

The Green Man

- 1 Glance upwards as you approach or enter many of Britain's great cathedrals and churches, and it is more than likely you will catch sight of the Green Man looking down at you. But who is this strange green figure, surrounded by foliage, often with leaves spilling forth from his mouth?
- 2 Green Men are usually found on religious buildings but not always: the Green Man is also a popular name for English inns and pubs! However, the Green Man is an example of how images from the Old Religion were brought into Christian churches, and is one of the most ancient, pagan symbols to be found in the Christian church. Pre-Christian pagan traditions and superstitions, 35, were still influential in the early Middle Ages. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the Green Man seems to appear most often in places where there are stretches of ancient woodland, for example in Devon and Somerset and on the edges of the forest areas of Yorkshire and the Midlands.
- 3 As the Green Man is also portrayed with acorns and hawthorn leaves, symbols of fertility in medieval times, this would seem to reinforce the association with spring. However, the common theme which runs through these figures would seem to be that of death and rebirth, and the green that means life. Perhaps then, the Green Man appears on our medieval churches as a symbol of rebirth and resurrection, tying together the old ancient pagan symbols associated with spring with the new faith. Or perhaps the medieval stonemasons were just hedging their bets and incorporating the Green Man into the fabric of the religious buildings as a safety measure, to make doubly sure of the coming of spring and a plentiful harvest!



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