Medieval archaeology adventures at Fountains Abbey
Fountains Abbey was founded in 1132 by 13 Cistercian monks from York and Whitby. They’d grown fed up of the extravagant way the monks lived in York, so they escaped to live a simpler life at Fountains.

Today, Fountains Abbey is an impressive ruin. In fact, they’re the largest ruins of a monastery in the country. You can use this activity pack to imagine what life would have been like for the monks who first arrived there all those years ago.

This week’s activities include:

- Make a medieval floor tile
- Spend a day in the life of a medieval monk
The church at Fountains Abbey was one of the very first in the country to be fitted with a decorative tiled floor. It was installed a little after 1236 AD. Previously, the floors of churches would have just been beaten earth.

The tiles are made of clay and there are lots of clues about how they were made underneath and on their sides. They usually have **sandy bottoms** from the wet clay cut-outs being left to dry on trays of sand, and you can see **fingerprints and knife marks** on the sides of many tiles, where the tiler has formed the tile into a precise shape.

Using the pictures as inspiration, why don’t you make your very own medieval floor tile?

You could draw one and colour it in or make one from natural materials you’ve found in your garden. Or, if you’ve got an adult to help, you could even bake some shortbread tiles and decorate them.

You can find recipe inspiration at:

[nationaltrust.org.uk/recipes](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/recipes)
The monks at Fountains Abbey were Cistercian monks whose lives were dedicated to prayer, which they expressed through rituals and routine. They would have entered church eight times a day!

Each service would have been signalled by a bell ringing, and in between, they would have been hard at work farming the land to survive, washing, cooking, caring for the poor and studying.

Below you’ll find an example of their daily schedule. Can you imagine yourself in the life of a medieval monk? Why not challenge yourself to keep a diary of your own day to see how modern life compares.
Vigils or Matins: It was still dark when the monks at Fountains Abbey got up for their first service of the day, but prayer was very important for them. They didn’t have lights like you, so every monk would have a candle to light the church.

Lauds (or ‘Dawn Service’): The second service happened when the sun started to rise and the first bits of light appeared – so it would have been earlier in the summer and later in the winter. Did you see the sunrise when you got up today?

Prime (or ‘Early Morning Service’): This service would start as daylight began. Afterwards, the monks would have had a Chapter meeting and got to work. In the Chapter House the monks would read out their rules and sort out their to-do lists. What’s on your to-do list today?

Tierce (or ‘Mid-Morning Service’): After this, there would have been more work to do. This could be saying prayers for people, writing or jobs around the abbey.

Sext (or ‘Midday Service’): After this service the monks had dinner, which would have consisted of things like soup and bread with weak beer to drink. What are you having for dinner?

Nones (or ‘Mid-Afternoon Service’): In winter, the main meal would have been taken after this service. Monks ate their dinner in silence, using sign language to ask for things. Can you make the sign for ‘bread’?

Vespers (or ‘Evening Service’): As the sunset began and the day got darker, the monks had another service. Afterwards there would have been a light supper of bread, fruit and veg. After this service and their food, they would have had an evening reading of the Bible, usually in the Chapter House.

Compline (or ‘Night Service’): This service was just before bedtime. In Winter, this service would be at 6:30pm and afterwards the monks would have a chance to go to the warming house. The warming house was the only room in the abbey with a fire, and monks would have gone in for 20 minutes at a time. This is also where they would have had a bath – but only 4 times a year!
If you enjoyed this activity pack, you can discover more archaeology activities by visiting the Young Archaeologists Club at yac-uk.org