



Tudor Treasures: Curator for a Day



Museum of
THE ORDER OF
ST JOHN



The buildings and collections of the Museum of the Order of St John tell many fascinating stories spanning a period of almost one thousand years.

Explore our Tudor objects and buildings and find out what life was like in the Order's London Priory, before discovering how its once close relationship with Henry VIII came to a sudden end.

Key Stage: 2

Duration: 1 hour

Objectives:

Understand the role and influence of religious houses in Tudor England

Understand why Henry VIII started a new church

Know about some of the ways that St John's Gate was used by Tudor Kings and Queens following the Dissolution of the Monasteries

Understand how historic buildings and museum collections can help us to find out about the past

Welcome to the Museum of the Order of St John. The historic buildings and objects here provide key information and clues to help us understand life at the Priory of the Order of St John in the Tudor age.



What is the Order of St John?

The Order of St John was founded by Christian monks, as an organisation with the purpose of caring for the sick. It was founded in the holy city of Jerusalem nearly 1000 years ago. As the Order grew in wealth and power, it spread to many countries including England. The Order's bases were called Priories.

The Priory in London was founded in 1143 and was (and still is today) the English headquarters for the Order of St John.

Activity (1 min)

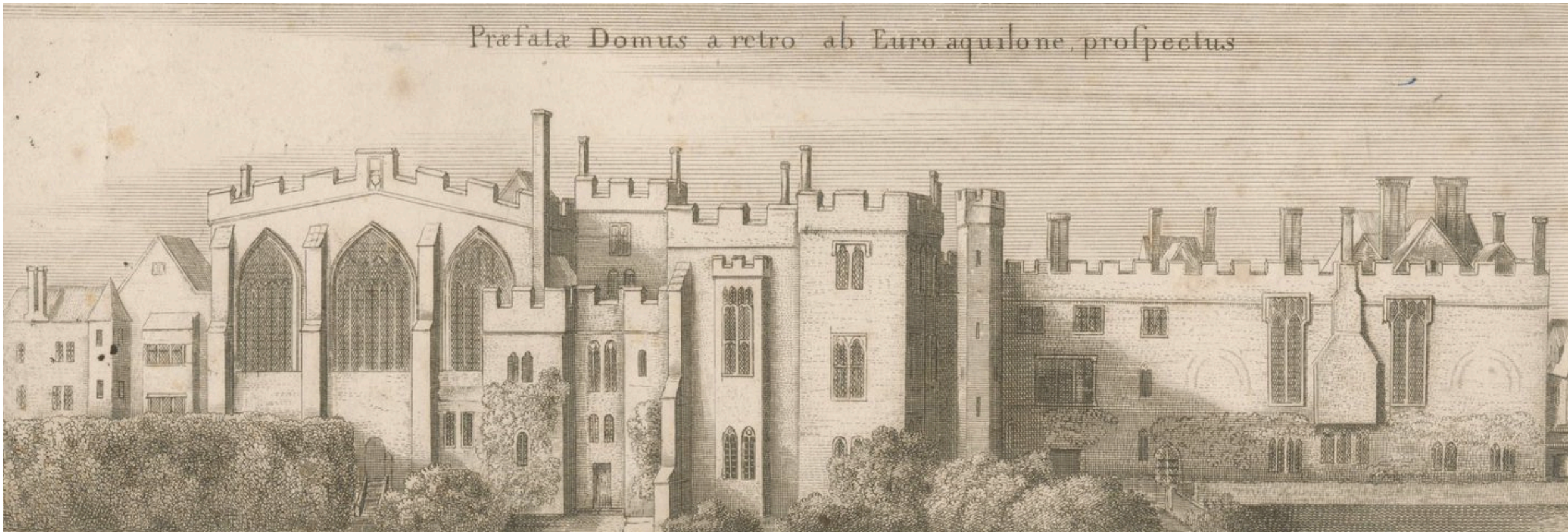
Do you know what a priory is?

Turn to the next page to find out...



This is the symbol of the Order of St John. Try to spot it in some of the images you see today!

A priory is a place where religious men or women live and work. The most important building within a priory is the church.

