

= Glastonbury Abbey =

Glastonbury Abbey was a monastery in Glastonbury , Somerset , England . Its ruins , a grade I listed building and scheduled ancient monument , are open as a visitor attraction .

The abbey was founded in the 7th century and enlarged in the 10th . It was destroyed by a major fire in 1184 but subsequently rebuilt and by the 14th century was one of the richest and most powerful monasteries in England . The abbey controlled large tracts of surrounding land and was instrumental in major drainage projects on the Somerset Levels . The abbey was suppressed during the Dissolution of the Monasteries under King Henry VIII of England . The last abbot , Richard Whiting ( Whyting ) , was hanged , drawn and quartered as a traitor on Glastonbury Tor in 1539 .

From at least the 12th century the Glastonbury area has been associated with the legend of King Arthur , a connection promoted by medieval monks who asserted that Glastonbury was Avalon . Christian legends have claimed that the abbey was founded by Joseph of Arimathea in the 1st century .

= = History = =

Suggestions that Glastonbury may have been a site of religious importance in Celtic or pre @-@ Celtic times are considered dubious by the historian Ronald Hutton , but archaeological investigations by the University of Reading have demonstrated Roman and Saxon occupation of the site . In 1955 Raleigh Radford 's excavations uncovered Romano @-@ British pottery at the west end of the cloister . The abbey was founded by Britons and dates at least to the early @-@ 7th century . Dark Age occupation of the site is evidenced by pieces of ceramic wine jars that were imported from the Mediterranean . A medieval Christian legend claimed the abbey was founded by Joseph of Arimathea in the 1st century . This fanciful legend is intimately tied to Robert de Boron 's version of the Holy Grail story and Glastonbury 's connection with King Arthur from the early @-@ 12th century .

Glastonbury fell into Saxon hands after the Battle of Peonnum in 658 . Saxons under Cenwalh of Wessex conquered Somerset as far west as the River Parrett , perhaps with the intention of gaining control of the abbey . Cenwalh allowed the British abbot , Bregored , to remain in power , a move perhaps intended as a show of good faith to the defeated Britons . After Bregored 's death in 669 , he was replaced by an Anglo @-@ Saxon , Berhtwald , but British monks remained for many years .

= = = Saxon era = = =

King Ine of Wessex enriched the endowment of the community of monks established at Glastonbury and reputed to have directed that a stone church be built in 712 , the foundations of which form the west end of the nave . A glassworks was established at the site during the 7th century . Glastonbury was ravaged by the Danes in the 9th century . The contemporary reformed soldier Saint Neot was sacristan at Glastonbury before he founded his own establishment in Somerset . The abbey church was enlarged in the 10th century by the abbot of Glastonbury , Dunstan , the central figure in the 10th @-@ century revival of English monastic life , who instituted the Benedictine Rule at Glastonbury . He also built the cloisters . Dunstan became Archbishop of Canterbury in 960 . In 967 , King Edmund was interred at Glastonbury . In 1016 Edmund Ironside , who had lost England to Canute but held onto the title of King of Wessex , was also buried there . Cnut 's charter of 1032 was " written and promulgated in the wooden church at Glastonbury , in the kings presence " .

The medieval Glastonbury Canal was built about the middle of the 10th century to link the abbey with the River Brue , a distance of about 1 @.@ 75 kilometres ( 1 @,@ 900 yd ) . Its purpose is believed to be to transport stone to build the abbey , but later was used to transport produce , including grain , wine and fish , from the abbey 's outlying properties . Much of the building stone came from the abbey 's quarries at Doultling , accessed by way of the River Sheppey at Pilton .

From the 11th century the abbey was the centre of a large water @-@ borne transport network as further canalisations and new channels were made , including the diversion of the Brue to access to the estate at Meare and an easier route to the Bristol Channel . In the 13th century the abbey 's head boatman transported the abbot in an eight @-@ oared boat on visits to the abbey 's nearby manors .

= = = Medieval era = = =

= = = Norman conquest = = =

At the Norman Conquest in 1066 , the wealth of Glastonbury made it a prime prize . The new Norman abbot , Turstin , added to the church , unusually building to the east of the older Saxon church and away from the ancient cemetery , thus shifting the sanctified site . This was later changed by Herlewin the next abbot , who built a larger church . Not all the new Normans were suitable heads of religious communities . In 1077 , Thurstin was dismissed after his armed retainers killed monks by the High Altar . In 1086 , when Domesday Book was commissioned , Glastonbury Abbey was the richest monastery in the country . About 1125 , the abbot Henry of Blois commissioned a history of Glastonbury from the esteemed historian William of Malmesbury , who was a guest of the monks . His work " On the Antiquity of the Glastonese Church " was compiled sometime between 1129 and 1139 as part of a campaign to establish the abbey 's primacy against Westminster . It is the source for much of our knowledge of the abbey 's early history but is far below William 's generally excellent standards : his acceptance of the monks ' forged charters and unsubstantiated early legends is apparent and even his list of the community 's abbots cannot be reconciled with 10th @-@ century originals subsequently discovered . These problems and the discrepancies between " On the Antiquity " and his own later histories has led many scholars to assume William 's original text was more careful and its accounts of " Phagan " and " Deruvian " , along with various passages about Arthur , were later additions meant to bolster the monks ' case .

