



Make a bee-line Buckfast Abbey

At the edge of Dartmoor National Park is the small market town of Buckfastleigh, famous for its butterfly farm, otter sanctuary and Buckfast Abbey.

Like many of the towns in the South-West it grew up from the fact that it has two rivers flowing through it and so the mediaeval locals decided to use the waters coming down from Dartmoor to help them.

The early Christians must have liked the place too because in 1018, during the reign of the slightly mad, and militarily brilliant Danish King, Canute, they decided to build a Benedictine Abbey in the peaceful countryside where they could grow their vegetables, keep their animals and praise the Lord for the ability to brew beer. The monks made money from the sale of wool from their flock of sheep and from the plentiful supply of fish in the rivers.

Life continued pretty much unchanged for the next few hundred years until the plague arrived in Britain in 1377 and killed off over a third of the population. Despite prayers and incense, not even the clergy were free from the touch of death, and the Abbey lost two abbots and many of its monks.

The Reformation of the 16th century witnessed the full force of the mighty King Henry VIII and his megalomaniacal attack on the church in England. His civil servants were sent across the land to take note of all the wealth that the monasteries and abbeys had been building up, before he closed them down and took the money for himself.

On 25th February 1539, William Petre arrived at Buckfast with a letter from the king announcing that the Abbey was to be dissolved and the monks had to leave. For over two hundred years the building stood empty

for

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B2
Intermediate



A Pingstone



A Pingstone

and fell into ruins until a group of French-speaking Benedictine monks who had been forced out of France arrived in 1882 and saw the opportunity for a bit of Do-It-Yourself and a way of getting a new House of God. They began to rebuild the Abbey and in 1932 their new Gothic and Romanesque home was consecrated. Work finally finished in 1937.

Today Buckfast Abbey has a small community of elderly monks who still follow a similar lifestyle to those of the original founders with their daily devotions and services. As with other monastic orders they are self-sufficient, with a farm where vegetables are grown and bees, pigs and cattle are kept.

To apiarists around the world there is a particularly strong type of bee known as the 'Buckfast bee'. It was developed by Brother Adam at the abbey as a result of the falling population of bees in the early 20th century. With a flight range of over six miles (10km) they are also known for their gentleness among the bee world and have been exported all over the world to start new colonies producing honey and other bee products.

A sign of the modern world is the Abbey shop in which camera- and guide-book-carrying tourists can buy wine, honey, beeswax, fudge and products made by religious communities around the world, and a gift shop, book shop, and restaurant. 📍 AT

The nave of Buckfast Abbey (left) is an interpretation of Gothic and Roman styles, while the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, which was built in the 1960s, features a very striking stained glass window featuring an interpretation of the Last Supper in a modern style; it was made by the monks in the Abbey's workshops.

Visiting Buckfast Abbey

Buckfast Abbey is included in LAL Torbay's 'Dartmoor Highlights' tour, next scheduled for 5th June.

You can travel to Buckfast Abbey on Stagecoach bus 88 from Paignton Bus Station, Monday to Saturday. A return ticket costs £4.40.

Curly kitty

There is a special breed of cat known as the Devon Rex which is famous for its curly fur. It was first discovered in the 1960s in Buckfastleigh.

Buckfast Tonic Wine

In recent times the religious aspects of Buckfast Abbey have been overshadowed by the negative effects caused by their most famous product, Buckfast Tonic Wine, commonly known as "Buckie". This fortified wine was first produced in the 1890s using a recipe brought over from France. With its high strength (15% alcohol by volume) and relatively low price, it has become an extremely popular drink in parts of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland as well as 10% being exported to Spain, Australia and the Caribbean. Opponents have accused the drink of being responsible for crime, alcoholism, disorder and social unrest in certain communities but statistically these allegations have never been proven.