

Alma Mater

Alma Mater Larp © 2023 is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0  

This Google Doc is a copy of all the pages on the *Alma Mater* website. It has been collated for the convenience of players who may find it easier to read this way.

We apologise that this Doc is formatted awkwardly in some places.

Due to the difficulties in keeping it up to date, it may sometimes lack information or have out-of-date text compared to the website. If you can, please rely on the website primarily:

<https://tillimint.wixsite.com/alma-mater-larp>

CONTENTS:

[Welcome](#)

[What is this larp?](#)

[Practical](#)

[Venue](#)

[Travel](#)

[Catering](#)

[Costume](#)

[Timetable](#)

[About us](#)

[Design Philosophy](#)

[Meet the Team](#)

[Expected behaviour](#)

[Themes - what is this larp about?:](#)

[Larp Style: What can I expect to do?](#)

[Chant together at various times throughout the day](#)

[Keep and break the Rule](#)

[Eating collectively, and taking turns to serve at table](#)

[Be interviewed by the King's commissioner](#)

[Experience Intense Emotions](#)

[Deal with Loss and Change](#)

[Explore relationships, positive and negative](#)

[What won't I encounter?](#)

[Writing my own character](#)

[Skill Points](#)

[Full Transparency](#)

[Gender equality](#)

[Winning](#)

[Combat](#)

[Midnight roleplay and slow mornings](#)

[I am not a woman: can I play?](#)

[History](#)

[The Church 'as it has been'](#)

[Monasticism](#)

[The Reformation](#)

[The Rule of St Agnes](#)

[Preface](#)

[Booking](#)

[Tickets](#)

[Understudy Tickets](#)

[Refunds and Re-sale](#)

[Budget Transparency](#)



Welcome

It is the year of our Lord, 1536. The convent of Whitwood Abbey, dedicated to the Nurturing Mother ('Alma Mater'), has stood on this spot for nearly three hundred years. For you, the religious sisters who dwell within, it provides a protection; a vocation; a routine - and above all a strict Rule of life.

The great mother Church provided well-born ladies, like you, a shelter outside of the cultural norms of marriage and motherhood. In return, you provide spiritual connection by reciting the psalms; and following the ancient laws of stability and obedience.

From time to time, your obedience would be assessed by visiting Church officials; your Abbey has never been found wanting.

But times are changing. The King, Henry VIII, battled to end his first marriage for years. The dispute between the King and the Church allowed powerful men into the government - men whose goal is Protestant reform. The new Queen has brought this closer.

You are now - whether you will or no - part of a new church, the Church of England. There is no certainty. There is no stability. There is to be an inspection.

What is this larp?

Alma Mater is a three-day larp for a dozen participants. You will be playing the religious sisters (nuns) of Whitwood Abbey, during the English Reformation, and at the very precipice of the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Players may be of any gender, but all characters are women. All characters are pre-written and assigned based on answers to the booking questionnaire.

Over the larp, the sisters will encounter an inspection by The King's Commissioner, a man who has been sent to assess the spiritual and financial value of the nunnery. He will interview each of the sisters to determine any spiritual fault or poor adherence to the Rule.

Practical

Venue

The event will take place in The Chellington Centre, which is a re-purposed church.

It has recently been refurbished and has a modern heating system. There is free parking and wifi.

In terms of accessibility, the building is mostly on ground level but there are 2 steps up to one of the rooms (where the altar was). Please let us know if you can't manage 2 steps.

There are 6 rooms for sleeping: these have 4-5 single bunks each. There are more bunks than the number of attendees, so we won't be squeezed for space, but you will be expected to share a room. Let us know if this isn't possible or if there are certain people you would or wouldn't like to share with.

You will need to bring your own bedding. If your travel arrangements will make this difficult (eg you are travelling by plane), please tell us and we can lend you some.

Please note that the rooms are not soundproof and we do recommend ear plugs for sleep.

UK electric points are available in each bedroom.

A few of the bunks are shorter than a typical single mattress (163 or 168cm). Please let us know if you wouldn't mind sleeping in a short bed.

The venue must be left clean after use as there isn't a team of professional cleaners.

Travel

Chellington is just outside of a small village in Bedfordshire; 60 miles/100km north of London; 30 minutes' drive off the M1.

The address is St Nicholas Church, Felmersham Rd, Carlton, Bedford MK43 7NA

The nearest train station is Bedford. From there it's a 20 minute drive - you can take a taxi or pre-discuss a lift. Preferably this will be with other participants rather than with the Team, but let us know if this proves challenging.

From Luton Airport

There are regular trains from Luton Airport Parkway to Bedford (take the train toward Corby) which takes 15 mins and costs £10-12.

Other airports are less recommended, but as long as you can get to Bedford you will be fine.

Catering

Food will be provided for all attendees at set meal times. Hot and cold soft drinks will be available throughout.

We request that no alcohol be consumed on site.

Food will be in a style appropriate for the sixteenth century. In keeping with a monastic diet it will be based on plant-based staples with optional additions of fish, chicken, cheese or eggs.

