

THE PARISH OF GAWSWORTH

Named Goursourde in the Domesday survey of 1086. The eastern boundary of Gawsworth Common lies 370 metres above sea-level. The western boundary stretches across undulating hummocky countryside, extending into the Cheshire Plain. From all round the parish there are magnificent views of the surrounding countryside which all of us living in the parish value.

Much of Gawsworth comprises agricultural land, predominantly grass and pasture for dairy cattle, along with some sheep. Farmers are now struggling and some are trying to diversify to help make a living. They are finding planning laws are difficult to understand and feel that everything and everyone is conspiring against them in the competitive new global world. This also threatens the sustainability of our rural parish.

Residents are unanimous in their commitment to retain this unique and outstandingly beautiful environment we are privileged to live in and feel it is their responsibility to protect and care for it. If you are a visitor to our beautiful parish please respect our wishes, leave it as you find it but enjoy your stay with us however short or long it may be.

HISTORY

The first knowledge we have of Gawsworth is of it being the home of feudal Knights and warriors. It came into the hands of Randle the Earl of Chester in the eleventh century, passing on by marriage to the Orreby family. In 1316 Isabel Orreby (heiress) married Thomas Fytton of Bollin and the estate stayed in the family until the eighteenth century when it passed by marriage again through Mohun, Griffith and then to the Harrington family in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, passing by sale to the Ferranti and then the Richards family.

In 1936 and 1955 parts of the parish were transferred to Macclesfield. Gawsworth now includes houses in Danes Moss, Dighills, Gawsmoor Hill, High Lane, Moss Houses, Shellow, Tidnock, Walkers Heath, Warren, Whitemoor and Woodhouse End.

GAWSWORTH HALL: A ancient Manor House built in 1567 a successor to the original thirteenth century manor house which stood farther to the north and was probably moated. It was the home of Mary Fytton, the supposed 'Dark Lady' of Shakespeare's sonnets, with whom the "Bard of Avon" was enamoured, upon whose beauty he gazed with such admiration and wrote about her with such intense feeling. Mary Fytton was a Maid-of-Honour at the Court of Queen Elizabeth, and

from the monuments in the Church, one might easily suppose her to be the Lady of the Sonnets. She was on all accounts a very beautiful woman, but alas for the honour of the Court, it seems she was black in character as well as in complexion, and was one of the participators in, and guilty of the heinous sins which mar the chronicles of the Court of Queen Elizabeth. She was on intimate terms with Kemp, the actor, and others. Mary Fytton was baptised at Gawsworth Church on 20th June 1578 and was twice married. She was the mother of two sons before either of her marriages. The Earl of Pembroke, the cause of this, was imprisoned and, because of the insult to her Court, heavily fined by the Queen. Following this she had several affairs until her marriage to Captain Laugher in 1636, when all went quiet until her death in 1647.

The house is now the family home of the Richards, with fine pictures and furniture. The present house presents features of some interest, retaining one of its many three-decker windows, and what appears to be the remains of an altar pace and confessional box temporarily constructed in the Reformation. The bulk of the building was destroyed or fell into decay in the eighteenth century. What remains, however, is of great beauty and significance. An open-air theatre in the grounds encompasses a range of summer entertainment and is well worth a visit.

ELISABETHAN GARDEN ~ in the grounds is an eighteen-acre Elizabethan garden surrounded by coped brick walls dating back to the sixteenth century. Some say this was constructed for the purpose of jousting and tournament, others that it was laid out as a garden pleasance. Recent archaeological research supports this theory. The land surrounding the Hall used to be part of Gawsworth Hall Park and some of the land is still designated a Conservation area.

POOLS ~ there used to be a run of five pools running from one side of the old Hall and across the front of the Hall and Church, but one has now dried up. Opinion differs regarding the origin of the pools and their use. They were possibly constructed as fish ponds to serve the manor, or as views from high points in the Elizabethan garden. Church records show that there were once some stocks against the church wall and also a ducking stool for punishing bad tempered wives and other wrong doers. The ponds still afford beauty and charm to the village of Gawsworth, along with the Manor house and Church.

NEW HALL ~ built by Lord Mohun in the early eighteenth century. It lay uninhabited for some time in the nineteenth century and has had a variety of tenants through its life. Recently it was converted into apartments, which are now fully occupied and very desirable.

THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST JAMES THE GREAT GAWSWORTH

Situated on Church Lane, next to Gawsworth Old Hall and Opposite the Old Rectory.

The walls of the nave were built of limestone in 1430 and the Chancel and Tower of pink sandstone in 1480. Previously a Norman Chapel stood on this site, probably resembling the chapel which now stands in the churchyard at nearby Prestbury.

The splendid roofs are five hundred years old: the nave roof is of a barrel beam design, and unique in this Diocese. There are still considerable traces of its original brilliant colouring and gilding. The chancel roof has an arch camber beam construction and with rare panelled sections with tie beams. It was never painted but the design of both roofs is of exceptional beauty and in excellent condition.

The choir screen occupies the site of the original rood screen and was erected in 1893 to replace a similar medieval screen which had been destroyed earlier. The cross and figure you can see standing above the screen were added in 1978.

The Fitton monuments

The Fitton monuments are situated in the Sanctuary. The tombs of four generations of the Fitton family stand on each side of the altar. 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 at Gawsworth in 1608. The tomb, constructed in 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 daughters beside the tomb-chest of her husband, Sir Edward Fitton (1550 - 1606). The effigy of Mary, the alleged dark lady of the 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 the corners.

The tomb behind and to the left of the altar is that of Sir Edward Fitton, the first Baronet (1572-1619) and his wife, Anne. The corresponding tomb on the south side of the altar is that of his son, Sir Edward Fitton, 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.

The chancel windows have fragments of ancient glass in them. On the south wall near the pulpit is a small statue of the Virgin Mary set in a niche.

Notice hanging on the walls there are also some rather poor sketches of the original murals of St Christopher, St George and The Judgement which were removed from the walls in the violent "restoration" of the Church in 1891.

The font with its octagonal basin is original 15th Century work and has a splendid carved and gilded font-cover.

Outside the church the great 15th Century tower is 103 feet high. There are many excellent window corbels and drip stones, shields of arms and gargoyles. The Sanctus Bell Cot is at the East end of the Church, combined with the cross, and not, as usually placed, at the junction of the nave and chancel.

The Churchyard stone cross 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.

SAXON CROSS ~ there is a Saxon cross, plinth and base at the junction of Church Lane and Woodhouse Lane. This is used by residents as the War memorial.

OLD POST OFFICE ~ is situated at the main cross roads. Before it was rendered it was painted black and white with a door situated more centrally. It is now a residence in much need of refurbishment.

POLICE COTTAGE ~ across the road from the old Post Office at the main cross roads and next door to the Methodist Chapel, is also now a residence.

OLD SCHOOL HOUSE ~ is the white building on your left as you enter Church lane from the main cross roads. This was used as a school until just after the 2nd World War.

DANE'S MOSS (Site of Special Scientific Interest), is one of the UK's few remaining lowland peat bogs and is now a nature reserve, surrounded by a woodland fringe. Characteristic bog plants include sphagnum mosses, cotton grass

and cross-leaved heath. Nine species of dragonfly and damselfly have been recorded on the reserve along with the green hairstreak butterfly.

MOUNT FARM PONDS ~ 0.2 acres comprising 5 small ponds with grassland banks. Pond sedge, marsh-bedstraw and marsh cinquefoil can all be seen amongst the vegetation rafts on the two southerly ponds.

GAWSWORTH COMMON ~ provides an area of rough grazing, its scenery verging on the typical moorland type found in the higher gritstone area between Macclesfield and Buxton.

WOODLAND ~ the most extensive areas of woodland occur just outside the parish on the Pennine foothills, these being areas less suited for grazing. Small areas of mixed woodland can also be found in Gawsworth itself and along the stream beds. The most famous in our parish is the National Trust property of Maggoty wood where the infamous 'Lord Flame' (Samuel Johnson 1691-1773) has his final resting place. The trees are mainly deciduous with bluebells in season.

Samuel (Maggoty) Johnson

Was a remarkable local celebrity of eccentric character, who lies buried in Fairy Wood, commonly known as Maggoty wood, not far from the church. Also known by the title of 'Lord Flame', he was a jack of all trades: dancing master, wit, poet, musician (violinist) and player.

