

St Mary's Church is the creation of an extraordinary woman, Sarah Losh. She was her own architect and paid for the cost of this unusual church out of her own pocket, to the tune of £1008.

There has been a church at Wreay for 700 years. In 1319 Bishop Halton wrote to give permission for a chaplain 'to attend divine offices' here. In post Reformation times there was a building which served both as chapel and schoolhouse. In 1739, after some improvements, it was consecrated by Bishop Fleming.

By 1840 the old chapel was in disrepair and it was then that Sarah Losh stepped in, donating the land and funds for a new church on condition that she 'should be left unrestricted as to the mode of building it'.



Sarah was born in 1785 into a prominent local family who were acquainted with the leading thinkers of the day from William Wordsworth to George Stephenson. Her studies ranged from the arts to the sciences and in 1817, accompanied by her sister Katharine, she went on the 'Grand Tour' of France, Germany and Italy where her interest in architecture was awakened.

Following the death of their father in 1814, Sarah and Katharine inherited the family estate of Woodside and the industrial interests in the north east. When Katharine died at the age of 46, Sarah never entirely recovered and St Mary's is, in part, a memorial to her beloved sister.



Sarah based the form of the church on a Roman basilica, a rectangular nave with a semicircular apse. This building type was used by early Christians, and Sarah would have seen examples in Italy, but it was at odds with the fashionable English Gothic style.

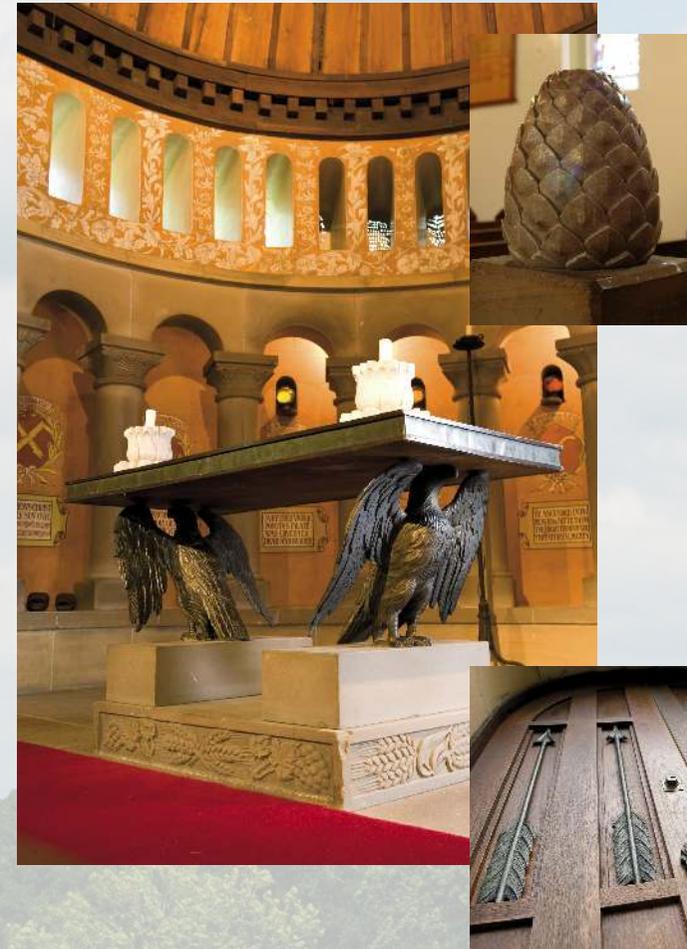
The church was built between 1840 and 1842 using local labour, including the stonemason William Hindson and his sons.