As there is only one small kitchen at Chellington, it isn't possible for you to prepare other food for yourself, nor use the fridge (other than for medical items). However you are welcome to bring snacks you can eat cold or prepare with hot water.

You will be expected to lay tables before meals, and clear and wash-up afterwards, according to a set rota. This is an in-larp duty (being a "Kitchener"). As it also serves an off-larp function, please discuss with us before making any rota changes.

Please bring gloves etc if you need them to wash dishes.

Costume

Most parts of your costume will be provided for you. This will consist of a tunic dress, an over-garment called a scapular, and a cloth (wimple) to cover your head and your neck.

We ask for your height and dress size on booking. This is a size and fat inclusive event and we will accommodate your body.

You will need to bring certain elements of the costume yourself; these are as follows:

- Undergarments (eg. bra, briefs) of your usual preferred sort.
- A white under-dress (known as shift/chemise) to wear between yourself and your tunic dress. Long-sleeved is better. Ideally this would be linen.
- Indoor shoes - plain simple flat shoes such as ballet slippers are fine.
- A belt: brown or black leather-look
- Something to pin your veil to, such as a white coif, cap, tube-scarf, or hijab under-bonnet. This needs to be comfortable to wear for long periods without getting a headache. It must sit firm on your head without slipping. All of your hair should be hidden by the veil so you might need bobby pins to style it up.

If you are worried about being cold, the site has modern heating. If you want to wear more layers of clothes under your shift (as long as these are not visible), that's fine. Alternatively you may wish to bring a white, black or grey cloak or blanket - the plainer the better.

Timetable

This timetable is in a draft format and may be subject to significant change.

The larp will run from the late afternoon on Thursday 3rd October to 12pm on Sunday 6th October and participants will be needed in full attendance throughout.

Please note that there is no roleplay on the Sunday. However, all participants are expected to stay and work together to tidy the site. Your cooperation is essential in allowing everyone to have a smooth journey home, and to avoid site fees for delayed departure or cleaning.

Thursday

5.30 pm - Arrive on site
6 pm - Workshops
7.30 pm - Supper
8 pm - Workshops
9.30 pm - Calibration & hang out
11 pm - Bedtime

Friday

8 am - Alarm bell
8.30 am - LAUDS
9 am - Breakfast
10 am - PRIME
10.30 am - Congregation
11 am - TERCE
1 pm - NONE
1.30 pm - Lunch
2 pm - Meridian silence (1h rest)
5 pm - SEXT
7 pm - VESPERS
7.30 pm - Supper
9 pm - COMPLINE
9.30 pm - In-larp curfew (night time roleplay)
10.30 pm - MATINS
11 pm - Bedtime

Saturday

8 am - Alarm bell
8.30 am - LAUDS
9 am - Breakfast
10 am - PRIME
10.30 am - Congregation

11 am - TERCE
1 pm - NONE
1.30 pm - Lunch
2 pm - Meridian silence (1h rest)
5 pm - SEXT
7 pm - VESPER
7.30 pm - Time out
8 pm - Off-larp supper
9 pm - Debrief & afterparty
11 pm - Bedtime

Sunday

8.30 am - Alarm bell
9 am - Breakfast
10-12 - Everyone tidies up site
12 pm - Leave site

Tickets

More information, including on ticket prices and concessions, can be found in [Booking](#).

About us

Design Philosophy

Alma Mater is a collaborative experience. The Team may write and design the larp, but it does not reach its final form and content until the participants have interpreted their characters and played the larp

Our Team are all feminist, socially liberal and left-leaning. The themes of our writing are inevitably influenced by that world view. Our feminism is not incompatible with the historical themes of sexism in the larps we write. The stories of historical women are all the more compelling when they are told in the context of the marginalisation which they experienced. We have found that 'gender neutral' settings often end up defaulting to telling male stories.

We want every participant at our event to take something useful from it, and we want the same thing! In fact we think it is the duty of everyone at a larp to try to both have fun and make sure the people around them have fun. We take the view that if every participant in a larp comes to it with that attitude, everyone benefits.

We are not profit making. We are volunteers helping people tell stories. We look forward to larping with you.

Meet the Team

LIZY
she/her

Lizy is the Creator of *Alma Mater*, having fallen in love with medieval monasticism, and larp - separately - at university 17 years ago. She considers herself catholic and atheist. She loves historical larps and has recently enjoyed playing (and being inspired by) *Meeting of Monarchs* (Charmed Plume), *Goetia* (OmenStar), *Three Kingdoms* (Jake Cyriax), and *Heathen* (Carver/Benyon). Her most recent organisation work was co-authoring *Anarchy LRP*.

In her spare time she's a doctor.

JULIAN
he/him

Julian is a writer for Alma Mater. As the Token Man, he will be playing the King's Commissioner, as well as other characters. After a history degree he now practices law, but still gets his buzz out of medieval history. He was the creator of *Anarchy LRP*. He's been larping for more than 20 years; and his favourites have been

Odyssey (Profound Decisions), *Outlaw* (EyeLARP), *The Quota* (Avalon) and *Strange* (Lavery/Hall/Blackshaw).

