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The history of St Alkmund has been prepared by Dr Judith Everard drawing on draft text by Dr Penny Upton and others but has been substantially researched by her. The description of the building and its predecessor is by Wendy Horton.

Illustrations may be found in a further file.

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## ST ALKMUND

St Alkmund's church originated as a Mercian royal foundation of the early 10th century. The collegiate church occupied an elevated and central position within the *burh*; its churchyard was an early marketplace. In the mid 12th century, the entire estate of St Alkmund's was transferred to Lilleshall Abbey, leaving the benefice a frugally endowed vicarage. As a parish church St Alkmund's was well favoured by the town's leading families in the later medieval and early modern periods. The medieval church, all but the tower, was taken down in 1795 and rebuilt in a lofty but plain 'church gothic' style. From the 1960s, the dwindling town-centre congregation could not support the church's maintenance and it was threatened with redundancy. Instead, in 2007 St Alkmund's joined the benefice of St Chad and St Mary and continued as a town centre church, open to townspeople and visitors for worship and cultural activities.

### CHURCH ORIGINS

The church's patron Ealhmund (Alkmund) was a Northumbrian prince murdered *c.* 800 and thereafter, according to a ninth-century list of saint's resting-places, enshrined at Northworthy (now in Derby).<sup>1</sup> His feast day, 19 March, is recorded in the late 12th-century martyrology of St Chad's, Shrewsbury, among the early additional entries.<sup>2</sup>

According to a tradition recorded by the canons of Lilleshall Abbey in the late 12th century, St Alkmund's was founded by 'Adelfelda, queen of Mercia',<sup>3</sup> almost certainly to be identified as King Alfred's daughter, the formidable 'Lady of the Mercians'. Æthelflaed, who had reclaimed Derby from the Danes in 917, and perhaps moved relics of Ealhmund to Shrewsbury before her death in June 918.<sup>4</sup> Later, King Edgar (957–75) established a college with a dean and 10 prebendaries.<sup>5</sup> The church occupied an elevated and pivotal position within the town; its churchyard was the principal marketplace until the late 13th century.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A. Thacker, 'Kings, saints and monasteries in pre-Viking Mercia', *Midland History* 10 (1985), 1–25, at 15–16.

<sup>2</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl. D 1225, f. 96.

<sup>3</sup> U. Rees (ed.), *The Cartulary of Lilleshall Abbey* (1997), no. 258, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> Thacker, 'Kings, saints and monasteries', 15–16, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, no. 258, p. 134; *VCH Salop.* I, 314–15; *VCH Salop.* II, 71; S. Bassett, 'Anglo-Saxon Shrewsbury and its churches', *Midland History* 16 (1991), 1–23, 9.

<sup>6</sup> *VCH Salop.* VI pt 1, 76.

The college's endowment survived the Norman Conquest. By the Domesday survey, St Alkmund's owned 21 burgages and 12 canons' houses in Shrewsbury, as well as two hides of land in Shrewsbury hundred which were held by two of the canons.<sup>7</sup> St Alkmund's also retained nine manors elsewhere in Shropshire, including the large and valuable manor of Lilleshall.<sup>8</sup> At the *Quo Warranto* inquest of 1279, the fee of St Alkmund in Shrewsbury had grown to 45 burgages.<sup>9</sup> The inquest returns closely match entries (suitably adjusted) in a late 13th-century rental of properties held by Lilleshall Abbey.<sup>10</sup> In the meantime, however, c.1145, the college was dissolved and its estate transferred to the newly founded abbey of Lilleshall, also dedicated to St Alkmund.<sup>11</sup> Thereafter, the abbey provided ministers to serve St Alkmund's as a parish church.

## PAROCHIAL ORGANISATION

### *Parish Boundaries*

The medieval parish of St Alkmund in Shrewsbury extended northwest from the church, bordered by High Street–Rous Hill to the west and Dogpole to the east; crossing Pride Hill, the parish extended to a narrow river frontage upstream of Welsh Bridge.<sup>12</sup> Beyond the urban area, the parish was formed from the estates of the Anglo-Saxon collegiate church of St Alkmund nearest to Shrewsbury, hence it included several detached portions. There was land in Castle Foregate and at Coton.<sup>13</sup> Beyond St Mary's parish, to the north, St Alkmund's parish included Uffington chapelry,<sup>14</sup> Albrightlee, part of Harlescott, and Hencott. Beyond St Chad's territory in the west was the detached portion of Preston Montford and Dinthill.<sup>15</sup> The boundary with St Mary's parish in Harlescott was settled in 1845.<sup>16</sup> From the mid 19th century, the parish boundaries were rationalised and the detached portions incorporated in new parishes. Preston Montford

<sup>7</sup> Eyton, *Antiq. Shrops.*, VI, 368–9.

<sup>8</sup> See *VCH Salop.* II, 71; Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, esp. Map I.

<sup>9</sup> Shropshire Archives (SA), 6001/28, pp. 37–8.

<sup>10</sup> U. Rees, 'A late-13th century rental of tenements in Shrewsbury', *TSAHS* 66 (1989), 79–84; Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, 189–90, no. 373.

<sup>11</sup> *VCH Salop.* II, 71; Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, xv–xvi.

<sup>12</sup> *VCH Salop.* VI, pt 1, Figure 10.

<sup>13</sup> Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, no. 375, p. 191; SA, 972/1/1/427–54.

<sup>14</sup> Until Uffington (with parts of Sundorne and Albrightlee) became an independent parish: Eyton, *Antiqs.* ix, 9–11; U. Rees (ed.), *The Cartulary of Haughmond Abbey* (1985), no. 294 p. 74, p. 194. Sundorne was removed from St Alkmund's parish c. 1155 when Haughmond Abbey bought out Lilleshall Abbey's interest in the estate: Eyton, *Antiqs.* vii, 280.

<sup>15</sup> Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, 193–4; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 266, 270; Eyton, *Antiqs.* vii, 194–7.

<sup>16</sup> SA, P252/F/4/1–9.

and Dinthill were incorporated in the new parish of Bicton in 1853.<sup>17</sup> A scheme approved in 1875 to remove the townships of Harlescott and Albrightlee from the parishes of St Mary and St Alkmund and attach them to Battlefield does not appear to have been implemented.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the new parish of the Holy Spirit, Harlescott, was created in 1963 out of the parishes of St Alkmund and Uffington.<sup>19</sup>

### *Clergy House*

Godfrey the vicar of St Alkmund's had a house in St Julian's churchyard<sup>20</sup> until c. 1275, when Abbot Luke and the convent of Lilleshall leased the house to Roger the Tailor and his wife Ysota (or Ysolda) for both their lives.<sup>21</sup> At an annual rent of 10s. the house was one of the most valuable of Lilleshall's tenements in Shrewsbury.<sup>22</sup> In 1287/8, Abbot Ralph and the convent granted to Hugh Ives, the vicar of St Alkmund's, and his successors, in perpetuity a rent of 10s. and the reversion of the house, then described as being on the south side of the church.<sup>23</sup> By c. 1331, the house had become the property of the vicar and was worth 26s. 8d. per annum.<sup>24</sup> The vicarage is mentioned in later deeds,<sup>25</sup> locating it on the south side of what is now St Alkmund's Square. In 1612 it was a house of three bays, of which part was rebuilt in brick by 1698.<sup>26</sup> A large garden extended south from the house (Fig. 1). The aristocratic Richard de Courcy (vicar 1774–1803) eschewed the old vicarage, which was presumably rented out. The decision of Charles and Julia Wightman to make it their home from the beginning of their evangelising ministry in 1842 (below), in what was by then an overcrowded and insalubrious neighbourhood, was perhaps a statement of intent. In 1866, Charles Wightman paid for the house to be reroofed,

<sup>17</sup> *London Gaz.*, 24 June 1853, p. 1768.

<sup>18</sup> *London Gaz.*, 19 Mar. 1875, issue 24192, pp. 1694–7.

<sup>19</sup> *London Gaz.*, 25 Oct. 1963, issue 43143, p. 8769. 'Holy Spirit, Harlescott', below.

<sup>20</sup> Godfrey appears to have held another messuage, on Dogpole, so it is not certain that he resided in the house near the church: Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, no. 267, p. 140.

<sup>21</sup> SA, 972/1/1/442; Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, nos. 280, 373.

<sup>22</sup> Only the houses of Henry Espec (13s. 4d.) and Adam of Stretton (11s.) were assessed for higher rents, and most were less than 1s.: Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, p. 189.

<sup>23</sup> Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, pp. 147, 189.

<sup>24</sup> Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, no. 378. Dated by Rees on the assumption that William Pope was the second vicar to occupy the house. If the house had been occupied first by Godfrey as vicar, however, the second vicar would have been Hugh Ives, hence no. 378, a valuation of the benefice, could be dated 1287/8 × 1313.

<sup>25</sup> SA, 840/128 (1588); 840/130 (1606). Cf. Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.*, II, 267–8.

<sup>26</sup> S. Watts (ed.) *The Glebe Terriers of Shropshire. Part 2 - Llanyblodwel to Wroxeter*. Shropshire Record Series, 6 (Keele, 2002), 99.

modernised and extended, with a parish room added, at a cost of *c.* £900.<sup>27</sup> Subsequently, in 1878, he had the house ‘obtrusively’ re-fronted by the Shrewsbury architect S. Pountney Smith, and adorned with ‘pious mottoes’.<sup>28</sup> The vicarage remained in use until 1934 when it was conveyed for a like purpose to the vicar of St Julian’s.<sup>29</sup> It is now in private ownership. The minister of the present joint benefice of St Chad with St Mary and St Alkmund is housed at St Chad’s vicarage.

#### *Advowson*

As a royal foundation, the advowson of the St Alkmund’s lay with the Crown. Edward the Confessor was said to have presented Godric Wiffesune to the prebend of Wistanstow. At Godric’s death, Roger de Montgomery, earl of Shrewsbury, presented as his successor Nehel (or Nigel), the earl’s physician.<sup>30</sup> The advowson reverted to the Crown with the cessation of the earldom in 1102. Henry I appointed as dean Richard de Belmeis, a native of Shropshire and the king’s chief agent in the county and the Welsh Marches. On his death in 1127, Henry I appointed his nephew Richard as dean in succession.<sup>31</sup> Richard de Belmeis the younger was one of the founders of Lilleshall Abbey, to which, with royal consent, he granted all the prebends of the church of St Alkmund.<sup>32</sup> The abbot and convent of Lilleshall then held the advowson of the vicarage of St Alkmund’s until the abbey’s dissolution in 1538, when patronage was assumed by the Crown.<sup>33</sup>

In 1628 the Crown sold the advowson to Rowland Heylyn (1562–1632). Heylyn was born in the parish of St Alkmund’s and educated at Shrewsbury School, making his career in the Ironmongers’ Company in London. Elected as an alderman in 1624, he served as sheriff of London the same year. Heylyn had purchased the advowson for the benefit of the Feoffees for Improvements, an unincorporated group of London merchants, Puritan clergy and lawyers who purchased advowsons and school masterships to exploit the opportunities for patronage that they offered. In 1630 the Feoffees were attacked by Heylyn’s kinsman, Peter Heylyn, in a sermon preached

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>28</sup> Newman and Pevsner, *Shropshire*, 564.

