



There is a Church and a Priest here, and a mill to serve the Hall' *Domesday survey 1086*

### **An Historical Tour of St Mary's Church, Weaverham**

For over 1000 years, the people of Weaverham have worshipped here. This lovely old Church, dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, built of local red sandstone, over-looks the winding River Weaver valley from which Weaverham takes its name.

There have been 3 Churches on this site. The first was Saxon and this was substantially built, for it existed in 1277 when King Edward I built the Abbey of Vale Royal. Unfortunately, there is no trace of this early Church.

The second Church was built between 1281 and 1360. The Church was long and narrow, with a Priest's vestry, approached by a door, now blocked up on the South side of the communion table. The tower is the oldest part of the present Church. It was originally 6 ft. higher and spired. It is embattled, has diagonal stepped buttresses at its corners and reticulated tracery [decorative open patterns in the stonework at the heads of Gothic windows] with a Tudor hood. It has 4 string courses [projecting horizontal length of masonry], and gargoyles protrude at the angles together with carved heads. The arms of the Warburton family can be seen carved on the south face.

Extensive alterations and enlargements took place in the 16th century and the Church is largely of that period.

One thing I ask of the LORD,  
this is what I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD  
and to seek him in his temple.

**Psalm 27:4**



**South Door** Entering by the south door, note the mutilated arch in the porch. This was caused by widening in 1724 by Isaac Johnson.

Note the addition of kitchen and toilet facilities which were installed in 2000. Designed by Architect Graham Holland, the work was contracted to Shepherds of Macclesfield. The

total cost of this work was £50,000.

On entering the church the first effect is one of spaciousness due to the number of large windows. The stained glass is comparatively recent. The central east window dates from 1854, and the others are later.

Look up at the list of Vicars on the wall. We know that there was a Priest here in 1086. Before 1277, the living was a rectory in the gift of the Crown. Our list of Vicars extends in an unbroken line from 1299.



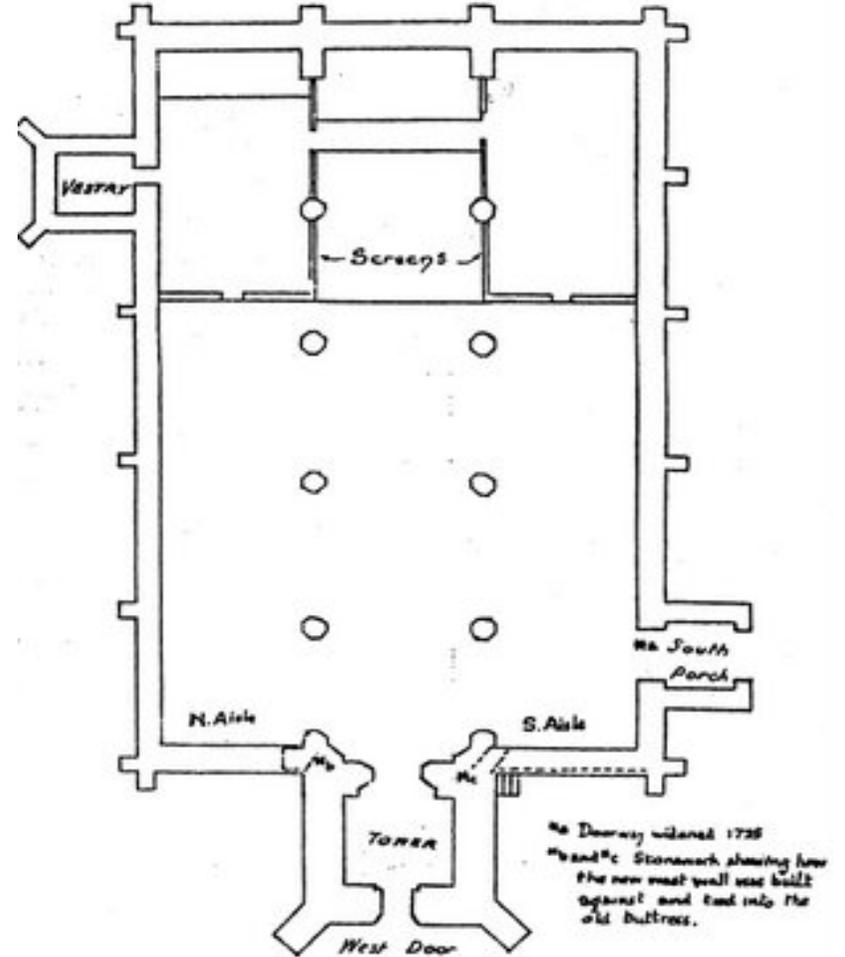
Here also you will see the Book of Remembrance which contains the names of those whose ashes rest in the Garden of Remembrance.