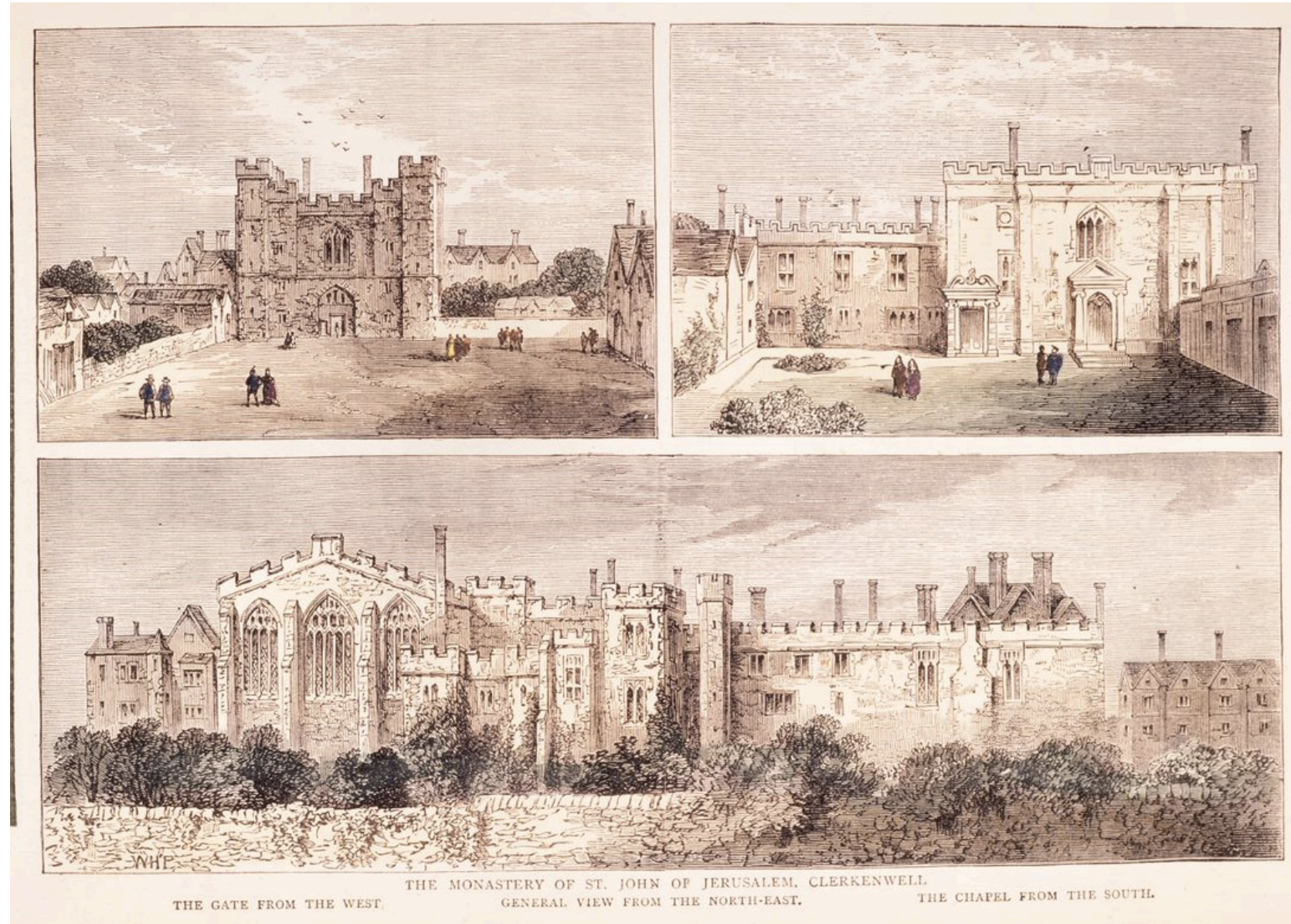


Inside the Priory

The Priory of the Order of St John in London was a very large estate with several grand buildings and land.

Life at the Priory would have been very comfortable for the monks who lived there.

The buildings were very decorative in style, both inside and out. They used expensive materials, like glass, for the windows and the rooms were furnished with ornate objects and portraits of important people.



St John's Gate

St John's Gate, pictured here, was built in 1504 to provide a grand entrance to the Priory of the Order of St John.

