

Away from it all

The Anchorhold

There is a small building (an anchorhold) attached to the corner of the church. It was built in 1910 on the site of one from around 1400. Here a religious man (anchorite) or woman (an anchoress) could live a life of prayer away from society.



The anchorhold outside the church

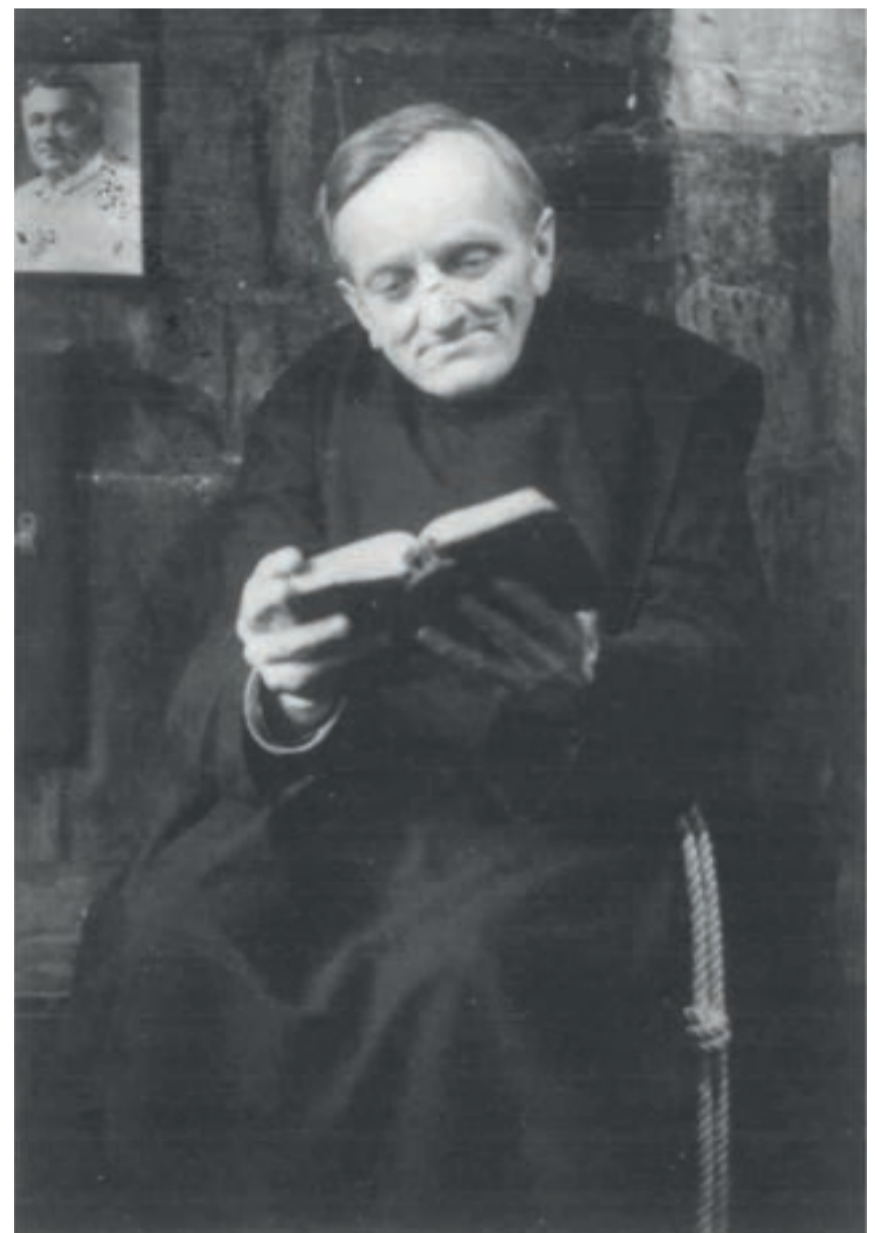
How do we know?

Look for the openings (squints) in the wall at the back of the church, on your left as you enter. They show where the original anchorhold was. The anchorite could see through into the church, hear the Mass and people's confessions. Churchwarden Edwin Ridsdale Tate reopened the squints in 1910 when he designed and built the modern anchorhold. The lower squint was closed again in the 1970s because a cat kept climbing through it!

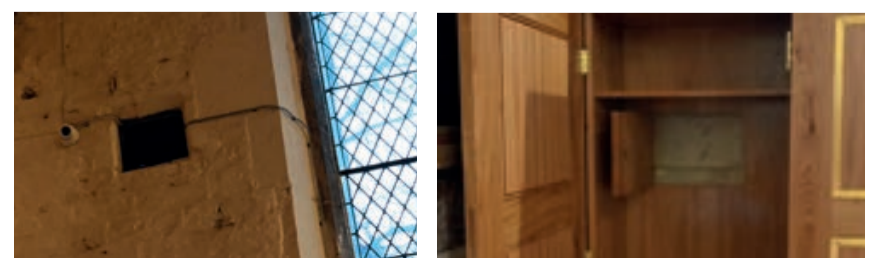
What did they do?

Anchorites and anchoresses followed a set of rules for how they should live. These advised on their food, clothing, and even how many haircuts they could have a year! Wealthy people donated money to pay for the anchorite or anchoress to pray for them.

"Unless need compels you, you must not keep any animal except a cat"



Brother Walter - Anchorite



Bottom left: the two 'squints' on the west wall

Wise women

The Anchorhold

We know this church had a number of anchoresses at different times. They offered spiritual advice to people. Some became well known through the connections they made.

Who were they?

Dame Emma Roughton is the only one of the early anchoresses whose name we know. Her seven visions were written down in 'The Pageants of the Earl of Warwick', the illustrated story of Richard Beauchamp's life. She predicted Henry V's death, the birth of his son Henry VI and Beauchamp's role as his guardian. Around the time of Emma's visions in 1421, Henry V, his pregnant wife and his court were in York.

Did you know...? The Frontier Nursing Service made a big difference to the number of deaths of babies and children in remote rural areas of Kentucky by providing nurse-midwives.



Mary-Breckinridge Frontier Nursing Service

Who were the others anchoresses?

The modern anchorhold was probably built for a nun, Adeline Cashmore. She wrote a book of mystic verse called 'The Mount of Vision'. Adeline was an advisor to Mary Breckenridge who founded the Frontier Nursing Service, in Kentucky in 1925.



Extracts from 'The Pageants of the Earl of Warwick' © The British Library

