

St Arvans Church brief history – the website provides more information



www.starvanschurch.org.uk

Legend has it that St Arvan was a ninth century hermit who supported himself by coracle fishing for salmon in the nearby river Wye.

The circular nature of the churchyard suggests that its origins are Celtic - probably ninth century. The celtic cross, discovered buried near one of the nave walls during the Victorian enlargement of the church, is one of only three similar C10th crosses in Monmouthshire and was probably a tomb or churchyard cross. The Chancel itself is mediaeval, including the original C13 South Window. In the chancel south wall is an early Norman Priest's doorway and some exterior stone carving seems to have Saxon influence.

The church was enlarged between 1813 and 1823, including the distinctive octagonal tower built, like the other external walls, of local red sandstone, the gift of Nathaniel Wells, of Piercefield Park, now Chepstow Racecourse. Wells himself was churchwarden here and was remarkable in that his mother was a Negro slave on the family's plantations in St Kitts. He was Britain's first black High Sheriff when he was appointed High Sheriff of Monmouthshire by the Prince Regent, and a Deputy Lieutenant of the County. There is a memorial tablet to Nathaniel Wells in the Chancel on the South Wall.

The single bell cast in 1751 at the Chepstow Bell Foundry by William Evans (1710–1767) is still tolled for services.

A major restoration in 1883 added stained glass, two side aisles and dormer windows, designed by Seddona nd Pritchard (architect and Arts and Crafts furniture designer; restorer of Llandaff Cathedral). It was at this restoration that the two side aisles, complete with dormer windows, were added.

A refurbishment and partial restoration took place in the 1980s when the statue of Our Lady and sacrament house were added and the curved ceiling of the chancel and sanctuary were finally decorated as had been intended at the Church's Victorian restoration with mediaeval colours and gold leaf.

The Church was Grade II Listed in 2001 due to its three distinctive periods from medieval to Victorian.