

Churches and Pubs

Visit to St. Oswalds Church, Lower Peover. - Wednesday 23rd July 2009.



Some two dozen members of the Group met up at its usual assembly point, the High Lane Village Hall car park at 10am. and after distributing the none drivers among the car owners offering spare seats, we made our way to St. Oswald's, Lower Peover for 11am.

Fortunately we arrived during a sunny break in the weather and were able to get some nice pictures of the Church exterior before entering and meeting our guide Mrs. Ann Godfrey.

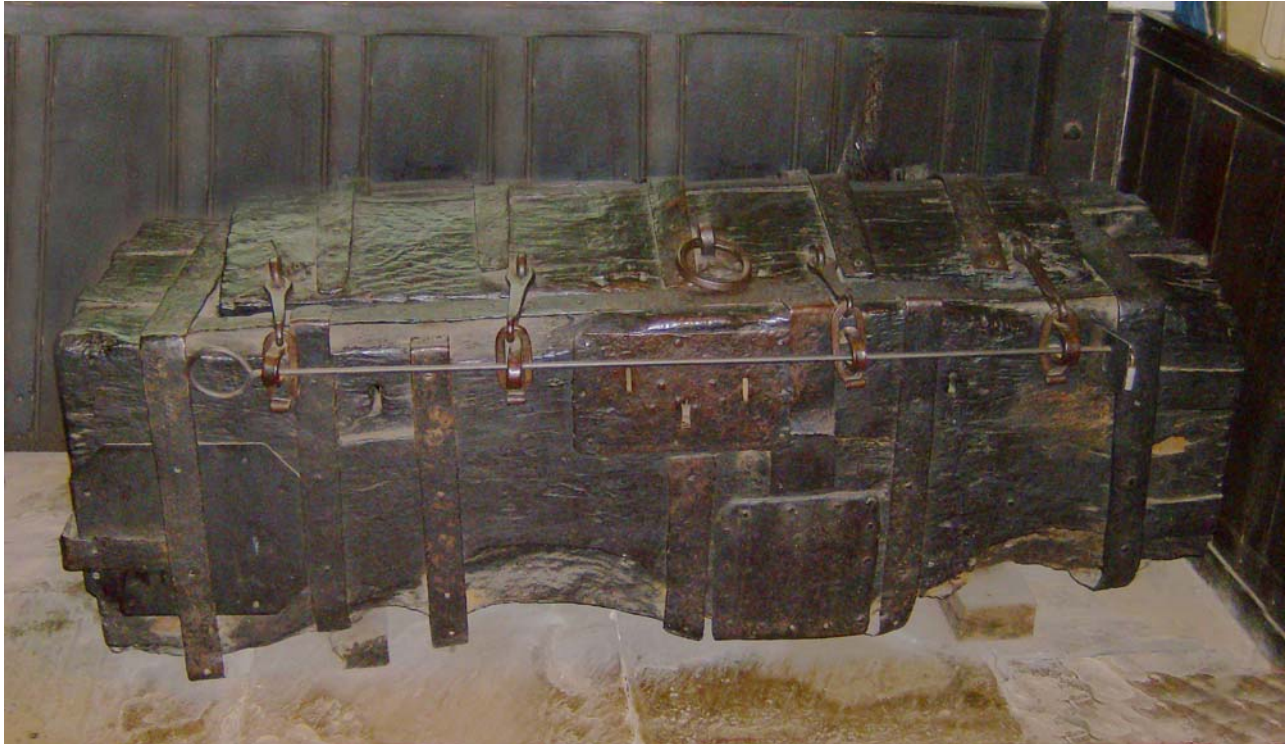
The church is dedicated to Oswald, king of Northumbria from 643AD, was converted to Christianity as a young Prince and took an active part in evangelizing that Kingdom. He lost his life at the battle of Maserfield (probably Oswestry) on August 5th, 642. The following year his remains were recovered by his brother and taken to be enshrined at Lindesfarne. Oswald was considered a Saint and a Martyr and as a result relics accompanied English Missions to the Continent from 690 onward.

