

Interpreting Your Site

Workshop Notes #2



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south yorkshire's faith tourism initiative



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Thank you for attending one or more of our training workshops for welcomers / guides. We hope that you found the sessions interesting and useful, and that you will be able to put into practice some of things we talked about. This booklet contains handouts from the second part 'Interpreting Your Site' workshop.



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ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE

It is said that all architecture has its origins in religion.

Most of the oldest structures erected by man are interpreted as being both places of burial AND as holy places, marking the presence of spiritual powers.

The first hunter/gatherers set up large standing stones as they roamed the countryside, even though they had no permanent dwellings. With agriculture and the need for permanent homes, sacred areas were surrounded by stone circles. So when the first permanent dwellings were built by man, they built even more substantial homes for their gods. With the coming of Christianity and permanent churches, the same principal applied. The splendid medieval churches we now see were surrounded by crude wood and thatch dwellings.

In today's multi-cultural Britain there are a variety of places of worship. Each is unique and worth visiting. People visit faith sites for many reasons. No matter what their principal reason for visiting, most will be interested in the history and heritage of the building and its community.



WHAT DO WELCOMERS NEED TO KNOW

Record as much information as possible about your site, and make it available to all your welcomers/guides. This should include: the age and use of various component parts, the former use of parts of the site, the symbolism of items, interesting stories about the site or people (whether true or 'stuff of legends').

There may be so many that to include ALL on a tour would be impractical, but welcomers can vary the selection they pass on to visitors.

Welcomers should find their role interesting, fun and not at all stressful. They will be passing on selected pieces of information that have been prepared for the benefit of keen visitors who, after all, are there for the purpose of finding out such information.



KNOW YOUR CHURCH

Churches are literally 'treasure houses' of history. They are full of carvings, green men, bosses, gargoyles, tombs, monuments, stained glass and more.

Very few ancient churches are built in the style of one architectural period. There are around 10,000 churches of medieval origin in the UK. They were all built for the same purpose, but no two are the same.

This term church was used originally to describe the Christian community, and only later came to mean the building used for worship. Churches are traditionally aligned on an east-west axis.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PARISH CHURCH

Ancient churches have usually undergone a series of redevelopments. The evolution of old churches can be estimated from the style of arches, doorways and windows, as these features were most commonly changed.

The main architectural styles are Saxon (597 - 1066); Norman (1066 - 1200); Early English (c1200 - 1290); Decorated (c1290 - 1350); and Perpendicular (c1350 - 1530).

Since the 1500's, the principal parts of the church have remained basically unaltered. Stonework weathered over the centuries may have been replaced, and in some cases vestries have been attached. In South Yorkshire 71 churches have medieval fabric. 50 have parts dating back to the 12th century or earlier.

OUTSIDE YOUR CHURCH

LYCH-GATE

Lych is derived from the Old English 'lich', meaning corpse.

From 1549 it was required that Lych gates be provided at the entrance to churchyards. They were meeting places and shelters for the party bringing a corpse for burial, and for the priest and church party to receive the corpse.

Medieval lych-gates were made of timber and most have long since disappeared. However, many new lych-gates were erected in Victorian times, sometimes as memorials to prominent local people or as war memorials.

CHURCHYARD

Graves in the churchyard should face east. Christians adopted the old Jewish custom of burying the dead with their feet towards the rising sun. It is also to face the Lord, who will approach from the east at the final Day of Judgement.

Most burials took place on the south side of the church. Due to the large number of burials over the centuries, the churchyard paths tend to be lower than the ground! The north side was sometimes used for the burial of suicides, criminals, and infants who had not been baptised.

BURIALS

For much of history, the church or churchyard were the only places for burials.

The great and the good could be interred inside the church (hence the term 'stinking rich' from the smell) or sometimes outside at the east end. All other members of society were buried in the churchyard.

Individual plots and headstones were not common until the 17th century. With the great increase in population brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the very high mortality rate, churches and churchyards become unsanitary.

Legislation enacted between 1832 and 1906 gave local government the power to act. Privately-run cemeteries began to be established.

COFFIN

The word probably derives from the Saxon 'cofa' meaning cave.

The wooden coffin is of comparatively recent origin. Numerous stone coffins exist which appear to be 11th and 12th century. They are a single block of stone, hollowed out to receive a body.