<sup>29</sup> SA, P256/F/1/3/8, and see ‘St Julian’.

<sup>30</sup> Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, no. 258, p. 134.

<sup>31</sup> Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, xv–xvi, citing *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, ii, no. 1492.

<sup>32</sup> Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, no. 1, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> George Crane was presented as vicar by Edward VI in 1550: Staffordshire Record Office (SRO), B/A/1/14iv.

before the University of Oxford. In 1632 an action was brought against the Feoffees by the attorney-general in the Exchequer. The Feoffees were dissolved and the property they held reverted to the Crown.<sup>34</sup> The advowson of St Alkmund's remained with the Crown until 1873 when the patronage was conveyed to the bishop of Lichfield.<sup>35</sup> The bishop of Lichfield continues as patron of the benefice (formed 2007) of St Chad with St Mary and St Alkmund.

### *Income and Property*

Having acquired all the property of the former college of St Alkmund, the abbot and convent of Lilleshall Abbey were responsible for providing a minister for the Shrewsbury church. In 1291 the living was valued at the relatively modest sum of £10.<sup>36</sup> Soon afterwards, possibly 1313 × 1330, the portion of the abbey's annual revenue allocated to the vicar of St Alkmund's was confirmed as: the vicarage house worth 26s. 8d., the altarage worth £10, the great and small tithes of Harlescott worth around £2 10s., the small tithes of Dinthill and Preston Montford, and gifts, offerings and confessions from those three townships. The total income was at least £15, in an ordinary year.<sup>37</sup> These revenues were retained by the vicar of St Alkmund when the temporalities of Lilleshall Abbey were surrendered to the Crown in 1538. The living consisted of the vicarage house and much the same spiritualities in 1612, with the tithe of certain pastures in Coton.<sup>38</sup>

Rowland Heylyn, who purchased the advowson of St Alkmund's in 1628, also purchased the tithes and tithe barn of Coton, which had formerly belonged to St Mary's college. Thomas Lloyd (vicar, 1607–39) complained in 1634, however, that the living was still worth just £10 per annum. Lloyd alleged that Heylyn had undertaken to devote the Coton tithes to the support of the vicarage up to an annual value of £30, but instead the income had been diverted to the support of a lecturer at St Alkmund's and that he,

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<sup>34</sup> For Heylyn see M.L. Schwarz, 'Heylyn, Rowland (1562–1632)', *ODNB* (2008). For the Feoffees for Improvements, C. Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (1956), ch. 11; I.M. Calder (ed.), *Activities of the Puritan Faction of the Church of England, 1625–33* (1957) which prints the key documents.

<sup>35</sup> SA, P253/F/2/1/1; *London Gaz.*, 6 May 1873, 2264–5; H.E. Forrest, *Old Churches of Shrewsbury* (1922), 115.

<sup>36</sup> *Taxatio*, 249.

<sup>37</sup> Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, no. 378, pp. 192–3.

<sup>38</sup> Watts, *Glebe Terriers*, 99.

as vicar, had received no advantage from the tithes.<sup>39</sup> After the suppression of the Feoffees for Improvements, a lease of the tithes of Coton was made by the Crown to Thomas Lloyd. He subsequently came under pressure to share the profits of these tithes with the curate of St Mary's, in whose parish the tithes lay. This became part of a larger attempt to improve the income of the poorer town livings; it is not clear whether the comprehensive settlement desired was ever achieved.<sup>40</sup> By 1698, the vicar also received £1 6s. 8d. from the Drapers Company to read prayers on Mondays and £5 from the corporation for reading prayers every morning; a further £6 for daily prayers, charged on an estate at Astley, was added by 1736.<sup>41</sup>

In 1772 the living was valued at about £100 per annum.<sup>42</sup> In the early 19th century, the vicarage of St Alkmund's was notoriously 'not a rich one'.<sup>43</sup> In 1837 the living was worth £219 per annum,<sup>44</sup> but by 1865 this had fallen to £190,<sup>45</sup> and by 1891 to £175 gross.<sup>46</sup> The Coton tithe barn, now a shop, was leased for £10 per annum.<sup>47</sup> In 1885, however, in order to induce the ageing but popular Charles Wightman to continue as vicar, a fund was raised by the parishioners which provided an extra £100 per annum to augment the curate's stipend.<sup>48</sup> By 1941 the annual value of the living had increased to £480 net.<sup>49</sup>

General registers commence in 1556 and survive complete. Separate marriage registers began in 1754 and baptism and burial registers in 1813.<sup>50</sup>

## CHURCH LIFE

### *Middle Ages*

The Anglo-Saxon college of St Alkmund may have survived the Conquest with its estates more or less intact, but it was subject to lay interference from the highest level. Roger de Montgomery, earl of Shrewsbury (d.1094), presented his physician, Nigel, to

<sup>39</sup> *Cal. State Papers, Domestic 1634–5*, p. 377; I.M. Calder, 'A seventeenth century attempt to purify the Anglican Church', *American Historical Rev.*, 53 (1948) 760–75; Calder, *Activities of the Puritan Faction*, 87. See Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 270–3; Coulton, *Regime and Rebellion*, 78.

<sup>40</sup> *Cal. State Papers, Domestic 1638–9*, 209, 394–5; *Cal. State Papers, Domestic 1640–1*, 342–3.

<sup>41</sup> Watts, *Glebe Terriers*, 100.

<sup>42</sup> SRO, B/V/5/18, 1772, archdeaconry of Salop.

<sup>43</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 266.

<sup>44</sup> C. Hulbert, *History and Antiquities of Shrewsbury* (2nd edn, 1837), II, 295.

<sup>45</sup> *Crockford's Clerical Directory*. [cf. 1868 edn, p. 708]

<sup>46</sup> *Kelly's Directory of Shropshire* (1891), 410.

<sup>47</sup> Watts, *Glebe Terriers*, 101.

<sup>48</sup> C. Bullock, *Lives Worth Living. Prebendary Wightman and Mrs. Wightman* (1898), 13.

<sup>49</sup> *Kelly's Directory of Shropshire* (1941), 221.

<sup>50</sup> SA, P252/A/1–5; P252/A/11/2.

the prebend of Wistanstow. On Nigel's death, Earl Hugh de Montgomery intervened, persuading the dean and canons to lease the prebend to a layman.<sup>51</sup> In the early 12th century, when the advowson had reverted to the Crown, one of Henry I's 'new men', Richard de Belmeis (viceregent in Shropshire; bishop of London, 1108–27), was appointed dean and by his death in 1127 he held several of the prebends. The office of dean and the prebends were then granted by Henry I to Richard de Belmeis the younger, who c.1145 donated the whole of the college's endowment to his foundation of Lilleshall Abbey. Notably, Richard granted all the prebends that were in his own hands, and the reversion of the remaining prebends as they became vacant. The new abbey was formed by a party of regular canons from Dorchester Abbey. The college of St Alkmund was evidently regarded by the Norman rulers primarily as a source of patronage, so that within a few decades after the Conquest there was little or nothing of a resident community of canons serving the church. It follows that other clergy must have been employed for this purpose.

By the beginning of the 13th century, the church was served by one or more chaplains. If Peter the chaplain of St Alkmund (c. 1210–30)<sup>52</sup> is the same as Peter 'the perpetual vicar of St Alkmund',<sup>53</sup> then the establishment of the vicarage could be dated to the early 13th century. Godfrey was vicar of St Alkmund's from c.1230 × 1250 to c.1275 and had a house near the church that later became the vicarage.<sup>54</sup> William of Coton, styled simply 'chaplain', also attested documents concerning Lilleshall Abbey's interests in Shrewsbury alongside Peter, and later Godfrey, into the 1250s.<sup>55</sup> There were at least two chantries, whose chaplains held houses of the fee of St Alkmund, by the 1280s: one dedicated to the Virgin Mary and one for the soul of Nicholas son of Ivo.<sup>56</sup>

Hugh Ive was vicar of St Alkmund's in 1287/8.<sup>57</sup> He was probably a son or nephew of the Nicholas son of Ivo who regularly attested documents concerning the fee of St

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<sup>51</sup> Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, no. 258, p. 134.

<sup>52</sup> Attestation 'domino Petro capellano ecclesiae Sancti Almundi Salop' as first-named witness to a deed that has no apparent relevance to Lilleshall Abbey or St Alkmund's: Rees, *Cart. Haughmond*, no. 1187, p. 218 ('c. 1210–c. 1216'). See also Peter the chaplain, William the chaplain: SA, 972/1/1/429 (c. 1210); Peter chaplain of St Alkmund: 972/1/1/465 (c. 1220 × 1230). Cf. Owen and Blakeway, *Hist. II*, 276 note 1.

<sup>53</sup> Deed broadly dated 'mid 13th century': SA, 972/1/1/459.

<sup>54</sup> SA, 972/1/1/433, 972/1/1/442. Probably the same as 'Godefrid capellan[us]': Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, no. 374, p. 191 (1240 × 1252), and the priest 'Godefrid' named as former tenant of a messuage on Dogpole (1275 × 1285): Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, no. 267, p. 140.

<sup>55</sup> SA, 972/1/1/429 (c. 1210); 972/1/1/433 (c. 1240); Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, no. 374, p. 191.

<sup>56</sup> Rees, 'Late-13th century rental', 80, 82.

<sup>57</sup> Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, no. 280, p. 147.



Alkmund in Shrewsbury in the first half of the 13th century,<sup>58</sup> and for whose soul the chantry had been established by 1279.<sup>59</sup> In the 1280s both Nicholas son of Nicholas Ive and Hugh Ive held burgages in Shrewsbury of the fee of St Alkmund.<sup>60</sup> William Pope was instituted vicar in 1313, he was admitted a burgess of the town in 1318, received licence to travel to Rome in 1325, and resigned the living in 1349.<sup>61</sup> There is little evidence of pluralism or absenteeism. Philip Lawley (vicar, 1361–99) appears to have been exceptional in that he held a benefice at Holgate (Shropshire) in 1362, was a canon of St Chad’s, Shrewsbury from 1364, and rector of Hopton Castle (Shropshire) from 1373.

In 1388 the church was said to have been, since the foundation of Lilleshall Abbey, ‘all desolate and destitute of divine service, to the very great discomfort of the good people of the town’.<sup>62</sup> This may have been an exaggeration since the chantry of St Mary was still in existence in 1384.<sup>63</sup> Clearly, however, parish worship was unsatisfactory. To remedy the situation, fresh provision for clergy was made. First, in the 1380s, the church’s patron, Lilleshall Abbey, was engaged in improving the standard of worship through the vernacular writings of the canon John Mirk, *Festial* and *Instructions for Parish Priests*.<sup>64</sup> Although both works were intended for wide and general distribution to parish priests, the abbey’s own benefices were certainly in mind – the *Festial* includes a sermon to be preached at St Alkmund’s church on the saint’s feast day.<sup>65</sup>

Second, by 1384 a fraternity of the Holy Cross had been established, linked to the chantry of St Mary. The fraternity was served by chaplains, whose duties included not only praying for the souls of the king and queen and the founder, but also providing divine service in the church.<sup>66</sup> In 1389 Thomas Pride endowed two chantry priests with

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<sup>58</sup> SA, 972/1/1/429, 972/1/1/430, 972/1/1/432–8, 972/1/1/441, 972/1/1/459. See also U. Rees (ed.), *The Cartulary of Shrewsbury Abbey* (1975), pp. 144, 149, 162, 380. For Nicholas, with Henry, Hugh and John, ‘sons of Ivo’: SA, 972/1/1/435.