St Mary's is full of symbolic ornament and carvings which refer to death and rebirth, drawing upon Christian, pagan and personal references. The carvings are based on nature with images of animals, insects, flowers and fossils. You could call St Mary's Church Sarah's 'Benedicte' - *'All ye works of the Lord, praise ye the Lord....'*



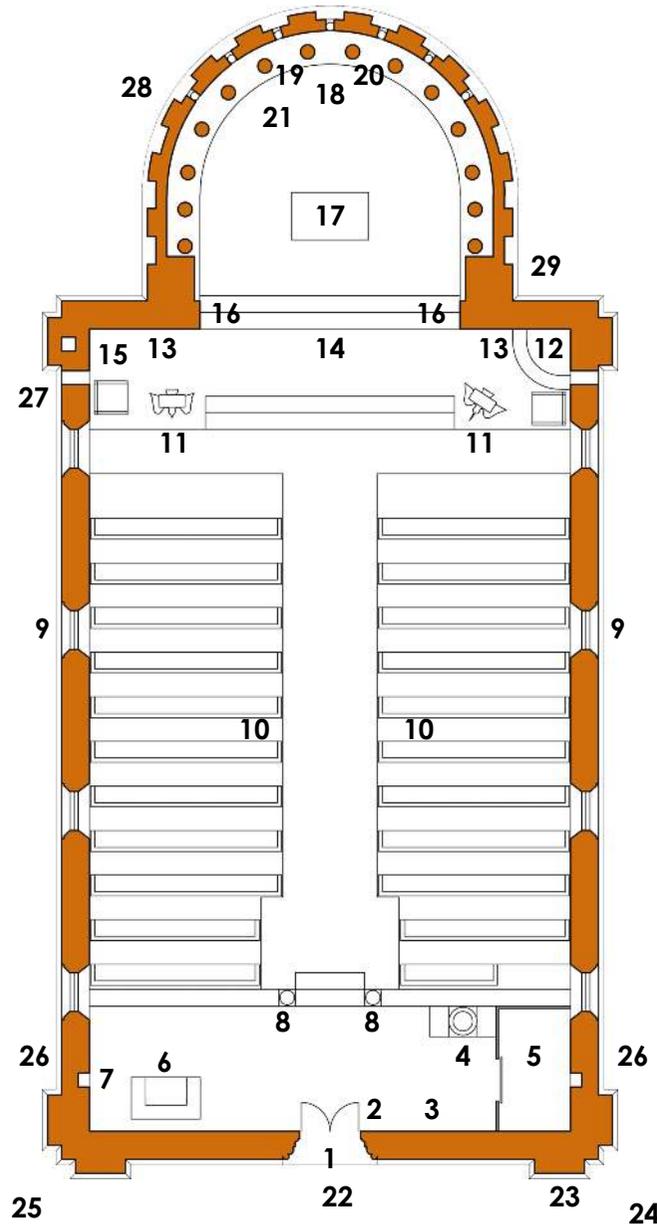
To complete your visit to St Mary's Church follow the Sarah Losh Heritage Trail to the **Sarah Losh Heritage Centre** within the refurbished Chapel of Rest. Here you will learn much more about local history, the 12 Men of Wreay, Sarah Losh and her family, St Mary's Church and Sarah's other creations. Suitable for all ages, the exhibition is open from 10am to 4pm each day, free of charge. Collect a Trail guide.

St Mary's Church, Wreay



Explore the unique and inspirational church of St Mary's created by Sarah Losh, Romantic genius, antiquarian, architect and visionary.

