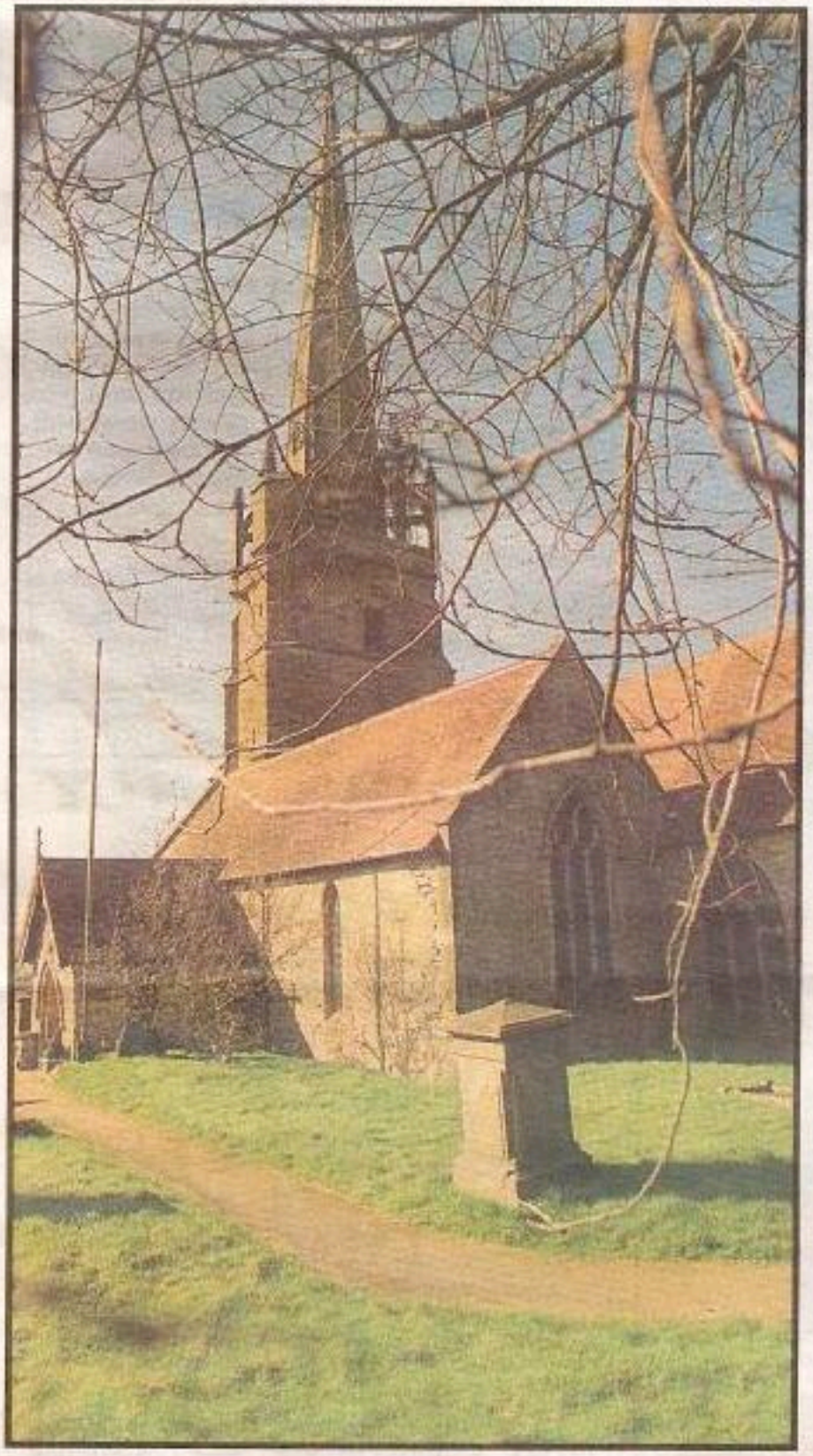


St George's legend is set in stone

THE beautiful parish church of St John the Baptist in Ruardean is one of the oldest in the county, dating from the early 12th century.

Local legend gives the date as the numerically symmetrical 1111 but the vicar, the Reverend Cliff Davies, dismisses this as fanciful romanticism.

But like so many ancient churches, it is a jigsaw in stone and time.

The lady chapel itself is from the 12th century, the porch was added in 1200 and the chancel and sanctuary saw the light of day around 1635.

On the tympanum of the Norman main doorway is a large carving depicting the battle between good and evil, personified as St George and the dragon.

The piece was the work of the Hereford School of carvers and there is also a large painting of it hanging in the belltower.

The church also boasts an unusual font in that it bears the date 1657.

This is remarkable because, at that time in our history, England was groaning under the moral weight of puritanism and fonts were generally forbidden for their frivolity.

Today, unlike so many country churches whose identities have been swallowed up within a united benefice, Ruardean maintains its autonomy as a single parish.

"It is a healthy and lively congregation," said Mr Davies. "We have a good mix of all ages. There is an older congregation for evensong but that is to be expected.

"We have a lot of young people coming through and we have lots of social events, like soup lunches."



■ ABOVE: An idyllic rural scene at St John the Baptist in Ruardean.

■ FAR RIGHT: Take a step back in time as you wander around the inside of the church.

Pictures: Martin Perry