<sup>59</sup> Rees, ‘Late-13th century rental’, 80, 82; Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, p. 189.

<sup>60</sup> Rees, ‘Late-13th century rental’, 80; Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, p. 189.

<sup>61</sup> Rees, *Cart. Lilleshall*, p. 193 (note); Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 276.

<sup>62</sup> TNA, C 47/45/393, translation in W.G.D. Fletcher, ‘Certificate of a gild or chantry in St Alkmund’s church, Shrewsbury, 30th January 1388–9’, *TSAS* 3rd ser. 5, part 3 (1905), *Miscellanea*, xii–xiv.

<sup>63</sup> SA, 3365/795, m. 1d. The authors are grateful to W.A. Champion for supplying information on St Alkmund’s chantries in this and the following paragraphs.

<sup>64</sup> T. Erbe (ed.), *Mirk’s Festial. A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Myrkus (John Mirk)* pt 1 (Oxford, 1905); S. Powell (ed.), *John Mirk’s Festial*, 2 vols (Oxford, 2009–11); E. Peacock (ed.), revised by F.J. Furnivall, *Instructions for Parish Priests by John Myrc* (1902); S. Powell, ‘Mirk, John (fl. c. 1382–c. 1414)’, *ODNB*.

<sup>65</sup> ‘De festo Sancti Alkemundi et eius solempnitate Sermo brevis’, in Erbe (ed.), *Mirk’s Festial*, pp. 240–4.

<sup>66</sup> TNA, C 47/45/393; ‘Misc.’, p. xiv.

eight messuages in Shrewsbury and its suburbs. The fraternity later held land in Meole Brace, known as ‘Prydesland’.<sup>67</sup> There were four trustees: Thomas Pride himself and three chaplains, one of whom was the cantarist of St Mary’s chantry and the others perhaps of Holy Cross.<sup>68</sup> The vicar of St Alkmund’s instituted in 1405 and his successor in 1413 were described as chaplains and were perhaps cantarists of the double chantry.<sup>69</sup>

Later evidence suggests that while the memory of St Mary’s chantry was not lost, the fraternity of the Holy Cross was the dominant institution. By 1399 the fraternity had been granted a tenement near the cemetery of St Alkmund’s, possibly the same tenement, perhaps a guildhouse, mentioned in 1462 as ‘in the corner near the church leading to Fish Street’.<sup>70</sup> That is almost certainly to be identified with Bear Steps Hall, perhaps the building for which timber was required in 1384.<sup>71</sup> Eventually the fraternity’s possessions included various properties in the town and its environs, and four chambers near the cemetery of St Alkmund’s of which one was held by the incumbent of the chantry, one by the clerk of the parish church, and a third was called the school (*scola*) or ‘scole house’.<sup>72</sup> At their dissolution in 1547 the chantries of Holy Cross and St Mary were served by two priests: Hugh Taylour and John Layd (*sic*), then aged 60 and 54. In 1555/6, Edward Graye and John Loyd, alias Lane, received pensions as incumbents respectively of the chantry and fraternity of the Holy Cross.<sup>73</sup>

Another significant perpetual chantry at St Alkmund’s was that of St Katherine, which was probably founded by Reginald Perle, a member of a family which held burgages of the fee of St Alkmund in the 13th century and included several bailiffs in the 14th and 15th.<sup>74</sup> In the 1470s the chantry was said to have ‘long’ (*ab antiquo*) enjoyed an endowment of the annual rent of 24s. paid by the borough for a plot (on

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<sup>67</sup> Manor court record of 1422: J.B. Blakeway, ‘History of Shrewsbury Hundred or Liberties’, *TSAS* 2nd ser., 8 (1896), 111.

<sup>68</sup> TNA, C 143/407/32; *Cal. Pat. Rolls 1388–92*, 45; A. Hamilton Thompson, ‘Certificates of the Shropshire chantries’, *TSAS* 3rd ser. 10 (1910), 343–4. For Thomas Pride, see: J. Roskell, L. Clarke and C. Rawcliffe, *Hist. of Parl. House of Commons, 1386–1421*, IV, 140–1, available at: <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1386-1421/member/pride-thomas>

<sup>69</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 277.

<sup>70</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 267 note 4.

<sup>71</sup> SA, 3365/795, m. 1d; M. Moran, *Vernacular Buildings of Shropshire* (2003), 223.

<sup>72</sup> TNA, SC 6/EdwVI/393; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 269–70, 270 note 1; *VCH Salop*. VI pt 1, 123–4.

<sup>73</sup> Hamilton Thompson, ‘Certificates’, 343–4; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 270.

<sup>74</sup> More than one bailiff bore this name in the 14th century: J. Morris, ‘The Provosts and Bailiffs of Shrewsbury’, *TSAS*, 3rd ser. 1 (1901), 289–320, at 317–18; ‘Perle, John II (d.1428/9), of Shrewsbury, Salop’, *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1386–1421*, ed. J.S. Roskell, L. Clark, C. Rawcliffe (1993): <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1386-1421/member/perle-john-ii-14289>

Pride Hill) on which the town's original fleshboards had been erected *c.* 1270. The initial grant to the borough was made by Hugh Baryl but later Perle's heirs were regarded as having the reversionary interest.<sup>75</sup> The chantry may have been defunct by 1518–19, when the payment was discontinued.<sup>76</sup> A chantry of St Clement the Pope was last recorded in 1537.<sup>77</sup>

The presence of the fraternity and the chantries helps to explain the important memorial brasses at St Alkmund's in the late Middle Ages and beyond.<sup>78</sup> Three that remain in the church are of Margery Humfreston, her first husband John Hervy, and her second husband John Humfreston, vintner and burgess of Shrewsbury (*c.* 1475). Other brasses commemorated local gentry such as Thomas Corbet of Moreton Corbet (d. 1436) and his wife Angharad, and leading burgesses such as Thomas Pontesbury, merchant of the staple (d. 1514) and a former bailiff. Other members of this important local family continued to be buried within the church after the dissolution of the chantries.<sup>79</sup> Richard Stury, presumably the prominent burgess of the early 14th century,<sup>80</sup> was also commemorated in the church. There is record of stained glass depicting a man and woman kneeling, the man in a surcoat bearing a purple lion, was inscribed 'Orate pro bonu statu Richardi Stury' (Pray for the good estate of Richard Stury).<sup>81</sup> Another important monument was an altar tomb bearing 'two bearded recumbent figures in long robes, originally one slab', possibly of the later 14th century.<sup>82</sup> Also buried in St Alkmund's was Robert Dudley (d. 1539), half-brother of Edward, 2nd Lord Dudley and MP for Shrewsbury (1529, 1536).<sup>83</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Bodleian, MS Gough Shropshire 6, f. 34v; SA, 3365/410; 3365/413 [Shrewsbury Borough, bailiffs' expenditure 1476–7, 1467–8]; see *VCH Salop.* VI pt 1, 79, 122.

<sup>76</sup> TNA, C 1/722/20–1.

<sup>77</sup> *VCH Salop.* VI pt 1, 122, citing ? SA, 3365/1795, fo. 15v.

<sup>78</sup> BL, Add MS 30,331, fos. 48–54; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 286–90, with illustrations of five of the brasses after W. Mytton (SA, 7381/207). Two medieval brasses – 'Full-length figures of a man and wife, the man with fur-lined robe and pouch, the wife with late form of kennel headdress, both standing on a tessellated pavement' – were donated by the National Art Collections Fund to Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery in 1952: <https://www.artfund.org/supporting-museums/art-weve-helped-buy/artwork/3029/monumental-brasses>. The (now) Art Fund attributes them to old St Chad's, but they are also claimed by St Alkmund's.

<sup>79</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 288–90, with illustration.

<sup>80</sup> *VCH Salop.* VI pt 1, 57–8. Alternatively, the Richard Stury (d. 1469) who founded a chantry in St Mary's church: *ibid.*, 122.

<sup>81</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 275.

<sup>82</sup> Now in the Abbey church, Shrewsbury: Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 165–6, with plate on preceding page; Newman and Pevsner, *Shropshire*, 520.

<sup>83</sup> 'Dudley, alias Sutton, Robert (1471/72–1539), of Shrewsbury, Salop', in *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1509–1558*, ed. S.T. Bindoff (1982): <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/dudley-robert-147172-1539>.

Master Adam Grafton LLB (vicar, 1473–89) and William Cureton (vicar, *ante* 1535–50) were also deans of the royal collegiate church of St Mary’s church, perhaps implying that the vicarage of St Alkmund’s was more prestigious than it was onerous; John Wylkocks (vicar in 1511) was a Doctor of Theology.<sup>84</sup>

#### *Reformation*

Willam Cureton was succeeded by George Crane in 1550. Crane remained vicar through the turbulent changes in ecclesiastical life and doctrine until his death in 1591.<sup>85</sup>

In 1552 the church still possessed a fairly comprehensive collection of liturgical vestments and vessels, including a chalice and paten, four bells, a brass cross, a copper pix, a brass censer, two brass candlesticks, four burses for the corporals, a pair of organs, eight chasubles, four of which were part of full high mass sets, several silk and velvet copes, a carpet for the altar made from a further four copes, two altar cloths and two towels. By 1553, however, there remained only one chalice and paten and three bells.<sup>86</sup> With the temporary return of the Catholic faith under Mary I, some Catholic furnishings were clearly restored; the rood, for example, was the object of testamentary bequests in 1555 and 1559.<sup>87</sup> Some care seems to have been taken of the fabric. Fragments of glass removed from one of the south windows of the old church still survive (2021) in the west window of its successor; they include the arms of Richard Sampson, bishop of Lichfield, 1543–54.<sup>88</sup> In 1585 the steeple was repointed by one George Archer, a plumber (in the medieval sense) from St Albans, who performed a number of daredevil feats atop the steeple, including acrobatics, turning the weather cock about like a wheel, and ‘whooting and crying’.<sup>89</sup>

St Alkmund’s was served, at least in the 1570s, by a curate, Roger Barnes, who died at the beginning of a severe outbreak of the plague in Shrewsbury in 1575/6.<sup>90</sup>

Ecclesiastical commissioners visited Shrewsbury in 1584 to review conformity in the town. On their instruction, the churchyard cross **was** taken down.<sup>91</sup>

Humphrey Leech became vicar in 1598, and by 1604, having also become a chaplain of Christ Church, Oxford, was assisted at St Alkmund’s by a curate. He was a notorious

<sup>84</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 276–7; *VCH Salop.* II, 123.