Julian and Lizy have been married for 2 years. When he's not working or larping he enjoys being a Dad to their two kids.

SARAH
she/her
Logistics and Admin

JESSICA
she/her

Jess is in charge of event management and participant wellbeing. During the event she will be your first port of call if you need help or if something has gone wrong. She has trained as a teacher and been organising larps since 2006.
Jess and Lizy have been married for 12 years.

Expected behaviour

Taken and adapted from Dave Proctor's [policy for Pride Without Prejudice](#), based on '[Snakepit Model Equality and Diversity, and Acceptable Behaviour Policy v 0.5.5](#)' originally by Doug McGregor.

This policy explains the behaviour we expect of attendees at *Alma Mater* including the [Team](#). All participants confirm that they will comply with this agreement when they book.

You must not:

- Discriminate against others based on off-larp (out-of-character) attributes (including: age, physical appearance, sex and/or gender identities including transgender status, race, disability, neurodiversity, nationality, religion, parental status/choices, class or social status, sexuality or relationship choices)
- Use derogatory or bigoted language based on out-of-character attributes
- Criticise someone for using accessibility aids eg. wheelchair, eyeglasses
- Sexually harass other participants
- Make references to certain unacceptable themes (as listed in the [Themes](#) section)
- Drink alcohol; smoke or vape; or use illegal substances on site.
- Film or photograph others without their consent
- Interfere with another participant's off-larp belongings or mobility aids
- Attempt to shrug off responsibility for your actions, including by claiming they were in-character
- Cause damage to the site or leave mess for others to clean up

You should:

- Take reasonable responsibility for your own wellbeing and that of others
- Make yourself aware of acceptable and unacceptable [themes](#) to base your roleplay on
- Respect other people when they ask you to stop doing something (we will show you techniques for this before the larp)
- Let one of the Team know if someone or something is making you feel uncomfortable
- Make choices which will increase the roleplay experience for yourself and others ('play to lift')
- Treat people by the gender of their character without commenting on sex characteristics, such as facial hair

- Treat all attendees, including the Team, with courtesy - remembering at all times that we are all attending in order to co-create an experience, rather than as 'a customer'

We reserve the right to decline a booking from any person without giving a reason.

If you break this policy, we may:

- Discuss the situation with you and/or issue a warning
- Ask you to take a break
- Ask you to leave
- Ban you from attending future larps we run
- Share certain information with organisers of other larps, at our discretion
- Take legal action

Themes - what is this larp about?:

Alma Mater is a larp about a close community under threat of destruction. It is about the end of an ancient way of life. It is about social and personal conflict within a homosocial (all-female) environment. It is about experiencing a flavour of the order and rhythms of monastic life in the early 16th century. It is a larp about change, loss, and yearning.

Please note that Alma Mater explicitly includes the following themes, and roleplay on them will be encouraged. In-larp conflict and discrimination will be encouraged on these attributes.

- Catholicism and early Protestantism
- Gender, sexism and misogyny
- Gender-based violence
- Trust and betrayal
- Loss
- State oppression
- Poverty, bankruptcy, financial ruin
- Chastity and unchastity (where same-sex, criticism should focus on the unchastity rather than homosexuality)

In addition, the following themes may be part of the larp for some characters but should be roleplayed with care, with an awareness that they may distress other players. Roleplay on these themes should be considered “opt-in”.

- Consensual sexual contact
- Visions, voices and mystical experience which nowadays might be thought of as "mental illness"
- Physical illness
- Physical and verbal intimidation
- Unspecific fears of sexual violence (no more than brief, non-detailed references)
- Past experience of domestic violence and abuse
- Pregnancy
- Restriction from eating meat, fish or cheese as penance
- Corporal punishment / humiliation

These themes are not part of the larp and it is not acceptable to make them part of roleplay or refer to them:

- Discrimination on the basis of any off-larp attribute.
- Non-consensual sexual activity (except unspecific fears as above)
- Sexual activity involving children under 16
- Incest
- Miscarriage, stillbirth, infant death and abortion
- Self harm or suicide
- Eating disorders
- Racism or antisemitism

The lists of potentially distressing themes are not exhaustive and are based on our experiences. If there is something you would like added to this list to make your experience more comfortable, please speak to us.

Remember, at all times you should take reasonable responsibility for your own wellbeing and that of others. You must respect other people when they ask you to stop doing something, and allow them to leave a scene before continuing to roleplay.

See [Expected Behaviour](#) for more details.

Larp Style: What can I expect to do?

Alma Mater is a larp about recreating the feel of late medieval monastic life. The day will have a rhythm of prayer, singing, eating and sleeping.

Chant together at various times throughout the day

The life of a religious sister in the early 16th century was dominated by the singing of psalms at the regular Offices of the day from morning to night. The community will come together to chant in unison at set times. Some characters may strain at the monotony, or try to stand out. Others enjoy the meditateness and togetherness.

