



The origins of St Mary's date from the early part of King Edgar the Peacemaker's reign, c.AD 960, when he founded a church at the site. However, unlike the other churches in the region, St Mary's did not come under the responsibility of the diocese of Lichfield, but was to be under the jurisdiction of the crown: a Royal Peculiar. The original Saxon building was replaced in the mid-12th century by a Norman cruciform church.

Building work continued on the new church: in the late 12th early 13th centuries the nave walls were extended outwards, and columns and arches were inserted where the original wall had been located. The chancel was extended and two chapels added either side of it. In the mid-14th century the south-east chapel was demolished and replaced with the present Trinity chapel. The final phase of construction took place during the Wars of The Roses, c.1470, with the removal of the central tower, the erection of a spire on the west tower (amongst the highest church spires in England) and the construction of the carved nave ceiling.

Much of the stained glass seen today in the church originates from other ecclesiastical buildings, both local and in continental Europe, and was purchased and installed under the tenure of Revd William Rowland, 1829–51. Thanks to his tireless efforts St Mary's can boast a world-class collection of stained glass.

St Mary's also has the distinction of being the only surviving medieval church in Shrewsbury.



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# St Mary's Church

## Shrewsbury, Shropshire

### A walk round guide



- 1 The 15th-century **font**, originally positioned in St Nicholas' chapel, remained undamaged when the church spire fell through the roof in 1894.
- 2 Remarkably, the magnificent 15th-century **nave ceiling** has remained intact despite the spire falling through the roof. The only sign of the spire's collapse is the lime staining on some parts of the wood.
- 3 The two **north aisle ceiling carvings** depict a Cockatrice and an Angel: these images are thought to represent the Devil and St Michael.
- 4 **Floor tiles**: mostly Minton tiles, laid in 1864–65, though the St Catherine's chapel tiles date from the 1840s with over 60 designs. The chancel and sanctuary tiles are by Godwin (1868) and those in the Trinity chapel are by Maw & Co. (1888).
- 5 The only surviving 13th-century **plaster work** in the church is located in the north transept. Originally all the walls in the church would have been plastered and painted.
- 6 There are some 49 **Netherlandish roundels** throughout the church dating from the 16th/17th century, and depicting various biblical and apocryphal stories. Twelve roundels are in St Nicholas' chapel. Two English zodiac roundels in the south porch show Cancer and Leo.
- 7 The **Stafford memorial** commemorates Sir Nicholas Stafford, Bailiff of Shrewsbury during the reign of the Lancastrian king Henry VI in the 15th century, and his wife Katherine. However, he is depicted wearing Yorkist armour which reveals where his true loyalties lay.
- 8 The **Benbow memorial** commemorates a famous parishioner, Vice-Admiral John Benbow, d. 1702.
- 9 The magnificent **Jesse window** (cover) was made in about 1345 and installed in St Mary's in 1792, having been rescued from Old St Chad's following its collapse. It is a representation of the genealogy of the Holy Family.

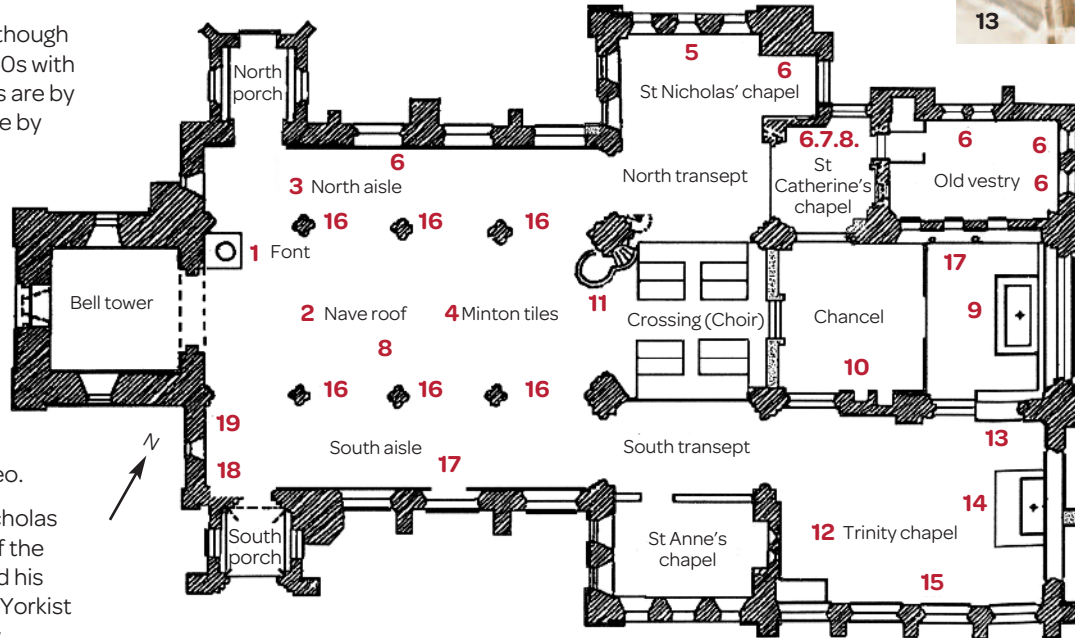


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- 10 The **sedilia** or priest's seat dates from the very earliest phase of Norman building (c.1150). It is a particularly fine example of Norman stonework, with a simple but characteristic chevron or zigzag pattern across the arch.
- 11 The limestone **pulpit** dates from 1853 and depicts on its three main panels the Nativity, Crucifixion and Ascension of Jesus. In between stand three of the Apostles, St Peter, St Paul and St John. Designed by Mr S Pountney Smith of Shrewsbury and carved by George Landucci.



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- 12 The **Trinity chapel**, built c.1360, replaced the original Leybourne chapel. It has strong connections with the local institutions of Shrewsbury School and the Shrewsbury Drapers Company.
- 13 **Tomb of Simon de Leybourne**. The Leybournes were a prominent local family, titled the Lords of Berwick. The effigy has crossed legs which signifies that Simon was a Crusader and, given the date of his interment, c.1315, he would have most likely taken part in the Ninth Crusade 1271–72.
- 14 The **altar** in the Trinity chapel was constructed by the famous local glass maker Margaret Agnes Rope in memory of her father, Henry John Rope, surgeon at The Salop Infirmary and churchwarden.



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- 15 The **alabaster carvings** date from the 14th century and represent some of the most important scenes from the Bible, including the baptism of Jesus, the baptism of John the Baptist, and the crucifixion of Jesus and his ascent to heaven.
- 16 The **Romanesque column and arches** are another curious feature, originally constructed c.1190–1220. By this time Romanesque architecture had been superseded by Gothic.
- 17 The church features outstanding vivid **medieval stained glass** of international importance from across northern Europe. Of particular interest are the 16th-century St Bernard windows, depicting scenes from the life of St Bernard of Clairvaux.
- 18 The **puritan balcony** is rumoured to have been the favoured preaching spot of an unnamed puritan minister during the 17th-century Civil War and Commonwealth. It is said that he preferred to barrack, curse and preach to his congregation from behind so they would focus on their prayers and God.
- 19 The two large 10th-century **Saxon tombstones** are the only surviving pieces from the original Saxon church and churchyard.