It was built during the Tudor period when Henry VII reigned over England. His son, Henry VIII, inherited the throne and became king five years later in 1509.

The Order of St John has always had a close relationship with the British monarchy, and today you'll discover more about the Order and St John's Gate's Tudor connections.



This is King Henry VII, the father of King Henry VIII.

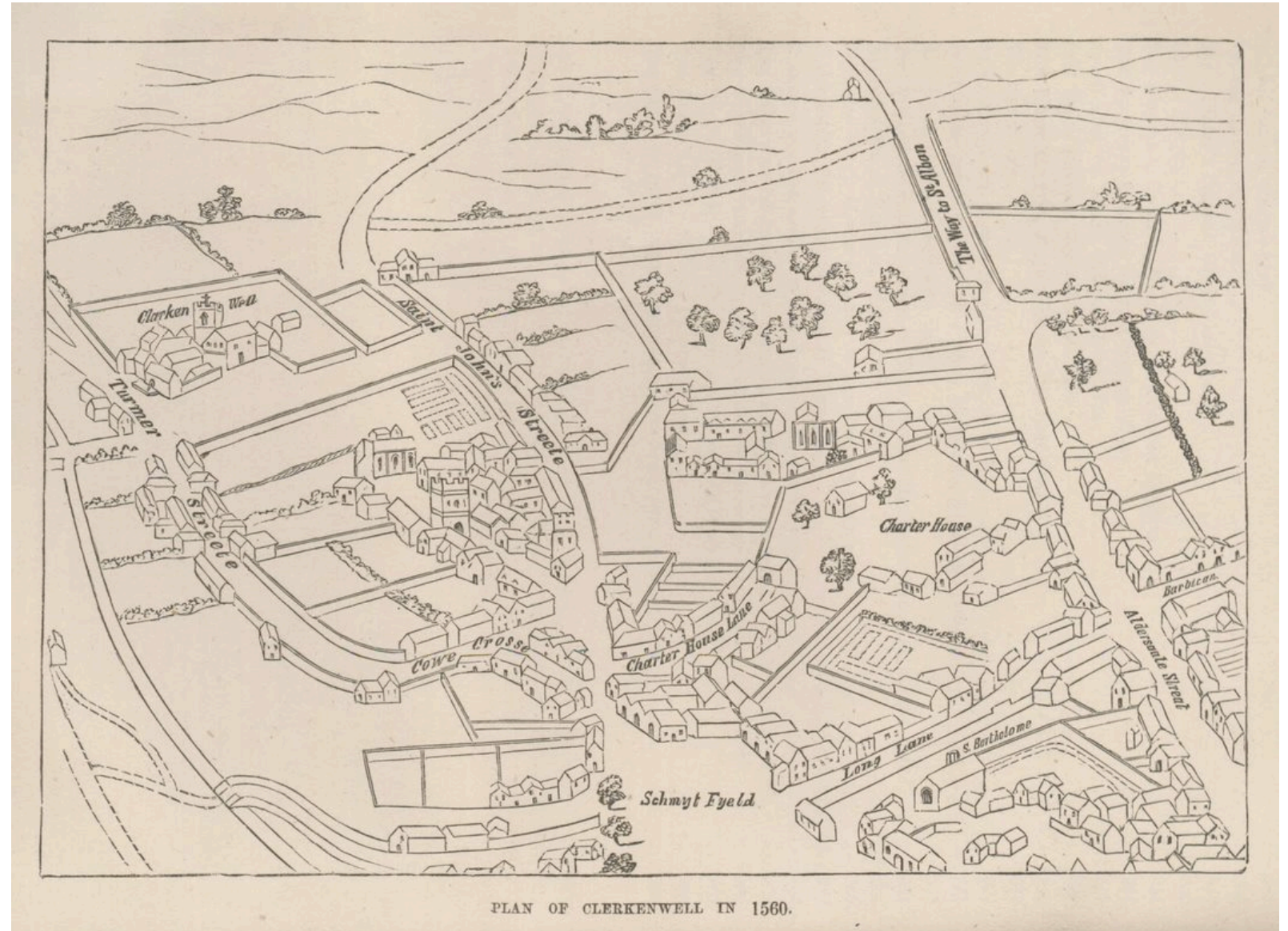
Activity (3 mins)

Can you spot St John's Gate on this map from 1560?

