



ST MARY MAGDALENE TORTINGTON WEST SUSSEX

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is possible that the foundation of this small church is closely linked with a long-vanished monastic community. Certainly there is no mention of it or any parish church in the Domesday Book of 1086. The community in question was Tortington Priory, which was founded around the middle of the 12th century, a date which ties in quite neatly with the architectural evidence for the period in which St Mary Magdalene was built. Nothing remains of it today except a section of the priory church, used in the 17th century as a wall for a barn, and now incorporated into a residential development.

Tortington Priory owed its foundation to Alice de Corbet, a possible mistress of Henry I, and was originally a dependent house of the Abbey of Sées in Normandy. It was occupied by canons of the Augustinian order, who were sometimes known as the Black Canons because of the colour of their habit. The Augustinians followed a rule inspired by the life of St Augustine of Hippo, who was born in North Africa in 354. They came to England at the very beginning of the 12th century and at the peak of their influence controlled over 200 houses in England and Wales, although this number had shrunk to 170 at the time of the dissolution. They also ran schools, hospitals and almshouses.

At Tortington, as elsewhere, the ordained brethren would have made up only a small part of the community. Many others would have been involved in the day-to-day running of the land owned by the Priory, working on the farms and managing



its economic activities. There were also tenants who occupied the Priory's substantial holdings throughout this part of West Sussex. The canons had their church inside the Priory itself, but of course this busy lay community needed a church too, and it seems likely that the building we can see at Tortington today, less than a kilometre from the Priory ruins, is it.

When the monastic institution was closed down by Henry VIII in 1536, there were only five priests and one novice occupying Tortington Priory, and the final hundred years of its life had been marked by argument and neglect. Several visits from the Episcopal authorities had revealed irregularities which led to protracted disputes; and in 1527 the condition of the buildings was strongly criticised, the priory church and brew-house being considered ruinous.

The parish church, on the other hand, has survived to the present day with its outward appearance

very little changed. The major alterations concern the south aspect of the building, since originally there was no south aisle. This was built in the 13th century but some time later fell into such a bad state of repair that it was abandoned and the line of the south wall taken back to the nave. Around 1860 this aisle was restored by the churchwarden, G C Coote. The north vestry was added at the same time. It is important to note that, despite these changes, the lovely arch over the church door, now set in the south aisle, is an original feature of the 12th-century building.

The church as a whole received some remedial attention during the 20th century. The bell-cote turret was built in 1904 to replace a similar construction which was in need of repair; there are two bells inside, one of which is medieval. The church was declared redundant in 1978 and came into the care of The Churches Conservation Trust two years later.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH

The church walls are faced with irregular flints in a way characteristic of many ancient buildings in this part of the world. The angles of the buildings and the windows are shaped with cut blocks of Caen stone, a common, if more expensive import from Normandy. There are a few patches of brick repair, especially in the north wall; the western wall of the vestry is faced with brick and covered with a concrete render.

The small cross-gable over the church doorway sticks out of the south aisle below a white boarded bell-cote. Like the nave roof, this entrance is ornamented with tiles along its crest in a fleur-de-lys pattern. The arch of the doorway itself is well-preserved, especially considering it has been taken apart and moved three times during its life, out and back and out again, as the south wall of the church was altered and rebuilt. It has four 'orders' or bands of decoration, beginning nearest the door with plain stone, succeeded by a typical Norman chevron pattern, then chevron with additional ornamentation, and finished with a hood of a stylised four-leaved design.

The Caen stone in the west wall shows quite clearly where the restored south aisle bonds with the main body of the church. The blocks which form the edge of the nave look appropriately older than the corresponding blocks in the aisle. More weathered stone can be seen around the small nave window. Near the base of the western face of the north-west corner of the church is a piece of medieval ornamentation, in the shape of three inverted cones, which has been incorporated into the building during restoration work.

At the eastern end of the south wall of the church is a low side window. This was used to ring a small hand-bell during the medieval mass.

