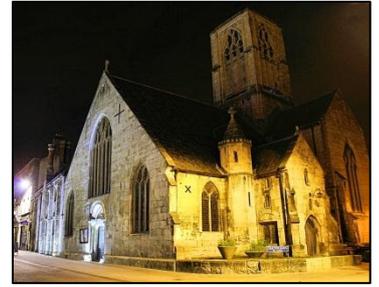


The History of St Mary de Crypt Church

Norman Church

Little is known of the cruciform Norman church other than that it was consecrated in 1137 and that the floor plan had dimensions similar to those of the present church. It was illustrated in the 1455 Rental of Gloucester.



Perpendicular Church

The present church in the Perpendicular Style, which evolved very early in Gloucester, dates from between 1461 and 1490. It was re-built on the Foundations of the Norman Church when Henry Dene, The Patron, was prior of the Priory of Llanthony-St Mary. However the *Victoria History of Gloucestershire (1988)* says that it was new in 1401. The half rounded Responds (half pier bonded into a wall and carrying one end of an arch) and the round arched door on the West Wall are all that remain in the church of its Norman predecessor. The Lancet Windows in the South Choir Aisle date from the 13th Century.

St Mary de Crypt is the only one of the 12 mediaeval churches to have had a crypt and unusually to have one of such dimensions, here extending under the whole of the floor area, although from the East Walls to immediately to the west of the central tower it is fully occupied with burial vaults. Verey (1970) states that the only Norman work to survive is some arches in the blocked off portion of the crypt, which lies under the South Aisle of the Nave. It seems possible that this area is a Charnel House into which the burials in the Norman church were removed when the present church was built.

The accessible chambers under the nave and its north aisle were in use by 1576 as an Inn; during the Civil War, at the time of the Siege in 1643, they were the main magazine of the Parliamentary defenders of the City against the armies of King Charles I. As recently as 1842 they were used for warehousing.

This cruciform church has been described as “A Cathedral in Miniature” because its large Choir is taller and longer than the nave.

Choir

The very tall east window with panel tracery is filled with 19th century stained glass which is an excellent copy of a mediaeval European “Credo” window. The glass is a Memorial to John Goulter Dowling, who had been Rector and Master of The Crypt School. Around each of the named Apostles there are the words which each contributed to the Apostle’s Creed.

In the Sanctuary are windows in the eastern blind bays, rather mutilated about 1530. These were only whitewashed over at the time of the is recognisable as ‘The Adoration’ unidentifiable.



Triple Sedilia and a Piscina on the an Easter Sepulchre on the north

ogee-shaped canopies. A Sedile on the north side of a Sanctuary is very rare and Henry Dene, the patron, is reputed to have placed it for his own use. The raised Sanctuary floor dates the 1845 restoration; it is paved with nineteenth century encaustic tiles with mediaeval Patterns, but also including some which depict in symbolic form the post-Civil War Arms of the city, which are three inverted chevrons and ten cannon balls, only that number remaining when the siege was raised. The art of making encaustic tiles having been lost at the Reformation was rediscovered in 1830. In their making the chosen design is incised in the red clay base, the incisions are filled with white clay, glazed and then fired. At the base of the divided pillar on the south side a small number of pre-Reformation encaustic tiles are affixed. The stone mensa, removed at the Reformation was rediscovered in 1845 and replaced in its

north and south walls and in the mediaeval wall paintings dating from recently uncovered, having been Reformation. The north side painting but that on the south side is

south side and a single Sedile and side, all crowned with gorgeous

original position. The surmounting reredos in Caen stone with Venetian mosaic dates from 1889. Screens separate the Choir from its two side aisles, that on the north side retains a pair of Hagioscopes and the pillars which support the arcade and clerestory are unusually divided to provide access between the Choir and the side aisles.

The Queen Strut roof dates from the 16th century when it was raised and the clerestory added. The delightfully carved and gilded bosses include some depicting angels playing musical instruments

Raikes Chapel

The South Choir aisle was reordered in the 1930 as a memorial to Robert Raikes junior whose family vault is marked by a modern slate cover, also a relief in boxwood, of the younger Robert. The table tomb in the south east corner is that of Sir Thomas and Lady Bell. He had purchased the Blackfriars' Priory from King Henry VIII after the Dissolution; their kneeling figures which once adorned its top have been lost.

The fine memorial by Peter Scheemacker to Dorothy Snell +1746 was moved to this position from the choir in 1845. Above it is the memorial to James Kyrle and Anna his wife +1645. John Kyrle, philanthropist who was known as "The Man of Ross" was related to James. Anna was the sister of Edmund Waller the poet and a cousin of John Hampden the great Cromwellian statesman. On the south side the recessed ogee canopied tomb of Robert Manchester +1460 who bequeathed "his largest brazen pot towards a ring of five Bells of one concord for the tower". The western Memorial screen was erected in 1920.

