

THE SPANISH ARMADA COMES TO TORBAY

Taleblazers Trips at Torre Abbey



Subject: History

Topic: The Tudors and Torre Abbey

Setting: The Learning Lab, Spanish Barn and Gardens.

With a focus on the causes and consequences of the 16th Century war with Spain and specifically the Armada of 1588, we follow the first skirmishes of the war - the taking of the Nuestra Senora del Rosario and the subsequent imprisonment of almost 400 Spanish sailors in the barn at Torre Abbey.

Organisation of the session

We will start by creating our own Galleons to discover Drake's strategies while we play out one of the most exciting and Torbay-centric events of the invasion. Using the Spanish Barn as our backdrop there will then be a performance of an original ballad telling the story of the Spanish Armada. We will explore key elements from the story – structure, setting and character before guiding the students to create their own interpretation of the tale from the opposing perspectives of the English and the Spanish.

There will also be an opportunity for students to split into groups to explore the Abbey and complete the Torre Abbey in Tudor Times worksheets or the Taleblazers' Riddle Trail.

Learning objectives

To make students aware that Torre Abbey was directly involved in Tudor events of great historical significance such as the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the Spanish Armada.



Before you join us at Torre Abbey

Pupils might like to:

- Look at other sources about Torre Abbey e.g. illustrations, internet images, news reports etc.
- Found out about and discuss the events leading up to the Dissolution of the Monasteries.
- Talk about the differences between the Catholic religion and the Church of England.
- Find out about and discuss the events leading up to the Spanish Armada.

How your trip to Torre Abbey links to the Curriculum

“Know and understand the history of these islands as a coherent, chronological narrative... how people's lives have shaped this nation and how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world.”

“Gain historical perspective by placing their growing knowledge into different contexts: understanding the connections between local, regional, national and international history.”

Taleblazers are a CIC that celebrate the heritage, folklore and natural history of Devon. They bring together art, storytelling and history in a way that really gets children excited about heritage! These workshops will enthuse your students about local history and develop their creative writing and performance skills.



Taleblazers
CHANGE THE STORY. CHANGE THE WORLD.

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE MONASTERIES

In 1528, Henry VIII asked the Pope for a divorce because Katherine of Aragon, his wife of 19 years, was unlikely to produce a son. Henry wanted to marry Anne Boleyn, a much younger woman. The Pope refused to comply so in 1534, Henry finally cut all ties with Rome, became Head of the Church of England and went ahead with the divorce.

Torre Abbey is closed

In 1536 Henry began to close all monasteries starting with the smaller ones and moving on to the larger ones, such as Torre Abbey. The last abbeys were closed in 1540.

Henry's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell organised 'visitations' to all monasteries. His aim was to value their assets and seize them for the Crown. To justify this Cromwell's spies claimed to find widespread wrongdoing.

A stitch-up?

As far we know, no such wrongdoing was uncovered at Torre Abbey, although after the visitation local people claimed that the abbot was hiding some of the abbey's valuables. Records reveal that many people didn't like the harsh rule of the abbot and were pleased when the abbey closed – so it may have been a stitch-up.

The king's men

In 1539, Sir William Petre, Secretary of State to Henry VIII, arrived at Torre Abbey with his henchmen. He ordered the church to be smashed so it couldn't be used again. Valuable possessions such as the abbey deeds and charters were confiscated, and books and manuscripts were burnt.



Forced to leave

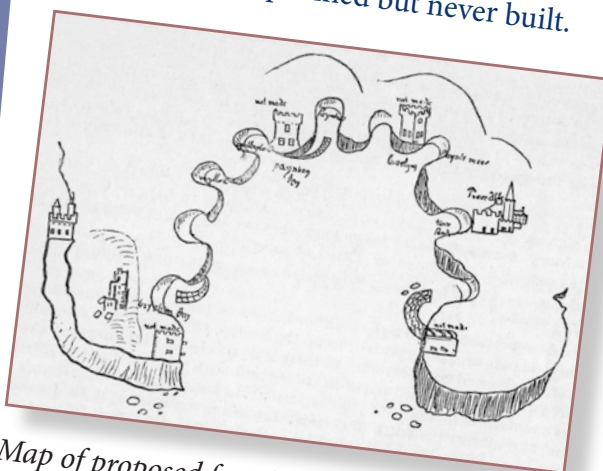
Abbot Simon Rede was ordered to sign a deed of surrender and everyone was forced to leave. The canons got rotten pay-offs and were made homeless, but the abbot gained a huge pension and became vicar of Dartmouth. The king gave Torre Abbey to Sir John St Leger to pay off a large debt.



