

The Premonstratensians were Canons, not monks, which meant that they worked in the community, as priests, doctors, teachers and in other roles. There were usually 12-15 Canons who were ordained at any one time, with a variable number of lay brothers. They managed their farmland, ran coal mines, tanneries and a lead smelting plant. They had water wheels on the Sheaf for milling corn, tanning and fulling. While there is no written record of the link, it is very likely that the Abbeydale Hamlet was originally started by the Canons of Beauchief, who were among the founders of Sheffield's industry. As the Abbey prospered, more land was given to it, including areas in Ecclesall, Fulwood, Totley, Chesterfield, Eckington and Staveley.

At the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII in 1536, Abbot John Sheffield surrendered the Abbey to the King's commissioner, the lead was stripped from the Abbey roof, the windows smashed and the building left to decay. The estate of Beauchief was sold to Sir Nicholas Strelley for a sum around £233 and remained in his family until 1923. Due to the fact that in some cases daughters succeeded the estate, the owner's name was first Strelley, then Pegge, then Burnell. Little is known of the Abbey for some time after the Dissolution. The building of Beauchief Hall began in 1671, using some of the Abbey stones. At about the same time, the present chapel was built in the nave of the Abbey, as a private chapel for the Pegge family.

In 1923, the Burnell family sold the estate, with the Hall, to Frank Crawshaw who gave the Abbey to the City of Sheffield in 1931. He also sold the land of the present golf course to the City. Now Sheffield City Council are responsible for the maintenance of the Abbey as a Historic Monument and Grade II listed building.

The original Abbey church was about 200 feet long, much longer than the present church. This chapel was built using part of the side nave walls of the church, the surviving tower and a new east wall with a large window.

The Tower (1)

The tower at the west end of the church is original, and was remodelled in the 14th century. The height of the tower was reduced in the 18th century. It still seems very high from the inside. The doorway is Early English and the large west window is 14th century. It was bricked up until the 1960's, when it was re-glazed by Sheffield Council.

There is a small door to the right which leads to a spiral staircase, climbing to the bell platform in the tower roof. This is inaccessible to the public for safety reasons. The font is of unknown date and is frequently used for baptism services.

The Nave (2)

The box pews are 17th century, except for those at the back which are more recent. The tallest pew (the manorial pew) was for the Beauchief Hall family, which had a fireplace and a separate entrance.

Louise Jennings has given much work to the Abbey. The four bronze plaques on the left of the door show scenes from the Abbey's history. The small sculpture of St Thomas a Becket and the Premonstratensian canon in the tower, are also her work.

The psalm board has a cherub's head on the side facing the congregation and a Coat of Arms granted to one of the family in 1836 on the reverse. The stained glass window is Victorian and was inserted in the upper part of the original door from the cloisters to the Abbey church.

The Pulpit (3)

The pulpit is typical 17th century in its arrangement, as is the 'strap-work' carving which matches that on the high-sided pew.

Memorials (4)

Since the chapel was a family chapel until the 1920's, all the memorials are to the Strelley-Pegge-Burnell family and the Crawshaw family. The largest is the marble memorial on the south wall, carved by Sir Henry Weekes RA and depicts Charity.

Outside the Abbey

The door and tower are flanked by two arches, one round and one pointed. They were originally part of the other Abbey buildings and were moved to their present position between 1815 and 1857.