Keep and break the Rule

To be a sister is to embrace (in theory) a life of strict moral and physical discipline. In practice, everyone bends [The Rule](#) to their own comfort. A sister who breaches the Rule can expect to face consequences, be they social or physical. Of course, she is likely to have many strong incentives to break The Rule as well. We will have a pre-larp workshop together on consequences and punishment; and escalation/de-escalation techniques.

Eating collectively, and taking turns to serve at table

The community eats collectively, all of the sisters taking turns to serve the others at table, as "Kitcheners". This is a time of closeness and community - but also a time when the rules of the community bite.

Religious sisters were expected to refrain from eating certain foods at certain times for spiritual reasons, and you may optionally choose to engage with this. However, the larp will be set in a season where sisters can eat widely, with few restrictions. Either way you can enjoy satisfying period-appropriate food and won't go hungry.

Read more about the Catering on the [Practical page](#).

Be interviewed by the King's commissioner

The King's commissioner will be speaking to everyone. He will be asking questions about moral, financial and personal weaknesses. His purpose is to find flaws and heighten them, to give reasons to close the House for good. Some sisters might beg, plead or snitch. Some might confess. Some sisters may need to have their will broken first. Optionally, these scenes can have roleplay around verbal or physical intimidation.

Experience Intense Emotions

Your characters will be confronted with intense relationships and difficult moral dilemmas. Your character will have to face them and deal with the consequences of the decisions while maintaining (or not) the Rule of the House.

Deal with Loss and Change

Your character will have to deal with the end of life as she has known it up until now. She can fight futilely against the change, or make plans for a new future.

Explore relationships, positive and negative

The sisters all know each other well - they live in a closed, intense, homosocial environment. Your character will have pre-written relationship "hooks", both positive and negative, with other characters, for you to explore. You will create more seeds of relationships in workshops before the larp starts. Relationships with other sisters may be familial, friendship, hierarchical, spiritual or romantic.

Touch

Participants may make light physical contact with each other on the hands, arms and shoulders. Other touch must be by explicit consent only. Intimate roleplay should not involve contact of areas which would be covered by a one-piece swimming costume. In any case, please refrain from having sex while you're with us - the rooms are not sound proof.

What won't I encounter?

No writing of own characters

All the characters in this larp are written by the Team. We will work with you to make sure your character is one you can enjoy embodying.

No skill Points

There are no mechanical skills or skill points in this larp. You will expect to support other players if they say they can do something; equally you are encouraged to keep your character's abilities in fitting with your character description.

No full transparency

The characters know each other well and all have relationships - some pre-written and some you can develop in workshops before the larp. After casting, you will be able to read character details for all of your sisters. However, everyone has secrets, and these will emerge throughout the larp.

No gender equality

This is a time and place in which women are marginalised compared to men. Conceptions of non-binary genders are not well understood. Although we know of historical people in religious life whose stories fit with our modern ideas about trans* and genderqueer identities, their stories aren't in the spotlight here. This larp is about the collection of identities we know as women.

At this time, women of high or elite status (your characters) have limited agency in their own lives. Girls are born into the legal control of their fathers and most then pass into their husbands' hands. The sisters have stepped sideways, away from this patriarchy by their religious life. However, many of the sisters have not freely chosen to enter religious life, and some are happier with the option than others.

Religious sisters are women who are exempted from the typical societal expectations of a woman as a wife and mother - but that exemption is under attack and by the end of the Reformation there will be no religious houses in England.

All player characters in the larp are women; but you will encounter and perpetuate internalised misogyny, and you will also encounter a few men such as The King's Commissioner who will use his gender to establish dominance.

No winning

If you go into the larp trying to align your off-larp goals with the aims of your character, you risk serious disappointment. The larp is about feeling the emotional highs and lows of your character's struggle. Many characters will end up in a worse situation than they started. Not all will be worse off, but setting out to "win" in this way is likely to be frustrating.

No combat

There will not be any physical combat eg. with weapons; but you may encounter interpersonal violence. Any simulated violence must be negotiated first with consent from all participants.

No midnight roleplay or slow mornings

Because of the plan for a regular rhythm of the day, you will need to be awake to participate in events in the morning. Therefore roleplay will stop and we suggest you get to sleep by about 11pm.

I am not a woman: can I play?

Alma Mater is a larp about a homosocial environment: a nunnery. All characters are women. There are no male or non-binary characters available to play. Neither cross-dressing nor concealed gender are themes of the larp.

However, we welcome players of any gender. As long as you are wearing the costume (habit) of a nun, you do not need to alter your gender presentation in any way. Therefore we could see sisters with beards, deep voices, flat chests and so on. These characteristics must not be commented on during the larp, and are not part of the world of the larp.

Of note, we are trans-inclusive and feminist creators, and will not tolerate off-larp discrimination of any kind. Read more about [our philosophy](#) and [Expected Behaviour](#).

History

Participants are not expected to be experts in the history of the period: the creators are definitely not experts. None of the characters nor the Priory are based on real people or places. The setting is divergent from history in a number of ways, both deliberately and accidentally. Deliberate diversions will be clearly marked as **fiction** in design materials.