Henry VIII

After Henry's split from Rome, the Pope planned to unite France and the Holy Roman Empire against England and invade.

England was badly prepared for such an invasion but Henry acted quickly. He used money gained from the monasteries to build a chain of fortifications along the south coast including Dartmouth, Plymouth and Portland. Blockhouses (small fortifications) at Tor Bay were planned but never built.



Map of proposed fortifications for Tor Bay



You may like to discuss the winners and losers when the abbeys closed.

WINNERS

The king:

- Gained funds for fortifications.
- Gained the loyalty of rich landowners to whom he sold monastic lands and property.
- Got rid of the monastic orders who sided with the Pope against him.

The Abbot of Torre:

- Gained a huge pension and a nice living as vicar of Dartmouth.

Local knights:

- Those who supported the king could buy huge monastic estates at bargain prices.

Local builders:

- There was lots of building material going cheap.
- There might be opportunities to work on the new coastal forts.

Local villagers:

- The harsh rule of the abbot ended.

LOSERS

The canons:

- Got rotten pensions and were made homeless.
- Lost status and purpose in life.

Abbey servants:

- Lost their jobs and abbey accommodation.
- Their future was uncertain.

Local poor people:

- There was no hospital if they fell ill.

Travellers:

- There was nowhere to stay with free board.

Local Catholics:

- It was now illegal for them to practise their religion.
- They lost their church in the monastery.

Local families:

- Could no longer send their sons to prepare for monastic life.

THE ABBEY RUINS

Ask your class to look for:

- The **remains of the abbey church** smashed so that it couldn't be used again. (Note the collapsed church tower you see today was destroyed further in the 18th century to make the ruins more picturesque.)



The smashed effigy of a knight

THE UNDERCROFTS

- Pieces of **elaborate stonework** jemmied out for reuse.
- The **smashed effigy of a knight**.
- The **grave slab of the sacristan** (who looked after the abbey's valuables) found buried.



Finely carved stonework



THE SPANISH BARN*

The Spanish Barn was built in the early 13th century to store crops from the abbey farms.

In 1588, it became a temporary prison for 397 members of the crew of the *Nuestra Señora del Rosario*. The ship was part of the Spanish Armada that Philip of Spain had sent to invade England with the intention of restoring Catholicism. Elizabeth I, a Protestant, ruled England at this time.

English warships, commanded by Lord Howard and Sir Francis Drake, were chasing the Armada up the English Channel when the *Rosario* was crippled in a collision. Drake seized his chance, captured the ship and had her towed into Tor Bay. The crew were held in the Spanish Barn for 23 days before being moved on to Exeter.



Sir Francis Drake

You may like to talk about:

- **Thick stone walls** supported by **buttresses**.
- **High, narrow, slit windows** making escape difficult.
- **Large strong doors** which which would have been guarded.
- The **distance from the barn to the sea**.

* *The Spanish Barn is sometimes closed for events. Please check availability before your visit.*

800 YEARS EXHIBITION

On the Top Floor is the 800 Years Exhibition, the middle section of which chronicles the abbey in Tudor times.



Tudor Bell

You may like to talk about:

- **The talking portraits (video) of Sir George Cary** who tells how he saved the prisoners in the Spanish Barn from starvation, and **Sir John Gilbert** who wanted to make money from them by asking for a ransom.
- **Tudor arms and armour**.
- **The alarm bell** used to raise the alarm in the event of an attack.
- A **print of Sir Francis Drake** playing bowls on Plymouth Hoe.