The church door has big and rather attractive 19th-century hinge brackets, and further iron work

around its handle and keyhole. The large Norman font inside sits on a Victorian circular base and is decorated with a semi-architectural scheme. A frieze of rounded Romanesque arches supports a thick moulding like a coil of rope, which forms the rim. Every alternate limb of the arcade sits on a miniature column; the others end in a design resembling either a shell or a flower.

The church is so small that all its major features are visible from the west end of the nave. To the north are two windows, filled with 19th-century stained glass. They show St Richard, a bishop of Chichester, holding a model of the cathedral, and St Mary Magdalene, holding a vessel of anointing oil. These were both designed by Charles Kempe, who has inserted his logo, a wheat-sheaf, at the foot of the St Richard window. Below is a brass memorial to the man responsible for the 19th-century alterations, and the installation of these windows, G C Coote.

There is also here a large marble wall memorial to the Leeves family, a classical panel set under an urn. Its decoration of branches and trailing leaves forms a pun on the family's name.

Beyond the windows and these features are the door to the vestry and the pulpit. This last is 17th-century. Its panelled sides are topped with another arch motif and additional decoration, including a flower



The interior, looking east.

design punched or stamped into the wood between the panels.

The southern side of the nave consists of a two-bay arcade. Its 13th-century pointed arches contrast pleasingly with the earlier font nearby and its Romanesque architectural relief. This arcade must have been filled in when the south aisle was abandoned, and then knocked through again during the Victorian restoration.

In the aisle itself is a 15th-century oak pew. Although its carved panels have suffered a little over the years, the pattern, which combines a three-headed arch (trefoil) with a four-leaved design (quatrefoil), can still

Timeline	
354	St Augustine born in North Africa
681-6	St Wilfrid establishes first Sussex cathedral foundation at Selsey
1075	The Council of London moves the see of Selsey to Chichester
1091-1123	Bishop Ralph de Luffa completes the first cathedral at Chichester; much of his work (nave, transepts, quire) remains
c.1106	The Augustinian order first established in England, at St Botolph's Priory in Colchester
c.1140	Priory founded at Tortington
c.1140	Parish church of St Mary Magdalene built
1200-80	Side chapels added at Chichester Cathedral
c.1220?	South aisle added to parish church: nave arcade replaces wall
1400-10	Spire, bell tower and cloisters built at Chichester
1536	Tortington Priory dissolved on orders of Henry VIII
?	South aisle abandoned at Tortington church: nave wall restored
c. 1860	G C Coote replaces south aisle and builds vestry
1873	Roman Catholic Cathedral built at Arundel
1904	Restoration work at St Mary Magdalene
1980	Church in the care of The Churches Conservation Trust.

