

## 4: Origins and Growth of the Area

### 4.1 Nineteenth Century Prestwich

The creation of a new road from Manchester to Bury in 1826 affected routes that had been established in the centuries since the Roman road from Manchester to Ribchester fell into disuse. Settlement in Prestwich centred on the area to the north of the line of Church Lane and Clarks Hill, where Wash Lane (now Clifton Road), Greengate and Back Lane (now Rectory Lane) enclosed a hamlet of cottages, with its own school and police station, two farms and, from 1826, a small cotton mill (Figs. 3 & 4).



Fig. 3: 1818 Map



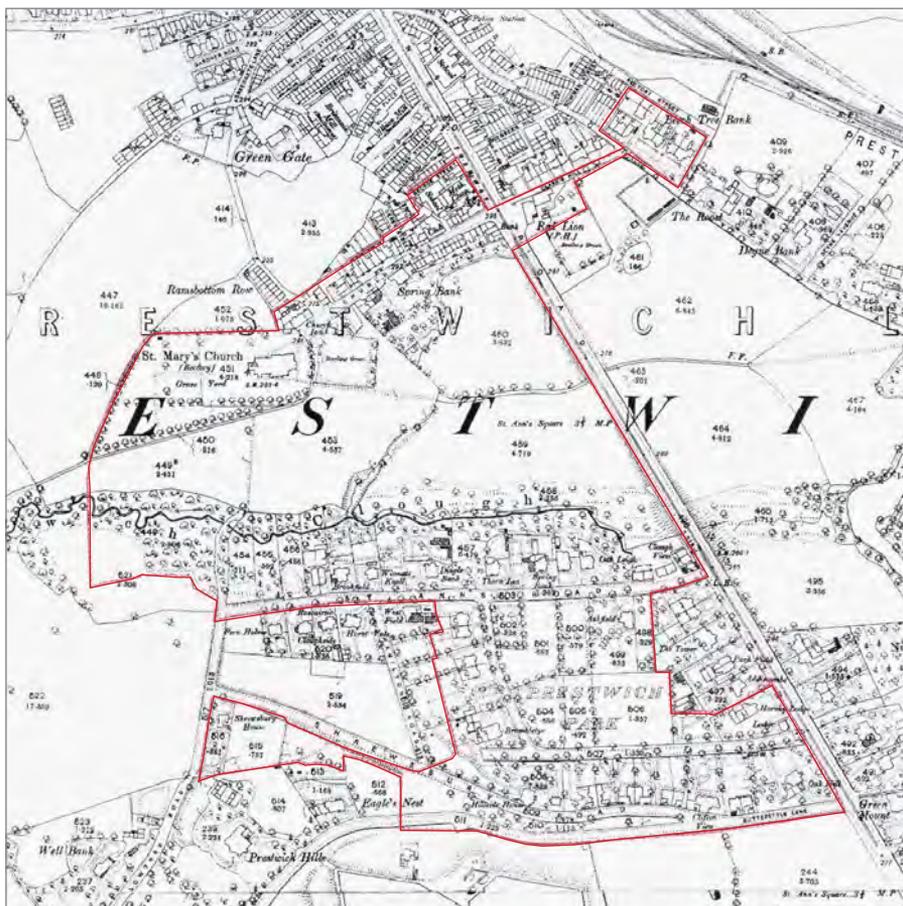
Fig. 4: Tithe Map 1839

Access to the hamlet had formerly been via Bury Old Road, Ostrich Lane, Bent Lane and Back Lane. The new road to Bury was turnpiked to cater for the horse-drawn traffic of the expanding Lancashire cotton trade.

The vast and ancient parish of Prestwich-cum-Oldham, which stretched 13 miles from west to east, was controlled by the Church and Rectory of Prestwich. Winding lanes and rutted tracks led parishioners to St Mary's Church from Pilkington, Ringley, Unsworth, Great and Little Heaton, Alkrington, for the ceremonies of christening, marriage and burial. The rectory 'The Deyne' was situated at a distance from the church in extensive Glebelands with its own fishpond at the head of The Dingle. Field names such as Clarks Meadow, Old Meadow, Church Bank, Bellhouse Croft, and Well Meadow were evocative of the rural landscape of Prestwich. The antiquity of 'The Deyne' did not prevent its demolition in 1837 and replacement by a large mansion in the Tudor Gothic style.

Residential development of the Prestwich Park estate from c.1850 followed the building of 'Oak Hill' at the corner of Butterstile Lane in 1836, a detached house with a Grecian-revival porch, by the Manchester architects, Mills & Butterworth. (The eminent architect, Alfred Waterhouse, designed a conservatory for 'Oak Hill' in 1856 for his client, Samuel Eveleigh.)

