

ST MARY THE VIRGIN, GREAT SHELFORD, CB22 5EL

Trail Answers and Explanatory Notes
for Parents, Teachers and Accompanying Adults

Children's Answers are in Bold. Further information is for interest and discussion.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a church here since Norman times. The original building was replaced in about 1400 by Thomas Patesley (Rector 1396 – 1418). See children's question 4. The tower was surmounted by a 14m high steeple, which was blown down in 1708. This event would have weakened the tower itself, which collapsed in 1798. The present tower, with its octagonal upper stage, was constructed in its place in 1800-01 using local labour and material salvaged from the wreck. In the rebuilding the westernmost bay of the nave was lost, so that the nave is now nearly square in plan. Apart from these changes the main structure of the building seems to be that which was built in 1400. The style is described as Perpendicular but, because of the date of its construction, the building shows many features of the earlier period of architecture.

1 FONT

- **Water** is put in the font **when a person is christened/baptised**. A font is a large bowl, usually of stone with a lead lining, in which people are baptised with water as a sign that they have become members of the Church.
- **This font has eight sides so it is an octagon**. A circle, the perfect shape, is the symbol of God. A square or cube is the symbol of the Earth and an octagon is halfway between a circle and a square and symbolises Jesus unifying God and Earth.

Baptism or christening signifies the washing clean of the participants. The font is usually at the rear of the church or near the entrance, signifying the start of a Christian's journey through life.

2 THE BEGINNING & END

- **The language is Greek**.
- **The letters, A and Ω (alpha and omega)**, the first and last in the Greek alphabet, symbolise God, the beginning and the end and His infinite and eternal nature.

3 PARISH PRIESTS

- **Andrew**, the first recorded Priest was appointed in **1179**. We do not know his surname. He was appointed **113 years after the Norman Conquest**.
- The present Priest is **Simon Talbott**, appointed in 2013.

4 THOMAS PATESLEY

- Thomas Patesley, Rector between 1396 and 1418, **oversaw and probably paid for the rebuilding of the church** in about 1400.

5 IHS & THE SIGN OF THE FISH

- IHS is a diminutive of the Greek word ΙΗΣΟΥΣ meaning JESUS. In Greek capitals it is ΙΗΣ and in Greek lower case it is ιησ. ΙΗΣ has become IHS and ιησ has become ihc. IHS is known as the sacred monogram. It can be seen on a **number of kneelers**.
- The 'sign of the fish', often stylised as shown, was a secret early Christian symbol. It is derived from the Greek for fish, ΙΧΘΥΣ (Ichthus), an acronym for the Greek words meaning '*Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour*'. A **number of kneelers** are embroidered with fish symbols.



6 ROOF

There is a fine medieval roof with alternating tie beams and hammer beams.

- Wooden carvings of **human figures** and **angels** are attached to the hammer beams. **Four have hands raised in prayer; two others hold a book and a scroll**. The remaining two figures are evidently human and have the priest's tonsure. **One holds a church** - surely intended for Patesley; **the other a book** - perhaps a parish chaplain.

7 DOOM PAINTING

The painting of the Last Judgement, or 'Doom', above the chancel arch, dating from the early 15th century, is rated by many as one of the finest in the country. Some of the things that may be distinguished are highlighted below.

- In the centre, **Christ**, wearing the crown of thorns and the scarlet robe bearing the 'glorious scars' of the cross, sits on a rainbow. Christ's left hand is raised in a gesture of judgment. His right hand blesses. Angels on each side bear the cross, the spear and the sponge on the javelin. On the left is the sun and on the right the moon (with a face).
- To Christ's left is **John the Baptist, wearing camel hair - the camel's head and neck still attached**.
- To Christ's right kneels the **Virgin Mary**, her hands raised in worship. Above them, archangels sound the last trump. They are identified as archangels by the crosses on their heads.

