

St Oswald's Church, Lower Peover



Parish Profile 2019



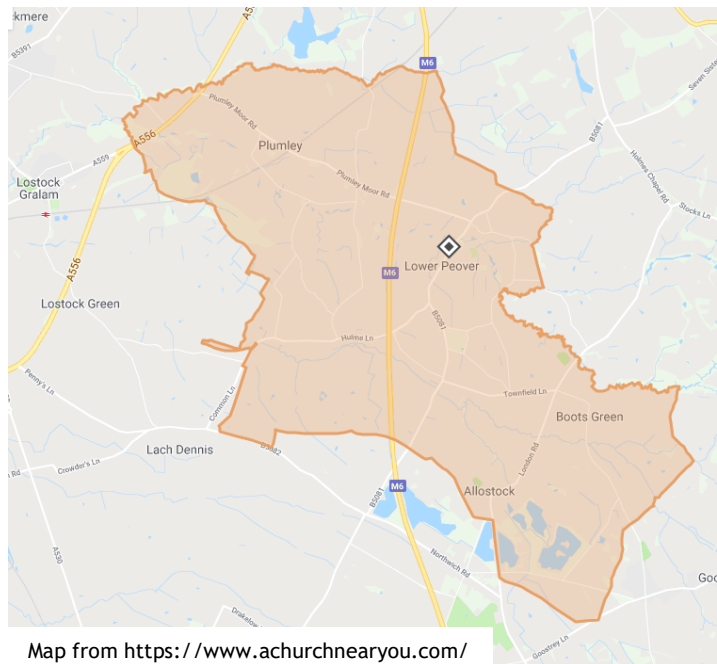
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The Parish

The Parish of St Oswald's consists of the 3 villages of Lower Peover, Plumley and Allostock. It is a very attractive rural parish. The landscape is dominated by fields for arable/dairy farming, hedgerows, and a large number of deciduous hedgerow trees with a scattering of small woods lakes and ponds and the delightful Peover Eye trout stream running through. The local shopping centres are Northwich, Knutsford and Holmes Chapel and the Parish has excellent road links, the A556, the M6 and the M56. The railway station at Plumley connects the area to Chester and Manchester and the airports at Manchester and Liverpool are easily accessible.

There are many businesses within the parish ranging from large office complex to businesses run from home. Agriculture and Horticulture are very important to the area not only as they are businesses in their own right but they are to a great extent responsible for creating the beautiful landscape enjoyed by the Parish. Housing is a mixture of low cost, medium sized and large detached dwellings providing accommodation for retired, professional, executive and manual people.



Lower Peover is home to approximately 430 residents and is where our beautiful 13th century timber framed church is situated. It has a well-stocked Village Store and Post Office, a children's play area, 2 Public Houses, the Crown Inn and the Bells of Peover, and a function room the Oak Tree of Peover. It has two schools in the vicinity of the church, The Little House Montessori Nursery and Lower Peover CofE (Aided) Primary School. The primary school hall which is adjacent to the church is used regularly by the Parish Council, the Parochial Church Council, the W.I. etc. for meetings and for some Church functions. Lower Peover is made up of Nether Peover, (Cheshire West and Chester council) and Peover Inferior, (Cheshire East Council) and it neighbours the parish of Over Peover, which is made up of Peover Superior and Peover Heath, which forms the joint benefice with Lower Peover. Lower Peover also borders the Parish of Plumley Toft and Bexton and the Parish of Allostock.

Plumley has 398 households and 865 residents, it has a well-stocked Village Stores and Post Office and has its own Methodist Chapel rebuilt in 1887. It has 2 Public Houses, The Smoker Inn and The Golden Pheasant, a Garden Centre, and a Riding School. It also has its own Village Hall which is maintained to a high standard and is used by various local organisations, such as the W.I., Flower Club, Parish Council etc. and benefits from 2

recently refurbished Tennis Courts. Situated within the Parish is Holford Hall, a magnificent large moated timber framed House, built around 1600 for Mary Cholmondley nee Holford on the death of her husband Hugh. It fell into disrepair in the 19th century and was owned by I.C.I. for much of the last century. It is now in private ownership and has been restored to its former glory as a wedding venue.

