

The Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Weaverham

This building is 'The Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin'. It is the house of God and has been used as a place of worship for over 1000 years. It is currently the home of 'St. Mary's Ecumenical Church' and is served by a Church of England Vicar residing in the Vicarage next door to the church. We are also on the circuit of a Methodist minister.

As well as a scale plan of the 1877 alterations to the church there are plans of the church at various stages of its history which have been made by Rev Canon Egerton and Charles Bebbington. These are not to scale. Notes on the church windows are available to view inside church and on the history society website history.weaverham.org.uk.

Tour of church: Background notes

There was originally a Saxon Church on this site. It was probably built around 900A.D. or even earlier. The Domesday Book (1086) mentions only a few parishes with a priest and Weaverham was one of them. The early Saxon Church still existed in 1277 when King Edward I laid the foundation stone of Vale Royal Abbey. (Edward and his wife Eleanor stayed for three days at the Manor of Wallerscote within the manor of Weaverham for this special occasion).

Edward gifted the manor of Weaverham, including the church, to Vale Royal Abbey, (although the Abbot agreed to pay an annual rent of 6 marks to the Abbey of St Werburgh which had a previous claim on the manor). This was probably the reason that a new church was built here some time between 1281 and 1360 (i.e. late 13th / early 14th century) constructed of local sandstone blocks. It was almost a cross shape (see Bebbington's XIII century plan and note dotted outline of original Saxon Church). We can imagine this church if we ignore the vestry and the side chapel chancels as well as the north and south aisles. With the exception of the South porch, the fabric of the church is largely the work of that period (13th/14th century).

The church was re-modelled in the 15th century (see XV century plan) and the West tower (which dates from then) is probably the oldest visible part of the present building (*pre 1485 when tradition says it was repaired. Pevsner agrees that it was built before that date*). It originally had a steeple, making it 7ft. (2.13m) higher, but this was taken down in 1823. (See Bebbington's 15th century plan of the church)

During the Dissolution Vale Royal Abbey Church was demolished in 1539 and some of the fabric was used when St Mary's was extended in the 16th century. (see Bebbington's 16th century plan of the church)

According to Ormerod the church has the appearance of being built in the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I i.e. some time between 1558 and 1625. However, Bebbington who had access to church records, accounts and other documents said that he could find no documentary evidence of any work other than repairs being carried out after 1558 apart from the extension of the church in the Lady Chapel. He concluded that the church is mainly 15th century. According to Pevsner the pillars and windows in the church are Perpendicular. This term refers to the period between 1350 and 1550. For this and other reasons it seems that Bebbington was correct i.e. the church is mainly 15th century (NOT 16th century as stated on the blue plaque).

In 1651/1652 (during the English Commonwealth which followed The English Civil War) the Cavaliers defaced the Schoolhouse. They broke windows and destroyed the seats. The School was transferred to the Church where more damage ensued – windows were broken and pews and other seats pulled out or damaged. The Patron and the Churchwardens petitioned in Quarter Sessions at Knutsford and the Royalists had to 'make a lay' for repairing both buildings. It should be noted that although the Parliamentarians plundered Weaverham, and tied old men to a cart, dragging them through the mire and treated them cruelly in the Dungeon, we have no record of them damaging the church. (N.B. 1st Civil War: 1642-46; 2nd Civil War: 1648-49; 3rd Civil War: 1649-51)

Charles Bebbington said that marks on the outside east wall were made by archers who used the churchyard as a tilting yard during the 1659 Battle of Winnington Bridge (the last battle of the Civil War – an uprising following the death of Oliver Cromwell). Others have since claimed that one of the marks was made by stray shot from that battle, which Professor Peter Gaunt of Chester University and of the Cromwell Society, says is highly unlikely. Of course, the marks may be due to the way the sandstone has weathered.

A new boiler was installed in 1930. There is a mythical story that 'during the necessary excavations about 50 or 60 skeletons were found in a mass grave. Each one had a hole through the centre of its forehead which was the same size that would be made by a bullet from a muzzle-loading gun used during the Civil War. The holes were too big to have come from a later period. It was assumed that they were the victims of a mass execution. (We have been told that this was not a common method of execution at the time). It is said that following the discovery, the vicar, Canon P.A. Miller, gave the skeletons a Christian burial.' (N.B. the vicar was also honorary canon of Chester). **We can find no documentary evidence to support this story.**

Restoration was carried out in 1853-1855 by Antony Salvin and again in 1877 by John Douglas.

It is interesting to note that, according to White's Trade Directory 1860, **the cost of** Antony Salvin's **renovations** in 1853-1855 was 'near £1200' and that, according to Kelly's Trade Directory 1878 the John Douglas renovations in 1877 cost 'about £2000'.

The 15th century Tower Arch is thought to be the oldest in the church, although the pier caps and string courses were added as part of the 1877 restoration of the church by John Douglas. (Obviously the glass is of an even later date! – 1986).

The Blackhurst Clock: On the south pillar of the west arch. This has suffered some damage in the past as the decorative carving is missing on the left side as you face it. The clock was made by the local clockmaker Joseph Blackhurst who died on 17th August 1867 age 73 years. He is buried in grave 1 by the south door on the west side of the church.

Note marks on the West wall and on the 2 pillars behind the pews at the back of the church. These indicate the position of supports for a square gallery (see plan of 1877 alterations). This is where a band of minstrels playing wind and stringed instruments would have led the singing. The instruments were replaced by a barrel organ in 1833 with the organist acting as leader and choir master, the choir also singing in the gallery. The windows in the roof (called clerestories) were installed to let the light in for the minstrels. Canon Egerton's plan of the church 1281-1360 shows a gallery. It would have been necessary to remove this when the church was re-modelled in the 15th century, but we do not know whether it was replaced immediately. The gallery is also shown on his plan for 1558-1800 so it seems reasonable to assume that it was. However, according to Charles Bebbington a new gallery was installed in 1765. Whether or not this was a replacement for an earlier one that had been removed, possibly for structural reasons, we do not know. We can only assume that it was, based on Canon Egerton's plans.

