

The text of the oath taken by the Master of St Anne's Guild, found in The White Book of the Guild of St Anne. Photo Credit: Photo taken by S. Kennedy with permission of the Royal Irish Academy @RIA

St Anne's Guild in St Audoen's Church

Medieval Lay Religious Guild

Medieval Christians' view on the world

Medieval Dubliners lived their lives close to death. Plague had returned to the city regularly in the 80 years after the 1348 outbreak. This left a profoundly pessimistic mark on people's psyche. They were familiar with the harrowing sight of dead bodies; it was like the horrors of hell had visited their city. These scenes of doom were reflected in church decoration; even illiterate people understood that salvation lay through the Christian church. People knew that they could not cheat death, but what they feared most was going to hell.

Medieval Christians believed that only the truly saintly would enter heaven after death. Others had to spend time in purgatory to purify their souls. The idea of purgatory became widely accepted after 1290, when a chantry house or lay religious guild was established after the death of Queen Eleanor of Castile to pray for her soul. Masses sung or said for a person after death, especially on the anniversary of their death, would speed the journey through purgatory and into heaven. People regularly left money in their wills to provide for these masses.



St Audoen's Church, Dublin.

Christians came together in sodalities and fraternities to support each other in praying for their dead relatives. St Anne's Guild, based in St Audoen's Church, grew out of this movement. There were about six religious guilds in medieval Dublin. St Anne's is the most well known and probably the most long lived of these.

The guild was formally established by charter in 1430, but property deeds relating to the work of the guild go back as far as 1285. The purpose of the guild was to fund chaplains in St Audoen's church to pray for dead guild members' souls. Financial support for St Anne's guild during a person's lifetime or in their will, was a form of spiritual insurance; your soul would be cared for after your death.

Devotion to St Anne was very strong in Medieval Dublin. The extent of this devotion was such that in 1352, the 26th of July was declared a holy day in her honour. Christians were required to refrain from work and attend mass. For the members of St Anne's Guild, the 26th of July was a special festival. St Anne's Chapel within St Audoen's Church was decorated in damask hanging and lit by numerous candles and torches. All members attended Vespers with mass forming the centre of the celebration. The guild master and wardens led a procession of adoration to St Anne through the local streets. Guild members dressed in their finest clothes and walked in procession behind their guild banner.

The pageantry of the day lent excitement and helped reinforce group identity. Afterwards, the guild members retired to a local tavern for a banquet. This important day reinforced the collective nature of the fraternity. Members felt supported in their religious convictions.



The seal of St Anne's Guild showing St Anne and her daughter the Blessed Virgin Mary, dressed in clothes typical of the medieval period. Mary appears to be holding a book.

The Latin inscription reads: 'The common seal of the Fraternity of St Anne of the church of St Audoen'. Drawing provided courtesy of Neil Moxham, guide at St Audoen's Church.

By 1430, leading members of the guild felt the need to protect Guild assets by acquiring a Royal Charter

The 1430 charter, signed by King Henry VI, gave the guild the protection it needed for its property portfolio; the guild relied on this protection for over 300 years through the Reformation. The expense of acquiring a Royal charter meant that it was only worthwhile where substantial and valuable property was at stake. The Statutes of Mortmain (1279-1290) limited the amount of property a church could hold, to prevent the church becoming too powerful. By establishing a lay religious guild, the assets of guild members were held separately from the church property.

