

St. Wenzels Church in Moravská Ostrava

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The church is indirectly documented by written sources in 1297, when the Ostrava parish priest Jindřich is mentioned. The dedication to St. Wenceslas refers to the Bishop of Olomouc as the founder of the town and the patron saint of the church. The building development of the church in the 13th and 14th centuries is evidenced mainly by the results of archaeological excavations carried out here in 1968–1971 and in 1998. On the basis of these findings, we know that the present St. Wenceslas Church was first built in its earliest brick phase as a single-nave church with a rectangular presbytery. It is thought that this first building was destroyed by fire perhaps sometime in the 1st or 2nd decade of the 14th century.

Even before the second phase of construction of St Wenceslas Church, the western tower was built, which served as a bell tower and probably also had a representative and guard function. The second construction phase (stone buildings) can be classified as the second quarter of the 14th century. The tower and the church were connected during this reconstruction. After this reconstruction, the church was probably flat-roofed, double-aisled and had a vaulted presbytery with a pentagonal conclusion.

Archaeologically, some parts of the church that had disappeared have also been uncovered; apart from the northern sacristy, which was demolished in 1803, these include the remains of the masonry of the ossuary in its western neighbourhood and the late Gothic chapel of St Angel the Guardian below the present sacristy.

During the 16th century, the interior of the church was modified. The existing vault was replaced by a three-aisled nave dated 1539, built with funds from the Bishop of Olomouc and local townspeople. The interior of the nave was decorated with ornamental and figurative paintings with themes from the Old and New Testaments and sin and salvation in several stages of modification.

In the Baroque period, the church continued to evolve spatially. The northern chapel of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was built in 1689 by Bishop Charles of Olomouc. The chapel of the Guardian Angels is documented by sources near the church already in the Middle Ages. It was not until 1764 that a new sacred space with this consecration was built on the south side of the church.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the church underwent further major modifications. In 1804 a late Baroque altar was built in the presbytery and in 1805 the upper part of the tower was modified to a late Baroque form. In 1836 the church was given a low-pitched roof. At the end of the 19th century, the interior of the church was modified according to the neo-Gothic design of the archbishop's builder Richard Völkel.

Between 1997 and 2004, the church underwent monumental restoration and is used for worship and cultural events. In 2021, the church was chosen as the final resting place of the first bishop of Ostrava-Opava, Mons. František Václav Lobkowicz.

The church and the church cemetery served as the final resting place of many generations of Ostrava's townspeople from the town's beginnings until the Josephine reforms. The cemetery itself was situated around the Church of St. Wenceslas and burials were also held inside the sanctuary. It was the only cemetery in Moravian Ostrava until 1585.

Its scale was probably not very large, as the area was bounded by walls and streets, which led to the so-called 'etage' situation, where mutually infringing graves are placed in several layers on top of each other. While archaeologically investigated medieval burials did not contain any objects of a personal nature, the deceased from the Baroque period were in many cases provided with objects of a religious (crosses, medallions, rosaries) or personal nature (rings, a medical device – a switch).

The custom of placing a coin in the mouth or hands of the deceased as an obolus of the dead has also been documented on several occasions; in two cases the findings also testify to so-called anti-amyrin measures. The cemetery at St. Wenceslas Church was used until 1821, when the last two people were buried there and the former necropolis was paved over.

The church is located in the northeastern part of the historic walled city of Moravská Ostrava. To the north of the church, a road led from the south-west, through the square and onwards through the Church Gate to the bridge on the Ostravice River to Silesian Ostrava and then to Frýdek. In the 18th century, an imperial road was laid out here and in 1836 the passage of part of this route through the town was modified. At the end of the 19th century, the development on Kostelní náměstí was corrected.

To the northeast of the church, the last remaining torso of the city walls of Moravian Ostrava, preserved in the above-ground parts, passes today. The north-western bastion, demolished in 1929, remains as the foundations presented today under glass in the Telepace building. To the southeast of the church, the building of the Ostrava-Opava Bishopric was built in 1998–2000, to the northeast today stands the City Gate complex, built in 2008–2010. In the south-western neighbourhood of the church, archaeological research has been underway since 2022, which, in advance of new construction, uncovered the archaeological remains of four urban plots with houses no. 8, 9, 13 and 14 demolished in the second half of the 20th century.

Literature: Vilém Plaček: Kostel sv. Václava v Moravské Ostravě. 2014.