This map shows where the Priory was located in London.

What do you notice about London in 1560? Do you think it looks different to the city today?

Most of the buildings of the Priory of the Order of St John no longer exist and modern buildings stand in their place. However, St John's Gate still stands tall today and it is where you can visit the Museum of the Order of St John.



Thomas Docwra

Thomas Docwra was the Prior of the Order of St John in England from 1501-1527. This meant that he was in charge of the Order's work across England.

Thomas Docwra had a very close relationship with Henry VII, and so the Order had a positive relationship with the monarchy.

Thomas Docwra was an extremely trusted advisor. He was a member of both Henry VII and Henry VIII's privy council (a small group of the king's most senior advisors). In his role he supported both kings as they ruled over the country by managing administration, policy and the dispensing of justice.

A painting of Thomas Docwra by
Edward Caruana Dingli



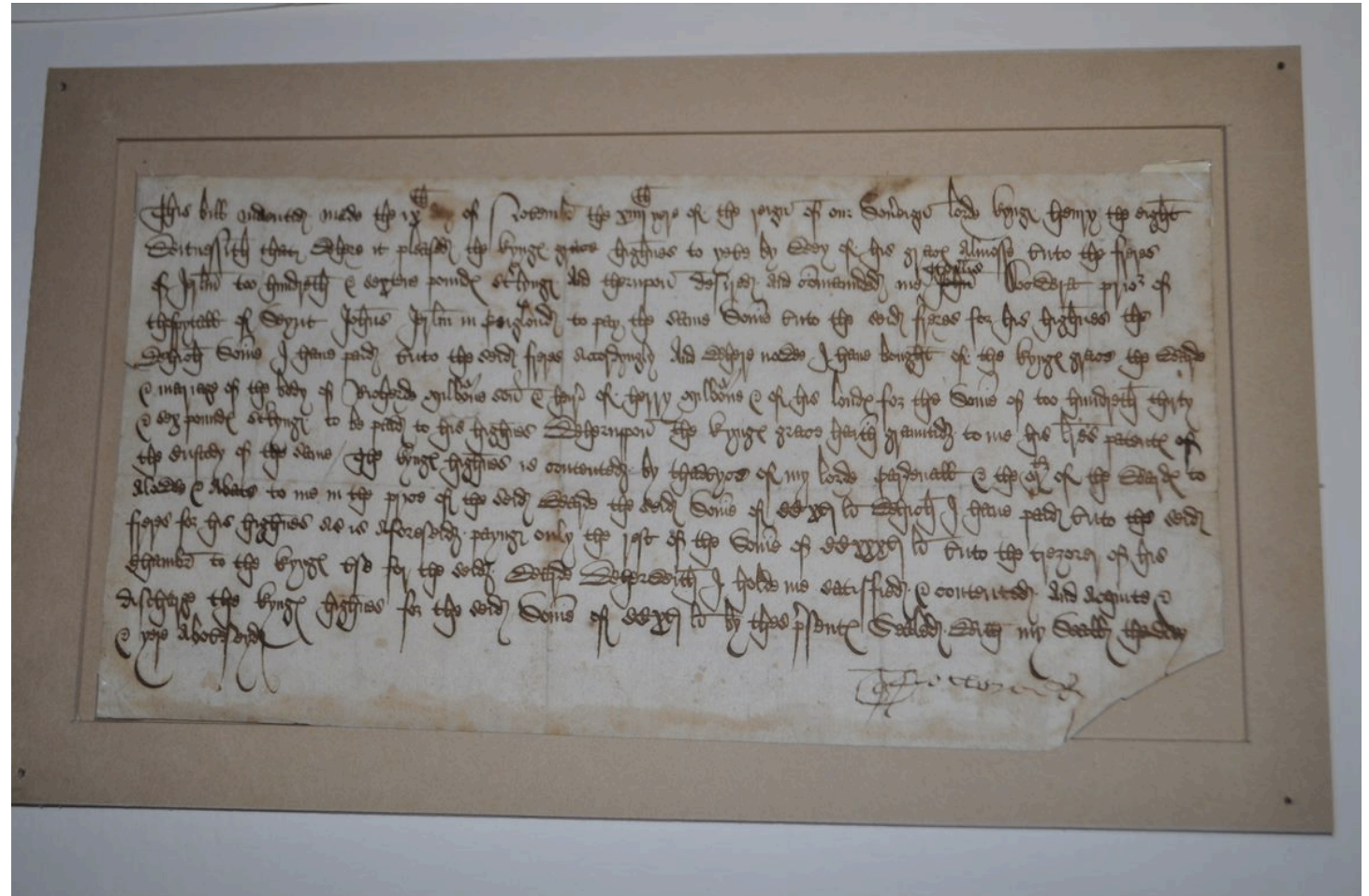
You can find this stained-glass window depicting Thomas Docwra in St John's Gate.