Stone coffins were never buried deeply. They were sealed by a stone lid, usually with a cross and a symbol denoting the persons rank or profession. These included a broadsword for a knight, or a chalice and bible for a priest.

Poorer members of the community were not buried in coffins. Their bodies were wrapped in a cloth shroud. In later days, they may have been placed in the 'parish coffin' and then taken out and placed in a communal grave.

PREACHING CROSS

In the 6th and 7th centuries, wooden crosses marked the spots where priests or monks preached to the local community. The wooden cross was replaced by a more permanent stone cross, around which services were held. Later still a wooden church might well have been erected.

CHURCHYARD CROSS

Large crosses were found in many churchyards, and were intended to sanctify the churchyard and provide a communal memorial to all the dead of the parish.

At the top of the shaft was either a cross or a tabernacle. Many survive only as a base and part of the shaft, because the cross was often destroyed by iconoclasts.

TOWER

Many parish churches have a tower at the west end of the nave. Some are topped by spires. The tower may have been part of the original building, or added or enlarged at a later date.

Others may have a tower between the chancel and nave, with a transept at either side. In this case, the space inside the church at the intersection of nave, chancel and transepts is called the crossing.

The church bells in the tower are pulled up from ground level, usually with the assistance of a form of treadmill.

PORCH

Ancient churches usually stand to the north of the original village, and the south door is the main entrance. From the 12th century many had a porch.

The porch protected elaborately carved doorways from the weather and was a useful shelter. Some had porch altars, where marriage contracts and legal agreements were signed. In some places the coroners court and the first school met here.

DRIPSTONE

A dripstone is a projecting stone moulding over doorways, windows and archways. It is used to throw off rainwater and to prevent it from running down tracery and glass. It was also used for ornament and sometimes heads, grotesques or other ornamentations are carved at either end of the dripstone.

GARGOYLE

Derives from the Old French 'gargouille', meaning throat.

A gargoyle is a projecting waterspout, usually incorporating a lead pipe. They were often carved in the shape of grotesque faces, beasts or figures.

Gargoyles appear to have been first introduced around 1200. As Celtic warriors were known to chop off the heads of defeated enemies and display them in public, it is thought this may account for the popularity of gargoyles.

MASONS MARKS

Each mason had his own registered mark which he scratched or chiselled onto every stone he carved. They could be passed from father to son. The marks were usually around two inches high, and were usually made up of straight lines. Registers of marks were maintained by the masons' guilds, to avoid duplication.

SCRATCH DIALS

Also known as Mass Dials, these were a very early and primitive form of sun dial.

They were used by priests to tell their congregation and passing travellers the time of the next service.

Usually in the form of a semi circle about ten inches across, they were scratched into the south wall of the church. A hole was bored at the centre and a number of lines were scratched from the hole to the arc. The priest would place a short stick in the hole and when the sun shone the shadow of the stick on to one of the lines, then the next service would start.

SUNDIAL

Most medieval churches have a sundial. It is usually situated above the porch or on the south face of the tower. Its main purpose was to ensure that the bell was rung at the correct time to mark daytime canonical hours. In many places, the sundial was the only reliable public timepiece until the early 19th century.

INSIDE YOUR CHURCH

FONT

Every medieval church contained a font. It was placed as close as possible to the main entrance of the church. This area was known as the baptistry. Today fonts may be found elsewhere in the church. The word font is derived from the Latin word 'fons' which means spring.

The font contains holy water used in baptism. They were originally large enough to allow the infant to be fully immersed, but in the middle ages it became the practice to baptise by partial immersion or pouring water over the head.

In 1236 it was ordered that all fonts should have a lockable lid. The water was generally only changed once per year, on Easter Sunday!

DEVIL'S DOOR

The north door, or 'Devil's Door', was in the north wall of the church. This door was traditionally left open during a baptism to let out any evil spirits that may have been in the child.

Following the reformation, many devil's doors were removed or blocked up.

NAVE

Derived from the Latin word 'navis', meaning ship. It is was thought that the nave roof resembled an upside-down ship, or the Ark of Salvation.

The nave is the main body of the church. In early times, the nave was unconsecrated and its maintenance was the responsibility of the congregation.

