



## A Glossary of Church Architecture

This is an overview of what you can see in churches, but is not intended to be comprehensive. Instead, it will help you look more closely at the immense ecclesiastical heritage of this county. We hope it will spark further interest and might inspire you to get involved with keeping the great legacy of our church buildings going. Further and more detailed information can be found in our online resources pack.

Churches are usually built on an east west axis, with the chancel eastern most. However, there are some exceptions not built on this orientation so that they fit in with the wider landscaping of a country estate or because there was not room in a more crowded urban setting.

### Exterior

*Aisle:* Coming from the Latin word 'ala' meaning wing, aisles are extensions to the nave on the north and south sides. Often added to earlier buildings to make space for growing populations, more processional space or additional altar positions. They are divided from the nave by a row of arches, known as an arcade.

*Ashlar:* This refers to stonework that has been cut to have a smooth face and edges, allowing for very thin mortar joints.

*Buttress:* These structures project from the wall to counteract the outward thrust of the wall. They changed in design from being broad and of shallow projection to being narrow and projecting further from the wall face as technology improved.

*Chancel:* Eastern end of the building often separated from the nave by an arch and a step, many chancels include the choir and the sanctuary, often up another step or steps. In the medieval period the chancel was separated from the nave by a Rood Screen.

*Clerestory:* This is the upper storey, raising the nave roof above the aisle roofs, usually containing windows to let in more light. These were often added later than the original church structure as building technology improved.

*Clock:* Some clocks are war memorials and some belong to the secular parish. Many are now wound automatically but some are still wound by hand. Not all clocks have chimes.

*Corbel:* These are stone projections that support a beam or an arch. A row of corbels is known as a corbel table and runs at eaves height below the roof. They are often carved with faces or monsters and can be seen both inside and outside a church.

*Crocket:* A projecting feature, often foliated or figured that adorns gables spires and pinnacles.

*Cupola:* These are small dome like additions to a church roof that may have a bell hung inside.

*Door:* Most commonly on the south side of the church, but can also be on the north side or on the west face of the tower. Timber doors vary in age and can sometimes with be found with very ornate and ancient ironwork.

*Gargoyle:* This is a stone carving, often of mythical creatures or caricatures, with a water pipe through the middle to let rainwater drain from the building. A carving without a water pipe is called a grotesque.

*Head stop / label stop:* These are usually found at the base of an arch or the end of a decorative moulding.

*Hoodmould:* A weathering or drip-stone protecting head of a door or window.

*Long-and-short work:* This is found on corners or at the join of two walls where stones are alternately laid vertically and horizontally. It can be an indication of a building from the late Anglo-Saxon period.

*Nave:* This is where the congregation sits. Nave comes from the Latin word, 'navis', meaning ship. If you look up, the roof looks like an overturned ship. The nave was used for many things connected to the secular functions of a community. Seating was not introduced until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although most pews are 19<sup>th</sup> century additions.

*Pinnacle:* A miniature spire structure usually found on the corners of a tower or at the top of a buttress to give the illusion of greater height. They can be highly decorative.

*Porch:* Usually on the south side of the church, the porch used to be where marriage contracts were signed and other business and legal matters took place. A room above the porch is called a Parvis and this is often where the first village school met or where court sessions were convened.

*Roof:* A variety of roof materials are used including lead, copper, slate and tile. The angle of the roof varies too and you can sometimes see a faint mark of an earlier roofline inside the church. Internally, you can often see the timber roof structure.

*Scratch dial / mass dial:* Often found on the south wall near the entrance or on the porch, these dials have lines radiating out from a central hole, into which a rod could be placed to cast a shadow to show the time when the next service would be.

*Spire:* These vary in type, height and plan. Some are thin needle spires which may have crockets. Others are broach spires, an octagonal spire rising from a square tower without a parapet, but with triangular masonry 'broaches' clasping the corners. Most have openings in them known as lucarnes.

*String course:* A horizontal band of ornamental masonry that separates different stages of a tower or wall.

*Tower:* These were sometimes built in different stages, so different levels may be different ages. Towers are usually at the west end or at the crossing of a church. Some are a separate structure to the church building such as that at Fleet St Mary Magdalen in Lincolnshire. Many Lincolnshire towers contain rings of bells and the church clock.

*Voussoir:* These are wedge shaped stones in arches and vaults.

*Wall:* Different materials are used across the county and sometimes in the development of the church. Most Lincolnshire churches are built of stone, although some are brick and more modern materials. Stone types vary across the county from the soft Splisby greenstone to the harder Lincolnshire limestones.

## **Interior**

*Altar:* This is the wooden or stone table, usually at the east end of the chancel (known as the Sanctuary) on which Holy Communion is celebrated. Altars can also be found in side chapels or in the nave, particularly in larger churches.

