

St. Leonard's Church

Warmingham

Background and Brief History



The year 2007 witnessed the biggest building activity at St. Leonard's, Warmingham since the current church was built in 1870. With a generous grant from English Heritage the roof was replaced.

This leaflet gives a brief history of the church to help visitors understand something of the background to the present church building. We hope you enjoy your visit to this beautiful and tranquil spot where worship has taken place for at least seven centuries.

“Poor Parish, Proud People – New Church, Old Steeple”

The above ancient expression, once applied to the inhabitants, is possibly unknown to many of the present generation. Part of its origin dates back to the seventeenth century for the Reverend Daniel Appleford, who frequently committed his thoughts to paper, once described the inhabitants as “poor, but proud”. The second part of this couplet was obviously added much later, for twice during the past two hundred years the main body of the church has been rebuilt, although the tower remains much the same as it did when it was built of hand-made brick in 1715. Nevertheless, even here there have been certain modifications to the belfry windows and battlements.

Brick and stone are combined to provide a building of great charm, marking the spot where a church has stood for at least seven and possibly nine hundred years. After the Norman Conquest of 1066 estates in Warmingham were granted to Randulphus, ancestor of the Mainwarings, and later to William Trussell, formerly of Northampton, through his marriage to Maud. These two families appear to have dominated the scene at a time when detailed records are virtually non-existent, but we are informed in Earwork’s History of Cheshire, that the country seat of the Trussell family lay immediately to the south side of the church. It is known that during the reign of Edward III (1327-77) licence was granted to Sir John Trussell to fortify the building. Although clay was excavated from this area at one time to make bricks it is quite possible that the earthworks, so clearly visible from the top of the church tower, were formerly in existence for less than peaceful reasons.

About the year 1500 Elizabeth Trussell, wife of the Earl of Oxford, sold her estate in Warmingham to Christopher Hatton KG – Vice Chamberlain and member of Parliament for Higham Ferrars. It is from this period that the church records give a more comprehensive picture of life in a village community, thanks to the meticulous way in which the ministers of that time attended to their clerical duties. Later during the same century they were sold to Sir Randolph Crewe, but gradually over the intervening years all the properties have been disposed of, although the family still retains the rights of patronage. The fact that the Crewe family have been closely associated with numerous churches in this area does not detract from their special

interest in Warmingham for during that time, no fewer than five members of the family have given almost one hundred years service as Rectors of Warmingham.

The former church building originally contained four chapels, each representing one of the parishes of Elton, Moston, Tetton and Warmingham. An artist's impression exhibited in the church is that of a half-timbered structure then in existence. It is believed that the building was by no means beyond repair, but of a "mean and unpleasing design" insufficient in size for the congregation.

The present spaciouly proportioned building in the perpendicular style (from the design by Hussey) was erected in 1870. It replaced its brick built predecessor which stood for less than one hundred years. This does not appear to be an act much in keeping with a "poor parish", as all visible evidence tends to point to motives of pride.

Upon entering the church one's eye is immediately attracted to the beautiful East window depicting the agony and compassion of Christ's crucifixion. It was installed to the memory of Canon Blackburne in 1870, a man who gave many devoted years of life to the service of the Parish. As with the more luminous scene of the Ascension in the South Transept, these two windows have quite a history of their own. They were both designed and executed by the firm of Marital et Chamoigneule in the French town of Metz, towards the German border. For a long time they were held up in transit due to the Franco-Prussian war. Eight years later the window in the North Transept was installed to the memory of Ralph and Helen Percival, which shows a composite arrangement of scenes from the life of Christ. As in the case of the second window in memory of the Gresty family, to be found in the South Aisle, this was made by Heaton, Butler and Bayne of London. The final stained glass window in the South Chancel was not installed until 1929. This is to the memory of Sarah Byram by her son John.

In the North East is the children's corner created some thirty years ago. The altar was presented to the memory of Kathleen Stuart, one time resident of Warmingham Grange, the new name given to the old Rectory. Here also is a very interesting brass plaque to the memory of William Lingard (1620) with an inscription well worth reading.

Two beautifully illuminated and illustrated addresses displayed in frames on the rear wall are dated 1888 and 1893 and pay tribute to the commitment of Canon Blackburne as Rector. These addresses not only demonstrate the deep affection in which Canon Blackburne was held, but also the exceptional skills of the artist who created them.

Prior to the building of the school in 1839, lessons were held in the lower portion of the Church Tower. The present clock was installed just after the turn of the century. To haul the huge lead weights to the full height of the tower each week, before the system was electrified, the great key, some two feet in diameter, had to be wound 276 times. High above the clock room hang the six huge bells. Two of these bear the following inscriptions: "God bless the Church and Nation, defend from Kings that are not Church's friend", Thomas Bostock, Thomas Cooper, Thomas Whiteker, C. Wars, 1715 and "God grant that England may be free from Presbytery and Popery", Samuel Holbrooke 1715.

In the back porch, opposite the door leading to the belfry staircase, is a large wooden panel once housed in the Rectory. This gives the names of various benefactors to the school and church. The ironmaster mentioned, Thomas Hall, later moved to the Hermitage, Holmes Chapel to operate the Cranage Mill but he is known to have been at Forge Mills, Warrington in the late 1600s. His generous gift and that of Thomas Clay bear out the belief that the industry, once established, prospered.

The churchyard contains many ancient gravestones and fascinating epitaphs. Near to the rear porch stand the old village cross dating from 1298. For many years no one realised that this was the original cross as a sundial had been placed on top of it. The cross was probably moved to its present position when the old cobbled road going through the village was widened.

We hope that you have found your visit interesting. You may perhaps find an opportunity here for quiet reflection and prayer.