

Trips Out with a Religious Connection

Evesham Centre, Part 2: The Bell Tower and Church of St Lawrence



The impressive Bell Tower, adjacent to the churches of All Saints', St Lawrence, and on the threshold of the Abbey Gardens in central Evesham.

The Bell Tower to Evesham Abbey alas had a short-lived relevance to the Abbey of St Mary's. Described as a masterpiece in Perpendicular architecture, it was built by Abbot Lichfield in 1533 to replace an earlier campanile in the abbey church. The Abbey for which it was built, however, fell victim to Henry VIII's Dissolution. The tower was then bought for the town in the 1540s; it is 110 feet high to the top of the pinnacles.



The beautiful Bell Tower that was built by Abbot Lichfield for St Mary's Abbey, Evesham.

The tower has one of the finest peals of bells in the country. They ring out every Sunday and Wednesday, and on special celebrations. A carillon (automatic mechanism similar to a piano roll) was installed in 1878 and now has the capability to play over 50 tunes. They play on the hour, every hour, from 9am to 9pm.



The cloister arch in Abbey Gardens, Evesham – one of the few vestiges of the old St Mary's Abbey.

There are some wonderful illustrations on the Evesham Abbey website of how the abbey might have looked in its heyday.



A beautiful tree in bloom in the Abbey Gardens, Evesham.



The site of the former fish ponds that once belonged to the Abbey of St Mary, Evesham, by the River Avon.



The River Avon at Evesham.

St Egwin's fish sculpture can be found in the Abbey Gardens by the river. Legend has it that St Egwin founded Evesham Abbey having discovered the key to shackles he wore in a fish served to him in Rome, where he had gone to seek the support of the Pope over a dispute. A swineherd named Eof had a vision of Mary and encouraged Egwin to found the abbey at the site. Eof gave his name to the town, that became 'Eof's ham' - latterly Evesham.



Near the café in Abbey Gardens is a fish sculpture recalling the legend of St Egwin.

The church of St Lawrence, Evesham



Two active churches existed side by side for centuries in central Evesham. A church was built on the site in 1295, then totally rebuilt in 1470. According to a board in the west entrance, All Saints' was used exclusively for the townsfolk - while St Lawrence was used for pilgrims, who were cared for in the abbey almonry. In the 1970s it was realized that there could only be one active church and it was then decided to make All Saints' the parish church for the whole town; St Lawrence became redundant but continues to remain open to visitors, maintained by the Churches Conservation Trust.



The altar and reredos at St Lawrence, Evesham.



The East Window at St Lawrence, Evesham depicts The Resurrection, the Last Supper, the Evangelists, the Arms of Worcester Diocese, the grid-iron on which St Lawrence died, the Arms of Evesham Abbey and of Edward John Rudge, the local squire and chief promoter of Eginton's restoration of the church (the glass is by Thomas Willement, 1862).



The roof at St Lawrence, Evesham.



The south chapel is dedicated to Saint Clement and was built by Abbot Lichfield as his chantry around 1500. It has a carved fan vaulted roof with a central pendant.



A tale of two fonts: left is the original font dating from 1320 which was removed in the Victorian era and became a birdbath; and right is its Victorian replica replacement with wooden cover in the South Chapel.



An inscription over the West Doorway at St Lawrence, Evesham. It is from Psalm 100, verse 4: "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise. "



A stained glass window depicting events leading to the Battle of Evesham between Simon de Montfort and the future King Edward I who led his father Henry III's army. It took place on 4 August 1265 as part of the Second Baron's war. The window shows de Montfort and his knights receiving Holy Communion before going out to fight. De Montfort was killed and his body mutilated, although his remains were buried in Evesham Abbey. King Edward later ordered his remains disinterred and scattered in unconsecrated ground. A monk can be seen praying for his soul, and de Montfort's crest is shown. Glass by F. Skeet, 1956.



The founding of Evesham Abbey: the glass in St Lawrence's is by Geoffrey Webb from 1938, and features the story of Eoves the swineherd, the vision of the Virgin Mary and Bishop Egwin. The Virgin has the face of Betty Goodall, to whom the window is dedicated. She died in 1931 aged 17. The Angels on either side are her two sisters, and possibly the Angels at the top are also related.



The window depicts the story of St Egwin, Bishop of Worcester, circa 700. He went on a pilgrimage to Rome, and prepared for his journey by locking shackles on his feet, throwing the key into the River Avon as he departed. Whilst he was praying in Rome one of his servants bought him fish to eat, and on preparing the fish the key he had thrown in the River Avon was found and he released himself. On his return to England, he founded Evesham Abbey (see previous image). The glass is by Geoffrey Webb from 1943.



The beautiful market square in Evesham town centre.

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Sources of information:

Geograph: <https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/5587691>

Booklet: The Churches and Bell Tower of Evesham by John Turner and Stanley English