Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

THE PRIORY CHURCH OF St MARY, LANCASTER

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 56



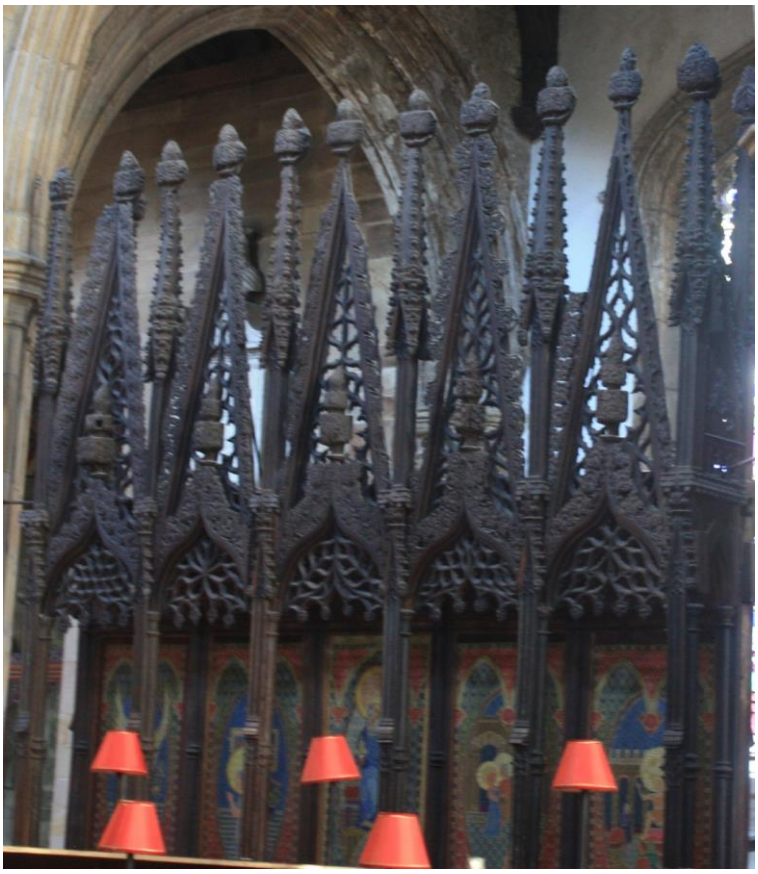
The tower

Until 1755 the Priory Church of St Mary was Lancaster's only church. It stands on a prominent position atop Castle Hill and next to Lancaster Castle – Guide 28 tells you

more about the Castle. The Church's site is on the northern flank of the Roman forts built here, of which very little remains above ground. The Church is Grade 1 listed.

There is some evidence for a Saxon church on this site dated to the 8th or 9th centuries and surviving in some stone fragments. There are also small sections of the Norman Benedictine Priory on this site, preserved in parts of the walls. The Benedictine Priory became the Priory Church of St Mary in the Parish of Lancaster in 1430.

The majority of the nave, chancel and chancel aisles are from the 14th and 15th centuries in a Perpendicular style. The most important feature of the interior is the elaborately carved choir stalls and their misericords (carved fold-down seats for the choir), which date to around 1340 and are considered to be among the best in the country.



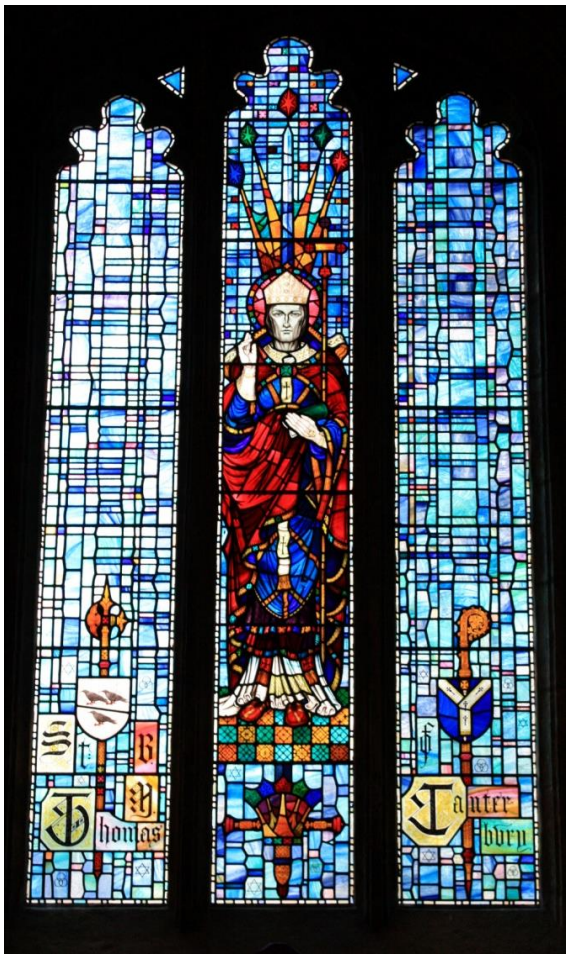
The choir stalls

There was a medieval tower on the west side, which became unsafe and was replaced by the present tower (designed by Henry Sephton) in the 1750s. This was followed by extensive and repeated internal refurbishments of the interior, with some galleries removed and the organ replaced. The gallery survives at the west end where the organ is, and it displays a carved Royal coat of arms.

The pulpit has woodwork dated 1619. The roof is 19th century. The SW porch and vestries were added early in the 20th century. The chapel in the NW corner for the

King's Own Lancaster Regiment was opened in 1903/4. The stained glass is mostly mid-Victorian some, including the East window by William Wailes. The best stained glass is at the east end of the South aisle - a figure of St Thomas à Becket by R F Ashmead of Lancaster's Abbott & Co. (1966). The work of the town's other major stained- glass firm, Shrigley and Hunt, is also represented in the church. (See Guide 6 on Stained Glass of Lancaster). There are a large number of brasses (some by A W N Pugin) and sculptures, including a Madonna by Shawn Williamson.

The burial ground to the west has been re-arranged, the gravestones laid flat and seating provided.



St Thomas à Becket, in Lancaster Priory by R.F. Ashmead of Abbott & Co (1966)

Reading

C Hartwell and N Pevsner *The Building s of England. Lancashire: North.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

The Priory's guide book.

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