



History of Marrick Priory

Outdoor Education and Residential Centre

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Please note: We are **not** open to the general public as a historical attraction as we must ensure the privacy and security of our guests. We understand that many people are interested in the history of Marrick Priory, which is why we have produced this free guide. If you find this information valuable please consider making a donation via our website to help support our charitable work.



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A brief introduction and summary.



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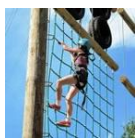
Marrick Priory was once home to a very rare object: probably Britain's oldest hearse, built in 1828.



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Marrick Priory was opened as an Outdoor Centre on 30th May 1970.



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The facilities have also been dramatically improved with the building itself having been extended on several occasions.

Introduction

Marrick Priory is a historic 12th century medieval building that was developed in the 1970s into an Outdoor Education and Residential Centre. It is situated in Swaledale in the heart of the beautiful Yorkshire Dales National Park and welcomes groups of visitors from all over the world.

The Priory is licensed to provide a wide range of adventurous activities and can be booked on a day or residential basis. Our activities include rock climbing, canoeing, kayaking, caving, orienteering, hill walking, mountaineering, archery, zip wires, high ropes courses and team building exercises.



Marrick Priory

For those wanting something a little less physically active, the Priory is also used by schools, youth groups, churches and adult groups interested in areas such as art, drama, music, history, environmental study, spiritual retreat and reflection.

One of the attractions of the Priory is that residential groups enjoy sole use of the building and can make the place their own for the duration of their visit. The Priory can accommodate groups of 50 people overnight. We pride ourselves on the quality and quantity of our home cooking and can readily cater for special dietary requirements.

Marrick Priory is run by the Head of Centre and a board of dedicated and active trustees. There is a close affiliation with the Church of England through the Diocese of Leeds, who has been instrumental in supporting and developing the centre since the 1960's. The Diocese appoints half of the trustees, with the other half being made up of locally recruited representatives.

History Summary

In the twelfth century, a group of Benedictine nuns chose this spot because of its beauty and its solitude. For four centuries it was home to their order until Henry VIII evicted them in 1540. Over the years that followed, the Priory was used as a Parish church before falling derelict and becoming a home for stray chickens!

The artist JMW Turner visited the Priory in 1816 and made a sketch, from which he later produced a watercolour. Marrick Priory was once home to one of Britain's oldest hearses, built in 1828.

During the 1960's the Priory was converted by the Diocese into an Outdoor Education and Residential Centre. In 1994 the old Prioress's house was converted from a barn into a large new common room. Further works were completed in 2003.



Remaining ruins

Today thousands of visitors a year still appreciate this place for the very same reasons that the nuns chose it 850 years ago; enjoying both adventure and tranquillity through a range of activities and residential opportunities.

Foundation

Today's visitors frequently comment on the beauty of Marrick Priory's setting in the middle reaches of Swaledale. For those who chose the site in the twelfth century, there were very practical considerations. The place enjoyed the shelter of the valley and offered a level platform of land, high enough above the flood level to be safe from the sudden surges of one of the swiftest rivers in England. Yet, at its normal level, the river could be readily forded and provided power for the corn mill and fish for the table. Good drinking water still flows abundantly from the spring directly up the hillside.

The notice from Roger de Aske to Roger, Archbishop of York, recording the foundation of Marrick Priory is dated between 1154 and 1158. Roger gave the house for nuns following the rule of St. Benedict. With it, they were given the parish Church of Marrick, jointly dedicated to the Virgin Mary and St. Andrew, plus one carucate of land in Marrick and other lands in the locality, totalling four hundred acres. Gifts were received from other barons so that, within a few years, the nuns had holdings at Hurst, Owlands, Ravensworth, Cowton, Marske, Kirkby Fleetham, Richmond and Carperby.

Once established, the Priory became the home of several of Roger de Aske's own daughters. Most of the nuns would have been from the families of landowners and merchants. Their day was divided by the offices, or times of prayer, beginning with Prime at dawn and continuing through Matins, Lauds, Terce, Sext, None and Vespers to Compline. Each day also included a mass, said by the resident priest, and time spent listening to a portion from the Rule of St Benedict.