Early drainage work on the Somerset Levels was carried out in the later years of the 12th century , with the responsibility for maintaining all the watercourses between Glastonbury and the sea being placed on named individuals among whom were Ralph de Sancta Barbara of Brentmarsh . In 1129 , the abbot of Glastonbury was recorded as inspecting enclosed land at Lympsham . Efforts to control flooding on the Parrett were recorded around the same date . In 1234 , 722 acres ( 2 @.@ 9 km2 ) were reclaimed near Westonzoyland and , from the accounts in the abbey 's rent books , this had increased to 972 acres ( 393 ha ) by 1240 . In the 14th century a Fish House was built at Meare for the chief fisherman of the abbot of Glastonbury that was also used for salting and preparing fish . It is the only surviving monastic fishery building in England . At the time of the Dissolution in 1540 , Meare Pool was said to contain a great abundance of pike , tench , roach and eels . In 1638 it was owned by William Freake , who described it as " lately a fish pool " . The importance of this industry is illustrated by a series of acrimonious disputes between Glastonbury and the Dean and Chapter of Wells Cathedral . The abbey required fish on Fridays , fast days and during Lent . As many as 5000 eels were landed in a typical year .

= = = King Arthur 's tomb = = =

See also Avalon

In 1184 , a great fire at Glastonbury destroyed the monastic buildings . Reconstruction began almost immediately and the Lady Chapel , which includes the well , was consecrated in 1186 . There is evidence that , in the 12th century , the ruined nave was renovated enough for services while the great new church was being constructed . Parts of the walls of the aisle and crossing having been completed by 1189 , progress then continued more slowly .

Pilgrim visits had fallen and in 1191 the alleged discovery of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere 's tomb in the cemetery provided fresh impetus for visiting Glastonbury . A contemporaneous , though

not an eyewitness account was given by Giraldus Cambrensis in his *De principis instructione* ( " Instruction of a Prince , " ca . 1193 ) and recollected in his *Speculum Ecclesiae* , ca . 1216 according to which the abbot , Henry de Sully , commissioned a search , discovering at the depth of 16 feet ( 5 m ) a massive hollowed oak trunk containing two skeletons . Above it , under the covering stone , according to Giraldus , was a leaden cross with the unmistakably specific inscription *Hic jacet sepultus inclitus rex Arthurus in insula Avalonia* ( " Here lies interred the famous King Arthur on the Isle of Avalon " ) .

According to Giraldus , the digging for the tomb was prompted by the intelligence obtained by Henry II from an aged British ( Welsh ) bard ( Latin : *historico cantore Britone audierat antiquo* ) . On the other hand , Ralph of Coggeshall writing somewhat later , states more prosaically that they came upon the older tomb by chance while removing the earth to bury a certain monk who had expressed strong desire to be buried there . Both Giraldus and Ralph say that the spot lay in between two pyramids in the abbey . William of Malmesbury does not refer to Arthur 's tomb but elaborates on the pyramids of varying height , upon which were statues with inscriptions " *Her Sexi* , and *Bliserh* ... *Pencrest* , *Bantomp* , *Pinepegn* , etc . "

Historians today generally dismiss the authenticity of the find , attributing it to a publicity stunt performed to raise funds to repair the Abbey , which was mostly burned in 1184 . William of Malmesbury 's history of the English kings stated " Arthur ? s grave is nowhere seen , whence antiquity of fables still claims that he will return " and his work " *On the Antiquity of the Glastonese Church* " ? larded as it is with known and suspected pious forgeries ? nowhere mentions a connection between the abbey and either Arthur 's grave or Avalon . The fact that the search for Arthur 's body is connected to Henry II and Edward I , both kings who fought major Welsh wars , has had scholars suggest that propaganda may have played a part as well . Gerald , a constant supporter of royal authority , in his account of the discovery clearly aims to destroy the idea of the possibility of King 's Arthur 's messianic return : " Many tales are told and many legends have been invented about King Arthur and his mysterious ending . In their stupidity the British [ i.e. Welsh , Cornish and Bretons ] people maintain that he is still alive . Now that the truth is known , I have taken the trouble to add a few more details in this present chapter . The fairy @-@ tales have been snuffed out , and the true and indubitable facts are made known , so that what really happened must be made crystal clear to all and separated from the myths which have accumulated on the subject . "

