

A STUDY OF THE VILLAGE CHURCH

Based on tour of
ALL SAINTS CHURCH
COVINGTON



STUDY PACK PREPARED BY
COVINGTON PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL
FOR CHURCH HISTORY RESEARCH AND BELL RESTORATION
PROJECT 2014



Tour of All Saints Church Covington

Exploring the Outside of the Church

Nave

All Saints Church is made of stone and rubble and has been here in some form for over 900 years. It is possible that there was a Church on the site at an earlier date that could have been made of wood; many Churches were. The earliest Churches would have been small square buildings that would have looked similar to the one in the picture (right) of a very early Church in Durham. Most have been built onto and altered many times.



Chancel



To begin with all Churches like All Saints Covington would have consisted of only a Nave where the worshippers stood. At a later date a Chancel would have been added at the east end from which the Priest would have said prayers. This would have been on a simple design with a tall nave and a rectangular chancel.

Tower



A tower would have been added to this. Originally towers were intended to be 'look out' posts and were designed in the same style as battlements on castles with parapets. We know that the tower at Covington was built around 1330. It does not have parapets as seen in the image and it is not certain whether it may have been altered at some later date.

Study Note

[A threat of attack from an enemy such as the Danes who invaded in Anglo Saxon times could be seen so that villagers were alerted to take refuge in the Church. This was long before Covington Church tower would have been built. By then it had become a tradition for all Churches to have a tower that subsequently became the ideal place to hang the Church bells.]

You will notice that Covington Church does not have a steeple. Most Churches you see in towns and villages have steeples. Many more did have steeples that were made of plaster and covered with lead but during one of the worst storms ever in England 300 years ago dozens were blown down. It is almost certain that this is what happened in Covington. The tower now has a tiled pyramid roof where a spire should be.

Study Note

[In the Middle Ages steeples were built as high as possible to point to heaven and were an iconic symbol used by many religions throughout history to attract people to worship. Some believed that the points of a steeple could ward off evil spirits. They also believed that steep roofs and gargoyles with hideous features could frighten them away.]

Chapel

Later on in the 14th century a Chapel was built onto the south side of the Nave of Covington Church. A hundred years later this Chapel was knocked down and if you look at the south wall beside the Porch you will see how the opening into the chapel was bricked up. One of the windows from the Chapel was used in the new wall. Compare this with the picture (right) of a Church with a Chapel and you will see roughly how big the Chapel was.



Study Note

[It was customary after the Norman Conquest for Lords of the Manor to have their own private chapels built. Sometimes they were separate buildings although usually attached to the Church in their Manor (village). They would be used by the Lord who paid for them for his own family's private prayers and the education of their children. They might have a separate Priest from the village Priest. If a Lord died or was a Knight that was killed in battle a Chapel might be built in his honour to be a place to pray for his soul. Inside it would be like a small Church with an altar and private seating for the family. Outside it would look like the one in the image.]

Graveyard

A Church Historian has said the Graveyard at All Saints has been built on top of an old burial ground where Anglo Saxons who lived here were almost certainly buried in pre-Christian times. We are told that St. Augustine, a Benedictine Monk, who became Archbishop of Canterbury, was ordered to obliterate pagan burials grounds by building on top of them. You will also notice that the level of the ground around the Church is much higher than the surrounding landscape because, it is claimed, so many bodies have been buried over many years in a confined area.

[Study note

Prior to the Norman Conquest Anglo Saxons were not all Christians although it would appear that in the Covington area most groups predominately were immediately before 1066. There is evidence of pre-Norman Anglo-Saxon Church building in villages fairly close by.]



As in all extremely old graveyards you will find many headstones or tombstones as they are called in many parts of the world. These are memorial stones set in the memory of a person. They give us an insight into the attitudes, beliefs and livelihoods of our ancestors.

[Study Note.

