

Great Archaeological Sites in Neath Port Talbot



5. NEATH ABBEY



In 1129-30 Sir Richard de Granville, lord of Neath found a monastery on the west bank of the River Neath (centred SS 7378 9736). Initially the monks belonged to the Savignac order but the abbey became Cistercian after the Savignacs merged with the Cistercians in 1147. One of the features of the Cistercian order was that its members were divided into choir monks and lay-brothers. The choir monks concentrated on study and above all on the daily round of services in the abbey church. The lay-brothers were responsible for work on the abbey's lands. Although some of them were out-stationed in granges too far from the mother house to enable them to return every day, others worked nearby and lived in the abbey.

Hardly any trace now remains of the earliest, Norman monastery. Some of the best-surviving buildings at Neath, and also some of the earliest to survive, are in the west range where the lay-brothers lived. The inner gatehouse, the entrance to the cloister ran through this range, with the lay-brothers' refectory on one side of it and their day-room on the other. Above them was the dormitory where they slept. The lay brothers' range was built in the Early English style of the early 13th century. Elements of this style also remain in the corresponding accommodation for the choir monks in the east and south ranges on the other side of the cloister, although much

of this was altered after the Reformation when they were incorporated in the new owner's mansion, or was allowed to fall into ruin. However, the vaulted undercroft to their dormitory still survives more or less intact.

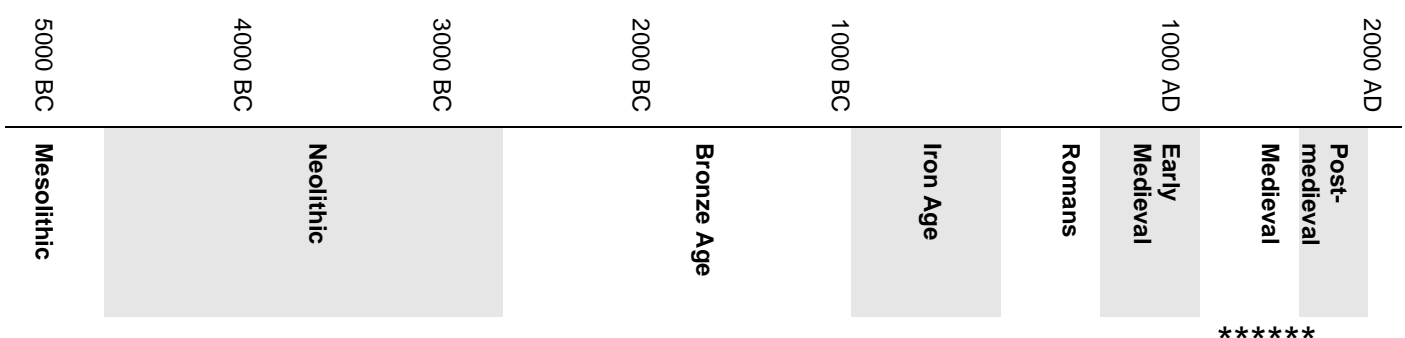
The church was rebuilt in the later 13th and early 14th century in the Decorated style. It has been badly damaged. Most of the carved decoration was ripped out so that the stone could be recut for use in the Tudor mansion, but some of the delicate carving around the windows remains in place. The latest of the monastic buildings was the abbot's lodging, built around 1500 next to the buildings that the choir monks used. After the Reformation it too was incorporated into the new mansion.

These buildings were in the inner precinct, the core of the monastery, but the whole complex extended far beyond it, to the main gate house of the outer precinct on New Road (SS 7369 9758), 250m from the inner gatehouse.



The site is on Monastery Road, Neath Abbey (SA10 7DW), and is usually open access during the day. There is limited on-street parking. Walking access from Neath railway station is via the footbridge over the river and Neath Abbey Road; Neath is on the main line between Cardiff and Swansea. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 165.

Timeline (the asterisks indicate the time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. Neath Abbey has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00585w, and the gatehouse is 00587w. You can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more about sites in South Wales connected to Christianity at http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic_christian/pages/index.html