

St Laurence's Churchyard Trail

(Thanks to Helen Davidson for the wild flowers drawings)

With the help of the map follow the trail around the churchyard. Features drawn to your attention are marked on the map by the same letter. But there is much else of interest, so take as long as you like.

A. Display board. This was a gift of 'Caring for God's Acre', a project that our church joined in 1997. An acre is traditionally the size of a churchyard; St Laurence's is a little less. We have drawn up a plan for the management of the churchyard, to keep it tidy but also to encourage biodiversity, giving wild flowers, animals and birds a chance to grow and flourish; or to put another way, to celebrate God's Creation. What attracted us to the project was the recognition that many churchyards have been untended for centuries and are treasure stores of plant and animal life; over 120 species of wild flowers are identified here.

B. Stone coffin. This ancient stone coffin was found 1827 under the south transept wall when the current vestry was added. Its origin is unknown, but one theory is that it is the coffin of the founder of the Lady Chapel in the south transept in the early Middle Ages. Look out for *Herb Robert* flowering here in summer.



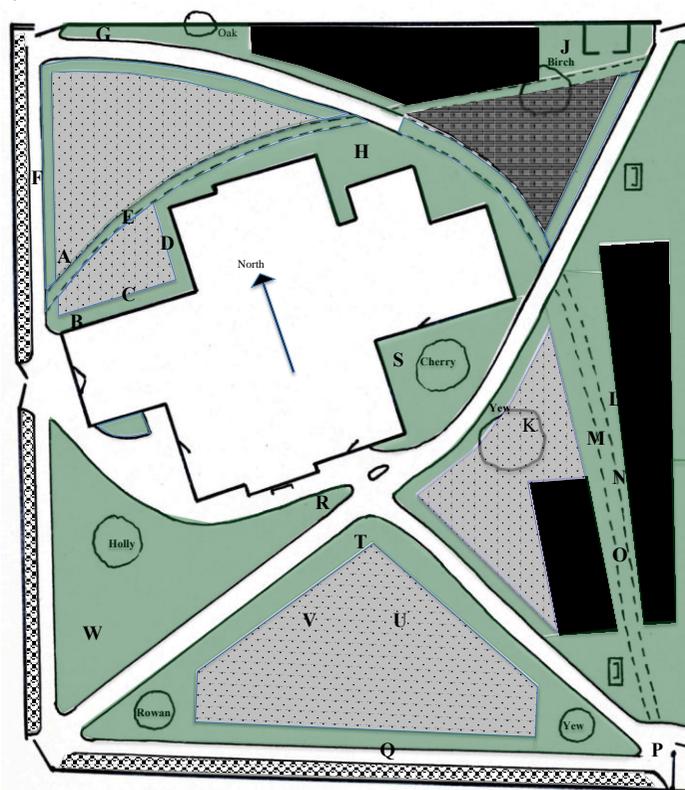
C. Above the north door is a sheela-na-gig, said to be an ancient fertility figure.

D. Wall Memorial to Rector Pemberton who died in 1848 and is buried near here. He gave us the east window and the west door. Walk to the diagonal grass path.



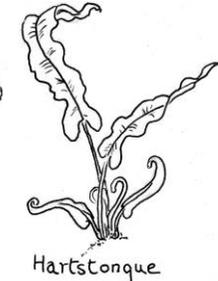
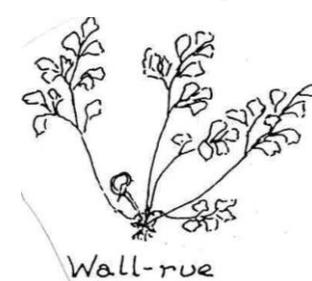
Germander
Speedwell

E. The diagonal path is mowed for the sake of the bell ringers! Look for the flowers; in summer *Germander Speedwell* and *Fox and Cubs* are both in flower here.



- | | |
|---|---|
|  Short mown grass, regularly cut |  'Meadow' grass, cut in August and October |
|  'Bulb' grass, regularly cut after bulbs have flowered |  Long grass, cut every other year in October |

F. The daffodils along the west wall are allowed to die back before mowing starts. Look at the lichens on the wall; also the *Hartstongue Fern* and *Wall Rue*.



