

The Mariners Chapel – Gloucester Docks

The 16 mile canal linking Gloucester and Sharpness was intended to bypass the narrow winding stretch of the River Severn below Gloucester. The canal opened in 1827 and growing numbers of seamen and boatmen came to Gloucester.

In the first half of the nineteenth century the dock gates were closed on Sundays, and cargo handling was not allowed. The sailors' clothes were considered inappropriate for worship in the city churches which led to the creation of a public subscription by the docks traders to provide a church specifically for the crews of the visiting ships. In 1849 the Mariner's Chapel opened and initially became very fashionable with the townspeople who flocked here in large numbers. The chaplain in charge was responsible for visiting every ship that arrived in Gloucester to distribute bibles and religious tracts. He also visited the two homes for sailors in the city and conducted open air services for the families who lived aboard the numerous longboats that moored in the Barge Basin. This community generally shunned the new chapel because they considered it 'too posh'. Regular services are still held here with a congregation drawn from various parts of the city.

Local architect John Jaques designed the church – a simple building with just a nave and bell tower. Local builder William Wingate began work in 1848. The chancel is at the west end instead of the normal east, due to the close proximity of a warehouse. Stained glass windows were added to the chapel in the 1920s. Local war poet Ivor Gurney is said to have played the organ here for a time.

The chapel opened in February 1849, with Rev James Hollins being appointed the first chaplain.