The care of the house and the farm was in the hands of the steward and a host of servants, among them porters, milkers, cooks, stable hands and farm workers. The demesne, or home farm, would supply their day-to-day needs and the nuns enjoyed a degree of comfort, supported by the rents as well as gifts from their families. In times when travel was slow and arduous, the hospitality afforded by the Priory was welcome and the nuns, in turn, appreciated the news brought by pedlars and merchants from Richmond and beyond. Each year, the fleeces from the large flocks would have been sold to travelling merchants, sometimes from as far afield as Italy. As a defence against unfair trading, the nuns' steward would have kept one special 'stone', known to weigh 14lbs, to check the measure given by the visiting purchaser. There was only one fleece from each sheep in a year, but the ewes were also valued for their milk, used to make cheese. Ale was home-brewed.



Marrick Priory – the tower with the modern extension in the foreground

The Stainmore region of Upper Teesdale still holds menace for winter travellers and, in 1171, Ralph, Lord Moulton, gave a hospital, or hostel, at Reycross on Stainmore, together with an endowment, to allow the nuns to maintain a chaplain at a stipend of £4 13s.4d. per annum. Looking ahead three centuries, the nuns were known to have provided the titles for twelve ordinands of the York Diocese in 1476. So, with their extensive lands, the hospice and clerical patronage, the nuns exerted an influence beyond the tiny cloister which once stood between the nave and the present farm house.

In the latter part of the twelfth century, the Eggescliffe family established a house for Cistercian nuns a mile downstream from Marrick. These nuns, white-robed in contrast to the black habits of the Benedictines, followed a more austere rule, a reformed version of St. Benedict's Order. The marauding Scots completely despoiled and razed Ellerton Priory in 1342, carrying off seven foundation charters. Marrick did not entirely escape the Scottish raids, and it is believed that the dramatic drop in the valuation for papal taxation from £66.12.11 in 1291 to a nil valuation in 1318 reflects the losses suffered in that period.



Marrick Priory – the view from private grounds

Dissolution

Marrick survived the first round of closures, even though it did belong to the ranks of the smaller houses, with an income below £200 per annum. On 17th November 1540 the King's commissioners evicted Christabel Cowper, prioress, with sixteen nuns. As scant compensation for loss of home and way of life, the prioress received a pension from the commissioners of one hundred shillings, and the other nuns varying sums down to twenty shillings.

Hilda Prescott's novel, 'The Man on a Donkey', tells the story of Marrick Priory in the days leading up to the seizure by the crown. Miss Prescott modelled her fictitious prioress on Christabel Cowper, born in 1495, the daughter of a Richmond wool merchant.



Henry VIII

The Commissioners' survey showed there were many Yorkshire houses with lesser means in 1537. Marrick had a gross income of £64.18.9 per annum, £48.13.3 net. Of this, approximately one-fifth was distributed as alms: £4.17.9 to the poor at the gate of the priory on Maundy Thursday, nearly £3.0.0 to the poor at other times, and twelve shillings to the weak and sick coming to the priory. In addition to the rents and dues from their considerable endowment, the scale of wool amounting to eight sacks a year was a regular source of income. Tithes of lead were received, as well as the more general agricultural tithes; a lead tithe of twenty-four shillings is recorded from Hurst.

It can hardly be more than legend, but the guide books delight to relate the fortunes of Isabella Beaufort, a 19 year old beauty and maid of honour to Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine of Aragon. Isabella is said to have fled to Marrick to escape the king's amorous attentions. She remained there until the Dissolution, when she was reunited with her true love, Edward Herbert. They married and lived happily ever after in the 'West Country'.

The central figure in the fate which befell the Priory was Sir John Uvedale, also known as Sir John Woodhall. He had been secretary to another of Henry's queens, Anne Boleyn, and, at the time of the Dissolution, was secretary of the council of the North, among other royal offices. Almost three years before the nuns actually left, Sir John coveted Marrick and let it be known to Thomas Cromwell, Henry's Vicar-General. Sir John was personally present for the eviction and, three years later, he received the lease for the site and the demesne lands. This was followed in 1545 by the purchase of the property for £364.0.6. Tax returns show him to have been the most wealthy man in the dale. Ownership changed again in 1592, when it was passed by deed of feoffment to Timothy, later Sir Timothy, Hutton of Marske. His son, Matthew, sold the land and tithes in 1633 for £3280 to the Blackburn family of Blackburn Hall, on the river bank alongside Grinton Church.

