

A Guide and History to the Church of St John the Evangelist, Over, Winsford.

A SHORT GUIDE TO THE CHURCH.



As you enter the church turn left and walk towards the Lady Chapel on the wall, to your left, you will see the memorials to the Collins family. [Picture](#) Eliezer and Emma were master and mistress to St Johns School for 40 years, their son Basil died at the age of 34 and Ethel, their daughter who died at the age of 26, the lectern is also a memorial to this young lady.. [Picture](#) The Lady Chapel is comparatively new in that it was dedicated in 1972 with the Aumbry Safe in February 1973. The organ is not the original, [Picture](#) that having been reconditioned and repaired in 1969, it was replaced in 1975 with the organ from the redundant church of Holy Trinity in Hoylake.

The Reredos, behind the altar, was dedicated in 1932. [Picture](#) The panels either side of the Reredos were given by the newly formed Mothers Union and dedicated in 1950 to replace curtains. Behind the choir stalls to the right of the altar will be seen a memorial to Jim Yardley and his family, Jim had been a member of the choir and sexton for many years and in fact sang at the Christmas Midnight service shortly before he died. Joan Ayliffe was a reader in St Johns sadly killed at the Over Roundabout as a result of which the traffic lights were finally installed. In the side windows in this area will be seen the letters SD for Sara Delamere, it also appears in other places in the church.

Carry on, to the left past the pulpit a gift from The Hon. Col. T G Cholmondeley, and the window, between the Scout and British Legion banners, was erected in 1924 in memory of George Henry Cromack and his wife Susan. George had been organist at the church for 40 years before he died in 1914, he could have been the first organist but this is not known, he is believed to have been blind and possibly taught at St John's School. Carry on towards the font, this a gift from The Hon. And Rev. H P Cholmondeley and you will see the memorial window to Smallwood family. The next memorial is to those who died in the Great War, this is next to the vicar's vestry, the Font was originally sited here. The double doors under the west window lead to the choir vestry, this is referred to elsewhere. On the opposite side of the church is the 'children's corner' the window is in memory of Samuel and Ann Blackburn 1935. Samuel had been a policeman in the parish before moving to Ormskirk, he and Ann had no children and money was left to the church to provide a memorial window. The table is in memory of the grandson of a former churchwarden, the little boy died of a cot death in 1995 the table was made, by a member of the choir, from a redundant pew.

Over the years there have been many gifts to add to the beauty of this church and my apologies for not listing them all.

Did you notice two interesting carvings in the church? High above the pulpit is a little man . [Picture](#) and on one of the columns near the main door is a squirrel.. [Picture](#)

On leaving the church turn and look at the inscription above the main door "To the Glory of God and the memory of his dearly loved wife Sara Delamere. This church was erected by Hugh, Lord Delamere. A D 1862." Presumably this was the intended date of completion, but consecration did not take place until 1863, even then building was delayed!! The outside porch doors were erected in 1979. This was found necessary due to vandalism as will be noticed by the 'additions' to the carved heads either side of the main door. In the churchyard are several interesting memorials. As you leave the church turn left and under a tree you will see the memorial to the first vicar the Rev Edward Woodyatt who died in 1918 at the age of 88 having been vicar of this parish for 46 years. The first name on the memorial is Charlotte Yeoman who was the mother of Rosa Charlotte who died in 1908 at the age of 77 and was the wife of the said vicar, he was buried along with his wife and mother-in-law. Further down the main drive, to the left, is a large square memorial to those who died in the Over Cotton Mill Fire in 1874. The names on the memorial are Eileen Fletcher 18, Catherine Mountfield 17, Eliza Hindley 15, Harriet Whitehurst 34, Thomas Whitehurst 3 months, Mirian Whitehurst 23 and John Timperley 20.

Thomas was Harriet's son, her 13 year old daughter who also worked at the Cotton Mill was saved. There is a wealth of history in the churchyard if you know where to look. I have seen two memorials which state 'As a token of esteem and remembrance from the Managers and Girls at Meadow Bank Salt Works' they do not say how they died or when. Before leaving the churchyard turn and look at the tower and the clock. The clock only has three faces as the south side of the tower, at the time of building, faced fields. Floodlighting was install to celebrate the Millennium.

