

AN ANCIENT SITE AND A SPECIAL PLACE

There has been a church here since at least 1291 when the Norman tower was built, and there may have been a place of worship here even longer than that.

The Kerry Ridgeway runs past the church, an ancient trackway between England and Wales; up to about 150 years ago it was still used by drovers walking their cattle from the Welsh mountains to the Midlands to sell.

As well as being a special green space full of history and nature, the churchyard tells us a lot about people from Bishop's Castle's past.

WONDERFUL WILDLIFE

Old churchyards like this one are full of wildlife. In the past, the UK contained many meadows full of wildflowers and different grasses. Most of this meadowland has been destroyed but the grassland in churchyards is still full of these different plants.

Wildflowers growing here provide food for insects like butterflies which attract a range of birds, who also love being able to nest in the trees or hide away in the ivy.

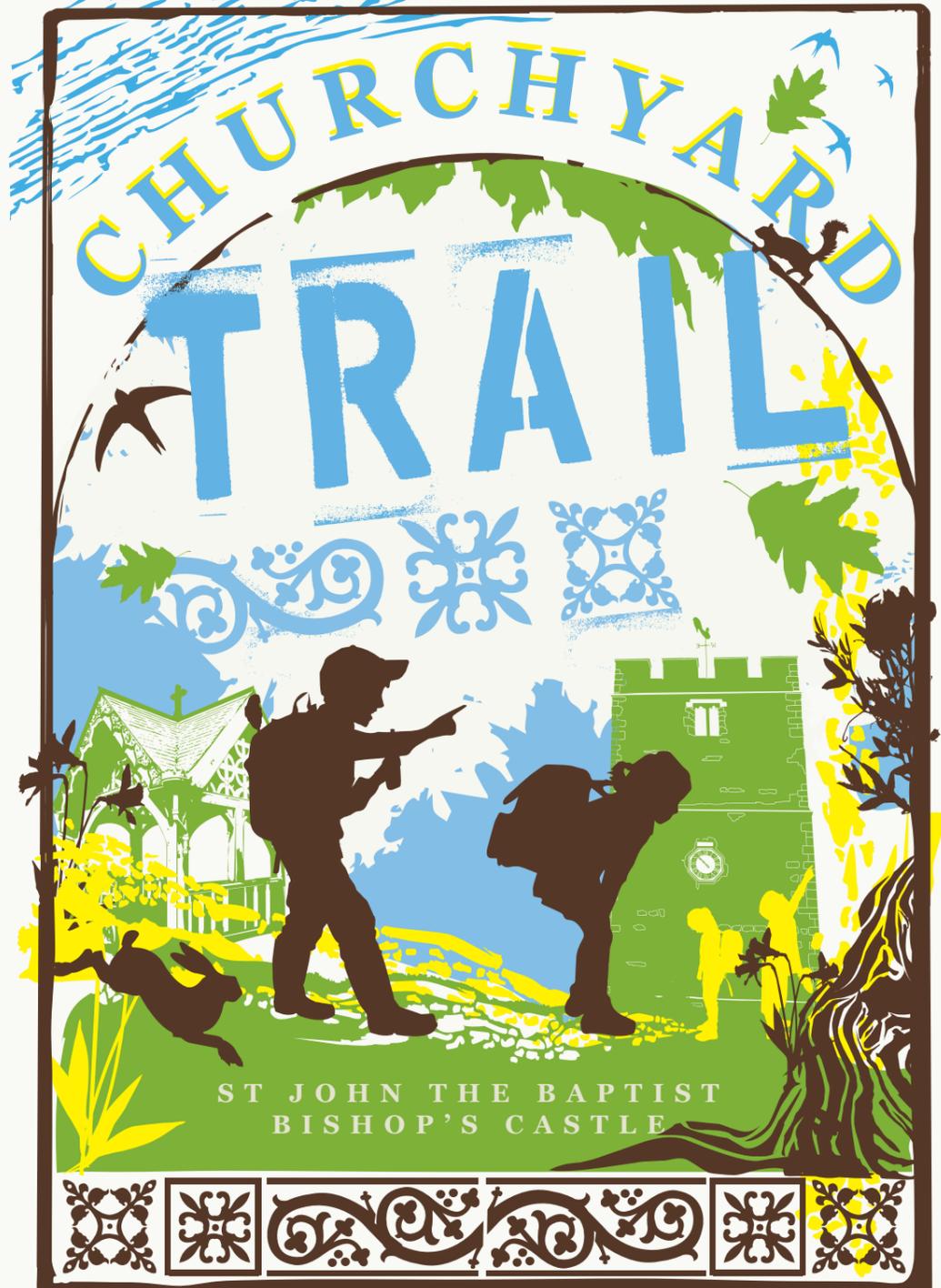
Frogs and toads are very happy in the damp areas of long grass and under piles of stone and wood, and you may find slow worms which look like snakes but are actually lizards with no legs!

