

Outside the church ~ notes for leaders

The children will work in small groups, and will need to be guided around the outside of the church. They will observe all the features chosen by the teacher, but each group will only draw one. Help the children to observe carefully and to think about the outer shape of the feature before they begin. Encourage them to see similarities and differences in order to focus their work ~ e.g. this window is the same shape as that tombstone. Keep asking **why** the children think that something was made in that way.

a) Spire or tower: many churches have towers that were once used as lookouts. If the enemy was seen, people took refuge in the church. Christians describe the spire as a finger pointing to God.

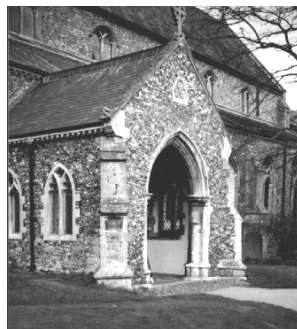


b) Bells:

The bells are used to call people to church. In the past, they were also the means of telling the time, and sometimes of passing on news of a death, a warning or a celebration.

c) Porch:

The porch is an important place. In the past, people were married in the porch, and business contracts were signed there.



d) Preaching cross:

Some churches have a preaching cross, which stands outside the church building. Before churches were built, people preached in the open air.

e) Doors and windows:

The doors and windows reflect the age of the church, with windows sometimes being added or changed to reflect new ideas, such as stained glass, or to commemorate a particular event. This could be a memorial window for those who have died, or to mark an event, like the new millennium.

In old churches, the door will be made of thick wood, reflecting the need for security, as well as being well-built to last for a long time.



The windows will be high up, and relatively small, as churches were not heated until relatively recently.

f) Saints:

Parish churches are dedicated to a patron under God ~ usually to a saint, but sometimes to 'all saints' or to the Virgin Mary. There is often a symbol of that saint, either outside or inside the building.

The one here is of Saint Michael.



g) Gravestones and memorials
All graveyards have memorials, some of which may be very old. Explain that these are to help us to remember those who have died, and expect the children to recount their own losses.

Make sure that children do not play on the graves, as some people will find this distressing.



h)



Corbels:

These are carved faces that are often hidden in surprising places in the church. They may be in the shape of people, giants or monsters.

If you can find out some information about the church before you go, you will feel more confident about the visit. The priest or vicar is a great source of information, and will often be happy to accompany a visit if booked well in advance.

References: Jamal D. Exploring a church, available from the Diocesan Library
Fewins C. illus. Davies T. ~ Be a church detective, pub. The National Society 0-7151-4790-0