



ELY CATHEDRAL

The Green Man Trail



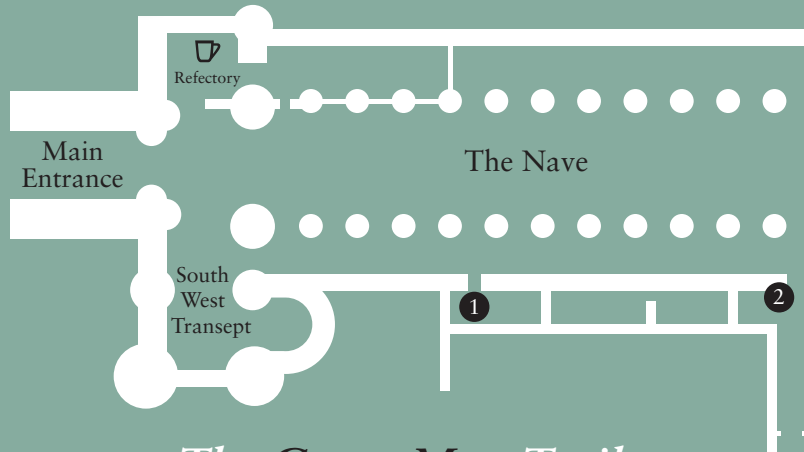
Can you find them all..?

1. **START. The Prior's Door.** Go through the door and turn around. At the base of the door arch are 2 early examples (from about 1135) of creatures with vegetation coming from their mouths.

2. **The South Entrance.** Go through the door, turn around and look at the archway on your left to find this cat-like animal - also from the 12th century.

3. **The Octagon.** Up on one of the pillars forming the central Octagon you will find this magnificent beast (perhaps a lion?) from the 14th century.

4. **The Lady Chapel.** Enter the Lady Chapel and look up into the roof. Among the ceiling bosses is this fine *Green Man* - just one of eight here, also dating from the early 14th century.

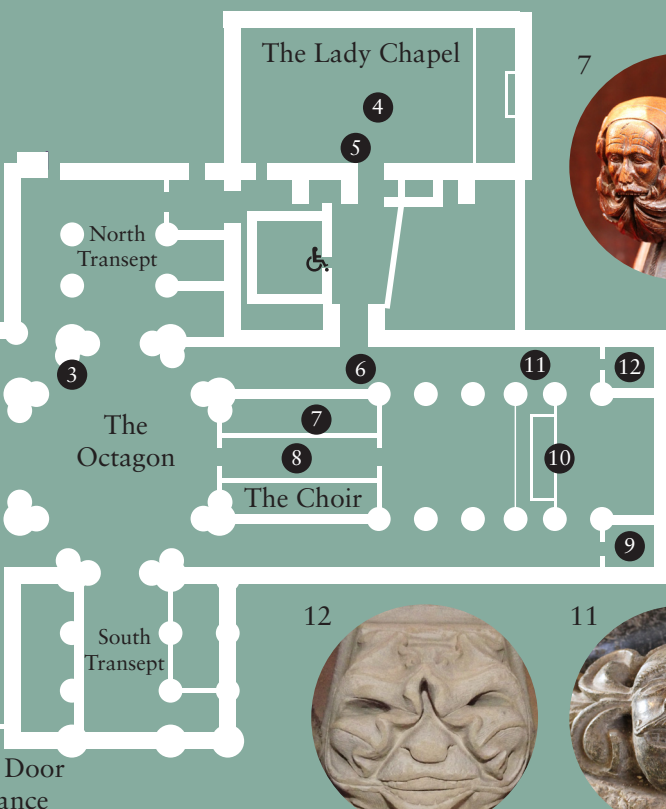


The Green Man Trail at Ely Cathedral

5. The carvings around the Chapel's walls contain many small green creatures, but these are often hard to find! More easily visible is this *Green Man*, above the exit on the right, as you leave.

6. **The North Choir Aisle.** Up in the ceiling by the stairs to the organ, this foliated head is one of two, dating from the early 1300's.

- 7. The Choir.** Enter the Choir from the East. At the second stairway on your right look at the choir stalls to the left of the steps. This fine medieval gent is one of a number carved on the choir armrests. NB. Please do not enter the choir stalls.
- 8.** In the roof above you another three *Green Men* can be found, all brightly painted.
- 9. Bishop West's Chapel.** Go in the Chapel and look up at the finely decorated ceiling. These 16th century *Green Men* now appear more foliage in form, than human.
- 10. The Reredos.** On the rear of the decorative screen behind the altar are three of these Victorian creatures inspired by earlier medieval work.



- 11. Pillar by Bishop Northwold's tomb.** This is just one of several 13th century green faces that can be found at the bases of the pillars either side of this tomb.
- 12. FINISH. Bishop Alcock's Chapel.** Another late example, (from the turn of the 15th - 16th century), this *Green Man* looks down on the tomb situated on your left.

Ely Cathedral has, at the last count, over 70 *Green Men* and animals within its walls. Many are difficult (or impossible!) to see. However, those featured in the trail are all visible from the ground floor without the use of binoculars or other equipment.

What are Green Men?

The origins of *Green Men* are unclear. They begin to appear in the 10th century and can be found in written works as well as being commonly carved in wood and stone in churches. They became most popular during the 11th and 12th centuries, but despite evolving in style they finally died out in the 16th century.

Definitions of *Green Men* (or foliated heads) differ between authors on the subject, but typically they consist of a human male, or animal, head which has foliage appearing from the mouth, eyes or ears, or where foliage forms some integral part of the head / face.

As an entity they didn't exist until 1932 when C.J.P. Cave wrote his article: 'The Roof Bosses of Ely Cathedral', commenting on this form of art and drawing it to the attention of academics and public alike. He went on to study them all over the country, but it could well be said that Ely Cathedral is the birthplace of the *Green Man* as we know them today.

Seven years later Lady Raglan published an article entitled: 'The *Green Man* in Church Architecture' which put forth the theory that such depictions embodied the central figure of May Day celebrations, known as 'Jack in the Green'. As these celebrations represented the last vestiges of ancient tree worship and spring sacrifice, she surmised that *Green Men* must surely represent a pagan belief that still held sway in the medieval period.

This theory took hold and remained unchallenged during the 1950's, but with more modern research a number of alternative theories have been put forward to challenge Lady Raglan's belief. These include:

- A Christian representation of Adam who, in medieval gospels, was said (on his death) to have had seeds from the Garden of Eden placed in his mouth which grew into a tree. There are numerous positive Christian references to trees and vines (the 'Jesse Tree' being just one example).
- A representation of evil or danger - this is aligned with the 'wodeswose', or wild man who lived / hid in the woods, and the belief that forests were unsafe places where danger and adversity lurked. In the 9th century leaves represented lust and the colour green had evil connotations, as seen in the 14th century tale of St Gawain and the Green Knight (but, of course, the label of '*Green Man*' is a modern one).
- More recent views have aligned *Green Men* with a natural 'Father Earth' personification, either as a secular or pagan counterpoint to the religious elements elsewhere in churches, or as a balance to the depiction of St. Mary as the archetypal Christian mother figure.

Some scholars now believe that *Green Men* are more likely to depict a Christian standpoint than a pagan one, but the reality is that no one truly knows. There is no clear evidence to show that any of the current theories are correct. Whatever their meaning, they provide a fascinating subject and we hope you enjoy finding them on our trail.

Our *Green Men* and animals all conform to the definition included above and our trail will take you from early 12th century examples to some late copies from the 19th century. Those included here are often in areas where there are others, so it is worth taking a look around at each spot to see what else you can find...