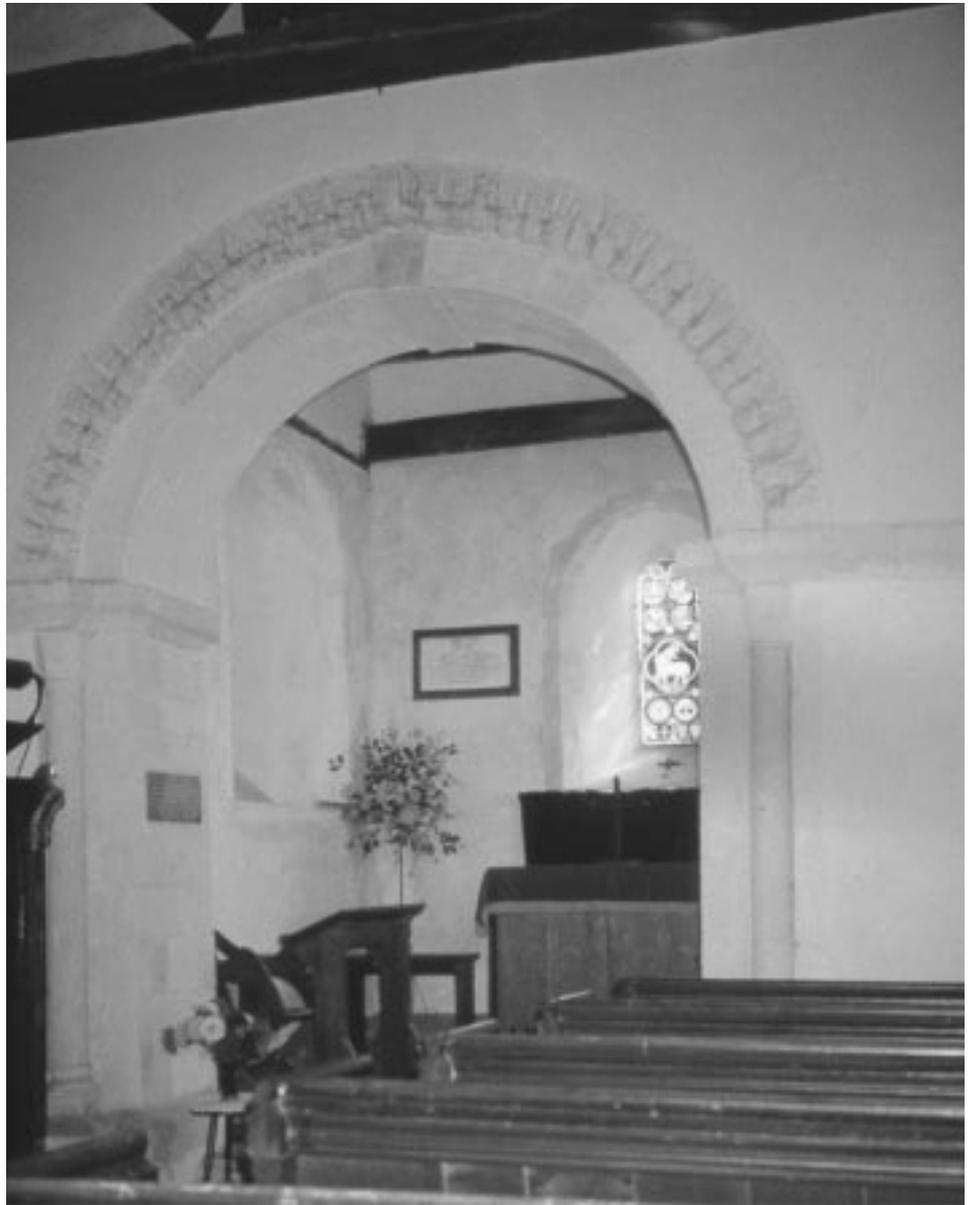
be easily identified.

Above, the nave roof may retain its ancient timbers. It consists of crown posts springing from thick cross-beams. There is an additional half-bay at the west end with tall vertical beams which support the bell-cote. Ahead, to the east, up in the gable of the roof, are two hatchments, or panels depicting coats of arms. Here again is the Leeves family, this time William and Richard.

Chancel

It is however the chancel arch which remains the most forceful and compelling feature of the church. It has two orders, the inner being a plain arch rising to a later keystone, which is dated 1750 and inscribed with the name and arms of W F Leeves, who bought what had been the priory estate in 1706. The outer arch consists of what seems to be a series of highly stylised animal faces. They look like masks, sprouting feathers, leaves and hair. In fact, at first, it is difficult to distinguish anything except too many eyes. But there is a pattern. Every other feature is a design based upon a large bird's head. Although these are by no means identical, they all appear to be grasping the inner edge of this second band of the arch in a long powerful beak. Between the birds are freer interpretations of faces or beasts looking the other way. Some may be breathing fire or spouting water: some appear to be eating other smaller animals (hence the extra eyes). One, near the top of the arch, may even be feeding young. These designs seem to be a reflection of the Scandinavian inheritance of the Normans (a name which after all identifies them as "men from the north"). The arch was probably painted. There is nothing quite like it anywhere else in Sussex. Underneath is a brass memorial plate to Roger Gratwyck, Lord of the Manor and builder of Tortington Place, which was constructed from materials taken from the dissolved priory.

