

**Trips out with a religious connection:  
The Malvern area of the Diocese of Worcester  
Part 4 - Little Malvern Priory; Great Malvern Priory**



The roadside sign for Little Malvern Priory.

We spent the night in Great Malvern, at the Premier Inn, where we had an a la carte dinner and then breakfast the following morning. It was very comfortable. On Day 2 of our short visit to the Malvern area, we set out to visit **Little Malvern Priory**.

The Priory was built for a community of around a dozen monks in 1125 and was originally known as St Giles Priory. It was built as an annex to the Church Of Worcester with Worcester's Prior having the right to remove monks from Little Malvern and indeed being able to choose the Prior of Little Malvern.



**The churchyard of Little Malvern Priory Church.**





The attracted carved church signboard on the approach to the Priory Church.

On August 31st 1534, Prior John Bristowe and his remaining six monks were required to surrender the buildings and their lands with the dissolution of Little Malvern Priory (probably the smallest Priory in the land) as part of King Henry's programme. In 1536, John Bristowe was awarded a pension and the Monastery buildings were already beginning to fall into disrepair.



Relics from a bygone age: parts of the Church destroyed in the Reformation are displayed in the narthex of the church.





The nave, chancel and rood screen of the Priory Church.



The rear of the church, showing the font, organ gallery and a hatchment.

The land was purchased by the **Berington** family shortly after the dissolution of the monasteries. They had **Little Malvern Court** built around the 'Prior's Hall' and also on the site of the Monastic Cloisters. The ten acres now surrounding the Court (the house and gardens are open to the public on certain days) used to be part of the monastic grounds. Over the next three centuries the Priory Church deteriorated to a point where the barrel vault roof caved in and the Berington family had this repaired in 1864. Since then there have been a number of refurbishments and the remaining Priory Church and nearby ruins are listed as an ancient monument.



Medieval carved choir pews; and behind set into the wall were 'squints' through which non-monks could view the Mass.



Priors of Little Malvern Priory, starting in 1171, continuing to its dissolution in 1534.



The imposing tower of Little Malvern Priory Church.





**Farmland surrounds Little Malvern Priory Church.**

Our final visit on our trip to Malvern was to **Great Malvern Priory**. We had already visited this very impressive building in October 2017, but were so impressed we vowed to return there.



An impressive panoramic view of Great Malvern, with Great Malvern Priory Church tower in the distance.

**The Priory** was a Benedictine monastery c.1075-1540 and is now an Anglican parish church. In 1949 it was designated a Grade I listed building. It has the largest display of 15th century stained glass in England, as well as carved misericords from the 15th and 16th century and the largest collection of Medieval floor and wall tiles. In 1860 major restoration work was carried out by Sir George Gilbert Scott. It also the venue for concerts and civic services.



**A beautiful altar cloth and tiled reredos at Great Malvern Priory.**





Medieval wall tiles at Great Malvern Priory.



The High Altar and Reredos at Great Malvern Priory. The Reredos depicts Christ's Nativity.

The Priory was built for thirty monks on land belonging to Westminster Abbey. A charter from Henry I in 1128 AD refers to Great Malvern Priory as 'the Priory of St. Mary'. In 1154–1156, Westminster Abbey obtained a Papal bull from Pope Adrian IV which confirms a strong dependency of the priory of St Mary, Malvern, on the Abbey of Westminster.





Human faces and animals are carved into the choir seats at Great Malvern Priory.

On the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1541, local people raised £20 to buy the building to replace their decaying parish church.

By 1788 the Priory had fallen into disrepair. It was partly restored in 1812 and again in 1816, 1834 and 1841. A careful restoration was carried out in 1860 under the direction of **Sir George Gilbert Scott**, the famous architect, who also designed the roof of the nave in imitation of the medieval original.

The church has around 500 on the parochial council electoral roll. Services are a mixture of traditional elements with some modern elements. The choir is well established. There are several active groups for children and young people. The church sponsors several "Mission Partners".

The current incumbents are the Vicar of Malvern, Rev. John Barr, and his wife Rev. Dr. Mary Barr. A past incumbent was the Christian writer Anthony C. Deane.



Looking upwards, the Priory has the most beautiful and intricate ceiling consisting of fan vaulted stonework and ornate wooden panelling.





Outside in the Priory grounds.



On leaving the Priory, we had a short walk around the centre of Great Malvern. One of the landmarks we saw was the Unicorn, a pub frequented by Christian writer and author of the Chronicles of Narnia CS Lewis and his friends.



A blue plaque to CS Lewis who met at the Unicorn Pub in Great Malvern.





We also wandered around Rose Bank Gardens in Great Malvern, which has a striking artwork depicting two fighting buzzards by sculptor Walenty Pytel.

**Magda and Martin Jones**

**First version**

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Sources: Wikipedia entries

Little Malvern Priory History Section: <http://www.littlemalvernpriory.co.uk/history.htm>