We encourage participants to have a collaborative approach to creating an immersive setting: add historical details and authentic elements if you know about them and wish to do so. But don't challenge or 'correct' other people unless you have been asked for your opinion. If a historical detail is interfering with your interaction with the event, or if there is something you would like to change or add, please discuss with the design team.

The Church 'as it has been'

Coming Soon

Monasticism

Since the very early days of Christianity, people have withdrawn themselves away from normal secular life, in order to spend time contemplating God. A life devoted in this way, a Religious Life, is considered a very holy one, and many such people are revered as saints. Over the centuries Religious Life has developed traditions and rites of its own. The most common 'tree' of tradition is monastic community. This has many branches, known as Orders.

Monastic communities can be involved in preaching and working with and among secular people: these Orders are called friars. However, the older and more typical Orders live separated ('cloistered') from the world, in communities which are always segregated by sex. Most houses are for a single sex only.

People enter a community, first as postulants and then novices. After a few years, they could take solemn vows, after which point they would permanently be a member of the Religious Order (for women, "a nun").

Each Order follows its own set of laws, known as the Rule, all of which descend from the pre-eminent Rule created by St Benedict. Nuns or Houses which do not adhere strongly to the Rule will be disciplined.

The sisters of Alma Mater belong to a **fictional** Order called the Montacutian Order, which follows the **fictional** Rule of St Agnes. This Order was founded

in 1235 by St Agnes of Montacute and has 8 houses in England and several in Scotland and France.

Formally, this house is called *The Abbey of The Nurturing Mother of the Redeemer at Whitwood*, which in Latin is *Alma Redemptoris Mater*. Therefore it is commonly called either Whitwood Abbey or *Alma Mater*.

The Reformation

Criticisms of the Church have built from deep within. Martin Luther, a German friar, broke away from the Church and its traditions, calling Rome “the worst whorehouse of all whorehouses”. Throughout the 1520s this opposition movement, called Protestant, has been building. Areas of Northern Europe including (what in the 21st century will be known as) Germany, Denmark and Sweden have renounced the authority of the Pope for more local control, and made sweeping reforms to religion. In Sweden, all monastic property was seized by the crown and nobility in 1527, although religious people were allowed to remain living in their communities.

Until now, religious texts and services have been almost universally in Latin. Yet, while the printing press has meant more and more people can read, Latin fluency has been declining. Even in religious houses very few sisters understand Latin. William Tyndale is trying to make scripture directly accessible to English-readers, but when he published his anti-authoritarian Bible translation, he was called a heretic and the texts were burnt.

In England, King Henry VIII had originally been strongly critical of Luther, to the point that the Pope titled him “Defender of the Faith”. However, when the Pope declined Henry’s request for a divorce from Queen Catherine, “the King’s great matter” of divorce became a burning political question. The solution, in the end, was The Act of Appeals in 1533 and The Act of Supremacy in 1534 - new laws which created an independent “Church of England”, and put King Henry at its head.

The Act of Supremacy required all men holding church offices to swear an oath of allegiance to the King over the authority of the Pope. The vast majority have done so, but a handful of zealous monks, Bishop John Fisher, and former Lord Chancellor Thomas More, are all imprisoned for refusing to say the oath.

As of 1536, what the Church of England's theology will be, is still a matter to be decided. King Henry is not a Lutheran, nor even a Protestant - and there are those in his court who are on both sides. Parliament is soon expected to set forth the first definitions of the new Church as the Articles of Religion.

In the meantime, the King has set up a Commission to "visit, repress, redress, record, order, correct, restrain, and amend all [...] errors, heresies, abuses". On the surface this appears like any number of inspections that Religious Houses have had regularly under the Church hierarchy for many years. However, the Commissioners have been taking scrupulous details about the property and finances of each House. And the Commissioners no longer report to a Bishop, but directly to Cromwell, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Though not a priest, the king has appointed Cromwell as Vicar General for the whole country. There are rumours that Cromwell works closely with Lutherans.

Recent History of the Abbey Alma Mater at Whitwood

- Nuns are all ladies of relatively high social status (the top of the middle to the bottom of the upper class); nobody here has ever ploughed a field or had to beg on the street.
- From one point of view, religious communities of women don't do anything 'useful', at least in the physical world. Nuns don't spend their day working, sewing, nor illuminating manuscripts etc. Their 'job' is to sing through the whole book of psalms every week; in order to pray on behalf of the people who founded and sponsored the abbey. Protestants throw accusations of "laziness" and "inutility" at them.
- 10 years ago, the Abbess Henrietta died after a long illness, and was replaced via election by the current Abbess, Joan.
- The nun Margery is a major spiritual attraction for pilgrims to the Abbey because of her mystical visions. Around 8 years ago, a book was published about Margery's prophecies. It was called '*A marvellous shew of the voice of our Judge wrought through the least of his servants*'. It caused a minor scandal as it cut against the political grain, as well as because women are legally forbidden to

preach or give sermons. As with all books which cause a stir: it was censured and burnt by the authorities.