<sup>85</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 277.

<sup>86</sup> J. Hunter, ‘Inventories of church goods in Shrewsbury’, *TSAS* 10 (1887), 399, 404–5.

<sup>87</sup> SRO, B/C/11 (wills of Meredith ap David and Fulk Harding).

<sup>88</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 275.

<sup>89</sup> W.A. Leighton (ed.), ‘Early chronicles of Shrewsbury, 1372–1603’, *TSAHS*, 3 (1880), 239–352 at 301, naming the acrobatic plumber as George Arthor; quoted in Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 301.

<sup>90</sup> Leighton (ed.), ‘Early chronicles of Shrewsbury, 1372–1603’, 277.

<sup>91</sup> Shrewsbury Chronicle, 296.

figure who preached sermons both in Shrewsbury and in Oxford that were so hostile to Puritanism that he was suspected of popery. In Shrewsbury he was protected by Ralph Gittins, second master of the Free Schools, also a suspected papist. Leech indeed did eventually convert to Catholicism and in 1618 became a Jesuit.<sup>92</sup> His successor at St Alkmund's, Thomas Lloyd, his former curate, obtained the living in 1607 and remained vicar until his death in 1642.

Lloyd was not a preaching minister and may have been of conservative instincts. His ministry was undermined by the creation of a lectureship at St Alkmund's. In 1615 Rowland Heylyn gave the Corporation a rent charge of £20 towards the costs of a lectureship in St Alkmund's and one Thomas Peerson was invited to take the post.<sup>93</sup> His successor was Julines Herring, who was born in Montgomeryshire and who may have had family connections in Shrewsbury.<sup>94</sup> Herring existed on the margins of the established church. He graduated from Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge in 1604 and was ordained by an Irish bishop to avoid subscribing to the Thirty-Nine Articles. Before coming to Shrewsbury, he had been lecturer at Calke in Derbyshire. In 1618 Herring was invited to accept the lecturership at St Alkmund's by William Rowley, acting, presumably, on the part of the Corporation. He remained in the town for 17 years.

In Shrewsbury Herring preached at St Alkmund's on Tuesdays and after divine service on Sundays. His Sunday lectures were repeated on rotation in the houses of the Puritan members of the Corporation. He also drew other Puritan ministers into the town and preached at the houses of the north Shropshire gentry. It was probably Herring rather than the vicar, Lloyd, who benefitted from the purchase of the advowson by Heylyn in 1628. Although no separatist, Herring was mistrusted by the town's conformist clergy and was suspended from preaching on a number of occasions. He made an enemy of Archbishop Laud. In 1635, perhaps having recognised that his position in the town was becoming impossible (and his salary was almost certainly cut off by the dissolution of the Feoffees for Improvements), Herring left Shrewsbury. In 1636 he was invited to become minister to the congregation of the English reformed

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<sup>92</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 278–9; P. Milward, 'Leech, Humphrey [alias Henry Eccles] (1571–1629)', *ODNB* (2004).

<sup>93</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 270 n citing the Corporation's registers.

<sup>94</sup> For Herring see J. Eales, 'Herring, Julines (1582–1644)', *ODNB*; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 270–2, 279–80, nn; and the early biography, 'The Life of Master Julines Herring, who died Anno Christi 1644', in S. Clarke, *A generall Martyrologie ... whereunto are added the lives of sundry modern divines* (1651), 462–72.

church in Amsterdam and left England for there the following year. He died in Amsterdam in 1644.<sup>95</sup>

That the intrusion of the lecturer was something of a threat to church order is suggested by the visitation records. In 1633, for example, there were several presentments of parishioners for not attending their own church.<sup>96</sup> Two years later there was a plethora of presentments indicative of nonconformity: John Baker, clerk of St Mary's, for marrying two parties in William Wooding's house in the night; Joseph Whicher and John Persivall refused to receive communion kneeling; and four parishioners did not frequent their own church.<sup>97</sup>

Nevertheless, distinguished townsmen and their neighbours continued to be buried in the church in the first half of the 17th century, including the draper William Jones (d. 1612) and his wife (d. 1623), whose tomb-chest with recumbent painted effigies is now in the Abbey church.<sup>98</sup> Late brasses commemorated Richard Prowde (d. 1608), draper, and Thomas Jones (d. 1642), Shrewsbury's first mayor. Another fine altar tomb in the chancel commemorated Robert Stephens (d. 1632), also a draper and a former bailiff.<sup>99</sup>

### *Interregnum*

Thomas Lloyd's successor as vicar, Thomas Good, a fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, and a convinced monarchist and episcopalian, was ejected when Shrewsbury fell to the Parliamentarians in 1645, even though he was of Puritan leanings.<sup>100</sup> His successor, Thomas Blake, through his controversial publications on the inclusivity of the Church's sacraments, beginning in 1644, may have become less welcome to the authorities. In 1650 he left Shrewsbury with Samuel Fisher, the incumbent of St Mary's, to avoid the plague and by 1652 had returned to his former ministry at Tamworth.<sup>101</sup> Blake's successor in 1650 was Richard Heath, a respected scholar of Middle Eastern languages, praised by the Puritan Richard Baxter as 'an ancient grave minister, moderate, sedate,

<sup>95</sup> 'Herring, Julines (1582–1644)', *ODNB*.

<sup>96</sup> SRO, B/V/1/53.

<sup>97</sup> SRO, B/V/1/55.

<sup>98</sup> SA, 6001/3055, f. 65; Newman and Pevsner, *Shropshire*, 520.

<sup>99</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 168–9, 290–2.

<sup>100</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 280–1; J.E. Auden, 'Ecclesiastical history of Shropshire during the Civil War, Commonwealth and Restoration', *TSAHS*, 3rd ser., 7 (1907) 241–307, at 258; J. Jones, 'Good, Thomas (1609/10–1678)', *ODNB*.

<sup>101</sup> W. Lamont, 'Blake, Thomas (1596/7–1657)', *ODNB*; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 378–9; R. Gough, *The Antiquities and Memoirs of the Parish of Myddle, County of Salop, 1700* (Shrewsbury, 1875), 178; cf. Auden, 'Ecclesiastical history', 282.

quiet, religious'. Heath remained in office after the Restoration, until August 1662 when his opposition to the Act of Uniformity, perhaps more political than spiritual, obliged him to retire.<sup>102</sup>

*1660–c.1850*

In the later 17th and the 18th century, church life at St Alkmund's seems to have been less turbulent. Heath was succeeded in 1662 by Richard Beeston who remained until his death in 1683/4 and his successor, John Lowe, was vicar for 50 years (1684–1734).<sup>103</sup> The church remained a favoured burial place for local worthies, notably the Jones family. Sir Thomas Jones, a former alderman of Shrewsbury and lord chief justice (1682–6), was buried there in 1692 and his daughter gave the church a handsome carved oak altar-screen.<sup>104</sup>

In 1772 the vicar, Samuel Sneade, reported that he resided constantly and had no curate; he conducted services three times on Sundays, with one sermon, and celebrated Holy Communion monthly. He knew of only one reputed Catholic family within the parish, a few Presbyterian families and fewer Methodists, who had no meeting house.<sup>105</sup>

Richard de Courcy (vicar 1774–1803) was a member of an aristocratic Irish family and a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin. De Courcy moved to London in 1764 where he established links with the evangelist George Whitfield and with the Lady Huntingdon connexion. Appointed curate of Shawbury (Shropshire) in 1772 by the evangelical Richard Hill of Hawkstone, it was perhaps through Hill's influence that de Courcy became vicar of St Alkmund's in 1774. He installed a singers' gallery in the church the following year and oversaw the repair of the steeple.<sup>106</sup> De Courcy chose not to reside at the old vicarage house; he is said to have built the large townhouse, No. 6 Quarry Place (c. 1778) but later resided at The Mount.<sup>107</sup> A polemicist, de Courcy might be described as a 'Calvinist Evangelical Anglican', and was said in 1799 to appeal

<sup>102</sup> Auden, 'Ecclesiastical history', 297, 300; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 281–2.

<sup>103</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 282.

<sup>104</sup> SA, 6000/3055: H. Pidgeon, 'Salopian Annals', I, fos. 63–4, 65r; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 275, 292.

<sup>105</sup> SRO, B/V/5/18, cited in B. Coulton, 'Evangelising Georgian Shrewsbury: controversy and conciliation', *TSAHS* 87 (2012) 113–24 at 116, 117.

<sup>106</sup> [anon.] 'Memoir of the Rev. Richard de Courcy B.A., late vicar of St. Alkmund's church, Shrewsbury', *The Evangelical Magazine*, 12 (1804), 97–104; Coulton, 'Evangelising Georgian Shrewsbury', 117–19, 121; T. Friedman, 'Golden age of church architecture in Shropshire', *TSAS* 71 (1996), 119.

<sup>107</sup> T. Minshull, *The Shrewsbury Visitor's Pocket Companion...* (Shrewsbury, nd [1795]), 51; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 17 July 1802, 4. On Quarry Place: Newman and Pevsner, *Shropshire*, 563; *Shropshire Mag.*, Nov. 1981, 32–3.

particularly to Methodists who did not wish to sever all connections to the Church.<sup>108</sup> Preaching without notes, and describing himself as ‘an ambassador of Christ Jesus’ to the parish, de Courcy was locally well regarded, and several collections of his sermons were published.<sup>109</sup> John Byng, later Lord Torrington, however, coming in 1793 to St Alkmund’s, ‘where a famous preacher holds forth’, was less enamoured. ‘This gentleman possesses, with all his countrymen, a lack of judgement; as never knowing when, or where to stop ... His discourse was rash, and bewilder’d ... He went on for an hour, and twenty minutes!! Too long for my mind, or any attention: his auditors sleep’d and waked; stood up and sat down’. The service itself ‘was drowsily perform’d by a sick looking curate’.<sup>110</sup> De Courcy’s obituarist, however, praised how: ‘differing from those generally stiled Evangelical Ministers in this, ... he never appealed to the passions of his auditors, but through the medium of the understanding’.<sup>111</sup>

The most significant event of de Courcy’s tenure was the demolition of the old church and its replacement by a new and smaller structure. By 1793, the old church was in need of repair, and the collapse of neighbouring St Chad’s in 1788 provided a warning of what might happen. After several meetings, the vestry voted for demolition rather than repair, allegedly at the instigation of ‘a few active parishioners, influenced by the suggestions of interested individuals’. The decision was later condemned by the Shrewsbury historian Hugh Owen as ‘hasty and ill-advised’, costing more than the repair of the existing fabric which was discovered too late to be fundamentally sound. The rebuilding was sanctioned by act of parliament in 1794 (see below). The demolition, which began in May 1794, was swift and ruthless; ‘no care was taken to preserve the numerous grave-stones, brasses, tombs, and other ancient memorials with which the aisles and chapels abounded’.<sup>112</sup> The new church opened on 8 November 1795.<sup>113</sup> Just before, a total of 92 pews had been let by auction, raising a sum of £104 3s. 6d. A further 18 in the gallery raised about £19.<sup>114</sup>

De Courcy died in 1803 and after the brief incumbency (1806–18) of Edward Linzee,

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<sup>108</sup> Coulton, ‘Evangelising Georgian Shrewsbury’, 118; *VCH Salop*, VI pt 1, 199.