North Choir Aisle

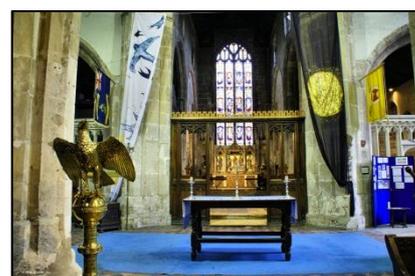
This accommodates the Vestries and the Sweetland Organ. At its east end are memorials also removed from the choir in 1845 to Daniel Lysons +1681 and John Snell +1727. The western memorial screen was erected in 1920 as a memorial to those men of the parish who gave their lives in the 1914 -1918 War.

Tower

The central tower is supported on massive columns that in the north-west corner being enlarged to accommodate the spiral stair leading to the Ringing Chamber and at one time the Rood-Loft. It houses a fine ring of eight bells cast and hung by the Gloucester Bell Foundry of the Rudhalls. At one time also a faceless clock, located in the Clock Chamber, would have sounded the hours. The figures surrounding the bell-hole in the centre of the lierne vault represent the four Apostles: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. On the south east column is a sword rest dating from the reign of George II on which the Civic Sword would have been placed during a service attended by the Mayor. The Nave Altar is a seventeenth century Refectory table, formerly in St John the Baptist.

North Transept

The memorial brasses from the tomb of John +1529 and Joanne Cooke +1345 who founded The Crypt School were placed in front of a closed doorway in 1923 by the Old Cryptians' Club. On the north-west column, supporting the tower is the only memorial in the city of his birth to the Reverend George Whitefield. It was erected in 1939 following the celebrations to mark the 250th anniversary of his ordination. Facing this is the carved oak chest inscribed "St Mary de Crypt 1603". Names incised in the floor tiles mark the vaults beneath of various families. The family of bankers named Hoare founded Yale University in the USA.



South Transept

Contains the 18th Century font in which Whitefield and Raikes were baptised. On the south wall is the piscina of a chantry chapel which once occupied this space. A heavy wooden chest with three locks and a padlock in which the parish treasures would have been kept in the 15th Century, formerly in St John the Baptist.

Nave

Tall Nave of three bays with slender cruciform chamfered pillars. The roof, which also covers the aisles was originally a Crown Post roof but the collar purse Crown Posts have been removed; these timbers may have formed the roof of the Norman church before being re-used. The linenfold pews date from the 1845 restoration but may have re-used the timber from those that they replaced. The pulpit with its sounding board, from which George Whitefield preached his first sermon on 27 June 1736 may be contemporary with the church, but other experts date it as seventeenth century which seems more likely since pulpits in churches were not obligatory until 1603. Between 1845 and 1975 the pulpit was in use in the Congregational Chapel at Edge, near Painswick, explaining the brass plate attached to it.

The wooden eagle lectern also dates from the 17th Century and the two clergy stalls were brought from St Weonard's Church in Herefordshire, but are contemporary with the pulpit. On the sill of the north aisle window is a bust from the tomb of Richard Lane +1667, a former Mayor. Nearby the memorial brasses to the two wives of William F-Henshaw+1515, bell-founder, moved to this position in 1959 when St Michael's church was demolished. Also, but not now evident on the north wall, there was a north door and also a window which was closed up when the Crypt School was built in 1539.

South Porch

Above the rib vaulting is a Priest's Room which is accessed by a spiral stair from the north aisle and which provided access to the north, south and west galleries. The north and south galleries were removed in 1845 and the west gallery in 1875 when the organ was moved to its present location.

Bells

The Richard Manchester ring of bells was recast and rehung, unsatisfactorily, several times prior to 1710, when Rudhalls Gloucester Bell Foundry was commissioned to recast and rehang them. To the five bells of 1710, two Treble's were added in 1749 and the Tenor Bell (14 cwt) was added in 1772. The 7th was recast in 1864 by Mears. In 1907 they were rehung on a steel frame with plain bearings. They are regularly rung by Members of the Ancient Society of Crypt Youths, founded in 1710.

Old Crypt School

In 1329, Richard Hart, Prior of Llanthony St Mary, Patron of St Mary de Crypt, conveyed to John Cooke an L shaped piece of the burial ground for the establishment of a "frescole of grammar". The schoolhouse was built abutting the north wall of the church and was purchased by the parish in 1860 for £500, for use as Parish Rooms when the school outgrew the building. The Southgate Street face is ashlar (masonry of large blocks wrought to even faces and square edges) but the churchyard side is Tudor brick. The Master's Desk is on permanent loan to The Crypt School.