

St Editha's Church History

One of the largest and oldest in the Midlands, dating back 1200 years. In 597 Augustine came from Rome to spread the Christian faith and seventy years later, in 667, St Chad was made Bishop of Lichfield. It is thought that he visited nearby Tamworth and a church stood on the present site of today's church.

A hundred years later Tamworth was the Capital of Mercia, the principal kingdom of England, with Offa as its ruler from 775 - 796. King Offa built his palace at Tamworth and kept the great feasts of Easter and Christmas, so there would probably have been a church of some size and splendour. Between 796 and 857 no less than fourteen Royal Charters were issued from Tamworth, many of them witnessed by churchmen.

In 874 Tamworth was invaded by the Danes, the church was destroyed, but in 913 Aethelfleda, Lady of the Mercians and daughter of King Alfred the Great, drove back the Danish invasion and rebuilt the town and church.

In 925 attempts were made to bring about a peaceful settlement between Mercia and Northumbria where Sigtrygg the Dane was King. Aethelfleda's niece, Editha, sister to Athelstan, was given as the betrothed of Sigtrygg. The ceremony took place in the church in the presence of King Athelstan and solemnised by Ella, Bishop of Lichfield.

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All information believed accurate at time of print, based on available research. No liability is accepted for errors.



Sigtrygg soon lapsed into paganism and was killed so Editha took religious vows and entered a convent at Polesworth. Here Editha served in the precincts of the Castle where she devoted her life to the poor and sick. She established a convent in Tamworth where she was Abbess until her death in 960. When the church needed a dedication the local population asked that it be Editha. The local papal representative forwarded it to the Vatican who agreed that Editha became "a saint by popular acclaim."

In 1080 the great Norman Church was built, probably an extension of Edgar's church and was at least as long as the present building, in the shape of a crucifix and with a central tower.

It is uncertain as to whether King Edgar had founded the 'College' or if this was done by Robert de Marmion, Dispencer and Champion of William the Conqueror. The first recorded Dean of the Collegiate church was William Marmion, son of Robert. At that time there were five canons. The canons and their Vicars formed the College, which survived until 1547, when it was dissolved. However, a lay Dean and lay canons remained until 1931.

Building work in the 13th Century included the north aisle of the nave, the old font and the crypt under part of the south aisle.

The great Norman arches in the chancel are from 1080 but some were destroyed in the 'Great Fire of Tamworth'



in 1345. Baldwin de Witney was faced with great difficulties in rebuilding the church. Poverty, plague and wars abroad, were overcome and the task completed within twenty years. De Witney died in 1369 and his effigy is in St George's Chapel.

The late 14th century saw the re-building of St George's Chapel and the start of the great West Tower. This was probably completed about 1420. The clerestory windows in the nave and the north and south aisles and the chancel are 15th Century.

For more information on St Editha's Church please visit: www.stedithas.org.uk or tel: 01827 68339

Sunday worship: 8.30am, 10.00am and 6.30pm



Welcome to Tamworth

St. Editha's Church



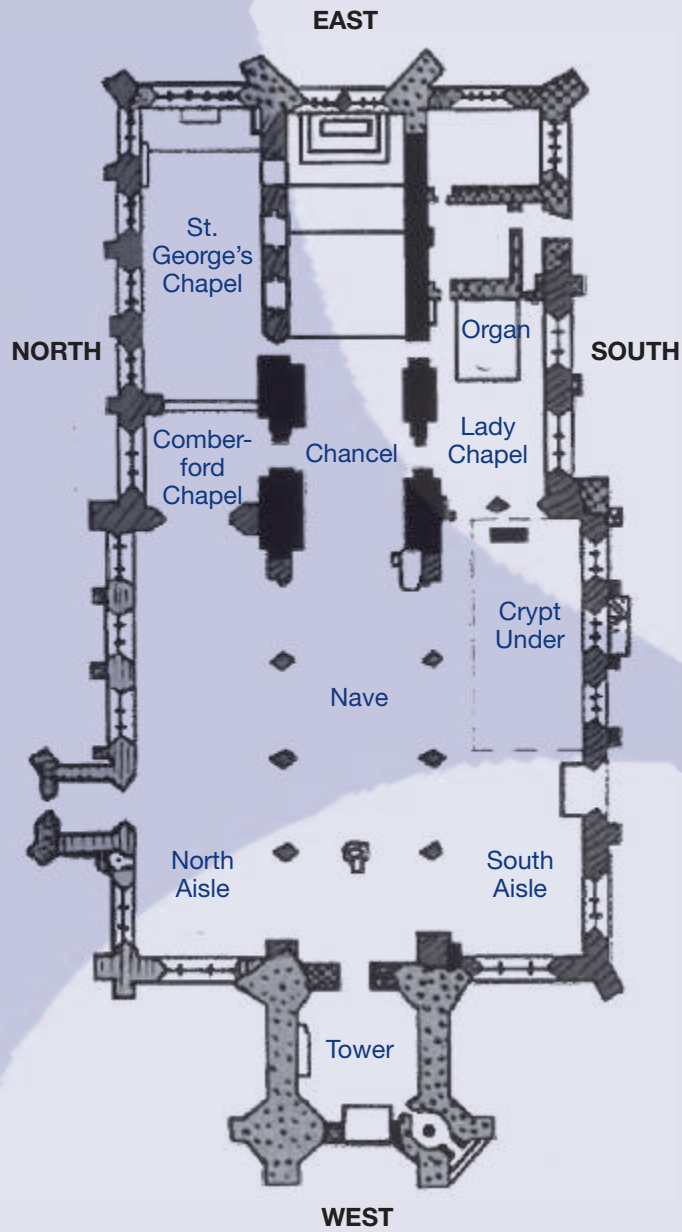
An introduction to the history of St. Editha's Church.

