

St. Mary the Virgin Parish Church, Baldock

Church Trail for Children





Welcome to the church of St. Mary the Virgin, Baldock.

This trail has been compiled for children and young people, but is equally exciting for adults to join in too. You can use the trail on your own or part of a group. As well as finding out about the building, we hope that you'll discover something about the families who helped establish this church and the town of Baldock, in particular the Knights of the Middle Ages.

This trail also includes QR codes to scan using a mobile smartphone for you to connect to additional information on the internet, if you have the capability, or at home when connected to Wifi. Our author has also provided links to a number of interesting websites which you'll find at the back of the trail guide.

There is also a separate illustrated guidebook *St Mary the Virgin, Baldock: a Christian journey*, available which provides a more in-depth history of the building and insight into the Christian faith that older children and adults might be interested to read.

At the back of this trail guide you will find a map of the church to help you navigate around the building. We hope you enjoy your visit.

The Knight's Tale



Our church is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The original church on this site was likely to have been built in about 1150 by the Knights Templar on land gifted to them by Gilbert de Clare, the Earl of Pembroke. Parts of this early church are still to be found at the east end of the chancel. It belonged to them until they were dissolved in 1308 when it was then granted, together with the manor of Baldock, to the Knights Hospitaller who are thought to have expanded the church in about 1330.

A memorial to Reginald de Argentein is given pride of place here at St. Mary's facing the chancel at the top of the Nave. He was from a distinguished Norman family that came to England with William the Conqueror. He was the son and grandson of Knights Templar.

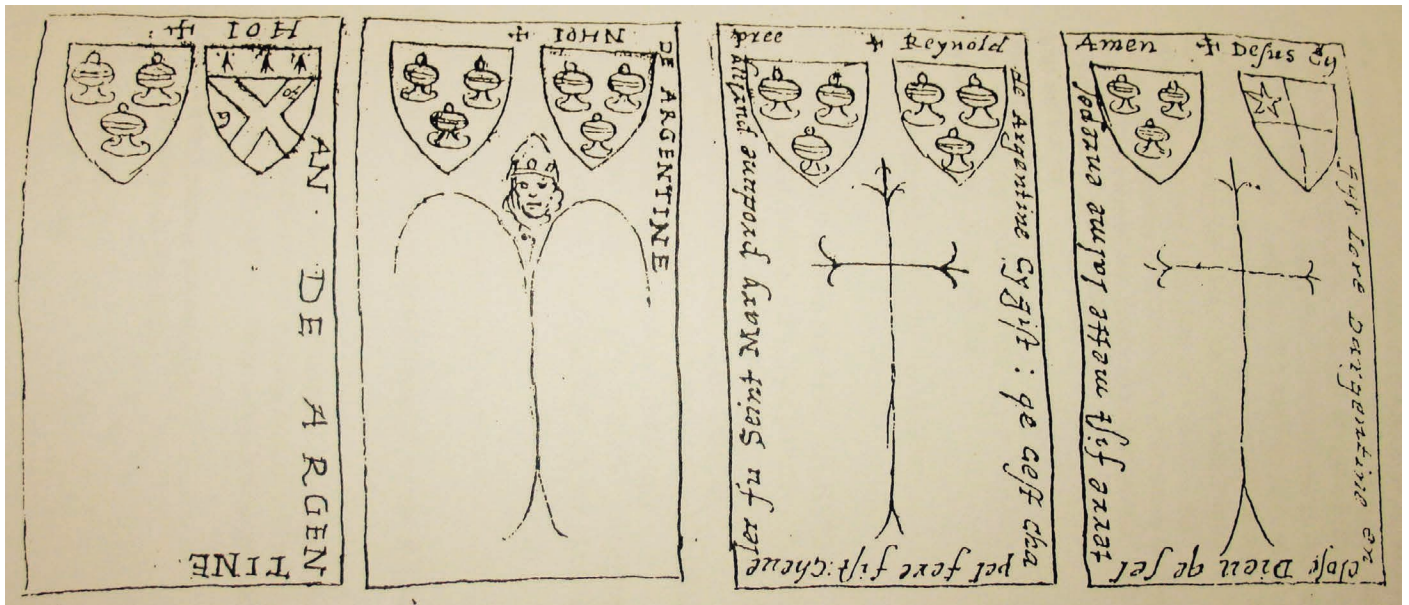
Reginald de Argentein was son of Giles de Argentein, an energetic knight who was once captured by the Welsh when fighting Prince Llewelyn. Later in life Giles became a political figure and a royal steward. However, with the uprising of the barons, Giles seems to have taken the cause of de Montfort and benefited following the arrest of King Henry III and his son, Prince Edward. When the rebels were defeated, Giles' lands were seized. In 1266 he was granted the King's pardon and his lands restored. He died in 1282.