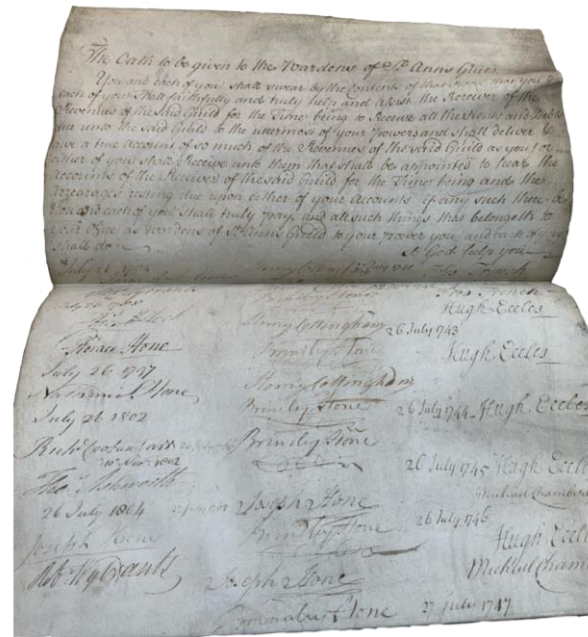
The 1430 Charter of St Anne's Guild sets out the rules governing their corporation and legal competence in managing their property portfolio. It also sets out the appointment of a master and two wardens to manage guild business, as well as the appointment of six chaplains for six altars in St Anne's Chapel within St Audoen's church. The 1430 charter permitted the guild to amass property with an annual value of 100 marks or £66.13s.4d. It was the wealthy powerful Dubliners who formalised the guild by seeking the Royal Charter. However membership was open to all, men and women, rich and poor. Belief in purgatory and the power of prayer were prerequisites to membership.

People from all walks of life shared in the fellowship of the guild and could be assured of financial assistance should they fall on hard times. The White Book of St Anne's guild lists many of the petitions from guild members and their families for assistance when they had fallen into economic distress. Many of these members had come from families that were once wealthy but whose resources were now much depleted. Widows with children sought funds for rent arrears, fuel and food. These grants from St Anne's Guild were made on the basis of the petitioners' connection to the guild, rather than residence in the parish.

All masters and wardens were drawn from the elite of medieval Dublin; Mayors of Dublin, Alderman of Dublin Corporation, Records of Dublin (chief magistrates), freemen, citizens, chaplains, knights or merchants. This connection to powerful people was one of the factors that enabled the guild to survive and thrive even through the Reformation. The surviving deeds of the guild show that guild properties were usually leased to members of the trade and craft guilds. Indeed, members of St Anne's guild often benefited from these leases of properties well located from Dublin city to Crumlin, Kilmainham and Swords.

The guild chaplains operated independently of the parish, yet were dependent on the cooperation of the parish clergy. Guild chaplains supported the parish clergy in liturgy, sang in the parish choir and visited the sick. However, they were dependent on the parish for the use of St Anne's chapel within the church. The church benefitted from financial donations from both the guild and separately from guild members. The overlapping concerns of the guild and the parish clergy ensured that the relationship benefited both parties. Many of the records of medieval religious life were written by the clergy for their own purposes and the laity were often invisible. The records of St Anne's guild shine a light on the work of lay people in serving Dubliners' religious and social needs.

St Anne's Guild funded six chaplains to serve at six altars in St Anne's Chapel within St Audoen's Church. The altars were dedicated to St Anne, the Blessed Virgin, St Catherine the Virgin, St Nicholas, St Thomas and St Clare. By the time St Anne's guild was established, the walls of St Audoen's Church were described as being lined with devotional altars. Archaeological remains indicate that there were so many altars, that wooden screens were erected to separate them. This vibrant church was a spiritual powerhouse of community life supporting parishioners in all stages of life.



The text of the oath taken by the Warden of St Anne's Guild, found stuck into the back of The White Book of the Guild of St Anne. Photo Credit: Photo taken by S. Kennedy with permission of the Royal Irish Academy @RIA



This sketch of the Fresco on the wall of St Anne's chapel in St Audoen's Church was drawn when the Fresco was uncovered in 1887. Since then it has disappeared because of its exposure to the weather after the roof was removed in 1820. Photo credit: By permission of the Royal Irish Academy @RIA

Prayers for the souls of the dead.

The Guild maintained a list of obits or anniversaries of the deaths of members and everyone in this list benefitted from the masses regardless of their wealth in life.

Funerals were an important event in the life of guild members. St Anne's chapel was draped in black damask, and torches and candles were lit. Free food and drink were often available; this guaranteed there would be a good turnout of mourners praying for the soul of the deceased. Some of the wealthier members of the guild paid fees to St Audoen's church so that they could be buried within the walls of the church. However, for St Anne's Guild, praying for the souls of their dead members to speed their journey through purgatory was their sole concern.

St Audoen's Church and St Anne's Guild grow as donations pour in during the 15th century.