*Altar frontal:* The fabric hangs at the front of the altar and can be changed according to the different church seasons. Some can be really elaborate, whereas others are simply a piece of coloured cloth.

*Apse:* This is a semi-circular or polygonal end to the east end of the chancel. It was often used in earlier churches up until the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century.

*Arcade:* This is a line of arches, supported by columns, usually found between the nave and the aisles.

*Arch:* A construction to span an opening or carry a load. Made up of wedge shaped voussoirs. Can be semi-circular or curved form – see Church Architectural Guide document

*Arch style:* See Church Architectural Styles document.

*Belfry and Bells:* Churches often have bells hung in the tower with ropes below in a ringing chamber. The belfry is the level with the bells. The practice of church bell ringing is called campanology.

*Bequest board / Charity board:* These boards are usually found in the nave and list the bequests made to the church or to a local charity for example to support the poor or educate the children of the parish.

*Brasses:* These are usually found on the floor although are sometimes placed on the walls to help to preserve them. They are memorials, which would have been highly detailed, although this has often worn away.

*Capital:* This is the broad area at the top of a column, which gives structural support to the arch above. They are often highly decorated. The style of decoration can help to date when the column was built.

*Choir:* This is sometimes spelt 'Quire' and is the space to the western end of the chancel, traditionally where clergy and a choir would sit. There are usually choir stalls, some with elaborate carving.

*Column:* A vertical structural element supporting an arch, can be circular, square, polygonal or lozenge shaped in section depending on when the columns were built. They can be different on each side of the church, helping to date when aisles were added.

*Communion rail:* This is the rail between the choir and the sanctuary in the chancel. It is where people come and kneel to receive Holy Communion (the bread and wine) from the priest. Communion rails can also be found around nave altars and in side chapels.

*Crossing:* This is the point where the transepts join the nave and the chancel. Sometimes the tower or spire is above this.

*Decalogue Boards:* The 10 commandments are displayed either on painted wooden boards or are stencilled straight onto the wall.

*Easter Sepulchre:* This opening on the north side of the sanctuary was used as part of the Holy Week services and Easter festival in medieval times. Some are a simple opening yet others are intricately carved stonework such as at Heckington St Andrew.

*Font:* The font is used to hold the water for baptism, and is often found near the entrance to the church as baptism is seen as the start of entering the Christian life. In the medieval period the water was left in the font and only changed infrequently. Therefore, a lockable lid or font cover was added so the water could not be stolen. Evidence of where the hinge and the lock were fixed can sometimes still be seen.

*Hatchments:* This is a diamond shaped piece of wood or wood and canvas painted with someone's coat of arms. This was carried in front of their coffin when they died and was eventually hung in the church.

*Lady Chapel:* This is a side chapel, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus also known as Our Lady, hence, Lady Chapel. They can also be known as Mary Chapels or Marian Chapels. More often found in larger churches, but you can also find side altars dedicated to St. Mary.

*Lectern:* This is where the Bible is read from during the services. Some are in the form of an eagle supporting the book stand.

*Ledger stone:* These large memorials in the form of rectangular stones usually found on the floor. Some are simple with just a name and date of death. Others are much more elaborate with obituaries and carving around the edge.

*Lord's Prayer/ Creed:* These are often found near the Decalogue boards and together form the basis for Christian teaching.

*Manorial pew / chapel:* This was where the Lord of the Manor and his family sat. The pews are often highly decorated and were sometimes screened off from the rest of the church.

*Memorials:* There are often memorials inside churches. Some are simple with only the name and dates of the person commemorated. Others are much more elaborate with carving and extensive eulogies. Effigies lie on top of table tombs and the elaborate carving shows the clothing or armour in minute detail.

*Misericord:* This is a small lip on a hinged seat that someone can lean on during long periods of prayer. The underneath of the hinged seat can be ornately carved with figures, animals, flora, mythological creatures and religious symbols.

*Organ:* A pipe organ is still the most likely instrument used to lead the music in churches. They range from very large and complex with many pipes, stops, keyboards and pedals to more simple instruments. The pipework at the front is often decorated.

*Parclose Screen:* Often ornate structures sometimes found separating side chapels from the rest of the church. Positions of missing parclose screens can often be traced by notches cut in column capitals or bases.

*Parish chest:* This large wooden chest with iron bands was usually made of oak. It was used to store parish records and the communion vessels. There would be at least two locks on the chest and each churchwarden would have one key, so that they both had to be present to open the chest.

*Pews / Seating:* Pews are a relatively modern addition to church interiors with most being of 19<sup>th</sup> century date. However, they were introduced into churches from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards in the form of bench like seats with backs. Box pews were introduced from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, which were enclosed with panelling and accessed via a hinged door and were still popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

*Piscina:* A niche, often beneath a highly decorated canopy recessed into the wall near an altar. It has a shallow bowl shape in it where water can drain away onto consecrated ground. Rarer is a double piscina, with one space for washing hands and another for washing the vessels used in communion. If there is a piscina without an altar nearby, it can be an indication of where an altar once stood.

