

## = St Mary 's Church , Acton =

St Mary 's Church is an active Anglican parish church located in Monk 's Lane , Acton , a village to the west of Nantwich , Cheshire , England . Since 1967 it has been designated a Grade I listed building . A church has been present on this site since before the time of the Domesday Survey . The tower is the oldest in Cheshire , although it had to be largely rebuilt after it fell in 1757 . One unusual feature of the interior of the church is that the old stone seating around its sides has been retained . In the south aisle are some ancient carved stones dating back to the Norman era . The architectural historian Alec Clifton @-@ Taylor includes the church in his list of ' best ' English parish churches . In the churchyard is a tall 17th @-@ century sundial . The church is an active Anglican parish church in the diocese of Chester , the archdeaconry of Macclesfield and the deanery of Nantwich . Its benefice is united with those of St David , Wettenhall , St Oswald , Worleston , and St Bartholomew , Church Minshull .

## = = History = =

The presence of a church with two priests on the site is recorded in the Domesday Book . The church and its lands were given by the second Baron of Wich Malbank to Combermere Abbey early in the 12th century . Following the dissolution of the monasteries , the advowson was granted to Richard Wilbraham and it then passed to the Lords Tollemache .

The tower was built about 1180 , which makes it the oldest tower in Cheshire . When it was built it was over 100 feet ( 30 m ) high but its top collapsed in a storm in March 1757 damaging the roof of the church and the clerestory . It was rebuilt but only to a height of 80 feet ( 24 m ) . The north aisle was built in the last quarter of the 14th century in Decorated style and the south aisle and chancel were built early in the 15th century . The internal fittings of the church were damaged in the Civil War . There were restorations in the 17th and 18th centuries . In 1897 ? 98 the Lancaster architects Austin and Paley carried out a further restoration . This included reflooring and reroofing the church , removing the plaster ceilings , rebuilding the north wall of the north aisle and the clerestory , installing heating apparatus , and adding a new pulpit , porches , and doors .

## = = Architecture = =

### = = = Exterior = = =

The church is built in red sandstone with a lead roof . The tower is within the body of the church with arches leading into the nave and the side aisles . These arches , together with the thin lancet windows and the flat buttresses , date from the 13th century . The authors of the Buildings of England series state that this early date is rare for towers in Cheshire . The upper parts of the tower , built after the collapse of 1757 , are by William Baker in early Gothic Revival style . The nave has four bays , with north and south aisles of six bays . The chancel has three bays with a vestry on its north side . The piers of the arcade date from the 13th century while the capitals are from the 19th @-@ century restoration . The authors of the Buildings of England series state that the body of the church is mostly Perpendicular in style . At the east end of the north aisle is the Mainwaring chapel , which was originally a Lady Chapel ; at the north side of the tower is the Dorfold chantry . Old stone seating remains around the sides of the church , which is unusual .

### = = = Fittings and furniture = = =

In the Mainwaring chapel is the canopied wall tomb of Sir William Mainwaring of Baddiley and Peover who died in 1399 . His effigy is in alabaster , it is recumbent and dressed in plate armour as a knight . His head rests on a helm bearing an ass 's head and around his neck is a gold collar of essés . The rest of the monument is in red sandstone . At the east end of the south aisle is a marble

tomb commemorating Sir Richard Wilbraham ( 1578 ? 1643 ) , his son Sir Thomas Wilbraham ( 1601 ? 1660 ) and their wives . It includes the recumbent effigies in marble of Sir Thomas and his wife , Elizabeth . At the east end of the south aisle is an ancient piscina which is in good condition . In the chancel is another piscina and a sedilia , both of which are damaged . The screen in the Dorfold chapel is dated 1685 while that dividing the chancel from the nave is from a later date . The communion rail is also dated 1685 . The brass chandelier dates from the 18th century . Stained glass in the east window and in windows of the south aisle is by Kempe and is dated between 1885 and 1888 . The reredos includes the Ten Commandments to the north of the altar and the Lord 's Prayer and the Creed to the south . The carved oak pulpit on a stone base and the oak eagle lectern date from the 19th century .

The font has a Norman bowl with lead lining set on a 19th @-@ century base . It consists of a round bowl carved with figures , and simple ornamentation . For many years it had been in the garden of nearby Dorfold Hall before being reinstated in the church . At the east end of the south aisle are carved stones , some in sandstone , others in limestone . The style of the limestone stones suggests a date at the end of the 11th century and that of the sandstone stones around 1100 . They are considered to be among the most significant pieces of Romanesque sculpture in the country . There is a ring of six bells . Five of these were cast by Rudhall of Gloucester in the 18th century and the sixth by John Taylor & Co in 1893 . The parish registers begin in 1653 and the churchwardens ' accounts in 1755 . The two @-@ manual organ was made by Alex Young and Sons of Manchester in 1897 , and was renovated in 1939 , and again in 1997 .

= = External features = =

In the churchyard is a tall sandstone sundial over 12 feet ( 4 m ) high . It was originally a medieval cross which was made into a sundial in the late 17th century . The remaining parts of the cross consist of an octagonal shaft on three ashlar steps . On top of this has been added a square moulded cap surmounted by a ball finial . On each face of the head is a dial , and the head is surmounted by a globe on a short stem . It is a scheduled monument and is designated as a Grade II listed building . Also listed Grade II is the red sandstone churchyard boundary wall which is probably an 1897 restoration of an earlier wall . The churchyard contains the war graves of five Commonwealth service personnel ; two of World War I and three of World War II .

A. N. Hornby ( 1847 ? 1925 ) who played for Lancashire and England is buried here . He was the first man ( of only two ) to captain his country in both cricket and rugby , but is also remembered as the England cricket captain whose side lost the Test match which gave rise to the Ashes , at home against the Australians in 1882 . Additionally , he played football for Blackburn Rovers . He was immortalised in one of the best known of all cricket poems , At Lord 's by Francis Thompson which contains the following lines :

It is little I repair to the matches of the Southron folk ,  
Though my own red roses there may blow ;  
It is little I repair to the matches of the Southron folk ,  
Though the red roses crest the caps , I know .  
For the field is full of shades as I near a shadowy coast ,  
And a ghostly batsman plays to the bowling of a ghost ,  
And I look through my tears on a soundless @-@ clapping host  
As the run stealers flicker to and fro ,  
To and fro :  
O my Hornby and my Barlow long ago !

= = Current activities = =

St Mary 's continues to be active as an Anglican parish church . It is the most active member of the Cross Country Group of Parish Churches which comprises St Mary 's , St Bartholomew 's , Church Minshull , St Oswald 's , Worleston and St David 's , Wettenhall . The churches share a vicar and

three licensed readers . The vicar is Revd Peter Lillicrap . St Mary 's holds two or three services each Sunday and a service of Holy Communion each Wednesday . The group of churches is also involved with community activities including Praise & Play for pre @-@ school children and their carers , the Holy Disorder youth club and the 1st Darnhall Guides and Brownies . The church is open for visits and private prayers on Wednesday mornings .