

Bolsover Parish Church

A QUICK TOUR



BOLSOVER PARISH CHURCH



St Mary & St Laurence



Welcome to the Parish Church of Bolsover, which has almost 1000 years of Christian heritage. The church is situated in Old Bolsover Town on a natural terrace in the Magnesian Limestone escarpment overlooking the River Doe Lea and the Vale of Scarsdale. The town, 6 miles east of Chesterfield, lies in the north-east of the county of Derbyshire in the civil District of Bolsover.

The church is dedicated to Saint Mary, the mother of Jesus and to the Roman Saint Laurence who tradition says was martyred by being roasted alive on a gridiron. His feast day is 10th August; from 1251 the annual Bolsover Fair was held on that date and may have lasted to the 15th August, the feast of the Assumption of Mary.



The church is a Grade II* listed building. Although it was gutted by fire in 1897, rebuilt in 1898 and damaged again by fire in 1960, many important features have been preserved including 12th century artefacts, the 13th century tower, 17th century crypt and Cavendish Chapel (with 18th and 19th century additions), and Victorian developments including the fine 'Christ the King' east window, dedicated to the memory of Lady Augusta Cavendish-Bentinck, the first Baroness of Bolsover.

More recent features include the Remembrance Corner and the Remembrance Window for the men from Bolsover who fell in the Great War (1914-1918). The Willis organ was installed at the west end in 1962. Bolsover's coalmining heritage is evident in the Coalite Corona, two miners' lamps, National Union of Mineworkers Banner and the 1990's engineering technology underpinning the tower.

Bolsover was mentioned as 'Belsevore' in the Norman *Domesday Book* (1086).

Although there was no written reference to a Bolsover church in *Domesday*, several Norman carved stone artefacts, including a decorated slab coffin lid, a hole-stone with the sign of the cross, and corbels discovered during reconstruction, are evidence of an earlier place of Christian worship on this site. The animal head stone corbels surviving from that church have now been set into the wall overlooking the choir stalls.

Natural hillsides, cliffs and woods, together with defensive earthworks, protected Bolsover's pre-Norman settlement. These were all assimilated, along with the church, into the Outer Bailey of the enclosed, hilltop, motte and bailey fortress, founded by Lord of the Manor, William Peverel. William was the allegedly illegitimate, but nevertheless favourite, son of William the Conqueror, and Keeper both of Bolsover Castle and Peveril Castle at Castleton in the Peak District.

Transcripts, originally from Darley Abbey near Derby, indicate that in about 1150, Avice of Lancaster, wife of the younger William Peverel, "gave the church at Bolsover to Darley Abbey". William de Ferrers, Earl of Derby and Keeper of Bolsover Castle confirmed the gift in about 1220. Bishop Stavensby of Lichfield established a vicarage at Bolsover but Darley Abbey maintained its estates in Bolsover. In 1229 Darley Abbey received royal approval of the gift from Richard I.



This was confirmed by his brother King John, and lasted until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in the 1530s. Then all church premises were rented out to the incumbents.

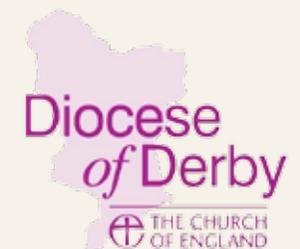
As Lords of the Manor, the Welbeck branch of the Cavendish Family and their successors, and the Hallows Family from Glapwell who are remembered in the Lady Chapel, became patrons of the Bolsover benefice. In 1620 the Cavendish Chapel was added to the church at the east end of the south aisle. It houses two splendid marble monuments.

Ecclesiastically, the Parish of St Mary and St Laurence is in the Deanery of Bolsover and Staveley which was formerly part of the old Scarsdale Hundred (administrative unit) recorded in the countrywide Hundred Roll drawn up for Edward I in 1274. This was for administrative, military, and judicial purposes in common law. The parish at that time was in the See (Diocese) of Lichfield, where it remained until 1884 when it became part of the Diocese of Southwell.

The Parish became part of the present Diocese of Derby on its creation in 1927.

