

St Nicholas Priory



A day in the life of a
Merchant's son

Dear friend,

My name is Nicholas Hurst, I am 11 years old and I live here with my family at the Priory. I spend most of my time at school - like you!

My school day might look a little bit different though. I attend a strict grammar school with other wealthier children. Schools starts at 6 o'clock in the morning and ends at about 5 o'clock in the afternoon - so it's a very long day.

In the morning, we get taught arithmetic and basic numeracy, to make sure we can keep accurate records and accounts for when we're older. I plan to become a Merchant, selling Exeter's woollen cloth all over the world, like my father.

After arithmetic, I practice my reading and writing. There are very few books in our school, so we learn to read with hornbooks - which are small wooden boards with a handle and a piece of paper with the alphabet, phonics and the Lords Prayer written on it. In the afternoon, we learn from the Bible, hear stories from history and then practice our Latin grammar.

If we get things wrong or misbehave, the Schoolmaster, Mr. Lumley is allowed to hit us with a cane - I'm quite naughty at school so I get caned quite a lot. What happens to children who misbehave at your school?

Most girls tend to start work or do chores all day, but girls from richer families get taught by a tutor at home. My friend Alice's tutor teachers her reading, writing, arithmetic and some things like history and sewing. She is very clever and wishes she could go to school too, but it's a very different life for a Tudor girl!

I only get Sundays off of school to attend church, but there's not any homework to do so it's not so bad. When I do get free time, I love to play football with my friends - although my mother says that it's quite dangerous as there aren't any rules or referees. At home, I like to play with my toys and my favourite board games like chess, backgammon and cards.

Yours sincerely,

Nicholas

Activities

Do you think Nicholas is higher status or lower status? Why?

Why do you think poorer children and girls did not get to go to school?

How are lessons different in the Tudor period? What lessons do you are missing from Nicholas' timetable, that would be familiar to you?

How is Nicholas' school more strict? What are some key words that you would use to describe a day at school in Tudor times?

Write a letter back to Nicholas, comparing how your lives are the same and how they are different. Do you have any questions for him about life as a wealthy child in the Tudor period?