Reginald de Argentein was grandson of Richard de Argentein - described as a valiant and noble knight, who rode on pilgrimage to the Holy Lands and died in 1246. Reginald was called to arms on many occasions but did not distinguish himself as his father or grandfather had before him. He married Lora, daughter of Hugh de Vere, the 4th Earl of Oxford. Reginald died shortly before 3rd March 1308. His gravestone, with a rhyming French inscription that states that he had caused "this chapel" to be made, survives in Baldock church.

Four Argentein gravestones are documented as laying within the church. In addition to those of Reginald and Lora, there were two more bearing the names 'Iohn de Argentine' and 'Iohan de Argentine'. It seems likely that those were the



gravestones of Reginald's son John and his first wife, Joan. Lora's gravestone, complete with a rhyming French inscription, was designed to match Reginald's. It bore the arms of de Argentein and de Vere.

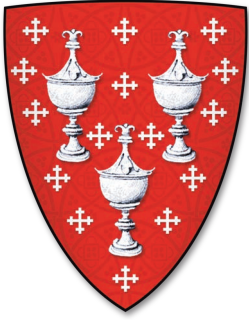


Sketch by James Strangeway dating from 17th Century of the de Argentein gravestones.

Evidence suggests that John had a younger brother called Giles, born in 1280, who was ranked in his prime as one of the three most accomplished knights in Christendom, along with the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry, and King Robert the Bruce. Giles died at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 when he was riding with the Earl of Pembroke at the side of King Edward II. When all seemed lost they escorted King Edward to safety and then, according to Sir Thomas Gray in Scalacronica, de Argentein told the King,

"God be with you, Sire; it is not my wont to fly," turned his horse's head, and rode back to meet a soldier's death in the battle-field with the war cry, "An Argentein!"





*Coat of Arms
of Giles de
Argentein.*

And, "O farewell," the victor cried
Of chivalry the flower and pride,
The arm in battle bold,
The courteous mein, the noble race,
The stainless faith, the manly face!
Bid Ninian's convent light their shrine
For late-wake of de Argentein
O'er better knight on death-bier laid,
Torch never gleam'd nor Mass was said!

From: The Lord of the Isles canto vi.



*Giles de
Argentein at the
Dunstable
Jousts.*

1. Don't step on my grave!

On entering through the north porch door, there is a Purbeck limestone floor slab with very worn lettering from about 1200 AD.

Can you identify any of the letters remaining?



This memorial slab is thought to relate to the Argentein family, possibly Robert de Argentein who was married to Lavinia and is mentioned in early 13th century papers in Baldock. It dates from the late 12th to early 13th century, which would make it contemporary with the first church built on this site.

Purbeck limestone was used by stonemasons throughout the medieval period to make tombstones and adornments for cathedrals and churches throughout England. It came from Dorset.

2. The Font

Continue your visit at the west end of the church under the tower. Here is the font. The font is Norman from the late 12th century, belonging to the earliest known church on this site. It has an octagonal bowl with beaded edges and a circular stem flanked by octagonal shafts with moulded bases.



12th Century Norman Font.

In medieval England a child was usually baptized on the day they were born. The mother would stay at home but the father would assemble the godparents and, together with the midwife, they would all bring the child to the church. This procession would frequently include friends and relatives and could be quite festive. The priest would meet the baptismal party at the church door. Here he would ask if the child had been baptized yet and whether it was a boy or a girl. Next, he would bless the baby, put salt in its mouth to represent the reception of wisdom, and exorcise any demons. Then he would test the godparents' knowledge of the prayers they were expected to teach the child. At the baptismal font the priest would anoint the child, immerse them in the font, and name them. One of the godparents would raise the baby up from the water and wrap them in a christening gown. The last part of the ceremony took place at the altar where the godparents made the profession of faith for the child. The participants might then all return to the parents' house for a feast (if they could afford it).