<sup>109</sup> *Gentleman’s Magazine* 73 pt 2 (1803), 1095; Coulton, ‘Evangelising Georgian Shrewsbury’, 119.

<sup>110</sup> B. Andrews (ed.), *The Torrington Diaries* (1934–8), III, 234–5.

<sup>111</sup> *Gentleman’s Magazine* 73 pt 2 (1803), 1094–5. Both cited in Coulton, ‘Evangelising Georgian Shrewsbury’, 121.

<sup>112</sup> For the surviving memorials, see above.

<sup>113</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 298–9 (Cf. H. Owen, *Some Account of ... Shrewsbury* (1808), 274–6, 286); D.H.S. Cranage, *Architectural Account of Churches of Shropshire*, vol. 10 (1912), 893–5; SA, 1049/3938.

<sup>114</sup> SA, 1049/10.



John Wightman served as vicar from 1818 until 1841. Wightman was also rector of Saltford (Somerset);<sup>115</sup> virtually all his duties at St Alkmund's were performed by the curate John Richards (d. 1862). Wightman was, however, a promoter of parochial schools, and it was during his incumbency that St Alkmund's parochial school was established.<sup>116</sup> A new organ was purchased by subscription and installed in the gallery in 1823.<sup>117</sup>

*c.1850 to present*

In 1841 Wightman resigned the living in favour of his son, Charles Edward Leopold Wightman (1816–96). Godly in character, Wightman gave sermons that were arresting if not eloquent. In his time, the parish saw 'no modern innovations, but the simple earnestness of true Evangelical worship',<sup>118</sup> as acknowledged by the town's Nonconformist ministers. In 1842, Wightman married Julia Bainbrigge James (1817–98)<sup>119</sup> and the couple began what was effectively a joint ministry of spiritual reform.

The neighbourhood of St Alkmund's church had become particularly overcrowded and unwholesome. Julia Wightman noted in 1858 that there were three public houses and a beer house just on Butcher Row, a very narrow street with passages where the families of poor workers lived among the butchers' stalls and slaughterhouses, most of the 'masters' having moved out to Pride Hill.<sup>120</sup> At the 1851 census, the congregation of St Alkmund's consisted of 250 in the morning and 280 in the evening, with 68 Sunday scholars in the morning and 96 in the afternoon, although the church had the capacity to seat 800. The only other place of worship in the parish was the meeting room of the Plymouth Brethren in St Mary's Street, with just 25 seats.<sup>121</sup> Julia Wightman wrote that, of the 43 families living in Butcher Row, on a given Sunday in 1858 just six individuals had attended any place of worship.<sup>122</sup>

An active philanthropist, Julia Wightman initially worked to aid 'fallen young women': 'in 1843 she formed a local fund-raising committee, which initially sent girls

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<sup>115</sup> Except where stated, the following paras. are based on C. Bullock, *Lives Worth Living*. Prebendary Wightman and Mrs. Wightman (1898); and J.M.J. Fletcher, *Mrs. Wightman of Shrewsbury: the Story of a Pioneer in Temperance Work* (1906).

<sup>116</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.* II, 283; see 'Education, c.1600–2000: Parochial Schools' in this volume.

<sup>117</sup> SA, 6001/3055: Pidgeon, 'Salopian Annals', I, f. 27; S. Bagshaw, *History, Gazetteer & Directory of Shropshire*, (1851), 52.

<sup>118</sup> Bullock, *Lives Worth Living*, 28.

<sup>119</sup> M. Barrow, 'Wightman [née James], Julia Bainbrigge (1817–1898)', *ODNB*.

<sup>120</sup> Mrs Charles W., *Haste to the Rescue; or, Work while it Is Day* (London, 1859), 20, 25; Fletcher, *Mrs Wightman*, 55.

<sup>121</sup> Field (ed.), *Church and Chapel*, 76; Bagshaw, *History, Gazetteer & Directory of Shropshire*, 52.

<sup>122</sup> *Haste to the Rescue*, 20.

to local penitentiaries'. Later she organised a new institution, the Salop Home on Wyle Cop, with a more humane regime: the Shrewsbury Society for Outcast Females, on Dogpole, had a matron, sub-matron and about 10 inmates in 1851.<sup>123</sup> It was for her work and publications promoting temperance (indeed, complete abstinence from alcohol), however, that Julia Wightman became well known. In January 1858, inspired by the work of Catherine Marsh,<sup>124</sup> Wightman began evening visits to poor parishioners, encouraging the men to 'sign the pledge' and thus founding the St Alkmund's Total Abstinence Society. Weekly 'cottage readings' in houses on Butcher Row and Castle Foregate proved so popular that in October 1858 they were consolidated and held on Sunday evenings in St Alkmund's schoolroom. By this means, the working poor were encouraged to begin attending church alongside the predominantly middle-class congregation.

The Wightmans were responsible for a number of philanthropic endeavours. Charles Wightman was a staunch supporter of the Church Missionary Society; several missionaries went abroad from St Alkmund's, including Arthur Poole, the first Anglican bishop of Japan.<sup>125</sup> Julia championed the YMCA and YWCA in Shrewsbury (both started through St Alkmund's) and founded the Shrewsbury Association for Friendless Girls (1882). When the St Alkmund's Total Abstinence Society outgrew the schoolroom, the Wightmans sought a new venue as an alcohol-free alternative to the public house. The purpose-built Working Men's Hall opened in 1863, costing around £5,000 in total.<sup>126</sup> The site on Princess Street was purchased out of the proceeds of Julia Wightman's best-selling account of her parish work, *Haste to the Rescue* (1859), which was translated into several languages.<sup>127</sup> Further books were to follow,<sup>128</sup> her example proving the primary influence in the establishment of the Church of England Temperance Society.

Julia Wightman was no lover of the fabric of new St Alkmund's, and in her closing

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<sup>123</sup> 'Wightman [née James], Julia Bainbrigge (1817–1898)', *ODNB*; Census 1851, TNA, HO 107/1992, Shrewsbury St Julian, p. 17.

<sup>124</sup> C. Marsh, *English Hearts and English Hands* (1858).

<sup>125</sup> A.R. Buckland (revised H.C.G. Matthew), 'Poole, Arthur William (1852–1885)', *ODNB*.

<sup>126</sup> For the date, see conveyance of the site of the former Fox Inn in 1862 (SA, D36.2); see also SA, Watton's Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 7, pp. 216–17 (1862).

<sup>127</sup> Mrs Charles W., *Haste to the Rescue; or, Work While It Is Day* (London, 1859).

<sup>128</sup> [J.B. Wightman], *Annals of the Rescued* (1860); 'An account of the origin and progress of the Workingmen's Hall from the issuing of the first appeal to 1864' (copies at SA, C01 1637, 3051); *More than Conqueror' or the Life of John Woolford, Telegraph Inspector and Secretary of the Shrewsbury Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association* (London, 1873); *Arrest the Destroyer's March, or 'Lift ye up a Banner'* (London, 1877).

years hoped that it ‘might be cleared away’, drawing up plans and laying aside money to that end.<sup>129</sup> She lived long enough to see, and applaud, some of the church’s Georgian character erased during the incumbency of her husband’s successor, John Justice Norris (vicar, 1893–1905). Brass plaques in St Alkmund’s record the re-erection of the parapet and pinnacles on the spire in 1896 and the restoration of the arch and interior of the tower in 1904 as memorials to Charles and Julia Wightman, respectively.

In 1892 Charles Wightman was made a prebendary of Lichfield cathedral.<sup>130</sup> The marble font in St Alkmund’s, from an anonymous donor, is a memorial to ‘the Revd Prebendary Wightman’. The funerals of Charles and Julia Wightman (buried in Shrewsbury’s municipal cemetery) were significant events in the town,<sup>131</sup> and by the 1900s St Alkmund’s profile among Shrewsbury’s ancient parish churches was high. In 1912, during the incumbency of Francis Roach (1905–15), the church celebrated its millenium. A special service was attended by the mayor and corporation after a procession from the Guildhall led by the borough band,<sup>132</sup> and a pageant was staged at the Music Hall.<sup>133</sup>

The following decades saw a slow decline, not helped by a rapid succession of vicars, though the rather longer incumbency of Frederick Tennison (vicar, 1915–34) was still remembered with affection *c.* 1980.<sup>134</sup> More important, however, was the decanting from the First World War onwards of Shrewsbury’s town centre population into the new suburbs, and the industrial development of Harlescott. After 1918 much of the energy of successive vicars was absorbed at Harlescott, which was constituted as a conventional district in 1924 (below). In 1934 the then vicar of St Alkmund’s, W. E. Thompson, announced his intention of leaving the vicarage to live at Harlescott, but this was in part a protest at his inability to secure funding for a curate there.<sup>135</sup> Increasingly its growing congregation conducted worship and social activities apart from the parish church.<sup>136</sup> The turning point came in 1963 when Harlescott became a

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<sup>129</sup> Fletcher, *Mrs Wightman*, 23.

<sup>130</sup> *The Times*, 26 Feb. 1892.

<sup>131</sup> *Wellington Jnl*, 25 Jan. 1896, 3; 22 Jan. 1898, 6.

<sup>132</sup> C.K. Beavan, *A Short History of St. Alkmund’s Church, Shrewsbury* (n.d.), 6 (date of millenary corrected); *Crockford’s Clerical Directory* (1932), 1284–5.

<sup>133</sup> F.H. Roach, ‘St. Alkmund’s Shrewsbury. Celebration of the Millenary’ (1912); *idem*, ‘The Drama of St. Alkmund’s, Book of Words’: SA, 6004/3140, SA, C01 1683; programme at SA, P257/V/9/1.

<sup>134</sup> Beavan, *Short History*, 6.

<sup>135</sup> *Kington Times*, 11 Aug. 1934.