St Audoen's church benefitted from numerous donations from its foundation in 1190. Within 100 years it had doubled in size. By the early part of the 13th century, a new chancel was added to the north east of the church. By the time St Anne's guild received its Royal charter in 1430, a four-story tower was added to the church and three bells were cast for it. This indicates the wealth that existed in the parish at the time.

Perhaps the most well know endowment at St Audoen's church was from Sir Roland FitzEustace, Lord of Portlester in 1482. He funded a private chapel to the south east of the church, which was named the Portlester Chapel. FitzEustace was Lord Chancellor of Ireland and it is said he made the donation in thanks for being saved during a perilous sea journey. He also bequeathed a life size cenotaph of himself and his wife Margaret, least anyone forget his generosity. Probably as a gesture of appreciation, St Anne's guild granted him a messuage; this medieval term referred to a property with buildings, outbuildings, a garden and an orchard. It was located close to St Audoen's Church and was granted for his and his son's lifetime.

Some of the bequests had special conditions attached to them. In 1529, Richard Talbot bequeathed property in Dublin to St Anne's Guild on condition that on the Saturday before the feast of St Barnabas, a bellman was to go around the city ringing a bell and asking people to offer '*pater noster*' and '*ave*' for his soul, that of his wife, his children and his sequels (descendants). The following day mass was to be sung in plain song at St Audoen's church. If the guild failed in these obligations at any time in the future, Richard's descendents had the right to claim the land back and divide the proceeds among the poor.



In 1482, Lord Portlester erected a Cenotaph of himself and his wife Margaret at St Audoen's church on the occasion of their donation of funds to build the Portlester chapel. This sketch of the figures was drawn by Thomas Westropp in 1893.

Photo credit: By permission of the Royal Irish Academy @RIA

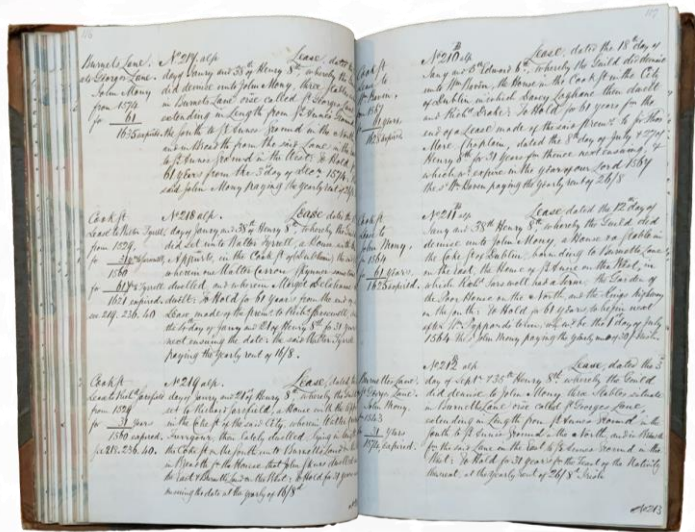
In 1534, the guild acquired Blakeney's Inn, located to the east of St Audoen's Church. The guild purchased the Inn from James Blakeney of Rykynhore in exchange for cash and lands at Saucereston, near Rykynhore in the parish of Swords. The Inn is described as having a garden and a turret. It had been the home of the Blakeney family whose ancestors John and James Blakeney had been among the founders of the guild over a hundred years before. The building was renamed the College of St Anne and was used as accommodation for the guild chaplains. Parts of the College were also rented out to raise income.

The building is long gone and St Audoen's Catholic church stands in its place today.

St Anne's Guild faces the challenges of the Reformation after 1540

From 1541, the new Protestant religion was promoted in Ireland. Henry VIII abolished lay religious guilds across England. Many in Ireland, including St Anne's Guild, managed to survive. The new Protestant religion, with King Henry VIII at its head, rejected the doctrine of purgatory. This had been a core part of the existence of St Anne's Guild. Many of the rituals at the core of St Anne's Guild, such as veneration of shrines, were called into question by the new religion. With the dissolution of the monasteries (1536-41), St Anne's guild lost some of its properties, such as the lands rented from St Mary's Abbey. However, they did manage to salvage some lands in Kilmainham that were leased out to the prior of the Hospital of St John.