The importance of the headstone in history can be traced back to Roman times when they were used to record the successes of deceased war heroes. Celtic cultures were also known to place pieces of rock at the head of a grave. Headstones have been used for centuries. The Celtic cross that St. Patrick is credited with having introduced into Ireland in the 4th century is evident throughout Europe and became a fashionable monument in Victorian times, most notably in Dublin. These can be found in village Churchyards such as Covington. Along with the other older headstones they have become unreadable as a result of erosion. Recently those researching family history have realised the value of headstones. Erosion has meant the loss of much irreplaceable data.

The position of a grave of a deceased person in a churchyard was an indication of their social status. In some parts of the country this was a traditional practice. The poor were buried on the north side of the graveyard in the shadow of the church where there was no warmth from the sun along side the unbaptized, the excommunicated, and those who had committed suicide. Those of high status were buried on the sunny south side; the clergy, usually on the east, where they would be near to the altar. Plans of graveyards could reveal details of the status and character of the deceased or the circumstances of his death. The position of graves in a churchyard can often provide much information for family history researchers.]

Priest's Door



In the south wall of Covington Church is an interesting feature found in old Churches; a very small door that leads into the Chancel and the Sanctuary. This is the priest's door. It is said that these doors were deliberately made smaller so that the priest would have to bow his head as he entered the holy place and humble himself before God.

North Door

On the North side of the Church is another most interesting door. This would have been an original external entrance. It is likely to have been what was called 'the devil's door' because it was entered from the north side, 'the Devil's side'. Such doors were found in medieval Churches and were only opened for baptisms and communion. The belief being that any evil spirits that were driven out by the Holy Sacrament would flee out through this doorway.



Above this door is a tympanum, a word used to describe an area above a door opening and below the arch above it. During the late Saxon and Norman periods many of these tympanums were highly decorated with carvings and were often the most decorated area in the Church. The tympanum in Covington is regarded as one of the best examples and is very well carved. It has been carved from one big piece of limestone.

[Study note

The carving depicts a wingless griffin on the left and a lion with tail winding around between its legs and ending in a leaf. The Griffin has an eagle's head and a lion like body. It has been assessed as being carved sometime between 1120 - 1130. For this reason an academic has proposed that it is a heraldic design. This may very well be the case.

At this date a Knight named Bernard de St Walery was the feudal lord of estates that included Covington. His coat of arms bore two lions very similar in appearance to the one in the tympanum. His son died in the Crusades in 1190.



The Griffin and the wingless Griffin were favourite bearings early adopted by English armoury. The Griffin combined the bodily attributes of 'the cloud-cleaving eagle' and 'the king of beasts' that it had the head, neck and wings of an eagle conjoined to the hinder part of a lion. Some were depicted as wingless. It was a symbol that

instilled terror into the enemy. Interestingly the feudal lords of Covington, before and after the de St. Walery family, were the de Bayeaux family. They have a similar coat of arms to the de St. Walery family but with only a single image of a lion.

Three talons of a Griffin were preserved at Bayeaux in France where this family came from and fastened on high festival days to the altar; there purported to be some strange legend of a cup formed of a Griffin's claw dedicated to St. Cuthbert. Without more evidence we cannot know which family in Covington the tympanum was carved for or its accurate historical significance.



The door itself has ironwork that has also been dated 1100-1135 and is very interesting.

This door is featured in a book called 'Medieval Decorative Ironwork in England' by Jane Geddes who considers it to be one of the earliest examples of split-curl ironwork.

In the late Anglo Saxon and early Norman period wrought iron became invaluable for use as moving parts such as door hinges and handles. Hinges had straight bars almost as long as the width of the door and the ends were split and curled backwards. The big nails that hold the door together were called 'roves'.]

Porch

All Saints Covington has a traditional Porch of the kind you will find on almost every village Church. A Church historian believes that the original porch was likely to have been made of wood and that the existing Porch was added a hundred years after the Nave was built when the doorway to the Nave was altered.



