



EXPLORING ENGLAND'S CHURCHES

Using architectural clues to interpret a religious building

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How many church architects can you name? Many famous architects cut their teeth on designing churches. You might consider visiting the parish church on your doorstep to discover how religious architecture developed. Possibly one of the oldest structures in your area, it offers a wide variety of first-hand architectural opportunities. Students can find out about the power and patronage of the church whilst developing the skills of deduction, discussion, data gathering and processing and cooperation.

Some of the architecture will be unique. Churches were designed for a particular type of service with each generation using its spaces in different ways, as befitted their understanding of their faith. If this understanding changed, sometimes the building had to be changed, too. Many churches provide clear evidence for changes, such as blocked up doorways or windows and roof 'scars' that show where the height of the building has been changed.

Examine the walls – were they built at the same time? Look for straight-line joints that show walls have been added on. Buttresses to help support the walls can show that something heavy has been added or simply that the walls have begun to lean outwards! Are the doors and windows all the same size, shape and style? Hint: round-headed arches are usually older than pointed ones. The oldest window will tell you which bit of the building was built first. Are there examples of steps that now go nowhere? Those sited in

front of the crossing may once have led to the top of a roodscreen (destroyed during the Reformation or later Puritan influence) with figures showing the Crucifixion.

Building design often gives clues to social status. Perhaps the architect planned the church for use by different groups of society, without their



having to come into contact with each other. At the chapel of Chichester St. John's, servants had to go through a separate entrance and climb upstairs to take their places in seats in the gallery.

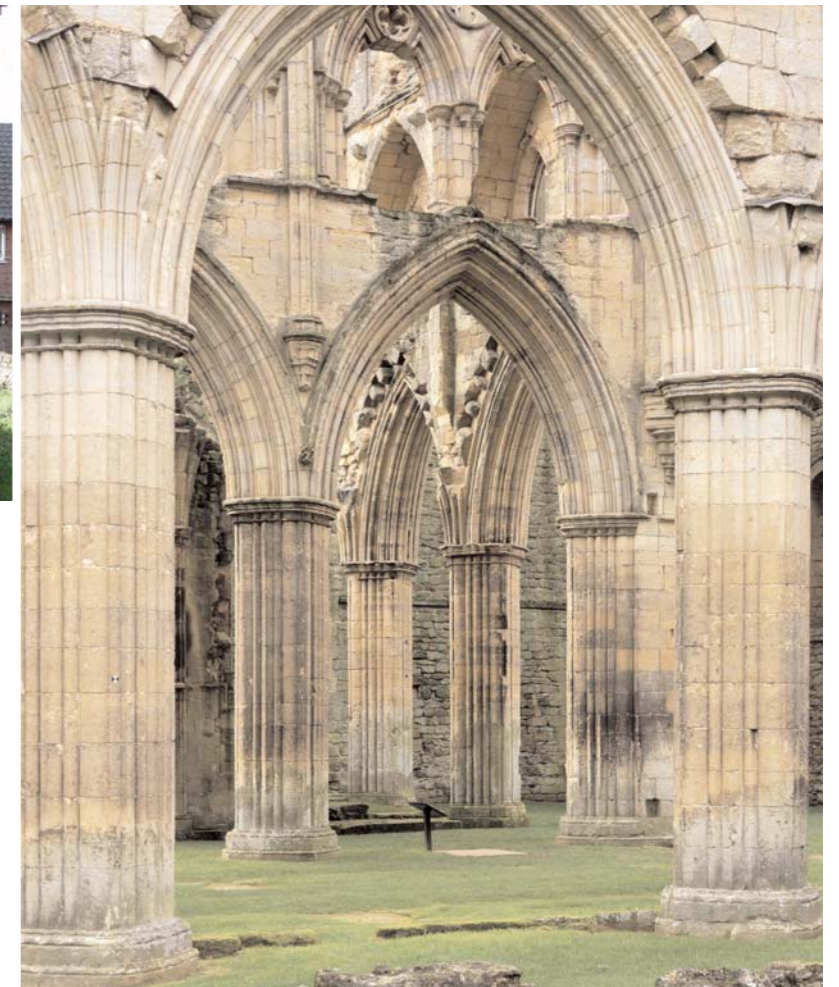
What design is the seating? In the past people had to pay to get a pew for their family whilst poor people had to stand at the back. Doors and high sides were used in box pews to keep out the draughts. Sometimes a new church was paid for through selling the seating and there may be labels indicating which pew belonged to who – or pegs for gentlemen to hang their hats on!

Ask students to draw a plan of the whole building to show its shape. Does it remind them of anything? The cross is very important in the Christian religion.

The Churches Conservation Trust cares for over 300 church buildings of historical and architectural importance – our website will tell you if you have an outstanding Trust church nearby to visit. The Trust provides opportunities for design students to use its churches for real-life design proposals where a new use is sought for a listed building with fittings that must be retained.

This year we commemorate the centenary of the death of G.F. Bodley, an important architect of the Gothic Revival and C.E. Kempe, an influential church decorator of the nineteenth and twentieth century. 'Sacred Art: stone and glass' is an educational CD Rom which uses the work of these men as a starting point to inspire curriculum-based design work. It provides suggestions for practical activities and ready-made Schemes of Work with materials that can be downloaded onto an interactive whiteboard. Visit www.visitchurches.org.uk to see free sample materials and buy a copy for just £5.

When churches come into the care of the Trust, it seeks to increase people's access to, understanding and enjoyment of those churches, through appropriate adaptations, education programmes, promotion and events, working with local communities to revitalise their churches and contribute to community regeneration. Taking your students to visit one of these churches to study the architecture or consider a new use will produce informed and enthusiastic citizens.



Top left: Developing architectural drawing at York Holy Trinity. Bottom left: The devil is in the detail at Bywell, St Andrews.

Top left: Wall showing changes at Cambridge All Saints. Top right: Rievaulx Abbey, arches and buttresses of North side of Abbey Church. Bottom right: Big Draw Ipswich 2006; architecture is all around us.