The gallery was removed as part of the 1877 restoration carried out by John Douglas. This was probably because an **organ** had been installed a few years earlier. In 1872 Mr Heath of Hefferston Grange presented a 2-manual organ.

The present organ was installed in 1951 as a **Parish Church War Memorial**. (in memory of those who served in the second World War). The money was mostly raised by the congregation, but with a generous donation of £100 by ICI. The original quotation for a new organ was £3500 in 1947, but this had increased by at least 15% by the time the organ was built, in addition to other expenses involved in its installation (including work on the floor). Jeff Burgess, who was a member of the congregation in 1951 says that the organ is classed as a concert organ because nobody was building church organs at the time.

Bench in front of organ: The original Gothic screen from the old 13th century church was replaced sometime around 1530. This 'new' screen was removed in 1774 and the wood recycled. This bench was made from it. Note the carving of tracery with two heads depicting a man and a woman in the time of Henry VIII. We can only imagine the beauty of that screen.

The Stone Font: The column and base are 13th century. The bowl is 14th/15th century and the cover Jacobean i.e. early 17th century. According to Bebbington the font was 'trimmed' in the 17th century to suit the style of the pillars. (source: Pevsner's guide and Bebbington's paper)

When the gallery was removed in 1877 this font was replaced by a marble one which used to stand in the south west corner near the south door. You can still see the pulleys in the ceiling which were used to raise and lower the heavy cover. The marble font was removed in 1927. Charles Bebbington rescued the old font from the scrap heap where it had been for the past 50 years. It was restored to the church and placed in its present position. At the same time a cross ornamentation was added. Charles Bebbington rescued the Jacobean cover from the old Vicarage stable loft (the stables occupied the site of the present vicarage). (N.B. The font should not have been placed on the scrap heap Church rules say that a font no longer in use should be buried in holy ground in order to acknowledge the font's spiritual significance and as an object that has been vital to the life of the church as the body of Christ)

Note the black mark on the pillar near the organ. In the latter part of the 1940's, a lightning bolt hit the church during a Sunday service leaving this mark. Jeff Burgess, a former church warden witnessed this as did his son, Jeff Burgess who is still a member of our congregation (2024). He was in the choir at the time and says that it struck a large stone cross on the outside of the church at the east end. Luckily it fell outwards. He said that if it had fallen inwards it would have taken off part of the roof and the altar. He describes the lightening as having been 'like a thunderbolt' He said he 'heard it more than he saw it' but he saw it go straight down the aisle quite high up in the apex of the roof hitting the pillar at the west end of the church. Unsurprisingly it frightened everyone in the congregation.

The Nave Ceiling: by Antony Salvin 1853-5.

The North Aisle

The First World War Memorial (in memory of all those in the parish who served in WW1) now blocks the position of the **former North Door**. However, its position can be clearly seen from the outside and the mason's initials, 'EJ' can also clearly be seen in the frame. In a more superstitious age, the door was opened to let evil spirits out of the church during a baptism. It **may** also have provided a separate entrance for the musicians to enter the gallery. Although the North Aisle was not present in the 13th century church, it did have a north door (see 13th century plan). We are not sure why it was blocked up, but the 1877 church restoration took place shortly after the organ was installed.

The 16th century ceiling is thought to have come from Vale Royal Abbey Church when it was demolished during the Reformation. (Sources suggest that it was installed here circa 1560). Originally it was enriched with bosses and coloured. Unfortunately, a similar ceiling in the south aisle had to be removed because of damage by the death watch beetle which made it unsafe.

Memorial Plaque to Charles Edward Bebbington: Parish Clerk and Sexton 1904-1943 (previously Deputy Clerk from 1885). He succeeded his father and was the last in a long line of holders of the freehold office of Parish Clerk. He was a well-respected antiquarian and worked tirelessly researching the history of this church and the village, writing many papers published in the 'Transactions of the Lancashire & Cheshire Antiquarian Society.' It is said that 'he was never happier than when using his skill as a craftsman on some work of restoration'. It was Charles Bebbington who rescued the font from the scrap heap.

The Charles Spencer Stanhope Window

At the foot of the window we can see that this is a memorial to a former vicar 'Charles Spencer Stanhope M.A. for 39 years Vicar of the Parish born October 14th 1795 died October 29th 1874. The parishioners and others in loving memory of his pious labour placed this window'. He was actually the incumbent at Cawthorne in South Yorkshire a post which he did not relinquish when he accepted the living at Weaverham. Indeed he was vicar of All Saints Church, Cawthorne for 52 years from 1822 until his death in Weaverham in 1874. According to his niece he much preferred the Yorkshire folk to the 'Cheshire louts'. There is a stained glass window in his memory in All Saints Church and another in Crowton Church.

He was obviously a great character who was vicar from 1835-1874. He was very absent minded and eccentric and a multitude of tales have been told about him. For example:

When he was vicar the choir sang in the gallery and the tunes for the hymns were confined to those the barrel organ could play. He would sometimes change the appointed hymn and announce one not on the barrel organ. The organist, Mr Bayley Bebbington (father of Charles Bebbington) would have to shout from the gallery telling the congregation which hymn the organ could and would play and which the choir would sing. If the vicar thought the singing was too slow, he would shout "A bit quicker Bayley, a bit quicker" whilst swinging his arm in imitation of the turning of a barrel organ.