George Scholes of 'High Bank', Scholes Lane, sold his land holdings, as did Viscount Ingestre (heir to the Earl of Shrewsbury) to enable houses to be built for the rising middle classes of Victorian Manchester (Fig.5).





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- 6) Prestwich Park, c.1895, from a photograph by W H Martin  
 7) Prestwich as seen from the Reservoir.  
 8) Shrewsbury House and Prestwich Park.  
 9) Charles Swain's House (photo by I. Pringle)  
 10) Former billiard room (photo by Philip Ashwin)  
 11) Conservative Club bowling green from St Mary's Church tower  
 12) Church Lane Forge.  
 13) 'The Castle', Church Lane (photo by I Pringle)  
 14) Church Lane Georgian block (photo by I Pringle)

The estate had gated entrance lodges and was laid out with detached and semi detached brick built houses, sited in large gardens to enjoy views across Prestwich Clough to St Mary's Church. The two pairs of commodious semis (45 to 51, Prestwich Park Road South) were designed in an overscaled Georgian idiom by Isaac Holden & Son, architects of the County Asylum, Prestwich.

Construction of the Prestwich Hills Reservoir (Fig.7) by Manchester Corporation in 1867 allowed for a permanent supply of clean water to higher level districts such as Prestwich. Grass mounds and embankments concealed the two reservoirs, whilst a cast-iron crane on a track and the reservoir Keeper's House enlivened the skyline above Butterstile Lane.

The beech woodland between Butterstile Lane and Shrewsbury Road, which continues, as mixed woodland, to the escarpment behind Eagles Nest flats, is a landscape feature of some age. There are significant views north to Stand Church and Holcombe Hill as the lane rises.

Residential development of Prestwich Park continued throughout the nineteenth century, with large villas being built on Prestwich Park North (now St. Ann's Road) as far as the entrance to Prestwich Clough below Lowther Road, along the Bury New Road frontage and on plots of land not built on in the first phase of development.

As surviving examples on the north side of St Ann's Road demonstrate, there was a distinct individuality of style, noticeable also in 'Ashfield' and Hornby Lodge. Nos. 14 to 42 Prestwich Park Road South were built at the end of the nineteenth century in a uniform but highly attractive style.

Shrewsbury House (Fig. 8) was built at a distance in extensive grounds on an elevated site enjoying views over open countryside. Charles Swain, engraver and poet, lived at 'Carnethie', Prestwich Park Road South (Fig. 9) at the time of his death in 1874. Described as the "Laureate of the North", Swain wrote verse that was popular on both sides of the Atlantic.

Prestwich Conservative Club was founded in 1874 and, in 1879, moved to purpose built premises on Church Lane, designed by the architect, William Dawes, with a top-lit first floor billiard room (Fig. 10). In 1957 the club sold

the original premises and moved across the lane to 'Spring Bank', which had been purchased in 1928 as a home for their tennis club. A bowling green (Fig. 11) had been created in 1902 at the bottom of the huge garden that 'Spring Bank' looked down on.

The Church Inn had a bowling green and a billiards room across the lane before the present rectory was built in 1923. Between this site and 'Spring Bank' was a group of brick buildings, amongst which was the coach-house and stables built for Dame Katharine Egerton in 1757. A forge (Fig. 12) stood on the site of the present day Pensioners hut (Church Lane Community Centre) with a cobbled trackway leading down to Ramsbottom Row, terraced cottages dating from the mid-18C.

32 to 34 Church Lane, built in 1811 for the then Rector, James Lyon, are of interest in originally having separate dwellings at pavement level.

George's Terrace was built in 1863, with a solitary gas lamp lighting the steps leading to raised gardens above a high brick wall. An earlier house stood on the corner of Derby Street - this was reputedly the village lock-up. Across Derby Street was a double-fronted house and a double-fronted cottage, the six feet gap in between being filled by the 'Smallest House in Lancashire', 10 Church Lane, known locally as 'The Castle' (Fig. 13). The tiny house was lived in until the late 1950s.

On the other side of the lane was a terrace of cottages, one of which served as 'The Ring o' Bells' beerhouse and several of which had been lived in by hand-loom weavers. At the Bury New Road corner is a late Georgian block (Fig. 14) that had two shops facing the main road and a slaughter house in the yard behind. Sheep and cattle would be led here from pasture land just to the south.

Clarks Hill formed part of the winding route across Prestwich before Bury New Road was turnpiked. The Red Lion was rebuilt in 1892, although it was licensed as an ale house as early as 1629. A Georgian cottage stood at the west end of Clarks Hill and a converted farmhouse at the other, with an irregular terrace of Victorian houses in pretty, south facing gardens in between (Fig. 15).



