



**A SHORT HISTORY OF ST LUKE'S
CHURCH, GOOSTREY & THE YEW TREE**

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FOREWORD

“At a time when those all-important moments of tranquility and reflection become increasingly hard to find, sitting quietly in the cool of a building that has been standing for two hundred years helps to put one’s life in perspective. In a church you find a sense of continuity; the same surnames appear on headstones and memorials. In many churches you can see the gradual process of development and change in the building itself. Visiting a country church is like opening a window on living history, inside and outside every church the past is always present.”

The above words are taken from “English Country Church” written by the actor Richard Briers.

They are a very appropriate foreword to this account of St Luke’s Church, Goostrey.

The Parish Church of St Luke's, Goostrey to 1792

Generations of villagers from Goostrey have worshipped in religious edifices under the patronage St Luke and it is interesting to note that, as a religious foundation, the church or chapel in Goostrey dates back to the late 12th or early 14th Century.

Until Cheshire became firmly incorporated into the diocese of Lichfield in 920 AD, it was, in reality, a missionary area. At the time of Domesday, much of Cheshire was covered in forest and the population was probably as low as 1100. From that period until the early 19th Century, most of the county was divided into large parishes, each of which had a parish church together with satellite churches called parochial chapels of ease. A chapel of ease was used for all religious purposes save the "liberties of public baptism and burial."

In a license from the Abbot of Dieuclares, then owners of the advowson of Sandbach, to Thomas, Abbott of St Werburgh's at Chester, permission was granted for him to have a chapel in his manor house at Barnshaw. There is express mention of chapels belonging to the mother church of Sandbach, which can only refer to those at Goostrey and Holmes Chapel. Popular opinion assumes that the Abbot in the above mentioned deed, was Thomas Capenhurst, Abbot from 1245 to 1269. This, together with other references to "Abel Chaplain of Gostre" and "Hugh Chapel of Goostree", in documents dated precisely, confirm the existence of a chapel in 1244.

Little can be certain before 1200, apart from two small references in the Domesday Book, which translated read:

The same William holds Gostrel and Radulf of him. Colben held is as a free man. There is a virgate (a measure of land, about 30 acres) rateable to the gelt.

There is land for two oxen. It was and is waste.

Hugh holds of the Earl Gostrel. Godric held it and was a free man. There are iii virgates of land rateable to the gelt. The land is i carucate and a half. It was always waste and is so now.

Another theory expounded by Dr Ormerod in his 'History of Cheshire' relates to the existence of two Courts Leet; one held at Barnshaw and the other in Goostrey in houses fitted to cater for such occasions, and it follows that such a mansion house must have existed at an early period in Goostrey and probably occupied the site of the present church yard which "exhibits the

traces of a fortified parallelogram". "The east and north sides slope almost precipitously to a deep dingle below, and the other sides appear to have been strengthened by a deep fosse which is now filled up on the south, but may be traced along a deeply sunken highway on the west." Whilst this may or may not be true, the old Court Leet Rolls reveal much of the day to day business transacted by major families in the area.

In 1320, William, son of Henry of Cranach (Cranage), made a release of certain land to another. This documentation is witnessed by Geoffrey de Cranach, Chaplain of Church Holme and Goostree.

William had only a female heir, Alice, who was living at Cranage in 1375, and became the wife of William de Nedeham of Derbyshire. Many references to the Nedeham family can be found in the Holmes Chapel registers, and one Robert Needham was knighted in September 1594 and later created Viscount Kilmorey after his estates in Ireland.

In 1350, as is widely known, a license was drawn up by Roger de Norbury, Bishop of Lichfield, granting permission as from 13th May, for the inhabitants of the hamlet of Gostrey (*apud hameletum de Gostre*) to bury their dead in the chapel yard on account of the problems encountered in transporting the deceased to Sandbach, in particular the crossing of the River Dane. It is interesting to note that around this time, the bridge at Saltersford was built to assist in the transportation of salt from Middlewich to Macclesfield. However, the obligations for all funerals were still to be paid to the then Vicar of Sandbach, John de Tydrynton.

However, the said John de Tydrynton appears to have been lax in his duties as documents dated 1352 indicate that the Abbot of Dieuclares in the County of Stafford had failed to provide a chaplain to celebrate divine service in the chapels of Hulme and Gostree, as he was bound of right and according to their ancient foundation. This was also a problem at Sandbach, although we do know that John de Tydrynton was still Vicar in 1356 and did not die until 1371.