The nave was used for many functions. In early days it was the scene of trial by ordeal, the arms which every parish had to provide were stored here (the regimental colours still found in many churches remind us of this) and it was a venue for guild plays, processions, assemblies, for church ales, and business.

SEATING

For centuries there was no seating in the nave, although a stone ledge was sometimes provided for the elderly and infirm - 'the weakest go to the wall'.

With the increase in preaching came the need for seating. By the late 16th century an increasing number of churches had installed permanent benches.

Rows of benches are often erroneously referred to as PEWS. Pews are actually enclosed structures, and of a much later date. They had doors to protect from drafts. These box pews, as they became known, were sometimes provided with armchairs and cushions and perhaps even a stove and curtains.

POPPY HEADS

Poppy Heads are ornaments, often found on top of the upright end of seats and benches. They may be carved in the shape of figures, animals, beasts, foliage, or a number of other shapes.

PULPIT

The oldest mention of a pulpit in England dates from the 12th century. The oldest example still in existence is believed to date from about 1330. In the 15th century, only a fifth of churches had a pulpit, but in 1603 they were made compulsory.

LECTERN

The lectern is a reading desk on which the bible rests. It is usually made from

brass or wood, and is moveable.

Brass lecterns are usually in the shape of an eagle with outstretched wings. The eagle often stands on a ball which represents the world, while the bible on the eagle's back symbolises the gospel being carried to the corners of the earth.

BEQUEST BOARDS

Bequest boards hang on the walls of the church, usually in the nave. They list gifts of money made to local charities. Bequest boards also give an idea of the changing worth of money over time.

HATCHMENTS

A hatchment is a diamond-shaped board made of wood or wood and canvas. It bears the arms, crest or motto of a deceased person.

Hatchments were carried in front of funeral processions to the church, and afterwards hung on the gate of the deceased person's house. After it had been hung on the gates for several months, it was taken down and hung in the church.

ROYAL COAT OF ARMS

After the Pope granted Henry VIII the title 'Defender of the Faith', Royal coats of arms of the king or queen of the day were hung in churches. They were there to remind congregations of the link between the church and the state.

PARISH CHESTS

For hundreds of years, large chests with slots in the top were used for the collecting alms. Chests were also used for keeping parish registers, accounts, and other records. They usually had three or more locks, each with a separate key held by a different person. All had to be present to unlock the chest.

WALL PAINTINGS

In the middle ages, the interior walls of churches were like picture books of painted plaster. They were used as visual aids for the illiterate congregation. Walls were covered with murals depicting saints and scenes from the scriptures.

The DOOM was painted on the wall above the chancel arch. It generally depicted

Christ presiding in majesty over the Last Judgement, in which the naked souls of the dead rose from their graves to be weighed by St Michael and received by the angels into eternal paradise or dragged by devils into the fiery mouth of hell.

STAINED GLASS

Stained glass is used to add beauty and colour to churches. Often windows show biblical scenes. Most medieval stained glass was lost following the Reformation and during the Civil War, when it was smashed by the iconoclasts.

There was a revival of interest in stained glass during the Victorian era, and much of what we see today is from that time. Victorian stained glass was usually installed as a memorial to local people or to commemorate significant events.

GREEN MEN

The Green Man is one of the most powerful and enduring pagan symbols and was originally a Celtic fertility symbol.

Green Men are found in a variety of forms in the ornamental stonework and woodwork of medieval churches. They are male heads peering through foliage, which is often growing from their eyes, mouth, ears and nostrils. They are usually found on roof bosses, capitals, corbels and misericords.

CLERESTORIES

In larger churches, the upper level of the nave wall was often pierced by windows to increase the amount of light. When aisles were added in medieval times, many churches raised the nave wall, so that a clerestory could be installed.

AISLE

From the Latin 'ala' meaning wing. An aisle is a sideways extension of a nave, from which it is divided by an arcade of arches. Some churches were built with aisles, but they were usually added to earlier buildings. This may be to reflect the growing population.

ARCADE

An arcade is a range of arches supported on piers or columns. The term is also used to describe the arched division between the nave of a church and its aisles.

COLUMNS

Arcades rest on columns. The first columns would have been made of wood. They are like trees and remind us of ancient pagan beliefs and practices.