How does a modern baptism or christening differ from that of medieval England?

<https://churchofenglandchristenings.org/>



3. A Knights last resting place.

As you walk up the nave towards the altar, look down and you will notice one of the flourishing 18th century trades of this market town on your way to finding the one that marks Reginald de Argentine. This is probably one of the oldest memorials in the body of the church. It is an inscribed slab in the nave just below the Chancel screen, a memorial to Reginald de Argentine, Knight Templar, who was thought to have financed restoration works in the late 13th Century.

The inscription is very indistinct and written in medieval French, but it is known from several earlier recordings, that it would have translated as:

“Here lies Reginald de Argentine who caused the chapel to be built. He was a Champion of St. Mary to whom pray for the pardon of his soul.”

This Purbeck limestone slab is early 14th century. It has a floriated cross, 2 shields and lettering around the sides. The inscription is in Norman French.



The Argentine family were allied to the Norman kings and played a major part in the history of England.

Look at the spelling for his first name. In medieval times spellings for names were not fixed. His family came originally from the Argenton region of France so he might be referred to as de Argenton. Equally, it was common to see the family referred to as Argentomago, Argentomo or anglicised as Argentine.

How is his first name spelt here?

Did you notice anything about the slabs you walked over down the aisle and the spelling or script of some of their words?

What a tangled web the Normans wove!

At the time of the Domesday Survey, Baldock was a part of Weston and belonged to William de Ow. William de Ow was a Norman noble and a cousin of William the Conqueror. It was claimed that during the reign of William II, de Ow was accused of treason and demanded to prove himself innocent via trial by combat. He lost and was subsequently blinded and dismembered. His lands were forfeit and later granted by Henry I to Walter, son of Richard de Clare. At Richard's death his estates passed to his nephew Gilbert de Clare, who was created first Earl of Pembroke by King Stephen.

Gilbert de Clare started out life without land and wealth of his own but he was closely related to very powerful men, specifically his uncles, Walter de Clare and Roger de Clare. Gilbert was a baron, a tenant-in-chief in England, and inherited the estates of his uncles which included the baronies and castles of Normandy. He married Isabel de Beaumont, circa 1130. Isabel



Gilbert de Clare coat of arms.



Gilbert de Clare depicted in a stained glass window in Tewkesbury Abbey.

had previously been the mistress of King Henry I of England.

In 1136 Gilbert de Clare led an expedition against Exmes in northern France and burned parts of the town, including the church of Notre Dame, but was interrupted by the forces of William III, Count of Ponthieu and escaped the resulting battle only after suffering heavy losses. King Stephen made him Earl of Pembroke in 1138. After King Stephen's defeat at Lincoln on 2nd February 1141, Gilbert was among those who rallied to the Empress Matilda when she re-took London in June. However, he was at Stephen's side in Canterbury when the King was re-crowned at Christmas in 1141.

Gilbert later joined Geoffrey's plot against Stephen, but when that conspiracy collapsed, he re-joined the King, being with him at the siege of Oxford late in 1142. In 1147 he rebelled when King Stephen refused to give him the castles he asked for. However, the Earl appears to

have made his peace with the King before his own death the following year in 1148. A little before the middle of the 12th century, Gilbert de Clare granted 120 acres of land from his manor of Weston to the Knights Templar following discussions with Hugh de Argentein. Here the Templars, 'built a certain borough which is called Baldock.' Baldock, originally Baldoce thrived as a market town. *Baldac* is the Old French form for Baghdad and some historians suggest that the place was named by the Templars after the Arabian city of Baghdad, renowned as the most prosperous market in the world and the city which thwarted all their attempts to conquer it.

The first Templar chapel, consisting of the present day chancel and nave, was built in the latter half of the 12th century. Baldock was an important English centre for the Templars between 1199 and 1254.