He wrote his sermons on loose sheets of paper which he frequently got out of order, which, we are told, "enlivened his discourses on many occasions." When he returned from his honeymoon he happily drove away from the station leaving his wife on the platform. He was nearly home before he realised what he had done. (There are lots of other stories about him.)

Amongst the other **memorial plaques** of note is a **brass one from 1762 and another from 1779**. Both are above the Parish Chest.

The one on the left hand side of the Parish Chest reads:

'In memory of Thomas Pierson of Weaverham, Yeoman. Died October 6th 1762 age 63 and his daughter Anne died February 18th 1766 age 33.

Jane his wife, died August 26th 1766 age 33

Stranger, whoe'er thou art, who on this stone shalt read our fate, be mindful of thy own life's uncertain period. Fix thine eye, strive to live well, and study so to do.'

The one on the right hand side reads:

'In this place at his own request, were interred the remains of Daniel Milner, gentleman, late of Acton in this Parish. He died November 5th 1779 age 81 years. His integrity of heart and sincerity of intention. If liberal manners of regularity of conduct, if a reverence for the established religion and, compassion of the poor excite imitation or deserve remembrance then is not this memorial erected in vain. Such virtues reader are the more valuable. They are rare that they might not die with the dead they are here recorded not through ostentation but thy contemplation and practice.'

The Parish Chest of 1725: (The original chest has not survived. This is its successor – purchased in 1725.) This is where the parish records (including registers of births, deaths and marriages) were stored. (Now, of course, all parish records nationwide are stored by County Councils/Borough Councils and ours are stored in the Winsford salt mines which are very dry.) It had three locks. The vicar and the two church wardens each had a key so that the chest could only be opened if all three were present. Unfortunately the locks were forced open in 2006/7 and are now broken. The chest is now used to store toys for the children using the crèche during the Sunday morning service.

N.B. The Church Registers date from 1576 and the Records from 1630. The first baptismal record is of Roger Woodward 1576

The Pews: Other than pews for the gentry, pews for the parishioners were first put in during 1634. The 140 dark oak Jacobean pews cost £16 1s 8d (£16-8.3p). Those in the south aisle faced north and those in the north aisle faced south. There were none in the nave. These pews were closed up. They had a turned knob at each corner for a candle. Candles were the only means of lighting the church until the mid-19th century when oil was introduced. The 1634 pews were replaced as part of the 1877 restoration of the church. According to Bebbington the panels of the old pews were used to form the backs and ends of some of the new 1877 pews. The 1877 pews are also made of oak. Look at the carved ends of the pews - each one is different. Notice the 1877 knobs which do not have a hole for a candle, as this is no longer necessary.

The old collecting boxes with long handles: on chest behind pulpit.

The Lady Chapel

This was formerly a private chapel belonging to the owners of Hefferston Grange. It was originally called the Grange Chapel and later the Heath Chapel. In 1919 the Heath family relinquished their ownership of the chapel, and in 1925 it was dedicated by the Bishop of Chester as the Chapel of the Annunciation. Note brass plaque on wall. The pews were removed in 2006 and replaced by chairs. A carpet was also laid on the new floor, so that it could be used as a crèche during the Sunday morning service.

The North Window: Second square up on LHS of window is a little mark (a black tower imposed on the head of a wheatsheaf) which signifies that this is a window by C.E.Kempe & Co. Ltd) (Charles Eamer Kempe 1837-1907 was an eminent stained glass artist and church decorator. He and his firm were responsible for beautiful windows in many of our cathedrals as well as a window in Sandringham Church in memory of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. This logo indicates that this window was made after his death when his chief designer and friend John William Lisle carried on the tradition of the Kempe style.) This window was paid for by public subscription in memory of Dr. Joseph William Smith (1844-1916). Like his father before him, Joseph Smith was a doctor who lived and practised in Ivy House. The road, which was originally called Stark Lane, became known to the locals as Smith's Lane or Doctor's Lane. The official name now designated by the council is Smiths Lane. Dr Joseph Smith was very considerate to the poor and had a habit of not sending bills until death had occurred. As well as being a country practitioner he was a magistrate and county councillor. Consequently he was held in great esteem and occasionally feared, but also greatly loved. Dr Smith used to drive around his large practice, which included Delamere, Little Leigh, Kelsall and Tarporley in his gig. On Christmas Day 1907 he was presented with a motor car and accessories and an illuminated address by his grateful patients. A garage was also built adjacent to his house. Over 1200 people contributed to the gift, raising over £850 at a time when the average wage was £2. Dr Smith was said to be a ladies' man as well as having a great sense of humour. He would playfully 'scutch' gossiping women with his whip as he drove round the village. He would frequently head a funeral cortege to the churchyard and boasted that he always 'took his work home'. When he was 72 he called to see a patient on the way home from a meeting. As he got into his car he had a seizure and died a few days later.

The Communion Table is Elizabethan with turned legs and came from a Hampshire Church.

The piece of wood on the windowsill beneath the north east window is believed to be part of the 13th century church and was found in a nearby cottage. The **carving** on the box, which is usually on the windowsill and sometimes at the back of church, is also believed to be made from part of the 13th century church.

The North-East Corner: This was not part of the 15th century church, but was added in the 16th century in order to make the church 'square'. (Between 1558 & 1625 according to Ormerod/1636 according to Bebbington. However, the 16th century ceiling from Vale Royal Abbey Church goes into the extension and was put up in 1560 which implies that the extension was added prior to this date i.e. earlier in the 16th century.) Looking towards the east wall (adjacent to the chancel), a line is clearly visible from bottom to top, the stones on each side being of contrasting colours. This is where a buttress (formerly outside the

church to give the building extra strength) used to stand. Externally there is a line by the drainpipe following the line inside the church.