I do hope you have enjoyed my guided walk through St Johns Church and will visit again sometime. The churchyard in spring is worth a visit starting with the snowdrops, either side of the main drive, followed by the crocuses, daffodils and then the bluebells, white as well as blue, by then the lime trees are in full leaf. The two trees nearest the church were cut down in 2005 as the roots were causing damage to the footpath, but we hope not the church.

Items of interest about the "New" Church at Over.

During the middle of the 1800's the vicar of the parish church of St Chad, Over arranged for church services to be conducted in the National School as this was centred in the centre of Over village as it was then. St Chad's church being on the boundary of the parish.

The then Lord Delamere of Vale Royal Abbey had purchased the Market Hall from the shareholders and with a gift of money this became the National School. (Now

known as St John Church of England Primary School). He then looked at the need of a Church of England Church in the centre of the village, as several nonconformist churches had already been established. He donated a portion of land on the corner of Whitbys Lane and what is now Delamere Street, and the Parish of St John the Evangelist was then created out of the parishes of St Mary's, Whitegate and St Chad, Over. In 1861 the foundation stone was laid and the church was built as a memorial to Sara Delamere, Lord Delamere's wife. The first service was held on 21st June 1863. John Douglas was the architect and the church was built at a cost of £5000, this having been met by Lord Delamere, it included under floor water heating and gas lighting. It cost twice that amount to repair the south isle roof in the late 1900'.

The original ground plans for the church show seating for 500. Since then the baptism font has been moved to allow for the creation of a choir vestry, now the vicar's vestry. The new choir vestry was added in 1961 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the church, and was dedicated at a Centenary Service by the then Bishop of Stockport on the 16th June 1963. Seats have been removed as congregations declined and for the more convenient use of the space in the church. The seats at the rear of the church were removed to provide an area for holding meetings and enjoying tea and coffee after Wednesday and Sunday morning services. We now have electric light, oil central heating, and a sound system with a loop connection for the hard of hearing. How things have changed. Even reporting as will be seen in the following extract.

The consecration and opening of the new church was reported in the Macclesfield Courier and Herald on 18th June 1863:

"The Consecration and opening of the new church at Over in this County took place on Thursday last week. The Consecration was performed by the Bishop of Chester (John Graham) who arrived at 11 o'clock; the edifice was crowded by a highly respectable congregation, including a considerable number of clergy of the surrounding neighbourhood.

The building placed on an elevated site, is of Runcorn stone and has a tower and spire 140 feet high and form a beautiful object on the landscape. The style of the architecture is geometrical gothic, with a nave, side isles, chancel with chantry and vestry. The under portion of the tower forming the baptistery. The building is warmed by hot water apparatus and has handsome brass gas fittings.

The Lord Delamere has born the entire cost of the site and building, about £5,000, as well as the endowment, with the exception of grants from the Incorporated Church Building Society and Diocesan Societies, and his Lordship has provided a comfortable Parsonage House. The Rev. Edward Woodyett M A (Oxen) as been appointed to the Incumbency, and has entered upon his pastoral duties"

The report in the Macclesfield Courier details some of the gifts made to the church and the donars. "Sadly Mr Jackson, who had been largely responsible for the creation of the church had died 4 months before at the age of 73." The report continued

"The collections on the opening day amounted to £35 and the choir of Whitegate sang the psalms and hymns and acquitted themselves in a most pleasing manner

under the direction of Mr Twiss who presided at the organ, which is a very sweet little instrument built by Bevington & Son of London.

On Sunday morning (21st June 1863) a congregation of three hundred assembled at the new church to hear the newly appointed incumbent, the Rev. Edward Woodyett, M A of Christ Church, Oxford, preach his introductory sermon from Acts 16 part of verse 30 and 31 – ‘What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ’

After the service the christening of the architect’s child took place, when the Rt. Hon. Lord Delamere undertook the office of Godfather; there was also another christening of a child belonging to the newly appointed district, which now forms a parish in itself...’

Early Parish Records

The early parish records are very different from those used at the present time, in that they contain very little information. For a baptism we now require date of birth, parents name address and occupation and the names of the godparents. The first entry on the **Baptism Register** states ‘ 21st June 1863, John Percy Douglas, parents John and Mary Douglas. The next entry is of a Joseph Galley, parents Samuel and Eliza on 22nd June 1863 and is noted private with Samuel’s occupation as Labourer. The next two entries for John Ledward and Mary Brooks on 25th and 28th June are also marked private, whether these were conducted in the home or at the church is not noted. The next entry on 2nd August 1883 was presumably in church and that was the baptism of Henry Ledward son of Samuel and Eliza Ledward and Samuel was a Miller.