*Poppyhead / other carving:* Seat or bench ends are sometimes intricately carved with a finial (known as a poppyhead), other foliage, flowers, animals or scenes from the Bible. Some are medieval, others are later copies.

*Pulpit:* This is a raised platform or structure from which a sermon can be preached. They are usually in the nave near the chancel arch and are accessed via steps. Their height makes the priest more visible and more audible. Sometimes there is a sounding board or tester above.

*Reredos:* A screen behind the altar, often ornately carved or decorated.

*Rood remnants:* Near the chancel arch, some churches have openings high in the walls or the remains of stair vices. These would have led to the rood loft, a timber structure with a Rood (image or sculpture of the crucified Christ) often accompanied with images or sculptures of the Virgin Mary and St John on either side. The loft would have been above the rood screen and constructed of timber, often highly carved and decorated. The majority of rood lofts were destroyed after the Reformation. Some rood screens still survive e.g. Coates by Stow St Edith, or were replaced with later copies e.g. Huttoft St Margaret.

*Roof angels:* Often wooden carvings, sometimes painted that are either at the junction between the wall and the roof or on other parts of the roof structure.

*Royal Coat of Arms:* Usually painted on a square or oblong board although carved examples may survive. Most surviving examples date from the Hanoverian period (1714-1901).

*Sanctuary:* The area at the east end of the chancel where the altar is, usually separated from the rest of the chancel by a communion rail and a step.

*Sedilia:* These stone seats, usually in twos or threes, are found on the south side of the chancel where the clergy and their assistants would sit. They are often decorated and carved.

*Side chapels:* Side chapels are usually found at the eastern end of the side aisles, with their own altars. The most common dedication is to St Mary, mother of Jesus but they can be dedicated to other saints.

*Squint:* These openings were cut on an angle through a wall so that those in a side chapel or an aisle could see the main altar where Holy Communion is celebrated, particularly the moment when the priest held up the host (the bread).

*Stone coffin lids:* These are some of the earliest memorials and often just have a cross marked on them. However, there are some that have a symbol of the profession of the person, such as a sword for a knight and a chalice for a priest.

*Transept:* These are areas at right angles to the nave or central tower usually projecting out in a north and south direction. If viewed from above, they would form the shorter arms of the cross.

*Vaulting:* An arched stone or brick ceiling often supported by decorative ribs. In parish churches most commonly found in porches.

*Vestry:* The room set aside for clergy to put on their robes or 'vest' in.

*Wall painting:* Before the Reformation, the interior of churches could be highly decorative with wall paintings depicting various scenes from the Bible, the lives of saints and terrifying images of the inevitability of death and the divine judgement and retribution. These were painted over during the Reformation only to be rediscovered much later such as those at Pickworth St Andrew or Corby Glen St John the Evangelist.

*Windows:* See architectural styles document.

*Window glass:* Some stained-glass dates from the medieval period, but usually only survives as small fragments in a later glazing scheme. With Victorian restorations of churches, new stained-glass windows were introduced. Stained glass was often used to tell Bible stories.

## **Churchyard**

*Churchyard:* The area around the church may have been used for burials for some time before the church was built. Burials are usually facing east, so that they face the rising sun and will be facing Christ when he comes again at the Resurrection. The shape of a churchyard may indicate how old a Christian site it is, with round or ovoid churchyards being potentially earlier than rectangular or square ones.

*Churchyard cross:* These tall stone crosses were to mark the ground as holy and to remember the dead of the parish. Often only the base and the shaft remain as most were destroyed after the Reformation.

*Commonwealth war graves:* There are several churchyards in Lincolnshire with Commonwealth War Graves. These are distinctive, being all of one size and usually made of Portland stone.

*God's acre:* God's acre is another name for churchyard. Caring for God's Acre is a nationwide project that seeks to help parishes care for their churchyards so that they are beautiful havens for heritage and wildlife.

*Grave stones:* Whilst grave markers have been used for centuries, not many survive that are earlier than 17<sup>th</sup> century. Some have elaborate carving and others are simpler in form, recording the name and dates of the person commemorated.

*Lychgate:* The word 'lych' comes from the Old English word for corpse. The priest would meet the party bringing the corpse at the entrance of the churchyard and lychgates were built to provide shelter for this part of the funeral rite. Surviving examples tend to date from the Victorian period constructed from stone, brick and slate.

*Yew trees:* Some yew trees are older than the churches they stand near and have been considered sacred since ancient times. The tree is a hardy evergreen therefore a symbol of death and resurrection.