

The Prayer Book in use at ...

St James the Great, Gawsworth, Cheshire

Gawsworth is situated four miles south-west of Macclesfield down a quiet loop off the main A536 road to Congleton.

The view of the church of St James the Great, Gawsworth is perhaps one of the finest in the county – the church and the surrounding trees, mirrored in the pools, and the half-timbered Old Hall and Old Rectory, together with the early eighteenth-century New Hall, make up the medieval hamlet of Gawsworth to complete a delightful picture of this unique and often visited area of Cheshire.

The Revd William Edgar Clarke (Rector of Gawsworth 1953–64) penned these words in 1954 following the restoration of the Fytton effigies:

The beauty of Gawsworth and its noble church are not ours alone – we hold them in trust for those in all parts of the world who love Gawsworth and for the many generations to come. It is very gratifying in this day and age that such loving and sympathetic interests are constantly at work on our behalf, not only in the skilled work of restoration, but in being vigilant in preserving this romantic and much-loved corner of Cheshire from the ravages of time.

In medieval times, Gawsworth was a small farming community within the larger Prestbury parish, which was made up of thirty-five similar sized townships – from Poynton in the north to Bosley in the south and Chelford in the west to Taxal in the east. Gawsworth was originally a



‘Chapel of Ease’ to the mother church of St Peter, Prestbury – it became an independent Rectory in 1382 although it had had its own Rector since 1262, with the appointment of John de Birtles.

In 1430, the Norman chapel – reputedly built in the mid thirteenth century – proved too small for the increasing population and the nave, as you see it today, was built up to the original chapel, which served as the chancel. Some fifty years later, a new chancel was built around the old Norman chapel, which was then pulled down, and at the same time, the tower was built.

It was the Fytton family of Gawsworth Old Hall – Lords of the Manor and Patrons of the Living from 1316 to 1643 – who were responsible for the building of the church as you see it today. The present church is wholly fifteenth century, built in the Perpendicular style and Pevsner describes the building as ‘a very strange church in that it has no aisles, but a very wide nave and no structural separation of the chancel from the nave’.

But when you enter the church, stand at the back for a moment and admire the excellent proportions of the building – cast your eyes upwards. The splendid roofs are over five hundred years old. The nave roof, barrel beam in design and unique in the county, shows considerable traces of its original brilliant colouring and gilt, a magnificent example of fifteenth-century craftsmanship. The chancel roof is of a later date, a panelled camber-beam roof of the usual Cheshire type of the late fifteenth century, three bays divided by an intermediate rafter with four purlins, making twelve panels of equal size. This roof was never painted but both roofs are of exceptional beauty of design and have stood the test of time.

The seventeenth-century Fytton monuments, situated in the chancel, are an added attraction for the visitor. The oldest monument is in memory of Francis Fytton (d.1608) – the effigy lies on a table tomb, his head reposing on a large helm and beneath the tomb is a cadaver or skeleton in a shroud. The





other three monuments are in memory of the third Sir Edward Fytton (d.1606); the fourth Sir Edward Fytton (d.1619) and the fifth Sir Edward Fytton, the last of the 'fighting' Fyttons who died in 1643.

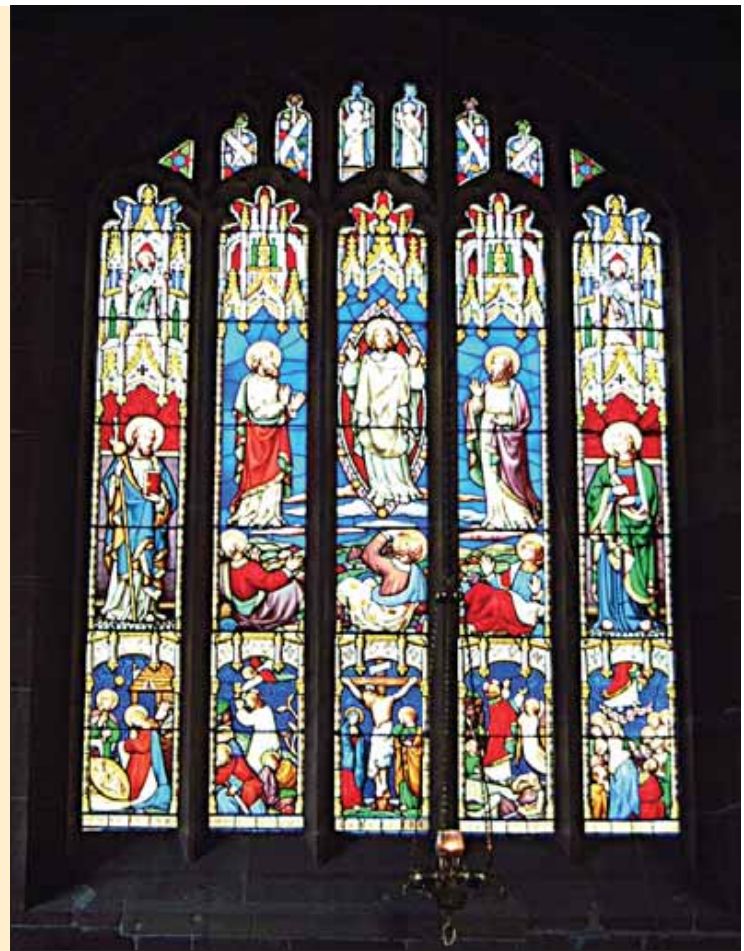
There are several interesting stained glass windows – including one dedicated by 'Lillie Langtry' – but not the lady with Royal connections!

Gawsworth St James is blessed to have good congregations, mainly of the middle-aged generation, plus some younger families and those young people getting married at Gawsworth,

particularly as the church is one of the few in the area that offers the 1662 Prayer Book services – many of our congregation travel a distance to attend these services. The observance of the Prayer Book at Gawsworth has existed for centuries and it is the love of the Prayer Book and the support of successive rectors that has maintained the Anglo-Catholic tradition at St James. Our Patron, Mr Tim Richards, who lives at Gawsworth Old Hall, is an ardent supporter of the Prayer Book. Holy Communion is said every Sunday morning at 8.00 a.m. and every Wednesday at 10.00 a.m.; the first Sunday in the month is the half-hour Family/ Young People's service at 10.00 a.m, followed by Sung Eucharist; second Sunday at 10.30 a.m. is devoted to Sung Matins; and Sung Eucharist on the third and fourth Sundays again at 10.30 a.m. In the evenings,

Holy Communion is sung on the first and second Sundays and Evensong on the third and fourth Sundays. The congregation is well supported by a mixed adult choir of between twelve and fifteen members, a number of whom are also members of the local Thomas Cranmer Choir, led by our organist and choirmaster, Mr Keith Yearsley MBE.

The Parish of
Gawsworth St James



stands on its own. The rector – and Honorary Assistant Bishop of Chester – is Bishop William A. Pwaisiho, OBE, formerly the Second Bishop of Malaita in the Solomon Islands. His address is The Rectory, Church Lane, Gawsworth, Macclesfield, Cheshire SK11 9RJ (Tel. 01260 223201).

The church is open during the day and visitors are most welcome. Group guided tours of the church are available by prior arrangement – the contact is rbarry.rose@btinternet.com

Barry Rose, PCC Secretary