Information relating to the early part of the 15th century is scarce, however, we can, from certain deeds, wills, and other documents establish certain facts. In 1405, William de Eton, then aged 40, held an enquiry into the ages of two co-heiresses, Elizabeth and Agnes War of Somerford. This document also

details the deaths of William's five brothers, slain in Gostree and buried in the churchyard.

The church was visited in 1569 and it is recorded that it contained several coats of arms relating to local families, including the Kinseys and Venables. The Jodrell Deeds, dated 1548, refer to a James Brook of Goostrey, chaplain. Later deeds in 1564, 1576 and 1588, refer to Alexander Button, curate, Thomas Wainwright, minister, and James Whytaces, clerk, and probably serving in the cure of Goostrey.

During this time, it appears that a John Statham "Chaplain of Goostree Chapel" appeared in the Consistory Court at Chester to answer complaints made by the wardens that he had not kept the font and other necessary things in the church clean. His defence appears to have been that "the font hath holes in the covering and will not be kept clean" and that "unto other things, he hath promised ecclesiastical obedience."

It was also during this period, in 1561, that the earliest Register of Goostrey was established, and from this we can trace the development of families and trades within the village and its surrounding area. The Booths of Twemlow, the Kinseys and the Eatons of Blackden, the Baskervyles of Barnshaw, and the Jodrells and Leighs of Twemlow.

In the early 17th Century, we can begin to picture the chapel as probably built of wood in the Cheshire black-and-white style, consisting only of a nave and chancel and a small additional aisle on the south side, belonging to the Booths of Twemlow. However, this does not appear to have been adequate for the ruling families of the day, and in June 1617, following an obvious dispute, Peter Daniel of Over Tabley, acted as mediator and concluded an agreement with the help of Henry Wainwright, Church Warden, between Henry Mainwaring, Thomas Baskerville, John Booth, John Kinsey, and John Eaton, that certain additional aisles should be built to both the north and south, to provide seats and burial rights for the aforementioned gentlemen, and that these gentlemen, their families, their tenants, and their servants, should pay for the burial within the aisles of the church, at a cost of three shillings and four pence, such monies to be paid to the Church Warden of the day. Notwithstanding this agreement, Henry Mainwaring still maintained his seats in the chancel and the right to be buried there, although at a greater cost of five shillings.

In 1629, Archbishop Harsnetts of York carried out a metropolitan visitation and many puritan clergy and parishioners were prosecuted, some even from Goostrey, where the Church Wardens were threatened with an interdict if they did not put affairs in order.

In 1667 and 1711, further agreements were concluded for further “out-lies” to be built, at the expense of, and for the use of, Edmund Jodrell. These appear to have been located on the south side, between “Booths Ile” and the porch. The Registers refer to many ministers and curates officiating during this period. A burial in 1617 is signed Josephus Becke. Following a visitation in 1634, Mr Tudman, Vicar of Sandbach, noted that William Hoult, Minister of Goostrey, had not read divine service upon holidays.

In 1645, Zachary Crofton, a notable Puritan writer, preached many sermons at Goostrey, where he was not properly settled at this time, and in 1648, the celebrated Henry Newcome arrived in Goostrey. Henry arrived with his family on November 23rd and lived in some rooms at Francis Hobson’s near the chapel for six months. A memorandum in the Register confirms that all within the Chappelry of Goostree in the five townships of Barnshaw, Goostree, Blackden, Twemlow and Lees did unanimously agree and consent to the appointment of Mr Henry Newcome. He later moved to Kermincham Hall where he was given several rooms by Col Henry Mainwaring. In his autobiography, he writes: “I went every Lord’s Day in the morning to Goostree and got thither in time, and preached twice a day, and was well able to do it being then in my youth and strength.”

It was recorded on October 18th 1649, he refused to give communion to Capt John Baskerville of Old Withington, because of his frequent drinking, and he also barred Mr John Kinsey of Blackden for the same reason.

