ENGLISH HERITAGE
EDUCATION

SELF-LED ACTIVITY
CHECK THE EXCHEQUER
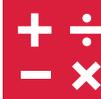
KS3

Recommended for

KS3 (History, Maths)

Learning objectives

- Understand the development of the Church in medieval Britain and managing accounts in a medieval monastery.

- Explore how monasteries earned their income.

- Apply mathematical skills of subtraction, division and multiplication.

Group size

5–6

Time to complete

20–30 minutes
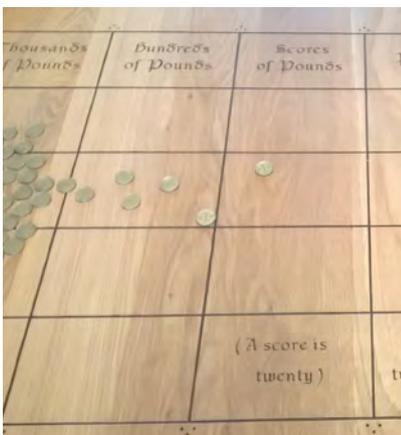
The word exchequer, or 'scaccario' in Latin, comes from the word for chessboard, which refers to the check pattern/grid layout of the table.

SUMMARY

The monastery had its own treasury and system of accounting modelled on the royal system. The royal exchequer processed the accounts through calculations made on a central square table, surrounded by officials.

The grid was made up of columns that delineated different amounts, thousands of pounds, hundreds of pounds, etc. Tokens were used to represent amounts of money and make calculations i.e. to balance credits and debits.

In their group of 5–6, students can sit around the exchequer table in one of the seven positions: John the treasurer, Alan the abbot, Matthew the scribe, etc. The abbot oversaw proceedings, the treasurer handled the money and the scribe recorded the transactions. The group can complete each of the challenges on the paddles on the table.

The students should also look at other features in this room that relate to security and the preservation of important documents.

MORE LEARNING IDEAS

The questions over the page look in more detail at a typical medieval abbey's income. In 1535, Dr Richard Layton, under orders from Henry VIII, visited Battle Abbey to inspect the monks' conduct and assess the abbey's wealth. Students could perform a role play about Layton's visit. How would the abbot justify the abbey's expenses to the king?

CHECK THE EXCHEQUER

William the Conqueror gave Battle Abbey an endowment called the leuga – it meant that the abbey earned income through farming and collecting rents from tenants.

Thousands of pounds	Hundreds of pounds	Scores of pounds	Pounds	Shillings	Pence
		(A score is 20)	(A pound is 20 shillings)	(A shilling is 12 pence)	

In 1535, the abbey earned an income of £880 pounds a year.
How much did the treasurer have left at the end of the year?

• The dried-fish merchant has come from London to collect a payment for £48 and 17 shillings worth of dried fish for the year. However, the abbey then supplies him with £31 and 4 shillings and 6 pence worth of fresh fish from its ponds.

• The apothecary needs payment for supplying mercury: 6 scores, £7 and 2 shillings.

• A boy comes three times a week to dig out the waste from the dormitory latrines. He works for 2 pence per day.

• The mason has come for payment for recent extensions to the abbey cloister walks. He worked for 64 days and gets paid £3 and 6 shillings a day. However, he broke a stained-glass window which was worth £23 pounds and 2 shillings.