Thomas Docwra's work

As Prior, Thomas Docwra spent a lot of his time improving how the Order's land was managed. This was very important as the Order owned huge amounts of land in England, and the money they made from the land through rent and the sale of crops and livestock was all sent to London.

This is a letter written by Thomas Docwra on 9th November 1522. The letter mentions a gift of £216 from Henry VIII to the Order of St John. In today's money this would be worth about £112,325.31!

According to the letter, Henry gave the money to the Order so that they could look after one of the king's wards, Richard Milbourne, on his behalf. Richard was the orphaned son of a noble family.



**Can you read any of the words in Docwra's letter?
Handwriting looked very different in the Tudor age!**

The life of monks at the Priory

When a monk joined the Order of St John, they took a vow to serve the sick and poor. At the Priory, they would give money to the local poor and they bought peas, beans, grain and vegetables to feed the local peasants in a large courtyard located just through St John's Gate.

Despite making a promise to live in poverty when they joined, the monks made sure they had extremely comfortable living conditions. They ate lavish meals everyday of swan followed by chicken and beef and enjoyed delicious custards for dessert accompanied by lots of wine. Life in the Priory was luxurious for the monks.

By the reign of Henry VIII, the Order of St John were extremely wealthy; it was the second richest Church institution in England.



A Well-Stocked Kitchen, by Joachim Bueckelaer, 1566

Henry VIII and the Church

Henry VIII wanted to leave a strong heir to the throne to continue the Tudor dynasty.

Unfortunately, Henry only had one daughter with his wife Catherine of Aragon, but he knew that leaving a son to rule after him would make the kingdom more secure. Queen Catherine was getting older and was unlikely to have another healthy child. Henry wanted to marry someone younger who might give him a son and so he asked the Pope, the head of the Catholic Church, to grant an annulment – as if his marriage to Catherine had never happened.

Henry wrote to the Pope to say the Church should never have allowed his marriage and that not having a healthy son was God's punishment for marrying Catherine, the wife of his brother who died. However, the Pope refused to grant Henry the annulment.

After lots of failed attempts to negotiate, Henry decided to ignore the Pope, arguing that in the Bible there is no mention of Popes, for it is only kings who are answerable only to God.