- After the censorship of *A Marvellous Shew*, the Bishop performed a visitation of the Abbey as he anyway is required regularly to do. Fortunately, he pronounced the standard declaration for when all is found to be well in a visitation - *omnia bene*.
- The 1534 Act of Supremacy required all church members to swear an Oath of Supremacy, acknowledging the king as Supreme Head of the Church (not the Pope). There were no female religious who refused. Refusal (martyrdom) was almost never an option for anyone in an English monastic community. Of about 12,000 Religious, there were only a few score monks who did refuse the oath. However, these were mainly from extremely strict orders (chiefly Carthusians), and they were men. They were executed for their refusal between 1535-38. The options and agency of the refusers can't be compared with female communities. Summary: the nuns of Alma Mater have already sworn it.

The social order

The Abbess

The Abbess is the highest authority within the community, answering to the wider hierarchy of the Church. She has the right to command the obedience of any of the sisters, and to order the running of the House as she sees fit subject to the Rule. An abbess must have served as a nun of exceptional good standing for many years - in return she has more freedom and authority than almost any other woman in England.

The Prioress

The Prioress is second in authority only to the Abbess. She has day-to-day charge of disciplinary matters within the community, and is its public face when the Abbess is unavailable or when a matter does not warrant the Abbess's attention.

The Treasuress

The Treasuress is in charge of accounting the community's finances; keeping track of its lands and rents. It is her responsibility to make sure that the House remains financially solvent and able to discharge its duties to the Sisters and to the wider community.

The Almoneress

The Almoneress has two related responsibilities. Firstly, she is in charge of giving out alms to the local poor and needy. Secondly, she is in charge of welcoming guests and making sure they are looked after with suitable hospitality during their stay.

The Cellaress

The Cellaress is in charge of food and drink. It is for her to make sure the sisters and their guests are appropriately fed. She is also responsible for ensuring that sisters who are restricted in their diet out of devotion (or for discipline*) are suitably catered to at mealtimes. She coordinates the sisters who are acting as Kitcheners* to serve each meal.

The Cantrix

The Cantrix's role is to make sure the Offices are sung in good order and time by the Sisters. She makes sure the sisters assemble to sing the psalms, and aids and teaches them to sing them well.

The Sacrista

The Sacrista has charge of the community's sacred items: the cloths and candlesticks used in worship, and even the Holy Relics held in the House's care.

The Chamberlain

The Chamberlain cares for the sisters' robes and habits. She makes sure each has appropriate clothing provided, and sees to care and mending when required. She makes sure everyone has items they need (since, after all, they have no property).

Other Nuns

Where they hold no named role within the community, the first and greatest role of the nuns is to pray and sing the psalms. Beyond this, they are required simply to be holy in their behaviour and to keep the Rule.

The Novice Mistress

The Novice Mistress is a nun in charge of the community's novices. She trains and cares for them, and corrects them if they err, subject to the greater authority of the Prioress in grave disciplinary matters.

The Novices

Sisters who are preparing to take vows, novices are still in the process of learning all that is required of them in their life in the community. The usual time to be a novice is one year, although it can extend to two years if she is finding it challenging.

The Postulants

Women who are hoping to become novices and then nuns, postulants must spend a few months living the life of a nun before they are allowed to fully join. By these means can both they and the Community check that they are suitable for the religious life.

The Rule of St Agnes

A monastic Rule is a set of laws by which a religious house lives. It covers everything from the times and form of prayer, to how to punish miscreants. The Rule of St Agnes is a **FICTIONAL** creation based on The Rule of St Benedict, the most famous Rule of all. Your character, whether abbess or novice, will be very familiar with this Rule.

It is an expected part of the larp that you will follow some parts and break others. We look forward to seeing the ways that you roleplay with obedience and defiance.

Preface

Coming soon

Characters: The sisters of Whitwood Abbey

Joan the Abbess

Psalm 78: And he fed them in the innocence of his heart; and he led them forth by the skillfulness of his hands.

Joan is a woman weighed down by responsibilities. She faces the outside world carrying the crozier, the symbol of her responsibility for the fate of her community, and has done since the death of the old Abbess Henrietta a decade ago. Yet within the abbey she is the object of admiration, resentments and ambition. She tries to be the best shepherd of her community that she can, but her desire to please every member of the flock sometimes leads to avoidance of conflict. Her recent recovery from an illness has shown everyone what she means to them as mother, teacher, leader. She will be in charge of leading the abbey through the visitation of the King's Commissioner, but how can she meet this challenge without compromising her prized gentleness?

Maud the Prioress

Psalm 101: Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.

Maud is well-suited to her responsibilities in upholding order and the Rule within the community. She holds her sisters to tight compliance with their vows of obedience; even stricter perhaps with those closest to her. She knows her place as second only to the Abbess, so she expects everyone else to know their place as well. She hasn't

always understood kindness or indulgence, and she is certainly more familiar with the mundane than the mystic. But her practical hand has kept the loom weaving through difficult times before.

Phillippa the Treasuress

Psalm 94: Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.

