

# Hidden Stories Open Doors

## Discover Churches

### Tourism Resource Guide

#### Case studies and examples



**Discover  
Churches**  
Herefordshire & Shropshire

The guide has been written and collated as part of the Discover Churches project in Herefordshire and Shropshire.

Here are some great case study examples of hidden stories being used to encourage visitors. Also, some brilliant examples of open doors; tourism and the wider use of churches, chapels and meeting houses from across the country.

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## Hidden stories

It is easy to take the 'people stories' associated with your church for granted, because you have known about them for a long time. Whether someone from recent or ancient history, make the most of your connections. Try to tell their whole story, if there are difficult aspects but tell them openly and frankly.

**Is somebody unusual commemorated in the church? Perhaps the mother of numerous children or somebody who lived to be a centenarian? If so, make the most of it.**

- **Leominster** Priory : There is a memorial to Mary Rodneidgh in gratitude for her faithful service of 25 years as parish nurse.
- St Mary & St Nicholas, **Beaumaris**, Anglesey : there is a brass plaque on the wall of the nave recording gifts to the poor people of the town. One of the donors is named as 'Tabora the Black'. The parish register describes her as an Ethiopian. She probably came to Wales as a slave and was in service with the local aristocrat, Baron Hill, who paid for the education of her son James.
- **Dixton** church, near Monmouth : There is a brass gauge recording the more memorable floods of the river Wye, the last being after Storm Denise in 2020.
- **Llangattock** church, near Crickhowell in Monmouthshire : Among the wall monuments under the tower is one to Anne Lewis, who died on 21 February 1773 at the age of 72. As a midwife, 'she was an instrument in the hand of Providence to bring into this world 716 children'.
- **Clodock** church, in west Herefordshire : There is a 9th century tombstone with an indistinct and bad Latin inscription commemorating,

HOC TUMULUM RETINET(T), MEMBRA PUDIC(E), GUINNDA CAR(AE) CONGU(GIS), QUAE FUIT IPSA (IB)IDEM

'that faithful woman the dear wife of Guinnda who herself was born in this place'.

More information : [ewyaslacy.org.uk/](http://ewyaslacy.org.uk/)

**The human stories behind monuments and tombstones are easy for visitors to miss, they will be grateful to you for pointing them out.**

- St Peter, **Peterchurch**, Herefordshire : In the churchyard you will find a grave commemorating Private Peter Jones VC who fought in the battle of Rourke's Drift.
- **Wormsley** church, Herefordshire : In the churchyard are the graves of two local brothers, Thomas and Richard Knight. Richard was a prominent 19<sup>th</sup> century archaeologist, and Thomas was an apple grower who pioneered several new varieties of that fruit. Thomas Knight's epitaph describes him in these terms:

'He possessed a mind capable of investigation the most secret works of nature, a heart overflowing with true charity to all mankind, a hand which never refused assistance to the deserving or withheld relief or consolation from the poor...'

- Hundreds of miles apart you can find commemoration of two men who were both diplomatically active for decades in Eastern Europe, and both became MPs.

In **Strachur** churchyard, in the Cowal district of Argyllshire is the grave of Sir Fitzroy MacLean, a pre-war diplomat in the Soviet Union, who also worked with Tito and his partisans in Yugoslavia, and became an MP after the war, but maintained his close Eastern Bloc contacts. He lived at Strachur House, and his huge front lawn was the playing field for the village shinty team. Unlikely spectators at matches over the years included the King of Nepal on one occasion, and Messrs Kosygin and Gromyko from the Soviet Union on another! Ian Fleming was a good friend of MacLean's and many think that Sir Fitzroy, with his secretive diplomatic contacts, was the model for James Bond.

Some hundreds of miles south, the small village church of St Nicholas, at **Brushford** on the southern edge of Exmoor, has a chapel designed by Edwin Lutyens. Why would the brilliant architect and planner, who masterminded the creation of New Delhi, the capital built for the Indian Empire, be involved in this country church? The answer is that it is a memorial to local MP and diplomat, Aubrey Herbert, who helped secure Albanian independence; it is said that twice he was offered the chance to be King of Albania and twice declined!