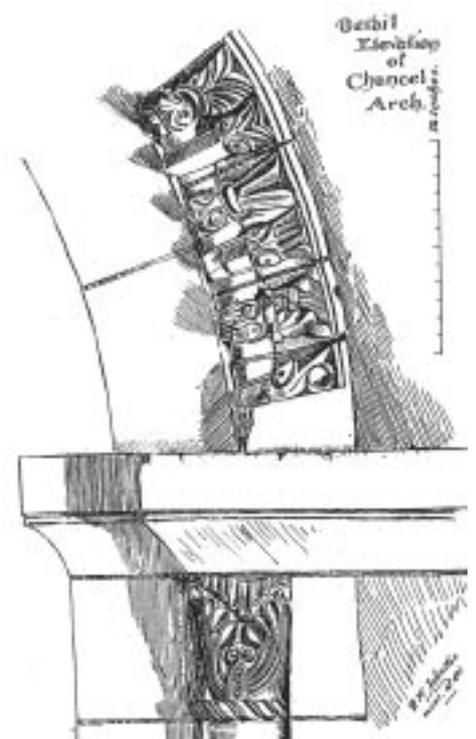
The small chancel beyond the arch



The chancel arch.

is lit by three windows; that in the east wall has stained glass depicting the Lamb of God and the symbols of the four evangelists. There are two memorial plaques. The roof is of a similar construction to that in the nave, although its beams are of a later date.

A drawing of part of the chancel arch, taken from the guidebook to the church written in 1904.



EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

The church at Tortington is so near to Arundel and yet in the middle of the quietest countryside. You will notice on your arrival that it is strictly 'dropping off' territory, as there is absolutely nowhere to park a large vehicle. Once you are settled, however, the environment is very safe and wonderfully peaceful.

Especially if you combine your visit with a study of other churches in the area, you will certainly find it useful to discuss with your pupils how ecclesiastical architecture works. They will understand the importance of the differences between buildings only when they have some idea of what all churches share. Start with a compass in order to establish the significance of the orientation of church buildings.

Using language

Practice using the language of the compass to describe parts of the classroom, or a church plan. Ask: Why is this clearer than using *left* and *right*? Familiarity with the words used to describe parts of the church may be useful, although there is no need to get carried away with too many technicalities. But it will be helpful if your pupils know what a *nave* is, a *font*, an *altar* and so on. A wordsearch would help pupils to be comfortable with these new words, but it is only relating them to use which will make them stick. Ask: Who sits in the nave? What is a chancel for?

The country in the church

Medieval masons, woodworkers, and indeed artists of all kinds often turned to the natural world for inspiration. This is why our churches are full of motifs, stylised or naturalistic, drawn from the living world outside their walls. Although the church at Tortington is small, your pupils will be able to find plenty of examples of plants and plant patterns. These may include:

- the Leeves memorial

- the border of the Kempe windows and his sign

- the font

- the arch over the south door.

Discuss with your pupils how art can depict objects naturally or use individual features to develop designs and styles. Compare, for instance, a Dutch flower painting with Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* and a scheme of decoration by Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

Go outside the church and look for inspiration in the species of plants in the immediate environment. Ask your pupils to sketch leaves and flowers for identification back at school. Can any be related to work visible in the church (oak leaves in the border of the St Richard window, for instance)?

Back at school, your pupils could plan and make a piece of sculpture for the interior of a church, which would bring the outside in. It would need to provide some kind of commentary for visitors to help them understand the relationship between the building and its environment. Then take a similar survey of the area around your school. There may not be much countryside in evidence, but what shapes and materials are there which might inspire



A drawing of the font from the 1904 guidebook to the church.

artwork? You could make another sculpture for the classroom and display it alongside the church piece.

Patterns and patterning

Studying patterns can encompass number and language work, as well as providing material for art and design. Music may also be an accessible way of helping pupils discover how patterns can be established and disrupted for aesthetic effect.

Ask: How would one go about estimating how many of the Victorian tiles were needed for the floor? And how many of them would need to be patterned? Pupils could design a floor for a space of given dimensions, order the right number of plain and patterned tiles and then write out instructions for a company to lay them correctly. The place of the unusual tiles could be expressed in terms of coordinates.

