



*Internal view of St Mary's Church as you enter
through the West Door*

St Mary's Church Weeford



*A brief history
of the building
and its significant families*

Manley's

The first of the Manley's to live in Weeford was John Shaw Manley who built the imposing "Manley Hall" on land he had inherited from his father Admiral Isaac George Manley (the last survivor of Captain Cook's first round the world voyage) in 1833. John Shaw Manley was later to become High Sherriff of Staffordshire. There is a plaque within the chancel to his son William Campbell Manley who was secretary of Legation at Copenhagen in the mid 19th century . A number of other plaques and windows are also dedicated to members of the Manley family.

The fact that there was significant rivalry between the Wyatt and Manley families may be seen in the fact that all memorials and windows dedicated to members of the Wyatt family are situated on the south wall, while those for the Manley's are on the north wall. Family members and staff at the time always ensured that they kept to their own "side" of the church when attending services.

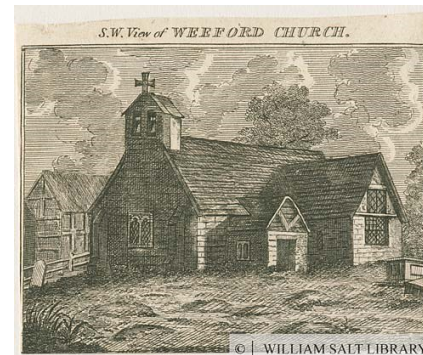
The Organ

The acclaimed "Holditch" organ was presented to the church in 1847 in memory of John Shawe Manley, with a second manual being added by the parishioners in memory of the Rev'd Frederick Beaumont who served as Rector between 1879 and 1901.



St Mary's Weeford—the Church and its environment.

The ancient village of Weeford is mentioned in the Domesday Book and was also one of the five original "prebends" that paid "wax Scot" or "Plough Alms" to the Cathedral in Lichfield from the beginning of the twelfth century. It is therefore likely that there has been a church here for many centuries. Old registers for St Mary's currently held in the County archives date back to 1562, while an area of flooring and some of the foundation stones of a previous building are still visible in the churchyard.



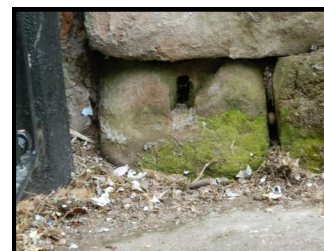
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St Mary's church in 1801 just before it's demolition to make way for the current building



Flooring & foundation stones from a previous building on the South Side of the church.

There is also a large stone on the north side of the entrance gate which could have been a "scratch dial" and others near to the church door may have been scored with "archers grooves" - however it is also possible that these were simply the workings of some mischievous choirboys during the early to middle part of the last century.



A "Scratch dial" and a stone with "Archers Grooves" or the mischievous workings of choirboys in the last century?



The current church – a grade 2 listed building, was built in 1802 by acclaimed local architect James Wyatt. Records show that it was paid for by public subscription, however, as ever, in a small community raising sufficient funds was not easy and the architect had to be asked to amend his plans in order to cut costs to pay for its completion. A letter from Wyatt to the vicar of Weeford sent on July 16th 1803 shows that he not only met this request, but also stated that his family would be prepared to pay for the ornamental furnishings, such as the Altar, the Pulpit, the Screens and the Font if there was still a shortfall.

When it was first built there was no entrance lobby or chancel, however there was a central small Spire with flying buttresses just above the crossing which probably housed at least one bell. Weight is added to this theory by a system of rollers and pulleys for a belfry that were discovered during work to repair the ceiling above the Chancel Steps some 60 years ago, others are still visible above the North Transept



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Drawing of the current building as originally designed by James Wyatt.. The small spire with flying buttresses is clearly visible, however at this point there is no Chancel or entrance lobby with Pepperpot Bell Tower.

The most colourful member of the Swinfen family was Patience, a former scullery maid. Who married Henry, the heir to the Swinfen estate in 1831. Sadly Henry died in 1854 which, unfortunately for Patience was before his father Samuel. Under the terms of Samuel's will, the estate should now have passed to his next surviving blood relative, nephew Frederick Hay Swinfen – leaving Patience penniless. However, within three weeks of her husband's death she had not only managed to persuade the aged and infirm Samuel to transfer a large amount of his funds and securities into her name, but also to rewrite his will leaving all his real estate to her. Samuel died just 20 days later, leaving Patience Swinfen a very wealthy woman.



Patience Swinfen

The series of court cases that were to follow ran until 1864 and were to become one of the most famous in world legal history. They showed that Patience was not afraid to take on some of the most illustrious members of the legal profession, nor to do whatever she had to in order to win her case, and win her case she did.

In 1861 Patience married Charles Wilsone Broun. Charles already had one son who was born in 1858 and who also took the Swinfen name, Michael Alexander Wilsone Swinfen Broun went on to have a distinguished career in the army and become High Sheriff and Deputy Lieutenant of Staffordshire. Michael was also a great philanthropist and made many bequests to the city of Lichfield and the organisations within it. He bequeathed Swinfen Hall to the Church and city of Lichfield – sadly St Mary's Weeford stands outside of the city.