= = = = Annexation to Bath and Wells = = = =

In 1197 , Savaric FitzGeldewin , Bishop of Bath and Wells , traded the city of Bath to the king in return for the monastery of Glastonbury . Savaric secured the support of Pope Celestine III for the takeover the abbey as the seat of his bishopric , replacing Bath . The plan was that Savaric would be bishop of Bath as well as abbot of Glastonbury . In his support , Savaric obtained letters from various ecclesiastics , including the Archbishop of Canterbury , Hubert Walter , that claimed that this arrangement would settle longstanding disputes between the abbey and the bishops . The monks of Glastonbury objected to Savaric 's plan , and sent an appeal to Rome , which was dismissed in 1196 . But King Richard , no longer imprisoned in Germany , sided with the monks , and allowed them to elect an abbot , William Pica , in place of Savaric , who responded by excommunicating the new abbot . With the succession of John as king in place of his brother Richard in 1199 , Savaric managed to force his way into the monastery and set up his episcopal see within the abbey . The monks appealed to Innocent III , the new pope .

At first , Innocent took the side of the monks , and lifted Pica 's excommunication . While the newest appeal was taking place , Pica and a number of his supporters , who had travelled to Rome to appeal in person , died in Rome in 1200 , and some of the monks alleged this was by poison administered on the orders of Savaric . Meanwhile , Innocent had changed his mind , and reinstalled Savaric as abbot , ordering some English clergy to judge the specifics of the case , and allot the revenues of the abbey between Savaric and the monks . Savaric then attempted to secure more control over other monasteries in his diocese , but died before he could set the plans in motion .

The bishops continued to use the title Bishop of Bath and Glastonbury until finally renouncing their claim to Glastonbury in 1219 . Services in the reconsecrated Great Church had begun on Christmas Day , 1213 , most likely before it was entirely completed . King Edward I and Queen Eleanor attended the magnificent service at the reburial of King Arthur 's remains to the foot of the High Altar in 1278 .

= = = 14th and 15th centuries = = =

In the 14th century , only Westminster Abbey was more richly endowed and appointed than Glastonbury . The abbot of Glastonbury kept great state , now attested to simply by the ruins of the Abbot 's Kitchen , with four huge fireplaces at its corners . The kitchen was part of the magnificent abbot 's house begun under Abbot John de Breynton ( 1334 ? 42 ) . It is one of the best preserved medieval kitchens in Europe , and the only substantial monastic building surviving at Glastonbury . Archaeological excavations have revealed a special apartment erected at the south end of the abbot 's house for a visit from Henry VII , who visited the abbot in a royal progress , as he visited any other great territorial magnate . The conditions of life in England during the Wars of the Roses became so unsettled that a wall was built around the abbey 's precincts .

The George Hotel and Pilgrims ' Inn was built in the late 15th century to accommodate visitors to the abbey . It has been designated as a Grade I listed building . The abbey also held lands outside the town serving large parts of Somerset and including parts of neighbouring counties . Tithe barns were built to hold the crops due to the abbey including those at Doultong and Pilton .

= = = Dissolution of the Monasteries = = =

At the start of the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536 , there were over 850 monasteries , nunneries and friaries in England . By 1541 , there were none . More than 15 @, @ 000 monks and nuns had been dispersed and the buildings had been seized by the Crown to be sold off or leased to new lay occupiers . Glastonbury Abbey was reviewed as having significant amounts of silver and gold as well as its attached lands . In September 1539 , the abbey was visited by Richard Layton , Richard Pollard and Thomas Moyle , who arrived there without warning on the orders of Thomas Cromwell . The abbey was stripped of its valuables and Abbot Richard Whiting ( Whyting ) , who had been a signatory to the Act of Supremacy that made Henry VIII the head of the church , resisted and was hanged , drawn and quartered as a traitor on Glastonbury Tor on 15 November 1539 .

= = = Decline = = =

After the Dissolution , two of the abbey 's manors in Wiltshire were sold by the Crown to John Thynne and thereafter descended in his family , who much later became Marquesses of Bath . The Thynnes have preserved many of the abbey 's Wiltshire records at Longleat up to the present day . The ruins of the abbey itself was stripped of lead and dressed stones hauled away to be used in other buildings . The site was granted by Edward VI to Edward Seymour , 1st Duke of Somerset who established a colony of Protestant Dutch weavers on the site . When Seymour was attainted in 1551 , the abbey site reverted to the crown , but the weavers remained until they were removed in the reign of Queen Mary . In 1559 Elizabeth I of England granted the site to Peter Carew , and it remained in private ownership until the beginning of the 20th century . Further stones were removed in the 17th century , so that by the beginning of the 18th century the abbey was described as a ruin . The only building to survive intact is the Abbot 's Kitchen , which served as a Quaker meeting house . Early in the 19th century , gunpowder was used to dislodge further stones and the site became a quarry . The Ancient Monuments Protection Act 1882 stopped further damage to the site and led to the first historical and archaeological surveys .