Wealthy parishioners continued to support St Anne's guild and leave money and property in their wills. Chaplains continue to be appointed each year and the property portfolio continued to grow. Affiliation to St Anne's guild was initially able to transcend the differences between Catholics and Protestants; the guild was able to accommodate both. St Audoen's Church had been appropriated for Anglican services after 1540s and Catholic services were fully transferred to St Anne's College by 1611. St Anne's College was later appropriated by the St Audoen's Protestant parish clergy and renamed St Audoen's College.



An excerpt from The Book of St Anne's Guild from the 1560s. The book contained accounts and leases relating to the guild property portfolio up to 1817. This book and the related deeds are preserved in the Haliday collection at the Royal Irish Academy. Charles Haliday was a banker, bibliophile and antiquary. Photo Credit: Photo taken by S. Kennedy with permission of the Royal Irish Academy @RIA

Sectarianism split the Ball family apart in 1580

Bartholomew Ball and his wife Margaret were members of St Anne's Guild and they are buried in St Audoen's Church. Bartholomew had been Mayor of Dublin and Keeper of the Keys of the Treasury in Dublin Castle. Margaret had 10 children of whom 5 survived. They lived comfortable lives, despite remaining as Catholics after the Reformation. Bartholomew died in 1573. Margaret continued to hold secret Catholic masses in their house and sheltered priests on the run from persecution.

Two of their sons, Nicholas and Bartholomew Ball, remained Catholics and members of St Anne's Guild. Nicholas was active in the guild protecting guild documents from government scrutiny. Bartholomew was imprisoned in Dublin Castle for his protests against the imposition of the new state Protestant religion. Margaret's eldest son Walter adopted the new Protestant faith to further his political career.

In 1580, Walter Ball was installed as Mayor of Dublin. Shortly afterwards he arrested his mother Margaret because of her failure to adopt the new Protestant religion. Because of her arthritis, she was carried to the Dublin Castle dungeons on a stretcher. He said she would be released from prison when she took The Oath of Supremacy and adopted the Protestant faith. She refused. Dublin Castle dungeons were dark, damp and cold; no place for an elderly frail woman. Nicholas, brought her food, candles and clothes. When he became Mayor of Dublin in 1582 he tried to secure her release. However, in the meantime, Walter had been elevated to the position of Commissioner for Ecclesiastical Causes. This out ranked Nicolas' position as Mayor. Their mother remained in prison. Despite this, Margaret survived over three years in captivity, eventually dying in 1584. Her son Walter never relented and Margaret never took 'the oath'. Margaret was recognised as a martyr for her faith and accorded the title Blessed Margaret Ball in 1992 by Pope John Paul II.

St Anne's Guild survives the Reformation

After the Reformation, St Anne's Guild showed great skill in adapting their operations to the circumstances of the time. Between 1535 and 1666, 17 out of 22 guild masters had also been Mayors of Dublin. The remaining 5 were Aldermen, as were most of the guild wardens. The guild had the appearance of a shadow corporate body to Dublin corporation; it had full corporate power and half the membership of Dublin corporation were also guild members. The descendants of the founding members maintained their family memberships. There were close ties of business and marriage between the families of guild members. There was also a strong connection to the Bakers guild (known as the guild of St Anne and St Clement) and the bakers met regularly in properties owned by St Anne's guild. The Carpenters guild also met in property rented from the guild and made regular payments to the guild.



An excerpt from the Accounts of St Anne's Guild dated May 1770 showing a rent payment of £1. 19s.. from the Carpenters Guild. Photo Credit: Photo taken by S. Kennedy with permission of the Royal Irish Academy @RIA

The guild began to focus on secular matters such as protecting their assets and looking after poor members. By emphasising the role of the guild in providing opportunities for members to invest in property and socialise in a convivial way; they emphasised the civic opportunities of membership. The most prominent activity of the guild after 1550s was the leasing of property and this proved to be an incentive for aldermen and eminent citizens to retain their membership. Guild members were sometimes offered property leases at reduced rates.

Conscious that they were coming under attack from the state and established church, the guild recorded the minutes of their meetings meticulously. From 1591, measures were taken to secure all the property deeds of the guild. They were put in a stout chest locked with three keys. The keys were held by the wardens and a senior guild member; all three needed to be present to open it. In 1593, the chest was moved to the home of Alderman Christopher Fagan, near Cooks St. When he died, the chest was moved to the care of Alderman Nicholas Ball and afterwards to Alderman Matthew Handcock.



