

THE STORY OF  
ST PETER'S CHURCH,  
LEIGHTON-cum-MINSHULL VERNON

Manessele (Minshull Vernon)

Leofnoth held it: he was a free man  
1 hide paying tax: land for one plough:  
1 rider 2 slaves and 2 smallholders have  
1 plough: meadow 1 acre: woodland 1 league long and  
1 league wide: 4 enclosures:  
a hawk's eyrie.

*Domesday Book 1086-8*

Land has been farmed in this area since long before the Norman Conquest and entries in Domesday Book show that both Minshulls were very thriving communities more than one thousand years ago.

After the upheaval of the conquest the land locally was laid waste because the inhabitants fought to resist the French invaders and were put down by force. However, life eventually settled into the Norman pattern of Lord, Knight and peasant, the Lord in this area being William Malbedengor Malbanc, first baron of Wich-Malbanc or Nantwich.

His son, Hugh Malbanc, founded Combermere Abbey. It was from here that a grant was given to provide a simple church in one of the Minshulls and so in time it became Chirchemunschull (c.1190; the earliest extant recording is 1289).

After the death of the third baron of Wich-Malbanc, there being no male heir, his lands were divided amongst his three daughters and Auda, the youngest, inherited this Minshull. Her husband was Warin de Vernon, baron of Shipbroke and he appended his name to Auda's inheritance and so we have Minshull Vernon (c.1200; the earliest extant recording 1308).

## THE FIRST CHURCH

For centuries the people of Minshull Vernon worshipped, were baptised, married and buried in churches of neighbouring townships. Then, in the latter years of William IV, it was noted that the Church in the Nantwich Deanery was able to provide spiritual care and accommodation for divine worship for less than one third of its inhabitants.

Simultaneously a Mr James France France of Bostock Hall drew the attention of the authorities to the Act of Parliament which stated that when a township and surrounding area exceeded one thousand inhabitants a church should be provided.

Therefore, after obtaining the necessary permission from the church authorities, James France France gave two small fields in Leighton township and provided funds to build a small church. These fields – Third Gate Field and Fourth Gate Field, lay alongside the turnpike road from Nantwich to Middlewich, which, in 1840, was known as Gatefield Lane. The church was dedicated to St. Peter and consecrated on 10th February 1840. A new district was assigned on 3rd April 1840 of Leighton in Nantwich parish and Minshull Vernon in Middlewich parish.

There were 120 free sittings at 6d per annum and 80 sittings at two shillings per annum. These funds were to help offset the curate's stipend salaries of clerk, beadle, pew openers, singers and pew cleaners, the wine, candles, vestments, books and coals.

The patronage or right of nomination of a curate was held by James France France of Bostock Hall. The curate could officiate at churchings, baptisms and burials – not marriages.

The reasons for the church's sudden decline are lost but in 1847 the church was found to be in a dilapidated state. Therefore it was demolished and the ground laid out as a cemetery.

## THE PRESENT BUILDING

So the new church was planned and built in Minshull Vernon township to serve Leighton-cum-Minshull Vernon. The main benefactors were James France France and Edward Loyd. This church was built from a design by Sir Gilbert Scott, dedicated to St Peter and consecrated on 12th December 1849. Authority was given to perform churchings, baptisms and burials – marriages had to wait till June 7th 1861.

Bagshaw's Directory of 1850 tells us,

"The Church is an elegant structure in the Anglo-Gothic style. It consists of a nave and chancel, the latter is separated by a handsome stone arch. The roof is groined timber supported by hammer beams and stained in imitation oak. The seats and stalls are of the same kind of wood. The west windows and the chancel are richly beautified with stained glass and the whole has a very chaste appearance. It is built of fine stone and will seat about 200 persons."

The parsonage, now the Old Vicarage, was built in Elizabethan style and completed in 1850.

In 1879 the stained glass East Window was placed in memory of Lewis Loyd and a new organ was purchased in 1889.

In 1913 plans were passed to allow the building to be extended on the North side in order to rehouse the organ and thus provide the additional choir stalls as they now exist.

In 1959 electricity was put into the church, the installation being presented in memory of the late Mr Albert Brown by his widow. In the same year an organ blower was installed in memory of the late John Robinson Moreton. Formerly the organ had to be pumped manually. Outside lighting was installed in memory of the late Mr and Mrs D Ford.

In July 1966 the new choir vestry was opened and dedicated by the Bishop of Stockport.

In 1974 a stained glass window was placed on the north side of the chancel in memory of Mr Malcolm Riley and the communion rails and gates were modified in memory of Mr Malcolm Riley in 1975.

The glass door of the porch was dedicated in memory of Mr Arthur Edge in 1990.

In 1993 a bequest from Mr Bob Broad, designated to be used towards the comfort of the church, provided the initial impetus to the replacement and refurbishment of hassocks (kneelers). This gift was followed by the donation of many other hassocks. The first of the new hassocks were dedicated and placed in the pews on May 21st 1995.

Of the two banners, one was made by Mrs Freda Broad for the celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Diocese of Chester which took place on the Roodee on June 30th 1991. The symbols represent St Peter the Fisherman (the fish and the net) and the parishes of Leighton (the serpent on the pole a symbol of healing to symbolise the Hospitals) and Minshull Vernon (the corn and the rush symbolising the farms and the River Weaver). A new Sunday School banner was also donated by Mr Tom Darlington and Mrs Enid Treweek and dedicated on February 26th 1995.

And so to the present. The land is still farmed, although the ancient manors have been replaced by “commodious brick residences with convenient outbuildings” (White’s Gazeteer 1860). And St. Peter’s Church? To the list of donors should be added the names of all those souls who quietly and unceasingly work and have worked to make St. Peter’s a living Church, to the glory of God.

Elizabeth Crabtree

## CLERGY

1840-1841	Regd Yonge (Curate of St Peter’s, Leighton)
1841-1842	Alleyne Rogers (Incumbent of St Peter’s Leighton)
1844-1849	Moses Reid (Curate of St Peter’s, Leighton)
1849-1869	Moses Reid
1870-1893	William Hodgson Coates
1894-1901	G Wyatt Ninis
1902-1917	Robert James Douglas Keith Chalmers
1918-1938	Herbert Henry Corsbie
1938-1939	Wilfrid Greenwood
1939-1951	Ifor Owain Pugh
1951-1955	Ernest Hall Christopher
1959-1986	Peter Eric Gains
1987-1989	Howell Arfon Jones
1990-	Gordon David Geddes