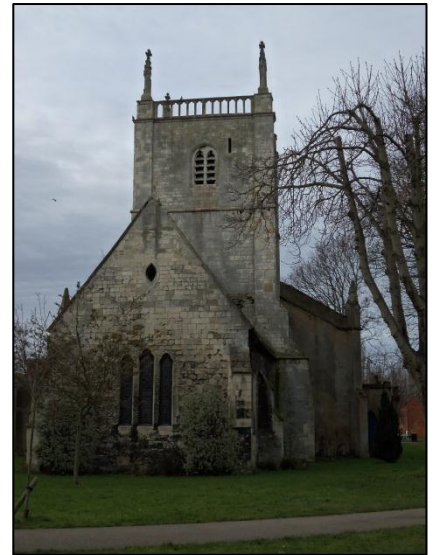


The History of St Mary de Lode Church

The old church of St Mary de Lode, also called St Mary before the gate of St Peter, St Mary Broadgate, and St Mary de Port, has long been considered to be of Saxon foundation. Its name is Old English and refers to the ford or lode that crossed the River Severn which ran near the west door.

2nd – 10th Century

Excavations in the nave during the summers of 1978 and 1979, under the direction of Richard Bryant, revealed that the church is built over two substantial Roman buildings of the 2nd-4th and 5th-6th centuries. The second Roman building appears to have been deliberately levelled to make way for a timber building, which contained burials in the Christian manner, and may have been either a Christian mausoleum or a church.



Above this building lay the floors of the 9th or 10th century Saxon nave. Just outside the west end of this church was a cemetery which was in use for at least 250 years before a stone western annex was added to the nave. The annex was built in the mid-11th century or earlier. It had substantial foundations, probably to support a large western gallery rather than a tower.

11th - 13th Century

In the 11th or 12th century the Saxon nave was demolished, but the walls of the western annex were incorporated into the first aisle-less Norman nave. The Norman church also had a central tower and a short chancel. A decorated doorway was set into the west wall of the retained annex.

In the mid-12th century, north and south aisles were added, and the walls of the nave were pierced for an arcade. Towards the end of the century the tower fell and destroyed the chancel. Both the tower and chancel were rebuilt in a style markedly different from that of the first Norman building.

In the 13th century, the chancel was extended to the east and the aisles to the west, while the north and south walls of the western annex were cut back to allow another bay to be added to the nave arcade.

Architectural elements from the 12th century onwards are still visible in the tower and chancel, but the nave was demolished in 1824-26 and replaced in the early Gothic revival style.

Roman Pavement discovered

In 1825 a Roman pavement was discovered. The Gloucester Journal of 22nd August 1825 gives a description of a beautiful tessellated pavement which had been discovered in the churchyard of St Mary de Lode about 5 feet below the surface of the earth, and states that the walls of the old Church were built upon it. The report of the builder was as follows: "*It was divided into compartments enriched with a variety of scrolls, frets, and other ornaments having a wreathed border enclosing figures of fish and surrounded with a guilloche. The colours of the tesserae are red, white and bluish-grey*". In the excavations of 1978 and 1979, a large mosaic with white diagonal trellis decoration against a black background was discovered, and a portion of this mosaic can be viewed at the rear of the north nave pews.

Gloucester must have been an important centre between Roman and Saxon times, for Conmal, the last British King of Gloucester, was defeated by the Saxons at Dyrham in 577, and when in the 7th century Christianity attained a permanent footing in the West Country, Gloucester was the capital of the Huiccas. Although the Anglo-Saxon bishopric of the time was established at Worcester (680),

there must have been a church or churches in Gloucester, and tradition favours the church of St Mary de Lode. Not much is known of the church in 9th and 10th centuries, but although Gloucester was captured and sacked by the Danes in 877, Ethelred ruled Gloucester later under Alfred the Great and was buried in the parish in 911. According to the Domesday Book, except the Abbeys of St Peter and St Oswald, there was only one parish in the whole city at the time of the conquest, which must be St Mary de Lode. The entry relates "Arnulfus the priest holds one mansion which pays gabel and withholds other custom".



In 1222 a disastrous fire broken out in Gloucester, and the "entire parish of St Mary was burnt", and the fate of the church is naturally impossible to determine.

