Days Out with a religious theme or connection
North-west of Shrewsbury – Battlefield, Preston Gubbals, Ruyton XI Towns, Loppington, Colemere.

Sculpture of medieval weapons of war, at the site of Battlefield Church, near Shrewsbury.

Battlefield

Magda and I chose **St Valentine's Day**, probably the first mild and sunny day of 2019, to explore the area of Shropshire to the north-west of Shrewsbury.
Our choices were guided by the excellent leaflet published by the **Shropshire Churches Tourism Group.**
We began with a very famous church near Shrewsbury, near the site of the **Battle of Shrewsbury in 1403.**

The church is on the site of the medieval Battle of Shrewsbury; Magda investigates the lychgate carvings!

Alas, the church is no longer used for worship but it is maintained by the **Churches Conservation Trust.** We were unable to go inside. However, the stonework outside features some wonderful gargoyles.

The Chapel was built in 1406 to commemorate those who died in the battle – estimated to be around 5,000.

The battle was fought on 21 July 1403, waged between an army led by the Lancastrian King Henry IV and a rebel army led by Henry "Harry Hotspur" Percy from Northumberland. It was the first in which English archers fought each other on English soil, and reaffirmed the effectiveness of the longbow and ended the Percy challenge to King Henry IV of England. The battle itself and many of the key people involved appear in **Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part 1.**

Inside the church, the roof beams display the shields of Henry IV's knights.

Left: an anguished figure. Right: A statue of Henry IV, who defeated Henry "Hotspur" Percy in the battle, stands on the outside east wall.

A gryphon-like figure.

The chapel was dedicated to **St Mary Magdalene** as it took place on 21st July 1403, the eve of the saint's day. Much of the church we see today is the result of an extensive restoration in the 1860s, by a distinguished local architect **S Pountney Smith**, who saved the church from ruin. Though he kept the original shape, tower and walls, the magnificent hammerbeam roof, the reredos, and all the fittings and furniture were installed by him. He was also responsible for installing the fine stained glass typical of the 1860s.

Preston Gubbals

Our next church was **St Martin's**, a redundant Anglican church in the village of **Preston Gubbals**. Again, alas, it wasn't open to the public at the time we visited. It's recorded in the National Heritage List for England as a designated Grade II* listed building, and is under the care of the Churches Conservation Trust.

The ornate church gates at Preston Gubbals.

The remains of the 1866 enlargement - beside the single cell building which survives today.

St Martin's originated as a chapel of ease, and what now remains was the chancel of a medieval parish church. It was probably altered in the 14th or the 15th century. In 1866 a new church was added to it, and it became the south aisle of that church. This enlargement was designed by **Samuel Pountney Smith**, and cost £1,600 (equivalent to £150,000 in 2018). In 1973 most of the work carried out in 1866 was demolished, leaving a single-cell building.

THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST.

The Church of St Martin.

This charming church has been remodelled many times.

It was originally the chancel of a medieval church. When a large new church was added to it in 1866, St Martin's became its south aisle. Then the new church was demolished leaving the building you can see today.

A beautifully preserved fourteenth-century engraved tomb slab and a seventeenth-century font survived the changes.

Please sign our visitor book, and make a donation towards the conservation of the church.

In the churchyard of St Martin's Preston Gubbals is a sculpture bearing the image of a church etched into the shape of an apple.

Ruyton-XI-Towns

Ruyton-XI-Towns, formerly **Ruyton of the Eleven Towns** or simply **Ruyton**, is a large village next to the River Perry. The village acquired its unusual name in the twelfth century when a castle was built, and it became the major manor of eleven local townships. The Roman numeral for eleven is included in its name. Some of the eleven ancient townships, mostly situated to the north and west of Ruyton, still survive as hamlets today.

St John the Baptist church is on a raised site, dominating the centre of the village, with the ruins of the castle at the west end.

The elegant staircase of stainless steel and glass, leading to the bell tower.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, while a medical student, worked as an unpaid assistant in the village for a Dr Eliot for four months in 1878, living in at *Cliffe House*. He later recalled Ruyton in his *Memories and Recollections* (1923) as "not big enough to make one town, far less eleven".

