



Exploring the Market Place: past and present

Heritage Open Days
Organised by Salisbury
Civic Society

St Thomas' Church

St Thomas' Churchyard

This beautiful church has many interesting features. A number are detailed below but help is available from the Church Welcomers who are often present and ready to assist you by share their knowledge and love of the place. There is also an excellent QR code-based guide which offers informed comment and close ups of some of the features enabling visitors to see them in detail, despite their presence in the soaring roof!

The earliest St Thomas's church was a wooden building erected in the 13th century. It is thought to be the first building which encroached upon the market place. The first church was soon replaced by a stone building, which has changed over the intervening eight hundred years. Parts of the tower date to the 14th century, but it has a complex history. A stone spire atop the tower caused the tower to lean and had to be removed. It was replaced by battlements and a different roof. The Chancel collapsed in 1448 and rebuilding began again at once, with significant funding support from Thomas Swayne, a rich merchant in the city. The main nave dates from the 15th century and the vestry from the 16th.

A key feature is the Doom painting above the Chancel arch from the late 15th century. It is believed to have been whitewashed over in 1593 and rediscovered in 1819. There are also a three faced image of the Holy Trinity, many Angels on the roof beams and 15th century wall paintings in the Lady chapel on the south east side of the church. The Samuel Green organ was presented to the Cathedral by George III in 1792 and gifted to St Thomas's church in 1877. In front of it is St George's Altar, constructed from a medieval tomb. There are several merchants' marks in the stonework around the church. Outside the church on the south (Silver street) side, the 17th/18th century clock features wooden figures, Jacks, which appear to strike bells.

When the church was built there were two parish churches in the area: St Thomas's and St Martin's at Britford. As the town grew three town parishes were defined: St Thomas's, St Edmund's and St Paul's. St Thomas's and St Edmund's combined in 1975. Some of the artefacts now in St Thomas's were brought from St Edmund's church when it became an Arts Centre.

The church hosts many events including musical performances, the annual Christmas Tree festival, theatre (for example, Murder In the Cathedral), bookstall and coffee mornings (Sat) and much more.

Recent study of the history of the church and churchyard suggests an alchemist may have lived in a small room on the north side of the church. The room was accessed through a porch, which is no longer there, by the north door which can still be seen.

The churchyard and St Thomas's square have seen many changes (see 28 Cheesemarket, Dinghams) and occupants over the years. The City mill was nearby and the corporation swimming baths (1889 to 1920) were behind the city mill. William Brown, a famous stamp dealer who started the Royal Philatelic Society Journal, AH Jay printer, Best and Co. coal merchants, Diffeys confectioner and baker were all occupants of the square which now houses shops, a restaurant, offices and church rooms.