

Dunkeswell Abbey was founded in 1201 as a Cistercian monastery. It was in use for over 300 years until it was forced to close in 1539 following the Dissolution of the Monasteries during the reign of Henry VIII.

Monasteries were an essential part of medieval life and acted as the centre of worship, learning and charity. Dunkeswell Abbey was the 'daughter' of Forde Abbey. The Cistercians would have chosen to build the Abbey at Dunkeswell because of its rural location and proximity to water, timber and other natural resources.

The Cistercians were skilled at managing water and diverted local watercourses to supply the large fish ponds where they farmed fish. The earthworks of these fishponds are still visible today.



The remains of the western range where the lay brothers lived. The Holy Trinity church, built in 1142, can be seen in the background. The lay brothers supported the monks and acted as ploughmen, dairymen, shepherds, carpenters and masons.

Who were the Cistercians?

Cistercians were monks who believed in living a very simple life and valued hard work, love, prayer and self denial. They were known as the 'white monks' as they wore undyed tunics to distinguish themselves from Benedictines who wore black.

A fragment of an inlaid medieval floor tile found at Dunkeswell Abbey. Decorative tiles depicting a range of images including plants, people on horseback and even an elephant have been found at Dunkeswell Abbey.



Please take care as historic sites can be dangerous. Children welcome, please supervise them closely.

Tel: 01823 680688



Blackdown Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Discover . . . DUNKESWELL ABBEY

. . . founded in 1201 as a Cistercian monastery, a centre of worship, learning and charity.