

DUDLEY: PROUD OF THE PAST, POSITIVE FOR THE FUTURE

Saint Thomas's Church

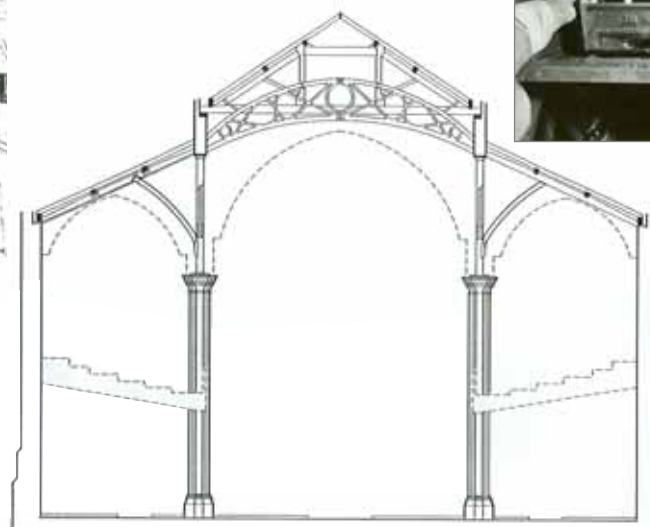
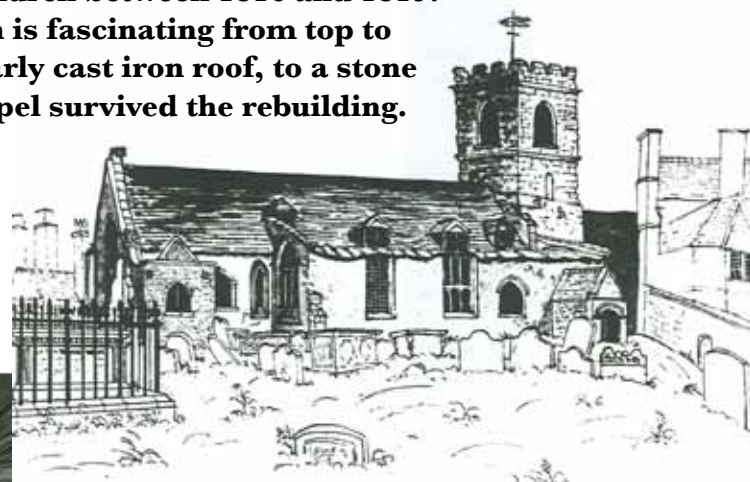


The Church's below ground Crypt.

The churches of St Thomas ("top church") and St Edmund ("bottom church") sit at either end of the medieval town of Dudley and were first mentioned in a document of 1182. The medieval building here was replaced by the present mock gothic church between 1816 and 1819. Saint Thomas's church is fascinating from top to bottom, from a very early cast iron roof, to a stone medieval crypt or chapel survived the rebuilding.



Right: Bomb Damage to the Church



Gervase Paganel, Lord of Dudley Castle, probably founded St Thomas's in the middle of the 12th century for use by the burgesses and townfolk of his "new town". He also established Dudley priory and provided income for the monks by giving them control of both the town's churches.

The dedication was to Archbishop Thomas A Becket who was martyred by Henry II in 1170. Gervase may have been making a political point since he was himself in rebellion in 1175, provoking Henry to order the demolition of Dudley Castle.

Research suggests that some of the medieval church survives today, deep below the present church's east end where two small interlinked chambers are constructed of apparently medieval masonry. These may have formed a crypt or even a small chapel where conceivably a relic of Archbishop Becket, perhaps a drop of blood or fragment of bone, could have been visited by pilgrims.

The medieval church was swept away early in the nineteenth century when it was felt to be too small and inconvenient for the area's growing population. The old building was replaced with the present mock gothic church, designed by William Brooks and built by Daniel Evens in 15th century perpendicular style.

The new church is remarkable in its extensive use of cast iron for details normally carved in stone, such as the window tracery, and for its roof structure where cast iron pillars and spans were used to augment the more usual wooded beams. The roof was a cause of dissent between Architect and Builder, the latter having inserted the ironwork without authorisation because he could not "warrant the work standing" without it. The extra cost involved was the source of much wrangling.

Such an early use of structural cast iron makes St Thomas's of great national importance, as reflected in its status as a grade II* Listed Building.

