

Holy Trinity Church, Coventry

Guide to records

Coventry Archives is located in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry, CV1 5QP. Admission to both the Reading Room and Research Room is free. Documents and books can be consulted without charge, but a charge is made for photocopying or the taking of digital images. Visitors are required to make an appointment to view original documents in the Research Room. Material in the Reading Room is available without the need of an appointment.

Opening hours: The Coventry Archives Reading and Research Rooms are open, 10.30 am – 3.30pm, Wednesdays – Fridays; the Reading Room is open on alternate Saturdays, 10.30 am – 3.30pm. Please refer to the Coventry collections online catalogue at <http://coventrycollections.org/> or further details, or telephone on 02476 237583.

Introduction

Holy Trinity Church was the parish church of the people of Coventry who lived in the area around the Coventry Priory (monastery). The first time the church is mentioned is in a document written between 1101 and 1113 when it is described as a chapel belonging to Coventry Priory. Its parish consisted of the northern part of Coventry and some areas such as Harnall, Radford, Whitmore, Coundon and Willenhall.

The first church was destroyed by fire in 1257 but it was quickly rebuilt. The oldest part of the church, the north porch, dates from this period. Saint Thomas' chapel was added about 1296 and the Archdeacon's chapel, to the left of the porch, was added about fifty years later. This chapel was used as a consistory court (a church court) to punish people who had broken the laws of the church.

The main part of Holy Trinity is built in the shape of a cross (cruciform) and much of it was rebuilt in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The nave, transepts and chapel all date from the late fourteenth century; the rebuilding of the chancel started in 1391. During the fifteenth century, the roof level was altered and a second line of windows (a clerestory) was built on top of the arcades which had supported the roof.

Holy Trinity's pulpit (preaching place) dates from 1470 and the two carved heads at its base may be those of Henry VI and Queen Margaret who often visited Coventry at this time. The font and the brass eagle lectern date from this time and in the choir are some carved seats (misericordes) some of which may have come from Whitefriars church when it was closed.

The upper part of the tower and the spire of Holy Trinity were blown down by a great gale in 1666 but were rebuilt by 1669. The spire is 237 feet high and is one of the famous three spires of Coventry.

Over the western arch, at the end of the nave, is a large painting of "The Last Judgement". This dates from the 1430s, and is a prominent example of a "Doom Painting", common in medieval churches. It depicts Christ with his arms raised in judgement, the twelve apostles either side of him, and the globe at his feet. Heaven is in the top left, presented as a grand city, while in the bottom right sinners are surrounded by flames in the mouth of Hell. This painting was whitewashed over during the Reformation period, and restored with a dark varnish in 1831, which obscured the painting. In the 1990s, it was carefully conserved again and is now visible for the public.

In the late fifteenth century, a hall was built for the priests who served the church. It was called the "Jesus Hall" and it stood next to the vicarage, on the south side of the church. The Coventry Cross stands near the site today. The hall blocked the way around the side of the church and so a special passage was made through the church for people passing by. The Jesus chapel was housed in a room above this passage and the doorway to this chapel can still be seen on the outside wall of the church.

During the nineteenth century the area by the altar (the sanctuary) was altered by the famous architect, Sir Gilbert Scott, in 1854. He also had the belfry removed from the tower and exposed the inside of the tower up to belfry level.

Holy Trinity church was damaged by bombing in 1940 but unlike the neighbouring cathedral church of Saint Michaels, it was not destroyed. Most of the bombs were put out before they reached ground level and

only one caused serious damage. This was in the Marler chapel where the stains on the floor mark where it fell.

Archival Material

PA122 – Jelffe's Diary - 1853-1868:

PA122/1

f4. A list of vicars of Holy Trinity Church, Coventry 1298-1837, including biographical notes about the vicars

ff5-13. A list of churchwardens, 1507/8-1841

ff17-19. An account of lands and houses belonging to HTC

ff20, 21r. Charitable bequests held by HTC

ff21v,22r. List of sermons preached, with lists of number times and details of payments

ff28v-29v. Copy of extracts from Churchwardens' Accounts for HTC, 1508-1627

PA122/5/5 - Notes relating to HTC:

First note regarding John Cocksonne's will dated 8 May 1564, re moneys to the vicar (of Holy Trinity) for preaching three sermons to the bellringer, vicar, Churchwardens (of Holy Trinity) and Mayor (of Coventry).

Second note regards the agreement by Downes, painter to pay 2s, re a building near the West Door of Holy Trinity.

PA122/5/7

Note about the Coat of Arms in HTC

PA122/6/4-5

List of subscriptions for the East Window of HTC, 1834

PA500

HTC Estate - 1291-1923

PA785/2/1-2 – HTC- Plans and Notes:

1 - Ground plan of Trinity Church by William Reader senior, shows old and new footpaths closed and opened respectively in 1833.

2 - Plan of Trinity Vicarage, shows position of Jesus Hall built in 1500, taken down in 1742. By William Reader senior.

PA1691/2/1/15

HTC, with illustration and presscuttings, 1111-1993

PA1734/3/5
Postcard of wooden belfry, 1905

PA2610/4/4
Photograph showing HTC and Owen Owen Store, mid 20th Century -
late 20th Century

PA2655/2/2/9
Slide: Holy Trinity Churchyard

PA2655/2/2/53
Slide: Holy Trinity Church Doorway, 1980

[This is the doorway which is at the top of a flight of steps on the
southern side of the church; there was a right of way through that part
of the church until 1833 - see BA/E/B/30.]

SLA/12
Holy Trinity Without Parish Meeting/Council, 1894-1928

Local Studies Material (available in the Reading Room)

Microfilm - Parish Registers, 1561-1965:

PA1273/12 - Baptisms, marriages, burials. 1561-1812

PA1273/12-14 - Baptisms, 1813-1904

PA1273/14 - Marriages and banns, 1754-1778

PA1273/15-18 - Marriages, 1778-1906

PA1273/18-19 - Burials, 1813-1839

PA1273/19-20 - Banns Books, 1778-1909

Pamphlets - all JN 726.5

Holy Trinity, Coventry - 1971

The Story of the Parish Church of the Holy Trinity, 1952

The Opening and Dedication of the Church Centre, 1975

Notes on Famous Churches & Abbeys, Holy Trinity Church, Coventry -
1934

Report on Structural Effects of Bell-Ringing, 1968

Box C3(a) Leaflets - Coventry Religion - Anglican Churches

Holy Trinity Church, Coventry - the Medieval Doom Painting, 2004

Holy Trinity, Coventry - Parish Magazine, 1926

Development of Holy Trinity Coventry, 1997

*Holy Trinity Church is also mentioned in the Coventry Peace Trail
leaflet, available free at the front desk of our Reading Room.