[Study Note

Rarely do you find any Church without a Porch. In Anglo Saxon times there were no porches and people entered the Church directly into the Nave. Porches were added after the Norman Conquest. It has been suggested that they were first built onto Churches for the purpose of storing weapons because they could not be carried into a holy place. It is known to have been the practice in Scandinavian Countries not to allow weapons to be taken into homes, porches there being described as weapon houses. In England when the Church was the chief focus of life in the Manor (Village) the porches became important places for buying and selling. Marriages were conducted there and they were used for the purposes of very limited education of the children. The priest had the responsibility of providing a Christian education to poor children. He would do this infrequently taking children one or two at a time when they were not working in the fields.]

Yew Tree

There is a Yew Tree in the Churchyard at Covington. 700 years ago it was very common to see yew trees growing near to a Church. This was because the wood was ideally suited to be made into long bows that the English were famous for using in battles. A few remaining yews can be as old as 700 years. After long bows were displaced as weapons by the introduction of more modern arms yew was no longer in such demand. It became more of a tradition to plant yew trees in Churchyards. The one in Covington is not all that old and was most probably planted as an ornamental tree.



[Study note

In medieval times the Churchyard would have been the safest place to grow a yew tree because it would have been the only area of land that was sufficiently enclosed to prevent cattle from wandering as it was sacred land. Yew trees being known to be poisonous could cause the death of animals that eat the foliage. The Churches were the focus of most activities in the Manor (Village) including the practice of archery. In many parts of England it was compulsory for every man capable of drawing a long bow to train on Sunday afternoons in butts near to the Church to ensure that they were proficient when the King or the Lord of the manor called upon them to render service in battles. Church buildings also provided another facility; they were generally the only buildings made of stone against the corners of which bowmen could sharpen their arrows.]

Bell Tower

The Bell Tower at All Saints Covington was constructed over 600 years ago. It has three stages. The top part of the tower where the bells are hung is called a belfry. This has openings or windows that are fitted with louvers to allow the sound of the bells to be more clearly heard outside the tower all over the village.

Most bells in Churches used to be hung on a thin rod and made to chime by someone down below pulling the rope that caused the bell to swing from side to side. It was always the Priest that rang the bell to call people to Church.



Sometime after 1600 the idea of attaching a bell to a wheel was thought of so that the bell could rotate 360 degrees. Someone then devised a Stay that stopped the bell when it reached the top of wheel so that the Ringer pulling the rope had much more control. When there was more than one bell in a tower the

Ringers found out that they could play a simple tune by ringing the bells alternately at different intervals. This was when villagers started to be responsible for ringing the bells and became Bell Ringers. More bells were added and bell ringing became a pastime very often with bell ringing competitions. When the tower of All Saints Covington was first built it had one bell. Another bell was added about 100 years later and another 100 years after that. It has been a long time since all three bells could be rung. The metal fittings were worn out making the bells jump about and hard to ring. Only one bell could be rung and that could not be rung properly. It was recently discovered that the frame from which the bells were hung had gradually rotted and was infested with Death Watch Beetle making it very unsafe to ring at all. In 2013 All Saints began a project to replace the old bell frame with a new cast iron one, renovate the three bells and add another one. This will allow the Ringers to change the order in which the bells sound and so ring a range of different tunes.

[Study note.

Before Christianity had spread across Europe early missionaries used small handbells to call people to Christian gatherings. It was not until about 400BC that bells were introduced into an early Christian Church in Campania in Italy. Perhaps 200 years or so later their use in Churches spread across Europe to reach England. Very early records show that it was not until St. Dunstan the Archbishop of Canterbury in the 10th century decided that bells of some sort should be hung in all the Churches under his care.

In medieval times swinging bells hung on wooden structures were used to warn people of fires, storms, possible attack by enemies and other events. In some countries such as Mexico they were still used for these purposes in the early 19th Century. In Tudor times in England Church bells were rung to alert people to impending danger of events such as the Spanish Armada.

The bell tower you now see at All Saints Covington would have been built primarily to house bells to call people to worship and at the start of mass and for special events such as funerals and weddings. Historically the bells could also be used as a fire alarm or be sounded for defence during wartime and in modern times to celebrate state occasions. Latterly bells have been rung to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee and the Olympics.]

