

Manorfield Detectives.



The Parish Chest.

This photograph shows the Parish Chest inside St. Michael's church. The chest is shown here by the south door of the church, where it stood before alterations were made. The chest is now near the font at the front of the church.

The chest is approximately 2.5m long and is a hollowed out oak tree trunk with the bark removed.

Nobody knows exactly how old it is but it is thought to be at least 13th century (1200-1299). It was mentioned in Nichols History and Antiquities of Leicestershire, published in 1811 and considered one of the most ancient in England even then.

So, why is it in the church?

Well, with a chest as old as this one, it has probably been part of the church since it was built.

As far back as Saxon and Norman England wooden chests have been an important feature of a parish church.

During the reign of King John (1199-1216), Pope Innocent III ordered that every parish church should have a hollowed out trunk fastened by 3 keys for security.

In 1287 it was ordered from the Synod of Exeter that all churches should have a chest for keeping books, vestments and church plate safe. A synod is a meeting of officials in a church.



Church plate is a collective term used for items made from precious metals (silver and gold), used in church services and celebrations.

These could be candlesticks, chalices and patens or baptismal shells or bowls.

Vestments are the robes and garments worn by the clergy and choir during church services and ceremonies.





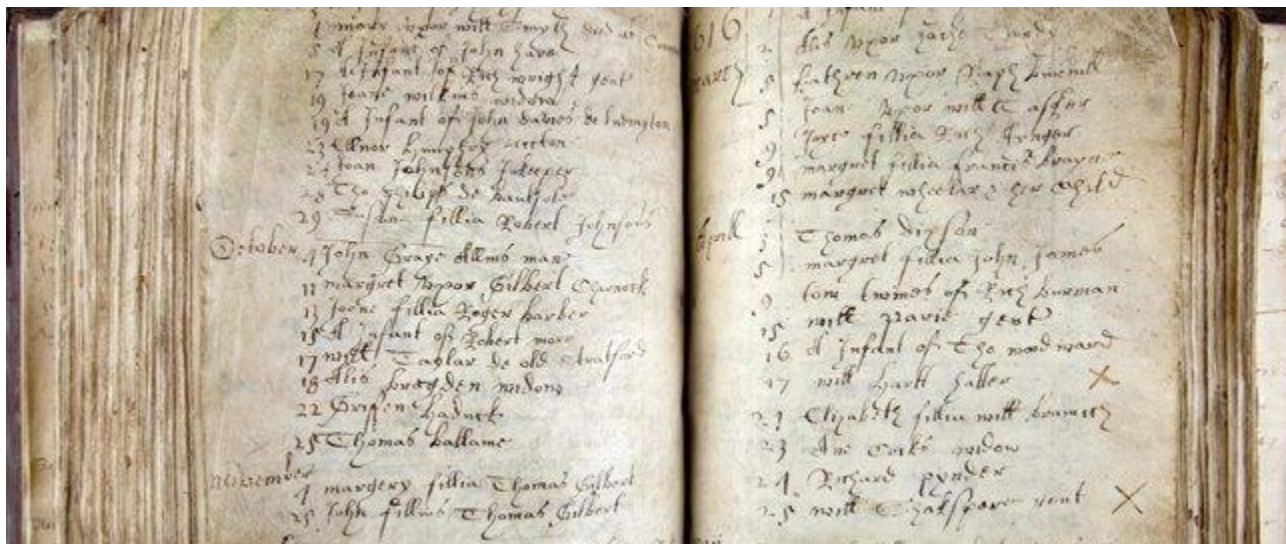
Can you find out what a chalice and a paten is?

Here is a link to see how these objects are used in a service.

<http://request.org.uk/life/spirituality/communion/>

In 1291, Pope Nicholas taxed every parish to raise money towards the cost of the Crusades. Money was to be stored in secure wooden chest with metal locks.

In Tudor England, Thomas Cromwell, the Vicar General to Henry VIII passed a law in 1538 to keep registers of baptisms, marriages and burials in every parish church. Stoney Stanton parish records survive from 1558, when Elizabeth I was the Queen of England.



So, parish chests have been used for hundreds of years for many different reasons. To keep clothing, objects, documents and precious items safe for the future.

One way to discover just how old the chest was would be to have a sample of the wood tested by a dendrochronologist.

See what you can discover about dendrochronology.
The picture is a clue.