<sup>136</sup> E.g. SA, P252/H/1/1–2, parish newsletters of 1945 and 1953.

separate parish, a portion of St Alkmund's endowments being assigned to it.<sup>137</sup> St Alkmund's was left as a small urban parish with fewer than 100 on the church electoral roll and insufficient endowment to support a vicar or to maintain the church fabric. In the mid 1960s, having retired to Shrewsbury, Prebendary Alfred Reginald Vincent 'took on the care' of St Alkmund's at the bishop's request, and worship continued under the good offices of a team of clergy and laymen.<sup>138</sup> The worn-out organ was replaced with a newly-restored one brought from St Margaret's church, Burton-on-Trent, which was being demolished.<sup>139</sup> In 1968, the ministry seemed to be secured by appointing the new incumbent of St Mary's, Henry Horatio Follis, to hold St Alkmund's in plurality. When Follis departed Shrewsbury less than three years later, however, the future of all the town's parish churches was under threat of 'reorganisation'.<sup>140</sup>

By the 1970s St Alkmund's church needed very major repairs, a burden that would have fallen principally on the small number on the church electoral roll. According to the quinquennial inspection carried out in 1976, 'the present condition of the church cannot be described as good ... the present state of the church is due to the original design and poor workmanship of the original builders'.<sup>141</sup> The rare peal of eight bells by John Briant of Hertford (1812) could no longer be rung, but the cost of rehangng was beyond the church's means. In 1974–5 St Alkmund's Parochial Church Council sold them to the Shropshire Association of Church Bellringers for £1,000, which was deposited in the church fabric fund. The bells were replaced by a single 18th-century sanctus bell from the redundant church of St Martin, Preston Gubbals.<sup>142</sup>

Charles Kenneth Beavan, the headmaster of Meole Brace Junior School and one of the clergy who had been officiating at St Alkmund's, was appointed in 1971 as non-stipendiary priest-in-charge.<sup>143</sup> Beavan steered St Alkmund's through successive proposals for reform or redundancy,<sup>144</sup> while increasing the congregation from its 1960s nadir. Socially conservative,<sup>145</sup> Beavan regarded worship at St Alkmund's as 'middle

<sup>137</sup> *London Gaz.*, 25 Oct. 1963, issue 43143, p. 8769; Beavan, *Short History*, 6.

<sup>138</sup> SA, P252/H/1/12/7: obituary, Aug. 1978.

<sup>139</sup> SA, P252/H/1/3/10, Dec. 1968, 2–3.

<sup>140</sup> SA, P252/H/1/3/10, Dec. 1968, 3–4; P252/H/1/5, July 1971.

<sup>141</sup> SA, P251/F/4/1/3/1.

<sup>142</sup> SA, P252/H/1/9/1, Feb. 1975, 3; Shropshire Association of Church Bellringers, 'Shrewsbury, St Alkmund', <http://www.sacbr.org.uk/Towers/ShrewsburyStAlkmund/ShrewsburyStAlkmund.html> (accessed 30 Oct. 2021).

<sup>143</sup> SA, P252/H/1/4, Jan. 1970, 5–6; P252/H/1/5/2, Oct. 1971, 1; P252/H/1/10/6, Aug 1976, 1; SA, P252/H/3/14, nd (1988).

<sup>144</sup> SA, P252/F/4/10 (1968–87).

<sup>145</sup> E.g., SA, P252/H/1/7/7, July 1973, 1–2; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 19 Aug. 1977, 2.

churchmanship’; he was attached to the Book of Common Prayer but also introduced a monthly ‘Divine Healing Service’.<sup>146</sup> In Beavan’s own words, the church was ‘a cell of distinctive worship and witness to which members come from many miles’.<sup>147</sup>

A serious threat of redundancy came with the 1970s scheme to close the town centre churches and leave St Chad’s as the only open church within the river loop; however, St Alkmund’s was reprieved in 1980.<sup>148</sup> The proposal in 1988 to develop St Alkmund’s church as a ‘pastoral centre’ – ‘a base for several agencies of community care and for Christian mission in the Town Centre’ – was viewed by Beavan as tantamount to redundancy.<sup>149</sup> Under this scheme, funded by the Shrewsbury builder and philanthropist Roy Fletcher, the church fabric would have been altered to provide individual spaces for up to 20 community care agencies, leaving the east end of the nave and the sanctuary for worship.<sup>150</sup> In this context, the quinquennial inspection report of 1985 had concluded that the building was generally sound.<sup>151</sup> The ‘pastoral centre’ foundered on issues both practical, such as responsibility for the future maintenance of the medieval tower, and spiritual. Beavan argued in 1988 that the congregation was not ‘fuddy duddy’ and ageing, but a ‘renewing fellowship’ that since 1971 had trebled to 198, with collections increasing fifteenfold.<sup>152</sup>

With Beavan’s retirement in 1990 it was commonly accepted that St Alkmund’s would be declared redundant, and in the late 1990s efforts, ultimately fruitless, were expended on the possibility of converting it into a workplace for the disabled. An announcement in 2004 by the Parochial Church Council that the church would be closed was challenged by the Revd Richard Hayes, a retired clergyman from the City of London, who argued that St Alkmund’s, as the only remaining Anglican church in the town centre, must be kept open.<sup>153</sup> In 2007 St Alkmund’s joined the group ministry of St Chad with St Mary and St Alkmund, under the overall pastoral care of the vicar of St Chad’s – a single benefice with two functioning parish churches (St Mary’s being redundant). Richard Hayes served as resident priest/honorary curate

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<sup>146</sup> SA, P252/H/1/9–10, 1975, 1976, *passim*.

<sup>147</sup> Beavan, *Short History*, 6.

<sup>148</sup> SA, P252/F/4/10/10–14; P252/H/3/14, nd (1988).

<sup>149</sup> SA, P252/H/3/5, P252/H/3/10.

<sup>150</sup> SA, P252/H/3/5.

<sup>151</sup> SA, P252/H/3/6.

<sup>152</sup> SA, P252/H/3/10, P252/H/3/14.

<sup>153</sup> This para. is based on information kindly provided by the Revd Richard Hayes.

until 2015.<sup>154</sup> Since 2000, major restoration work has been undertaken (below), and the church's future is now seen to lie in positioning itself as a 'city church', open to any townspeople and visitors seeking spiritual refreshment. It is now also the spiritual home of the Shropshire Army Cadet Force. Holy Communion is celebrated every Sunday and Thursday.<sup>155</sup>

## RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

### *Setting*

St Alkmund's churchyard is irregular in shape, tightly bound by the narrow lanes of the town centre, St Alkmund's Square to the north and east and Fish Street to the west. To the south of the church is the graveyard, beyond which is St Julian's church, located on the slope below. These two adjacent medieval churches are thought to have been carved out of the parish of St Mary, St Julian's church probably last, given its less favourable position. Their medieval steeples soar above the skyline of central Shrewsbury, adding much to the character of the town, although during the late 18th century the bodies of these two churches were rebuilt in contrasting styles and building materials. (Figures 2, 3)

### *The Medieval Church*

It is possible to reconstruct the appearance and development of the medieval church through contemporary drawings and descriptions. Demolition occurred just after Revd Edward Williams had produced his watercolours of Shropshire churches, which so accurately depict their fabric and development, whilst Revd Hugh Owen produced detailed sketches and cross-sections of St Alkmund's church, including ones made during its demolition. The medieval church was 124 ft long, including the tower which was 22 ft square, and 74 ft wide.<sup>156</sup> (Figures 4, 5)

The Norman, 12th-century, church was cruciform in plan with an aisled nave, north and south transepts and chancel, constructed of a friable red sandstone. There may have been a crossing tower and/or a west end tower. The north transept as

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<sup>154</sup> Crockford's Clerical Directory: [https://www.crockford.org.uk/places/10706/the-benefice-of-shrewsbury-\(st-chad\)-st-mary-\(st-alkmund\)](https://www.crockford.org.uk/places/10706/the-benefice-of-shrewsbury-(st-chad)-st-mary-(st-alkmund)) (accessed 30 Oct. 2021).

<sup>155</sup> <https://stalkmundschurchshrewsbury.org/> (accessed 30 Oct. 2021).

<sup>156</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.*, II, 273–6; SA, XLS2392: Revd Hugh Owen (1810); SA, 6001/372/1, f. 128 (south 1789), 6001/372/3, f. 98 (north 1793); Revd Edward Williams, Watercolours.

depicted by Revd Williams had three tall round-headed lights under a hoodmould and a round-arched doorway beneath, whilst the east end was flanked by slender round staircase turrets with pointed caps. A low lean-to north aisle is shown towards the west. Cross-sections by Revd Owen reveal the two-bay nave arcades which had round arches on circular piers with moulded capitals. The lean-to north aisle was said to be small and dark inside.

Considerable remodelling took place in the early 13th century in Early English style, not dissimilar to developments at St Mary's church. A large square three-bay chapel was added between the nave and north transept, removing part of the former north aisle. Narrow buttresses divided paired lancets, the arches on short pillars consisting of four clustered shafts with foliate capitals. Meanwhile, triple stepped lancets were inserted into the ends of the chancel and south transept, the latter with a low pointed doorway beneath. The north chancel wall had a pair of tall lancets, and there was a pointed north door into the north aisle. Early English detail was recorded inside by Revd Owen, including pointed arches between the crossing and transepts. (Figure 6)

Chapels were added to the north and south sides of the chancel, possibly in the early 14th century, as both had an east window in Decorated style, whilst the north chapel had a three-light Decorated north window and the south chapel had a low door beneath the east window.

In common with other Shrewsbury churches, there was considerable embellishment in the 15th century, discernible from the white sandstone and Perpendicular detail. The south wall of the south chapel was altered with the insertion of two large Perpendicular windows. The south chancel wall also received a large Perpendicular window, beneath which internally were the sedilia, three stalls with trefoiled arches enriched with crocketed canopies. A battlemented clerestory was added to the nave, similar to that of St Mary's church, with paired windows with four-centred arches, whilst to avoid blocking the light, the gable of the north chapel was rebuilt with a shallower roof pitch. A wide four-bay battlemented south aisle was constructed, with doorway under a large sun-dial and three large Perpendicular windows to the south wall and similar west window. Inside the aisle was a panelled timber ceiling with flower bosses at the intersections. Against the lean-to north aisle was a gabled porch of white or grey stone, so probably of 15th-century date.