The nave at St John the Baptist, Ruyton.
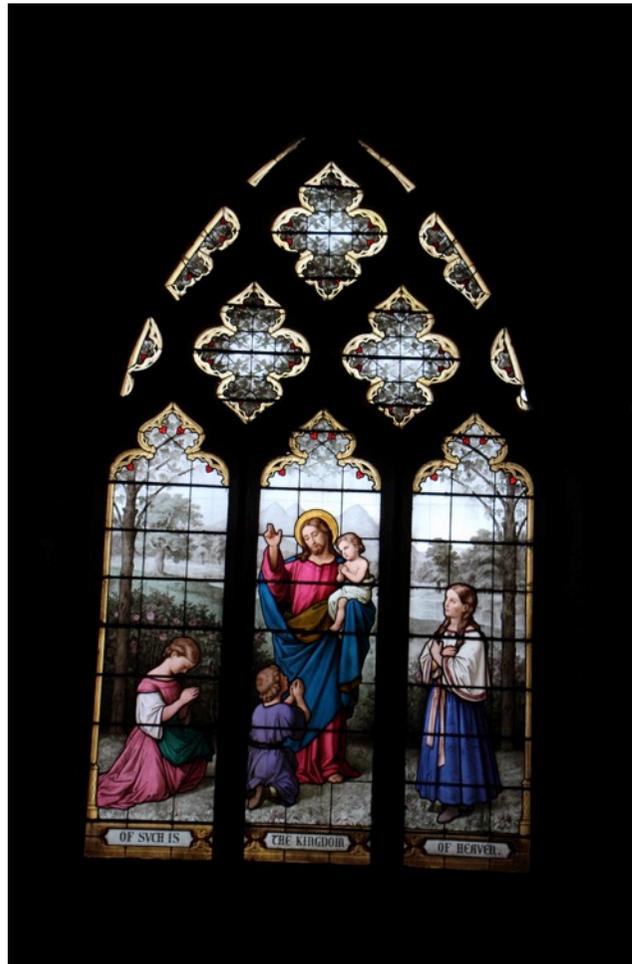
The beautiful altar at St John the Baptist, Ruyton; also a stained glass window.

Lying in the Welsh Marches, **Ruyton castle** was destroyed in 1202 by the Welsh. It was rebuilt by 1313 but was destroyed again by Owain Glyndŵr. Its ruins stand in the parish churchyard.

Parts of the church date from the 1130s.

The romantic ruins of the castle to the west of the church at Ruyton.

A beautiful panoramic view from the churchyard at St John the Baptist, Ruyton.

An old lych gate at St John the Baptist, Ruyton XI Towns. A picture board in the churchyard gives an idea of the castle's design and also a timeline of its history.

Loppington

St Michael and All Angels, Loppington.

Loppington is a village situated a few miles west of Wem. It has the only remaining bull ring in North Shropshire, which was reported to be used for bull baiting until the 19th century.

A plaque in the churchyard urging visitors to respect God's Acre.

In 1190 Alexander de Lopitone granted Loppington Church and its tithes to Wombridge Abbey in return for prayers at the Priory for his deceased family members. It was at this time that the original stone church would have been built and there is evidence of Norman stone work in the building.

Inside the beautiful St Michael and All Angels, Loppinton.

Three kneelers at the altar of St Michael and All Angels, Loppington, depict the seasons, and buildings in the village.
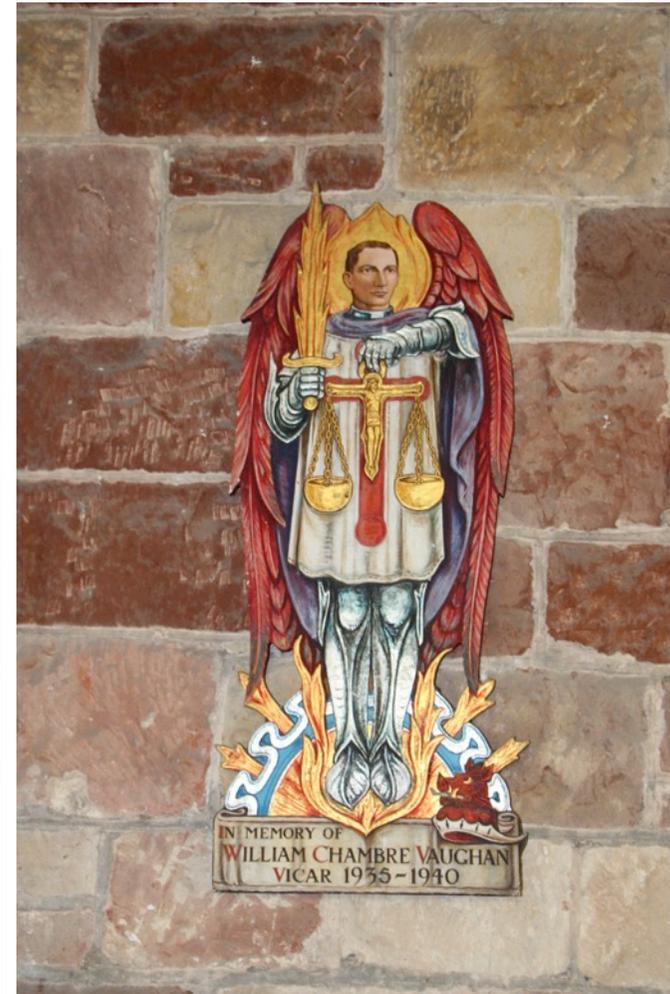
The Tapestry to the right of the Lady Chapel showing the Light of Christ was produced to mark the Millennium. Right: a memorial to a former vicar, William Chambre Vaughan.

