

St Mary's Church



St Marys Church Gateshead

Records from the thirteenth century list a succession of Norman rectors, the first being Robert de Plessis in 1242. In 1340, permission was given by the Bishop of Durham to build a sealed cell beside the church to house an anchoress (a female hermit who would probably have had teaching duties). In this building, which became know as the Anchorage, a school was eventually established. Through gifts and endowments, this school provided what was probably the only local access to education for Gateshead's people. It finally closed its doors in 1870, by which time a new 'national' school, also called St Mary's, had been built close by.

St Mary's also provided a site to care for the poor of the parish. Using funds raised from the local parish levy, a poor house was built and was in use in the seventeenth century in St Mary's churchyard.

From the 16th century, St Mary's was the base for the growth of a local type of administration - the select vestry of St Mary's Parish Church, known as the four-and-twenty. As its name suggests, this select vestry comprised twenty- four of the leading inhabitants of Gateshead. The four-and-twenty met at St Mary's

Church each Easter and appointed the various parish officers - churchwardens, overseers of the poor, overseers of the highways, and four parish constables.

Until 1825 all marriages and burials in the borough had to be performed in St Mary's. In 1979 it ceased to be used as a church, not long after this the building was largely destroyed by fire and again in 1983 and was boarded up. It was later restored to become an auction room between 1990 and 2000. After being empty for a few years it became a Tourist Information Centre and Visitors Centre until 2007.

St. Mary's Church reopened on the 16th December 2008 following a £1.2m transformation, funded by Gateshead Council, the European Regional Development fund and the heritage lottery fund, into Tyneside's newest visitor attraction.

The interior of the Grade 1-listed church has been completely stripped out to return it as far as possible to its former state, and is now open to the public with a programme of exhibitions and activities including a new family history section

Gateshead Heritage @ St Mary's welcomes visitors to learn the history of Gateshead, and provides a spectacular venue for events, family history research and educational activities.



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From Gateshead Heritage @ St Mary's website