



The Crooked Spire Fact Sheet

Construction of the amazing building of St Mary and All Saints Church – what we know locally as Chesterfield’s ‘Crooked Spire’ - began in 1234 on the east side where the oldest pillars in the church still stand. The church serves the Parish of Chesterfield.

Throughout the medieval period, especially in the 1300s, Chesterfield Parish Church continued to be expanded and improved.

There are lots of wild and wonderful theories about why the spire at St Mary and All Saints Church may have become crooked. Some say it is the work of the devil! However, it is more likely that there weren’t enough skilled carpenters to work on the spire after the plague (also known as The Black Death), which swept across Chesterfield in 1349, and mistakes were made.

The Church was first constructed with timber and, later, 32 tonnes of lead tiles were laid over the top. Another theory about why the Spire became twisted is that when the original untreated wood became wet and then started to dry during its construction, the weight of the lead twisted the spire. What are your theories?

The spire would have been built with the help of a ‘windlass’ – a large piece of equipment used in medieval times to help construct large buildings. It consists of a horizontal cylinder (or barrel) in which men walked around turning a rope around its axle (the outside of the cylinder) in order to pull up heavy timber. The wheel would be installed as high up on the building as possible and would be dismantled and moved up again as construction progressed.

The original windlass was on display in Chesterfield Museum which has recently closed for refurbishment. Very few of these windlass machines have survived to the present day, so we are lucky to have the original windlass used to construct the ‘crooked spire’ still in the town for everyone to see.

When the Stephenson Memorial Building is completed in 2024, containing the new Chesterfield Theatre and Museum, the windlass will be in pride of place again.

Watch our animation of the windlass at work on [Ashgate Heritage Arts’ You Tube channel](#)

The spire of St Mary and All Saints Church was added in the 1360s which is when The Crooked Spire medieval murder-mystery musical is set. If you come and see our musical, the Crooked Spire, you will find out more.

Here are some useful links for you to explore:

derbyshire.heritage.co.uk

[Wikipedia – Church of St Mary and All Saints, Chesterfield](#)

[BBC The British Museum - Medieval Builders Windlass](#)



Martin Coslett, Mary Hennessy & Peter Gray who wrote The Crooked Spire musical together