Newcome married Elizabeth, daughter of Peter Mainwaring of Smallwood, on 6th July 1648, and his first child, a daughter, was born at Kermincham on April 24th 1650. Henry and his family left Goostrey to go to Gawsworth for, whilst he was obviously a popular man within the parish, it appears the living was poor and did not include a house. Henry is recorded to have commented after the execution of Charles I, that “A general sadness is put upon us all” and he felt unable to preach the following Sabbath. These were brave words when related to the fact that he had been living as a guest of Col Henry Mainwaring, a parliamentary squire, who had fought bravely during the

Nantwich campaign of 1643 – 1644. Col Mainwaring later withdrew from the war, many say because of jealousy of Sir William Brereton, who entirely ousted him from the position of county leader in the first civil war.

Who succeeded Henry Newcome is in doubt. However, in 1653, Mr Thomas Edge was appointed minister of Goostrey. He also left to go to Gawsworth, a parish which appears to have provided a better living at that time. This is also confirmed by the comings and goings over the next 40 years. Edward Mainwaring, John Buckley, John Worthington, John Yarwood, John Alcock, John Barber, Edward Hough, Robert Johnson, Hugh Jennings and Messrs Brooks and Nabbs are all mentioned within the register and Church Wardens Accounts.

The Church at this time of Civil War suffered badly from the lack of resident curates and various preachers were hired. A Mr Hill was paid £2 6s 8d to preach for nine Sundays. A new pulpit was built at a cost of £3 11s 6d and an hour glass purchased in 1645 at a cost of 1/-. Much repair work was carried out to the building, as confirmed by the accounts of 1648, and we must assume that this was a direct result of the Civil War. New purchases were also made in 1662: 12/- for the supply and delivery of the New Communion Book, 16s 3d for new lead to the font and £1 14s for the purchase of surplices.

Local families did not escape from the Civil War and the resultant conflicting loyalties. Laurence Booth of Twemlow, the younger son of John Booth, was accused of siding with the King, deserting his estate and fleeing to the King's garrison at Chester. Following statements made by Richard Brooke, James Bullen and Philip Downes confirming these facts, his part of the estate was sequestered to cover the fine of £172.

It is the beginning of the 18th century that we obtain conclusive evidence that the church in Goostrey was constructed in timber with clay in-fill finished in plaster and lath. It had a small tower, presumably of timber construction, with a slated steeple. The tower had a clock and three bells.

We can only assume that the original construction had been started in the early 15th century when timber was readily available, especially in the forested parts of Cheshire. The ease of hauling oak trunks minor distances, compared with the transporting of loads of stone from further afield, obviously was an important factor. It also had a lychgate with a slate roof. A new church wall

was constructed in 1750 by George Warton, a local bricksetter, and many private donations were made to improve the fittings.

Thirteen yards of cloth were purchased for new surplices and a further 12/- spent on making them up. A tankard was purchased for communion and a new basin for the font. Mr John Booth of Twemlow gave a new pulpit cloth and cushion, and a new bible and prayer book. Henry Hobson purchased a new clock, and Dorothy Jodrell of Twemlow a new silver salver for use at communion.

We can only visualize the quality and detailing of the old church and one must assume that it would have been equal to St Oswald's of Lower Peover or St James and St Paul at Marton. St Oswald's originally had aisles under one roof until 1852. St James and St Paul, also built in the middle of the 14th Century, has a single roof span with low eaves, caused by frequent extensions. However, it is generally accepted that the eaves would have been even lower before 1840 with windows consisting of two lights and not three.

St Luke's, Goostrey, would have faced similar problems with the many extensions to the north and south aisles carried out between 1650 and 1750, and one can only wonder whether the alternative of lifting the roof levels was considered prior to demolition in 1792.

This appears to have been the decision taken at St Luke's, Holmes Chapel, around 1705, where what is an exceptionally large perpendicular timber church, lately clad in brick, appears to show evidence of the nave posts being heightened enabling the eaves height to be increased.

Goostrey, however, did not follow suit. The Rev W H Massie, writing in 1854, said "My old cure at Goostrey has a black-and-white chapel which, at the least interesting era of national architecture, was supplanted at a cost of £1,700, raised by the rates, of a brick nave and tower from a design by the village bricksetter. On enquiry, I found that the bitter cold of the thin walls determined their abandonment." His comments on the state of national architecture was obviously his own point of view, not supported by the facts of the day.