An excerpt from The Book of St Anne's Guild showing the grant of part of the old Blakeney's Inns to Nicholas Ball in 1636 .
Photo Credit: Photo taken by S. Kennedy with permission of the Royal Irish Academy @RIA

Guild members fight back against the new state religion

There were many Catholics and recusants, those who refused to adopt the new state Protestant religion, among the membership of the guild. Walter Sedgrave, guild master in 1593, had been arrested for supporting the rebellion of Viscount Baltinglass in the early 1580s and was known to protect priests in his home. Michael Chamberlain, guild master from 1598, and Matthew Handcock, guild warden in 1593, were imprisoned for their recusancy in 1605-6, having refused an order to accompany the governor to Protestant divine service. Catholics Edmund Malone and Nicholas Stephens held guild wardenships from 1605. Stephen's execution was ordered in 1613 for his leading role in the riot in Dublin after the overturning of the parliamentary election. He was reprieved. Handcock, Malone and Stephens spent the early months of 1606 in prison in Dublin Castle. Guild member, William Talbot, lost his position as Recorder of Dublin because of his refusal to take the Oath of Supremacy. All of these attacks on guild members hindered the administration of the guild. As the guild came under attack, they employed the services of the Lawyer, Henry Burnell. Burnell was also recusant.

St Anne's Guild continues it's work after 1590

St Anne's Guild continued to offer financial support to St Audoen's parish church. In 1597, an explosion at nearby Wood Quay damaged large parts of Dublin, including the tower at St Audoen's Church. St Anne's guild contributed to the repair of the tower as well as other structural works on the church. St Anne's guild also contributed to the relief of the poor during the 1590s caused by the nine year war between the English and the Ulster Clans.

However the parish clergy felt over time that St Anne's Guild had soaked up all the donations that should have come to them and this set the stage for the Protestant parish clergy to attack the guild with a view to seizing it's assets. State officials complained about their failure to gain access to the records of St Anne's property portfolio. From 1594-1609 the guild consulted eminent lawyers to defend the guild; their advice enabled the guild to fend off attempts by the established church to gain access to their property portfolio.

The decision to refurbish the guild altar in St Audoen's in 1597 and again in 1605, shows that the shrine was still important to guild members. The hall of St Anne's college was refurbished in the following years and in 1618 it was said that masses were conducted there – despite being outlawed by the state. Masses were also said in the houses of guild members. It is likely that money paid to Catholic priests was not recorded in the guild accounts. Members of the Sedgrave, Browne and Malone families worked as priests in the Dublin area from 1600-1630 and all had kinfolk in the guild.

St Anne's Guild and their charitable work in the 17th century

The guild continued its charitable work throughout the 17th century by supporting guild members that had fallen on hard times. Members of the once wealthy Cooper and Bell families were in financial distress and reached out to the guild. Mary Goulding, aged 80, daughter of Thomas Lutrell, lost property as a result of the 1641 rebellion. Robert Plunkett, a brother of the guild for over 40 years, had his lands sequestered during the 1640s rebellion found himself imprisoned in the Marshalsea Prison for debt. These were some of the guild families that received financial aid. That the guild gave relief to Catholics and Protestants was uncommon in as much as of elite Dublin society had become sectarian by this time.



An excerpt from The White Book of the Guild of St Anne showing a payment of £6 to Michael Chamberlain, a former warden of the guild on the 26th July 1709. His great grandfather Michael had been master of the guild in 1601 . Photo Credit: Photo taken by S. Kennedy with permission of the Royal Irish Academy @RIA

St Audoen's Parish church lead the attacks on St Anne's Guild

In 1605, Reverend John Richardson, vicar of St Audoen's Church, tried to take the major share of the revenue of the guild for the benefit of St Audoen's Church. Richardson demanded an annual stipend of £40 (which represented a substantial part of the guild income). He was only granted £13. 6s. 8d.