Within the churchyard of St Mary's are a number of gravestones and monuments to other members of the Swinfen family.

John Swinfen was a leading Presbyterian M.P who represented Tamworth, Stafford or Bere Alston in most parliaments between 1640 and 1694—retaining his seat throughout most of the upheavals that took place from reign of Charles 1, throughout Oliver Cromwell's "Commonwealth" and through to the reigns of Charles 2 and James 2—John Swinfen could therefore rightly be called Weefords answer to the vicar of Bray. He gained a reputation as a very active and energetic parliamentarian, he was a great debater and speechmaker and argued in favour of land tax in order to save the people from excessive taxation. It is little wonder that he was referred to by Samuel Pepys in his diary of 10th November 1662 as "the great Mr Swinfen the parliament man"

John Swinfens grandson Richard succeeded him as Lord of the manor and is also buried at St Mary's Weeford. Richard followed his grandfather into a career in politics, however, although he shared his grandfather's Whig sentiments, he was not such a noted parliamentarian.

The grade 2* Swinfen Hall which lies a short distance from the church, was built by Samuel Swinfen in 1757 to a design by Benjamin Wyatt – father of the more famous James Wyatt.

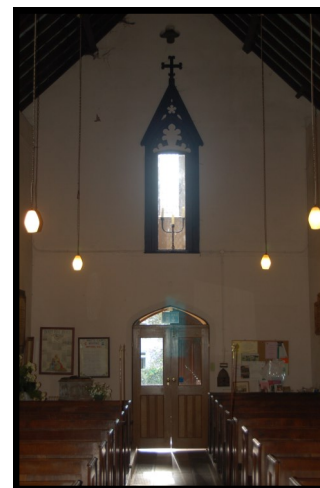


When it was first built there were balconies in the transepts which were occupied by notable local families the Swinfen's and the Manley's. However these were taken down in 1878, Repairs to the stonework indicate where they once stood.



Repairs to the stonework surrounding the transepts indicate where galleries once stood.

Another balcony at the rear of the church was for "singers and Psalms", this was removed in 1912 after it fell into disrepair. A large window above the west door was once the entrance to this balcony.



The large window above the door was once the entrance to a Minstrels Gallery.

St Mary's church has undergone several changes over the years. The Spire was taken down in 1838 and by 1841 had been replaced by the current entrance lobby and "pepperpot" bell tower which now holds two bells. It is unclear whether these are the bells which hung in the previous building or not.



St Mary's Church as it stands today with it's distinctive "Pepperpot" Bell tower and entrance lobby.

The chancel was added in 1876. The fact that all seven memorial plaques within the chancel, along with the dedication of the organ are to members of the Manley family would indicate that they were the prime benefactors of this improvement.



The Chancel was built in 1876

Swinfen's

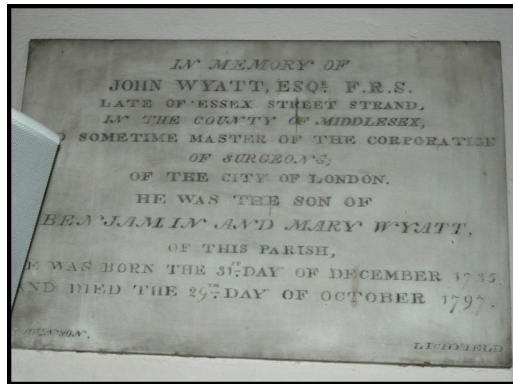
According to the History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Staffordshire written in 1834, the Swinfen family had probably been Lord's of the Manor of the Hamlet of Swinfen since the reign of Edward iii,

Within the church there are two gravestones dating back to the end of the seventeenth century with the following inscriptions:

JOHN SWYFEN, OF SWYFEN
ESQ WAS BORN MARCH THE 19th, 1612
CHOSEN A MEMBER OF THE PARLIAMENT WHICH MET 1640
AND OF MOST OF THE PARLIAMENTS
WHICH HAVE SATE SINCE: WHICH EMPLOYMENT HE
PERFORMED
WITH SINGULAR HONOUR AND
SATISFACTION TO HIS COUNTRY:
AND AFTER HE HAD LIVED AN IN
ESTIMABLE BLESSING TO HIS
FAMILY AND HIS FRIENDS, DIED ALSO
A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
APRIL THE 12th 1694

ANNE, WIFE OF JOHN SWYNFEN
OF SWYFEN ESQ
AFTER SHE HAD LIVED AN
INESTIMABLE BLESSING TO
HER HUSBAND, CHILDREN
AND FAMILY, 57 YEARS
HAD A COMFORTABLE DEPAR
TURE OUT OF THIS LIFE
ON THE 29th DAY OF APRIL
1690
IN A LIVELEY HOPE OF A
BLESSED ETERNITY
IN THE 79th YEAR OF
HER AGE.

