

Holy Trinity Church Coalbrookdale CHURCH GUIDE



Holy Trinity's connections with the Coalbrookdale Company and the ironworks can be seen everywhere in the building.

The main entrance consists of a pair of locally-made cast-iron gates and, when walking along the path to the church door, one is ever-aware of the Dale, the ironworks, and the splendid countryside of this part of Shropshire. The churchyard contains many graves of local people and a number of gravemarkers are unusual in that they were locally cast in iron. In the extreme North-east of the churchyard stands a gravestone with the inscription:

*This stone was erected by a few friends
in memory of William Dempster
who carved the stonework of the church.*

The most notable grave is, of course, that of Abraham Darby IV and his Wife Matilda. The grave, which stands at the east end of the church was cleaned and restored in 1993 and is a fitting memorial to the Founder of the church.

It is the stonework, locally cut from the same quarry as served Buildwas Abbey, that one first appreciates when approaching the building. Designed by Mr Voysey of the London architects, Reeves and Voysey, in decorated fourteenth-century Gothic style, the church consists of chancel, nave, eight bays, west porch, and a massive embattled west tower. The three-dial tower clock was given by public subscription. When the church was first built a

peal of eight bells was hung. These were rehung and tuned in 1925 when they were augmented by two further bells provided by public subscription in memory of Maurice Darby, the only son of Alfred Darby and great-grandson of the Founder, who was killed in the First World War.

The entrance to the church is by an iron-clasped oak door leading into the porch. Facing the door is the stone which commemorates the foundation of the church.

To the Glory of God.

This church was built and endowed by Abraham Darby Esq., JP., D.L. the foundation stone having been laid on 11th December 1851, upon land given by Adelaide Anna Darby. The bells were presented by Alfred Darby Esq., the Founder's only brother. The organ by Mary and one thousand pounds by Deborah, the sister of Abraham and Alfred Darby, the donation of the latter sister through her husband, Henry Dickenson Esq.

From the porch one passes through an oak swing door to see many items of interest. At the east end can be seen the beautiful altar window which depicts the Crucifixion against a rich background of trees and flowers. The window was given in 1900 as a memorial to the Founder by his widow. Below the window, mounted on fine Asburton marble steps and locally-made encaustic tiles is the altar with a silk brocade frontal. On the reredos is a silver cross given in memory of the Rev'd C. B. Crowe, a former vicar; candlesticks given in memory of Freda Gladys Fowler, and flower vases in memory of William Humphreys. Mrs Alfred Darby (the Founder's sister-in-law) gave a superb silver-gilt chalice made in Augsburg, Bavaria, in the 1700s and formerly belonging to the Sawabian Charterhouse of Buxheim. A German cruet tray of the same date is supplemented by a matching paten and communion cruets made in London in 1849. These items are usually on display in the Museum of Iron.

The outstanding chancel decoration is the work of H. S. Goodhall-Rendel who, in 1931, was commissioned to undertake the work by Mrs Muriel Cope-Darby, the then Patron, in memory of her brother Maurice. The decoration, of a painted stencil design, is today in the care of the Labouchere Trust. The furnishings of the Chancel and Sanctuary are of Australian Silky Oak and were part of the 1931 refurbishment. The lectern was given by Mr and Mrs Alfred Dixon in memory of their daughter Lily.

In the nave, on the south side can be found the church's most rare possession; a window of 16th-century Flemish glass depicting the Last Supper. The characters of the window are quite "ugly looking" with Judas having a shock of red hair and teeth which project from a leering mouth. One side panel shows Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Above are light-painted panels depicting the Annunciation and Old Testament scenes. The Flemish Window was given as a wedding present to Mrs Henry Whitmore (née Darby) and presented by her to the church.

Other windows include, in the south aisle, one given in memory of Hadrian Harris B.A. by his sister, parishioners, and friends and, in the north aisle, windows to the memory of John and Hannah Fox, and of Henry Dickenson.

The nave roof is supported by stone arches and octagonal pillars. The carved heads on the corbels are said to be members of the Darby family, although the easternmost heads are obviously those of Queen Victoria and the Bishop of Hereford. The pews are finished with unique carved ends, each of a different design, whilst the doors contain locally-made cast-iron detailing.

A number of memorials adorn the church walls, perhaps the most unusual of these being the memorial over the porch door to Captain Matthew Webb, the channel swimmer, who was a Churchwarden in the 1850s and who died whilst attempting to swim across the Niagara. This effort was seen as being tantamount to suicide and so his memorial is placed in this ignominious position! Another memorial is to Thomas Parker, the noted electrical inventor, whose work brought about great advances in electrical technology. One of the newer memorials is the cast-iron plaque of the Last Supper which was presented by the Coalbrookdale Company in 1959 to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the ironworks.

The original organ was built by J. W. Walker and Sons. In 1905 it was found to be in need of repair; during the work, by Harrison and Harrison, it was moved to the south-east corner of the church, this leading to the former lady Chapel being shut off (this now being the Choir Vestry and a meeting room). In the 1931 refurbishment the organ was returned to its former north-east position.

One of the problems that this second move created was the difficulty of communicating with the organist. Mrs Cope-Darby (one of the then Patrons) had very specific views about the tempo of hymns and wished to let the organist know if she disapproved. In order that she could make her feelings known, her pew was fitted with a small footpedal which illuminated a light on the organ console. The pedal remains today but the Patron rarely occupies the front pew!

Holy Trinity Church is a beautiful building that glorifies God and expresses the prosperity of the Dale in the mid-19th century. The church, though, is not a museum, it is a living place of worship and ministry. Services are held at various times on Sundays and during the week; visitors are always welcome to join us. The church is not normally open outside worship times but a notice in the porch tells how to locate parishioners who will be more than pleased to show you The Jewel of the Dale.