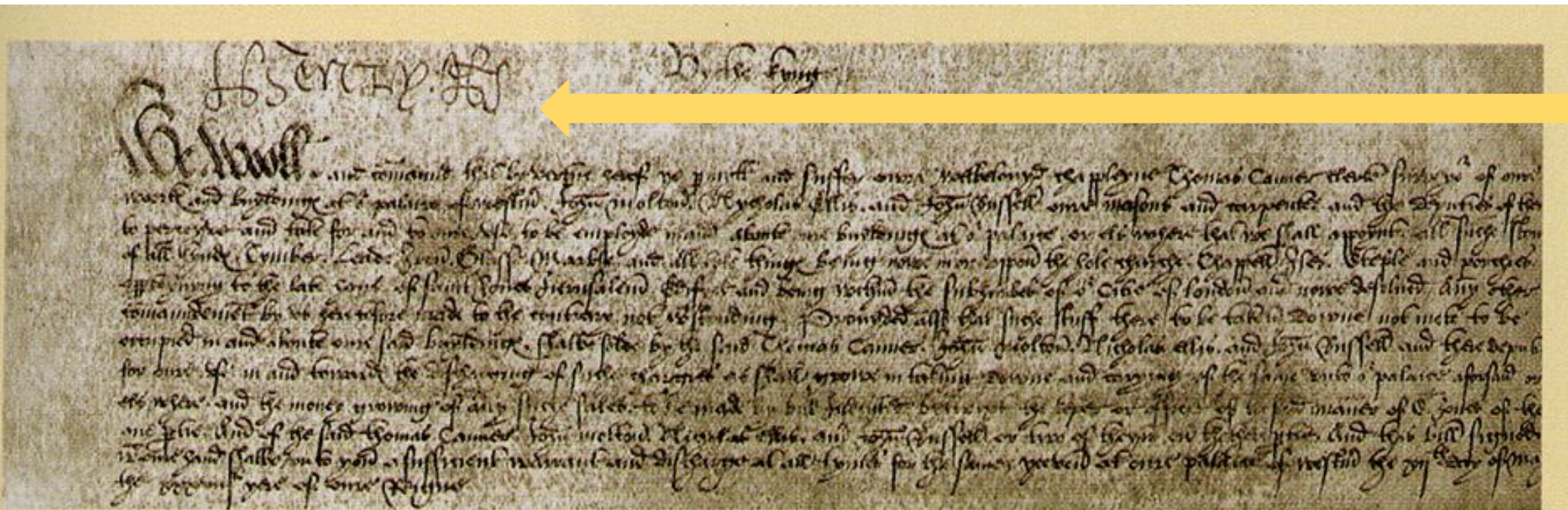
In 1533 Henry separated from the Catholic Church and made himself the head of a new religious order, the Church of England, and allowed himself to divorce Catherine.



The dissolution of the monasteries

All the monasteries and priories in England supported the Catholic Church, so Henry started to close them down, taking their land and their wealth. Some of the closures were violent and the monks were tortured or burned at the stake. However, the closure of the Priory of the Order of St John was peaceful.

Henry VIII had been a big supporter of the Order of St John, and so he offered the monks who lived there a large sum of money to leave peacefully. Henry then signed the warrant we see below, which allowed his loyal lords and courtiers to take from the Priory buildings the glass, lead and stone for improvements to their own houses.



This is the signature of Henry VIII

William Weston

When Thomas Docwra died, Sir William Weston took over as Prior.

William Weston was due to receive the most generous pension of all at £1000 a year after the Priory closed. However, he is said to have died of a broken heart on the very same day that the Order of St John in England was officially dissolved, on 7th May 1540.

This image shows an important ceremony at parliament in 1523. Henry VIII sits on his throne and William Weston, as Prior of the Order of St John, is the figure dressed in black sitting at the right end of the crossbench with the barons, facing the king.

Henry VIII on
his throne



William
Weston

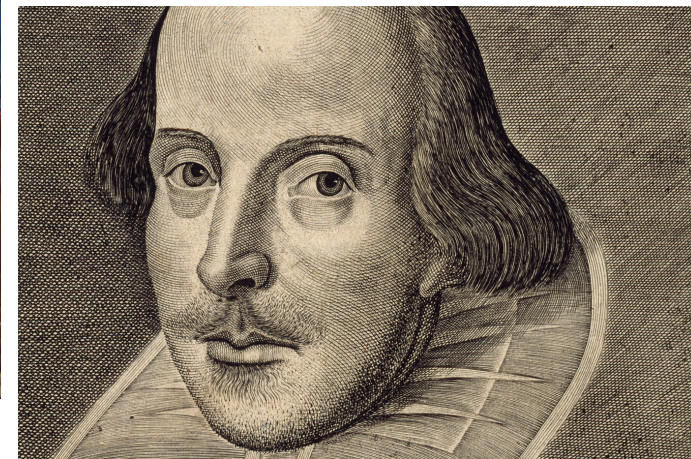


This is William Weston's tomb, in the Crypt of the Priory Church

After the dissolution of the Priory

After Henry VIII closed the Priory down, he and other Tudor kings and queens found different uses for the Priory buildings:

- Henry VIII used them to store his tents and hunting equipment.
- He later gave the Priory to his daughter Mary to use as a palace, which proves how grand the buildings would have been.
- When Henry VIII's other daughter Elizabeth became queen, she made playwrights like William Shakespeare come and perform all his plays there before they could be seen by the public, just in case there was anything in them that she didn't like!