The priory church, like many of its kind, continued to be used as the place of worship for the parish. Many of the dales people, like those in other remote areas of the North, were slow to accept the religious changes dictated by the crown. On 30th November 1569, during the Northern Rebellion, Bryan Carter and William Allanson of Arkengarthdale, William Arundell of Healaugh and several other people attacked the mansion house of Alfred Woodhall of Marrick with swords, spears and bows and arrows. Afterwards, they broke the communion table in the church and robbed and grievously injured the curate, William Pratt, so that his life was despaired of. Amongst the forty-odd from Swaledale who were later punished, William Arundell of Healaugh was fined £2.

JMW Turner

The artist JMW Turner visited Marrick Priory in the summer of 1816 on his way from Wensleydale to Richmond. He was collecting sketches for illustrating 'A General History of the County of York' by Thomas Dunham Whitaker, published in December 1822. The sketch of Marrick Priory is viewed from the east, a view which is now obscured by trees. The sketch formed the basis of a studio watercolour "Merrick Abbey, Swaledale" (Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Japan) engraved by J.C. Varrall for Thomas Dunham Whitaker's 'History of Richmondshire', part of the projected seven volume 'General History of the County of York'. The engraving is shown below. For copyright reasons we are unable to show the watercolour, but you can find it on the Tate website.



Merrick Abbey, Swaledale 1822

Joseph Mallord William Turner 1775-1851

Purchased 1986

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/work/T04460>

Photo © Tate CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported)

The Turner Trails bench can be found opposite Marrick Priory on a public footpath leading to Steps Wood. From here there are fantastic views overlooking Swaledale.

About JMW Turner (1775-1851)

Joseph Mallord William Turner was an English Romantic painter, printmaker and watercolourist. A child prodigy, Turner studied at the Royal Academy of Arts from 1789, enrolling when he was 14, and exhibited his first work there at 15. He left behind more than 550 oil paintings, 2,000 watercolours, and 30,000 works on paper. He is today regarded as having elevated landscape painting to an eminence rivalling history painting. The Tate created the prestigious annual Turner Prize art award in 1984, named in Turner's honour, and 20 years later the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours founded the Winsor & Newton Turner Watercolour Award. The Bank of England announced that a portrait of Turner will appear on the £20 note beginning in 2020.

The information in the paragraph above was taken from Wikipedia.



JMW Turner

The Hearse House

We would like to thank **Beamish, The Living Museum of the North** for kindly providing the source material for this section. Further details can be found by following the links on the Hearse House page of the Marrick Priory website.



The Hearse House

In October 2015 the Beamish Museum's Buildings Team began work on constructing a replica Hearse House near St Helen's Church. It was completed by December 2016. The Hearse now has a permanent home of its own and is on display to the public for the first time in decades.

Marrick Priory was once home to a very rare object: probably Britain's oldest hearse, built in 1828. The simple two-wheeled hearse left the Priory's grounds in the 1960s. It was collected by the Beamish Museum from our stone-built Georgian Hearse House. This early and vernacular horse-drawn vehicle is exceptionally rare, and perhaps more so, as we are aware of its origin and history. We even have a record of its very first occupant, as the Marrick Priory registry records:

"1828 April 2nd, Mary widow of Thomas Hillary [a farmer], Lanehead House, aged 67, Hearse first time used."



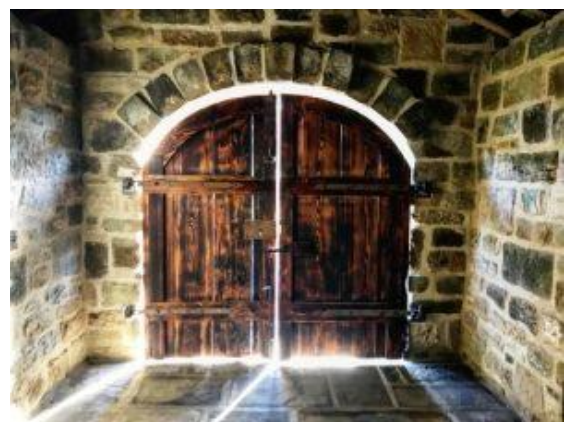
The 1828 hearse

The Main Structure

The main structure consists of stonework, joinery and a stone slab roof. The stone slab roof has been weather-proofed using a traditional method known as 'torching'. This involves adding a coat of lime pointing to the underside of the roof slates, tiles or slabs to create a barrier against the elements, while still allowing the building to 'breathe'.