**Thinking wider than just the church or chapel, it might be that the local community was part of a local historic event or even a regional or national one.**

- First records of a church at **Brampton Bryan** date back to 10<sup>th</sup> July 1275 in the Cantilupe Register of Thomas de Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford. The present church dates from 1656 and is notable for being one of only six churches in England to be built, or rebuilt, in the eleven year history of England known as the Commonwealth. This unusual church, commissioned by Robert Harley and paid for by him/and his son, was originally a straight-forward Puritan 'preaching box'. A broad nave and chancel in one covered with an outstanding triple hammer roof structure, which tradition suggest was reclaimed from the nearby castle ruins. The first service to take place was that of Sir Robert's funeral.

With the award of Heritage Lottery funding, a major programme of repairs, including complete reroofing, dendrochronological research to discover the provenance of the present roof, stonework, rainwater goods and drainage started in 2021 and finished in 2022 and has removed the church from the 'Heritage at Risk Register'. During the English Civil War, in the absence of her husband and sons, Lady Brilliana Harley defended Brampton Bryan Castle during a three month siege by Royalist troops.

Included in the funding was the development of school information package explaining how Brampton Bryan explaining how Brampton Bryan was involved in the Civil War.

More information : [bramptonbryan.org.uk](http://bramptonbryan.org.uk)

- St Mary Magdalene, **Hucknall**, Nottinghamshire is blessed with an unusually rich heritage which, with the help of a National Lottery Heritage Fund, is now excellently displayed website. Key to encouraging visitors was the church joining Visit Nottinghamshire and placing leaflets in Nottingham Tourism Centre and at local hotels. St Mary's is not only the final resting place of Romantic poet Lord Byron but also of his daughter Ada Lovelace, who has become increasingly recognised for her work on the Analytical Engine, Charles Babbage's proposed mechanical general-purpose computer, back in the 1830s and 1840s. Other local figures who are celebrated here include the bare-knuckle boxer 'Big Ben' Caunt, the Heavyweight Champion of England in the 1830s and the composer Eric Coates of many a popular orchestral piece, including the wartime 'Calling all Workers' and 'Music While you Work'. Using local volunteers who undertook the detailed research, they have created colourful and informative displays and leaflets about all of the above. There is also a section devoted to the 20 stained glass windows produced by the renowned Kempe Studios in London, fine examples of the Victorian Gothic Revival.

More information : [hucknallparishchurch.org.uk/hucknall-heritage/](http://hucknallparishchurch.org.uk/hucknall-heritage/)

- The story of **Eyam** village during the year of the Plague, 1665. When it was realised that the Plague had come to the Eyam through some cloth delivered from London, William Mompesson, the Rector, supported by Thomas Stanley, the former incumbent, feared that this would spread the disease over a wider area and asked villagers to quarantine themselves. An authentic history of those fearful months is vividly told in an exhibition in St Lawrence, Eyam and at Eyam Museum. And as you walk between the two, you pass cottages many of which carry a plaque commemorating past inhabitants who died.

More information : [eyamchurch.org/village-history/](http://eyamchurch.org/village-history/)

- In 2015, St Michael & All Angels, **Kingsland** had its quinquennial review, with the architect reporting several serious defects that required immediate attention by the Parochial Church Council. With little or no money available to spend on repairs.

A detailed list of agreed activities that would be for benefit of the local community was produced. These vary from the way in which the churchyard is managed, to the setting up of history clubs, and forming groups to help the elderly and those with dementia. Whilst the capital work has been ongoing there has been a great deal of interest by the community including hard hat tours, learning about the restoration work, and others have learnt skills such as repointing in lime mortar.

The capital work has now been completed, and we are turning our attention to the activities scheduled through until the end of 2023, making the total time for the project to restore the church to be just over 7 years. All being well Kingsland will have an historic Grade I listed building that is in such a condition as to be able to withstand the ravages of time and weather for the next 100 years!

More information : [kingslandchurch.co.uk](http://kingslandchurch.co.uk)

- The **Camden 4**. Not everyone is lucky enough to have a tourist magnet in the shape of Victoria and Albert and proximity to Osborne House, but even relatively recently built churches have a heritage and In London the Heritage Lottery Fund has given a grant to the Camden 4, a group of four churches built in the last 250 years encouraging parishioners to research the history of their churches and give guided tours on selective open days.

