7. The East End

Behind the altar is a Saxon scrollwork vine frieze. The present east window was inserted in 1900, replacing an 18th-century one of Venetian design (see back of leaflet).

8. The Virgin

The cowled figure holding a book is probably the Virgin Mary. Originally, her eyes would have contained gems. Dating (like most of our sculpture) to the late 8th to early 9th centuries, she is flanked by friezes of parading saints, which were possibly part of a tomb or shrine.

9. The Angel

This is a replica of our best Saxon carving, housed in the tower. The angel, like Mary, holds his hand up in a Byzantine blessing, highlighting links between Breedon and Europe that went as far as Constantinople (modern Istanbul).

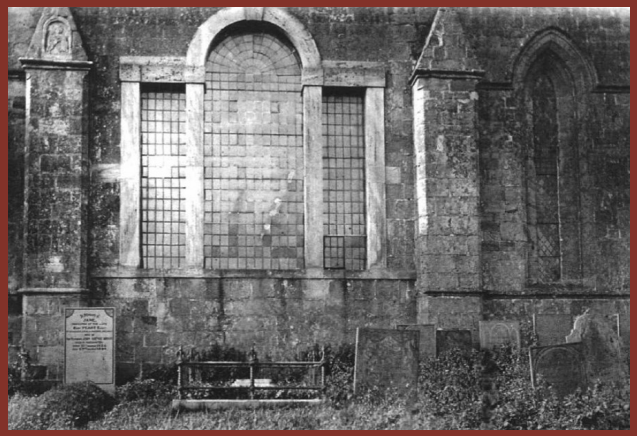
10. John Johnson's Grave

John Johnson was murdered by the 4th Earl Ferrers in 1760. The latter was tried and hung in London, reportedly averting the French Revolution happening in England. Take our graveyard trail to find out more!

Brief History

A religious building has been on this site since the late 7th century AD, when a monastery was founded inside an Iron Age hillfort. The building has gone, but what remains is one of the largest and finest collections of Anglo-Saxon carvings in the country.

An Augustinian priory was founded here in the 12th century, its east end forms the present church. Following the Reformation, the north aisle was used by the Shirley family of nearby Staunton Harold for worship and burial.



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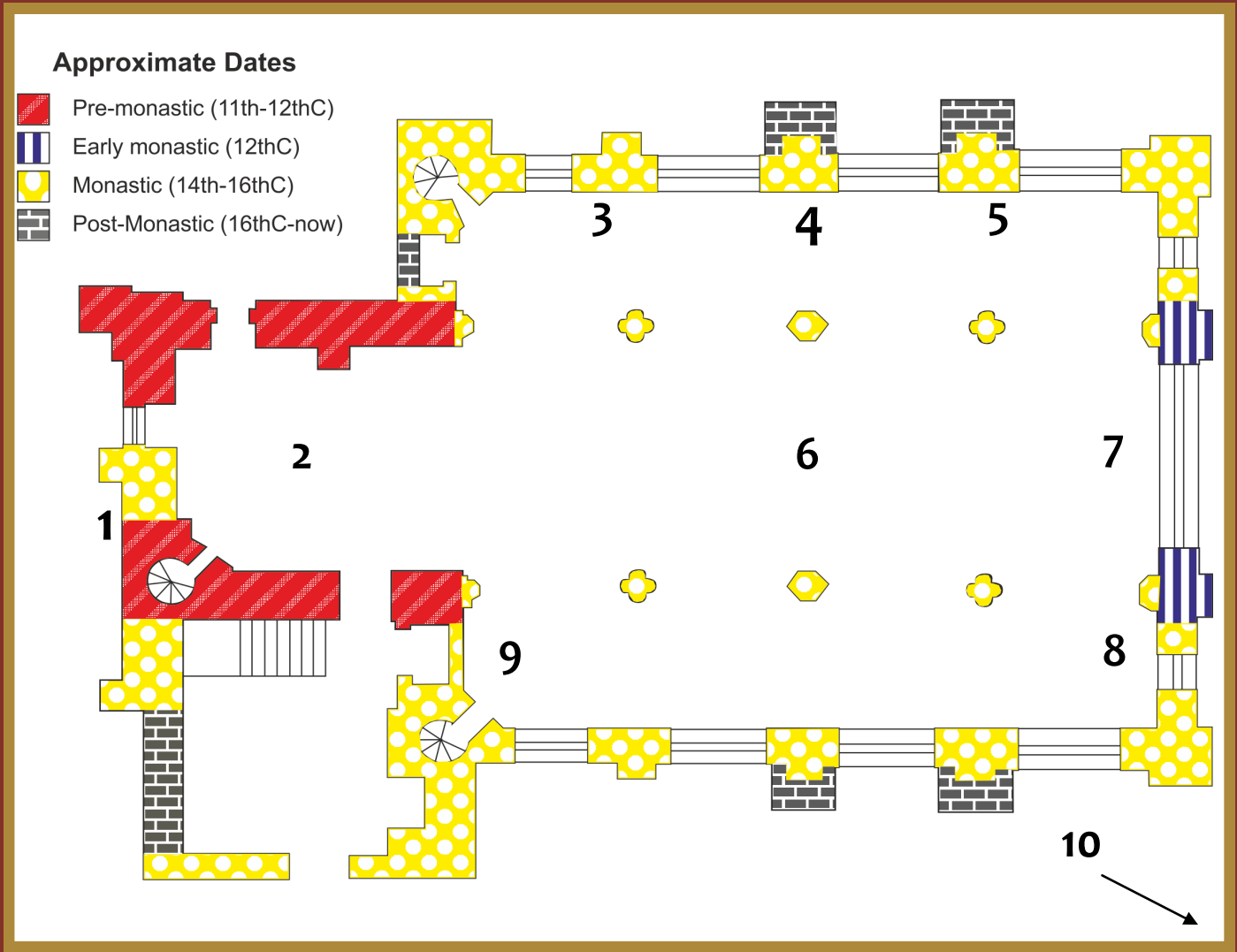
Breedon Priory Church

10 Things Not to Miss

Made possible with Heritage Fund



1. The West End

This is the site of the nave of the Augustinian priory, built in the early 12th century. At that time, the church would have been twice the size it is now. The nave fell into disrepair after the Reformation and was demolished.

2. The Font

The octagonal font dates to the 15th century. The top tier features elaborate windows, a rose and the coat of arms of the Beresford family. Heraldry belonging to other local families appears on the lower tiers.

3. The Squint

The small hole to the right of the window is a squint, allowing sick monks to follow church services from their beds. Underneath the window are Saxon cross shafts recovered from the walls of the church.

4. The Shirley Pew

Dating to 1627, the pew celebrates the marriage of Sir Henry Shirley and Dorothy Devereaux, daughter of the 2nd Earl of Essex. Henry was Catholic at a time when the faith was heavily persecuted, so the pew acted as a convenient cover for him to attend an Anglican church whilst not necessarily following the service itself.

5. The Shirley Monument

Three generations of the Shirley family are commemorated here. The largest monument, with a skeleton underneath, dates from 1598. It was built by George Shirley following the death of his wife Frances in 1595. They are surrounded by their children, two of whom died as infants.

6. The Pews

The pews date to the late 18th century. They would have originally have been 0.3m taller with seats on all sides.