

Church and the community: a new perspective in sharing

Aims & Objectives

To promote and develop the use of the Church and its facilities as a community asset

To form partnerships with local affinity groups encouraging them to use the Church for meetings and events in return for their support in maintaining the fabric of the Church

To restore the secular role of the Church as a dynamic centre for a vibrant local community encouraging today's 'new' Chorley to relate to its past roots



In the last newsletter reference was made to the close affinity between Saint Laurence's Church and the town of Chorley highlighting the enduring bond that existed between Church and township. Chorley is not mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086) but was, at this time, possibly a summer pasture for the village of Croston that held its parish church. The earliest mention of a chapel in Chorley was in 1362, and a century later the core of the current Church of Saint Laurence was erected.

Initially Chorley was an agricultural community and its first market was situated at the crossroads by the chapel of Saint Laurence. This market grew although a visitor to the town in 1536 dubbed it 'wonderful poor or rather no market'. However by the next century the town had a grammar school and from 1660 handloom weavers were producing cotton cloth. By the end of the seventeenth century it had become a stopping place for coaches signifying its increasing importance.



The Next Step

Hopefully readers of this leaflet will be intrigued enough to want to discover more about Friends of Saint Laurence and explore the possibilities offered by such a proposal.

This is an exciting new experiment in sharing, bonding together Church and a community which already has its roots deep in the area's history.

Further information can be obtained from Michael Welsh
friends@stlaurencechorley.co.uk (01257 276992) or a member of the steering committee who be be glad to meet you and discuss their plans in person

In common with many other Lancashire towns Chorley had its share of skirmishes during the Civil War. During the war it had mixed fortunes and was of little strategic importance. Although its location astride the north-south highway meant that armed militia were a common sight most of the townspeople seemed to be neutral. A further hazard during the seventeenth century was the plague and in 1631 it arrived in Chorley possibly brought in by traders or fair showmen. The records of death recorded in the registers of St. Laurence's Church suggest that 120 people died of the disease, about one sixth of the population of the town at that time.

Nevertheless the town continued to prosper. Great estates were being developed by local worthies particularly at Astley, Gillibrand and Duxbury providing added prestige to the area. In addition to its growing importance as a market town it was fast becoming a centre of industry and commerce. Its population increased from 4,500 in 1801 to 27,000 in 1901. The first cotton mill was built in 1777 an industry that continued to thrive. The discovery of coal both in the heart of Chorley town and in the many of the surrounding villages brought added prosperity. This was aided by the building of the canal and the coming of the railway which provided access for the transportation of goods to both national and international markets.

After the First World War, however, the cotton industry fell into a long decline due mainly to Indian Cotton Duties and by the 1950s it became obvious that coal mining's days were numbered. Chorley had to discover a new role for itself and to do this it looked for diversification. The Leyland Motors Factory and the establishment of the massive Royal Ordnance Factory at Buckshaw did much to help with regeneration, as more recently has the rise of High Tech businesses.

Throughout all the changing fortunes of Chorley's history, the Church of St. Laurence has been a constant feature in the life of the town providing both spiritual and cultural support to its inhabitants. Even when it became necessary to build a new church to cope with the town's growing population and create new parishes, the townspeople did not forget that the old church that had existed for centuries was enshrined in their hearts. Local historian, George Birtill, wrote of the people of Chorley, that 'they didn't have hatchments or memorials in stone or brass. They didn't need any. The old church was their memorial. It still is'.

