

St Mary

Sarnesfield

Sarnesfield. We should come to it in summertime, when the church is framed in green by the lovely trees, and red roses climb around its ancient porch. Here is beauty for those who love it, and antiquity for those who love that.

From Arthur Mee's 'Herefordshire'

Sarnesfield,
Hereford HR4
8RE



The Church of St Mary is situated in the parish of Sarnesfield which is first mentioned in the Domesday Book as Sarnesfelde. The origins of its name come from the Welsh 'Sarn' (road) and the old English 'feld' (open space), hence 'open space by the road'.

A small rural parish, Sarnesfield had over 120 parishioners at the turn of the 1900s, primarily engaged in agriculture and forestry. Today, as agricultural has modernised and mechanised and horizons broadened, that number has fallen to something nearer 45 parishioners.

The Church of St Mary is a small, Grade 1, 12th century Norman place of worship. About 1300, the western tower was added, and viewed from the outside is 'unadorned, unbuttressed, and batters out at the base.' A south-facing chapel and timber-framed exterior porch were added in the 14th century.

Inside the church

The interior of this church is a great delight to parishioners and visitors alike. Simply decorated with limewash walls, the church is a place of exceptional calm, ideal for reflection and religious worship.

In the east window of the south transept, what remains of the church's medieval stained glass can be seen. Four tiny, very charming figures from the 14th century, as well as fragments from the 15th century add delicate colour to the church.

In the chancel, the dominant feature is the Arts & Crafts stained-glass World War 1 memorial window. The window was designed and fitted in 1922 by Christopher Whall, one of the most eminent designers and stained-glass practitioners of the Arts & Craft Movement.



Several fragments of 13th and 14th C floriated crosses, which have served as memorials to the early inhabitants of Sarnesfield, still remain in the church, but only one bears any inscription. This commemorates Isabel De Sarnesfield and appears to be of 14th century workmanship. It can be found in the South-east corner of the south chapel.

John Abell

In the churchyard is the resting place of John Abell (C.1578 –1675), the celebrated ‘Sarnesfield carpenter’. Born in Sarnesfield, he was to become regarded as one of the finest domestic and civic architects of the 17thC, and was widely held to be the leading practitioner of the black & white timber style of architecture so characteristic of this part of the county. Situated just a few paces from the church porch, his plain, inscribed table tomb is a grade II listed ancient monument.

Historic context

Sarnesfield was granted by William the Conqueror to his distinguished follower **Roger De Laci**. Subsequently, it appears to have been in the hands of a family which took its name from the place as early as the reign of Henry I; Philip de Sarnesfield held one and a half hides from Hugh de Lacy in 1109.



By the reign of Richard II, its lord was **Nicholas de Sarnesfield**, a member of the retinue of the Black Prince. In 1386 he was a Knight of the Order of the Garter and an eminent diplomat. He died in 1394, leaving his wife, and co-heirs, his two daughters, one of whom married **Hugh de Moynton** or **Monington**. The second daughter married Walter Bromwich of Sarnesfield Coffyn (now Little Sarnesfield Farm about two miles from the church).

Visitors to St Mary’s will find copies of a more comprehensive leaflet, *Notes for Visitors*, as well as a leaflet about John Abell available in the church. They are also available from the PCC Secretary Roger Marshall on 01544 318795 or: rogermarshall@bbmax.co.uk