The founding of St. Oswald's, Lower Peover by Richard Grosvenor in 1269 was probably due to the steady increase in the number of tenants as the land was drained and forests cleared

When he had built his chapel of dark oak interior, half timbered on the outside, he applied for the services of a priest. It was arranged between Royal Authority (Henry III), the prior of Norton and the clergy of Great Budworth that a priest should visit Lower Peover on Sundays and Wednesdays, the chief Holy Days and Saint Oswald's day (Aug. 5th).

Mediaeval churches had little furniture apart from the altar. In St. Oswald's the first addition was a font, introduced in 1322 when baptisms were first permitted.

The only other notable, and necessary, piece of furniture in the Middle Ages was the chest in which books, vessels and robes were kept locked when not in use. St. Oswald's is famous for its 'bog-oak' chest, now in the South Chancel, one of a very few left of its kind.



Legend has it that at one time the prospective bride of a Cheshire farmer was required to be able to lift the heavy lid with one hand!

By the middle of the 15th century the estates had passed to Sir Robert Grosvenor of Hulme. In his will he left provision for the building to be enlarged. A proper side-aisle was added along the north side, the roof being adjusted in some way to allow for this. Some of the carved roof-timbers remaining today in the north aisle may go back to this date.

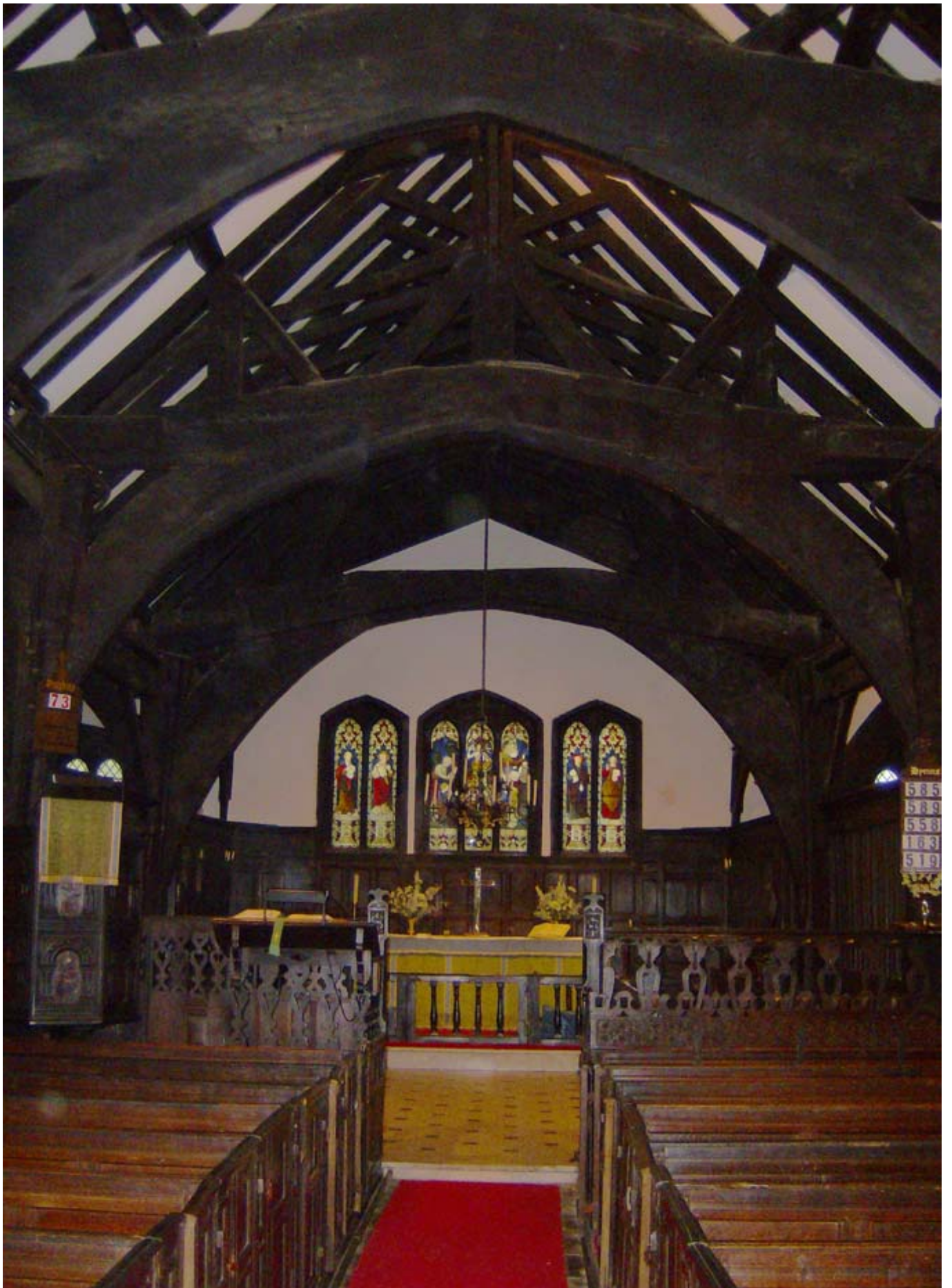
It was in 1582, just six years before the defeat of the Armada, that the registers (opening in 1570) record: "In this year the Tower was builded of stone" from Alderley. There had been two bells in the old tower, as recorded in an inventory made by royal order in 1548, under Edward VI. By 1625 the new tower contained four bells. Today there are six, and change-ringing is regularly practiced and performed.

