



A Short History of St Marys Church Shrawardine

This is a short version of the history of the building and the village as we know it – if you want to know more please do get in touch as the longer version that was written in 2013 is in the process of being updated.

St Marys has been at the centre of this small community for centuries – in 2013 we commemorated 800 years of known worship on the site culminating in the dedication of a roundel in the west window created by a then member of the congregation. Although the regular congregation is small, we are joined by many members of the 140 strong population at Christmas, Easter and other festivals. The churchyard is frequently visited by family members of those that are buried here and is kept in good order by a dedicated team of volunteers.

The first reference to a church in Shrawardine is 1213, but most of the present building dates from the mid seventeenth century with some earlier fabric remaining. The history of the church is closely linked to the nearby castle, the church being largely destroyed during the Civil War in 1644 – 45 and not being completely rebuilt until 1722. The church was restored in 1892 under architectural supervision having had some interior alterations carried out around 1840 and again in 1861. With the exception of the vestry the external appearance of the church has probably changed little since the church was rebuilt after the Civil War but the interior has had several alterations made to it.

The church consists of a nave of 1649 and chancel dated 1722, both incorporating some twelfth century fabric, restored and a vestry added in 1930. The church is of dressed red sandstone with red and yellow/grey sandstone ashlar dressings. The restoration work from 1892 is evident today in the Gothic Revival style of the interi. One phase of the existing building dates from 1649 when the nave and south porch were rebuilt following demolition by Royalist forces during the Civil War. It is possible that at least some of the sandstone blocks in the nave are reused from the demolished chancel, which was not rebuilt until 1722 as evidenced by a date stone on the east end. Of the building it replaced very little remains but at least part of the north wall of the nave is probably medieval as there is a cusped lancet window which may be original. The font is twelfth century and the gallery seventeenth. Externally little has changed since the rebuilding with the exception of drainage works in 1861 and the blocking of a priest's door in the south wall of the chancel in 1892. In 1930 a small vestry of red sandstone was added on the west end of the church.

The chancel was reconstructed in 1722 in sandstone. It has undergone alteration or restoration on four occasions – 1840, 1861, 1892 and 1936 and its character reflects all four. The windows date in their present form from the 1861 restoration as do the altar rails but both are thought to be earlier. The stained glass in the east window was presented by the Earl of Powys, who also funded the replacement of the roof and ceiling. The floor tiles in the sanctuary date to the 1892 restoration as does the insertion of a piscina and sedilia, the blocking of the priest's doorway in the south wall and the insertion of the chancel arch. Additionally the panelling dates from this restoration and could be made from the old box pews. The altar, reredos and rood all date to 1936. In 2013, the chancel was carpeted and the choir stalls replaced with blue chairs. Beneath the altar is the grave of Frances Browne, Rector at the time of the Civil War. Canon Basil Clarke said of the restorations “these

various well meaning alterations have made it a well kept church but less interesting than it might have been”.

In 2020 the remains of a Maidens Garland were discovered in the vestry. This is a find of high significance given the rarity of such items generally and the design of this one specifically, as well as its strong links to the church and the community. The item is known to relate to a 15 year old girl called Dorothy (Dolly) Newcombe who lived in the village but sadly drowned in the river. Her burial is recorded in the parish registers as taking place on 29 August 1753. Documentary evidence relating to the item report the existence of white gloves, possibly made of paper, attached to it but these do not appear to have survived. White gloves were strongly associated with such items representing the purity of the individual commemorated. Although it was known that the church had several maidens garlands all were thought to have been lost. Rev John Auden noted in the transcripts of the parish registers that “formerly a heart shaped piece of black tin on which was inscribed in gold letters “DN died 1753 aged 15” was to be seen hanging over the window on the south side of the nave and underneath were suspended a pair of white gloves, but the whole of the monument was removed when the church was renovated in 1840”. This is corroborated by Mr Edward Brayne, whose memories were recorded in an article published in 1903 in which he remembers the heart suspended in the church when he was a child and in which he recounts the circumstances of Dolly’s tragic death.

TIMELINE

1086 “Saleurdine” in the Domesday book. No mention of the church.

1165 First mention of Castle.

1213 First mention of church when King John appoints Rector.

1215 Castle destroyed by Llewellyn, abandoned by King to the Earl of Arundel.

1240 Castle recorded as rebuilt.

1291 Parish valued at £5 per annum.

1341 Parish of “Shrawarthin” valued at £2 due to the Earl having enclosed some land and remaining land laying waste due to “insufficient means of the tenantry” and floods.

1386 Shrawardine Chapel found to be “free and without any cure of souls”. Benefice value £5 per annum.

1583 Sir Thomas Bromley, Lord High Chancellor of England purchased Shrawardine Castle. His son Henry made it his principle residence.

1643 Castle garrisoned on behalf of the King.

1644 Chancel was “thrown down on St Matthias Day”.

1645 Church was “puld down on Whitsun Eve”. “The town was burnt on Midsummer Eve and Midsummer Day” and the castle surrendered on the 29th June.

1649 Nave and south porch rebuilt with voluntary contributions.

1722 Chancel rebuilt.

1799 Castle and village sold to Robert, Lord Clive.

1840 Alterations including removal of reredos and prayer boards either side of the east window and maidens garlands from the nave. Changes to the churchyard including

new path and gate on the south side of the church.

1861 Sundry repairs costing £73 including works to the roofs and ceilings paid for by the Earl

of Powys and the Rector George Clive.

1892 Restoration under supervision of Percy Heylyn Currey, a Derby based architect who restored and designed several churches in Derbyshire.

1930 Vestry built at west end.

1936 New altar, reredos, rood to chancel. Organ moved to gallery.

1948 Memorial window to Flying Officer Farrow replaced a plain window in the north nave.

1950 Electric lighting installed

1956 Under seat heating pipes installed.

1987 Listed Grade II*

1991 Windows restored

2001 Maintenance to gallery and bellcote

2013 West window insert of stained glass to commemorate 800 years of worship 2020

Remains of a 1753 Maidens Garland dedicated to Dolly Newcombe discovered

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