How complex are the finances of such a huge estate, and even more so how complex those patchwork pieces of holdings, bequests and inheritances of this ancient institution? Poor Philippa never seems to rest, like a mouse fleeing from corner to corner collecting crumbs and titbits. No one but she knows the exact state of the Abbey's finances, but everyone knows what happened to the formerly-great Abbey of Grantham when it became insolvent: the stakes are high. Philippa coming late to sing Offices with ink on her fingers is a familiar sight. Perhaps she will relax a little now her blood-sister Mary has joined the Abbey as a postulant.

Sybil the Almoneress

Psalm 139: I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

High-born Sybil had a life before joining the Abbey - she was the daughter of the Earl of Rotherham, she was married for a time, and widowed. The last Abbess respected her status and hoped she would have a lot to teach the sisters, but after she died, Sybil was not the one elected to replace her. Still, Sybil strikes an imposing figure as Almoneress. She embodies the best of courtly manners, looking after the Abbey's guests, who are vital if the community is to continue to prosper and bring in donations and dowries. Sybil maintains a wide network of friends in court and

beyond, recently bringing her noble-born niece Katherine in as a novice.

Dorothy the Cellaress

Psalm 36: They shall be filled from the rich plenty of thy house; and thou shalt give drink to them out of the flowing stream of thy goodness.

Dorothy was created to nourish others, and was born to her role as Cellaress. Some feel that the Abbey should follow a stricter Rule with perhaps fewer flesh-days and less wine, but she knows that a well-nourished body will survive to pray for longer. She knows exactly what comes in and out of the Abbey, managing all its deliveries, and if there's anything unexpected or illicit she deals with it with mercy and God's love. Somehow she even manages to nourish her earthly family, keeping close ties with her aged parents.

Clemence the Cantrix

Psalm 108: O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory. Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations.

When some say most English nuns read nearly no Latin, and hardly even French; then Clemence pulls out her works of Hebrew and Greek scholars. Clemence is a theologian to rival most men. Persuasive, eloquent, and educated, she isn't perhaps the most flexible or empathetic. A problem, yes, when the religious settlement of the country is in such flux. She always conversed with men of religion all over the country, and some of those are in very hot water nowadays. She relishes order and routine, and she keeps her sisters to time in their Offices. Each arrangement of psalms is always carefully matched with events of the day - even if, perhaps, the significance goes over some heads.

Agnes the Sacrista

Psalm 91: Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

Agnes arrived in Whitwood 6 years ago when her small abbey at Grantham was dissolved by the Church. She fitted in well to her new community and brought an expertise in maintaining sacred vestments and relics which has suited her to the appointment as Sacrista. If she missed her brothers and sisters from her former abbey, she hadn't mentioned it for many years. Recent events seem to have brought old reflections back to mind, and she seems to be brooding on her memories.

Bess the Novice Mistress

Psalm 32: I shall give understanding to thee, and I shall teach thee; in this way in which thou shalt go, I shall make steadfast mine eyes on thee.

Scripture says that "He that spareth the rod, hateth his child; but he that loveth him, teacheth busily". Bess has lived her entire religious life at the Abbey, from postulant to today, and lives and breathes the Rule and the community. She cares deeply about the education of the novices and she has a fair and firm hand with them. She knows she has the right to discipline and chastise novices as she sees fit - even if sometimes the abbess or prioress might sometimes alter the penance. She has a true love of her sisters, and sees God in that love.

Alice the Chamberlain

Psalm 119: O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I understand more than old men, because I keep thy precepts.

A woman is always expected to flourish in charge of a household. Alice never wanted to be a wife... but the Abbey is a large household indeed. She enjoys the spirituality as well as the organisation of her life, and she has deep love for her sisters. She makes sure that the Abbey's little possessions are well-ordered, whoever has them in their keeping, and enjoys managing her sisters' letters in and out of the Abbey.

Religious life has given this woman from the Guild class a chance to enjoy reading and learning, and to come to a deeper understanding of the Church. And all this without having to trouble herself in the company of men. She is great friends with Maud and has become something of a mentor in faith to Isabel.

Ellen the Cellaress's Assistant

Psalm 37: Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

Ellen is a woman of sophisticated French education, who came to Whitwood in her youth and has been a key part of the community ever since. She has a good knowledge of theology and philosophy, and is close to the Cantrix, Clemence. She has a keen wit and loves to make her sisters laugh and smile, although sometimes there are those who would say that silence might be more appropriate. Lately she seems to be troubled by something, though she hasn't said what.

Peggy the Infirmarian

Psalm 71: Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.

Peggy has been at the Abbey longer than anyone, and is the eldest of all the sisters. Over the years, she has developed significant skill in dispensing herbal teas, wise words, and tender loving care. She looks after the sick and tends to those who need her. If she knows secrets of the sick-bed, she keeps them close to her chest. Of course, things that happen in the cloister or the refectory are fair game for a little gossip.

Margery a nun

Psalm 2: Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

Ecstatic visions and mysticism are incredibly popular in these unstable times, and Margery has been an overwhelming blessing to the Abbey in a number of ways. She hears the voices of the saints and shares prophetic words - direct from God. Cynics

say visionaries are self-serving, but Margery doesn't have a selfish bone in her body. Other words that wouldn't be used for her would be discreet, politic or practical. Nevertheless her sisters are more than happy to provide what she lacks, for the sake of the sister that they love, and the fame and financial benefits brought by her pilgrims and disciples.