There are also tablets in the Nave in memory of John Wyatt (1735 – 1797) who was a surgeon in London. He should not be confused with his uncle, also called John (1700-1766), who worked with Lewis Paul in Birmingham to develop new techniques for the mechanical spinning of cotton and is credited with inventing a machine used before Arkwright's Spinning Jenny



More recent members of the Wyatt family who are remembered in St Mary's Church are former Amateur cricketer and Captain of Warwickshire, Worcestershire and England, Robert Elliott Storey Wyatt 1901-1995 and politician journalist and chairman of the Tote, Woodrow Wyatt—Lord Wyatt of Weeford 1918- 1997 who is also buried in the churchyard.

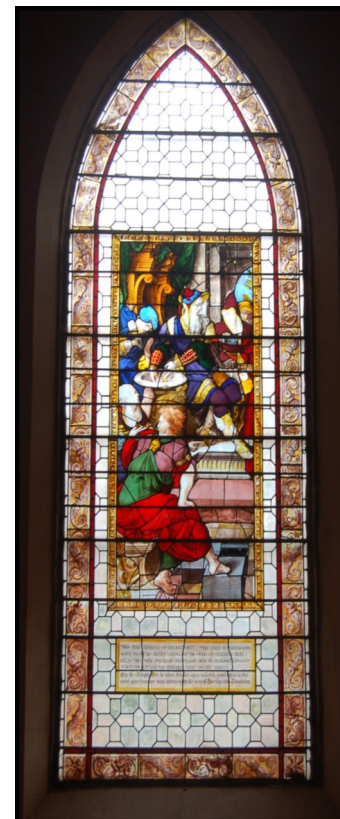


The Windows.

St Mary's has a number of fine stained glass windows of which the most notable is the one within the South Transept. This was brought in 1803 from the chapel of the Duke of Orleans near Paris; it is in the Netherlandish Mannerism of the late 16th century.

The fact that this was taken during the French Revolution is made clear by the inscription:

"These fine remains of ancient piety were torn by sacrilegious hands from the private chapel of the Dukes of Orleans near Paris. They were purchased and placed here by Sir Robert Lawley, Bart. When the church was finished anno domini MDCCCII. May the almighty God to whom they are again dedicated guard them in this sacred place from ever being witness to the like scene of sacrilege and devastation".



It is probable that this window was one of a series showing the events leading up to the crucifixion of Christ and that at some stage after they were taken down some of the pieces of the different windows were muddled up. As a result you will see that there are a number of parts of this window which aren't "quite right". For example, the man in the foreground has a leg for an arm



The Window in the North Transept which shows the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John) is dedicated to the Rev Robert Cowpland. He served as vicar for 46 years from 1833—1879 and oversaw all the major building alterations of the time.

Other windows dating back to the nineteenth century are memorials to significant local families.

The Pews

The nine rows of pews at the rear of the church are original to the building. You will notice that they are raised up above the level of the ground which is in accordance with Wyatts instructions.

The subject of pews was a very contentious issue in the middle of the 19th century, copies of an acrimonious exchange of letters on the subject which took place between Rev Cowpland and Samuel Swinfen from 1842—1844 are in existence today and chart the argument over the “ownership” of two of the pews.

These older pews are not only numbered but also, many still bear the paper labels signifying who may sit there.

The pews nearer the front of the church are Victorian replacements

Pew 24 —it is just about possible to read the label which states” Servants of Swinfen Hall”

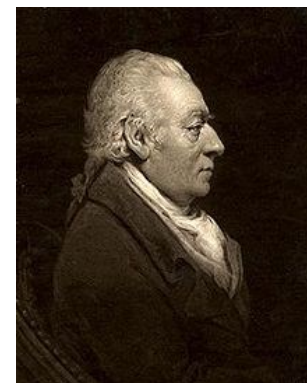


Significant families.

There are three notable families among those associated with St Mary’s Weeford, the Wyatts. The Swinfen’s and the Manley’s.

Wyatt’s

There were Wyatts in Weeford at least as early as 1562 with a number gaining reputations as noted architects. Records show that Edward Wyatt was heavily involved in major alterations to the previous church building and Benjamin Dean Wyatt (1775-1852) built the theatre Royal Drury Lane and was also Surveyor at Westminster Abbey. However, it was Benjamin's father, James (1746—1813), born 1/2 mile away at Blackbrook Farmhouse who was the most acclaimed and influential architects of his age. His first major building in the U.K. the Pantheon in Oxford Street, was described by Horace Walpole as “the most beautiful edifice in England”. In 1792 he was appointed surveyor – general, a post which effectively made him the most prominent architect in the country. James Wyatt was also involved in works at Windsor Castle, Kew Gardens, the restoration of the House of Lords and the building of St Mary’s Church Weeford. He was also the Lichfield Cathedral architect in the 1780’s and oversaw work to remove 500 tons of stone from the nave roof, replacing it with lath and plaster, and effectively saving the cathedral from collapse.



*James Wyatt 1746—1813
One of the most notable and influential architects in British history. Also a son of Weeford and architect of St Mary’s Church.*