The main changes were made at the time of John Holme. In 1852, under the direction of the well-known architect A Salvin, and the church was transformed into "the finest specimen of timber-built ecclesiastical edifices extant" (*Illustrated London News*, Jan 1st, 1853). The pattern of half-timbering visible previously on the north side, gave inspiration for what is now seen round the exterior as a whole.

A small organ had been in use for some years. It was later replaced by a larger one (Alexander Young, 1880) which was further adapted in the 1950's and in the 1980's.

The windows, as altered and replaced in 1852, were of clear glass, as had pertained since the Cromwellian period. In 1875 the main east window was glazed in memory of the Rev. John Holme, with a Resurrection scene and the four Evangelists. Other memorial windows followed in the succeeding decades, of good quality for their period.

The building was wired for electric light in 1939, but not lit by that means until 1945. It was rewired in 1967. Candlesticks and candelabra are used at Festival Evensongs and these remain in the chancel area. Both chandeliers are of the 19th Century: the one of wrought iron is English in make and design, while the brass one is copied from a 17th century Dutch pattern.



Finally we cannot finish without mentioning the Clock - On the belfry wall a diamond-shaped tablet reads - "To the glory of God, in commemoration of the sex-centenary of this church (1296-1896,) and of the Diamond Jubilee of her Majesty, Queen Victoria (1837-1897,) the clock with chimes was placed in the tower on Wake Sunday, 1897" This clock is a horizontal beam clock manufactured by Midland Steam Clock Works of Derby. It remains the only public clock in the parish.

The Church is still in rural surroundings at this well known beauty spot. Here is a centre of Christian worship and life for a parish of nearly 2,000 people. Long may it remain.

Following our guided tour of the Church, we thanked our excellent guide Mrs. Godfrey, then the party *ran* through pouring rain to the adjacent hostelry, 'The Bells of Peover' which was fortunately only a few yards away. This '*Pub*' dates back to 1569, but its more recent claim to fame was as a privately run very high class Restaurant and Public House. Unfortunately, the since the original proprietors left it has since been taken over by one after another of the well-known brewery chains culminating with the acquisition, by Robinson's of Stockport, only a few weeks ago.

Whilst the 'locals' point out that it is no longer the restaurant that it was when in private hands, we found the fare and service of a high standard. The menu provided a very good variety of foods that seemed to suit all palates and pockets. The cost for a generous main course and drink being about £12.50 per head. Certainly we heard no complaints and believe that there was a general move to sign up for our next *soirée*.

Eric & Sue Harlin

(Sorry - 1027 words)