Talk with your pupils about the patterns in words and how poets may use these as rhyme and rhythm. The memorial to Roger Gratwyck is an excellent example. Pupils will be intrigued by the spelling!

BEHOULD AND SEE A FREIND MOST DEARE
THE LORD HATH TAKEN HIM AWAYE
AMEND YOUR LIVES WHILST YOU BE HERE
FOR FLESH AND BLUDD MUST NEEDES DECAY

This is written in eight-syllable lines. Try some writing in which pupils concentrate on syllable-patterning and encourage them not to worry about rhyme. Many haiku (seventeen syllable three-line poems derived from Japanese verse forms) are expressed in language which will mean they are accessible to your pupils. Traditional haiku are also concerned with nature imagery and metaphor, which would make them particularly appropriate for this church.

If you work at this church, you are at some point going to be tackling its two great 12th-century arches, over the south door and the threshold to the chancel. An awareness of the mathematics of the circle will be very useful here, at whatever level is right for your pupils. A series of

identical curves, from a set of toy building materials or a model railway track will quickly show that the higher the band is on the arch, the longer it needs to be. Ask your pupils to draw a half circle and use a protractor to describe the position of several points on the arc. They should then be able to divide the arc into equal segments - and so you will have the basis for a scheme of decoration.

Before the visit, prepare a template for a block in each of four bands of decoration for a full size arch - one perhaps that will fit over the door to your classroom. You could identify groups of four pupils who would work together. At the church, your pupils can collect ideas for their block by sketching directly onto the template. Back at school, they could finish one design, and make it bold and clear with strong ink lines. Photocopy these to make a whole arch, cut them out, mount them over your door and prepare to welcome your visitors into the 12th century!

You could even ask pupils to design 'iron' fittings for your classroom door. These would be symmetrical like those on the church door and could incorporate keyhole, handle and hinges. They could cut out circles of black card to make the door seem studded with nails and produce designs for an appropriately grand key.

The individual elements of the chancel arch are much less regular than the arch over the church door. Here you could ask each pupil to make an individual contribution and mount them together in a huge span on a blank wall. Many activity/craft books have instructions for making animal heads, or masks, which might be a good basis for adaptation. Cut-up egg boxes would make marvellous eye sockets. Make your brief reasonably tight so that pupils have to design a mouth grasping a central structure of some kind. Take photos on site to help them construct the whole piece and join the separate bits of work together.

