



# Dorfkirche Steffenshagen fährtenlese

## **The village church in Steffenshagen**

was built in the 2nd half of the 13th century. The village of Steffenshagen was first mentioned in a document in 1273.

The church was founded by the Cistercian monastery of Doberan. As in other villages in the vicinity of the monastery, a Christian community had developed in Steffenshagen. Before this brick church was built, they had perhaps already been meeting for services in a wooden church.

The choir or chancel of the church, the eastern part of today's large building, was built first. A large number of decorative elements can be found here, the like of which cannot be found in any other village church in Mecklenburg.

## **The mythical creature frieze**

The superimposed friezes with depictions of animals alternating with friezes depicting fig leaves should be emphasised. Lions, panthers and griffins are probably depicted. The latter, like the lions, are symbols of dominion and strength. As winged mammals, griffins combine the earthly and the heavenly. They were used by many rulers in their coats of arms, but also by cities such as Rostock and Greifswald. The panther probably symbolises the resurrection. However, other explanations are also possible. At the time of their creation, such symbols played an important role in people's everyday lives. Then as now, these creatures are fascinating because they are not clearly good or evil – power can be both. It is not known what the patrons really associated with the symbols.

## **The priest's door**

Another unique feature of this church is the door leading into the chancel from the south. It is the priest's gate, which was reserved for priests after the church was completed and well into the Reformation period. The figurative depictions seem almost childish to us today, but this is precisely where their special charm lies. We can identify at least two figures as apostles: St Peter with the key and St Paul with sword and shield. Attempts to give the other figures names are still unsatisfactory.

If you look at the exterior of the village church, you will only realise after careful consideration that the church does not stand before you in its original size. It was doubled in length between 1862 and 1866. The current stone tower was built and replaced a wooden bell tower that had previously been used for four bells. Today, a medieval bell, cast in 1379, and a small bell from the year 2000 still ring in the tower.

The sacristy, attached to the north of the chancel, was also built in 1866 and replaced the previous medieval building, which was decorated with medieval ceiling paintings.

When the church is open, let yourself be surprised by the interior and take time for silence and prayer!