- 1. Arrows.** The arrows, symbols of death, are set within the door panels. They recall the death of Major William Thain, a friend of the Losh family, killed in the Afghan war of 1842.
- 2. Gourd and vine.** Carved by Robert Donald, Sarah's gardener, the vine, complete with grub and butterflies, wraps around the door frame and recalls the story of Jonah.
- 3. Portrait.** For many years believed to be a portrait of Sarah Losh but now considered to be a woman 20 years her junior. It is possibly her cousin, Sarah Spencer Losh.
- 4. Font.** Carved from alabaster by Sarah and her cousin William Septimus, the side panels depict plants, animals and insects. The dragonfly and butterfly are symbolic of new life. The mirrored lid recreates a pond with waterlilies.
- 5. Vestry.** A modern construction incorporating metal arrows found in the undercroft. Originally there was no vestry as the vicar would robe in the Vicarage nearby.
- 6. Organ.** The organ was built around 1900 and donated to Storth Chapel, Arnside in 1933 then relocated to St Mary's in 2008. We are uncertain how music was provided in 1842.
- 7. Arrow.** Another arrow, this time embedded in the wall. Did it support a lantern over the Tablets of the Law?
- 8. Pinecones.** The pinecone is an ancient symbol of fertility, regeneration and inner enlightenment. It also recalls Sarah's friend, William Thain, who sent her a pinecone from Afghanistan. As well as framing the aisle, pinecones form door handles and central bosses on the roof trusses.
- 9. Nave windows.** The nave windows are early examples of the work of William Wailes from Newcastle. A mosaic of glass pieces appear to have had a former life. They are another example of Sarah's forms of resurrection, creating form out of chaos. The upper windows are by Geoffrey Rowell of Carlisle and depict different flowers.
- 10. Pews.** The frames are oak and the panels and seats are Spanish chestnut blown down in Lowther Park in 1839.
- 11. Lecterns.** The eagle and stork lecterns were carved by John Scott, a crippled man from Dalston. Carved from chestnut, they stand on plinths of bog oak.
- 12. Pulpit.** Also carved from bog oak that had lain submerged in nearby Wragmire Moss for over 3000 years. It has been carved in the shape of a calamite, a fossil tree. The primitive horse-tail shoot acts as a candle holder.
- 13. Archangels.** The two archangels stand on brackets carved with images of bats and a dragon - the symbols of light standing upon the symbols of darkness.



Plan of St Mary's Church

- 14. Angels.** High above the arch stand a row of angels separated by palm trees. The shelf below is decorated with oak leaves, acorns, grasshoppers, flowers and grapes. They echo Solomon's temple, where 'he carved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers'. 1 Kings v29
- 15. Owl and cockerel.** Originally sited at the west end of the church this shelf is supported by an owl and cockerel, the animals of night and day.
- 16. Man and Woman.** At the base of the arch are the heads of a man and a woman, perhaps Adam and Eve.
- 17. Altar.** A slab of green Italian marble resting on two brass eagles and set upon a stone base carved with wheat ears and grapes for the bread and the wine. It is freestanding so that the priest faces the congregation, a practice that would later be prohibited as it suggests Catholicism. Upon the altar are alabaster lotus-shaped candlesticks carved by Sarah.
- 18. Colonnade.** 14 stone columns with carved capitals form 13 seats for Jesus and his disciples gathered around the altar. The paintwork was added in the 1880s making Sarah's 'recreation' of the Last Supper more explicit.
- 19. Lamps of the Spirit.** 7 coloured globes are set within the apse wall and lit by sunlight.
- 20. Fossil Windows.** Made from thin sheets of alabaster carved like stencils are images of fossils copied from recent finds in the Northumbrian shales.
- 21. Pompeian Lamps.** Bronze candelabra that Sarah and Katherine brought back from their visit to Pompeii in 1817.
- 22. West facade.** The window surrounds are decorated with natural forms from the sea, the earth and the air.
- 23. Well.** The lion's head at the base of this well once flowed with water from an underground stream.
- 24. Sundial.** Carved around its base is the inscription, 'Do today's work today'.
- 25. Font.** The font from the original church now serves as a bird bath.
- 26. Gargoyles.** These wonderful creatures do not act as water spouts. Sarah called them 'emblematic monsters'.
- 27. The Dragon.** This monster had a purpose, acting as a chimney to the original stove beneath the apse. A smoke breathing dragon!
- 28. Apse.** The curved apse with its scale-like roof slabs recall the northern Italian churches visited by Sarah.
- 29. Undercroft.** The flat headed corbel arch, common in the reign of Edward I, was rescued from the original church.