Exploring the Inside of the Church

Nave

On entering the Church through the Porch you find the Nave. It was here in the very early Churches that the Villagers would gather and stand to hear the Priest say prayers. The Nave was called the peoples Church.



[Study note. The Church in most villages would have been the only stone building and the centre of the community. The villagers lived in small cottars huts. Nearly all important events took place in the Church and the Churchyard. On festival days children would play and adults dance in the confines of the Church and even the Nave itself.]

Pews

The Nave has rows of wooden benches called pews in which worshippers can sit or kneel facing the altar.

[Study note. Old Churches did not have pews or seats of any kind. The first seats were made of stone without backs that were up against the wall for a very few privileged people to sit on. They were later replaced by wooden benches that people brought into the church for those who needed them. There is evidence that some pews were fixed in All Saints Covington around 1440 although it was not until almost 100 years later that Bishops ordered Priests to preach sermons so that pews became an essential part of the furniture of every Church. To begin with people could buy a pew and were given a deed to prove that it belonged to them. They were then able either to give or sell the ownership of the pew to someone else. This practice lasted for many years. Most of the pews in All Saints Covington were installed in the 15th century]

Chancel

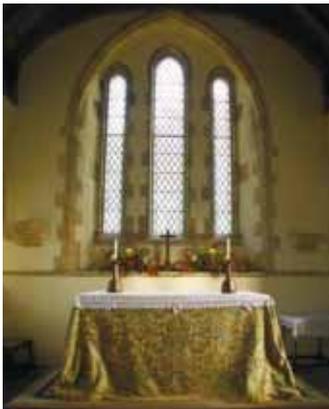
Turn right and at the end of the Nave you will find a Chancel, a place from which the Priest says prayers and holds communion in the Sanctuary, which traditionally is at the east end. It was sacred to God and he had his own entrance to it through the Priest's door.

[Study Note. Chancels were added to Naves at the beginning of the 13th Century by order of the Catholic Church Council to protect the Sanctuary, where the Blessed Sacrament was given. The Chancel was for the Priest and the Nave for the worshippers. The present building of All Saints Covington could have taken place after this date and so the Chancel may have been built at the outset.]

Vestry

On the right off the Chancel you will find the Vestry. This is a small room that is really the Priest's wardrobe where he keeps the special clothes he puts on for different services. These are called vestments. The Rectors of small Churches today take their special clothes home because they have to use them in other Churches they are looking after.

Sanctuary



In the area of the Chancel known as the Sanctuary you will find the Altar or Communion table. This is where only the items used for the Holy Sacrament are placed; the altar cloth, communion cup (chalice) and trays (paten) for wine and bread.



Chalice & Paten

Piscina

On the right hand side of the Altar you will find something called a piscina built into the wall; a basin with a drain that was used by the Priest to wash his hands and also the sacred vessels before and after the services.



*[Study note. Piscinas were originally called *sacrarium lavacrum* meaning 'ritual bath'.*

During the reign of Edward I (1272 - 1307) it was directed that all priests wash their hands prior to celebrating mass, and to empty the water down a special drain provided for just that purpose. All Saint's piscina is fairly shallow compared with many others and so the objects would have been washed simply by holding them above the basin and running water over them. More elaborate piscinas have an upper shelf known as the credence on which the chalice and paten, or water jug, were placed during washing.]

Ambry

On the opposite side (left) of the Sanctuary there is niche in the wall that is called an Ambry meaning 'a place for keeping tools'. This is where Priests kept oils for use in sacraments also the items used such as the cups.



[Study note. In larger more prosperous Churches Ambries were more likely to be built as elaborate cupboards and often locked because the oils and other items were regarded as being sacred. In modern times these items are kept in the Vestry]

In many smaller Churches in the Chancel you will find the Organ and choir stalls. You may also find what is called the Priest's stall. This is where the Priest sits and stands during services. The stall used at All Saints Covington is on the right of the Chancel.