Memorial to Rev Francis Long below the tryptic. Rev Francis Long was loved by his parishioners and the day before his funeral his coffin was carried into the church and following a service his coffin was guarded by teams of volunteers who stayed there overnight – ‘almost like a mini lying in state’.

The Vestry was behind the main altar in the 13th century church, but it is clearly shown in its present position on the 15th century plan of the church.

Battle of Waterloo memorial. Above the vestry door is a memorial to 19 year old Lt Ashton of Hefferston Grange who was killed at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. He had joined the army at the age of 15. When news of the victory at Waterloo reached London his mother, Mrs Ashton, was staying at the London home of her mother, Mrs Jarret. Everybody was preparing to illuminate their houses to celebrate the victory. The Duke of Gloucester was a friend of the family and instead of sending an aide-de-camp, as was usual, he rode to the house himself to break the news telling them not to illuminate their house as John had been killed. Before the battle John had such a strong premonition of his own death that he gave his watch to his uncle, Mr William Ashton.

The Chancel

The Pair of Sanctuary Chairs of William and Mary period (i.e. late 17th century): Exquisitely carved. When there is a wedding these are placed near the lectern in the central aisle and, after they are married, the bride and groom sit on them during the service. The bishop will sit on one of these chairs if he is involved in a service e.g. confirmation.

The **linenfold panelling** behind the altar was brought from Aston Hall in 1854, but originally came from Norton Priory and is probably 16th century.

N.B. According to ‘Notes on Cheshire Churches’ by Glynne the linenfold panelling came from Dutton Old Hall. However Bebbington states that

‘The linenfold panels round the sanctuary came originally from Norton Priory to Aston Hall and were brought to the church from Aston in 1854. This was confirmed to me by the late Lord Barrymore as recently as 1924, his lordship telling me he well remembered the panelling being brought from Aston and also the particulars of their Norton origins.’

Ref; Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society Vol LIV. ‘The Parish Church and its Registers’ By Charles E. Bebbington.

On the basis of what appeared to be a reference to an eyewitness account it can be assumed that the linenfold panelling came from Aston Hall although Lord Barrymore would have been relatively young at the time and many years had elapsed between 1854 and 1924.

When the linenfold panels were brought to the church Rev Charles Spencer Stanhope (whose memorial window is in the north aisle) wanted them put around his new pulpit but he was prevented from doing so by Mr Smith Barry (Lord Barrymore’s father) and Mr Wilbraham.

He was more or less accused of popery in a poem written by Mr Roland Egerton Warburton of Arley. The poem also mocks him for the way he used to get his sermon sheets out of order:

‘A large D’Oyley Bible a sermon in sheets,
A carved linen panel your Pulpit completes,
But beware how you hang that Napkin outside
Or the Sermon within it may possibly hide.
Beware lest intent on that Napkin outspread

You lose of your own exposition the thread.
 Or lest between preaching and bleaching perplex'd
 Instead of the Napkin, you mangle the text.
 Though that Napkin may be like yourself high and dry
 And plain country Protestants pass the thing by,
 But when Westerton hears of your doings in town
 He'll soon have that last rag of Popery down.'

The Holy Table is **Chippendale** (1760) with cabriole legs and claw feet.

The Communion Rails: These altar rails were here prior to 1877 but were removed as part of the restoration of the church. They were then used as a balustrade to the back staircase at Hefferston Grange. They were restored to the church in 1909 and, when they were being re-fixed, Bebbington found an inscription saying the rails had been "made out of the olde ones and put up here in the year of our Lord 1709". Searching through the accounts of the church, he found this to be correct. There is documentary evidence that the "olde ones" were REPAIRED in 1634, so they have had an interesting history, i.e. Altar rails in 16th century church; repaired 1634; removed and new ones made from them in 1709; removed 1877 and used as balustrade to a staircase; restored to church 1909.

N.B. Mr Heath owned Hefferston Grange in 1877 but in 1909 it was owned by Mr Frankenbury of Salford.

Note the Victorian **encaustic floor tiles**.

The East Doorway: This door has been blocked up and evidence of its former position hidden by the linenfold panelling. Its position can clearly be seen on the outside of the building. This doorway led to the vestry in the 13th century church. According to Canon Egerton a new vestry was built when the church was extended in the 15th century (note door leading to vestry in Lady Chapel) and the old one removed (see XV century plan of church). The door may have remained here for some time, because, according to evidence found by Charles Bebbington, it was not blocked up until 1636.

When the panelling was removed for repairs in 1915 Charles Bebbington discovered shelves and an aumbry (an aumbry is a place used to house the communion bread and wine). Inside the aumbry he found some old papers and documents that had been lost for nearly a century. These are now looked after by Chester Records office in the Winsford salt mines. He also discovered a hornbook (used in the past to teach children the alphabet, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed etc). Unfortunately the handle was missing. The hornbook, together with a replica made by Charles Bebbington is kept in the West Tower safe.

The East Window: This is the oldest of the windows in the church (1854), although most are Victorian. It was paid for by public subscription. According to a past vicar, Rev Geoffrey Parsons, who studied all the windows in the church, it can probably be attributed to Wailes (although according to Pevsner it may be by John Hardmann and Co.) The five main lights depict Christ ascending with the gospel writers either side.

Memorial to Rev Stanhope's children – above altar RHS N.B. Of his 7 children only the two eldest survived to adulthood. One of them, Charles William Stanhope later became the first vicar of Crowton Church. He was an alcoholic who beat his wife who consequently divorced him. Neither son had any children.

Brass Memorial to William Barker: (SW side of end pillar north side of chancel): A Free Grammar School was founded in Forest Street in 1638 for children (i.e. boys) living in the Township of Weaverham & the Lordships of Gorstage & Sandiway. (English & Latin were free, but a small charge was made for writing and accounts.) William Barker of Sandiway was the main benefactor. In 1678 he not only endowed the school with £100 in money (an enormous sum in the 17th century), but gave it lands in Great Budworth and Weaverham.

