



Parish Church Treasures: The Nation's Greatest Art Collection

John Goodall

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Our parish churches constitute a living patrimony without precise European parallel. Their cultural riches are astonishing, not only for their quality and quantity, but also their diversity and interest. Fine art and architecture here combine unpredictably with the functional, the curious and the naïve, from prehistory to the present day, to form an unsung national museum which presents its contents in an everyday setting without curators or formal displays. Because church treasures usually remain in the buildings they were created for, properly interpreted they tell from thousands of local perspectives the history of the nation, its people and their changing religious observance.

John Goodall's weekly series in *Country Life* has celebrated particular objects in or around churches that are of outstanding artistic, social or historical importance, to underline both the intrinsic interest of parish churches and the insights that they and their contents offer into English history of every period. *Parish Church Treasures* incorporates and significantly expands this material to tell afresh the remarkable history of the parish church. It celebrates the special character of churches as places to visit whilst providing an authoritative and up-to-date history at a time when the use and upkeep of these buildings and the care of their contents is highly contentious.



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