

AN ANATOMY OF A  
PRIORY CHURCH

THE ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORY  
AND CONSERVATION OF  
ST MARY'S PRIORY CHURCH,  
ABERGAVENNY

edited by

**George Nash**

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**Hugh Harrison FSA**, took over a family ecclesiastical carving and joinery company that started in 1891 on the sudden death of the third generation of the family in 1972. Taught the traditional techniques by the old craftsmen, Hugh had to train a new team the modern techniques of conservation. The team has worked all over the country from their base in Devon. The team worked on the St Marys' choir stalls between 1996 and 1999 and Hugh has subsequently published a technical report of the work in the *British Archaeological Association Journal* in 2002 as an appendix to an article by Charles Tracy.

**Sir Trefor Morris CBE, QPM**, began his long police career in Manchester, progressed through the various ranks and specialist departments, particularly in CID and Fraud investigation and eventually became Chief Constable of Hertfordshire. He went on into H.M. Inspectorate and finally became Chief H.M.I. for England and Wales. A proponent of lifelong learning, he has had many opportunities for both formal and informal education and developed a particular interest in politics and history, a useful adjunct to his professional career. In 1996 he returned to his 'roots' in this part of Wales and as a Churchman, immediately became involved at St Mary's Priory. With his background he quickly and usefully became involved in the many restoration projects at the Priory, particularly with the Tithe Barn Interpretation Centre. This in turn led him to become immersed in the history of Monmouthshire in general and Abergavenny in particular, with much emphasis on the Mediaeval and Tudor periods. He spends a significant time helping out at the Church, particularly lecturing and acting as a guide to visitors.

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## Foreword

It is right and proper that this book has been compiled in memory of our sadly departed predecessor: The Very Reverend Jeremy H. Winston who died on the 12th November 2011.

Father Jeremy had a great love for this Priory Church. A love which resulted in him not only ensuring its fabric did not deteriorate, but also a vision as to how it could be developed for our day and our age.

In 1993, the post of Vicar of Abergavenny, based at St Mary's Priory Church, became vacant, Jeremy Winston was seen as the natural successor to the previous incumbent, Colin Sykes, who had died in office prematurely and the challenge to carry on the revitalization of this historically important, yet moribund church, was too tempting to resist. The post also carried with it responsibility for the daughter small church, Christchurch and the post of Rector at the medieval church of St Peter's, Llanwenarth Citra.

St Mary's Priory Church, in the center of Abergavenny had survived the depredations of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, with a magnificent collection of tombs and monuments, because of its strong royal Tudor connection. An effective group of volunteers from the local history society had formed the 'Monuments Restoration Fund' and Jeremy quickly became involved in what proved to a protracted and costly exercise, which demanded great fundraising efforts of the group and the extraordinary work by the restorers led by Michael Eastham. The overall project cost in excess of £600,000. As well as the fabric of the Church, with his enormous enthusiasm and charisma, he turned this rather introspective into a warm open welcoming community, with a growing congregation and although it took time, he used his skill as a musician to encourage and rebuild the musical tradition of the Church, identifying and exploiting a musical director, Tim Pratt, to create a fine Church Choir.

For Jeremy, this was only the start of a number of restoration projects. He quickly realised that St Mary's had no facilities for Church meetings, events and activities. He again utilised the skills in the congregation to put in train a project to build an adjoining Priory Centre and repair and refurbish surviving parts of the old Priory. The Church again was successful in fundraising and was helped considerably by the Heritage Lottery Fund with a grant of £450,000 to build an excellent and attractive facility which is used on a daily basis for all manner of community as well as Church activities. The building was officially opened in 2000 by HRH The Prince of Wales, who is the Patron of the St Mary's Priory Development Trust.

Later that year he moved to transform the rest of the Church Site, utilising the project skills of a group led by Sir Trefor Morris to acquire the adjoining Tithe Barn, repair and refurbish an almost derelict building and to turn it into a remarkable Heritage Centre, explaining the history and development of St Mary's Priory, for tourists local visitors

and schools. This project attracted considerable grants totaling £2.2m from the Heritage Lottery Fund, CADW, the Welsh Assembly Government and Monmouthshire County Council. Again, our Patron, Prince Charles officially opened the building in 2008. It was the tenacity, foresight and inspirational leadership of Jeremy Winston that has created this highly attractive well used Site, with lovely and functional courtyards between the tithe barn and the Priory Church.

This book is in honour of our beloved Jeremy and tells of how St Mary's Priory Church has developed over one thousand years from its foundation as a monastic priory in 1087 to a parish church at the Reformation, through the Victorian era up to the present day.

I have been blessed with many professionals who help us understand the history of the site and how we can preserve it for future generations. I wish here to pay particular thanks to our Archeologist-in-Residence Dr George Nash, whose idea this book is.

Mark Soady  
July 2014



JEREMY WINSTON (1954–2011)