The hanging candelabrum: According to the Rev. A.V. Atkinson, when he wrote about it in 1942, this brass candelabrum dates back to the 18th century and he stated that there were only 21 of its kind in Cheshire. Bebbington however claims that the candelabrum is 17th century.

The Rood Screen and Rood Loft (a gallery above a rood screen): There was a rood screen and loft in the 13th, 15th and 16th century church (see Canon Egerton's plans of the church 1281-1360 & 1558-1800). As we know, a rood screen/loft used to be placed in a church to separate the holy part of the church from the congregation in the nave. (In the Middle Ages the nave would have been used for a range of secular purposes and the **original** purpose of the rood screen was to protect the sacrament from irreverent access or abuse) It is believed that evidence of the rood screen/loft can be seen by looking at the arch at the east end of the church. There are marks on the stone near the top of the arch showing where the rood loft *may* have been attached. The rood screen was removed in 1774 and replaced by a three-decker pulpit and prayer desk (see Canon Egerton's plan). This was so large that the coffin had to be carried under it in a funeral. This pulpit was removed in 1854. Marks near the base of the pillar indicate where its' replacement stood. In 1877 the present carved oak pulpit was installed. At the same time, the minstrel's gallery was removed and the choir stalls were installed. (i.e. The choir has been brought from the back of the church to the front, with the organ at the rear of the church.)

The oak (eagle) lectern was presented to the church in 1877.

The Wilbraham Chapel

This chapel was originally owned by the Dones of Crowton and was known as the 'Crowton Chapel'. The Dones left Crowton in the 17th century and were followed by the Hattons. We can see the family memorials on the east wall. The estate was then bought by a member of the Wilbraham family, who built Delamere House (a large house surrounded by a wooded park and now a housing estate). The chapel then became known as the 'Wilbraham Chapel'. The family was still occasionally using the Georgian box family pews in the middle of the 20th century. The copper bowl, used for flowers, belonged to the family.

The South East Door: The box pews were installed in 1700 and a window put in, making the chapel a lot lighter. This MAY have been when the south east door, shown on the 13th century plan of the church, was blocked up. However, it could have been removed when the church was extended in the 15th or 16th century. However, it would have provided a private entrance to the family chapel, so it seems likely that it was here until the box pews were added in 1700.

The Wilbraham Hatchment (big coat of arms on wall): When George Wilbraham died in 1885, this was carried, by hand, from Delamere House to the church.

Wooden model of church was made by a member of the congregation in the 1950's.

The South Aisle

The screen: According to Bebbington the Crowton/Wilbraham Chapel in the 13th century was screened round by a heavy oak screen, the lower part of which may still be forming the lower part of the pews along the west and part of the north side of the north aisle. . According to Pevsner and other historians the present parclose screens around both side chapels date from 1636. Bebbington claimed that he had found evidence that the head of the parclose screen in the Wilbraham chapel is made from the head of the old Gothic screen

MUSIC GROUP CORNER: A pew was shifted in 2009 in order to accommodate the music group (formed 2002/3), so, instead of a Minstrel's Gallery we now have a minstrel's corner! The choir, sitting in the choir stalls and accompanied by the organ, sing every Sunday at evensong and at special services, whilst the Music Group lead the singing every Sunday morning.

First World War Memorial: Either side of main panel – lists the fallen. It is said that during the Sunday service the vicar at the time, Rev Francis Long, (whose memorial is in the Lady Chapel) would read out the names of those recently killed and that one Sunday morning he had to read out the name of his only son, Lt. Francis Stuart Long, whose name is on the centre panel of the memorial, and who died in the Battle of the Somme, 1916 age 20. Sadly one of his daughters, Alice Mary, died in 1921 through shock sustained during the air raids in London whilst she was nursing the wounded and sick from the battlefields of France and Flanders. The names of both children are mentioned on Rev Long's gravestone making it a war memorial

The Douglas Window: was given to the Church in 1877 by John Douglas in memory of his parents and sisters.

Memorial plaque to Thomas Cooper on south wall between the two windows. Thomas Cooper died 28th August 1778 and is buried 'in the church south pew'. He was the huntsman to the Hon Smith Barry, son of the 4th Earl Barrymore. A match was made for 500 guineas for a race between Mr Barry's 4 year old hound 'Bluecap' and Bluecap's three year old daughter 'Wanton' against Mr Meynell's 'Richmond' and a favourite bitch. The drag was drawn and run on 30th September 1763 at Newmarket Heath. Bluecap came first followed closely by Wanton and far ahead of Richmond 'The bitch never run in at all' 'Three score horses started with the hounds and Thomas Cooper was the first up but the horse was run quite blind'..

The Coward Window: erected by Peter Barncroft Coward, a Rotherham Solicitor, in memory of family members. Depicts King David, King Solomon, King Edward I who founded Vale Royal Abbey, and John Chamneys the first abbot of Vale Royal. Under the latter, it states that the king granted John Chamneys 'the Advowson and the Castle of Weaverham'. We do not know what this means. 'Castle' could be another word for 'Manor' or 'area' as we do not know of a castle in Weaverham. However, there is a 'Castle Field' near the river between here and Acton Bridge but no evidence of a castle has been found there.

The end pew before south door: notice the Churchwardens' staves with brass heads of a mitre and crown. One is for the people's warden and the other for the vicar's warden and this is where the Churchwardens used to sit. There is now no obvious distinction between the two wardens and they no longer sit in this pew. We are not sure when the wardens stopped sitting here but they were doing so in the 1940's when Jeff Burgess's father, also called Jeff, was the people's warden. The panels at the back of the pew are from the three decker pulpit.

