



St Werburgh's - Werburgh Street

St Werburgh's is to be found close to Dublin Castle and takes its name from the Abbess of Ely, patron saint of Chester who died in 699AD. This church is first mentioned in a letter dated 1179 to the then Pope (Alexander the third) but it was built on or near the site of St Martin of Tours a church that was there in Viking times. This church was burned in 1283, as was a lot of the surrounding area. It was rebuilt and when in 1559, Saint Mary del Dam was closed the two parishes were merged in St Werburgh's and it was then that it became the parish church of Dublin Castle. In 1630 is described as "in good repair and decency" with two hundred and thirty nine household of which twenty eight were Roman Catholic. William King who are crucial in the rebuilding of South Dublin's Churches, he went on to become Archbishop of Dublin but was rector here from 1679 to 1688.

A new church was built on the site in 1719 designed by Isaac Wills. It was damaged by a fire in 1754 and reopened in 1759. It was described by Gilbert as "one of the most fashionable churches....always densely thronged" It was attended by the Lord Lieutenant and the Royal arms are still there today, a carved plaque on the west Gallery just under the vice-regal pew. Seats were reserved in the church for officers and soldiers up until 1888 and the La Touches lived in nearby Castle Street.

It is said that Handel used the organ (built by Ferdinand Weber) here for the rehearsal of his Messiah before its first performance in Fishamble Street in 1742.

Originally it had a 160 foot spire terminating in a gild ball and weather vane, this was found to be in a dangerous condition and was removed in 1810 and a tower which was removed in 1836 on the instructions of Dublin Castle. This was a security measure as there was fear it could be used by snipers. Parishes were responsible for putting out fires in the area and the church is supposed to house two early fire engines (these were not spotted on our t visit in November 2015). In the stairs foyer leading to the gallery is the altar tomb of the FitzGerald s and memorials to the Earls of Kildare, thought to be from the 15th or 16th century and moved here from the Priory of All Hallows after the dissolution of the monasteries. The covering slab bears the effigies of a knight in armour and his lady. A full description is given in the Dublin Graveyard section of this website written by the Lord Walter Fitzgerald and published in 1891 in the memorials of the dead in Ireland.

Whitelaw's survey of St Werburgh's Parish of 1798 notes a total population of 3629 with 338 houses. The area covered a number of streets, alleys and courts which included Skinners row, Dame Street and Castle Street.

Described in 1837 by Lewis, "The church was erected in 1759(sic) the front is composed of a basement story ornamented with six Ionic pilasters with an entablature, and a grand entrance of the same order. The second story, which is diminished, is adorned with four Corinthian pilasters, coupled, enclosing a large window, and supporting a pediment, above which rises a square tower of

Composite architecture, terminating with urns placed at the angles. An elegant spire which formerly surmounted the whole was taken down in 1810, on account of its dangerous state; and, for the same reason, the entire tower was taken down in 1835. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners have granted £1140. 16. 11. For the restoration of the tower and the general repairs of the building. The Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, attends here to qualify on his coming into office, the castle of Dublin being situated in the parish. The east window of stained glass is considered the handsomest in Dublin and cost about £600: the subject is the Presentation. In the interior are several neat monuments, and on the exterior, in the wall of the church, are some very ancient sculptured figures, evidently belonging to an older building". In 1851 the population of the parish was 2928.

The Church is a large edifice, on entering the building the dark wood can be quite oppressive and overwhelmingly sombre, but on further inspection, the beautiful carving is quite evident including the pulpit which includes the carved heads of the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). The church has numerous memorial including some to the Guinness family and to Matthew West, Goldsmith. The transcriptions for these are included with the graveyard memorials.

The RCB Library have the following registers

Baptisms 1704-1913

Marriages 1704-1956

Burials 1703-1843

Irish Genealogy have the following digitised online.

Baptisms 1704-1900

Marriages 1704-1900

Burials 1703 -1898