

St Mary de Crypt Church

The present church in the Perpendicular Style, which evolved very early in Gloucester, dates from between 1461 and 1490. It has been described as “A Cathedral in Miniature” because its large choir is taller and longer than the nave. It was re-built on the foundations of the earlier Norman church when Henry Dene, the patron, was prior of the Priory of Llanthony-St Mary (later Archbishop of Canterbury). Little is known of the Norman church other than that it was consecrated in 1137 and that the floor plan had dimensions similar to those of the present church.

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. The accessible chambers under the nave and its north aisle were in use by 1576 as an inn. During the English 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.

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. In the eastern blind bays of the Sanctuary are rather mutilated mediaeval wall paintings dating from about 1530. These were only recently uncovered, having been whitewashed over at the time of the Reformation. The north side painting is recognisable as “The Adoration” but that on the south side is unidentifiable.

The South Choir aisle was reordered in the 1930 as a memorial to Robert Raikes junior (founder of the Sunday School movement) whose family vault is marked by a modern slate cover.

The central tower is supported on massive columns that in the north-west corner were enlarged to accommodate the spiral stair leading to the Ringing Chamber, which houses a fine ring of eight bells cast and hung by the Gloucester Bell Foundry of the Rudhalls.

In the North Transept can be seen memorial brasses from the tomb of John and Joan Cooke who founded The Crypt School; and the only memorial in the city of his birth to the Reverend George Whitefield, internationally renowned evangelical preacher. Names incised in the floor tiles mark the vaults beneath of various families including the Hoare family of bankers who founded Yale University in the USA.

The South Transept contains the 18th Century font in which Whitefield and Raikes were baptised.