The South Porch and Doorway were widened in 1724/1725. It is said this was to accommodate ladies wearing wide skirts which were fashionable at the time. A new internal porch was added in 1877 and this was extended to provide a cloakroom and toilet area in 2001 when the kitchen area was installed.

The vicars are listed on the wall (back of church between door & window South side). There was a priest here in 1086 when the Domesday Book was written and probably long before that. Until 1277, the living was a rectory in the gift of the Crown. The list of vicars extends in an unbroken line from 1299.

Some interesting vicars

Rev. Edward Shalcrosse Vicar of Weaverham 1575/6-1607

The people of Cheshire as a whole objected to the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity but out of a troublesome county, Weaverham was the worst parish. Although he was the choice of the Queen (not the Bishop of Chester), Rev Shalcrosse was probably partially responsible. He was severely criticised in the Visitations of 1575, 1590 & 1592. He didn't wear his surplice or cross, didn't conduct the service in the order set down, and was frequently absent from services. He only gave one sermon in 3 years. (It was actually 4 years). He was an extortioner and took bribes for false penances. "He goethe much to the alehouse and is a common drunkarde". One night on the way home from the alehouse he fell in a ditch and was unable to stand up without help.

N.B. According to the Cheshire Quarter Session Files /82 Weaverham QJF 32 May 1603-October 1604 'Pet. Of Ellen, wife of Edward Shalcros Vicar of Weaverham, against Ralph Amery, ric Strech, John Peerson, Randle Farrar, John Jacson, Peter Barker, Allys Woodfen and Jane Millington of W., who have had her imprisoned in W and indicted at the court for felony.' Presumably in the Weaverham Manor Court.
N.B. It is not clear whether Ellen was a felon or the victim of a vendetta.

Rev Thomas Hunter MA (Oxford) Vicar of Weaverham 1755-1777

Very highly esteemed. Author of several notable publications 'active, social and just'.

The Carved Stone Slab: Unearthed in churchyard in 1938, when it was twice its present size. It was stolen from church when Michael Ridley was vicar and when the top half was returned a few years later it had been painted purple. (The vicar had received a phone call telling him that it had been left outside the door. It is believed that it had been used for black magic by a coven in Delamere Forest). At the time there was some debate about its origins. Some people believed it depicted Christ on the cross whilst others thought that it was a depiction of the horned god Ceruunos. There was an early British camp of the Cornovii tribe in the general area of the vicarage (the highest point of the village) and they worshipped Ceruunos.

However, according to Manchester Museum, although stylistically Celtic, it is probably ecclesiastical and could be Medieval or post Medieval, and was probably discarded. Probably intended for a church or large house or hall. To me, it seems that as it was found in the churchyard, it must have been intended for the church.

N.B. This stone seems to have been removed from the church circa 2017 and we are trying to find out where it is.

N.B. Looking at Canon Egerton's plan of the church 1558-1800 he notes that the church plate was hidden in 1745.

Bonnie Prince Charlie having defeated the only Government army in Scotland on 21st September 1745 began to lead his army south and by November had already reached Swarkestone Bridge, Derbyshire before his army commanders decided to turn back. Whilst the Jacobite army was moving south and fearing that the church silver might be looted, the decision was taken to hide it. It is said that the church plate was never retrieved from its hiding place and has yet to be found.

The following entry is from the Church accounts:

1745 Spent hiding the Church Plate

6d

The 8 Stained Glass Church Windows:

Separate sheets interpreting the 8 windows and their history are available to view in church and on the Weaverham History Society website: history.weaverham.org.uk. Those in church cannot be removed from the building.

There is some information in this document about Rev Charles Spencer Stanhope that is not on the relevant sheet about the window in his memory as we were not aware of the information at the time the windows sheets were written. The window was given to the church by the parishioners and is in the north aisle of the church.

The north window in the Lady Chapel was paid for by Public subscription in memory of Dr Smith in 1919.

The East window in the Lady Chapel was given to the church in 1873 by Mr Heath.

The East window in the chancel was put in by public subscription in 1854 and is the oldest in the church.

The East window in the Wilbraham Chapel was given by Mr Wilbraham's family in memory of their father in 1873

One of the windows in the south aisle was given to the church by John Douglas in 1877 in memory of his parents and sisters.

The other, which is near the south door, was given to the church by Mr P. Bancroft Coward in memory of his ancestors.

The Tower Window was given by Mr A. Johnson in 1877.

.

The Six Bells:

The oldest two are listed as they are the oldest bells by this founder (Bilbie) this far north in the country. They are the No.1 (treble) and No.6 bells. The founder was **Bilbie** and they were recast in 1796 by Bilbie. The No.2 and No.3 bells were recast in 1718 by **Abraham Rudhall** (i.e. before the nos. 1 and 6 were recast) The No.4 and No.5 bells were recast in 1876 by a London firm: **Mears And Stainbank**. Apparently all the bells were retuned in the late 1960's /early 70's.

Like most old bells each one had its interesting motto cast into it, but unfortunately those on the 4th and 5th were not renewed at the recasting.

1st Bell: 'My treble voice makes heart rejoice' and 'For King and Constitution'

'Thomas and James Bilbie, fecit 1795' followed by the names of the Wardens of that year.

2nd Bell: 'Peace and Good Neighbourhood' 1718

3rd Bell: 'Prosperity to the Church of England' 1718

6th Bell: 'I to the church the living call,
I to the grave do summon all,
Fear God, Honour the King'

'Thomas and James Bilbie, Chewstroke, Somerset,
Fecit 1795.' Followed by the names of the wardens.

N.B. This is not a complete history or guide to the church. If you wish to find out more please refer to the list of references at the end of this document particularly the paper written by Charles Bebbington or contact Weaverham History Society history@weaverham.org.uk if you have any questions.