Many local architects were carrying out work equal to that of any in London at that time. Thomas Harrison, born in 1744, whose buildings at Chester

Castle are among the best of their date (1785 – 1885) in England, also designed new gates for the City of Chester to replace the mediaeval gates, fine houses at Stockport and in Knutsford, the grand and taciturn Sessions House. This was also the period when many fine buildings were constructed, Stockport Infirmary, Macclesfield Town Hall and, closer to Goostrey, the utilitarian, but still classical, workhouses at Arclid and Sandbach.

Massie obviously thought little of the architectural merit of the new church in Goostrey, and later became involved as the instigator of the new church of St John the Evangelist at Byley. Certain references attribute the role of architect, builder and clerk of works, to Massie himself, however, this is disputed by the Incorporated Church Buildings Society, who gave the architect as J Matthews.

Perhaps, in retrospect, the demolition of the old church was ill-timed. However, one must assume that the main building was so badly decayed that there was little alternative. Another factor may have been the change in the form of religion with the emphasis now on the spoken word.

It was widely accepted at this time that churches should be converted into rectangular, galleried, preaching houses, and in view of this consideration, it was obviously cheaper to pull down the existing building and rebuild. This happened throughout the country and the majority of churches rebuilt were small and generally unpleasing in their external views, mostly constructed by a local builder, whose knowledge of church building was limited to domestic construction, using the local bricks of dull grey or insipid red.

Generally speaking, church design in Cheshire between 1701 and 1820 was not of high standard, failing to match those being achieved elsewhere. There were exceptions; Christ Church, Alsager, and St John the Evangelist, Knutsford, being two.

In Goostrey, we have inherited a building with a plain exterior of mainly local brick, with some stone detailing, and originally the interior would have been much the same. In 1876 the church was restored and the interior refurnished. It seems likely that the pulpit, lectern and sanctuary panelling were put in then. A new organ was given and a console in 1947 when the pipes were moved to the gallery.

In 1961 a new altar was given and other furniture for the chancel which was rearranged to give more space between the choir pews. The stained glass, which may aptly be called post-Raphaelite, dates from about 1876, the east window being given in memory of Egerton Leigh, the second of that name to live at Jodrell Hall, the south west window being in memory of Mary Susan Armitstead, the young wife of William George, vicar of Goostrey from 1860 to 1907. They married in 1865; she died in 1868.

Across from the church is the school. The earliest reference to a school is in 1640 when it was repaired. It was then next to the north wall of the churchyard where the old vicarage now stands, in a house that was also used as the courthouse for Goostrey Manor. This appears to have been pulled down in 1703. It may be then that the pupils moved across to the old school house, which is one of the oldest buildings in the village. In 1856 the main part of the present buildings were erected when the old days of a schoolmaster who was also the parish clerk came to an end. The last of these schoolmasters, Jonathon Harding, is buried by the west end of the church; he had held his office for fifty-six years. Another chapter was opened in 1977, with the building of a new infants department across the main road. With this the old connection of church and school was severed.

THE GOOSTREY YEW

In the Churchyard at Goostrey within feet of the entrance to the Church is a very old and most interesting Yew tree of enormous girth, which until recently does not seem to have attracted much attention. But it is almost the same girth as the famous yew in Selbourne Churchyard referred to by Gilbert White in his "Natural History of Selbourne", which still draws crowds despite having been severely damaged in the great gale of January 1990. The age of the Selbourne yew has been estimated by Mr Alan Meredith, a leading expert on dating trees, to be about 1400 years, but this cannot really be used as any guide in the case of the Goostrey yew because of the differences in soil and climatic conditions.

The probability is that the first Goostrey Church would have been built on the rising ground on which the yew was growing, and we do not know exactly, when that was. The Short History of Goostrey, a copy of which can be seen on the table at the back of the Church, records that "Goostrey Chapel was built before 1220" and as far as we know that was the first place of worship on the site. We are of course in 1992 celebrating the bicentenary of the present church, and its predecessor was a typical black and white half-timbered Cheshire Church. It is not certain when the black and white Church was built, but it is known that there was already a Church of some sort in Goostrey in 1220 because it appears in the earliest known list of diocesan Churches made in connection with a tax levied by Pope Nicholas in that year.