Pulpit

Stepping down from the Chancel you will find the Pulpit on the right and the Lectern on the left.

The Pulpit is really a preaching platform or stand rather like a small stage. It is usually reached by a small flight of steps. The simple reason for them to be built so high was to enable all worshippers to see the Priest or Minister when he gave a sermon. Pulpits are basically a box without a lid that can be very ornate.



[Study note. In the early Churches the Priest said prayers from the Chancel that was built higher than the Nave and accessed by perhaps two or three steps. Bishops ordered Priests to preach sermons in the late 14th century and so Pulpits became a common part of Village Church furniture. Long before this throughout the Christian world there were Pulpits in Cathedrals and large Churches from which the services were conducted. Most of these large places of worship had Pulpits walls and ceilings that were magnificently decorated along with very ornate furnishings.]

Lectern



The position of the Pulpit was called the Gospel side being the place from which the Priest read the gospel. On the other side of the Nave below the Chancel is the place where you will find the Lectern, a word meaning reading desk or stand. It is typically used by lay people to read from scriptures and for announcements.

[Study note. Lecterns in many Churches also have very elaborate designs and can be made from wood, metal or even marble. The one in All Saints Covington is a very simple design made of wood by what must have been a very skilful joiner and wood turner. Many Church Lecterns especially in Cathedrals and large Churches are formed in the shape of an eagle. This is to symbolise John the Evangelist author of the fourth gospel. The eagle being a figure of the sky able

to look straight into the sun representing that Christians should look on eternity without flinching as they journey towards their goal of union with God.]

The Organ



In early churches there were no Organs. Musical instruments of any kind were only considered suitable for entertainment. The human voice was the only means of making music in a holy place. Somewhere between the years 800 and 900 Organs were introduced into Churches. It was decided that the sound of pipe organs could elevate the soul. Now nearly every Church has an Organ. All Saints Covington had an Organ that became very old and was replaced with the present one in 1927. It is a small Organ that is ideal for a Church of this size.

[Study Note.

Organs were invented by a clever Greek Mathematician and Inventor Ltestibius in 200 B.C.. He first made a water pump to create compressed air that he later used to force air into the pipes of what he called a Water Organ. Hundreds of years later the same principle was used in the design of Organs to create the pressure of air needed except that bellows were used. Two men were needed to pump the bellows of a medium sized Organ in a Church. Men could not always be relied upon to use sufficient effort to keep the air pressure up for long periods. It was rather like using a Car foot pump non stop except that they were working hand pumps or levers. The present organ in All Saints has a very unusual design. It has bellows enclosed in a cupboard that had to be pumped by the Organist with their feet requiring a considerable amount of exertion whilst playing the keyboard above. A thousand years after the Greek Inventor made his first Organ it was discovered that air pressure could be maintained by the use of electricity and so the facility was incorporated into new Organs and many old ones in Churches were converted. The Organ in All Saints may not have been converted until about 1950.

The Organ in All Saints has only 8 octaves and unusually has no pedals. There are Organs in Cathedrals and large Churches with as many as 1000 pipes as tall as 64 feet. The Organ at Peterborough Cathedral (seen right with Robert Quinney Director of Music) has 5286 pipes. There are a few Organs in the world that have as many as 5 keyboards.]



Font

At the back of the Nave stands the Font near to the North (Devil's) Door. Fonts are basins that hold Holy Water used for ceremonies we call Christenings when the water is sprinkled on a baby's forehead to admit them into the Christian faith; Baptise them. The font in All Saints Covington is 900 years old with an octagonal bowl.



