The Church of San Gwydre

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The Perfect Setting

I have always been fascinated by church buildings due to the interesting architecture, as well as the images and atmosphere they evoke. I have built two churches in the past and both gave me a great challenge and helped to mold my building style into what it has become today. I have recently been writing and creating my own medieval saga and the first chapter has been based around a village and its various landmarks. I needed a larger more impressive setting for the final part and the idea of the scene set in an old churchyard with the church looming in the background was too good to pass up.

Preparation

Firstly, I needed some inspiration. I already knew I wanted to base the look of the church on the old Norman churches that can be found in many English country villages. Using my local church and a few images from the internet I was able to settle on a design that would suit my story's setting. I have never been one to draw up a rough design; I have always put together an image in my head and then worked from that. Like many LEGO® builders, I will then build a 3D image of the model in my head, working out any possible problems and what techniques and elements will work best. Once I have a clear vision of what I'm going to do, it's time to start building.

Foundation

From the start, I knew the church itself would be the main center piece of the model, so this would have an effect on how I would approach the whole build. Rather than build a landscape and place the church on top, I thought it would be best to build the church first and then build the landscape around it. This allows me to have more ease and freedom to be able to work on the church without a large landscape getting in the way. Another advantage is that having the church in place first, allows me to create a landscape that will compliment it. I started by laying down a foundation for the church building which you can see in Fig. 1.

The foundation needed to be two bricks high to allow me to add a row of 1x2 hinge bricks which are used to angle the walls slightly inwards. I then built one section of wall as a test,

which you can also see in this picture. This wall is mounted on the hinge bricks and then leans inwards against an inner wall of basic bricks. With this important section in place and happy with the result, I could then work on the rest using this as a guide.

Time & Patience

Creating the complex textured look of the stone walls is a long process. Not only do I have to build the outer textured wall, I also have to build an inner wall of basic bricks to add strength and support.

As you can see in Fig. 2, the textured stone effect is achieved by using a combination of many different bricks which are all placed as randomly as possible. This can take a long time as I like to stand back and take a long look at each area to make sure everything looks natural and pleasing to the eye. Sometimes, just the slight change in placement of a single brick can make all the difference! You will also notice that the stained glass windows are off-set using Jumper Plates to allow them to fit perfectly between the arches. Once one side of the church is built, I can then build a mirror image on the other side and build the tower.

Now we come to the roof which you can see in Fig. 3. I would have liked to use standard roof bricks but that would have been lazy of me and would not have allowed me to add any subtle texture. So once again, using hinge pieces I was able to make a roof using plates. Testing various heights of where I placed the hinge bricks allowed me to achieve the best slope gradient for the roof. Then it was a case of adding tiles and plates to achieve a more worn textured look.

Figure 3

Placement & Landscape

After building a solid base for the whole model, I can now lay the completed church in position. The church is placed on a combination of tiles and 1x1 plates which are laid out to match its foundation. This is much easier than trying to attach the church stud by stud and risk breaking it as you force it down.

As you will see in Fig. 4, the church is now in place and I have used various large basic bricks to form the rough contours of the landscape. This idea can be helpful when creating a landscape as it can give you a good template to work with. With this complete, it's now time to create the landscape.

With the rough template already in place, it's now a case of using different plates, bricks and slopes to bring the landscape to life. One of the main features of the settings I have been creating for my story is the use of Dark and Sand green shades for the landscapes. The standard LEGO® green color is very bright and overused, I felt a more realistic and natural look could be better achieved using more earthy tones. It also adds more to the atmosphere as the story I am writing takes place in a very old, dark and overgrown setting.

In Fig. 5 you can see I have covered the whole area in a combination of dark and Sand green plates with various brown

Figure 4

patches and a few hints of Olive green. I tend to use brown for areas right next to the building, then merge it into the Dark green and then into the lighter Sand green. Apart from the set brown pathway, everything else is randomly placed for a more natural look. I have also used various gray sloped bricks to create a few rock formations. These help break things up and add variation to the landscape.

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Figure 5

The church is in place, the landscape is laid, now for the fun part.

Bringing It to Life

The final process of the model involves adding all the various details and finishing touches that can really help elevate your model and make it stand out. Firstly, I use Dark green leaf pieces which I place over the various brown patches on the landscape. I then follow round and add lots of the Spikey Appendage pieces which work well as roots, thorns and general overgrown areas.

For this model, I wanted to add a small low section of wall on the outer area of landscape with an old wooden roofed gateway to the churchyard and church. Having this extra focal point at the front gives the feel of more depth when looking back at the church; this can be seen clearly in Fig. 6.

You will notice I have placed two trees, one to the left and one to the right. Placing them in these positions do not obstruct the main view of the church, instead they complement the building and help the whole landscape to blend as an image. Once again, the placement of trees in the right way can really make a big difference to the finished look and can make for some great photos. The trees are built using a combination of Technic pieces for the frame and then wrapping Droid Arms around to get the desired effect. Using this technique to build tree's means the possibilities are endless.

The final touches include using a mixture of 1x1 tiles and plates to lay down a worn cobblestone pathway over the bare brown route that runs from the church and out through the graveyard. Then various gravestones are added, randomly littered around the landscape. A lot of the gravestones were inspired by real ones from my local churchyard as I wanted a bit of variation amongst them.

The final result, an old church and graveyard standing amongst a dark and gloomy medieval landscape. The perfect setting and atmosphere for a showdown between good and evil.

Thank you for reading
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Figure 6