Hugh Owen reported that the nave ceiling was plastered, obscuring the roof timbers, with a spacious gallery at the west end. The chancel had a plain coved plaster ceiling and low pointed arches on each side accessing the north and south chapels. Furnishings included a carved oak altar screen, a gift of Mrs Baldwin, daughter of Chief Justice Jones (d. 1692, see monuments, below) whilst the pulpit and desk were against the north-west transept pier. Four coats of arms were recorded in the west window of the south aisle, one of the Talbot family, another relating to the merchants of the staple. Two stained glass shields in the tower west window had formerly been in a south window, one representing England and France, the other bearing the arms of Richard Sampson, bishop of Lichfield, 1543–55. There had been stained glass representations of a man and woman kneeling with an inscription referring to Richard Stury. Underneath the north Decorated window in the north chapel was a large tomb with recumbent effigy. Owen suggested that the clerestory and south aisle might be the work of Bishop Sampson but the classic Perpendicular style suggests a 15th- rather than 16th-century date.<sup>157</sup>

#### *The Medieval Tower*

The four-stage tower and the spire are contemporary, constructed of roughly coursed pale grey stone and rising to a height of 184 ft. Although Owen and Blakeway believed the edifice was built in the 16th century, after the south aisle and clerestory, there is little of Tudor character. On weighing up the stylistic evidence, Cranage dated the tower and spire to the last quarter of the 15th century which seems appropriate; the form of the west doorway and the finely proportioned window above are typically Perpendicular. In 1472 new fabric was referred to, which could relate to the tower and spire, or the clerestory and south aisle. By comparison, the clerestory of St Mary's church is of c.1477. (Figures 7, 8)

The tower is 22 ft square, the stages divided by moulded string courses with narrow stepped angle buttresses surviving at the west end. There is a fine west doorway, the two-centred arch inset within a square frame, with ringed and filleted roll mouldings and trefoils in the spandrels of the arch. A pair of ogee-arched statue

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<sup>157</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.*, II, 273–6; SA, XLS2392: Hugh Owen (1810); SA, 6001/372/1, f. 128, 6001/372/3, f. 98: Revd Edward Williams, Watercolours; D.H.S. Cranage, *An Architectural Account of the Churches of Shropshire* (Wellington, Shropshire, 1894–1912), X, 893–7; SA, PR/2/367; SA, PR/1/462; SA, 6001/3065, fos. 198–203: Thomas Farmer Dukes, Watercolours.



niches flanking the doorway have either been remodelled or inserted later. Above the doorway is a fine four-light Perpendicular window with cusped decoration. Small lights with ogee hoodmoulds are found on the third stage, whilst each side of the fourth stage has a three-light louvre opening with cusping. The battlements consist of openwork ogee arcades with gargoyles at the angles surmounted by large pinnacles with crockets 16 ft high. Surmounting the tower is the three-stage tapering spire with pronounced decorative elements, but these have been much renewed (see below). To its lower stage are two-light lucarnes with ogee heads under canopies with pinnacles, whilst above are single ogee-headed lucarnes with rolls and cusping.

As Cranage noted, the interior walls of the tower chamber and part of the west nave wall are of red sandstone which appears earlier than the exterior grey stone, suggesting that the tower was encased rather than totally rebuilt. Adjacent to the tower arch in the south wall is a shouldered doorway providing access to a spiral staircase leading up to the tower. The form of the arch would normally pre-date the 15th century, but the red sandstone fabric extends around the west edge of the staircase, suggesting that an existing door head may have been re-faced. The tall pointed tower arch has two orders of relatively poor ogee mouldings and narrow imposts, the latter continuing as an impost band on the nave side.<sup>158</sup> (Figure 9)

The steeple required regular repair after its construction. In 1584 it was repointed by George Archer of St Albans. In 1621, the top 12 ft of the spire was taken down and rebuilt, and further repairs were carried out in 1699 with a donation of £10 from the Corporation of Shrewsbury. The tower battlements and pinnacles were replaced by copies in 1775. In 1788, shortly before the rest of the church was demolished, the spire was found to be much decayed and was restored by Mr Cheshire of Coleshill, who added slightly to its height to make the taper more gradual. This work did not prove successful and had to be rectified in 1803 by Mr Straphen of Shrewsbury, who rebuilt the top, added a cap-stone of hard Welsh marble and a counter-weight inside, all at a cost of £46.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> J. Newman and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Shropshire* (New Haven, 2006), 521–2 (the source for ‘c. 1472 ... when “new fabric” is mentioned’ has not been identified), 528; D.C. Cox (ed.), *Sir Stephen Glynne’s Church Notes for Shropshire*, Shropshire Record Ser. 1 (Keele, 1997), 90; Cranage, *Churches of Shropshire*, x, 893–6; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.*, II, 273–6, 300; NHLE 1254774: Listed Grade II\*.

<sup>159</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.*, II, 301; Cranage, *Churches of Shropshire*, x, 896.

*Demolition and Rebuilding*

Between announcing and holding a vestry meeting in July 1788 to discuss repairs at St Alkmund's church, the crossing tower of St Chad's church collapsed. Not surprisingly this caused great alarm amongst the parishioners and it was resolved that the church fabric should be examined. Minor repairs were undertaken over the next few years, mainly to the chancel roof which showed signs of decay. The condition of the spire was discussed in 1789 but only repointing was required. A more thorough repair of the church was agreed on August 1792 following a plan put forward by John Carline, but in May 1793 the possibility of rebuilding the north and south walls and south aisle was also discussed. Two weeks later, on 30 May, Richard Baker of Highfields near Drayton and John Smith of Coppice Green near Shifnal were asked to inspect the church. Richard Baker sent his report on 5 August 1793 stating that the walls were much decayed and partly bulged, whilst the roof timbers, lead and stone coverings were exceedingly ruinous. The stone under the battlements was said to be decaying and in danger of falling, and the aisle roofs were in a weak state. Baker noted there was no imminent danger of the church collapsing and it was unlikely to deteriorate for a couple of years, but in the longer term, it would be necessary either to repair the whole building or demolish and rebuild it, preferably on a more compact scale. He advised the latter on financial grounds. Just a week later, on 11 August, it was resolved in a vestry meeting that a new church would be erected except for the steeple, at a cost not exceeding £2,000 including the pews. A committee for rebuilding the church was formed and competing plans were procured from Richard Baker and Carline & Tilley. Given that Richard Baker was asked to tender, he may have had an interest in condemning the old building, although the contract was finally awarded to Carline & Tilley. Owen and Blakeway were of the opinion that interested individuals had influenced a small group of active parishioners, leading to the wanton and unnecessary destruction of the ancient church.<sup>160</sup>

An Act of Parliament was passed for rebuilding the church, published on 17 April 1794. It stated that the church was in a very decayed and ruinous state except for the steeple, and that it was dangerous for the parishioners to assemble there to hear divine

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<sup>160</sup> Cranage, *Churches of Shropshire*, x, 893–5; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.*, II, 298–9; SA, P252/J/3/2/1, 2, 5: Copies of vestry minutes; SA, P252/U/2/8: Transcript by J. Browne (1968): 'The rebuilding of St. Alkmund's Church, 1795'; T. J. Howell, *The Stranger in Shrewsbury* (Shrewsbury, 1816), 105.

service. The trustees had permission to take down the body of the church and erect a new church, the construction work awarded on the basis of a tender advertised in a local newspaper. After winning the contract, Carline & Tilley wrote to the trustees on 23 December 1793 stating the following additions to their scheme: a plain neat font with statuary marble basin, a gothic communion table with marble top, two porticos to the east entrances, and cast iron muntins and sash frames for the windows. The total cost, including the value of materials from the old church and the drawings, was £2450. At a vestry meeting on 6 January 1794, it was confirmed that the work would be funded by the lay impropiators.<sup>161</sup>

A labelled plan signed by Carline & Tilley shows the proposed six-window building. The western bays flanked the medieval tower with a vestry to the north and waiting room for the poor to the south. The main entrance was through the west end of the tower, the west gallery reached by a staircase in the tower chamber. There was a pulpit and reading desk to the north-east and south-east, respectively, and the shallow chancel bay with altar-piece was flanked by small entrance porticos. In terms of seating, there were 92 box pews accommodating four people in each and ten good window seats for the poor with six in each. The gallery could accommodate 72 people in 18 pews with 20 seats for the poor. The total number of seats was therefore 520.<sup>162</sup> (Figure 10)

The articles of agreement were drawn up between Joseph Asterley, clerk to the trustees, and Messrs Carline & Tilley on 15 May 1794, work beginning the next day. From this time, the parishioners went to neighbouring St Julian's church for worship. The contractors were to demolish the old church to the bottom of its foundations, install new brick foundations, whilst the outer walls were to be faced in Grinshill stone, also used for the mouldings and flagstones. The roof was to be covered in slates from Llangynog or Ceunant quarries, the parapets and cornices cramped with iron. Cast iron window frames and tracery and the pillars supporting the gallery were all cast by the Coalbrookdale Company. The joinery was undertaken by John Hiram Haycock, later architect and county surveyor.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> SA, P252/J/3/31/1: Act of Parliament; SA, P252/J/3/7; SA, P252/J/3/2/1, 5.

<sup>162</sup> SA, P252/J/4/1/4: Plan.

<sup>163</sup> SA, P252/J/3/39: Articles of agreement; SA, P252/U/2/8; Cranage, *Churches of Shropshire*, x, 894–5; Newman and Pevsner, *Shropshire*, 521.

The new church opened on 8 November 1795, soon after the agreed completion date of 29 September, but the speedy construction had its downsides. Owen and Blakeway reported that most of the fine tombs, monuments and brasses in the old church were destroyed or dispersed, some of the brass sold by weight. It was also found that the ancient walls were strong and not easily brought down, and the cost of the project exceeded the agreed sum, amounting to nearer £4,000. The old church could have been repaired for considerably less.<sup>164</sup>

### *The Georgian Church*

The Georgian churches of St Alkmund's and St Julian's could not be more different; the latter in a simple classical style and built of brick, the former in a gothic style pre-dating gothic-revival and of white sandstone ashlar. The new chamber was 44 ft wide and 82 ft long internally, or 104 ft long including the tower, so was somewhat smaller than the medieval church. The regular six-bay nave with tall pointed windows is keyed into the medieval buttresses at the west end of the tower and has a shallow chancel projection at the east end flanked by small open porches. Narrow panelled buttresses with blind trefoiled arches divide the bays, which are continuous with the panelled parapets. The church was lit by tall cast iron three-light windows with decorative gothic glazing, which gave a lightness and elegance to the overall form. Only three of the side windows remain, to the west of the south wall and each end of the north wall. A moulded sill band relates to these windows. The chancel bay is in the same style, retaining its cast iron three-light east window, the flanking sandstone porches supported on clustered shafts, that to the south infilled. Inside the north porch is a gothic-style doorway.<sup>165</sup> (Figures 11, 12, 13)

Much of the interior was altered during restorations of 1897, but photographs of 1891 and 1895 show the Georgian interior beforehand. Lightened by white-washed walls and the original cast iron windows, the plaster ceiling by Joseph Bromfield had a decorative cornice, border and ceiling rose. There was a wood panelled gallery at the west end supported on narrow cast iron columns, with an organ in the centre obscuring the medieval tower arch. Box pews flanked a wide aisle with central reading desk. The nave was open to the chancel bay, divided by a simple low altar

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<sup>164</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.*, II, 298–9; SA, P252/U/2/8.

<sup>165</sup> SA, PH/S/13/S/1/4: Photograph c.1890

rail, with arched reredos beneath the painted east window. Gothic doorways flanked the chancel bay. Attached to the walls were classical-style monuments and hatchments.<sup>166</sup> (Figures 14, 15)

### *Repairs*

A few years after the church was completed in 1795, faulty timberwork was reported in the roof. Legal advice was sought over whether the contractors, Carline & Tilley, were liable, but it was concluded in 1807 that they were not. The parish had to borrow nearly £800 to pay for the repairs.<sup>167</sup>

By 1857 there was a problem with the east gable due to the use of wood in the construction of the window arch. According to Richard Dodson, architect, the gable was leaning outwards by 6.25 in. He proposed rebuilding the arch at a higher level with new voussoirs and it was certified that Dodson had completed the work on 31 October 1857.<sup>168</sup>

The tower and spire required ongoing maintenance after that of 1803 (see above). Further work costing £170 was carried out about 10 years later, and in 1821 the trustees accepted Mr Straphen's estimate of £127. Pidgeon reported in 1829 that the lower part of the spire was repointed and the canopied lucarnes restored. The window tracery of the tower and lower spire was repaired in spring 1871 along with stabilisation of the finials, all undertaken by Richard Salter.<sup>169</sup>

### *Restoration*

A significant programme of alteration and re-ordering took place from 1896 under the direction of the Shrewsbury architect, A.E. Lloyd Oswell. The Faculty was obtained from the Diocese of Lichfield on 3 December 1896. Externally, the most significant change was the removal of some of the cast iron windows; they were replaced by stone windows with heavy flowing tracery, typical of the period, whilst the lower panels were infilled with stone (see figures 3, 12). A small south porch was

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<sup>166</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.*, II, 299; E. Mercer, *English Architecture to 1900: The Shropshire Experience* (Logaston, 2003), 292; Newman and Pevsner, *Shropshire*, 521–2; SA, PH/S/13/S/1/19–20.

