

## Brief History

Darley Abbey had no building for public worship after 1538 when the abbey was closed following the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII. Villagers had to travel to the mother parish of St Alkmund's for Sunday worship, baptisms, weddings and funerals. Thomas Evans (1723-1814) began to purchase land at Darley Abbey in the late eighteenth century. Thomas would take over the existing mill buildings that sat along the side of the Derwent, creating the cotton empire that the Evans are best known for today. When he died in 1814, the remaining family took over the mills. It has been customary to associate all owners of "dark satanic mills" with cruelty and exploitation; yet the Evans family of Darley Abbey took their responsibilities as employers very seriously and dealt generously and kindly with their workers. They continued to build a community for their workers at Darley Abbey. Walter Evans I (1764-1839) took over his father's responsibilities particularly in relation to the cotton mill and the village. It is to him that the village is indebted for its Church and its School, two aspects of life which were dear to his heart and, and in his mind, inseparable. At great personal expense he donated money for the building of both establishments: the Church completed in 1819 and the School in Brick Row in 1826.



**St Matthew's** was consecrated on 24th June 1819 by Walter Evans on his 55th birthday. An Act of Parliament in 1818 made money available from Queen Anne's Bounty, for the construction of Churches in newly populous industrial districts. From this fund, Walter Evans I received £400 towards the building costs for a new church at Darley Abbey. It was designed and built by Nottingham architect,

Henry Moses (1788-1867) in a Gothic style. Most of the craftsmen employed were local, such as the master mason, Stephen Swinnerton. Some of the stone used in the construction was quarried locally from a site at Allestree, with other stone for carved details and paving coming from further afield. Much of the stone was cut incorrectly, that is against the grain, and is the cause of some of the severe weathering and deterioration of the structure.

When St Matthew's first opened, it was then a chapelry of St Alkmund and therefore unlicensed for marriages. The first baptism took place on 15th August 1819 and the first burial on 21st September 1819. The first wedding was on 3rd February 1847. In 1886, Walter Evans II (1826-1903), commenced a programme of alterations to the fabric of the building which included installing a new organ at the east end of the Church, a new sanctuary and new vestries. In the 1950s the internal walls and ceilings were restored and painted. The Fellowship Room was added to the West end in 1965, then extended and refurbished in 2001. The East end of the Church was substantially reordered in 2000 to open up the chancel, relocating the choir and the organ in the nave.

## *Some points of architectural and historical interest*

**THE MAIN ENTRANCE.** St Matthew's can be approached through magnificent cast iron gates on Church Lane, from which steps and a path lead up to the main south door. By the steps is an old gas standard made by Thomas Crump of Derby in 1865. Now most people enter from the car park.



**THE SARCOPHAGUS.** Close to the original west door is a stone coffin made for a person of small stature. It was moved from Hill Square in the early 1900s to Nut Wood, then part of the gardens of Darley House, and moved to the churchyard in about 1932.

**THE CHURCHYARD.** A special feature of St Matthew's is that about 1500 of the burials are marked with a Welsh slate stone, or ledger. The funeral and memorial for mill workers and their families was paid for jointly from their weekly subscriptions to the Friendly Society and by the Evans family.

**THE EVANS GRAVES.** To the west of the main Churchyard path lie the remains of those of the Evans family who are not interred in the crypt below the chancel. Buried here are Walter II, his first wife Susan, son Arthur, second wife Ada, and his brother Henry. Also buried in the family plot is Ada's sister Margaret Roscow, and Alfred Ainger, Master of the Temple Church in London, long standing friend of the second Walter Evans.

**THE WAR MEMORIAL** commemorates servicemen of Darley Abbey who fell, or died of wounds received, in the two World Wars and other conflicts. It was dedicated on Armistice Day in November 1921, and was paid for by subscriptions from residents of Darley Abbey. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission looks after three graves in the churchyard, including that of Private Harry Allen Brown (1916), which is close to the War Memorial.

**THE LUSITANIA MEMORIAL.** As you approach the War Memorial there is a memorial to Walter, Jessie and Ivy Bailey of Shepshed in Leicestershire who died when the Lusitania was sunk on Friday 7 May 1915. Jessie, whose maiden name was Hanford, had four siblings. Her older sister was Florence, who was born in 1867, three years before Jessie. In 1893 Florence had married a Derby man,



Frederick William Cotton, and they lived at 3 Abbey Lane, Darley Abbey. A detailed leaflet is available.

**THE TOWER** is over 70 ft. high and from it there is a wonderful vista of the surrounding area. It contains only one bell whose origin is unknown for it pre-dates the Church, being cast in 1787.

**THE WINDOWS.** All of the windows in the nave and chancel have coloured glass. The Millennium Window in the East wall of the North Chancel aisle was installed in May 2003. The six diamond-shaped pictures illustrate the theme of the Light of God shining through 2000 years of Christian history, within Darley Abbey, the World and Creation itself.