The Interior

The Beamish team collected research on a number of similar buildings across the north of England in order to gain a better understanding of what the interiors of these buildings may have looked like in the Georgian period and what objects should be included to ensure historical accuracy. These buildings would all have had lime washed interiors. This was common for most vernacular buildings during that period, whether functional or domestic, due to the antibacterial properties of lime wash.



The replica hearse house interior

The Georgian Grave Digger

The Beamish Collections team identified relevant objects from their collections which help give life to the building and tell the story of a Georgian grave digger. The project is now complete and the hearse is in situ.

New Home at St Mary's Church



The finished project at St Mary's Church.



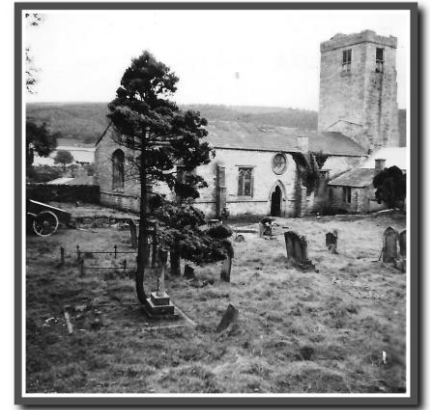
St Mary's Church with the hearse house just visible to the left

Photos from 1958

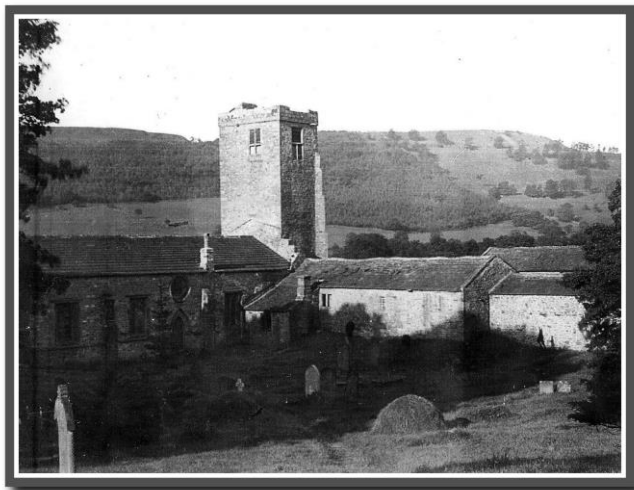
These photos from 1958 show several boys from Richmond Grammar School. They can be seen renovating Marrick Priory before it started life as an Outdoor Education Centre in 1970s. The photos were taken by Mike Wood, he has kindly donated them to the Priory. Mike himself can be seen in one of the photos renovating the hearse - he was 18 years old at the time.

When the boys arrived on site they took a photo of the Priory with the gravestones. One of these had an inscription with the name Cowper, dated in the 1700s. This was probably a descendant of our last Prioress - Christabel Cowper from the 1500s!

A large tree had fallen next to the Hearse House. When the boys removed it they found the hearse in pieces. Mike painstakingly put it together again with the help of historians in London. Sometime later the Hearse was collected by the Beamish Museum. More recently, the Beamish Museum have constructed a replica Hearse House off-site where the hearse is now on display to the public.