There was also a small Chapel in what is now Goostrey built by Thomas, Abbot of St Werburghs, under a licence from the Abbot of Dieulacres, then the owners of the advowson of Sandbach. This licence authorised Thomas to have a Chapel in his Manor-house of Barnshaw. It is known that monks from St Werburghs were sent to Goostrey for rest and recuperation and that they stayed at Barnshaw Hall and sometimes at the Old School House, and the Chapel would have been built for their use. Abbot Thomas is generally supposed to have been Thomas De Capenhurst who was Abbot from 1245 to 1269, so that the Chapel would have been built after 1245 when there was already an ecclesiastical building beside the yew. In fact the licence from the Abbot of Dieulacres makes express mention of the "Chapels" belonging to the Mother Church of Sandbach, which could only refer to the existing ecclesiastical buildings, one at Holmes Chapel and one at Goostrey. Abbott Thomas's Chapel was almost certainly the Chapel at Barnshaw Hall, which survived until quite recently and was only demolished between the wars.

There would have been nothing unusual, in fact rather the reverse, in the church, when it was built, being put beside a yew tree because of the reverence then felt for yews. They were objects of veneration in pre-Christian times and used for both worship and meeting places. An old yew which has not been cut or shaped puts out branches for a great distance and these grow down to the ground where they root and form anchors or perhaps buttresses, for their parent tree, and then spread again. In some cases the covered area has been big enough to give shelter for a gathering of four or five hundred people. These special trees were places of meeting and worship in pre-Christian days and were often in dominating sites and sites of local significance like ancient burial mounds.

Mr. Alan Meredith himself visited Goostrey in January 1992 and examined not only the yew, but a very interesting painting of the Church made in 1853 which gives an indication of the probable development of the yew at that time. It was a lovely unspoiled tree then, but sadly it has been subsequently cut back in an unnecessarily drastic way, no doubt in the interests of the church's safety in southwesterly gales. But as a result the bole is only about 5 feet tall before branching out compared with twice that or more in the case of the Selbourne yew. Measurements taken by two interested members of the Parish independently both arrived at a girth of 26 feet, which is a few inches larger than the Selbourne yew as measured by Mr. Meredith himself in 1981, but the Goostrey one, possibly because of the way it was cut back, has become "fluted" by epicormic growth, and to allow for this it seemed reasonable to reduce the diameter implied by a girth of 26 feet by about 4 inches or half the depth of the "fluting" at each end, and this in turn implies a true circumference of about 24 feet. Having regard to this factor and to information supplied to him before his visit and to the evidence as to the size of the tree 140 years ago deducible from the painting, Mr. Meredith assessed the age of the tree at 1200 years. On this footing it would have been planted towards the end of the 8th century AD during the reign of King Offa II of Mercia, in whose kingdom the Parish of Goostrey would then have lain. The other very interesting comment that Mr. Meredith made came from his examination of the painting. It was done before either the road that runs past the Red Lion or the road which runs down Church Bank were constructed. A good deal of the mound on which the Church stood must have been cut away to make these roads, and, as shown in the painting, it extended much further towards both the school house and the Red Lion and formed a symmetrical curve with the Church at the highest point. Mr. Meredith noticed this immediately and said that the shape as shown in the painting was that of a typical ancient burial mound, which it almost certainly was.

The Goostrey yew then was an old, mature tree when the 100 years war broke

out, and it might have been an attractive speculation that the local bowmen of Cheshire, especially any from the neighbourhood, could have used bows manufactured from wood from this tree during the French wars. We know for example that William Jodrell was in France with a group of bowmen, who would almost certainly have been local. Unfortunately some experts believe that the English Yew, splendid tree though it was, and is, did not produce wood of sufficient quality for the manufacture of longbows, for which all yew wood was imported from Spain and Portugal. This view has been challenged, but there are other reasons for supposing that English Yews were not used for longbows. In his book "The Complete Guide to Trees of Britain and Northern Europe" the well-known tree expert Alan Mitchell, discussing yew trees in churchyards, wrote "Had the yews been grown for longbow wood it would be hard to explain why one or two were not used in nearly every churchyard. If the branches only were used (and they are generally far more suitable than the boles) there would be no primary branches found today, nor would it be likely that multiple boles and low forks would be so frequent". Alas, we cannot reasonably speculate that bows from Goostrey were used at Agincourt.

Written in 1992 by Arthur Jones and Rod Wainwright