In 1611, the state brought proceedings against the continued existence of St Anne's Guild, with a view to acquiring the guild's extensive property portfolio. John Davis, the Attorney General, filed a case against Mathew Hancock, Master, and Nicholas Stephens and Edmond Malone, wardens of St Anne's Guild. Davis was challenging the practices of St Anne's Guild; demanding to know the legal basis on which they were founded and challenging their corporate status. The guild successfully relied on the original 1430 charter to defend its right to exist, arguing these rights had been exercised uninterrupted since 1430. The Attorney General argued that this was insufficient to protect their property being seized by the King. But the case seemed to rest there and no action was taken.

The cost of these legal battles was expensive for the guild and in 1620, they defrayed the costs by granting lands to members of the guild. An extra fine and increases in rent, meant that the guild income increased to £105. 2s. 0d. It was the issuing of these grants to guild members that focused the attention of the established church and the state during the 1620s and 1630s.

They saw these transactions as the culmination of a pattern of concealment and subterfuge. On foot of the charges of impropriety laid by Archbishop Bulkeley, the guilds affairs were examined. Income from a large number of properties did not appear on the accounts. The annual rents were found to be £289. 1s. 7d not £74. 14s.0d as claimed by the guild. Archbishop Bulkeley alleged that the profits of the guild were being divided up between guild members, Catholic priests and friars.

The argument that the guild was being used to support Catholic members, Catholic priests and ultimately a restoration of the Catholic religion was revived in 1634 when the Anglican Vicar of Christchurch, Reverend Thomas Lowe presented his case to the Archbishop of Dublin. Lowe claimed that a Papal Bull from Pope Pius V dating to 1568-9 was found in the papers of Richard and Christopher Fagan; directing the assets of St Anne's guild be applied only to the benefit of Catholics. He revived the argument that the guild assets were being divided between it's own members, Jesuit priests and popish friars. He also accused the guild of swallowing up all the church means to the detriment of the parish church that was in need of funds.

Lord Deputy of Ireland, Thomas Wentworth, becomes involved in the fight against St Anne's guild.

Lowe delivered the documents as proof of wrong-doing to The Lord Deputy of Ireland, Thomas Wentworth, in Dublin Castle. Wentworth had already been involved in a wholesale attempt to seize the assets of Irish Catholics. He sought to have these 'secret misappropriated livings' returned to the Anglican church. He ordered that the records of the guild be inspected to investigate their expenditure since 1603. The records showed that St Anne's guild had investments worth over 800 pounds and were only giving a small part of that to the parish church. They attempted to seize some of the guild property for use by the parish church and imposed thirty Protestant luminaries as members of the guild. They also seize the property of St Anne's College for the use of Anglican priests and renamed it St Audoen's College. This attempted coup of St Anne's Guild failed, probably because of the religious upheaval throughout the country at the time. While this attempt to close the guild failed, the membership was now mostly Protestant.



Lord Deputy of Ireland, Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford by Sir Anthony Van Dyck

Lord Deputy Wentworth was recalled to London for 'high misdemeanours' and the charges against him specifically refer to his treatment of St Anne's Guild. Within months, he was taken to the Tower of London where he was executed on the 12th May 1641. Despite the fate of Lord Deputy Wentworth, Reverend Lowe continued his persecution of St Anne's Guild.

From this point on, most of the masters of the guild were Protestant, usually prominent Aldermen. These Aldermen managed the considerable resources of the guild for the benefit of their chartable work. Despite all this, some prominent Catholics still managed to remain members of the guild demonstrating that civic solidarity could overcome the sectarianism of the time.

In 1679, the vicar of St Audoen's Church, Reverend John Finglass, commenced legal proceedings to abolish St Anne's guild. This was probably prompted by the guild ceasing payment of his annual stipend. He argued that St Anne's Guild was set up solely for the benefit of St Audoen's Church and that all the guild income should be applied only to St Audoen's. He claimed that the previous cases against the guild had failed because before 1641 the majority of the members were still Catholic. He argued that the Catholic members had concealed the extent of the guild assets, hiding them so as to benefit Catholic members. His case failed and the relations between the vicar and St Anne's guild soured. After 1690, Catholics were excluded from holding the roles of master or warden of the guild.