<sup>167</sup> Cranage, *Churches of Shropshire*, x, 895; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.*, II, 299; SA, P252/U/2/8.

<sup>168</sup> SA, P252/B/5/1/12–16. Compare the tower at St Chad's where the use of wooden tie beams caused structural issues.

<sup>169</sup> Cranage, *Churches of Shropshire*, x, 896; SA, 6001/3057; Pidgeon, 'Salopian Annals', V, f. 45r (30 Sept. 1827); SA, P252/B/5/1/17–18.

constructed against the second bay from the east end, replacing that in the angle of nave and chancel which was converted into a vestry.

The main interior change was enlarging the chancel at the expense of the nave, extending it by one bay. The south-east porch was now the choir vestry with the clergy vestry adjacent within a panelled enclosure. Choir stalls for men and boys were in the centre, with a new organ site to the north-east. The west gallery and stairs were taken down so the organ had to be moved.<sup>170</sup> (Figure 16)

A flat wood-panelled roof was inserted beneath Bromfield's plaster ceiling, supported by wall posts on corbels (See Fig 9). Also inserted was a double-chamfered chancel arch resting on shaped corbels, along with a coved panelled ceiling in the chancel. Oak wainscot panelling was fitted to the walls of the nave and chancel. Church furniture was replaced, including a new octagonal wood-panelled pulpit to the north-east of the nave and an octagonal font to the south-west, replacing three seats. Alterations were undertaken to the seating, including removal of the box pew doors. (Figures 17, 18)

The Faculty also referred to a memorial fund for the late Prebendary Charles Wightman, the former vicar. It was to be spent on reconstructing the tower pinnacles, under the direction of Lloyd Oswell, and the balance used for the seating and heating. The original waiting room for the poor, on the south side of the tower, had already been converted to a heating chamber with an external door. The medieval tower arch was finally exposed in 1904 in memory of Julia Wightman, the widow of Charles Wightman, who had played a leading role in the restoration project.<sup>171</sup>

### *Organ and Bells*

A small organ by Gray of London was erected on the west gallery in 1823, funded by public subscription. Repairs were undertaken by Messrs Gray and Davison in 1847, including the provision of pedal pipes. Further work was carried out in 1868 by Thomas Jackson of Wolverhampton to clean, repair and enlarge the organ, but this was not wholly successful as the new keys sunk onto the boarding. On 12 July 1968 a Faculty was obtained for the installation of an organ from St Margaret's church, Burton-on-Trent, to replace the existing organ. About 30 years later, this was sold and

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<sup>170</sup> SA, P252/B/5/1/20: proposed plan by Lloyd Oswell, 1896

<sup>171</sup> SA, P252/B/5/1/21-2; 23: aculty, 1896; Cranage, *Churches of Shropshire*, x, 897; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.*, II, 299.

replaced by a portable organ by Harrison and Harrison, situated on the south side adjacent to the vestry, which is on semi-permanent loan from the former Royal College of Church Music at Addington which closed in 1996. (Figure 19)

Owen and Blakeway reported that there was originally a peal of three large bells which were cast into five bells in 1621, a treble bell added in 1698. All the bells were melted down by Mr Bryan of Hereford in 1812 and re-cast as a light peal of eight bells. The bell-floor was at mid-level in the tower, but it was removed and the beam sockets infilled, the bells moved into the spire. This was not practical due to the height, so they were taken down in 1990 and restored before being sent to St Andrews Cathedral, Honolulu. A single bell is now rung from the ground floor.<sup>172</sup>

### *Stained Glass*

A focal point inside the church is the painting in the east window by Francis Eginton of Handsworth, which covers all three lights without division (See figures 14, 17). It depicts Faith kneeling on the cross, lifting her eyes to the crown of immortality, depicted as a stream of light coming through the clouds. On one side of the picture is a cup representing the holy sacrament, and on the other an open Bible. It was based on a painting of 1642 by Guido Reni, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, now in Munich, and was an integral part of the new church. When the trustees met on 30 October 1795, they recorded their satisfaction with the work and authorised payment of £200 to Mr Eginton. Stained glass elsewhere includes depictions of saints in the north wall, possibly by Evans, and the armorial shields of Bishop Richard Sampson (1543–55) in the west tower window (see above). A single light in the south wall is a First World War memorial depicting Christ looking down on a soldier in the trenches.<sup>173</sup>

### *Monuments*

Many monuments were destroyed during the demolition of the old church, although a number of chest tombs were moved to Holy Cross (the Abbey) church. Three engraved brasses from a late medieval monument are mounted on the south wall of the current church; they are dedicated to John Hervy (d. 1470) and John Humfreston

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<sup>172</sup> Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.*, II, 299, 301; SA, P252/B/6/3/1, 5, 7, 11; PH/S/13/S/1/29-31; <https://stalkmundschurchshrewsbury.org> (viewed 29 Nov. 2021); Information from St Alkmund's church; Howell, *Stranger*, 106.

<sup>173</sup> *Shrewsbury Chron.*, 3 Mar. 1905; SA, P252/U/2/8; Newman and Pevsner, *Shropshire*, 522; Cranage, *Churches of Shropshire*, x, 895.

(d. 1497), both burgesses of the town, and Margery Humfreston (d. 1500), who was married to them, consecutively. There are many classical-style wall monuments, some moved from the old church. Two particularly large monuments are mounted on the north wall. One is a memorial to Sir Thomas Jones (d. 1692), former Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, designed by James Paget, 1702. It is a copy of a monument to Sir Thomas Richardson in the Temple Church, London, and was erected by Jones's daughter, Alice. It consists of a convex tablet between black marble shafts supporting a broken segmental pediment from which rises a heraldic shield. Underneath is a garland and cherub, with leafy scrolls to the sides. The inscription refers to the vault where Jones's body was deposited (see below). Towards the west of the north wall is the second large monument, to Thomas Jones (d. 1715), grandson of Lord Chief Justice Jones, and his wife Mary (d. 1712). It is highly ornate with a segmental-headed niche containing an urn on a pedestal under a canopy with flanking cherubs and a heraldic shield rising above. Also on the north wall is a tablet dedicated to Margaret Lee of Wroxeter (d. 1752), in the form of a Greek-Doric temple front. Pidgeon reported that two further marble tablets bearing the heraldic emblem of the Jones family were erected on the north and south walls of the chancel in 1829 by Sir T. J. Tyrwhitt Jones. That on the north side was dedicated to his father, Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt Jones, Bart., MP for Shrewsbury (d. 1811), whilst that on the south side commemorated Sir Thomas Jones (d. 1782).<sup>174</sup> (Figures 20, 21, 22)

The ancient vault of the Jones family continued in use after the new church was built. In July 1824, Lady Harriett Rebecca Jones, widow of the late Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt Jones, Bart., MP, was interred in the vault, the first family burial for 79 years. She was fourth daughter of the late Edward Williams of Eaton Mascott and died there in 1824. Buried in the tomb were the family members commemorated on the north wall of the nave. There was also a coffin thought to belong to Alderman William Jones (d. 1612) whose altar tomb was originally located in the north chancel chapel, but was moved outside when the new church was built. After suffering from erosion, it was moved to Holy Cross church on 9 August 1824.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Newman and Pevsner, *Shropshire*, 522; Cranage, *Churches of Shropshire*, x, 897; Owen and Blakeway, *Hist.*, II, 288, 292–3, also describing the lost brasses and monuments, see *ibid.*, 286–97; SA, 6001/3058: Pidgeon, 'Salopian Annals', VI (June 1829).

<sup>175</sup> SA, 6001/3055: Pidgeon, 'Salopian Annals', I, fos. 64r, 65r (July 1824, 9 August 1824).



### *Early 21st-Century Repairs*

A major programme of repairs was undertaken in the early years of the 21st century, grant-funded by Historic England and a range of national and local charities. The building was re-roofed, including the installation of photo-voltaic panels, and a kitchen installed in the former heating chamber south of the tower. The surviving cast iron windows were restored and re-glazing undertaken with hand-made clear glass. Inside, the painted east window was restored along with painting and decorating.<sup>176</sup>

### *Graveyard*

The churchyard of St Alkmund's is irregular in shape and constrained in size. The graveyard was on the south side of the church (See figure 8). The demolition of the old church and rebuilding to a smaller plan created a little extra space; a higher fee was charged for burial 'on the site of the old church walls'.<sup>177</sup> The churchyards of St Alkmund and St Julian were closed to burials from 1856.<sup>178</sup>

An estimate for completing the iron railings around the side of the new church was obtained in 1795. The balusters were to be spaced at intervals of six per yard, with circular corners on each side of the entrance to the steeple door. Slips were to be provided for the steps. The total cost for the castings and patterns, slips and fixings was £52 8s. This probably related to a letter written on 14 December 1795 to the Dale Company, Coalbrookdale, asking them to send the bars for the iron railings, as ordered by Mr Carline, as soon as possible. It was signed by Joseph Asterley, clerk to the trustees.<sup>179</sup>

Around the north and east sides of the churchyard is a low brick plinth with chamfered stone copings, which would have supported cast iron railings. There is a car park on the north side of the church, the entrance marked two stone piers with pecked faces and moulded capstones. Gravestones and mature trees are located south of the church. On the west side, the churchyard is retained above Fish Street by a red brick wall with stone copings supporting cast iron railings. It includes an entrance with steps leading up to the west door, the sandstone piers with ornate capstones.

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<sup>176</sup> <https://stalkmundschurchshrewsbury.org> (viewed 29 Nov. 2021); Newman and Pevsner, *Shropshire*, 521.

<sup>177</sup> Watts, *Glebe Terriers*, 100–1.

<sup>178</sup> *London Gaz.*, 28 Oct. 1856, issue 21935, p. 3503.

<sup>179</sup> SA, P252/J/3/44, 50; Cranage, *Churches of Shropshire*, x, 895

These piers were raised later, perhaps during the 1897 restorations, with large pyramidal caps.<sup>180</sup> (Figure 23)

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<sup>180</sup> <https://stalkmundschurchshrewsbury.org>: The railings were restored in the early 21st century (viewed 29 Nov. 2021).