Capitals, the top part of columns, are often carved with leaves or other similar decorations, reinforcing the connection with trees.

CHAPELS

The term chapel came to be used for sanctuaries where Holy Relics were preserved and where prayers were said. From around 88 AD it was also used for sacred buildings with a status less than that of a church.

CHANTRY CHAPELS

By the 15th century most large churches had at least one chantry chapel, in which a priest was employed to sing masses for the soul of the founder of the chapel and others nominated by him. In town churches chantry chapels were often supported by trade guilds for the benefit of their members. Chantry chapels were abolished at the time of the Reformation.

CHANCEL ARCH

The arched opening in the east wall of the nave, providing access to the chancel.

ROOD SCREEN

In medieval churches, the rood screen was a decorative stone or wooden screen which separated the nave from the chancel, and had a central gate. Most were pierced with a lattice work of carved wood and richly decorated.

GREAT ROOD

A rood is a carved image of Christ on the cross, made of wood or stone. The medieval 'great rood' was a carved and painted crucifix, erected on a pedestal above the rood screen. It had the figures of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist on either side of Jesus on the cross.

ROOD LOFT

Many medieval churches had a rood loft, or singing gallery, on top of the rood

screen often supported by a coving. In most cases the only evidence left that these existed are the blocked up doorways that led to them.

CHANCEL / PRESBYTERY

Chancel derives from the Latin 'cancelli', meaning grating or lattice. The term is used to describe a presbytery which is separated from the nave by a rood screen.

From 1215, it was considered necessary to enclose the chancel by a screen - 'to preserve the mystery of the Eucharist' and to separate the holy part of the church from the sometimes rowdy secular activities of the nave.

ALTAR

The altar is the heart of the church. It usually stands at the east end of the chancel or presbytery, in an area known as the sanctuary.

The altar has two principal symbolic meanings. First, it is a sacrificial altar. Christian writers saw Jesus as a sacrificed lamb in his crucifixion. The altar remembers and repeats that sacrifice. Second, it is a table for a communal meal, remembering and repeating the last supper. The altar is frequently marked by five crosses, referring to the five wounds of Christ.

REREDOS

Behind the altar may be a reredos. It can take the form of a curtain, a picture or carvings in stone or wood. Sometimes it has niches containing figures of saints.

SEDILIA

These are recessed seats, usually three, for priests. They are set into the south wall of the chancel, are usually made of stone and may be canopied.

PISCINA

The Latin word 'piscina' literally means fish pond. The piscina is a niche containing a shallow stone basin with a drain hole, for disposing of the holy water used to wash the communion vessels during the service. A double piscina also has a bowl for the priest to wash his hands.

EASTER SEPULCHRE

Easter is the most important festival of the Christian year. An Easter sepulchre is a recess, usually in the north wall of the sanctuary. At Easter time it is symbolic of Jesus' burial in the tomb following the crucifixion.

AUMBRY

A small lockable cupboard or recess in a wall, usually the north wall near to the altar. It houses the sacred vessels used during the service and communion.

MISERICORD

Some choir stalls have misericords. They are hinged, tip-up wooden seats which, when up, have a second smaller seat on the underside for the user to rest on when standing position. Sometimes the misericord seat has carved decorations.

MEMORIALS

In 658 burials inside the church were sanctioned. It was normally reserved for people of importance.

Some early memorials were coffin lids, made of stone but marked with only a cross. Later versions have more elaborately engraved imagery and wording. During the 12th century, effigies began to appear. They were carved in low relief.

In the 13th century effigies of bishops and knights were common. Knights were shown in full armour. Some tombs featured a traditional sculpted effigy on top, with a skeletal cadaver underneath.

An alternative was an engraved brass. Cheaper than stone, brasses were actually made from latten, an alloy of copper and zinc. During the 14th and 15th centuries, brasses of rich merchants began to appear alongside those of knights, lords and ladies. Attempts at life-like portraiture did not exist, but fashions were portrayed with minute attention to detail.

Some of the most sumptuous tombs of the 15th and 16th centuries were encased in their own miniature chapels. The Victorian fascination with death was shown by an elaborate range of styles of tombs and memorials, including neoclassical, Egyptian, and high gothic.



KNOW YOUR GURDWARA

A Gurdwara is a Sikh temple.