THE CHAPEL

The Chapel was once the Guest Hall of the monastery. The ceiling dates from the time of Henry VII.

You may like to talk about:

- A decorative ceiling boss carved with a **Tudor rose**, the badge of the Tudors.

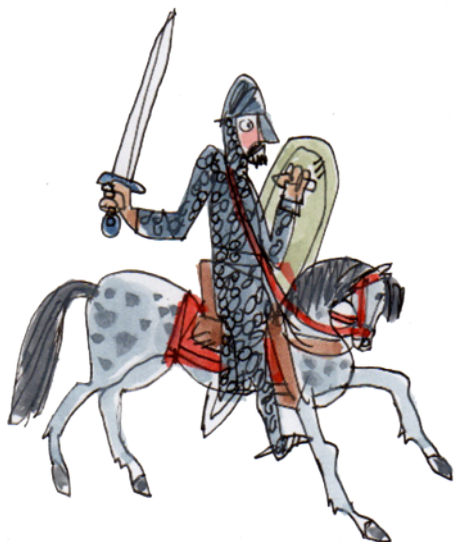
Note: Henry VIII outlawed Catholicism in 1534. In c.1680, the Carys, secret Catholics who owned the Abbey for 268 years, built a hidden chapel in the dining room attic.



Post visit

Post visit work could include:

- Using the story of the Spanish Barn in role play; or to write a letter from a Spanish prisoner to his wife/mother describing the conditions in the barn.
- To write and design a children's story based on actual events.
- Finding out more about weapons and warfare in Tudor times
- Researching more about life in a monastery in the Middle Ages.



Ideas for next steps back at school in KS1

- Use the abbey as a first introduction to looking at the 'real thing' and developing historical skills such as: 'How do we know it is old?'; 'How do we know what happened here?'
- Ask children to bring in something they think is 'old' and produce a time frame/chart/line to develop chronological understanding.
- Use the barn's features e.g. doors, windows, surfaces, roofs etc. and compare with the same features in your school building

Ideas for next steps back at school in KS2 & KS3

- Use the story of the Spanish Barn in role play before writing a letter from a Spanish Prisoner to his wife/mother describing the conditions in the barn.
- Use maps to investigate why Henry VIII considered strengthening fortifications in Tor Bay.
- Research the route that the Spanish Armada took and make inferences about reasons for the Armada's failure.

PRICES & PACKAGES



Teachers can choose to book a general free-flow visit with worksheets provided, a private guided tour of the Abbey or a hands-on Taleblazer's workshop.

If you would prefer to explore Torre Abbey independently, then an Educational Group Membership will allow any group from your school to visit for free for a year.*

With a host of group benefits, extras and packages to enjoy, a visit to Torre Abbey is the perfect day out for an informative educational experience outside the classroom.

Contact grace.melsher@torbay.gov.uk for further information and to book your trip.

Taleblazers Trips at Torre Abbey

The Spanish Armada comes to Torbay: With a focus on the causes and consequences of the 16th Century war with Spain and specifically the Armada of 1588, we follow the first skirmishes of the war, the taking of the Nuestra Senora del Rosario and the subsequent imprisonment of almost 400 Spanish sailors in the barn at Torre Abbey.

Medieval Mayhem: Based on events that took place at Torre Abbey in 1351, students will be introduced to the early history of Torre Abbey. We will learn what life as a White Cannon was like and how that life differed greatly to the lives of the common folk of Torbay.



Package	Self-Guided with worksheets (Minimum of 10)	Torre Abbey Private Guided Tour	The Spanish Armada Comes to Torbay Workshop	Medieval Mayhem Workshop	Full day hire of Learning Lab for self led workshop
Child (5-15)	£2 per child plus £25 Annual Educational Group Membership	£3.75 per child plus £25 Annual Educational Group Membership	£10 per child (Minimum of 30)	£10 per child (Minimum of 30)	£115
Student (16-19)	Coming Soon	£3.75 per student plus £25 Annual Educational Group Membership	N/A	N/A	£115

*Educational Group membership for schools costs just £25 per year