Activity: Curator for a day

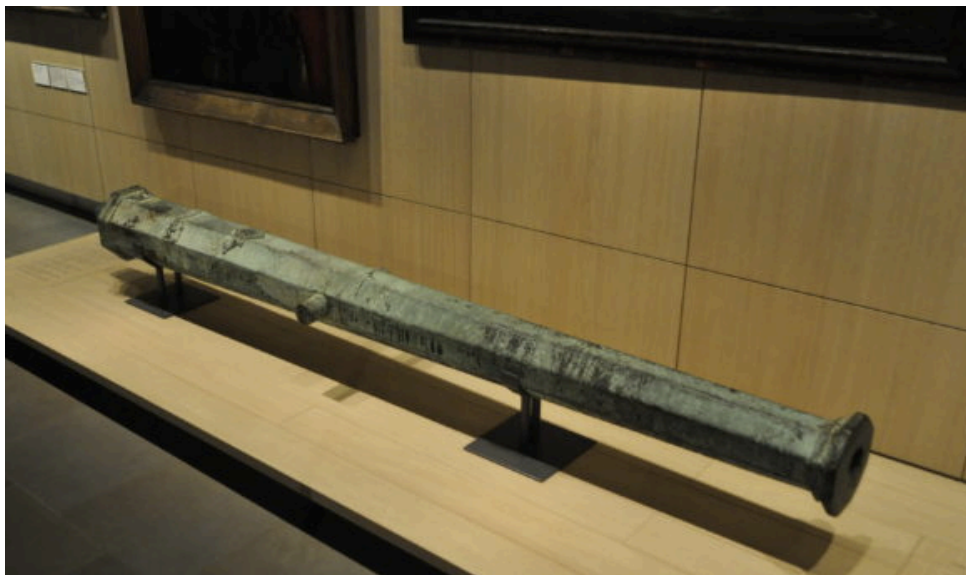
It is the job of a museum curator to look after the buildings and old objects that are stored at St John's Gate so that people like you can explore and enjoy them now and for many years to come.

At the Museum of the Order of St John there are over 60,000 objects in our collection!

Part 1:

Look closely at the objects on the next page and match each image with the words which you think help to describe the object.

When you look at each object, consider what it might have been used for, and who would have used it and why.



Henry VIII had this cannon especially made for the Order of St John in 1528-9.



Stone fragments from the Priory Church of the Order of St John c.1143 – 1545. This selection show painted details and carved stonework.



This is called the Rhodes Missal. It is a religious book which was made in 1504.

wealth

luxurious

power

influence

grand

vows

faith

understanding

military

educated

trusted

Activity: Curator for a day

It is a curator's job to make sure that we have as much information listed about each object as possible, so that visitors and people in the future can also learn and research about the past.

Part 2:

Chose an object that interests you in your home and imagine that it is an historic object from a museum.

Use the museum object card on the next page to fill out all the information you can find out about your chosen object.

You can do this for as many objects as you like, you might even like to put together all your objects to make your own exhibition!

Museum Object Card



Draw a picture of your object in the space below

What do you think your object is?
How was it used?



Now for a closer look...

Material

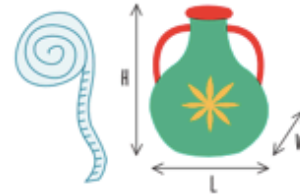
Colour

Texture

Height

Length

Width



Conclusion

Today we have learned all about the Priory of the Order of St John and its connection to the Tudors.

We have discovered why Henry VIII started a new religious order, and why the Order's Priory in London closed down.

We have learned about the importance of old objects and buildings and how they provide clues which tell us how people lived in the past.

Finally, we have successfully completed tasks and found out about what it is like to be a museum curator.

Well done everyone!

Find out more...

Read more about the Order of St John in the Tudor age

- [Thomas Docwra Prior of England 1501-1527](#)
- [A 16th century cannon](#)
- [A Tudor knight of St John](#)

Explore our digital resources

<http://museumstjohn.org.uk/learning/schools/>

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