

Lihou Island - Priory

The Priory on Lihou is believed to have been established by Benedictine monks from Mont Saint Michel in Normandy in the 12th century. The Priory is now in ruins, and archaeological excavations are being led by the States' Archaeology Officer to find out more about the structure of the Priory and its associated buildings, and the life of the monks. The site was first excavated by the famous local antiquary F C Lukis in 1868.

Modern excavations have resulted in the discovery of many artefacts including a wide array of pottery, a sundial, an impressive coin dating from the time of Henry the Third and a number of graves. Various forms of architecture have been noted in the domestic buildings area of the Priory, including a covered walkway and substantial fireplace. The States has placed coastal armouring around the south of the site to prevent erosion by the sea. The Priory site recently featured on BBC 2's "Meet the Ancestors" programme.

The exact date of foundation by the great Abbey of Mont St Michel in Normandy is unknown, but it is likely to be some time in the 12th century, probably 1114 AD. Although the English Crown confiscated the Alien Priories in 1414, evidence points towards this Priory's continued use until the 16th century when it was converted into a farmhouse.

It is almost certain that the Priory was built as a challenge to pagan worship. According to legend, witches who met at the nearby Le Catiaroc on Guernsey found the Priory a great source of irritation and dread. Their chant "Que! Hou! Marie Li Hou!" demonstrates the pagan defiance towards the new Christian faith and the Virgin Mary.

To visit the Guernsey Museums & Galleries website please click on: www.museum.guernsey.net