A large wall tapestry depicting St. Michael slaying the dragon. This was designed and worked on by five ladies of the church in memory of Revd Roy Sorfleet, a former vicar.

An unusually-shaped door handle at St Michael and All Angels, Loppington.

In 1643 there was a Battle of Loppington. During the Civil War, Loppington remained loyal to the Crown, as did most of Shropshire, but Wem was for Parliament. The Parliamentary forces sited a gun on Ditches Hill outside Wem and fired on Loppington, damaging the north wall of the church. The church roof was then set alight to force the occupants out and the roof and arcade were destroyed.
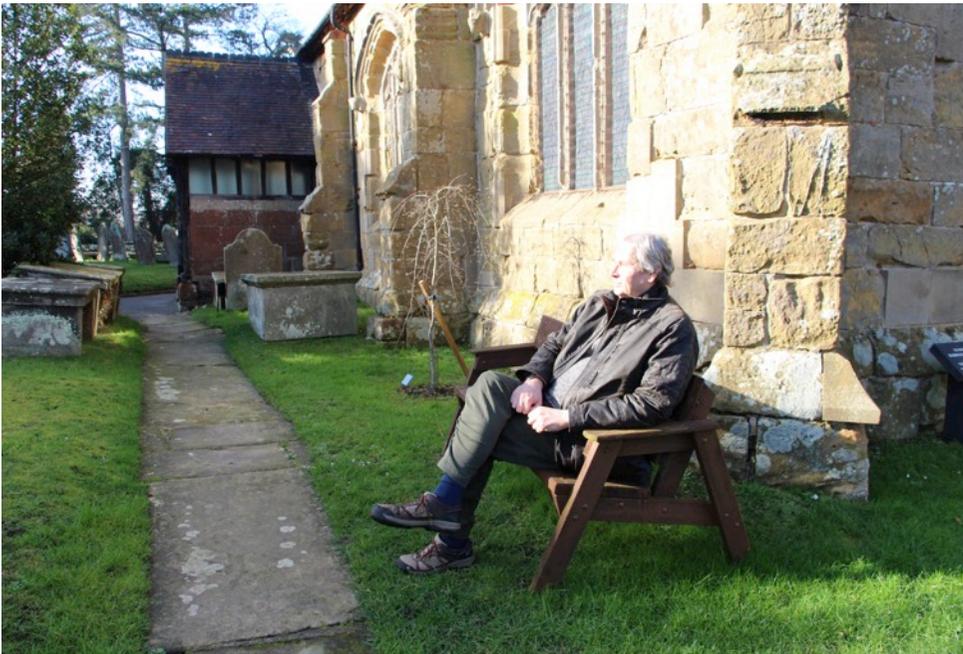
Enjoying the sun on a bench in the churchyard at Loppington.

Lyneal with Colemere

Situated at one of **Colemere, St John the Evangelist Church** was designed by G. E. Street, one of the great architects of his age (he also restored York Minster and Salisbury Cathedral). The foundation stone was laid on 3rd June 1869 and local stone, brought from Cefn by canal to Lyneal Wharf, was used in the construction.

The church is located on the shore of one of Shropshire's most beautiful meres, Colemere. The lake is almost completely surrounded by mature woodland and has two very attractive hay meadows. The site attracts a variety of wildfowl and waders.

The Church dates from 1870 and was built for Marian, Viscountess Alford as a memorial to her son, the second Earl Brownlow.

St John the Evangelist Church, Colemere.

Left: An attractive lamp on the pathway to the church. Right: a tree stump provides a convenient seat in the churchyard.

Sheep grazing in the field by St John the Evangelist Church.

The church has an idyllic panoramic view over Colemere.

Martin and Magda Jones

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Please let us know should you find any factual inaccuracies: mmjones29@blueyonder.co.uk

Information sources:

Battlefield
https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/visit/church-listing/st-mary-magdalene-battlefield.html

Preston Gubbals
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Martin%27s_Church,_Preston_Gubbals

Ruyton XI Towns
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruyton-XI-Towns

Loppington
http://www.stmichaelsloppington.co.uk/history.html

Colemere
https://sites.google.com/site/colemereresidentsassociation/home/st-michael-s-church