On the left in front of the organ is a settle made from the original chancel screen, and on the back is a portrait in sunken tracery of a man and a woman in the time of Henry VIII.

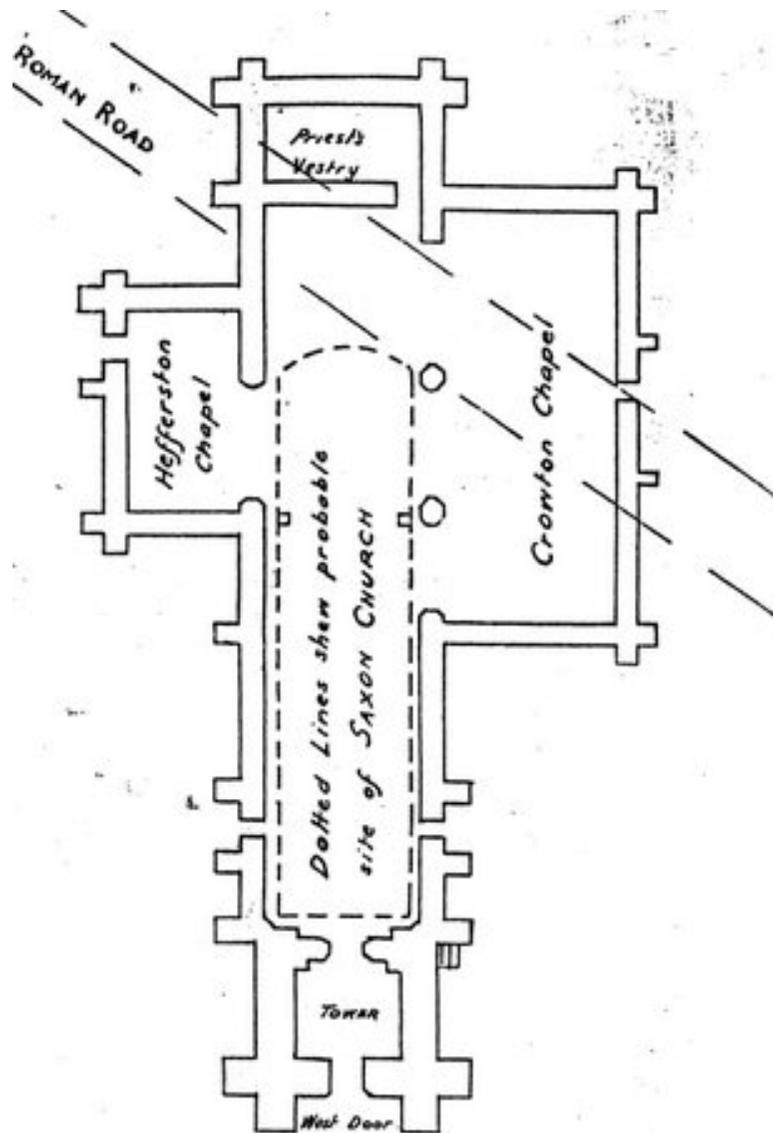


**Tower Arch** Looking left there is the tower arch, which is earlier than any other, and no doubt left untouched in 1485 when the tower was partly rebuilt, providing an interesting link with the earlier church.

There was a gallery in 1765, which lay across the west end where a band of minstrels with wind and string instruments led the singing. This was removed in 1877 when the pier caps and string courses were added.



Church after XV Century alteration



Church as built in XIII Century



**The Font** The font has an interesting history. It was placed in front of the tower arch in 1927 after 50 years in the old vicarage stable. A marble font was given in 1877, and stood by the south door, see the ceiling hooks for suspending the cover. This was out of keeping with the architecture, so the old stone font was fixed in its present position.

The lower part, the round shaft and the moulded base is possibly Norman, and the cover Jacobean.

**North Aisle.** The North aisle has a camber beam oak ceiling with beautiful moulded beams and framing. It is thought to have come from Vale Royal Abbey in the 16th century and is divided into 6 bays, each of 16 squares, which in turn are sub divided, giving 64 panels to each bay. The whole ceiling hangs from bolted tie beams with strong iron rods. Formally the roof was enriched with bosses and coloured. The south side had a similar ceiling but death watch beetle made it unsafe.

Going down the north aisle, note various memorial tablets on the wall, the earliest of which is in an interesting brass of 1762.

Note also the old collecting boxes with their long handles and the parish chest of 1725 in which parish records were stored. It has three locks, the vicar and two churchwardens each holding a key so that it could only be opened when all three were present.



