

Notes for Visitors

The Parish Church of St. James the Great, Gawsworth.

When you enter the Church stand for a moment and take in the excellent proportions of the building. The walls of the Nave were built of limestone in 1430 and the Chancel and Tower of pink sandstone in 1480. The splendid roofs are five hundred years old - the Nave roof, barrel beam in design and unique in this Diocese, shows considerable traces of its original brilliant colouring and gilt. The Chancel roof, arch camber beam in construction and with rare panelled sections with tie beams, was never painted but both roofs are of exceptional beauty of design and in excellent condition.

Previously a Norman Chapel stood on this site, probably resembling the chapel which now stands in the churchyard at Prestbury.

The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the aumbry to the right of the altar. It is kept there for use in administering Holy Communion to people who are sick or are unable to come to church, and to remind us of the ever constant presence of our Blessed Lord through the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

The Chancel screen occupies the site of the site of the original Rood screen and was erected in 1893 to replace a similar medieval screen destroyed earlier. The cross figures over the screen were added in 1978.

The Story of the Rood.

Rood-screens were so-called because they supported the rood, that is a representation of Christ on the cross. When Hilda Littler carved the Gawsworth rood, she did not follow the model familiar for the last five hundred years but went back to the pattern of the earliest surviving crucifixes. Instead of the dead body we see the sturdy figure of the living Jesus consciously offering the one oblation of himself. "I lay down my life for the sheep.....No one takes it from me" (John 10, 11 & 18). She has represented Mary the Mother of Jesus at the moment of the fulfilment of Simeon's prophecy: "A sword shall pierce through thine own heart also" (Luke 2,35). The sorrow of every mother mourning the death of her child is expressed in this figure of "Our lady of Sorrows" Hilda Littler studied at Liverpool Art School. She has exhibited at the Royal Academy and the Paris Salon. The cross was redesigned by Donald Buttress, now the surveyor of the fabric of Westminster Abbey, and made by Ken Peacock of Manchester University. It incorporates the cross given by Herbert Edward Polehampton, Rector of Gawsworth 1904-25.

The Font with its octagonal basin is original 15th Century work and has a splendid carved font-cover, attributed to George Frederick Bodley (1827-1907).

Visitors are always welcome to join our worshipping family. Services at Gawsworth are in the Anglo-Catholic tradition of the Church of England. They follow the form set out in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

The Fitton Monuments.

The rood screen gates are normally locked because the Church is alarmed beyond the screen. So proceed up the aisle to see the Fitton monuments which are situated in the Sanctuary and you will observe them from the Chancel screen. The tombs of four generations of the Fitton family stand on each side of the altar.

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The oldest monument is the table tomb nearest the communion rail on your right as you face the altar. It commemorates Francis Fitton, Knight, who was buried in Gawsworth in 1608. The tomb, constructed of freestone and alabaster, is the earliest example of Renaissance work in Cheshire. Note the splendid effigy, the interesting armorial bearings, and the representation of a headless skeleton in a shroud.

The next oldest is on the opposite side of the sanctuary and shows Dame Alice Fitton (d. 1626) with her two sons and two daughters beside the tomb-chest of her husband, Sir Edward Fitton the 3rd (1550-1606). The effigy of Mary, the alleged dark lady of Shakespeare's Sonnets, and a Maid of Honour to Queen Elizabeth I, is the second figure behind her mother. The monument originally stood away from the wall with the figures of the four children at each corner.

The tomb behind and to the left of the altar is that of Sir Edward Fitton the 4th, the first baronet (1572-1619), his wife, Anne, plus effigies of their ten surviving children - three boys and seven girls.

The corresponding tomb on the south side of the altar is that of his son, Sir Edward Fitton the 5th, the second and last baronet (1603-1643) and his wife Jane. The small figure is that of their daughter, Margaret, who died in 1631 at the age of 7. Sir Edward, who was the last of the "Fighting Fittons" was a soldier who distinguished himself in the Civil War in the Royalist cause and died at the siege of Bristol in 1643.

Pause as you return down the aisle to note the fragments of ancient glass in Chancel windows and the small statue of the Virgin Mary set in a niche on the south wall. There are also some rather poor sketches of the very large paintings of St. Christopher, St. George, and the Final Judgement which were removed from the walls in the violent "restoration" of the Church in 1851. A list of Rectors from 1262 AD hangs near the south door. A banner decorated with the arms of the past and present Lords of the Manor of Gawsworth hangs above the south door.

Outside the Church

Before departing take time to admire the exterior of the great 15th Century tower (103 feet high) and the many excellent window corbels with dripstones, shields of arms and gargoyles. The Sanctus Bell Cot is at the East end to the Church, combined with the cross, and not, as usually placed, at the junction of the nave and chancel.

The Churchyard stone cross at the back of the Church, in front of the South Porch is of interest being of the same date as the Church. It has carvings of animal grotesques representing the expulsion of evil spirits.

Times of Services

Sunday Services:

All main services are based on the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

Every Sunday - 8.00am Holy Communion (BCP)

1st Sunday - 10.00am Family Service for all. 6.30pm - Sung Eucharist (BCP)

2nd Sunday - 10.00am Choral Matins. 6.30pm - Sung Eucharist (BCP) & Healing

3rd Sunday - 10.00am Sung Eucharist (BCP). 6.30pm - Evensong (BCP)

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4th Sunday - 10.00am Sung Eucharist (BCP). 6.30pm - Evensong (BCP)

5th Sunday - 10.00am Sung Eucharist (BCP). 6.30pm - Devotion, Meditation & Compline.

Weekday Services

Every Wednesday - 10.00am Holy Communion (BCP)

Please join us for coffee/tea served in the Church Hall after each 10.00am Sunday service.

Rector: The Rt. Reverend William A Pwaisiho OBE. Hon. Assistant Bishop of Chester.
The Rectory, Church Lane, Gawsworth, SK11 9RJ

Please consider a donation whenever you are visiting the Church, whatever you can afford however small will help towards the substantial running cost of maintaining the upkeep of this beautiful Church, at present the cost is in excess of £200 per day. Please help to keep this Church here for another 500 years.