

A brief history of St Chad's

Many of us will have read about St Columba and his influence on first St Aidan and then St Chad; but nothing beats a visit either to Lindisfarne or Iona, from whence they came, in the 7th century. Those are both 'thin' places, where the besetting negativities on us are thinner and the presence of God is somehow felt more strongly.

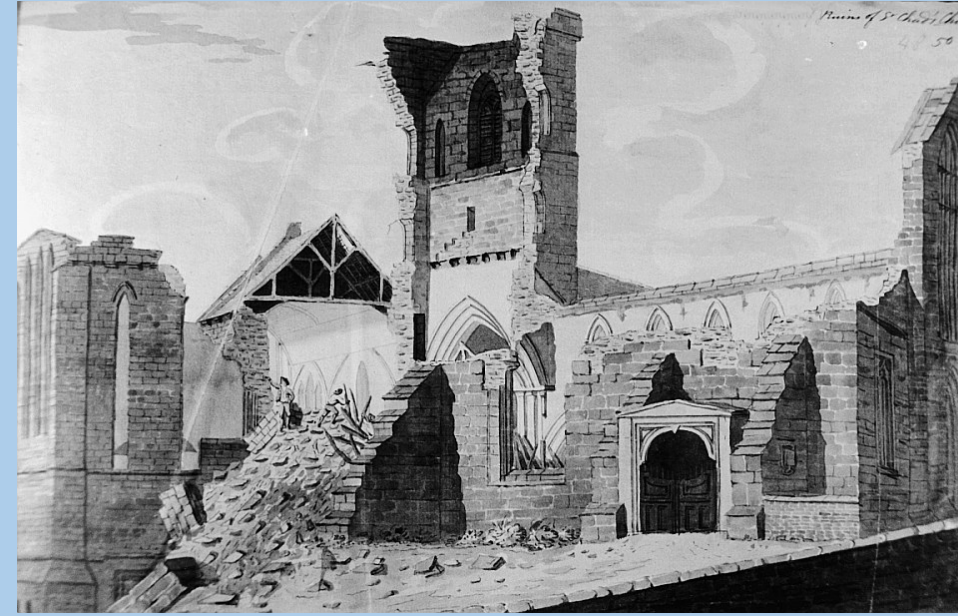
There has been a St Chad's church in Shrewsbury since the 8th or 9th century; it is documented in the Domesday Book. Originally built in Belmont – the beautiful high ground within the defensive town walls – it gradually fell into disrepair through the 1700s. The great engineer, Thomas Telford, advised that it was in danger of collapse, though the parishioners and powers-that-be initially disbelieved him, thinking that he was simply after an architectural commission.



Old St Chad's, Belmont; now a ruin.

Yet he was very soon proved right. One morning in 1788 the parishioners awoke to find they had a pile of rubble but no church, the collapse having been initiated by vibration from the chiming of the clock in the tower. A small section of Old St Chad's still stands, in nearby Belmont, and the remains of the crypt are open to the elements.

George Steuart, architect, better known for his country houses, was commissioned to design and build a new church. Through both an ostentatious choice of site which involved the demolition of some of the town wall and a curious 'misunderstanding' (the PCC thought they had commissioned a rectilinear church) the unique round bodied church now stands high over much of the town centre. The construction of Steuart's design was superintended by John Simpson, who worked closely with Telford on many of his famous iron structures; the great ironmaster William Hazeldine worked the narrow pillars which hold up the vast central roof giving a lovely sense of airiness inside. The church was consecrated in 1792 and it has been in continuous use for worship since then.



Being a child of the early Industrial Revolution the building has no ancient history, though the line of flagstones in the present church from the entrance to the altar is along the old town walls. It was decked out with 14 bells in 1798 which remain (after recasting and repairs) in frequent use for both peals and competitions. If you can tell a Norman & Beard from a Harrison & Harrison this is the organ to see, or rather, hear: installed by one and upgraded by the other it now has 'a rich, opulent tone' and is often used for recitals. There is some fine stained glass by David Evans:- a copy of Rubens's triptych 'Descent from the Cross' together with windows illustrating New Testament stories; and for anyone into heraldry there is a large collection of hatchments, the diamond shaped boards painted with the armorial bearing of a deceased person which were placed on the carriage as they were taken to church for burial and are now on the walls of the church.



The original silver basin in which Charles Darwin was baptised in 1809 is now in storage; the current font is made of limestone in which, rather aptly, many fossil lilies are visible. There are many other historical and architectural parts to look at—please read further in the [visitors](#) page.



But a church is not about its history or its architecture! It is living and ephemeral. We were very pleased to welcome Bishop Michael on St Chad's day in 2025 for a special service of re-dedication. As we seek to deepen our own faith, our ministry is to the town, from the homeless to the Mayor and Council. And also to our many visitors, concert goers and parishioners. So, as well as the person to person contact, and leadership from Rev Sam, our prayer is that any who enter the building find it to be a thin place, where faith rises to overcome fear, where hope rises to overcome despair, and where God's love may be abundant. Please join us in this prayer.