**The Pews** The pews for the parishioners [other than those for the gentry] were first put in during 1634 at a cost of £16.1s.8d. There were 140 Jacobean dark oak closed up pews, having a knob on each corner for a candle. This was the only form of lighting until oil in the mid 19th century. Rushes were strewn on the floor,

and twice a year, there was a ceremony to renew them. The pews in the body of the Church were made in 1877 incorporating panels and ends of the earlier pews which were put in during 1634.

**The Chapel** Pass through the oak screen into the chapel, formally a private chapel belonging to the owners of Hefferstone Grange [now a housing estate] and since 1925, the chapel of the Annunciation.

The Communion Table, with turned legs, is early 17th century. In 2006 the chapel was refurbished with a new floor, carpet and chairs. It is used as the crèche during services enabling the children's carers to be part of the services. The beautiful kneelers seen here, like those in the body of the Church were made by the ladies of this parish.



**The Chancel** Pass through the wooden screen to the chancel and see the brass memorial to William Barker, founder of the Grammar School formally the Abbots Court House.



The Communion table in the Chancel is a fine example of its type with cabriole legs and claw feet of 1760. The chancel panelling is old in part and notable for its linenfold carving.

In about 1636, the Priest's vestry beyond the east chancel was taken down and the doorway, thought at one time to be a leper door, was built up.

A shelved recess was made for the cruets at the time of communion, later it was used as an aumbry. 'Aumbry' is an old English word for a safe or cupboard, a special place used to house Holy Communion bread and wine, remaining from public worship and later to be taken to the sick.

During the repairs in 1923, an ancient Hornbook and various interesting documents and records for the years 1630 – 1728 were found here. The Hornbook is a small oak tablet with two sunken panels covered with transparent horn used for teaching the children the alphabet and prayers.

### **The Act of 1678**

"No corpse of any person or persons shall be buried in any shirt, shift, sheet or shroud, or anything whatsoever made or mingled with flax, hemp, silk, hair, gold or silver, or in any stuff or thing other than what is made of sheep's wool only, or be put into any coffin lined or faced with any sort of cloth or stuff or any other thing whatsoever that is made of any material but sheep's wool only upon pain of the forfeiture of £5 of lawful money of England"

This is one of the few Churches in Cheshire having details of the affidavits for about 60 years relating to an Act for burying in wool only. This was intended for lessening the importation of linen from beyond the seas, and the encouragement of the woollen and paper manufacturers of this Kingdom.

**Other Curiosities** During the installation of the boiler in 1930 about 50 - 60 human skeletons were found, and a number of the skulls had holes through the centre of the forehead. These bodies were given a Christian burial.

There is an interesting roughly shaped stone slab bearing a crude but deeply cut head and shoulder with what might be horns, which has baffled experts as to its origin. It was found in the Churchyard in 1938.

You will see in our Church, many memorials to past generations but this ancient building is not a museum. For here people come, asking a blessing upon a marriage, bringing a baby into the family of Christ, commending a loved one into the everlasting arms of our Maker. Here week by week, year in year out, people gather to offer worship and to gain strength for life.

**There is more to this building than meets the eye!**

If you would like to know more about St. Mary's church, its building, its people, its activities, please ask. It will be our pleasure to help.

And some entries from the Registers:

1771	Aug. 31st	William Swain junior of Sandiway. He was killed with his cart on Crew common near Crowton. Supposed to be very much in liquer. 'O Lord teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom'.
1771	Sep.8th	May an infant daughter of Thomas Burgess of Onston. This child was drowned. How different the sorrow to that above.
1772	Feb. 13th	Joseph Strettle labourer of Acton. This poor widower dropt down dead. 'O Lord keep us from sudden death'.
1775	Feb. 10th	Joseph Willcoxen stocking weaver, alias framework knitter de Weaverham. It is believed by the major part of the people of this town he received his death by the bruises give him by a local butcher. The coroner made an inquisition and the surgeon opened him and found part of his bowels broke. Many witnesses examined but through tenderness and/or not declaring what they knew, the ruffian was acquitted to the great mortification of many.
1778	Sep. 17th	Margaret Clark of Crowton Spinster. This young woman had hysteric fitts and was found dead in her bed.
1779	Jan.4th	Thomas Green of Gorstage Carpenter. He was found dead upon the road going to Stopport to see his children married there. 'O Lord save us from sudden death Amen'.
1779	Nov. 9th	William son of John Gerrard of Hodge Lane Farmer Suddenly N.B. This young man took his life through drinking at the race on Crabtree Green.
1782	Jan. 31st	Benjamin Smale of Cuddington labourer died of the bloody flux.
1783	July 16th	John son of John Hinton of Crowton of a mortification.



