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# 11 Lanercost Priory

**Theme:** Rivers, seas and life

## Location

11 Lanercost and Hadrian's Wall. The Priory is an Historic England site and you can park beside it [NY 555 637].

## Description

If you can't see bedrock, the stone used in local buildings is a great clue to the geology. Lanercost Priory goes one better, it tells us where the join is between two major geological periods of Earth's history.

The Priory is a 50:50 blend of two sandstones: a younger, dull red Triassic (St Bees) sandstone and an older pale grey-brown Carboniferous sandstone. The colours of these two different rocks add unique character to the stunning buildings. They also tell us about different past environments. The red sandstone was deposited in temporary rivers and lakes in a desert 250 million years ago and the grey-brown sandstone was once sand in rivers that ran through tropical swamps 330 million years ago. You can't see it in the landscape here but a geological map shows that the boundary between the two rocks runs almost due north-south through Lanercost.

The Priory was founded in 1169 by Augustinian canons. They used stone from local quarries to the west and to the east. But, along with many other church, castle and house builders, they also robbed ('re-purposed') stone from Hadrian's Wall, another monument whose building stone changed as it crossed the Triassic–Carboniferous boundary. The Romans quarried stone at many sites along the Wall and two of them, in the gorge of the River Gelt and at Combcrag, upstream in the Irthing valley, are less than six kilometres away. There are Roman inscriptions in both quarries and on the re-used stones in the Priory. Lanercost has a rich and sometimes turbulent history. It was plundered by William Wallace and Robert the Bruce and became a resting place for Edward I, 'The Hammer of the Scots', before his death. It is an evocative place.

## Photographs

(Photo 11-1) 11 Triassic and Carboniferous sandstone building stones in Lanercost Priory.

(Photo 11-2) 11 Lanercost Priory.



*(Photo 11-1) Triassic and Carboniferous sandstone building stones in Lanercost Priory.*



*(Photo 11-2) Lanercost Priory.*