During the times of the early Gurus, Sikh places of worship were referred to as dharamsalas. They were a place where Sikhs could gather to hear the Guru speak or sing hymns. As the Sikh population continued to grow Guru Hargobind introduced the word Gurdwara, meaning the gateway through which the Guru could be reached.

Any place where the Guru Granth Sahib is installed and treated with due respect can be referred to as a Gurdwara, whether it is a room in a house or a separate building.

Three main functions are carried out in all Gurdwaras. Kirtan is the singing of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib; Katha is the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib; and, the Langar, which is the free vegetarian community kitchen for visitors of all faiths. The Gurdwara also serves the Sikh community in other ways, including libraries of Sikh literature, schools and charitable work.

The word 'Sikh' means 'disciple' in Punjabi. Sikhs are the disciples of God who follow the writings and teachings of the Ten Sikh Gurus.

The first recorded Sikh settler in Britain was Maharajah Duleep Singh. He was the last ruler of the Sikh kingdom of Punjab and was exiled in the UK in 1849 after the Anglo-Sikh wars.

The first Gurdwara in the UK was established in 1911, at Putney in London.

Many Sikh immigrants came to the UK in the 1950s, most settling in London, Birmingham and West Yorkshire. They were mainly men from the Punjab seeking work in British industry, which had a shortage of labour. People wanted to leave the Punjab largely because of the aftermath of India's independence in 1947. Thousands of Sikhs from East Africa also came to the UK around the same time.

There are an estimated half a million Sikhs in the UK today.

OUTSIDE YOUR GURDWARA

NISHAN SAHIB

Nishan Sahib is the name given to the flag which flies outside every Gurdwara. It is a triangular piece of ochre or saffron coloured cloth with the Khanda emblem (the symbol of Sikhism) in the middle. The flagpost has a khanda or spear on top.

INSIDE YOUR GURDWARA

DARBAR SAHIB

The main hall inside a Gurdwara.

GURU GRANTH SAHIB

The Guru Granth Sahib is a holy book revered as the Eternal Guru of Sikhism. It is placed on a takhat (platform) or throne in a central position in the hall. It is covered with cloths when not being read and is the focal point in the Gurdwara. The Guru Granth Sahib should be ceremonially opened every day. Except for special circumstances it should not be kept open during the night. There will be offerings of food, money and flowers at the foot of the Guru Granth Sahib.

PALKI

The palki is the canopy covering the takhat. The top of the canopy is usually engraved with 'Waheguru' which means 'wonderful lord'.

CHAUR SAHIB

This is a fan constructed from yak hair with a wooden or metal handle. It is waved over the Guru Granth Sahib as a sign of respect.

KARA PARSHAD

This is holy food, served to the congregation and visitors. It is a sweet flour-based oily vegetarian food. It is placed near the Guru Granth Sahib during worship then stirred with a small Kirpan (sword). It is then given to all present as a sign of equality and unity.



KNOW YOUR HINDU TEMPLE

A Hindu temple is a house of worship for followers of Hinduism. They are usually specifically reserved for religious and spiritual activities.

A Hindu temple can be a separate structure or a part of a building. They are usually dedicated to one primary deity, but some are dedicated to several deities.

Hindu temples are known by different names in different parts of the world. The word mandir or mandira is used in many languages, including Hindi. Mandir is a Sanskrit word for where the mind becomes still and the soul floats freely to seek the source of life, peace, joy and comfort. For centuries, the mandir has remained a centre of life – a common community place where people forget their differences and voluntarily unite to serve society.

Hinduism in the UK dates from the early 19th century when there were Hindu visitors from the princely states of India. Raja Ram Mohun Roy was the founder of a Hindu reform movement in India. He came to England in 1829 to visit his Christian friends and had audience with King William IV.

Before India's independence in 1947, the number of Hindu immigrants to the UK was relatively small. After independence, the economic conditions of the 1960s compelled many Indians to immigrate in search of a better life. The UK was popular due to the fact that Indians didn't require a visa to enter or live there.

A large number of Hindus migrated to the UK in the 1970s, after the expulsion of Gurjarati Hindus from Uganda. The last wave of migration began in 1990s and continues to this day. The 1990s saw refugees from Sri Lanka and Hindu professionals (including doctors and software engineers from India) settling in the UK.