The Family of Argentein took their name from David de Argentein, a Norman who served under William the Conqueror and who was listed in the Roll of Battle Abbey. Their coat of arms were 'three covered cups argent, upon a field of gules' because they held the office of hereditary cup-bearer to the King at his coronation. Hugh de Argentein was the 1st Master of the Templars in England in 1140 AD. He was Lord of the manor of Great Wymondley.



A Knights Templar knight

The Knights Templar was a military and religious Order founded in 1118 as the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon. They were charged with protecting pilgrims journeying through the Holy Land from bandits and marauders. The Order was based at the site of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. They used monies from their estates in Europe to fund their expeditions in the Holy Land. They developed a system akin to the banking system of today where

landowners planning a visit to the Holy Land would entail their property to the Order and in return receive a promissory note that could be used to fund them

on their travels without the need to carry huge sums of gold. The Templars held unique rites granted to them by Pope Innocent II which excluded them from taxes and responsibilities to the Church and the crown. Their rise to power and wealth, and the jealousy and fear by European rulers of an independent army with the papal right to cross the borders of Europe unhindered, led to their downfall. The Order was dissolved by Pope Clement V in 1312 following pressure from King Philip IV of France who led an inquisition against them. Many of the Templars' possessions were given to the Hospitallers. Many joined the Order of the Knights Hospitaller, who adopted the title of Knights Templar after the suppression.

The Knights Hospitaller were a military and religious order also known as the Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem. They began a hospital founded in Jerusalem in 1080, to provide care for the poor and sick pilgrims who had journeyed to the Holy Land. After the first conquest of Jerusalem in 1099, during the first crusade, the Order was charged with the care and defence of all pilgrims to the Holy Land. During the Middle Ages, the Order became a powerful and wealthy military force, with foundations in many European countries. Their military powers ceased when Malta was surrendered to Napoleon in 1798. In England, the Order was revived in 1837 and was responsible for founding the St. John's Ambulance Brigade in 1888.

Look carefully at the cross used on the Knights Hospitaller's shield, you will see the similarity with the symbol used by St. John's Ambulance brigade now.



A Knight Hospitaller

What other symbols of Christian faith can you see around the church today?

Which Kings of England were mentioned above?

Can you name one other Norman King of England famous for his love of battle and crusades?

4. Coffin lid altar.

In the north chapel vestry area, on the floor under the window lies a coffin shaped Purbeck limestone lid with a foliated cross in relief. This is thought to originate from the 3rd quarter of the 13th century.



Above this lid there is a small curtain. Carefully draw this back to reveal remnants of the church deeds written in Latin on parchment. They detail an amount to be paid for the maintenance of the church building each year by themselves and their heirs in perpetuity. Are you related to William Cartel of Baldock or Walter Catteyl (1289)? They promised 2 pennies and 5 pennies each and every year to be paid on the feast of the blessed Mary in March and the feast of St. Michael in September. Do you know who John the son of John the spice merchant was or John Chapman his brother- was he a butcher too? They were some of the witnesses who signed this document.

Can you decipher what it says?

(Remember to draw the curtain back carefully to stop the light destroying this very old artefact.)

5. Now to the South side.

In the Trinity chapel on the south wall there is a double piscina (sink) and a double sedillia (seat). Look at the carving that remains above these arches. Parts of this date back to circa 1330 when the Knights Hospitaller took over the chapel.

6. Secret code.

On the wall of the south aisle is a glazed wooden frame with the list of the church's incumbents written inside. The number in brackets is a code identifying the patron of each incumbent. (Vicar)

Can you list the names of the incumbents appointed by the Knights Templar (Priors and Knights of St. John of Jerusalem in England)?

Can you work out which Queen appointed incumbents between 1554 and 1599?

Which King would have appointed Henry de Craystock?

Which King would have appointed Josias Byrd?

Epitaph to Josias Byrd

*'Josiah Byrd lies buried here
Who taught this parish three-and-fifty year
Aged he was, as I have heard some say.
He was eighty eight before he passed away.
And died in the year
When one and sixes three made up the Quere.'*

This inscription was said to have been written upon Josias Byrd's gravestone that stood for 200 years within the graveyard but sadly is no longer there.