Hurlothrumbo, was his chief production and it had a run of thirty successive nights at the Haymarket in London during 1729, the Prince of Wales and all the leading nobility attending. In Samuel's old age, the Earl of Harrington presented him with a small house in which to live out the remainder of his days.

On his deathbed, he earnestly requested that his body should not be buried at Church but in the wood where he now lies. The gravestone has a poem written by Samuel.

There are several very old trees in the parish which used to be part of the Gawsworth Park landscaping, including several very old Yew trees in the Churchyard. At one time the road leading to Gawsworth from Macclesfield was lined with beach trees. To my knowledge only one remains standing on Church Lane.

GENERAL POINTS OF INTEREST ~ Bed and breakfast is available and there are interesting pubs, garden centres and fishing facilities within the parish.

Macclesfield Canal runs through part of Gawsworth close to Fools Nook Public House and a swing bridge to allow passage of canal barges along the canal.

VILLAGE HALL, SCOUT HUT AND PLAYGROUND ~ are some of the central parts of the community where we can all meet and socialise. The Scout hut is under a programme of rebuilding. The playground has recently been refurbished with a footpath, tree planting, new playground area and football field.

FOOTPATHS ~ There are several footpaths, bridleways and canal towpaths that can be followed using a comprehensive Parish Map available at our Community Shop. Two footpaths were decommissioned between 1935/45 and residents wish to have these re-instated. The walks vary in length but all are well worth undertaking, especially in spring and summer.

COMMUNITY SHOP ~ situated near the primary school, this is a vital part of village life and essential to the pensioners in the village who rely on it for their every day shopping needs. This shop was recently in danger of closing, but the residents pulled together to raise enough money to purchase, refurbish and run the shop as a Community run project. There is a manager running the shop, but the shop is manned by volunteers. We opened in April, so everyone is still on a steep learning curve. Please take time to visit our shop where you will get a warm welcome.

TRANSPORT AND SERVICES~ Gawsworth has mainly a commuting population. The bus service only runs hourly during the day time. It is therefore essential to own a car or find other means of transport into Macclesfield and the surrounding area for most household needs, including health, senior school, college, work, petrol, library and other essential services.

NUMBER OF HOUSES IN GAWSWORTH Approximately 740

Gawsworth Henge

Until the 1980s the earthworks of a possible henge monument used to lie in a field alongside the Old Leek Road, just behind the Fool's Nook public house. The earthworks were roughly oval in shape with two entrances just slightly off a north-south axis. It had an inner bank of around 3 to 4m in height and an outer bank less than 1m, but no ditch. According to Gordon Rowley, in form it greatly resembles the 'henge' type of monument of the Late Neolithic era'.

Sadly, the earthworks were destroyed in 1986 for agricultural reasons, so we will probably never know whether or not it was a henge. However, there is evidence of Neolithic and Bronze age activity in that area. Across the other side of the main Macclesfield to Leek road from the Fool's Nook, excavations at the Woodhouse End Beaker barrow produced a large amount of Neolithic pottery, suggesting there must have been a settlement close by.

In addition, the Bridestones monument is only a few miles away. Some people believe that the greatest Neolithic monument - greater even than Stonehenge - was once to be found on the outskirts of Congleton. The Bridestones is today the remains of a once huge burial chamber, just inside the Staffordshire border below The Cloud. (The map reference is SJ906662, or head out of Congleton through Mossley towards Rudyard Lake). Sited 820ft above sea level, the burial chamber is believed to be just a small remnant of its former glory, with thousands of tons of stone removed from the cairn to build roads, homes and walls. Some of the stones are said to be in a park in Stoke-on-Trent.

Other stones were used to build the adjacent house and farm, while yet more were recycled into an ornamental garden in Tunstall Park. Local historian and former "Leek Post" and "Macclesfield Express" writer Doug Pickford once wrote that the Bridestones was possibly as big or bigger than Stonehenge, and more important. The Bridestones is believed to have been a massive chambered tomb: it was once over 100m long. A report from the 18th century said that as well as the main chamber, all that remains today, two subsidiary chambers were found some distance away. The real mystery is why the monument was built in Cheshire, a county not known for its Neolithic structures.

Today, the tomb can be seen on foot - if you visit when the rhododendrons are flowering purple it's an atmospheric place. It's allegedly haunted. Bridestones is also the name of the shopping centre in Congleton - possibly the only shopping centre named after a haunted grave in the country.