

St Saviour's Church is one of Guernsey's ancient parish churches dating from the 14th Century. It is part of the [Church of England](#) and formally was in the [Diocese of Winchester](#) but currently is under the care of [Salisbury Diocese](#).

History

Little is known of the early history of the Guernsey parish churches, but there is evidence that they stand on sites that were venerated as sacred places by the pagan inhabitants before Christianity was introduced into the island. A stone with two crosses cut in it, one on either side, which serves as a gatepost at the north-east entrance to the St Saviour churchyard, is thought to be a **menhir**, and as such regarded by the pre-Christian inhabitants as sacred.

When did Christianity reach the island? It is believed by many that it was brought by the Celtic saints, **Sampson and Magloire of Dol in Brittany**, in the sixth century. More recent thinking, however is that Christianity was brought to the island by the Romans, many years earlier. Whichever theory is correct, it is known that Christian people have worshipped on the spot where the present church stands for more than a thousand years.

Ecclesiastically the Channel Islands were part of the Diocese of Coutances in the Archbishopric of Rouen, and in A.D. 933 they became part of the Duchy of Normandy. Mention is made of St Saviour's Church in a charter of about 1030, by which Duke Robert of Normandy assigned the church, and three others in Guernsey, to the Benedictine Abbey of **Mont St Michel** in Normandy. The gift was confirmed by his son, Duke William (the Conqueror) in 1048, and by Pope Adrian IV (Nicholas Breakspeare, the only English Pope) in 1155.

After the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 the island was part of the combined kingdom of England and Normandy. The peace that was enjoyed then was broken when King John lost mainland Normandy in 1204; the island remained under the **English Crown** and the French made many attempts to recapture it. A particularly destructive raid in 1294 resulted in such damage to the churches that they were still in a state of dilapidation 10 years later.

The present parish churches thus date from the 14th and 15th centuries.

The three **patrons** of the churches, the Abbots of Mont St Michel, Marmoutier near Tours, and Blanchelande in Normandy received revenues from the Island such as the great tithes, so they had to bear much of the cost of reconstruction of the churches; naturally they protested at having to meet the cost of repairing damage caused by their fellow-countrymen, but they still had to pay. The responsibility they had for maintaining the churches and rectories was later passed to the civil parishes, a responsibility they bear to this day, meeting the costs required by means of the parish rates.

The Island continued under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Coutances in Normandy and paid dues to him until 1568. In 1496 the island was transferred by a Bull issued by Pope Alexander VI to the Diocese of Salisbury and three years later to the **Diocese of Winchester**. The situation in the island was not changed, however, as the Bishop of Coutances would not give up his jurisdiction and it was not until 1568 that the connection was severed and the island was definitely recognised as belonging to Winchester. The forfeiture of the French priories in the island, the Reformation and the introduction of Protestantism had none of them had any effect on the payment of dues to Coutances. In time of war with France the dues were suspended and payment resumed at time of peace.

Church services were almost invariably in **French** until after the middle of the 19th century and that language did not cease to be used in St Saviour's Church until about 1932. As a consequence, in 1553 King Edward's second Prayer Book was translated into French for use in the Channel Islands. In 1662 the Book of Common Prayer was translated into French by a Jerseyman, the Rev. John Durell, and by order of King Charles II the French version was used in the Channel Islands and in the Chapel of the Savoy in London.

The Church Building



The middle section of the church, broadly comprising the area of nave and north aisle within the octagonal pillars without capitals, is the **oldest** part of the church. There were later extensions of both nave and aisle eastwards and westwards, including the tower.

Substantial re-building, with some alterations, was carried out at various times, and one of the major repairs resulted from an incident on Sunday, January 30th in 1658. During Evensong on that afternoon a thunderstorm started and, with the third thunderclap, **lightning struck** the church. The people in the congregation were thrown to the ground and some worshippers were so badly shocked they were unable to walk home, though no-one was seriously hurt. The damage to the church was substantial. Part of the tower collapsed, the spire was lifted 18 feet up into the air and the smallest of the bells crashed to the ground and was broken. A portion of the north wall of the church was demolished and a window with it. In the early 18th century the building at the east end of the north aisle, now a vestry, was built to house the parish cannon and military equipment, and in 1831 the west end of the church was shut off by a brick wall for use as a **militia** store.

During the **Occupation** of 1940-1945 the church again had a military use when the Germans used the tower as an observation post, constructing a chamber in the spire and cutting peep holes through the lead covering. Also, a huge complex of tunnels was constructed, extending under the church land, mined by the labour of enslaved Todt workers.