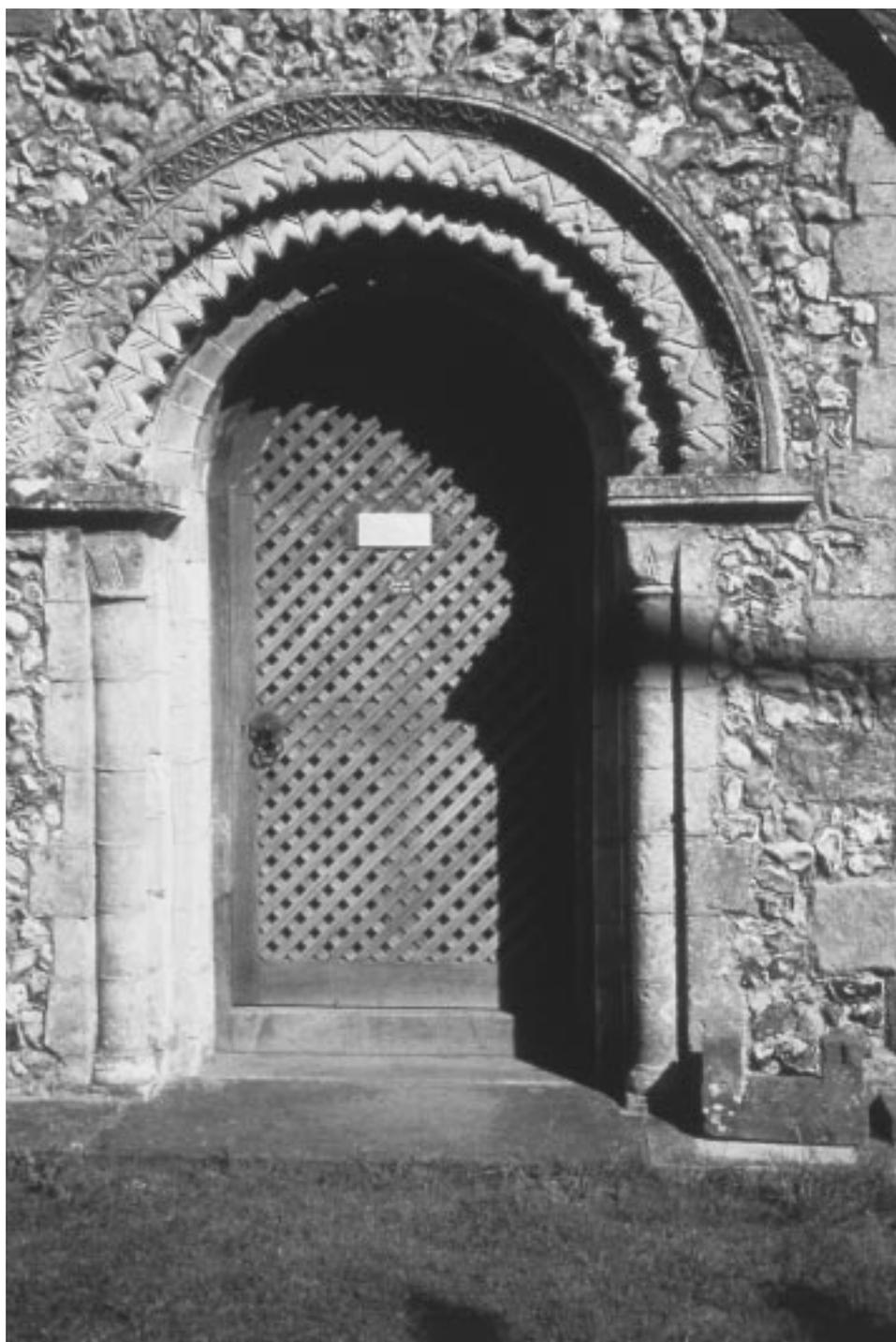
Communities

The Victorian Ordnance Survey map (see page 6) provides a suggestive context for imaginative writing. There are the clues to day-to-day activities such as the fields, the river, and the road to Arundel: while the church and the ruins of the Priory remind us of the two communities who relied on the successful management of the estate.

You could ask your pupils to research life on a medieval monastery. Work and religion would bring together most members of the

community. What kind of work did the canons do and in what ways would it have been valued? Make a list of the daily activities of the rest of the inhabitants of Tortington. Farming and brewing would be important, but there would also be milling, washing, carrying, ferrying, fishing and building to be done.

Pupils could write companion pieces contrasting a traveller's visit to Tortington in 1350 with their own trip to the church. How would the traveller arrive? What would he or she see, hear and smell?



The Norman south doorway.

What has happened to these communities? Politics killed the Priory, but why does the parish church no longer hold regular services? Pupils may be familiar with schools in their area which have closed, or cinemas, or shops. What happened to those redundant buildings - were they re-used, saved or knocked down? You could have a discussion about caring for buildings, and whether preservation is related to age or use or both. Choose five buildings in your local area and imagine they have been condemned. Only one can be saved. Set up a balloon debate where pupils are asked to vote for which gets thrown out of the balloon.

Making and meaning

Like all buildings, the church is an enduring demonstration of the properties and qualities of the mate-



Brick repair in the north wall.

rials out of which it is built. Each type of material has a story behind it involving different people and different techniques. This makes any ancient building a useful peg on which to hang a study of materials and their properties. It extends pupils' descriptive vocabulary and

encourages them to distinguish between smaller and smaller sets of physical substances.