N.B. Historical 'facts' are as accurate as possible at the time of writing, and where sources differ (e.g. wrt dates) this has been noted.

Church Wardens' Accounts

The churchwardens' Accounts make interesting reading and are now in the care of the Cheshire Record Office. Extracts can be seen in Charles Bebbington's paper as well as 'The Story of Our Village' and the guide to the church entitled 'Welcome to St Mary's Church Weaverham' by Joy Oldfield and Pat Sinott.

Here are just a few examples:

In **1634** £1 2s 0d was '**payde for dynners and drink for parishioners loading flagges for the church**'

Under the statutes of Henry V111 and Elizabeth I the church wardens had to pay for **vermin** to be destroyed.and there are many entries referring to this in the accounts. For example, in **1639** Rich'd Shepheard was paid 8d for this task. It should be noted that once fox hunting became popular foxes were not paid for.

In **1675** 6d was given to two **passengers** having a pass from Liverpool to Portsmouth. 'Passengers' are referred to a lot in the 17th century. They were often **vagrants** and the pass was signed by the Wardens, Vicar or Magistrate of each place through which they passed. The amount of money given varied.

In **1680** the churchwarden paid Jo Billington 2s 0d for going with him through the Town and Lordship collecting for **English slaves**.

Between 1530 and 1780 pirates from the Barbary Coast in North Africa captured and enslaved European Christians by raiding ships and coastal villages of Europe from the Eastern Mediterranean to Iceland, including South west Britain. Most European governments were often willing to pay a ransom for the return of some slaves from their country, but the British Government was not, and consequently English

slaves were treated more harshly by their owners than those of other nationalities. Churches therefore organised collections in the hope of freeing some English slaves. It has been estimated by some that approximately one million two hundred and fifty thousand European Christians were captured and enslaved between 1530 and 1780. In order to replace those slaves who died, escaped, converted to Islam or were ransomed it was necessary to capture 8,500 men and women every year.

In **1682** 6s 0d was spent collecting for the **Protestants in France**. This was at a time when Louis XIV was persecuting Protestants and banned emigration. He insisted that all protestants convert to Catholicism. Many protestants (Huguenots) however fled the country in the few years following 1681 resulting in a 'brain drain'.

In **1705** 4s 6d was spent going to Chester 'about Quakers being there a day and a night and horse hire' 1s 6d was also spent securing a **Citation upon the Quakers**. Indeed, five people were prosecuted for not paying their Church Leys. There are many other similar entries in the accounts.

In **1726** there is an intriguing entry for 6d spent taking care that **Grace Webster make no disturbance upon Easter Sunday**.

In **1733** 3d was paid for 'spikes to keep the **owls** of (off) some seats'.

In **1805** 10s 6d was spent **treating the Ringers** for Good News following the **Battle of Trafalgar**.

In **1818** 3s 0d was spent for the churchwarden to 'journey with Mr Clemenson to Sir John Stanley (who lived with his family at Winnington Hall) 'respecting **George Fluet comeing to church disguised in Womans Cloaths**'. We do not know what the outcome of this meeting was.

1839 £3 0s 0d was 'Paid for **Treat for Ringers at the Queen's Wedding**'.

1841 10s 0d was paid to Mr, Wm. Arfern for **parchment and for copying the plan of the interior of the church**. Presumably this was in anticipation of the restoration of the church by Antony Salvin.

There are of course many other entries in the accounts many of which reflect the history, political and religious laws and attitudes not only of this church but of the country at the time.

N.B. Where extracts have been taken from the original accounts the wording is in inverted commas and the spelling may seem a little strange.

Periods of English History and furniture design mentioned in these Background Notes

The Jacobean Period:

According to most sources the term 'Jacobean' coincides with the reign of James VI of Scotland 1567-1625. James inherited the English crown in 1603 as James I. Thus the term 'Jacobean' overlaps with the Elizabethan era in England.

According to the Oxford Living Dictionary Jacobean furniture is defined as 'being in the style prevalent during the reign of James I, characterised by the use of dark oak'. However, according to the Anglican Church Jacobean pews date from late 16th century/early 17th century (thus agreeing with the more generally accepted view given in the first paragraph above).

Jacobean style furniture in the home and in church was made during the late 16th/early 17th century and continued to be made, and was still fashionable, for a few years after the death of James I of England / VI of Scotland.

The pews in St Mary's Church, Weaverham were Jacobean although they were not installed until 1634. We do not know the date of the Jacobean font cover but can assume that it is late 16th century/early 17th century when the church was extensively altered and extended.

There was a rood screen in the church from the 13th century onwards and, according to Pevsner this was replaced in 1530. This early 16th century screen is often incorrectly referred to as the Jacobean screen. The 1530 rood screen was removed in 1774. The bench at the west end of church (i.e. the bench depicting the head of a man and woman during the reign of Henry VIII) was made from the 1530 rood screen so it is reasonable to assume that it was made in 1774 or soon after that. .

Elizabeth I 1533-1603 – reigned 1558-1603

James I of England and Ireland 1603-1625 (also King James VI of Scotland 1567-1625)
Born 1566 died 1625

English Civil War – 1642-1651 A series of armed conflicts between the Royalists (Cavaliers) and the Parliamentarians (Roundheads).

1st Civil War (1642-46) and 2nd Civil War (1648-1649) were fought between supporters of Charles I and supporters of the Long Parliament.

Charles I executed January 1649.

3rd Civil War (1649 -51) fought between supporters of 12 year old Charles II and supporters of the Rump Parliament. Charles II spent the next few years exiled in France.