The Hindu population in the UK is estimated at 750,000 and there are over 150 Hindu Temples.

INSIDE YOUR HINDU TEMPLE

MURTIS

The focal point of the temple are the shrines where the sacred murtis are housed. Murtis are the images or icons of divine spirits that are representations of God. They can be worshipped at home or at the Temple. Murtis are made according to the prescription of the Silpa Sastras, which are ancient artistic texts in India that describe the standards for Hindu religious iconography.

OFFERINGS

Hindu worship is primarily an individual act rather than a communal. It involves making personal offerings to the deities. Hindus repeat the name of their favourite Gods and Goddesses and say mantras (prayers). Offerings such as water, flowers, fruit and incense are placed before the Murtis.

TEMPLE WORSHIP

Hindus believe in one God, Brahman, who was the originator of everything. However, they believe that his work is now done and the task of creating, maintaining and destroying the world is up to three main Gods; Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; and other lesser Gods representing different expressions of Brahman.

Hindus worship various Gods depending on the characteristics they wish to emulate and according to their needs. Hindu homes have a shrine where offerings are made and prayers said. The shrine may be a room, a small altar or just a statue of their chosen deity.

At a Hindu Temple, different areas of the building have different symbolic meanings. The central shrine is the heart of the worshipper and the tower represents the flight to heaven.



KNOW YOUR MOSQUE

A mosque is a place where Muslims come together for prayer. Muslims often refer to the mosque by its Arabic name, masjid.

Mosques are also known for their general importance to the Muslim community and many are places to learn about Islam and meet fellow believers.

All adult Muslims are required to offer prayer, or Salat, five times each day. Most mosques offer all five required prayers daily: before sunrise (fajr), at midday (Zuhr), in the afternoon (Asr), after sunset (Maghrib), and in the evening (isha'a). It is obligatory for Muslims to offer prayer inside a mosque for the Friday prayer. According to hadith offering prayer in a congregation at a mosque is considered more virtuous than offering prayer alone as it illustrates the idea of brotherhood.

The first Muslim communities in the UK were found in port towns. Around 300 years ago, sailors were recruited in India to work for the East India Company. Some decided to stay in Britain and integrated into the local community.

The next peak of Muslim immigration came in 1869 with the opening of the Suez Canal. The increase in trade caused a demand for men to work in ports and on ships. Most of these immigrants came from the Yemen.

From the 1950s, Muslims came to Britain from the former colonies in the Indian subcontinent and East Africa. Large Muslim populations developed in many British towns and cities.

The first mosque in Britain is recorded as having been in Cardiff, in 1860. Today there are over 1.5 million Muslims in the UK making up 2.8% of the population.

OUTSIDE YOUR MOSQUE

MINARET

A minaret is a tall, slender tower that usually is situated at one of the corners of

the mosque. Traditionally a person called a 'muezzin' stands at the top of the tower and calls worshippers to prayer. In some cases, loud speakers are used. In most UK mosques, the call to prayer is only heard inside the mosque.

DOME

In purpose built mosques a dome is often placed directly above the main prayer hall, and may signify heaven and the sky. Domes can either be round or onion-shaped. The dome helps the Imam project his voice around the prayer hall.

INSIDE YOUR MOSQUE

MIHRAB

The Mihrab is a niche or arch in the east wall of the main hall. It indicates the direction worshippers should face in order to face Mecca.

MINBAR

The pulpit next to the Mihrab from where the Imam gives sermons and lectures.

ARABIC TEXT

There is often Arabic writing on the walls of the mosque. This could be the name of God, Allah; the name of Muhammad; or verses from the Qur'an.

CLOCKS

There are a series of clocks on the wall. They indicate the times for prayers.

ABLUTION FACILITIES

Ritual purification precedes all prayers. Mosques have ablution fountains or other facilities for washing in their entryways or courtyards. Shoes are not allowed, so there are shelves to put them on in a cloakroom.

MORTUARY

Some mosques have a facility for washing and storing the deceased. By Islamic law, someone who has passed away must be buried within 24 hours.



KNOW YOUR SYNAGOGUE

A Synagogue is a Jewish house of worship. Synagogues usually have a large hall for prayer, smaller rooms for study and sometimes a social hall and offices.