Whatever time of year you visit, there is always something interesting to see. Look for nesting birds in spring, grasshoppers amongst the long summer grass, scarlet, orange, pink and yellow waxcap fungi by the war memorial in autumn and thrushes such as redwing, fieldfare and mistle thrush in winter feeding on yew berries.

This churchyard is managed by volunteers who have also recorded the wildlife they see. So far we have found 170 different species and there are more to be found!



Let's keep burial grounds beautiful!



1 LYCHGATE

Lychgate comes from an Old English word "lich" which means corpse, or dead body, and the coffin would be rested in the lychgate before the burial service.

There used to be a step up into the lychgate. This would have been a relief in the days when there wasn't a proper drainage system in the town and rainwater (and sometimes worse!) ran down the street. There is a story that there were stepping stones crossing the road to allow people to get to Sunday service without getting their feet wet – or very smelly!

2 THE NORMAN TOWER

The tower is the oldest part of the church and the only bit remaining from an original Norman church. Look up at the top of the tower. Does it remind you of a castle? At one time the tower, which was one of the few stone buildings in town, would have been a safe place against attackers.

The tower contains the belfry, where the bells that ring for weddings and funerals are hung. How many bells do you think there are? For a clue, go back to the lychgate and look at the pub across the road!

Can you see something unusual about the clock? It only has one hand, so it shows hours, but not

minutes. In the past, life was more leisurely and knowing that the time was, for example, somewhere between 4 and 5 o'clock was enough.

Look around you and imagine the churchyard without headstones, the war memorial or tarmac paths. It was very unusual for graves to be marked with a headstone until about the 1650s, and before then the churchyard was an open meadow, used as a community space. Markets and fairs would be held there, as well as archery practice and various games.

At the base of the tower you can see a painted red line. This shows where the game of Fives, a kind of ball game a bit like squash, was played.

3 THE BLOTCHY HEADSTONE

What do you think the blotches on this headstone are? These are lichens; different colours are different types, which have been growing on the stone since it was put up in 1872.

There are about 2,000 different lichens in the UK and some have been used in the past for dyeing wool and other fabrics and yarns.

4 AFRICAN'S GRAVE

A bit further along the path from the blotchy stone is a headstone

that appears to be blank. But go round to the other side and you will see a beautifully carved inscription to "I.D. A Native of Africa" who died in the town in 1801. We don't know anything about I.D. as we don't have a name, birth date or any other clues.

In the 17th and 18th centuries many Africans were stolen from their homes and sold as slaves. The date of I.D.'s death is important because in 1807, just a few years later, an Act was passed in Parliament ending the UK slave trade, although it was 1833 before slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire.

The text on the headstone is from the Bible and reads "God has made of one Blood all Nations of Men." This was often quoted by people who were working towards getting rid of slavery completely, known as Abolitionists, and hints that the headstone was put up by someone who was part of the Abolitionist movement.

5 FRENCH LIEUTENANT COLONEL

Between 1803 and 1815 Britain and other countries were fighting France in the Napoleonic wars. Up to 57 prisoners of war were housed in Bishop's Castle. One of them, Louis Paces, Lieutenant

Colonel of Light Horse, Knight of the Orders of the Two Sicilies and Spain, died in the town in 1814.

The inscription on his headstone is in French and was probably put up by some other French officers, but if you don't speak French, don't worry, there is a small stone in front of his stone with an English translation!

6 THE HONEST BURGESS

At the time that Matthew Marston died in 1802 Bishop's Castle was well known as a "Rotten Borough", a place where votes for Members of Parliament could be bought. A vote was said to cost £20, nearly £1,400 pounds today!

Matthew Marston refused to accept bribes and his proud family made sure that this was recorded on his headstone.

7 CHURCHYARD WALL

Don't take too many steps forward – the churchyard is several feet higher than the road below, and there's no fence!

This is typical of old churchyards and is one of the clues about just how ancient this churchyard is. Over many centuries there have been a lot of burials here which have raised the level of the ground.