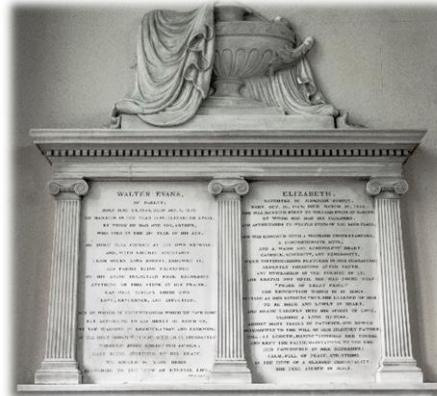
The East window (1891) is in memory of the second Walter Evans' first wife Susan and their only son Arthur, who died aged 15. The window in the South wall of the Sanctuary is dedicated to the memory of Walter. In the Chancel the pictorial stained glass windows are in memory of Hartley and Bertha Gisbome, and in memory of May Brittan, daughter of Rev. Charles Brittan, vicar of this parish from 1876 to 1897. May fell from the scaffolding for the new vicarage under construction in 1881. She suffered spinal injuries from which she died in 1888 aged 16. The original clear glass in the Nave windows was replaced in 1886 with coloured patterned glass, mainly to reduce solar gain; the lower tier was bricked up until 1950/51 when six windows were opened up and coloured glass inserted.

**THE BAPTISTRY.** The font was presented to the Church in 1886 by the children of the village and incorporates the original font. The Lace Altar Frontal, displayed in the wooden cabinet on the South wall, is thought to be the gift of Lady Lucy Hamilton, the wife of Colonel John Evans, a brother of Walter II. It was possibly made in North East Italy and is bobbin-made lace, based on Milanese lace of the second half of the Seventeenth Century. There is a memorial to Colonel Evans on the North wall.

**THE ORGAN.** Forster and Andrews of Hull built a new organ in the North Chancel in 1886. The organ had a mechanical (tracker) action, and was pumped by hand until 1931, when an electric blower was installed. The

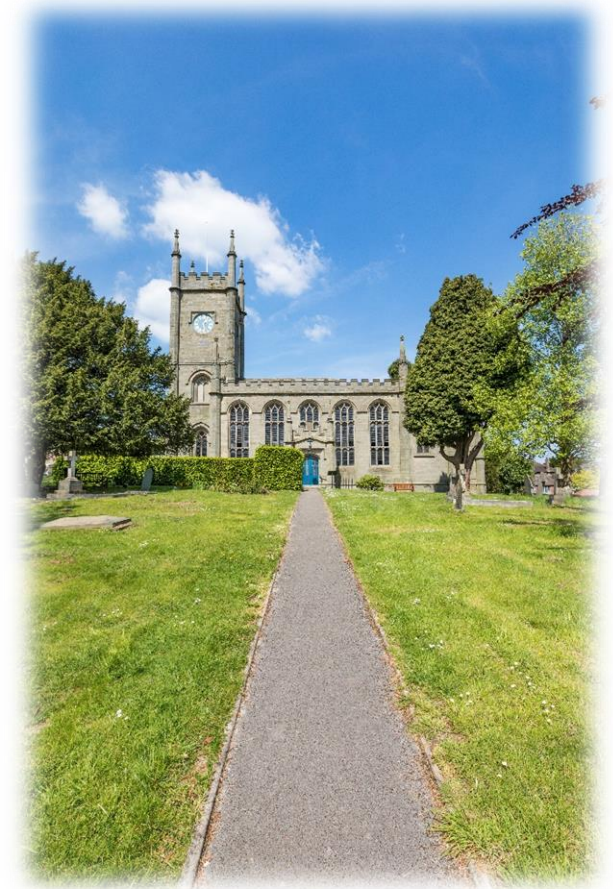
organ was enlarged and refurbished in 1986. In 2000, the organ was completely rebuilt by Henry Groves & Son of Nottingham, and moved back to the West end, above the Baptistry arch. The organ now has direct electric action, allowing it to be played from a detached and moveable console in the nave.

**THE MEMORIAL PLAQUES.** Inside the church there are many memorial plaques. One of particular note is that to Walter and Elizabeth Evans on the west wall. In the inscription recognition is given to Walter for the building of this Church. It is also interesting to note Catherine Wardle's plaque (south wall) in that she died one and half years before the Church was consecrated. The memorials in the baptistry are to Arthur Evans, son of Walter I and Elizabeth, and to Colonel John Evans, who saw action in the Crimea and the Indian Mutiny in the 1850s.



**THE SANCTUARY.** The wood carving is of excellent quality for a small village church and of particular note is the fine organ screen in the north chancel aisle, and the original choir stalls in the chancel. The altar is a simple wooden table. The reredos is of Chellaston alabaster, ornately carved, and the lectern was given by the villagers to commemorate the marriage of Walter Evans and Ada Roscow in 1896.

The original text and drawings for this leaflet were by Wendy and Janet Bitton in 1989. It was revised and updated, with photographs, by Liz Maher in 2019 in preparation for the church's Bicentenary celebration.



## St Matthew's Darley Abbey

For more information please see  
[www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk](http://www.stedsandstmatts.co.uk)