Tamworth
Borough Council



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St Editha's Church Features



The Tower

The Tower was built between 1380 and 1420. The height to the battlements is 30 metres with the highest weather vane at 42 metres.

The Double Spiral Staircase

The Double Helix Spiral Staircase is a unique feature and is just under 2 metres in diameter. There are 106 outer steps and 101 inner. It is honeycombed with passages and stands on three legs. It is one of only two in the country.



The Bells



There are ten bells in total. The earliest date for bells is 1552 when Church Commissioners carried out an inventory of churches. In the 17th Century the original bells were melted down and replaced by six bells, the earliest date recorded on these is 1607. In 1883 the bells were relined, two were re-cast and two were added. In 1931 the bell frame was replaced which included a steel frame to strengthen the Tower. In 1960 a further two bells were added to commemorate the 1000 anniversary of St. Editha's death.

The West Window

Designed by Alan Younger and takes its theme from the account in the revelation of St John.



The Font



This is carved from Caen stone from Normandy in N. France and was designed by Sir Gilbert Scott in 1853. It replaced a much simpler one and is very ornate with Biblical carvings of the 'Dove of Peace' and the 'Lamb of God'.

The Nave



The Lectern, eagle in design, dates back to 1875 and the pulpit replaced an oak three decker in 1870. The three memorial windows are dedicated to the men of the parish who died in the Great War of 1914, Rev. M B Peel, Vicar of Tamworth and

Grandson of Sir Robert Peel, killed in France in 1917, and to the men of the parish who died in the second World War, 1939 - 1945.

The West Wall

On the west wall are 2 brass plaques, the lower remembers Private Samuel Parkes. He was one of the very first to receive the Victoria Cross from the Queen for his bravery in the 'Charge of the Light Brigade' at Balaklava in 1854.



The Crypt



This is 13th Century in origin and was possibly a chapel in the churchyard incorporated into the present church in the 14th Century. From the reign of Elizabeth I to 1868 it was a charnel house where bones were placed. It then became

a coal house and housed a huge boiler. All of this was removed and the floor levelled with the restoration by the Round Table in 1977 to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee, to a refectory.

The Comberford Chapel

Built by the Comberford family, who owned Comberford Hall and The Moat House. A tablet stands commemorating the family. The last of the Comberford family, Robert, who died in 1671, is buried here with his wife and their two daughters.

St George's Chapel

The present chapel was not built until the end of the 14th Century, beginning of the 15th century. It is believed a smaller chantry existed on the same site as far back as the 12th century. The east windows

designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, known as 'Angels of Creation, connects the story of the creation of Man with his redemption. The glass is by William Morris. The window was placed in memory of Rt. Hon. Robert Peel, M.P. for Tamworth who died in 1872.

The Lady Chapel

This has a small altar with iron gates behind. Near the altar is a votive stand where candles can be lit and prayers said in remembrance of a loved one.



The Organ

The organ was fitted in 1926, it cost £4776 and was built by Harrison and Harrison of London and Durham, the third organ to sit in the church. It still has incorporated some portions of its predecessor and the electronically controlled

blowing apparatus is housed in an underground chamber in the churchyard. The first organ was installed in 1764, costing £295 and the second in 1792 costing £320.

The Processional Cross

This was given by the Tamworth Co-Operative Society in memory of the Reverend William MacGregor, Vicar of Tamworth from 1878 - 1887. He was the founder and Treasurer of the Co-Operative Society. The cross was designed by the church architect and made by A Edward Jones, Silversmiths of Birmingham.



The Marmion Windows

Sitting high up in the clerestory on the south side of the church, designed by Ford Maddox Brown with glass by William Morris and installed in 1873. They tell the legend of St Editha, the patron saint of the parish church.