- Below, **the dead rise from their graves.**
- On the left, the redeemed enter through the **gate of the heavenly city**, welcomed by the blessed ones.
- On the right **demons drag the doomed off to Hell with a great chain.**

8 EAST WINDOW

The east window, by the firm of Constable, depicts scenes from the Passion, the Last Supper and the Ascension.

- There are thirteen people around the table, Christ, in the centre, and the twelve disciples. Christ asked the disciples to eat **bread** and drink **wine** with him. The bread symbolises Christ's body, the wine his blood.
- The ceremony Christians celebrate to remember this event is called by a number of names – **Eucharist, Holy Communion, Mass, or The Lord's Supper.**

To the left we see scenes leading up to the Crucifixion; Roman soldiers and Judas Iscariot, with the kiss that betrayed Jesus and a purse containing the thirty silver coins with which he was paid for his betrayal.

In the upper right hand section we see the Crucifixion and below it, Christ in the tomb.

9 WAR MEMORIALS

- **Forty-three** Great Shelford service men and **two** women are listed on the WW1 memorial.
- The women who died were **Gladys Jones VAD** and **Ada Sillitoe**. VAD stands for Voluntary Aid Detachment. Volunteers acted as nurses, ambulance drivers, cooks and clerks. Gladys Jones died of malaria in Salonica. Ada Sillitoe was in the Women's Royal Air Force and is buried in Great Shelford churchyard. The WRAF was formed early in 1918 and Ada died in November 1918.
- The total killed in WW2 was **19**.

For interest, the ratio between the numbers killed in World Wars 1 & 2, about 2.5 to 1, ties in reasonably with the ratio of numbers killed in the two wars for the country as a whole, 735,000/384,000, about 2 to 1.

10 PISCINA

The church has two Piscinas, one in the Chapel of the Resurrection and one below the War Memorial in the Lady Chapel. The children will look at the latter.

The 12th Century Piscina in the Chapel of the Resurrection is a relic from the earlier building.

- **A Piscina is a 'washing-up bowl' used for rinsing the communion vessels.**

11 SCREEN

The rood screen would originally have been surmounted by a rood loft carrying the Great Rood, a sculpture of the Crucifixion. In this church, the Great Rood and rood loft have been removed.

The screen has tracery with leaves, Green Men, etc., in the spandrels.

- **Access to the rood loft was from the small door which can be seen on the left at the level of the top of the screen.**

12 PULPIT

The pulpit dates from 1636. It was originally a 'triple decker' complete with backboard and decorated sounding board (an early method of sound amplification!).

The preacher stands in the pulpit to give his sermon.

The pulpit is high so that he can be seen and heard by everyone.

13 PELICAN BOSS IN THE ROOF OF THE PORCH

- The symbolism of the mother pelican feeding her young is rooted in an ancient legend which preceded Christianity. The legend was that, in time of famine, **the mother pelican wounded herself, striking her breast with the beak to feed her young with her blood to prevent starvation.**
- **Early Christians adapted this legend to symbolise Christ, the Redeemer, giving his life to save mankind.**

Of interest to South Cambridgeshire children doing this trail is the fact that the pelican feeding its young with blood from its own breast is the symbol of Sawston Village College.

14 WINDOWS IN THE PORCH

- The four figures depicted are: -

a) Christ

b) St Luke

c) St John the Baptist

d) St Mary the Virgin

- Christ is surrounded by **children**, referring to the passage in Matthew's Gospel, "*Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven*".
- St Luke has an **ox** at his feet. The ox, recognised as the animal of sacrifice, was applied to St Luke because his Gospel emphasises the atonement made by Christ's sacrifice of himself on the Cross. St Luke holds a quill pen, symbolising his authorship of his gospel.
- John the Baptist holds the **Lamb of God**, in Latin the *Agnus Dei*, a title for Jesus that appears in St John's Gospel, where John the Baptist sees Jesus and exclaims, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" The lamb lies on the Book of Seven Seals, a reference to the Book of Revelation.
- Mary holds her symbol, a **lily**, signifying purity.