

St Mary's church dates mainly from the 15th century, although it is first recorded in the Norwich Taxation of 1254, and is a single chamber with no division between nave and chancel. It was restored by Henry Kennedy in 1857 and was vested in the Friends of Friendless Churches in 2002. Derwen is Welsh for oak; perhaps there was once a significant tree in the area in pagan times.



Exterior

The church is built of local grit-stone with a slate roof – apart from the distinctive red for the window and door surround to the south which comes from the use of Cheshire sandstone. The exterior walls were formerly whitewashed. The windows are mainly of Perpendicular date (15th century), including the elaborate 5-light east window. The small projection on the north side contains the stairs to the rood loft and was added by Kennedy in 1857. The bell-cote houses two bells; dated 1668, it is surmounted by a late 18th century weathervane, conserved in 2008. One bell is inscribed 1751, Luke Ashton, Wigan. A massive buttress supports the west wall and bell-cote. The church is entered by the south porch, which contains a holy water stoup. The south doorway appears to be of mid-13th century date.

Interior

The church is dominated by the fine rood screen, separating nave from chancel. Unusually, its rood loft survives: on the loft would, before the Reformation, have been located the rood itself – a crucifix, flanked by figures of the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist. The socket for the rood is still visible. The beams supporting the loft are richly carved, as is the tracery of the panels both of the screen and the loft. The screen would once have been richly painted: usually the lower panels would have carried images of saints or the Apostles. The whole is of the late 15th or early 16th century. Access to the loft would have been from stone stairs on the north side but is not now permitted. The arch-braced roof of the nave and chancel appears to be of 15th century date. The font is dated 1665 with a contemporary cover. Formerly there were open benches and a west gallery. The present pews, pulpit and altar



Font



Rood screen and detail of carving on the bressumer

are all of the 19th century. There is a 'dug-out' parish chest, possibly of 14th or 15th century date. The stained glass in the westernmost south window of the chancel was designed by H.E. Wooldridge and made by James Powell & Sons (1869). It depicts the Nativity, Resurrection and Ascension. The adjacent window depicts Christ with two saints (1860), the female figure possibly St Cecilia, the male one of the evangelists. It has a Welsh inscription. The chancel contains a number of wall monuments of 18th-20th century date: that on the north wall to Catherine Williams (died 1744, aged 94) is interesting for its use of different coloured marbles and the creation of one of the urns in paint only.



Stained glass designed by H.E. Wooldridge



Memorial to Catherine Williams

Churchyard

The almost circular churchyard (which is not owned by The Friends) contains a cross, dating from the 15th century. The niches towards the top retain sculptured figures of (east) Coronation of the Virgin; (west) the Crucifixion; (north) Virgin & Child; (south) the archangel St Michael, weighing souls on Judgment Day. On the south border is the former lych-gate, its archway blocked when the building became the village school.



St Michael the Archangel, from the churchyard cross



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Church of St Mary Derwen

a guide to its history



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