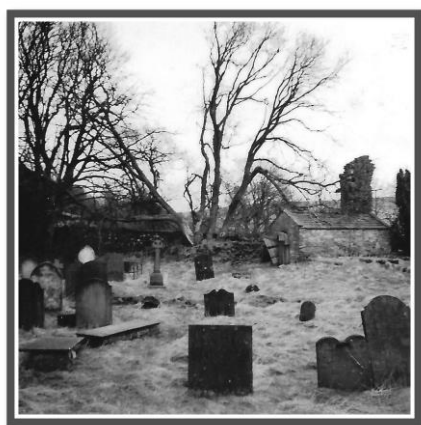
Marrick Priory before the renovations



Marrick Priory looking south



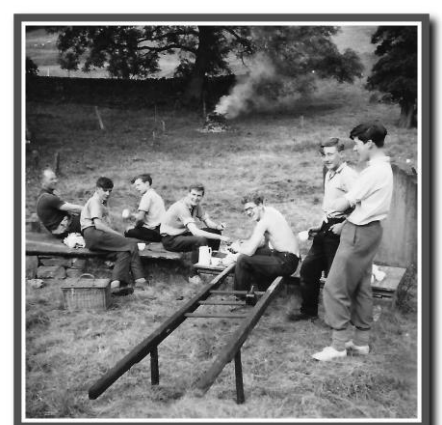
Mike Wood renovating the hearse



Grave stones and hearse house



Boys at work

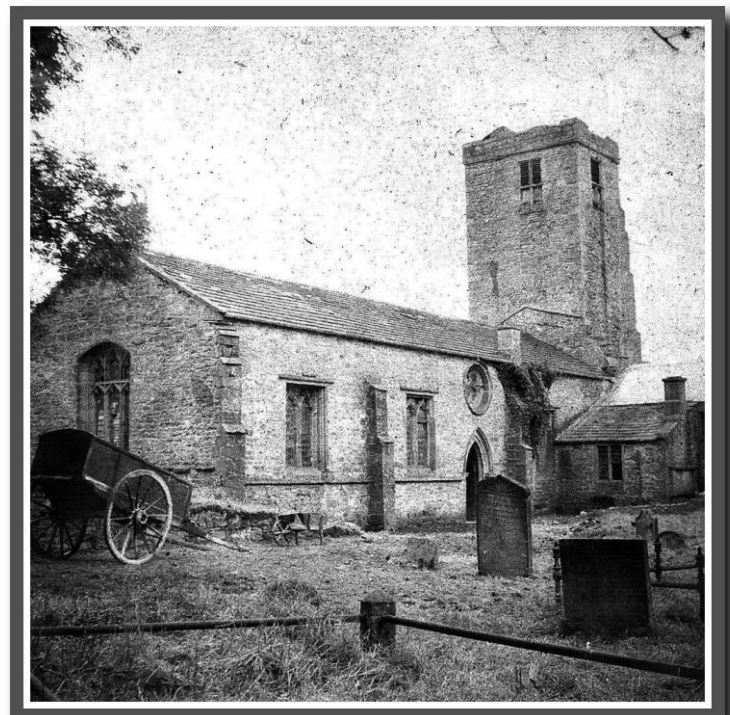


Barnard Castle School

Inside the chapel they found lots of debris and droppings. The wood was severely infected by insects and they were advised to burn it. Mike also told us that when he arrived on site he found lots of coloured glass on the ground which has since been dated to medieval period and a specialist glazier in the Dales put them together and they are now in the east window in the chapel.



Clockwise from top left: hearse house and ruins, chapel, main building with hearse, boys from Richmond Grammar School, view from the road



Youth Centre

The decline in population, the inaccessibility of the Priory and the presence of a chapel actually on the edge of the village, all combine to explain why the church had fallen into disuse by the end of the Second World War. Even for some years until then, the church had only been used once each year, on Whit Sunday, and 1948 saw the last of these occasions.

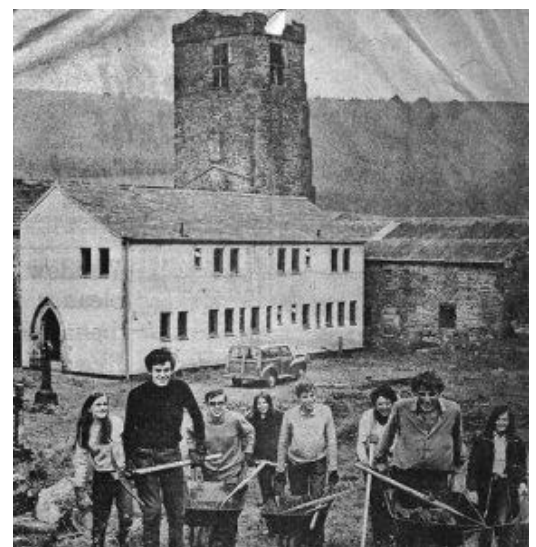
Disused and neglected, the building soon fell into decay. For at least a decade, it offered shelter not to the faithful but to the birds of the air, bullocks, sheep and goats. It was the superb remote setting and historical associations which prompted the late Ven. Harry Graham, Archdeacon of Richmond, and a few local people to see the Priory's potential as a place to attract the young. They asked for a report on the state of the fabric from Mr George G. Pace, the distinguished ecclesiastical architect, and, in 1959 and 1960, working parties of students, sponsored by the SCM in schools, began some restoration work on the church, battling against decay and the wild overgrown churchyard.