More information : [london.anglican.org/articles/national-lottery-grant-welcomed-by-four-camden-churches/](http://london.anglican.org/articles/national-lottery-grant-welcomed-by-four-camden-churches/)

- Eglwys **Llanbadrig**, the church of St Patrick, Cemaes , is open to visitors during daylight hours despite being located on a lonely part of the Anglesey coast, with few other buildings in the vicinity and only seabirds for company. It receives a steady stream of visitors who are intrigued by the legend that the church might have been founded by Saint Patrick in 440 AD and is perhaps the oldest surviving church in Wales. It sits on the windswept headland overlooking the small islet where St Patrick is said to have been shipwrecked on a voyage to Ireland. St Patrick took refuge in a small cave with a nearby well and he commemorated his escape from danger by founding the original Eglwys Llanbadrig – Saint Patrick's

Church – which was replaced with a stone version in the 12th century, and then rebuilt in the 14th century.

More information : [cemaes.wales/local-places/llanbadrig-church/](https://cemaes.wales/local-places/llanbadrig-church/)

- St Mildred's Church, **Whippingham**, was designed by Prince Albert and used by Queen Victoria and her family whenever they visited their Osborne estate on the Isle of Wight. Parishioners offer guided tours to coach borne visitors, charging £5 a head (which includes a free copy of the church guidebook) and the income, along with donations from well-wishers, has enabled the parish to build a village hall, where the café and second-hand bookshop generates additional income as well as providing a popular drop-in centre for local people.

More information : [whippinghameastcoves.org.uk/st-mildreds-church-whippingham/](http://whippinghameastcoves.org.uk/st-mildreds-church-whippingham/)

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## Open doors

Church tourism has a role to play in providing tourists or visitors with an enjoyable experience or visit. It can also be a catalyst for change.

The positive benefit for an areas culture and society can help to raise awareness of our common heritage; helps to encourage the interest of tourists and visitors in local values and communities, with a 'payback' in developing a sense of support and pride in the local community, its culture and history.

- The Church of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows, **Dolgellau** is an example of a church that is simply open during daylight hours, unattended, for anyone to enter and enjoy. Consecrated in 1963, it is a serene and beautiful Catholic church, designed by the Maltese parish priest, Father Scalpell, built from the local grey stone to harmonise with the vernacular architectural style of this southern Snowdonia town.. Outstanding features include the stained glass by Hardman Studios and a bronze crucifix by Giannino Castiglione, sculptor of the bronze doors of Milan Cathedral. The church regularly hosts lectures on such subjects as Zen and the practice of yoga, poetry and music inspired by the local landscape, and the insights to be gained from the study of philosophy and psychology.

More information : [taking-stock.org.uk/building/dolgellau-our-lady-of-seven-sorrows/](http://taking-stock.org.uk/building/dolgellau-our-lady-of-seven-sorrows/)

- The Cathedral Church of Our Lady and St Peter of Alcantara, **Shrewsbury** goes one step further than Dolgellau in that it often is not only open to visitors, it has enthusiastic greeters who will welcome you to the building, give you a short printed guide and answer questions.

This is the cathedral church of the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury and was EW Pugin's first major commission, which he executed at the tender age of nineteen, having just succeeded as head of the firm to his late father, the better known AWN Pugin. The cathedral has been enriched over the years and includes an original Minton tiled floor, high altar, reredos and font from the 1860s by Pugin, a fine baptistry with elaborate wrought iron font cover, Stations of the Cross carved by Philip Lindsey Clark and installed in 1954 and a rich collection of stained glass designed by the nun and Arts and Crafts artist Margaret Rope (1882-1953).

More information : [www.shrewsburycathedral.co.uk/](http://www.shrewsburycathedral.co.uk/)

- St Martin's church, in **Scarborough**, has become a focal point for the community, a regular meeting place for locals and a treat for visitors thanks to its newly developed kitchen and reordered space at the tower end of church where the Beggars Belief Café serves excellent homemade food with a warm welcome. Visitors come for the fine collection of William Morris and Burne-Jones stained glass, but they stay for the signature dish of Welsh rarebit, homemade soup, tea, coffee and cake whilst soaking up the beautiful surroundings of the church. In addition, there are sell out specialist 'bistro nights', with music and an intimate candle lit atmosphere.