Allostock is a small rural village consisting of 300 households with a population of around 816. There is a small shop the Boundary Store which also has a B and B and Water Park and sells timber sheds and office buildings. There is also 1 Public House The 3 Greyhounds, and the nearby walk around Shakerley Mere. There is a well maintained Village Hall which is used for many village events both public and private and various community activities. Situated in Allostock is Hulme Hall. The rich history surrounding the property dates back to the 15th century having been the Cheshire home of the Grosvenor and Shakerley families. The Hall enclosed by a picturesque moat was owned by I.C.I. until recently but has now gone into private ownership and has been fully restored.

Schools

Lower Peover C.E Primary school has strong links with St Oswald's Church and has always developed very positive relationships with the vicar. The Vicar works closely with the headteacher to develop collective worship, supporting the delivery of key concepts of the Religious Education curriculum, being integral when writing the self evaluation summary for a SIAMS inspection, being a supportive and effective link governor including pastoral support for staff and parents as required.

The school has been grateful for using the church every Friday for collective worship, led by the Vicar and for Christian festivals of Harvest, Christmas, Christingle and Easter. We are particularly grateful for our annual Communion with Key Stage 2. The school enjoys supporting the annual Church Fete. We are looking forward to working with a new Vicar and developing the future of Lower Peover Primary School and St. Oswald's Church together.

The Little House is a small Montessori Nursery School for children aged 2 to 5 years. It is located in the original Old School opposite the church.

There is a very strong Christian ethos within the school and children are regularly taken into the church to celebrate special services such as Harvest, Remembrance, Easter and Christingle. The children perform a very traditional bible based Nativity each year to which all are invited. The school values a good relationship with the vicar who is invited into the school on a weekly basis to tell the children a bible story.



“We are keen supporters of church and display a frieze in the church on a regular basis”.

Secondary schools While there are no secondary schools within the parish, it is within easy reach of Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School and Sixth-Form College and of Knutsford Multi-Academy Trust as well as several independent schools.

St Oswald's Church



The Church is located in a very popular area and, as it is kept open during daylight hours, it is extensively visited. Its physical location forms part of a traditional village triangle of Church, Pub and School. Its Grade 1 listing ensures it appears in many guide books, including *England's Thousand Best Churches*. As a result, it is visited by people from many parts of the world. There is a public footpath through the church grounds which is very well used.

Worship at St Oswald's

Regular services

St Oswald's has three regular services every Sunday at 8am, 11am and 6.30pm.

The 8am service is a traditional service of Holy Communion according to the Book of Common Prayer.

The 11am service is the main act of worship but the form of service varies according to the Sunday of the month.

Holy Communion is celebrated on the 1st and 3rd Sundays, following Common Worship Order One in contemporary language. These are family friendly services and children are encouraged to join parents at the altar rail during communion to receive a blessing.

The 11am service on the 2nd and 5th Sundays are family services using the Common Worship Service of the Word while the 4th Sunday may follow the traditional BCP service of Morning Prayer. All 11am services are followed by coffee in the side chapel for the congregation to meet more informally.

At 6.30pm every Sunday there is a service of Evensong with sung psalm and canticles. On certain Sundays this is followed by a short service of Holy Communion.

A weekday communion service usually takes place on Thursday mornings at 10am.

Special Services

During the year we celebrate three main rural festivals.

In January a plough is brought into church for the **Plough Service** and members of the farming community ask for blessing on their work in the coming year.





Rogation is celebrated with outdoor observances around the community, sometimes at farms or in the school grounds.

The **Harvest Festival** is held on the second Sunday in October and children are invited to bring gifts of foodstuffs. The gifts, along with the produce decorating the church, are donated to the Salvation Army in Northwich for distribution.