A line drawing or photograph of the church could sit at the hub of a wheel of information about materials. Each spoke would lead to the 'story' behind each type, its natural properties and the processes which make it fit for building. So one spoke would follow the quarrying and finishing of stone, one the moulding and baking of bricks. Photographs of modern usages could be included and the display could be compared with a similar one for your school.

The meaning of the shape of the church lies in both from religious doctrine and physics. Older pupils could design a test which would prove the strength of an arch, or a pitched roof, over a flat structure. Can they determine the direction of the forces in each case? Comparing the church at Tortington with Chichester Cathedral will focus attention on the additional structures (buttresses and so on) necessary to support hefty new masonry. Pupils could become mediaeval architects (with money to burn!) and plan an extension to the church - a Lady Chapel to the east, an aisle to the north, a tower?

Linking up

Charming as this church is, it is small. You may well find yourselves combining your visit here with one to another church nearby. In fact the small scale idiosyncrasies of the



Ordnance Survey map showing Tortington in 1899.

church at Tortington are shown to best effect after a visit to the more spectacular buildings within easy reach. There is another Trust church at North Stoke, near Amberley station; there is Chichester of course: and in 1873 a whole mediaeval French cathedral seems to have been beamed into Arundel, just up the road. This alone raises interesting questions about *the right shape* for a church, and what ingredients were thought to be necessary.

There is plenty of numeracy work to be found by comparing one of the large churches with Tortington. You could develop the idea of relationship between the two buildings by designing a table of statistics. Difference could be expressed in terms of percentages, or ratios. Estimate the dimensions of Arundel Cathedral. Use an upright ruler from a distance and another smaller object (a pupil) to measure from the same viewpoint in the same way. Once you take the real measurement of the pupil you will be able to calculate a real estimate for the height of the building. Guess the feasible size of the congregation for each church. On this basis, what dimensions would your pupils recommend for a church that needed to sit 80? Or 800?

Make a check list to help your pupils identify features of the churches. This should include non-architectural items such as *font*, as well as things like *north aisle*, *porch*, *cloisters*. Pupils would then need to plan a display, like a Venn diagram, which would communicate effectively which features were shared between one or more churches. What is shared by all? Could they design a standard series of questions which would enable a tourist from Mars to establish whether or not they were looking at a church?

An architectural timeline of Chichester Cathedral would be extremely revealing when compared to the more straightforward history of Tortington. There is a colour-coded plan in the cathedral guide-book which would help children

identify how visual evidence relates to historical development. A visit to the smaller church afterwards would give them an opportunity to use their understanding. They could illustrate their conclusions about the Tortington church with comparative images of the cathedral.

There are a number of things to be found at North Stoke in particular which would add something to your work at Tortington. There is a similar combination of the Romanesque (rounded) and later Gothic (pointed) arches, although rather more firmly angled to the later period. The thick pebbly mortar is in better condition, or more faithfully restored, especially on the west wall, and makes the north wall at Tortington more intelligible. There are clear sections of painted wall decoration which fit in very nicely with the foliage theme. There is a sheep's head to compare with the heads of the Tortington chancel arch, a 17th-century table with the same decorative motif as the pulpit described above, a plainer wall memorial with urn, and chancel stalls with very similar carving to the single ancient pew at St Mary Magdalene. Pupils could prepare a piece of writing describing and comparing how the two churches make them feel; which do they prefer?

Redundant churches

Parish churches are such a familiar and beautiful part of our English scene that they seem to be as permanent as the landscape itself. Sadly this is not so. For a number of reasons, such as the mobility of the population in town and country and decline in church attendance, many of them cannot now be maintained for their original purpose. But every parish church is special. All over England people are raising huge sums of money to keep their churches standing and in good repair, because they value them so much.

When a church has to close for regular worship, the Church of

England at its highest level becomes very concerned and a complicated legal process is set in motion to decide on its future. A few have to be demolished, usually for very good reasons and as a last resort, but many are given new leases of life through alternative uses. The Churches Conservation Trust cares for over 300 outstanding churches which, because of their beauty and interest remain unaltered and still consecrated for all to visit and enjoy. The Trust makes them accessible to the public and, of course, to educational groups.