The Northern Echo - 7th March 1967

Writing in 1960, Mr Pace stated "The relationship of the existing buildings at Marrick Priory to each other and to within Swaledale is magnificent and must not be harmed... The repairs to the existing buildings must be carried out in accordance with the best conservation practice". Within the next twelve months, he drew up plans for converting the building into a residential centre for young people. At this stage, no new building was envisaged and Mr Pace later referred to those early plans as intended for "rough living in a kind of superior cowshed".

Little progress was made in the next four or five years. Working parties of young people came each summer to do simple restoration work and certain urgent safety work was put in hand. Two unsuccessful applications were made to the (then) Ministry of Education for grant aid towards the project, but a third application in May 1963 resulted in a more positive response. By early 1965, the Diocese of Ripon had appointed a Diocesan Youth Adviser, the Rev. Maxwell Fergus, and he, with the Ven. John Turnbull, who had succeeded Harry Graham as Archdeacon of Richmond, now began to get the project seriously under way. Visits were made to the Department of Education, Her Majesty's Inspectorate were called in for consultation, and in September a new meeting of the Trustees and interested people was called, resulting in the setting up of



Working party of young people

a small action group.

On the advice of the Department of Education and the HMIs, this action group agreed to the adoption of a more comfortable standard of accommodation and housing for a permanent warden. Mr Pace drew up new plans to meet the new standards and to enable the proposed Centre to be used not as a "resting place for youth parties enjoying the local countryside", but as a properly equipped centre where community-based and experimental learning could take place and a variety of social and educational needs be met.

In May 1966, the Department of Education and Science approved the new plans and accepted the scheme as a regional project. A Management Committee grew out of the former action group, bringing together a wide range of experience and interests; theirs was the task of overseeing the development of the project, advising the architect and being advised by him, deciding upon furnishings and equipment and, in course of time, appointing a warden. They also had to raise the large capital sum



**1970 – boys from Bedale
are among the first guests
to visit the Priory**

needed for the project to match the 50 per cent grant aid from the Department of Education. Here the Committee was very well served by Sir Rupert Hart-Davies as honorary treasurer, and he it was who so successfully directed the appeal for funds. There was something of a local scandal when it was learnt that some of the building workers had a sideline in selling broken gravestones to form the bar at the Bridge Hotel, Grinton.

On 30th May 1970 the Bishop of Ripon, Dr John Moorman, dedicated the Centre and re-dedicated the Chapel, and the opening ceremony was performed by Lord Normanby, a trustee, who marked the occasion by giving the funds to build a warden's bungalow on the site. This was followed by the first warden, the Rev. Jonathon Bailey, taking office in March 1971. The mile of access road remained a treacherous track, spelling ruin for those who risked their vehicles, and it cast a blight on the centre when all else seemed well. Negotiation with the County Surveyor's Department led to the road being brought up to standard for adoption as a county road at the end of 1972. This last obstacle overcome, the demand to use the centre leapt up. It was evident

that the work would continue throughout the winter months and so central heating was installed to meet this welcome but unexpected development.

The voluntary effort, which characterised the early days of the venture, resumed in 1974 when Mr Alan Butterwick, with colleagues from the building industry and friends from youth work, undertook the building of the extension, doubling the size of the kitchen. The Management Committee continues to meet regularly to direct the expanding work of the Priory, which included more than two thousand residents in both 1973 and 1974.

It is not fanciful to notice a link across eight centuries to the present role of Marrick Priory as a centre of community life, hospitality, learning and prayer.



Rev. J Bailey

Photos – Then and Now

Marrick Priory was opened as an Outdoor Centre on 30th May 1970. Much has changed since the early days; we now offer many more activities led by a qualified and dedicated staff team. The facilities have also been dramatically improved with the building itself having been extended on several occasions. Below are some photos highlighting the changes.