= = = Modern history = = =

The ruins of Glastonbury Abbey were purchased by the Bath and Wells Diocesan Trust in 1908 . The ruins are now the property of and managed by the Glastonbury Abbey trust . On acquiring the site the trust appointed Frederick Bligh Bond to direct an archaeological investigation . Bond discovered the Edgar Chapel , North Porch and St Dunstan 's Chapel , however relations with his employers turned sour when he revealed in his 1919 book , The Gates of Remembrance , that he had made many of his interpretations in collaboration with a psychic medium . He was dismissed by Bishop Armitage Robinson in 1921 , because of his use of seances and psychic archaeology but is remembered as the man who " galvanised our cultural understanding of Glastonbury " .

A pilgrimage to the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey was held by a few local churches in 1924 . Pilgrimages continue today to be held ; in the second half of June for the Anglicans and early in July for the Catholics and they attract visitors from all over Western Europe . Services are celebrated in the Anglican , Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions . The abbey site is visited by over 100 @, @ 000 a year .

= = = Architecture = = =

The ruins of the great church , along with the Lady Chapel , are grade I listed buildings , and a Scheduled Ancient Monument . It is set in 36 acres ( 150 @, @ 000 m2 ) of parkland and open to the public . It is approached by the abbey gatehouse which was built in the mid 14th century and completely restored in 1810 . The 14th century abbey barn is also open to the public , outside the walls , as part of the Somerset Rural Life Museum .

The great church was 220 feet ( 67 m ) in length and 45 feet ( 14 m ) wide . The choir was 155 feet ( 47 m ) long and the transept was 160 feet ( 49 m ) long . St Joseph 's chapel was 110 feet ( 34 m ) long and 24 feet ( 7 @. @ 3 m ) wide . The remaining portions are of the clerestory and triforium arcades which were the supports of the central square tower . Other fragments of structures which remain include portions of the outer walls of the chancel aisles and the 14th century retroquire . There is also surviving stonework from the south nave aisle wall , west front and the Galilee along with its crypt linked to St Mary 's Chapel . The Lady Chapel , from which the walls survive , was described in 1478 as being 34 yards ( 31 m ) in length and 8 yards ( 7 @. @ 3 m ) wide .

The Abbot 's Kitchen is described as " one of the best preserved medieval kitchens in Europe " . The 14th century octagonal building is supported by curved buttresses on each side leading up to a cornice with grotesque gargoyles . Inside are four large arched fireplaces with smoke outlets above them , with another outlet in the centre of the pyramidal roof . The kitchen was attached to the 80 feet ( 24 m ) high abbot 's hall , although only one small section of its wall remains .

Work is still underway to analyse the results from excavations during the 20th century , and a new geophysical survey , which may help to specify exactly the size of different buildings and where they were situated . Early work has identified a Saxon enclosure ditch and , potentially the earliest cloister in Britain .

= = = Library = = =

The abbey library was described by John Leland , King Henry VIII 's antiquary who visited it , as containing unique copies of ancient histories of England and unique early Christian documents . It seems to have been affected by the fire of 1184 , but still housed a remarkable collection until 1539 when it was dispersed at the Dissolution of the Monasteries . Around 40 of the manuscripts from Glastonbury are known to have survived after the dissolution .

= = = Abbey retreat house = = =

Within the abbey wall , but closed to the public , is the abbey retreat house , which is now used by the Diocese of Bath and Wells . The Tudor Gothic house was built between 1829 and 1830 by John Buckler from the stones of the abbey ruins for John Fry Reeves . It was altered and extended between 1850 and 1860 , with further alterations in 1957 .

## = = Glastonbury Thorn = =

A specimen of Common Hawthorn found at Glastonbury , first mentioned in an early sixteenth century anonymous metrical Lyfe of Joseph of Arimathea , was unusual in that it flowered twice in a year , once as normal on " old wood " in spring , and once on " new wood " ( the current season 's matured new growth ) in the winter . This tree has been widely propagated by grafting or cuttings , with the cultivar name ' Biflora ' or ' Praecox ' . The custom of sending a budded branch of the Glastonbury thorn to the Queen at Christmas was initiated by James Montague , Bishop of Bath and Wells during James I 's reign , who sent a branch to Queen Anne , King James I 's consort . Trees survive from earlier grafts to perpetuate the Glastonbury legend , among them two other Holy Thorns in the grounds of St John 's Church in Glastonbury . The blossom sent to the Queen now comes from one of these .