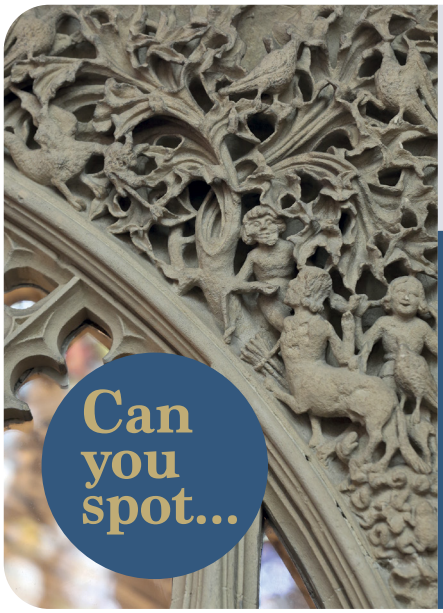
The Chantry Chapel

The Chantry Chapel was built in the Tudor times. It was started in about 1515 but it still wasn't finished 24 years later when Henry VIII closed the Abbey. It is one of the most beautiful parts of Bath Abbey and today, is a place where people can sit quietly and pray if they wish.

The Prior (or Head) of Bath Abbey was in charge of building the Chapel. His name was William Birde and you can see lots of birds and the letter W carved into the stone. This is called a rebus – it means making a word puzzle out of a name. Birde was so passionate about the project that he gave all his wealth to help build the Chapel. Sadly, he died in 1525 before it was finished.

One side of the Chapel was left blank and the stone carving was only finished in 1833, over 300 hundred years after it was begun.



The Tudors used lots of symbols (which is an object which stands for something else). For example, the use of vines represent Jesus. In the Bible, He says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener".

A dragon? It represents the Devil.

A centaur, who is half man half horse? He is shooting the dragon with a bow (which has broken off) and arrows. The man part of the centaur represents Jesus.

A man and woman? They are probably not Adam and Eve because there is no Serpent with them. They may be symbols of working peasants.

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Activity ideas

1. Using the pictures above to inspire you, copy or design your own carving for the Chapel below. You may want to make your design symmetrical and include plants and flowers in it, like the Tudors did.
2. The Chapel is a beautiful, quiet and peaceful place. Is there a place that makes you feel peaceful? What is special about it? What do think about when you are there? You could draw a picture or write about it.
3. A symbol is an object which stands for something else. The Chapel contains several Tudor roses (see the picture top left) which is the symbol for England. Which countries do these flowers represent? (answers below):

Daffodil (Wales), Shamrock (Ireland), Thistle (Scotland)

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