The issues that surround redundant churches can make interesting topics for discussion in the classroom or at the church itself. You might want to think about the following:

- the number of places of worship which have been closed in your area (nonconformist chapels, for example)
- the wide variety of reuse that chapels and churches have been put to (from tyre depots to art galleries, or adaptation for other religions)
- the large sums of money needed to restore or repair a church (nearly always an historic building) and where the money could, or should come from.

You could pose specific questions for your pupils and you could take it further by developing role-play, for example:

- You are one of a congregation of 12 (in a village of 100 people) and you love your old church. You have been told to raise £200,000 in two years to pay for repairs to keep it standing. What do you do?
- You have to decide whether to allow a redundant church to be adapted to another use or it will have to be demolished. What kind of reuse would you be happy with and what would you refuse to accept?

MAKING A VISIT

The church is normally open daily. The keyholder is Mrs Betty Luckin Manor Farm Tortington Nr Arundel

Sometimes, however, a Churches Conservation Trust church may have to be closed for repairs or in an emergency. Schools are requested to ring in advance to check the church is open and to book their visit.

PRACTICALITIES

A preliminary visit is essential on safety grounds to enable you to complete your own risk assessment. As the churches are historic buildings, they may contain uneven flooring, narrow walkways and limited lighting. This is all part of the experience. (If you require further details of particular churches, please contact the custodian or the Education Officer at Head Office.)

This pre-visit will be useful educationally, even if you already know the site as a general visitor. Decide whether your visit will be an introduction, a culmination or the central part of the work. The last can provide an opportunity for you to build on interest developed during the visit when you are back in the classroom. A well-structured visit can make learning enjoyable and fulfil curriculum targets across a wide range of subjects but do try not to ask pupils to do work in the church that could be done at school.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Melhuish, Joyce, *Church of St Mary Magdalene, Tortington, Sussex*, The Churches Conservation Trust, 2001. This is the guidebook.

Sussex Archaeological Collections, LII p163f. A detailed account of the church, written in 1909, with illustrations.

West Sussex Record Office
County Hall, Chichester,
PO19 1RN
Tel: 01243 533959

Fewins, C, *Be a Church Detective: a Young Person's Guide to Old Churches*, The National Society and Church House Publishing, 1992, ISBN 0-7151-4790-0. An excellent introductory guide for pupils.

Friar, S, *A Companion to the English Parish Church*, Alan Sutton Publishing, 1996, ISBN 0-7509-1284-7. An excellent compendium with good drawings and photographs.

The English Parish Church, The Open Churches Trust, 1995. Full colour poster which traces the development of the parish church with details of over 30 churches. Available from English Heritage Education.

English Heritage Education publishes a number of resources on churches for teachers:

Morris, R & Corbishley, M, *Churches, Cathedrals and Chapels*, English Heritage, 1996, ISBN 1-85074-447-5. In their series of teacher's guides.

Videos from English Heritage Education, available for sale or on free loan for educational institutions:

Buildings and Beliefs, 1990, 20 minutes.

Cathedral Archaeology, 1996, 21 minutes.

Chapels - the buildings of nonconformity, 1989, 18 minutes.

God's Acre - nature conservation in the churchyard, 1993, 24 minutes.

How Parish Churches Evolved, 1997, 21 minutes.

In Memoriam - the archaeology of graveyards, 1990, 21 minutes.

The Master Builders - the construction of a great church, 1991, 23 minutes.

English Heritage is the national leader in heritage education. It aims to help teachers at all levels to use the resource of the historic environment. Each year it welcomes over half a million pupils, students and teachers on free educational visits to over 400 historic sites in its care. For further information contact:

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The Churches Conservation Trust was established to look after parish churches which have been declared redundant. Currently there are over 300 churches in the Trust's care. It has an active programme of repair, maintenance and long-term conservation, as well as providing access, publications and encouraging occasional services. Events are held in many Trust churches. The Trust has joined with English Heritage to establish an education service, of which this booklet forms a part. For more information, contact the Education Officer, Virginia Johnston at:

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