G. Look carefully at the dressed stones in the wall at this point; the date tells us that the wall is 200 years old! The numbers on the stones indicate sections whose upkeep was the responsibility of particular parishioners or other benefactors, including householders from All Stretton and Little Stretton which had no churches till the early 20th century. Before the wall the churchyard was enclosed by a fence frequently reported as in need of repair. The wall was built when the Revd John Mainwaring was the Rector. He left money for the maintenance of the churchyard as long as the parishioners continued to pay their share!

H. The memorial to Samuel Glover who in the mid-19th century, after the coming of the railway, took over the old coaching inn, The Talbot, (which stood on Ludlow Road just south of Tudor Cottage) and turned it into Stretton House, a private asylum for gentlemen.

I. The rough area of long grass alongside the north wall of the churchyard is kept as a natural wildlife refugium.

J. The Garden of Remembrance was opened in 1994. It is overhung by a fine *Downy Birch* tree.

K. The large spreading Yew east of the church is about 170 years old. Several over-large conifer trees have had to be removed from the churchyard in recent years and have been replaced by a variety of mixed saplings including *Yew*, *Hornbeam* and *Whitebeam*.

L. Behind the yew tree is the interesting small tombstone of Margaret Morgan, the oldest in the churchyard and dated 1701. (Nearly all the graves date from the 19th century, which shows that the churchyard must have been cleared of earlier remains and memorials over the centuries.) If you look on the reverse side of the Morgan headstone you will find that it was used again!

M. The grass path leads to the south-west gate. In past centuries it was probably the route followed to the north door of the church (the funeral door blocked up since 1819) from the coffin path across the valley and over Ragleth Hill.

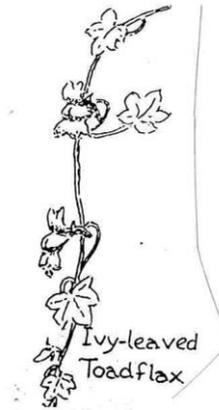
N. Look out for the Edwards' tombstone where the stonemason seems to have had a problem spelling the word 'daughter'!

O. The long grass areas either side of the path are only cut every other year to encourage flowers like wild carrot, dogrose, musk mallow, green alkanet, salad burnet, field scabious and devilsbit scabious. It also provides a habitat for overwintering invertebrates and a seed supply for birds. Over 20 different types of grasses are recorded in the churchyard.

P. Walk to the attractive iron gate which was for centuries the main entrance as the town was little more than the High Street. The back of the Buck's Head pub is shown on some old maps as the Manor House; the Manor Courts were probably held in this building.

Q. The south wall to the churchyard is alive with flowers and lichens. In summer on the brick sections of the wall, look out for the *Ivy-leaved Toadflax*. Now walk along the diagonal path towards the church.

R. The stump of sundial. This may have been erected on the site of the old parish cross. On the stone base collar are the initials TW & IW (perhaps Thomas Waring and John Williams) CW (churchwardens) 1713.



S. Look up at St Laurence, holding a gridiron, on the south-east corner of the tower. St Laurence was from Spain, but became a leader of the church in Rome; he is said to have been martyred on a gridiron.

T. Standing on the grass you have a good view of the three stages of the church's extension on the south side; on the right the 13th century south transept, in the middle the Victorian south aisle and on the left the vestry bearing the date 1831.

U. Meadow grass. The grass here and in some other parts of the churchyard is managed as meadow grass. It is not cut until August to allow spring and early summer plants to flower and set seed.

V. The gravestone of Thomas and Ann Cook nearby is well worth a look. See if you can read how Thursday featured in Ann's life.

W. The tree planted in memory of Norman Owen, churchwarden is a *Whitebeam*. The *Snake Bark Maple* originally planted unfortunately died.

The churchyard has not been officially 'closed', but the additional burial ground in Cunnery Road was opened in 1870 and the new cemetery in 1942.

WE HOPE YOU HAVE ENJOYED THE TRAIL.

ST LAURENCE'S CHURCHYARD TRAIL