7. Coats of Arms

Return to the chancel screen in the nave. On the chancel side of the screen there are 4 painted shields.

Can you draw the shield representing the Knights Templar?

Take a walk outside.

Exit through the south door. The west tower stands at 130 feet to the top of the spire, the lower part of the walls are thought to date back to the time of the earliest known church - 12th century.

As you walk round the tower, look out for marks on the stone walls thought to be early scaffolding pads from its first construction.

Outside the church in the wall of the north aisle behind the railings, is a 14th century recess with an ogee arch. The jambs have been restored. Set in the recess is a 14th century coffin lid with a cross in relief.

Continue around the building and look beneath the east window for evidence of a 14th century niche with a trefoiled head, having a rebated edge, and the remains of iron hinges.

9. Time traveller

Baldock has a rich heritage that goes well beyond the earliest years of the Knights Templar and their impact. Try the quiz on the next few pages to find out more about the people whose hard work and faith have glorified this church to God. On your way back into the church look at the gravestones in the church yard. Can you find a solicitor buried east of the north aisle. What about a man who died in 1837 who supported his friend in his appeal for the abolition of slavery?

Back inside the church

1. Draw pictures of the coats of arms you can find on memorials.

Can you find one for the Cecil Grave family?

Can you find the arms of a brewer?

Can you find the Pym arms?

2. Georgiana was the daughter of a bishop of Calcutta and the wife of a captain in the 5th regiment of the Madras Cavalry. **Where, when and how did she die?** Whilst her Father was Bishop of Calcutta (1827 – 1828), he became ill and was advised to take a sea journey for his health. He set sail for China but died before he reached land.
3. Now look on the opposite wall where you will find a memorial for her husband. **How did he die?**
4. Ann Gall's husband was a member of the 5th Bengal Cavalry. She died a widow in December 1840. **What was her husband's rank? What were they all doing in India?**
5. Kathleen Fairn was a faithful worshipper at St. Mary's until her death in 1959. **What was her day job?**
6. Sarah was the wife of a doctor. She died at age 34. **How many children did she have?**
7. Evelyn's son died in August 1915 in World War I following an attack on the shores of Gallipoli. **What rank did he hold in the army?**
8. A judge (Justice of the Peace) is commemorated in the chancel on the north wall. **What Bible verse is quoted on the memorial?**
9. Look at the First World War memorial.
Can you find anyone who shares your surname?
Can you find out if they are related to you using online census information?
Do you recognise any of the names of families commemorated elsewhere in the church?
10. The family Pryor have a vault in the chancel of the church.
Which family members can you find commemorated?

Look to the heavens and let your imagination go.

- Choose one of the label stops (carved heads above the pillars on the north and south sides of the arcades.)

Write a short story telling of their adventure and how they came to be immortalised in stone.

- Sit in the church and study the south doorway and door. Consider the weight of the door swung on huge, metal hinges. Look at the heavy bolts, what do they lock out? Who guards the door and why? Write a description of the door, consider how your senses can be used to build anticipation of what will happen when the doors finally open.
- In the north side porch look up at the ceiling. How many triangles can you find and what sort of triangles can you see?
- Under the tower in the baptistery graffiti has been carved into the west wall. What does the TAG stand for?
- In St. Mary's there are many doors that seem to go nowhere. Why do you think they were put in and why might they have been blocked off? Write an explanation of your reasoning.

Find out more about the Knights Templar - follow these links.