[Study Note. Originally Christians were baptised when they were adults at a ceremony either in the sea, in a river or by standing in a large font when their whole bodies were immersed in water. By the time All Saints Covington was built it had become the practice for babies to be baptised in a Church Font with water that had been blessed by Priests on Easter Sunday. This made it Holy water that ought not to be changed until Easter the following year. Round about the time that All Saints Covington was built the Archbishop of York ordered fonts to be locked and you will see holes in the bowl where a lock used to be. Baptismal water was often stolen and used for superstitious practices. If someone had had a spell put on them by a witch or had been cursed they took water to sprinkle on themselves to ward off any effects. A locked lid was made or an exceedingly heavy stone placed on the top that needed two or three men to lift off when the font was needed.

The water in the font could not be thrown away but must be spread carefully in the Churchyard's Holy ground for fear that drops would be used for spells. The Holy water from the piscina was drained away deeply into the ground for the same reason.]

[Extra Study Notes

Traditional features not found in Covington and many other Churches.

Reredos

Is a screen fixed to the wall above and below an Altar.



Those commonly seen in English Village Churches are usually of panelled wood although occasionally are of carved stone. A Reredos will cover most or a large part of the wall. Many are extravagantly decorated with niches for statues, paintings in the panels and, if made of wood, pinnacles. Nearly all large Churches and Cathedrals on the Continent of Europe have a Reredos, many of which are quite spectacular.]

Rood Screen

The word 'rood' is derived from a Saxon word 'rode' meaning cross. The Rood screen was a screen separating the Chancel from the Nave upon which stood a large figure of the crucified Christ, that is to say on a Cross. These screens could be made of stone, metal or more commonly wood that was ornately carved. The word 'chancel' is derived from a Latin word meaning 'lattice'. The carving and construction of the rood screen in very early Christian churches throughout Europe evidently always included lattice work. Hence the area that these screens separated from the nave was described as the Chancel even though lattice work was not commonly included particularly in English Churches. Some more recently constructed screens in large Churches have panels fitted with glass. Across the top of rood screens was a heavy beam. In many churches there were rood lofts that were accessed by narrow staircases that provided a wooden walkway. It is generally thought that candles were placed in the loft to illuminate the figures of Christ and other saints that might be erected there. Previously curtains were drawn across the sacred area around the altar during mass. It was felt to be necessary to protect the reserved sacrament from abuse. Because the nave was regularly used for secular purposes, even dancing, being the focus of activity in the village, rood screens were constructed.

A Church Historian has identified evidence of structural alterations to the Chancel arch that suggest that there was certainly a rood beam if not a complete screen in All Saints Covington similar to that in the image (Right).

Rood screens throughout England were destroyed under instruction of Henry VI 11, his son Edward and his daughter Elizabeth, such screens being considered the 'focus of superstitious adoration' with the result that not one medieval rood screen survived in any Parish Church. One hundred years or so later Rood screens were built in all new Anglican Churches.



Rood beams and lofts were accessed by wooden staircases that in a small Church would be narrow. All Saints Covington has a blocked up opening high up on the South wall that could well have been the way into a Rood loft in the demolished Chapel and at the same time provide access to the Rood beam.

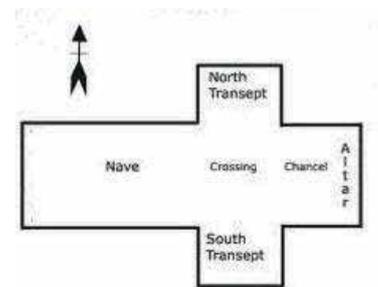
Generally

Ecclesiastical records describe Covington Church as St. Margaret's although it has been described as All Saints for a very long time. The probability is that the Church was dedicated to St. Margaret but during the 16th and 17th centuries certain Protestants and Puritans wanted to eliminate all customs of Catholic worship and dedication to Saints was one of the things that they objected to. In Churches where the dedications were destroyed it would have been replaced with one that was more tolerable to them.