More information : <https://www.friendsofstmartins.co.uk/>

- St Michael, **Llanfihangel-y-Creuddyn**, Ceredigion: this community has a small population but the whole village got behind the project to improve the visitor experience with a newly designed staircase that climbs the central tower for glimpses of the medieval timbers of the nave roof (added between 1502 and 1528), the bell frame (tree ring dated to 1537-8) and the sweeping views from the roof. The church received grants from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Wolfson Foundation and Ceredigion County Council and it won £10,000 from the National Churches Trust when local people helped it top the poll to find the most creative restoration scheme in a friends and members vote.

This is one of 17 churches on the 'Peaceful Places' heritage tourism trail, launched in 2014, taking visitors on a journey to discover wildlife and natural beauty, family history, architecture, art and craftsmanship

More information : [peaceful-places.com/about-trail](http://peaceful-places.com/about-trail)

- All Saints, **Hereford** is a remarkable re-ordered Grade I listed 11<sup>th</sup> century church has been a focus of Hereford life for over 800 years. Its dramatic twisted spire dominates the skyline, and the medieval interior is an inspired meeting of the sacred and the secular. The building is a church, a community centre and for 25 years a café providing delicious, home made food and drink using local ingredients.

It is a place where people of all faiths and beliefs are welcome to pray, worship, talk, savour the flavours of the cafe or use the space for all kinds of performances and meetings.

More information : [westherefordteam.org.uk](http://westherefordteam.org.uk) or [billskitchen.uk](http://billskitchen.uk)

- St Pancras, **Widcombe in the Moor**, Devon, provides a simple but very effective welcome that includes information about the local community as well as the church. Members of the congregation took the initiative in 2016 to apply for funding with the aim of encouraging visitors to stay longer and develop a deeper understanding of the heritage of the area, with its links to the ghostly folk ballad Widcombe Fair. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the project called 'Moor Than Meets the Eye' brought together public, private and voluntary sector organisations to deliver a project that developed a coherent series of signs, displays and leaflets. Placed in the church and around the village, these provide information about specific historic buildings, tin mining heritage, Victorian tourism and people associated with the village. Many local businesses have benefitted from the effort to promote the village as a core visitor attraction on Dartmoor, including the local shop, pub and café. Many more people now visit the church where visitors are encouraged to light candles, read prayer cards and simply sit and enjoy the peace of the church. As a reminder of their visit, the church encourages people to take home a small prayer flag, 'carrying the prayers of St Pancras out into the world'.

More information : [ashburtonandmoor.org.uk/widcombe-in-the-moor/](http://ashburtonandmoor.org.uk/widcombe-in-the-moor/)

- The 200 year old United Reformed Church chapel, in **Bingley** near Bradford in Yorkshire, now opens once a month from 10am to 2pm on a Saturday with two stewards in attendance to welcome visitors and answer their questions. Residents of the village, members of the congregation and their friends are being encouraged to record any memories that they wish to share. Special oral history open days are publicised in shops, the library, pubs and cafes and volunteers are on hand on to record such memories by phones, iPad or laptop. Ultimately these will be presented in a book that will remain in the church for visitors to enjoy.
- **Fetlar** Kirk, on the Shetland Island of that name, has become the first Church of Scotland kirk in Shetland to be sold to a local group. The Friends of Fetlar Kirk was specially set up to facilitate the purchase. Their wish is that the kirk should continue to be used for acts of worship, but also have a wider community use and they hope to install a toilet soon. The Church of Scotland has begun a programme of offering for sale some little used churches, so other opportunities of this sort may come along.
- To encourage churches in the diocese to consider opening their doors, **Llandaff Diocese** hosted a nine day Churches Unlocked Festival, featuring ten churches that were not normally open and that did not

fit the standard pattern of a medieval heritage church. Not only were the churches open daily during the festival, attracting people who visited on foot, by bike and by car to visit them all, guided by a specially printed leaflet, many of them also hosted events, including tower tours, lectures on church history, a harp recital, music from a local orchestra providing opportunities to learn an instrument to children from deprived backgrounds, a 1950s themed tea party, circus skills workshops and a children's competition to design a stained window.

This pilot project proved to be very popular and was successful in encouraging people who do not normally go to church to explore the building amid their communities. The festival will be repeated in years to come with a growing number of churches.

More information : [llandaff.churchinwales.org.uk/en/faith-and-ministry/churches-unlocked-festival/](http://llandaff.churchinwales.org.uk/en/faith-and-ministry/churches-unlocked-festival/)