Many Orthodox and Conservative Jews use the Yiddish term 'shul' in everyday speech. 'Synagogue' is reserved for formal occasions. Whenever any group of ten men comes together, they form a minyan, and are eligible to conduct public prayer services.

It is a myth that synagogues are based on the destroyed Holy Temple in Jerusalem. There is no set blueprint for and the architectural shapes and interior designs of synagogues vary greatly.

Judaism in the UK was first recorded during the Norman Conquest of 1066, mentioning Jews who arrived with William the Conqueror. However, it is believed that there has been a Jewish community here since Roman times.

In 1290 King Edward I expelled Jews from England and Wales. There was never an expulsion from Scotland. Oliver Cromwell lifted the restrictions in 1656.

The Jewish community remained comparatively small until the late 19th century, when there was mass Jewish immigration from Russia due to anti-Semitism. Britain developed a reputation for tolerance and became a haven for Jews fleeing the Holocaust in the 1930s and 1940s.

Today there are an estimated 350,000 Jewish people in the UK and around 350 synagogues.

INSIDE YOUR SYNAGOGUE

ARK/TORAH SCROLLS

The Ark is the cupboard where the Torah Scrolls are kept. These contain the text of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible written by hand on pieces of

parchment which is then sewn together and bound to two wooden poles to form one scroll. They have a sash to hold the two sides of the Scroll and are covered with a decorated sleeve with two holes at the top through which the handles can be seen. Three silver pieces hang from the scroll; a breastplate with a small window identifying the reading at which it is stationed; a stick with the shape of a hand at the end called a Yad, which is used to point when reading; and, on the top, handles are silver ornaments with bells.

Most synagogues will have a collection of several scrolls. They are usually only taken out to be read on the Sabbath (Saturday). A maximum of three may be used on any one day. In front of the Ark hangs an ornate curtain called a 'parochet' and over the Ark is often an inscription of a well know Hebrew phrase.

The Ark is situated on the east wall of the Synagogue in the direction of (closest to) Jerusalem and is named after the wooden chest, which held the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai.

TABLETS

A model of the two tablets on which the Hebrew words of the Ten Commandments are written usually hangs somewhere above the Ark. There often only have the first few words of each commandment.

SEATS/BOXES

On either side of the Ark are usually seats for the Rabbi and Cantor or the other lay leaders of the synagogue.

LECTERN

At the front but several feet away from the ark stands a lectern from which the Rabbi delivers a sermon.

LAMP

An Eternal Light (called Ner Tamid) hangs above the Ark. The light is always burning as a symbol of God's presence.

BIMAH

In Orthodox Synagogues, the Bimah is in the centre of the building. In a Reform

Synagogue, it is usually close to the Ark.

The Bimah is the platform from which the service is led and on which sits the desk for Torah readings. During the service, the Ark is ceremonially opened and the Torah Scroll is carried in procession to the reading desk.

MENORAH

This is a 9-branched candelabrum. It has been a Jewish symbol for 2200 years and recalls the overthrow of the Assyrian Greeks by the Maccabean Jews in the days of the second Temple in Jerusalem. In the Temple itself there was also a 7-branched candelabra. The menorah is only lit on the festival of Chanukah, which generally falls in December.

SEATING

Seats surround the Bimah on three sides, with perhaps a warden's box in front of the Bimah. Most synagogues leave the space between the Bimah and the Ark vacant. In Orthodox synagogues, men and women sit separately. There is either an upstairs gallery running along three walls or a downstairs area usually behind the men with a divider called a 'mechitzah'. In a Reform Synagogue, men and women can sit together. Seats often have boxes in front or beneath them in which people store their personal books and belongings

BOOKS

There are shelves with two types of books. One is a prayer book with Hebrew on one side and a corresponding English translation. The second is a Bible so that the congregant can follow the reading of the Torah Scroll. Hebrew reads from right to left so a book is closed the opposite way to an English one. There maybe other books of religious interest.

BOARDS

There are usually boards that list the name of the portion that is to be read on the Sabbath and the page numbers to find it.

WINDOWS

Windows are frequently stained glass and will depict scenes from the Bible or Festival celebrations. Many have 12 windows depicting each of the 12 tribes.

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