Ursula a Nun

Psalm 27: When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

Ursula joined the Abbey after a series of spectacular religious visions in her childhood. Since taking her vows, she hasn't been visited again, but nevertheless has made an excellent nun. If she feels something is missing, she has never seemed to complain. Nowadays she spends her time with Margery, who has regular visions. Ursula attends to Margery's more earthly needs; her constant chaperone. Lately she has also taken the postulant Mary under her wing.

Isabel a Nun

Psalm 73: My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my part without end.

Although an obedient and loving sister, Isabel has seemed to struggle with her relationship with Christ since taking her vows a few years ago. Recently, she tried to grow her faith with privations and fasting, but she became so unwell that she was sent to her family home for some time to recover. It must have truly been a blessing to her to see her blood-sister's large family and household, for she rallied quickly and returned to the Abbey. She will surely grow closer to God now, and the prioress has assigned Alice to mentor her through this acedia.

Frances a Nun

Psalm 139: Whither shall I go from thy spirit; and whither shall I flee from thy face? If I shall ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I shall go down into hell, thou art present.

Life under the Rule is strict, and the vow of Obedience requires constant and conscious struggle. The most recently professed of the sisters, Frances has really struggled. Perhaps if her home had been friendlier she would have gone back to it. Yet, she took her full vows before the bishop a few months ago, and surely that demonstrates her commitment to succeed? Admittedly the Prioress has had to punish her already for breaking a glass water clock, but that must lead her to closer fellowship with Christ.

Blanche a Nun

Psalm 45: All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad. Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold

Blanche is the latest arrival to the Abbey, having transferred here from being a nun at the fashionable Syon Abbey. A lady of some status, she was popular at court before taking her vows. She loves to entertain us with tales about courtly life and fashionable people, but they don't always seem to cast anybody in the most flattering light... except Blanche herself. She has fewer stories about how she came to leave court, or indeed leave Syon. If she finds friends at Whitwood, she will surely prosper here.

Edith a Nun

Psalm 40: And he led out me from the pit of wretchedness, and from the filth of dregs. And he ordained my feet on a stone; and he directed my goings. And he sent into my mouth a new song; a song to our God.

Edith is the Abbey's historian and biographer, interviewing her sisters and writing about life at Whitwood. She is friendly and obedient these days, but there are rumours around her past. It seems that once, many years ago, she was a runaway: an apostate, and lived life outside the cloister. She did her penance years ago, and all that is in the past, except perhaps for making her somewhat of a worrier. Perhaps it makes it easier for her to sit and listen to the lives of others now.

Letty a Novice

Psalm 137: O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.



Now into her second year at the Abbey, Letty came from a London family of merchants, and is well-read in modern philosophies and forward-thinking views. A country convent like Whitwood is the perfect place to learn the more traditional ways of religion, and will surely prove a settling influence on one so passionate. She seems willing to follow the rigours of religious life and the Rule, and after all, the young are meant to unsettle their elders and bring in 'the new'.

Katherine a Novice

Psalm 5: But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.

Katherine is a lady of high birth, niece of Sybil the Almoneress. She served Queen Anne at court for a season, but came to Whitwood last year with a strong vocation. She seems like a very model novice - following every precept given to her and shouldering her obligations with quiet obedience. She is always happy to tell her fellow novices where they too can improve, and to let their seniors know if they are recalcitrant. She's sure to go far.

Mary a postulant

Psalm 118: I called upon the Lord in distress: the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?

Sometimes a convent is a sanctuary. Mary was brought into the Abbey just a few short months ago, by her blood-sister Phillippa the Treasuress, after the death of her husband in a horrific accident. Thank goodness that the family were able to afford a second nun's dowry, for she seems to be truly finding her feet again, here in the company of women.

Booking

Tickets

Standard tickets are £275.

Sponsor donations are £25.

Sponsors allow us to fund concessions. The benefit to the sponsor is a warm glow and our gratitude.

Concessions tickets are £200.

Understudy tickets are £100.

You can pay by either bank transfer or Paypal.
We will send you details via email when we have confirmed we can offer you a ticket.

Understudy Tickets

Understudy tickets are a special ticket type for someone who can be very flexible. There are just a couple of these tickets available. Understudies will not be cast in advance, but will receive a character a couple of weeks before the larp. If someone drops out last minute, you may then be asked to change character, up to the very start of the larp. You should only apply for this ticket if you think you will enjoy this.

Refunds and Re-sale

Your ticket is fully refundable, minus transaction fees, for 14 days after payment. Beyond 14 days, we can refund you only after we have re-sold the ticket. All re-selling of tickets must go through us and our waiting list.

Budget Transparency

- Venue hire, with accommodation on Thursday, Friday and Saturday night (about 45%)
- Food and drink from supper on Thursday to breakfast on Sunday (about 20%)
- Costume and props (about 35%)
- The Team are contributing their work for free.