*Fig. 15: View of Clarks Hill*

Beech Tree Bank on Rectory Lane was originally two pairs of large semi-detached villas built in 1881 in an Italianate style with noteworthy decorative brick work. The well for this area was enclosed within an arch in the stone boundary wall.

Until the late nineteenth century there was open pasture land on either side of Bury New Road to the South of Church Lane and Clarks Hill.

The building of properties from Church Lane down the west side of Bury New Road altered the scale of the commercial frontage and extended the village as far as the

Picturedrome. The curved block and Nos. 395 to 399 Bury New Road are three storeys high and originally housed a bank and a hansom cab office run by Sam Lever. The facades are constructed of brick with stone and terracotta dressings and, in the case of No. 389, extensive use of decorative timberwork.

#### **4.2 Twentieth Century Prestwich**

The first cinema in Prestwich, The Picturedrome (later The Plaza), was opened on Bury New Road in 1911 (Fig. 16). The photographer, W H Martin, worked from 'The Studio' on the corner of Hacking Street and advertised as 'Artist and Military Photographer' 'Under the distinguished Royal Patronage of His Majesty the King and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.'

The encroachment of housing across areas of Prestwich in the early 20C led to the purchase by the Urban District Council of 13 acres of open land adjoining Prestwich Clough, following the gift of 9 acres of the Clough by Mr Gardner.

The Clough was declared “open for the use of the general public for ever” at a civic ceremony in May 1906. What had been sparse oak woodland grazed by cattle from the Clough Farm was planted out in ornamental fashion, with a bandstand, drinking fountain, tea rooms and rustic bridges and seats provided for the enjoyment of visitors (Fig. 17).

Following the building of the new rectory in 1923 on a site next to the Parish Church, the Victorian rectory was demolished and replaced with council housing. The Rector, Canon Cooper, was instrumental in the preservation of a large area of former glebeland as public open space.



16) *The Picturedome, Bury New Road.*

17) *Prestwich Clough.*

18) *The opening of St. Mary's Flower Gardens*

Prestwich Council acquired the site of the former rectory fishpond and Dingle, permitted extensive sand quarrying and tipped and levelled the site to create tennis courts, bowling greens, a playground and playing fields. Across Bury New Road, the former hay meadows, Church Fields, were transformed into a flower park, with bandstand and shelter.

The 17th Earl of Derby performed the opening ceremony of St Mary's Playing Fields and Flower Gardens in October 1931 (Fig. 18).

The new rectory was designed by the Manchester architects, Taylor & Young, in a revived Georgian style in two tone brick, with Modernist flat concrete roofs on the wings to either side of the front entrance. A motor garage stood to one side of the wing that housed the chauffeur and housekeeper. A raised brick terrace was created along the south front, incorporating a garden shelter and overlooking the former bowling green.

The sandstone pillar sundial, which had stood in front of 'The Deyne' rectory since the mid-17C, was re-erected behind a screen wall on the Church Lane frontage. The new rectory harmonised with the Georgian buildings, such as the Church Inn, which was first mentioned in an Ale House Recognizance in 1629 and 38 Church Lane, that then typified much of this historic quarter.

Drastic changes took place in the 1960s and 1970s, when much that was familiar of old Prestwich was swept away under Compulsory Purchase Orders. These Orders, which were intended to remove slum dwellings, resulted in the demolition of the Georgian and Victorian core of Prestwich Village. New blocks, such as the sheltered housing scheme on Clarks Hill and the Scout Hut on Church Lane, were erected, with gaps of wasteland left in historic frontages that have only recently been filled. The erosion continued with the demolition in Prestwich Park of grand properties such as 'Brambletye', 'Thornlea' (Fig. 19), 'Oak Leigh', 'Hurst Vale', 'The Tower', 'Westfield' and 'Riversdale' and their replacement with mundane blocks of flats, bungalows and housing schemes.

The designation of the St Mary's Park, Prestwich Conservation Area in 1993 has helped protect the varied architectural and landscape qualities of the setting to St Mary's Church from the worst excesses of redevelopment and change.

The progressive dereliction of three of the four villas at Beech Tree Bank was halted in an imaginative restoration in 1997. More recently, wasteland off Church Lane was reclaimed for 'The Coppice' housing scheme and a Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme was initiated to halt the decline of properties fronting Bury New Road down from the Church Lane corner.

### **4.3 St Mary's Church and Churchyard**

The Parish Church of St Mary (Fig's. 1 and 20) is a Grade I Listed building, with ten Grade II Listed monuments and structures in and around the churchyard.

A plan of the churchyard of c.1824 reveals its circular form, with the church placed on an eminence within this ancient boundary. An extension to the churchyard in 1827 was accompanied by new boundary walls and iron entrance gates and piers, as the tablet in the Eastern (brick) boundary wall records. Further extensions took place in 1864, 1886 and 1925, reflecting the change in Prestwich from a rural hamlet to a suburban town and on account of the vast increase in burials of pauper inmates of the County Asylum, Prestwich.

