

St Anne's Parish Church - a short history

The present building dates back just over 250 years (the tower was built in 1695 and the main body of the church was completed in 1748), but there are records of a church on this site over 3 centuries earlier.

In 1450, John Washbourne founded a [chantry](#) dedicated to St Anne. This was sponsorship by any other name. You would pay for a chantry to be built - which might just be a space set aside in a chapel or church - dedicated to a saint and for the blessing of your family or your 'guild'. If you were rich enough, you would also pay for a priest to say mass there every so often for howsoever long - sometimes specifying this in your will so your soul would receive regular prayers after your death.



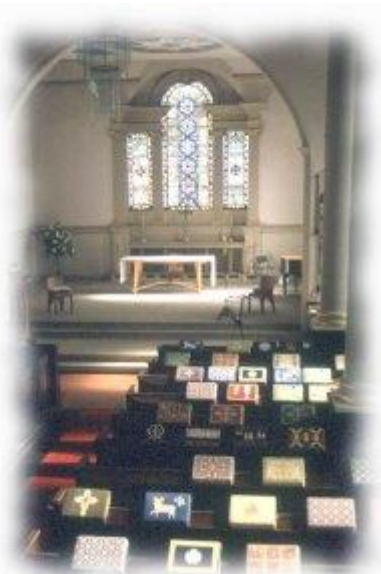
John's chantry was set aside in the "chapell of timber in the harte of the towne". This "chapell" seems originally to have been dedicated to St. Andrew, but after the establishment of John Washbourne's St Anne [chantry](#), which was obviously popular, the chapel itself came to be known as St. Anne's.

The Bewdley chapel was surrounded by a huddle of buildings, which explains why no views of it have been discovered. The mention of an outside staircase demonstrates that the chapel stood at first-floor level, and had business premises beneath it.

The Bewdley chapel was at first extra-parochial, but under [Henry VI's](#) reign (1422-61) was made a chapel-of-ease

to Ribbesford. One of the chantry priests acted as chaplain with the cure of souls. After the suppression of chantries in [Edward IV's](#) reign (1461-83), the endowments of the Bewdley chantries were alienated to lay hands, but the chaplain's stipend was guaranteed and augmented by the townsmen, who thenceforward appointed the chaplains, until 1720, when William Price, then rector of Ribbesford, successfully claimed the right of presentation.

In 1695, the present tower was built on the west end of the chapel, maybe to prop up the old wooden building. 50 years later, in 1745, the leading churchmen of the town decided that the time had come to replace the old chapel by a more spacious edifice of stone. By 1748 the new church was complete, classical style of the 18th century.



Its chancel, nave and aisles provide good internal visibility except from the side aisles where the round [Doric columns](#), which divide the nave into five bays, obstruct the sight lines. There are plaster ceilings, flat over the aisles and arched over the nave; a single tiled roof covers nave and aisles. The aisle-less chancel is similar to the rest in general style.



The gallery at the west end originally extended all the way along the north and south aisles, but these extensions were removed in 1934 back to the second pillar. In the restoration of 1992 these gallery wing extensions were finally removed altogether, leaving the gallery simply a west end structure, supported on the first pillars.

Bewdley is justly proud of its church bells. The oldest ones dated from 1660, but these were recast when a complete peal of eight was cast and erected in 1780 by the renowned Rudhalls of Gloucester.

Of the church plate, all kept in a bank vault, the flagon given by Sir Henry Herbert was, as the inscription shows, transferred here from Ribbesford Church; but the cup and paten presented in 1636 by Margaret Whitcoats, and the two large patens of 1759, were gifts to St. Anne's, as also was the modern chalice.

In 1923 sensible readjustment united the two livings of Ribbesford and Bewdley into a single incumbency and transferred the parishes from Hereford diocese to that of Worcester.

During 1989-93 the church was re-ordered creating a kitchen & [narthex](#) area and a large spacious chancel area.