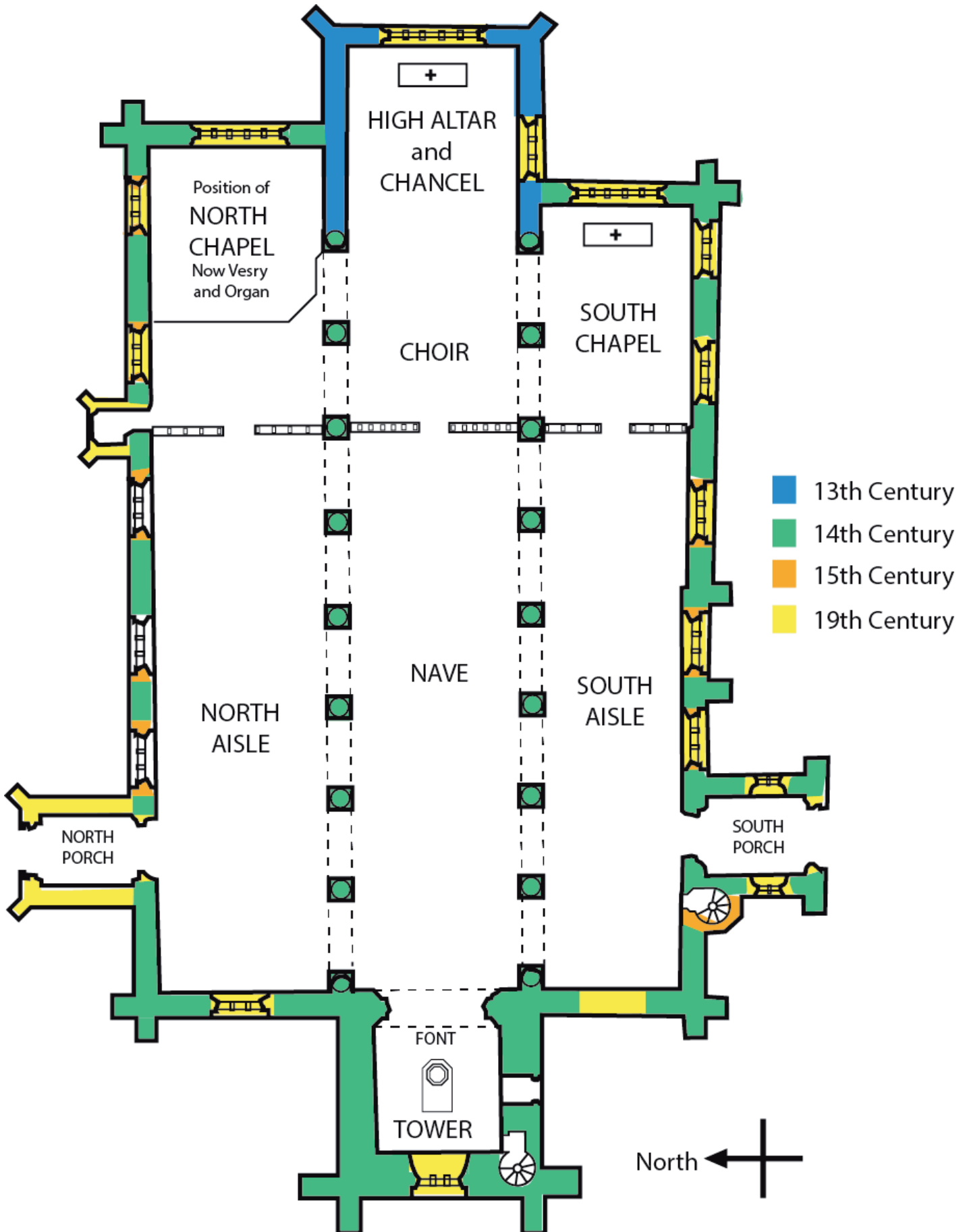
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- <http://www.abroy.com/play/escape-games/templar-secret/>

Visit Cressing Temple <http://www.visitparks.co.uk/places/creasing-temple/> or Royston cave: <http://www.roystoncave.co.uk/index.html>

Find out more about the Christian faith visit these links:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/being-a-christian.aspx>



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Written and collated by Susan Lyon B.Ed (hons) NPQH.

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This church is undergoing a significant restoration programme and we are very grateful to the generosity of the people of the town, our visitors and the Heritage Lottery Fund for supporting this work.

Recent phases have restored the tower, which you can climb when opened on special occasions. We have also completed restoring the roof and parapets on the south aisle and south door. In addition we have installed energy efficient lighting, which means you can turn on the lights when you visit. There are switches by the main doors. Please do turn them off as you leave.

Goodbye. We hope you enjoyed your visit. Please do come again.



Church Charity number
1133060

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