The **Marriage Register** shows similar changes in the details required. Today the age on the day of marriage along with the full address complete with post code, occupation and names of fathers along with their occupations are necessary. The first entry was on 3rd August 1863

John Smith	Bachelor	Full Age	St John Over	
Pansmith				
Eliza Eginton	Spinster	Minor	St John Over	-----
Bride and groom signed with X certificate completed by the vicar				
1 st November				
John Lowndes	Widower	Full Age	St John Over	Labourer
Hannah Rowlands	Widow		Full Age	St John Over
Domestic				

The first marriage where the bride and groom both signed the register was on 3rd March 1864

Alfred Johnson	Bachelor	Full Age	St John Over	Ships
Carpenter				
Sarah Shenton	Spinster	Full Age	St John Over	Domestic.

The **Burials Register** made rather sad reading in that the details were very brief, just the name, age and date. The first entry was for Ann Vickers on 13th September 1863 aged 26 the second was John Haigh on the 20th at 7 weeks

but at the bottom of the same page as number 8 was Mary Emily Vickers 7th April 1864 aged 1 year and buried in grave number one along with Ann Vickers. I was also sad to read that of the first 16 entries (the first two pages in the book) 10 out of the 16 were for children under 18 months.

The Architect John Douglas (1830-1911)

John Douglas was in practice as an architect in Chester from either 1855 or 1860 until he died in 1911 at the age of 81. His office was in Abbey Square, the business continued at the same address, under another name until 1974, unfortunately with the exception of one envelope of notes and sketches, all office records from the time of John Douglas were lost during the Second World War. Other records of his work are in private hands, notably the Duke of Westminster. During the late 1840's John Douglas was articulated to a Mr E G Paley of Sharpe & Paley in Lancaster, among the commissions they received were those for churches. It could be assumed that Douglas assisted with these commissions. In 1847 the firm was responsible for the partial rebuilding of Davenham Parish Church, some three miles from Sandiway where John Douglas lived with his father who was a builder and architect. It is not known if John Douglas senior was the builder used for the project but no doubt at the age of 17 John junior would have visited the site.

At the time John Douglas was setting up in business for himself he was commissioned by Lord Delamere to work on Vale Royal Abbey and the Abbey Estate. During this time Lord Delamere commissioned him to design a memorial to Sara Delamere, the building started in 1861 and was consecrated as St John the Evangelist, Over, in 1863, a parish created out of the parishes of Over St Chad and St Mary's. Whitegate.

During this time he designed the United Reform Church, Over, and by 1875 Hartford Parish Church had also been completed. He was responsible for buildings other than churches, among these were, Oakmere Hall and Hartford Lodge (now known as Whitehall), the east side of Wereburgh Street in Chester and the building that is now the HSBC Bank in Chester, although I am sure the inside of these buildings have changed. By this time the Duke of Westminster was a very notable client. While in practice in Chester John Douglas was a well respected man, on many committees and very active in local life. In fact a 'man of some importance.'

He married at the age of 29 in 1860 to Elizabeth Edmunds who was three years his senior. They lived in Abbey Square, their first son was John Percy followed by Colin Edmunds in 1864 Mary Elizabeth in 1866 and Sholto Theodore in 1867, sadly Mary Elizabeth died in 1868 of scarlet fever the following year Jerome their last child was born but lived only three days, their eldest son John died just before Christmas in 1873. John's wife died in 1878 and in 1887 Colin who was also an architect, died at the age of 23 after a long illness. John Douglas died in 1911; he was survived only by Sholto Theodore .

I like to think of our church as the first important building John Douglas completed with some of the features appearing in modified versions in other churches. I still think that St John's has that 'special something'.

Anyone wishing to know more about 'our' architect should read, as I did, The Work of John Douglas by Edward Hubbard. It is a fascinating and interesting book, giving a background to life in the late 1800's and showing just how far the influence of John Douglas spread. I must thank the work of Edward Hubbard for the information contained above.

Acknowledgements Edward Hubbard, The work of John Douglas.

The late G J C Griffiths, The Early Beginnings of St John The Evangelist Church Over. Reproduced with his permission by this church in June 1992.

With thanks to members of the parish for the memories and encouragement.
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