A dedication to St. Margaret was likely to cause offence for additional reasons. There were approximately only some 250 churches in England dedicated to St. Margaret of Antioch. She was supposed to be the daughter of a pagan priest whose Mother died at birth and was brought up by a woman that was a convert to the Christian faith. Margaret is said to have been disowned by her Father after she had consecrated her virginity to God. When she was offered marriage to a Roman Governor with a condition that she renounce her Christian beliefs she refused. As a result she suffered cruel torture and eventual martyrdom. Dedications to individual Saints were reintroduced during Victorian times when the patronage of St. Margaret could feasibly have been re-recorded.

Cruciform

Cruciform means the shape of a cross. In Western Europe the architecture of a church is usually based upon a plan drawn in the shape of a cross. Historically since the 9th century the altar is placed at the east end of the Church so that both the Priest and the congregation are facing East during the Eucharist. In very early village churches that consisted of merely a Nave in a simple rectangular shape without pews some worshippers would most probably have stood around the edges of the building and turned towards the altar or moved towards it to receive communion.



Subsequently, as is now the case, the Chancel formed the eastern arm of the cross and the Nave the western arm. The lateral arms to the north and south are created by a transept being a space across the body of the building. In a Christian Church this crosses the Nave in a cruciform. Whenever there were additions to original simple designs efforts were made to create the cruciform shape. The demolished Chapel at All Saints Covington was built more or less in the position of the south transept.

In old village Churches where there are no additions to create north and south arms the cruciform shape is maintained by the layout of the internal furnishings. The aisle being the western arm, the space between the choir stalls in the Chancel the eastern arm and the north and south transept represented by the space in front of the pews; the area in which you find the Pulpit to one side and the Lectern to the other.

The Importance of the East

In 7th Century England Churches were built facing east so that on the feast day of the Saint to whom they were dedicated mass could be offered on the Altar directly facing the rising sun. In England there is a contention that Churches were built facing east because it was the geographical direction of the Holy City of Jerusalem; a plausible argument since dozens of Churches throughout the world do not face the east.

It is the practice for graves to be oriented east to west and the deceased buried face upwards. This is commonly believed to be a Christian tradition although it has been discovered that Pagan graves are similarly oriented. The assumption is that the practice was followed on from Pagan Sun Worship. In Christian literature the east is considered to be the direction from which strength of light over darkness arises as a symbol of Christ.



Copyright reproduction images permissions:-

John Turrel

Inverallan Parochial Church Council

Radwinter Parochial Church Council

Swanley Technical College

Mary Evans Picture Gallery

The Kids Window History

Look and Learn History Picture Library

Peterborough Cathedral



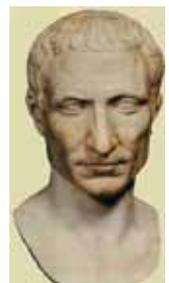
Christianity in Britain

Many years ago the people who lived in British Isles were called Ancient Britons. Just like people from countries all over the world they worshipped many gods and goddesses; often gods of nature or those that they believed gave them strength in battle. Their Priests were called Druids and they believed the oak-tree and mistletoe were sacred. On special religious occasions they would cut mistletoe and kill animals for their sacrifices.



Stonehenge and other stone circles that were made long before their time were used by them as holy places. The island of Anglesey, off north Wales, was the Druids' most holy place.

Fifty five years before Jesus was born a Roman Army came to Britain. The Britons had been helping their friends in Gaul to fight against the Romans. Their General Julius Caesar decided he would punish the Britons. He sailed across the Channel to fight them on the coast and returned the next year with a bigger army and marched in land to capture and destroy the Britons' strongholds.



Then about fifty years after Jesus was born the Romans sent armies to Briton again; this time to conquer most of the country and make it part of the Roman Empire. Because they feared the power of the Druids they marched to Anglesey, killed the Druids and destroyed the holy groves of oak trees.



By this time Christians were beginning to be accepted in the Roman Empire. The Romans had always believed there were many Gods. These included Jupiter, king of the Gods, and others like Mars the god of war, Neptune the sea god and Diana the



huntress. Whenever they conquered lands with different cultures they took on other gods at the same time as introducing their own. They also gave their own Emperors divine status after death.

