



University Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford

An HLF-funded project, completed March 2013

- Interpretation planning by Taissa Csáky (our content developer) at TGA Ltd
- Illustration by Peter Edwards (our illustrator)
- An HLF funded Project

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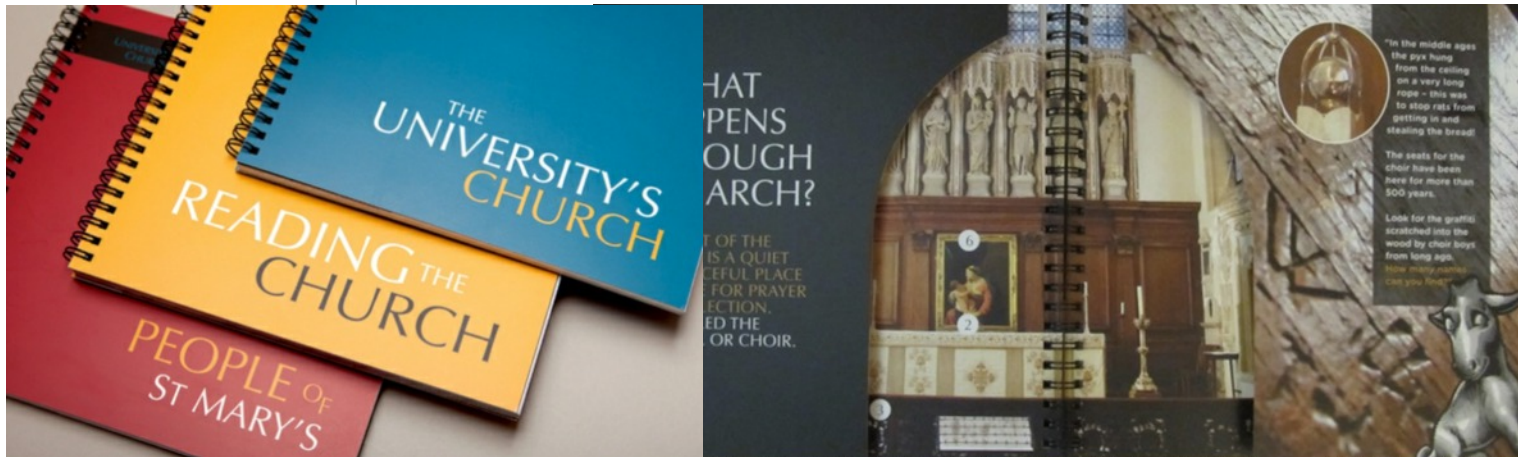


The University Church of St. Mary the Virgin is one of the oldest buildings in Oxford. The University was founded here and the church has been touched by many events significant in national history – Elizabeth I attended University debates here, Thomas Cranmer was tried here before being burned at the stake, and in the twentieth century C.S. Lewis and Desmond Tutu both gave sermons. Today the church is used for services, concerts and plays and the challenge was to share this rich history without compromising the sacred function of the church or reducing flexibility for accommodating special events. Working with the clerical team, church staff and academic advisers we devised a scheme that had minimal physical impact on the church but gave visitors a way of exploring the church at their own pace to discover stories that would interest and inspire them.



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The core of the interpretation is a set of three books (by Hotrod) distributed from a Welcome Desk. Each one allows visitors to take a tour of the church at their own pace. The children's trail is guided by a donkey based on a grotesque on the exterior of St. Mary's.

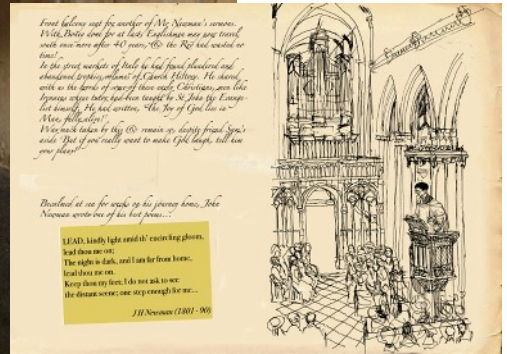
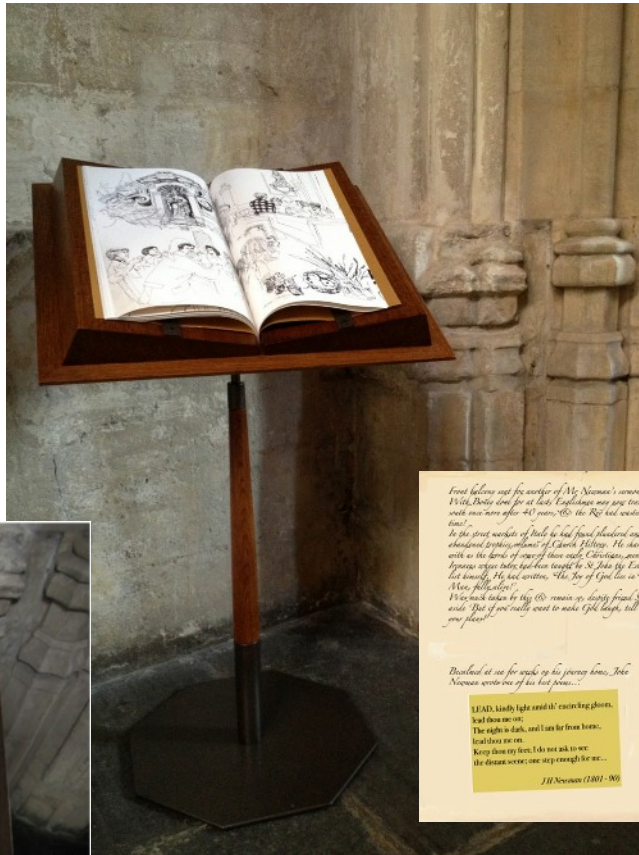


Interpretation panels were used at just two locations where they tell a story directly relevant to their position and did not intrude on the architecture. The panels on the above right show how this view changed between the 1400s and today.



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As visitors tour the church they encounter other interpretation. Three lavishly illustrated books introduce famous preachers, Catholic and Protestant martyrs, and the daily life of the church today. They are mounted on oak lecterns to match the Victorian church fittings and can easily be moved aside for concerts and services



In the former Chancellor's Court an embroidered lectern hanging in front of the Chancellor's chair shows the space as a medieval courtroom used to try students.