With the rise in power and influence of St Peter's Abbey (now the Cathedral), it followed that so large a parish as St Mary de Lode should be appropriated to the monastery. This was done and it is interesting to note that the Vicar and his successors were granted "a corrody pension of 5 marks a year, hay for one horse and entertainment for himself, a chaplain, a deacon, and two clerks, at the Abbey's table on certain festivals".

In the 16th century, St Mary's Square was the scene of a national tragedy, for on 9th February 1555, during the reign of Queen Mary, John Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester and Worcester, was burnt at the stake. A monument was erected on the site of his martyrdom in 1862.

Siege of Gloucester

St Mary de Lode fared badly in the Civil War. During the siege of Gloucester in 1643, the church itself was used as a prison for the Royalist soldiers captured at Barbers Bridge and Cirencester. There seems to have been no vicar from 1641-1660, and during that period there were several strongly supported petitions for uniting the Church with the Cathedral, but all ultimately failed.

In the chancel is the 13th century recumbent effigy of a priest vested in apparelled alb, stole, maniple and chasuble, lying under a much damaged 15th century canopy on the north side. It may possibly be the tomb of William de Chamberlayne. The tomb was opened and rifled in the 17th century but no treasures were discovered. (Some have claimed it is a monument erected to the memory of Lucius, the first Christian King of Britain, who Robert of Gloucester's chronicle mentions died at Gloucester about four years after his conversion, and who Camden and Collyer state was buried in St Mary de Lode Church.)

Organ and Bells

There is a fine peal of six bells, four of them by Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester and two by Roger Purdue of Bristol.

The organ was in the now redundant St Nicholas Church until 1968. The original organ was a one manual organ dated about 1760, some of the stopped wooden flutes are inscribed 1766, and tradition has it that it was originally at Moorfields and may have been played by Handel.

The pulpit is of 15th century workmanship showing the Tudor Rose on one of its panels.

Alterations and Additions

Alterations during the years 1978 and 1981 saw the pews in the aisles removed, a new nave floor laid, the west third of the nave converted into a hall, kitchen and toilets and the south porch reopened. The chancel was repointed and the southeast buttress extensively repaired. New windows were fitted to the northwest of the nave and repairs made to some of the chancel windows. The gallery was brought forward over the hall, and the west end features of the 1825 nave were retained.



Tributes

On the north wall are war memorials to men of the parish who died during the Two World Wars. There is a tablet in memory of Lieutenant Malcolm Cotton Brown, Royal Air Force, whose machine crashed at Brockworth in July 1918. This is one of the very few war memorials to an American in an English parish church. Malcolm Cotton Brown, the eldest son of a well-known American family, was a very gifted man, who joined the RAF before America entered the War.

There is a memorial to the Reverend C.C. ("Kit") Tanner, B.A., a curate at St Mary de Lode 1937-1939, a Cambridge Blue and rugby international who, while serving as a chaplain in the Royal Navy was awarded the Albert Medal for Gallantry at Sea. The citation in the London Gazette reads:

"For bravery and tireless devotion in saving life, when HMS FIJI was sunk during the Battle of Crete. Mr Tanner stayed to save the wounded men from the sick bay and was one of the last to leave the ship. While in the water he spent himself in helping men to rafts and floats and, when the rescuing ship came up, in taking to her the disabled men and others who could not swim... At length only one man remained to be taken across. Despite his exhaustion, Mr Tanner made a last effort to save him. He took him across and saw him safely on board, but when hauled up himself he died within a few minutes" (22nd May 1941).

Tributes in stained glass windows can be seen in the church commemorating:

- The Royal Gloucestershire Hussars – depicting significant battles during the First and Second World Wars in Egypt, Palestine, North and South Africa. Installed thanks to numerous donations and the Gloucestershire Regiment and dedicated on 20th April 1997
- Councillor Freda Wilton – the city's first lady Sheriff who ran the youth club at the church and was heavily involved with the Luncheon Club. The Club raised funds for the window which was dedicated on 16th July 2000



Robert Nairac Window

Captain Robert Nairac – the 29 year old Grenadier Guardsman who was awarded the George Cross, posthumously, for outstanding bravery. Installed thanks to the Glos. Branch of the Royal Society of St George and dedicated on 6th May 2000



Ivor Gurney Window

Ivor Gurney – Gloucester poet and composer, sponsored by the Ivor Gurney Society and dedicated on 28th October 2000