Early 1970s – Dining Room



2019 – Dining Room

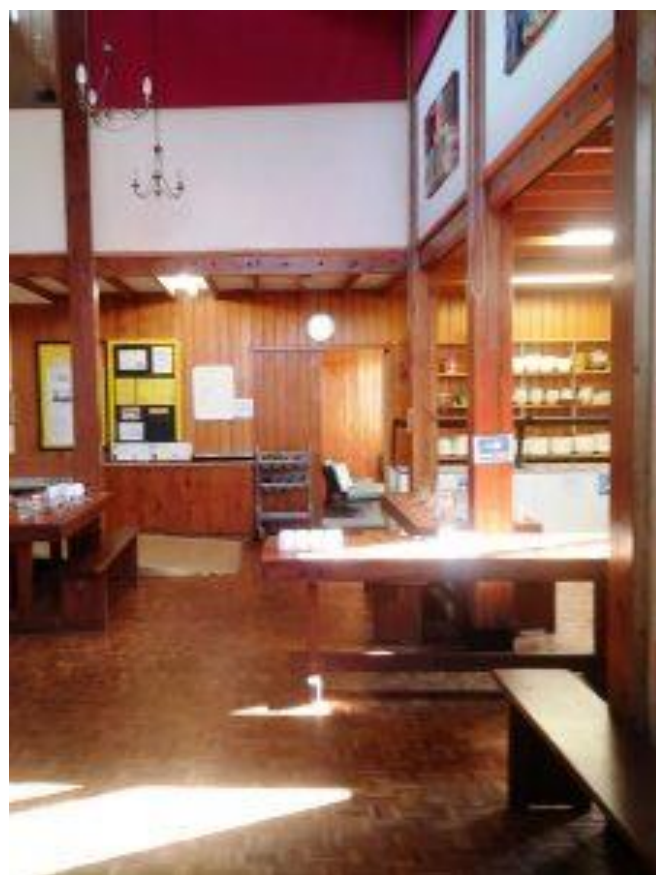
The dining room is at the west end of the main hall and, as the name suggests, it is primarily used by our guests for mealtime gatherings. We also use this space for table tennis (downtime) and indoor climbing and abseiling (as part of an instructor led session). Guests can climb up the inside tower wall to the right of the large window. They can also abseil in this area; descending from a trap door in the tower (accessed by the small door to the left of the ping pong table). We still use the ping pong table daily but it is folded up for abseiling sessions, which were happening just after the 2019 photo was taken.

The 2019 photo above also shows a door (to the right) leading to the Prioress's house - a 1994 extension/conversion that is now used as the large common room. On the left of the above photos you can see the boys' dormitory above the dining room. This has been upgraded to include an emergency exit (spiral staircase) and glazing that encloses the dormitory area.

The photos on the next page show the dining room looking in the opposite direction (east). In the 1970s the boys' dormitory was accessed via stairs direct from the dining room. Today the main access is from the main hallway, a subsequent building extension to the left of picture. The 2019 photo shows the servery in the far right corner of the room - the kitchens are across the main hallway.



Early 1970s – Dining Room



2019 – Dining Room

The 1970s photo above shows people gathered in a door way, this is the entrance to the small common room. You can't see the girls' dormitory in these photos - it's behind the boys' dormitory directly above the small common room. The photos below are taken from the main hallway entrance to the small common room. To the left of picture is the chapel and to the right is the dining room.



Early 1970s – Small common room



2019 – Small common room

The chapel today is similar to the chapel of the 1970s. It is still used by our residential guests as a place to congregate for worship, music, reflection etc. The Prioress's house (converted in 1994) is used as a large common room. It is also where our guests meet for pre-session briefings from the duty instructor.



2019 – The Chapel



2019 – The Prioress's house

It's not just the inside of Marrick Priory that has seen major developments over the years. The area outside around the ruins has been cleared and tidied.



1958 – Arch ruins



2019 – Arch ruins

We have also added lots of new activities and equipment in the grounds. In 2011 we constructed a high ropes area, outdoor climbing tower and archery range. At the same time we even installed two zip wires across the river - the main zip wire is long and fast, the smaller one is slower to return you safely back across the river without getting your feet wet.

In 2018 we built an outdoor classroom, just up the bank from the high ropes area. It is a fully enclosed structure that can accommodate around 20 people. The outdoor classroom is available for use by both residential groups and day groups.



Top left: 2019 - High ropes area and climbing tower, steps lead to outdoor classroom

Top right: 2019 - Outdoor classroom

Bottom left: 2019 - Archery range with outdoor classroom above in the trees

Bottom right: 2019 - River Swale viewed from archery range - the pole on the opposite bank supports our smaller return zip wire