There is a fine chair here with its pair in the Lady Chapel. They are elegant examples of this period being richly carved and cushioned.

The communion rails were removed in the restoration of 1877 and used at Hefferstone Grange as a balustrade to the back staircase. On their restoration in 1908, an inscription was found which stated that they were "made out of the olde ones and put up in the year 1708".



The rood screen was removed in 1774 and was replaced by a 3 decker pulpit and prayer desk which remained until 1854 when the pulpit was placed in its present position.



The two tier brass chandelier is over two centuries old and very graceful in the simplicity of its design. The oak [eagle] lectern was presented in 1877.



**Wilbraham Chapel** Pass through the door of the parclose screen that separated the rest of the church from the Wilbraham Chapel.



Here are the old Georgian box seats for the Squire. They are still used occasionally by members of the Wilbraham family whose name is perpetuated by memorials in the Chapel including the fine Hatchment hanging above. Note the old Oseley gravestone of 1639 and the interesting Hatton memorial slab of 1675.

**South Aisle** Passing down the south aisle, notice the Churchwardens' staves with their brass heads of a mitre and crown at the entrance to the Churchwardens pew. The panels at the back of the pew are from an earlier pulpit.



**The Bells** There are six bells in the tower, ranging in weight from 4½ cwt. to nearly half a ton. We may not know much of the early history of the bells themselves, but the frequent references to the payment of the ringers show how each national event, as well as the daily life of the village, was bound up with the sound of the bells. Accessions, Births, Deaths, Thanksgiving days, Curfews, Victories by land and sea, Preservation from the Plague - the bells rang for them all.

In 1718 came a great event in the bells' history. It was decided to have them re-cast at the famous foundry of Abraham Rudhall at Gloucester [the original contract was one of the papers found in the Aumbry]. The bells travelled by road to Shrewsbury and thence by water.

In 1796 the Tenor and Treble [1st and 6th] bells were re-cast in Somerset and in 1873, the 4th and 5th in London. All the bells were rehung in 1888 and again in 1978. Four of the bells are inscribed with their original mottoes. The inscriptions run as follows:-

- 1 "My Treble voice makes hearts rejoice For King and Constitution"
- 2 "Peace and Good Neighbourhood"
- 3 "Prosperity to the Church of England"
- 6 "I to the Church the living call and to the grave do summon all. Fear God. Honour the King"

Here are some extracts from the Churchwardens accounts concerning the bells:-

1708	Spent on ringers at taking of Lisle	£0	2s	6d
	Spent on ringers at taking of Ghent	£0	2s	6d
	Paid for ringing curfew and day bell	£0	10s	0d
	Paid ringers for ringing at coronation of George 1	£0	1s	0d
1715	Paid ringers for ringing on May 29th on the Proclamation and Inauguration Days and for the battles of Preston and Dumb-lain	£0	5s	3d
1771	The Wardens agreed that if the sexton and ringers stay away from the Church, they shall have power to turn them out.			
1810	Resolved that the ringers must be more punctual in the time of ringing and also be more tidy in their dress while ringing.			
1839	Paid for treat for ringers at the Queen's wedding.	£3	0s	0d

**The Parish Registers and Churchwardens' Accounts.** The Churchwardens' accounts date from 1630 and interesting items throw light on the past life of the parish. The registers date from 1576, the earliest entry being the baptism of Roger Woodward. There were many deaths from sore throats, small pox, weaknesses, paupers dying of starvation, palsy and hysterics. In April, May, June and July of 1788 there were 16 deaths from smallpox. In years 1794 - 1795, 33 deaths recorded from a weakness. A list of unusual occupations found in the records:- Hucksters, Pavois, Tow-dressers, Woolcombers, Wallers, Bonesetters, Websters, Cordwainers, Papermakers and Breechesmakers.

Here are some other entries from the Accounts which may be of interest:-

1634	Payde for dynners and drink for parishoners loading flagges for the Church	£1	2s	0d
1639	Payde to Rich'd Shepheard for heads of noysome vermine as is required by statute	£0	0s	8d
1680	Paid Jo Billington for going with me through Town and Lordship collecting for the English slaves	£0	2s	0d
1704	Gave a poor man who wanted a loaf	£0	0s	3d
1725	Gave to a man who had his house burn't down	£0	2s	0d
1726	Taking care that Grace Webster make no disturbance upon Easter Sunday	£0	0s	6d
1818	To journey with Mr. Clemenson to Sir John Stanley respecting George Fluet comeing to Church disguised in women's cloaths	£0	3s	0d