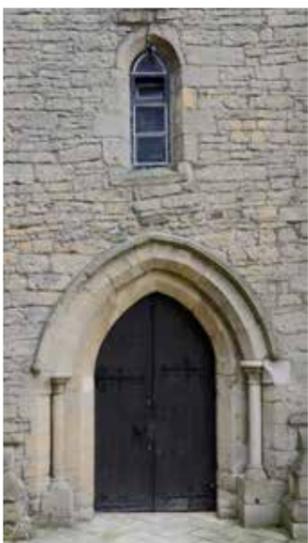
In 2012 Bolsover's first female vicar, the Reverend Rachel Gouldthorpe, was installed by the Venerable Christine Wilson the first female Archdeacon of Chesterfield, attended by the Reverend Helen Guest, the first female Rural Dean for Bolsover and Staveley Deanery.

Information supplied by Brenda Pegge





10. Coal Mining Heritage
The Coalite Corona, miners' lamps, National Union of Mineworkers' banner and the 1990s engineering technology underpinning the tower high-light Bolsover's coalmining heritage. The corona - circular chandelier above the choir stalls - is a replica of one in Lincoln Cathedral and was a gift of Bolsover Coalite Co., made by their local craftsmen.



9. The Tower
The 13th century tower, built in the locally quarried Magnesian Limestone, is a surviving part of the first stone church. It supports the original, broad-shouldered, broached-spire, roofed with Magnesian Limestone slabs. It now houses eight Victorian bells tuned and hung for change ringing. A 13th century bell pit used for casting the medieval church bells in-situ was discovered during excavations under the tower. *When you go outside have a look at the west door - notice how the left side is so much lower than the right - a sign of the effects of mining before the tower was underpinned in the 1990s.*

8. The Fire Window
This window in the south aisle is a memorial to the church having survived two disastrous fires: one in 1897 and another in 1960.



A Quick Tour

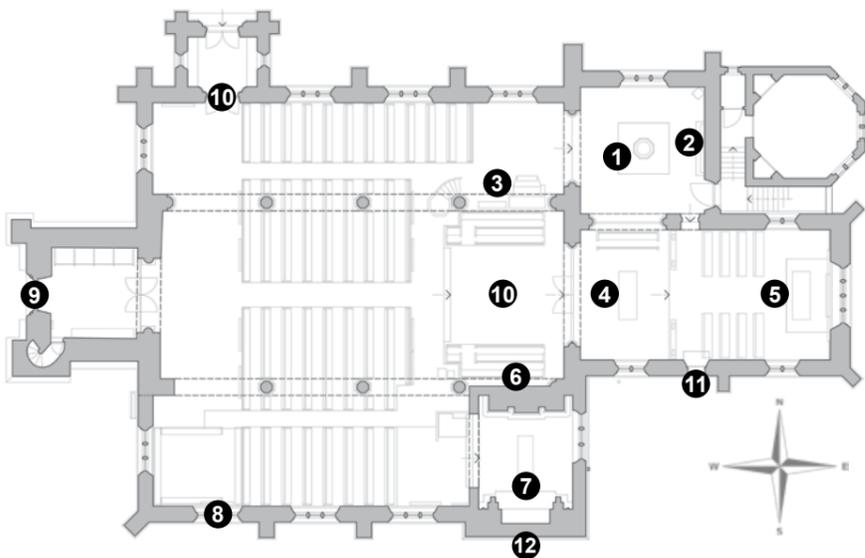
Here is a guide around 12 of the key features inside and outside of Bolsover Parish Church.



1. The Font
The medieval font and its cover were a gift from Chesterfield Parish after the first fire (1897).



3. The Organ
The original organ was made by the company Forster & Andrews in 1867 but it was destroyed by fire in 1897. A second organ (by Brindley & Foster) was installed in around 1921 but this was also destroyed by fire in 1960 (it has been suggested that the electrics in the organ might have been the cause of this fire). The current organ, by Henry Willis & Sons, came from St George's church in Glasgow and was installed here in 1962 at a cost of £8,850. The three manual console positioned near the choir stalls controls 1936 pipes in a loft on the west wall.



2. The Nativity Carving
This carving, dating from around 1300, is a nativity scene consisting of (from left to right): Mary, with Jesus on her knee (unfortunately his head is missing now), Joseph, two animal heads and onlookers. This object would have originally occupied a place of honour in the church but was buried in around 1644 at a time when icons like this were frequent targets of religious or political vandalism. In 1705 it was rediscovered, laying face-down near the Priest's doorway.