Commonwealth of England 1649-1653

The Protectorate – under the personal rule of Oliver Cromwell (1653-1658) and his son Richard (1658-59)

The Battle of Winnington Bridge 1659. Said to be the last battle of the Civil War. It was fought during the uncertainly following the resignation of Richard Cromwell and the ending of the Protectorate. The Royalists led by Sir George Booth were defeated by General Lambert heading a detachment of Cromwell's Model Army.

Restoration of the Monarchy. A political crisis followed the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658 which, in 1660, led to Charles II being invited to return to Britain and the restoration of the monarchy. The king returned on 29th May (his 30th birthday). All political documents were dated as if he had succeeded his father as king in 1649.

Reign of William and Mary – Mary reigned with her husband 1662 -1694 and William continued to reign after Mary's death until his own death in 1702.

William and Mary style furniture (often described as 'Early Baroque') generally refers to furniture made between 1695 and the mid 1720's.

Chippendale Furniture – Thomas Chippendale was born in Otley, Yorkshire in 1718 learning basic skills from his father (who was a joiner) before working for, and being trained by, Richard Wood of York. He moved to London in 1749 initially working as a journeyman cabinet maker. In 1774 he became the first cabinet maker to publish a book of his designs. He was not only a cabinet maker but also an interior designer advising on aspects of design such as soft furnishings and the colour of a room. He often worked with other specialists to supply furnishings for a whole house. The Holy Table in St Mary's Church, Weaverham is a Chippendale table dating from 1760 and has cabriole legs with claw feet.

References

This is an incomplete list

The Parish Church of Weaverham and its Registers by Charles E. Bebbington (published in The Transactions of The Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society Vol. LIV 1940)

Weaverham The Story of Our Village published 1951/52

History of Cheshire by George Ormerod

Notes on Churches of Cheshire by Sir Stephen R. Glynne and Rev.J.A. Atkinson of Tsohton 1894

The Buildings of England. Cheshire by Clare Hartwell, Matthew Hyde, Edward Hubbard and Nicholas Pevsner (published by University Press)

Canon Egerton's plans of St. Mary's Church, Weaverham (not to scale)

Plan showing alterations made by John Douglas

Minutes of PCC meetings 1945-1951 found in church safe but now held in the archives of Cheshire Record Office Duke Street Chester.

Welcome to St Mary's Church Weaverham (a guide to the church) by Joy Oldfield and Pat Sinott 1982 (the copy available in church was updated in 2007 by present church members).

Letters from Cheshire County Council and Manchester Museum

Extracts from past copies of the Northwich Guardian and other documents found in the Church safe which are now in the care of the Cheshire Record Office, Duke Street, Chester.

Cheshire History Number 60 2020--2021

Weaverham History Society archives

My thanks go to the late Pat Sinnott, a founder member of St Mary's History Group and later of Weaverham History Society, who spent much time researching the history of this church and passed on her enthusiasm and some of her knowledge to me by giving me a personal guided tour of the church. I have checked the 'facts' to the best of my ability but am open to correction.

INDEX

- Accounts (Church Warden's) 13
- Barker (William) 8
- Bebbington (Charles) 0 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 17
- Bebbinton (Bayley) 4
- Bells 12
- Bench 3
- Blackhurst Clock 2
- Blue Cap 10
- Candelabrum (Hanging) 8
- Carved Stone Slab 11
- Ceilings 3, 4
- Chairs 7
- Chapel of the Annunciation 6
- Chippendale 7
- Choir Stalls 9, 10
- Church Model 9
- Church Plate (1745) 11 and Cannon Egerton's plan of church 1558-1800
- Civil War 2, 15
- Clock (Blackhurst) 2
- Communion Rails 7
- Communion Table (Lady Chapel) 6
- Cooper (Thomas) 10
- Coward Window 10
- Crowton Chapel 9
- Dissolution 1
- Dones of Crowton 9
- Douglas (John) 2, 10, 17
- Douglas Window 10
- Eagle Lectern 9
- East Doorway 8
- East Window 8
- Edward the First 1
- Encaustic Tiles 8
- English Commonealth 2, 15
- Font 3
- Grammar School 2
- Grange Chapel 5
- Hattons of Crowton 9
- Heath Chapel 5
- Hefferston Chapel 5
- History 1
- Holy Table 7
- Kempe Window 6
- Lady Chapel 5
- Lady Chapel Ceiling 6
- Lectern 9
- Linenfold Panelling 7, 17
- Long (Rev Francis) 7, 10
- Long (Lt Francis Stuart) 10
- Long (Alice Mary) 10
- Memorial Plaques 4, 6, 7, 8, 10
- Minstrels' Gallery 2, 9
- Music Group Corner 10
- Nave Ceiling 3
- North Door 3
- North Aisle Ceiling 4
- Organ 3
- Panelling 7, 17
- Parclose Screens 9
- Parish Chest 5
- Pews 5, 9, 10
- Pulpit 7, 9
- Reformation 1
- Rood Screen and Loft 3, 8
- Salvin (Antony) 2, 17
- Sanctuary Chairs 7
- Sanctuary Panelling 7, 17
- Screens 3, 8, 9
- Shalcrosse (Rev) 11
- Side Chapels 5, 9
- Skeletons 2
- Smith (Dr) 6
- South Aisle 9
- South East Door 9
- Smith Memorial Window 6
- Stained Glass Windows 4, 8, 10, 12
- Stanhope Memorial Window 4
- Stanhope (Rev) 4, 7, 8
- Tower 1
- Tower Arch 2
- Vale Royal Abbey 1, 4
- Vestry 1, 6, 8
- Vicars (List of) 10
- War Memorial 3, 6, 10
- Waterloo (Battle of) 6
- Wilbraham Chapel 9
- Wilbraham Hatchment 9
- William and Mary 7, 15
- Winnington Bridge (Battle of) 2, 15