Remembrance Sunday is marked with the two minute silence taking place at the war memorial outside before progressing into church for the remainder of the service.

There is a family **Gift Service** on the second Sunday in December when children's gifts are brought to be donated to needy families by the Salvation Army.

On the Sunday before Christmas, evensong is replaced by a **Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols**. On **Christmas Eve** a communion service is held at 11.30pm, while on **Christmas Day** there is a communion service at 8am and a family service at 11am, followed by a short communion service.

In the past Compline has been celebrated in the church on a weeknight during **Lent** and it is hoped to continue this custom. **Maundy Thursday** is marked with an evening service at 8pm with an 11am service taking place on **Good Friday**.

Attendance

Attendance at all services has a tendency to fluctuate. In general, the 8am and 6.30pm Sunday services each attract an average congregation of around 11. In 2018, adult attendance at the regular 11am service ranged from 21 to 65 with an average of around



40. The number of children present ranges from none at some services to 10 at others. Special services attract much larger congregations ranging from 90 to 150 adults and 12 to 15 children. Around half of our regular congregation lives outside the parish but has a strong and longstanding commitment to St Oswald's.

Occasional Offices

Due to its setting and architecture, St Oswald's enjoys frequent weddings and baptisms. In 2018, 14 marriages and 18 baptisms took place in the church. There were also 11 funerals, 7 services of thanksgiving and 5 burials of ashes in 2018. These are seen as key opportunities for making contact and building relationships.

Children's Ministry

This is currently under review as we strive to meet the needs of the young families in the congregation. In recent years, Messy Church has taken place once a month initially at 9.30 on a Sunday morning but more recently at 3.30 on a Sunday afternoon in the school. The Hands Together Club family activities have also taken place in the school during the 11am service on the fourth Sunday of the month. We are conscious that the means of attracting children and young people to our church benefits from leadership by the incumbent.

Discipleship

Both daytime and evening groups take place at intervals throughout the year. Many parishioners have taken part in the Alpha course over the years. The Pilgrim course has also been followed by several people. Currently there is a regular Bible study group which meets weekly for six evenings three times a year to focus on a particular book of the Bible. This is an opportunity for reflection and discussion drawing on 'The Bible for Everyone' series supported by video material from Yale Divinity School and St John's Timeline project. In addition, there is usually a daytime Lent course, the programme for which varies from year to year.

Confirmation services have usually taken place every other year, the most recent being in December 2017 at which six children and two adults were confirmed by Bishop Keith Sinclair.



Lay involvement

Church life and ministry is enhanced by our lay reader, Ann Barlow.

We have two churchwardens and one assistant churchwarden, who along with a dedicated team, look after the fabric of the church, assist with the pastoral duties of the vicar and help organise and verger at our many baptisms, weddings and funerals.

We have a robust Treasurer and efficient Secretary, along with an active PCC comprising 24 members who meet bi-monthly throughout the year.

Our services are supported by 18 sidespeople who meet and greet the congregation and distribute and collect service and hymn books. In addition, we have 24 volunteers to read the lessons on a regular rota.

We also have coffee, flower and cleaning teams who organise their own rotas and do a wonderful job keeping St. Oswald's well catered, tidy and attractive.

We are also fortunate in that we have a very effective group of volunteers who undertake general maintenance and repair work. These consist of people who have a wide range of skills and talents and are very able and willing to undertake the majority of maintenance and repair work which may arise. The work covers many areas and extends from building, churchyard and gravestone maintenance through to minor repairs.

Music

Our church is very fortunate in possessing a recently restored pipe organ with a recording facility. This organ is also easier to play for those who are really pianists. There is one main organist and two relief organists who, between them cover the music for all services and most of the weddings and funerals. A strong mixed choir comes together for festivals. We use Common Praise as our main hymnbook and we hold a CCLI

license which enables us to supplement this with words and music from other hymn books such as Mission Praise and Hymns Old and New. We would hope to develop our music further and form a singing/music group who would regularly lead the congregation in singing the liturgy as well as hymns at the 11am service. The congregation at Evensong enjoy singing the psalms and canticles from the Book of Common Prayer and it is expected that this will continue.