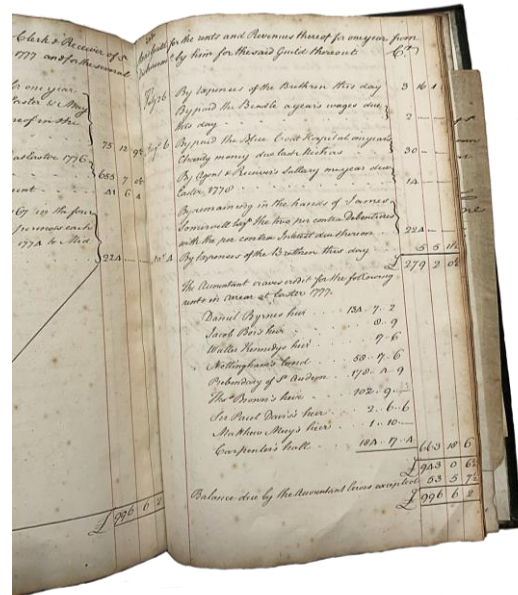
In 1695, the assets of the guild were handed over to four trustees; Archbishop Narcissus Marsh, Rev. John Finglass, William Molyneux and Christopher Usher. The trustees later sold a large part of the property portfolio to the Wide Streets Commission for clearance prior to the layout of new wider streets in Dublin.

The Charitable work continued through this time with funds used for the relief of poverty, the upkeep of the Blue Coat school, the upkeep of the church and the freeing of Christian slaves in Algeria and the Turkish Empire.

St Anne's Guild finally closes.

Throughout the 18th century, the guild continued its charitable works under the watchful eye of the prebend of St Audoen's Church. They met every year on the 26th July for their members banquet. Membership remained principally Protestant, although some small number of Catholic families continued to be members. The bonds of friendship between the families still in the guild remained strong and they continued to dispense relief from poverty and distress in a spirit of civic welfare and solidarity.

The Accounts of the Guild of St Anne shows that guild members continued to collect rents and pay out grants up to 1779. The final property transaction in their records dates to 1817, although some small number of their properties were retained by St Audoen's Church right up to recent years. In 1773, the parish clergy ordered the removal of the roof at the east side of the chapel, including the Portlester Chapel; the cost of maintaining the building was beyond the means of the church. In 1820, they removed the roof from St Anne's Chapel for the same reason. In 1835, an act of parliament abolished what remained of the medieval guilds but by then St Anne's had already ceased operation.

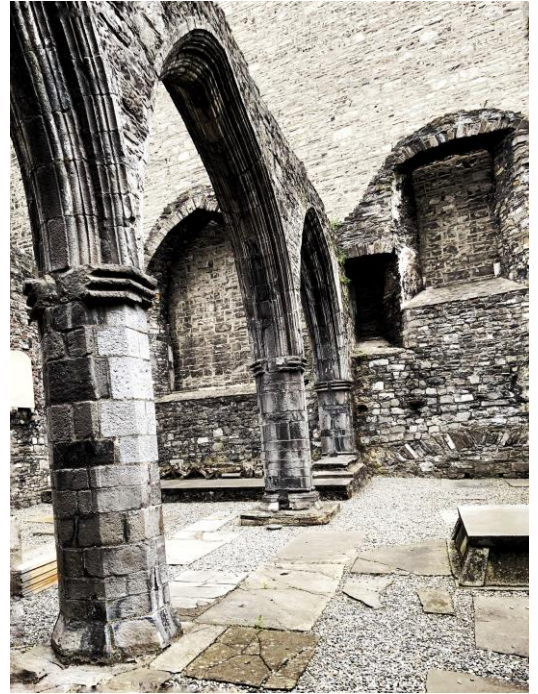


An excerpt from the Accounts of St Anne's Guild dated August 6th 1777 showing a payment of £30 to the Blue Coat School, now the Kings Hospital School in Dublin. The Protestant school was founded in 1674 and the first cohort of 60 pupils included three girls. Photo Credit: Photo taken by S. Kennedy with permission of the Royal Irish Academy @RIA

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I would like to thank the librarians at Dublin City Library and the librarians at the Bodleian Library in Oxford for all their assistance with my research. I would also like to thank Neil Moxham, guide and archivist, for his help.



A view of the Portlester Chapel today
Photo Credit: Photo taken by S. Kennedy

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