Jupiter

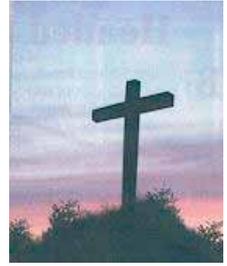
They eventually came to accept Jesus Christ and to add him to all other Gods but they would not accept the Christian belief that there was only one God.

Christianity came to Britain while the Romans ruled the island.



Christ

When Christians met to hear a Priest preach the gospel they gathered together in small groups in fields where a temporary cross was erected. Gradually over the next 400 years many small meeting places, wooden churches, were built.



The territories of the Roman Empire were attacked by hordes of tribesmen from the East so that it became necessary for all Roman armies to be recalled to defend them; even Rome itself was in danger. The Britons, who had enjoyed prosperity from protection by the Roman rulers, were now undefended against warrior tribesmen who sailed across the North Sea.

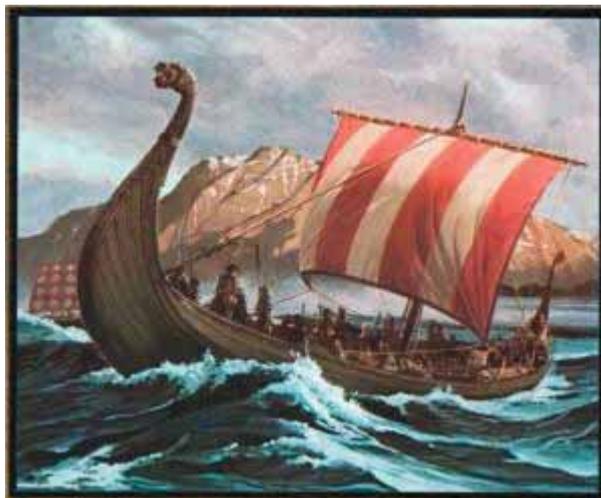


These tribesmen known as Angles, Saxons and Jutes regularly plundered the towns and villages along the east coast for many years. Gradually they pushed further inland and eventually stayed to create settlements. Over a period of time the ancient Britons were driven out and the majority found refuge in Wales and Cornwall. The invading tribesmen named the large part of Briton that they occupied Angle Land (England). They had their own gods called Thor and Woden and they settled down to farm the land.



Thor

Christian worship did not disappear completely but was revived during the next 200 years by the devotion of Christian monks who converted Anglo Saxon Chieftains to Christianity. Many monasteries and small churches were built in the villages throughout the land. England had become a peaceful Christian country for many years until more tribesmen from Denmark began an invasion. These were Vikings who did not have sufficient farmland and wealth in their own country to be prosperous. They invaded and over ran the north and east of England where they settled after agreeing to make peace with Alfred the Great the King of the Anglo Saxons who had defended and still held the rest of the country.



Alfred restored ruined monasteries and churches. The Danes had their own gods Odin and Thor. Alfred made friends with their leader who learnt about the Christian faith and was converted. Other Danish chieftains also accepted Christian beliefs, some recognising Jesus along with their own gods. The Saxons and the Danes lived in harmony for a long time and peace and prosperity were restored.

When Alfred's great, great grandson Ethelred became king in 978 more Danish Vikings began to invade England and after protracted hostilities the King of Denmark Sweyn took over the throne of England and remained King until he died. Even more hostilities finally ended in a major battle in Kent in 1016 in which the Danish King's son Canute won a decisive victory and became King of England.

King Canute became a Christian. He ruled the whole country well and after his death he was succeeded by Edward the Confessor another Saxon King who encouraged Christianity and built the Abbey at Westminster.

The Normans who conquered Britain fifty years later were Christians. In Normandy France, where they came from, they were well known for their Christian piety. Under their rule village churches became the most important centre of village life.



Image copyright reproduction permissions:-

John Turrell

Inverallan Parochial Church Council

Radwinter Parochial Church Council

Swanley Technical College

Mary Evans Picture Gallery

The Kids Window History

Look and Learn History Picture Library