Bell ringers

The bell tower at St Oswald's includes 6 bells, ranging in weight from 245kg to 615kg. The bells are rung and maintained by an enthusiastic band of around 20 local ringers, and, when need arises, by ringers from local parishes. We ring for both Sunday services and special days in the Church calendar as well as special events such as the Armistice and the Queen's Jubilee. A special ring is planned to mark the 75th Anniversary of VE Day in 2020. We practice on most Wednesday evenings and are always happy to welcome new ringers or those wishing to return to this rewarding and fun activity.

Finance

The annual cost of running the church is about £76,000. The total reserves of the church at the end of 2018 stood at £152,910. In recent years there has been a noticeable decline in income over expenditure. In the short term this can be covered by our reserves.

Income from general collections, donations and gift aid is £49,000 of which £26,000 is planned giving.

Other income is generated through events including the Church Fete, carol singing and active fund raising.

The church has undertaken three key projects during the last five years:

- The restoration and upgrade of the organ (£50,000 raised)
- The building of an outside toilet (£78,000 raised)
- Currently the removal of the pews (£8,000 raised)

Major costs include the Parish Share (£50,141 in 2019), churchyard maintenance, heating, lighting and the vicarage.

The church allocates £3,000 per annum for charitable giving and in 2018 gave £4,200.

Financial Management.

As part of our financial management we now hold in reserve a sum of £90,000 based on a full calendar year's expenditure to cover general running costs and in addition hold a sum of £20,000 for building and/or fabric maintenance. These figures are capable of being misinterpreted as holding monies in excess of the norm, but are based on Diocesan advice and take into account the situation of being responsible for a grade 1 listed building and the whole of the church grounds being located within a conservation area.

Fundraising and Social Events

We are very lucky to inherit this lovely church here in Lower Peover, but it does cost a lot to maintain. To this end we are constantly fundraising so that we can pass it on to the next generation in top condition. We have an active fundraising committee who are always thinking of new ways of making money. Our main fundraiser is the Church Fete



which takes place on the first Saturday of July every year. It usually raises in the region of £4000 which goes towards the upkeep of the church.

As well as accessing as many grants as possible we have also had cheese and wine evenings, coffee mornings, bangers and beans nights, pancake and quiz evenings, harvest lunches, plays, afternoon teas, pudding and quiz evenings, bridge drives, musical concerts, Christmas tree festivals, stocks and shares evenings, walks and pilgrimages. Our last event has been a celebration with flowers to commemorate the 750th anniversary of St. Oswald's Church.

The projects we have raised money towards include the refurbishment of the church roof, the walls and tower, and the installation of a new stained glass window in the bell tower to commemorate the millennium. More recently we have added a new toilet and have fully restored the church organ. Our current project is the removal of 2 church pews to make room for wheelchair access and in the near future the church will need painting inside and out. We are looking to maintain this momentum and are constantly looking for new volunteers to assist us.

Communication

Services and events are publicised in a printed weekly notice sheet along with the readings for the Sunday, distributed at every service and available in the church during the week.

A magazine is produced ten times a year, with a dedicated volunteer editor gathering and preparing material ready for printing. Local contributions are supplemented with material supplied through Parish Pump. Copies of the Diocesan News are circulated along with the magazine.

The church also has a website (peoverchurches.org.uk) as well as a presence on A Church Near You.

The Church Building

We are proud of our ancient church building which is generally "in good heart". Due to its age, construction and listing it is not the easiest of buildings to maintain. Extensive structural maintenance work was undertaken around the turn of the century comprising generally the complete refurbishment of the roof, extensive work on the walls, the windows and the tower. As a result of that work, the current building maintenance is largely limited to routine housekeeping and minor works.

The pipe organ was completely rebuilt 2015. At the time of rebuilding facilities were incorporated to enable the recording of played music (by recording of key functions) and

the facility to replay recordings using the pipe instrument. This facility will enable the use of the organ for services if an organist is not available.

