieu.</p> <p><i>Now turn to your right and follow the shoreline towards point 16 on your map overlooking the water.</i></p> |
| 16 | <p>The Mill Pond (positioned where you can see Mill and Village)</p> | <p><i>You should now be looking out across the water over a low stone wall at point 16.</i></p> <p>You are looking out over Beaulieu Mill Pond and Beaulieu Village. The pond was excavated by the monks. They also built a dam across the Beaulieu River to power their tidal mill, which was used to grind corn. The sluice gates under the bridge still help to control the level and flow of water into the Mill Pond.</p> <p>The Beaulieu River gave the monks direct access to the sea and the abbot had exclusive rights over the river and the foreshore. These rights are still held by Lord Montagu.</p> |

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| | | <p><i>Now turn to your right and follow the shoreline to join the Mill Pond Walk. This will take you to parts of point 17. Stop in front of an old section of the perimeter wall of the abbey.</i></p> |
| 17 | Part of abbey wall | <p><i>You should now be standing in front of an old section of the abbey perimeter wall at point 17.</i></p> <p>All monasteries had to be separated from their outlying lands by a wall or dyke.</p> <p>This is one of the larger sections of surviving medieval Precinct wall. It originally enclosed about 55 acres.</p> <p>Beaulieu Abbey was one of the few places in England where criminals could claim permanent sanctuary. As long as they remained inside the abbey walls, they could not be arrested.</p> |
| 18 | Conclusion | <p><i>We hope you've enjoyed this tour of Beaulieu Abbey. What you've seen so far is only the main abbey precinct. But there's a lot more of Beaulieu's monastic history to discover. If you go into the village you'll see cottages built of stone from the abbey ruins. And near the village of Buckler's Hard stands a magnificent ruin called St Leonard's Grange. This was a huge stone barn built by the monks to store their produce.</i></p> <p><i>If you'd like more information about the abbey, you'll find it in the Beaulieu guidebook, copies of which are available from our shops. And if you haven't done so already, don't forget to visit Palace House, its beautiful gardens and the Secret Army Exhibition, which are also in these grounds. Do come back and see us again!</i></p> |