4 & 5. The Chancel & Lady Chapel
After the fire of 1960, the opportunity was taken to reorganise the space available for congregational worship. The sanctuary and altar were brought forward into the chancel, nearer to the congregation. The east end of the chancel was partitioned by an open screen to form the Lady Chapel. The Lady Chapel altar stands before a reredos of carved Caen stone, parts of which have now been coloured and gilded. The statues at either side depict the Patron Saints of the church - St Mary and St Laurence.



The east window is a memorial to the 1st Baroness Bolsover who died in 1893.



6. The Animal Heads
Set into the wall here are stone corbels surviving from an earlier 12th century church building. These were discovered beneath the buttress of the chancel in 1961 when foundations for the vestries were being dug.



7. The Cavendish Chapel
In around 1618 the Cavendish Chapel was added to the church at the east end of the south aisle. It houses two sumptuous marble monuments. One to Sir Charles Cavendish (younger son of Bess of Hardwick) and his wife Katherine, Baroness Ogle of Bolsover Castle and their children. The other commemorates Henry Cavendish, the second Duke of Newcastle, his wife and daughter. The remains of several other members of the Cavendish family, including Charles Cavendish (1626-59), Viscount Mansfield MP, a royalist who sat in the House of Commons, can be found in lead-lined coffins in the family vault situated in the crypt under the Chapel. The Viscount fought in the English Civil War. After the public execution of King Charles I he went into exile. He died soon after returning to Bolsover in 1659 just as the republican Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell and his son Richard was ending.

The once private Cavendish mortuary chapel was opened up in 1923 and is now part of the church's Remembrance Corner, where there is also a memorial to the 17th century architect Huntingdon Smithson and his father John. The Remembrance Window, a tribute to the Bolsover Fallen in the First World War, overlooks the corner, which houses the church's Memorial Book, an on-going working document.

For more on the Cavendish family please see our accompanying leaflet.



Outside:

11. Crucifixion
Over the Priest's door on the outside is a carved tympanum showing the crucifixion. Dating from the 12th century it is one of the oldest features of the church.

12. Motto
The striking lettering on the outside of the Cavendish Chapel is the family motto "Cavendo Tutus", which means, "safe through caution".



Bolsover Parish Church

Summary Timeline

- 1100s The animal head corbels, crucifixion tympanum and two of the grave slabs date from this century, suggesting the date of the original stone church on this site.
- 1149 Records show that Robertus Avenel Clementum was vicar here.
- 1152 The Peverel family grant the Living to the Abbey of Darley.
- c.1200* Alan, Physician to King John, was vicar here.
- 1200s The tower was built and bells were cast in a pit below.
- c.1300 Date of the Nativity carving.
- 1300s Date of the font, given by Chesterfield Parish in 1898.
- 1604 Earliest date of surviving Parish records.
- c.1618 Cavendish Chapel commissioned by William Cavendish.
- 1648 Date of Huntingdon Smithson's grave.
- 1640s Bolsover Castle and town are occupied by Oliver Cromwell's Roundheads but, despite containing the monuments to the famously Cavalier Cavendishes, the church survived largely unscathed.
- 1704 First restoration works.
- 1727 Henry Cavendish monument
- 1773 Second restoration works.
- 1818-80 The vicars lived at Bolsover Castle.
- 1833 Influential Revd Hamilton-Gray succeeded the alcoholic Revd Calcroft.
- 1834 Third restoration works.
- 1867 Revd Hamilton-Gray was succeeded by the even more influential Revd Thomas Charles Hills. The area of Hillstown was later named after Revd Hills.
- 1877-8 William Mitchell Withers' restoration: galleries removed, north aisle added, etc.
- 1893 (or shortly after) – East window installed.
- 1897 First fire and subsequent rebuilding. The marble mosaic floor in the south aisle dates from this time.
- 1923 Cavendish Chapel opened up to be part of the church.
- 1960 Second fire and subsequent rebuilding.
- 1992 Tower underpinning installed.
- 2012 The Revd Rachel Gouldthorpe became the first female vicar here. (*c. stands for circa, meaning approximately.)



For more information please see www.bolsoverparishchurch.org

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