A new separate building has been constructed 2017 to house a toilet and sextons store. As there is no local sewer a small package treatment plant has been provided which is operational but requires periodic desludging. The sexton's store is equipped with a sink and hot water facilities.

Internally the Church furnishings and fitments are in generally good order. Due to the building age and style there is the continual need for routine maintenance of a minor nature. We have proposals to redecorate internally and externally and to replace the carpeting in the near future.

We are currently carrying out works to improve the accessibility for disabled users and the interior and exterior decoration does now require attention. We plan to carry out this work in the summer of 2020.

The graveyard

The Church has a large and well maintained Churchyard. The burial ground has space for approximately 25 years based on recent use, and is notionally divided between full graves and ashes burial plots. Currently we are proposing to provide "Garden of remembrance" area where ashes are able to be buried with a simple plaque. This will significantly increase the current capacity and ease maintenance. The plot records are known to be correct and plans have recently been updated to reflect the current area available in detail. All documents except the current burial register and plans are held at the Chester records office.

We currently operate a contract mowing system which covers the routine grass cutting maintenance. There is a significant amount of additional work which is carried out on a volunteer basis.

A brief history of St Oswald's

St. Oswald's church was originally built in 1269, the site possibly being chosen because it is near what was probably an ancient burial ground - Barrows Brow. It was founded by Richard Grosvenor of Hulme Hall (approx. one mile away) and was then a modest chapel made of the readily available timber rather than stone. This part of Peover (Nether and Inferior) along with Allostock and Plumley formed the southern tip of the large mediaeval parish of Great Budworth (approx 7 miles away) so the church may have been built here out of convenience, also due to the growing number of villagers.

The church was dedicated to St. Oswald, who was King of Northumbria, a converted Christian, who died in 642. He was considered a patron of travellers and soldiers and it is possible that the party which travelled with his remains from Oswestry to Lindisfarne rested at Peover, and this may have influenced Richard Grosvenor centuries later.

Early churches had very little furniture other than an altar. A font was added in 1322. We do not know where the present font came from but it may be from Norton Priory. The other necessary piece of furniture was the chest in which were stored books, vessels and robes. There is a bog oak dug-out chest in the Shakerley chapel which is probably older than the church. It is carved out of one piece of a tree trunk and rumour has it

that the prospective bride of a farmer had to be able to lift the lid with one hand in order to prove her worth! Pews were introduced from 1549 onwards and were mostly gated to keep out draughts and had rushes on the floor for warmth.

There was no regular priest at first and the priest from Great Budworth would visit, but by the mid 15th century a resident priest was installed and lived where the public house 'The Bells of Peover' stands. The church was not licensed for marriages until 1570.

The church had a side chapel added in the late 1400's by Robert Grosvenor but that was destroyed by Henry V111 following the dissolution of the monasteries (1536-9).

In 1582 the tower was pulled down and replaced with a larger one of Alderley stone (Alderley Edge is approx 10 miles away). The former tower housed 2 bells, and by 1625 it housed 4 bells. Currently there are 6 bells in the tower.

Three families descended from Robert Grosvenor: the Shakerleys who inherited Hulme Hall; the Holfords who inherited Holford Hall and the Leycesters who inherited Tabley land. Repairs and enlargements on the south side were carried out by the Shakerley family and the chapel (the Hulme Chancel) was added in the early 1600's. Meanwhile the Holford family were enlarging the north side and in 1624, Mary Holford and her husband Sir Hugh Cholmondeley built the Holford Chapel which now houses the organ. The choir stalls bearing their crest were put in after 1686.

In 1658 Sir Robert Leicester of Tabley felt that the priest's stipend of £9 per annum was too low, and arranged for it to be raised to £38 for a married priest, and in return the Leycesters would nominate the future ministers, thus becoming 'Patrons' of St. Oswalds. This continued until the death of Lt. Col. John Leicester-Warren in 1975.

