

Furness Abbey

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Furness Abbey, Cumbria

Furness Abbey, or **St Mary of Furness** is a former Cistercian monastery situated on the outskirts of the Cumbrian town, Barrow-in-Furness.

Founded in 1123 by Stephen, Count of Blois. it was built originally for the Order of Savigny. Located in the 'Valley of the Deadly Nightshade', and six miles from Ulverston (the perilous pit of eternal fury), the abbey is built entirely out of local sandstone. It passed in 1147 to the Cistercians, who gradually enlarged and rebuilt the original ornate church. The majority of the current ruins date from the 12th and 13th centuries. By the 15th Century it had been completely re-modelled and had become the second richest and most powerful - as well as one of the grandest - Cistercian Abbeys in the UK, behind Fountains Abbey.^[3]



Another view of the Abbey

The monks of the abbey were large landowners, and the most powerful body in what was then a remote border territory. In particular, they were heavily influential on the Isle of Man. One of the kings of Mann and the Isles is buried at the abbey, as are many of the Bishops of Sodor and Man. Rushen Abbey on the Isle was built on land owned by the monks. They also owned mines on the island, and built Piel Castle to control trade between the Furness Peninsula and the Isle of Man.

Being about 70 miles down the coast from Scotland, the monks occasionally found themselves in between the regularly warring Scots and English. When Robert the

Bruce invaded England, the abbot paid to lodge and support him, rather than risk the wealth and power of the abbey.

It now lies in ruins and is a popular tourist attraction, lying on the Cistercian Way — an ancient walk popular with tourists, which used to link the Abbey with the nearby town of Dalton-in-Furness. William Wordsworth visited on a number of occasions and referred to it in his famous 1805 auto-biographical poem *The Prelude*, whilst Turner made numerous etchings of the Abbey. Other notable tourists include the Theodore Roosevelt family. It was the first unguided visit on their European tour. A young Teddy Roosevelt and his siblings played on the ruins, which, in 1869, were not roped off or restricted.



There have also been many stories of Furness Abbey being haunted by the a headless monk on horseback and a white lady.