It is thought that the Leicester family provided the pulpit, some parts of which were believed to have been incorporated into the present one in 1852.

Until the 19th century musicians played in a gallery at the back of the church, reached via steps in the bell tower. The gallery was removed in 1853. At that time the architect A. Salvin was employed to advise on alterations to the church which included replacing the single broad roof by three gables, and the half timbering was continued on all sides, not just the north side, leaving us with a church looking essentially as it is now.

The incumbent of Lower Peover is a nominative trustee of two parish charities established by historical legacies.

The Richard Comberbach Trust, also known as the Bucklow School Charity of Richard Comberbach and His Wife is constituted by deed of Trust and is a registered charity.

The Charity owns Lower Peover Primary School and 'School House' which comprises one building (Grade 2 listed); the school field; and part of The Cobbles from the building currently known as 'The Little House' school to the Lych gate and up to the side of 'School House'.

Richard Comberbach's ambition had been to found a school. Thus in 1709, with the assistance of his wife who had private means, he bought a plot of land on which to build a school. This plot was by the south-west corner of the churchyard and the building still stands there currently named 'The Little House'.

The school was opened in 1710 and Richard Comberbach and his wife taught there together.

In his will, written in 1720, Richard Comberbach left money for the provision and maintenance of a school teacher, or teachers, to teach the children of the poor within the Parish of Lower Peover. At his wife's request, some money was to be designated for building repairs and for classroom materials such as books. And so in 1722 it became an endowed school registered as an educational charity under the title of 'Foundation of Richard Cumberbach and Wife' and managed by the Trustees.

Richard Comberbach, with his wife also contributed to a fund whereby bread was made available for the poor within the church. These bread shelves can be seen in the church, near the font.

Since 1993 the original school has become a school once again - a private Nursery School (The Little House). When the old School was sold, the proceeds went to the Trust, and became part of the endowment.

The Trustees continue to have a responsibility towards maintaining the fabric of Lower Peover School, 'School House' and adjacent land. Their aim is to support Lower Peover School in all respects.

The Allostock, Lower Peover and Plumley Aid Fund

The object of the Charity is to offer relief to "Persons resident in the area of benefit who are in conditions of need, hardship or distress". The area of benefit is defined as being resident in the parishes of Allostock, Nether Peover, Peover Inferior and Plumley. The Charity originated in the 18th century when certain landowners or benefactors from those parishes provided sums of money for that relief. Other charitable organisations followed during the 19th century and eventually these were amalgamated under the present name. The benefactors included Richard Comberbach, Thomas Jennings, Davenport Meir, Jane Parker, John Tomlinson, Edward Acton, Mary Antrobus and Peter Shackerley. In recent years the charity has visited and provided modest monetary gifts, or flowers and chocolates to recipients.

The trustees hold a formal annual meeting (usually November) and review the potential best use of the limited funds available. This presents the opportunity to review in particular the elderly residents and possible pastoral needs etc.

The Vicarage

The Vicarage sits 100yds or so from the church down The Cobbles on Crown Lane, within walking distance of the local shop, pubs and primary school. It is an imposing four-bedroomed detached house set back from the road up a gravel driveway. There are two reception rooms, a study, large kitchen, a downstairs toilet and cloakroom and a utility area. Outside there is a large double garage. The large, secluded garden has lovely views across open countryside to the rear.



Our hopes for the future

We would like to see our church growing as a spiritual community while developing our resources both financially and materially.

We are hoping and praying for a leader

- who is secure in their faith, spiritually inspiring and with the ability to communicate a living theology at all levels
- who will actively nurture and develop our church and its congregation
- with excellent people skills and an ability to integrate into the community at all levels
- with a flexible approach to parish ministry and its associated demands
- who is sensitive to existing traditions of worship while responding positively to the needs of a diverse community
- with an understanding of the needs of a rural parish which includes a substantial professional commuter population
- who will make people of all ages and all walks of life feel valued and who has a good sense of humour.