The Hearse House was built in 1801 on land called Salters Croft. It had two compartments, one for corpses awaiting burial and one for the Sexton, kept warm by a fire in an angle of the front compartment. A stone mounting block was purchased in 1678 and stands today near the main entrance.

Funerary monuments survive in the churchyard from the mid-17C in the form of flat stone slabs, the earliest of which is dated 1641. Recent research has identified 16 other gravestones dating from the 17C, some badly worn and others still crisply lettered and decoratively carved.

A stone baluster sundial enclosed by iron railings was erected in the churchyard in 1806 and there was a gradual change from the flat gravestone to the chest tomb and table tomb, the latter typified by that commemorating Mary Diggles, who died in 1804. Unusually, this is the work of a female mason, Sarah Patefield.



19) 'Thornlea', St Ann's Road (photo by I Pringle)

20) St. Mary's Church from the West

21) Swan and Fox frieze (photo by I Pringle).

The rural beauty of the landscape around the churchyard made it a fashionable place for burial of prosperous Mancunians throughout the Victorian period.

Monuments such as that to John Brooks, Secretary to the Anti-Corn Law League, with its life-sized, allegorical, marble statues; that to John Slagg, which was designed by Alfred Waterhouse; and that to Sir William Fairbairn, eminent Victorian engineer, whose funeral was witnessed by 50,000 people, typify the grand approach to death.

Many varieties of gravestones record the lives of people as diverse as William Sturgeon 'The Electrician', whose inventions determined the course of modern technology; the botanists, Percival, Horsefield and Buxton; the poet, Charles Swain; the book publisher, John Heywood; servants of the Earl of Wilton and R N Philips; the Post Master of Manchester and its City Treasurer; wealthy Greek merchants; clergymen; civic dignitaries; doctors; magistrates; cotton manufacturers; the internationally famous cabinet maker, James Lamb; Sir William Mather and his family; the Baroness de Ros; inmates of the Prestwich Asylum and their attendants; victims of the first and Second World Wars; and even a Waterloo veteran!

A clue to the antiquity of the site of the Parish Church of St Mary was provided during excavation below the tower in 1883 in connection with a solid concrete foundation that was being laid to prevent the collapse of the tower. Carved stonework was discovered decorated with Norman motifs of beakhead, catshead, roll billet and prismatic mouldings.

Surviving architectural evidence reveals a church of the 14C built of sandstone, with a nave and chancel under one roof, with an arcade of plain octagonal pillars and narrow aisles to north and south.

The tower was built some time after 1485, as a shield on its east face is carved with the Legs of Man, the Isle being one of the territories awarded to the Stanley family after the War of the Roses. The tower is adorned with grotesque gargoyles and a carved frieze depicting a swan protecting her cygnets against a fox (Fig. 21).

Substantial fragments of carved sandstone are preserved in the yard at the rear of the Church Inn. These correspond with remaining sculptural features below the tower parapet. (The tower contains a peal of eight bells, six of which were first cast in 1721, that were broadcast worldwide in 1942 to celebrate the victory at El Alamein.)



22) Interior of St. Mary's Church (photo by I Pringle).

23) Green Man ceiling boss (photo by I Pringle).

24) Interior with galleries.

The flat, panelled wooden ceiling (Fig. 22) with its array of carved bosses that includes a rudimentary Green Man (Fig.23) and a portrait of Ralph Langley, Rector 1493 to 1495, which was placed directly above the altar of the mediaeval church, is contemporary with the clerestory windows and pitched roof. The aisles terminated in Chantry Chapels, known today as the Wilton and Lever Chapels.

The South Porch was rebuilt in 1756 as the tablet over the doorway records. Galleries were erected from 1756 onwards, resulting in the raising of the aisle walls and the insertion of rectangular windows (Fig. 24).

The Lever Chapel (described as 'new' in the will of Robert Langley in 1524) was first rebuilt in 1731 and then again in 1874. A small chapel was built east of the Lever Chapel in 1875 and named after Canon Henry M Birch, Rector of Prestwich 1852 to 1884. The architect of both was John Lowe. The label stops on the windows of both chapels are enlivened by carved 'Mediaeval' portrait heads.

In 1854 it was decided to replace the pulpit, reading desk and clerk's desk dating from 1724 with a new stone pulpit. The old pulpit stood against a pillar four feet square, which had in it the stair to the Rood Loft and bell turret, marked by two blanks in the clerestory north range. A new pillar with 'angel' capitals was inserted at the juncture of mediaeval Nave and Chancel. Work to the Wilton Chapel in the same year revealed a walled-up niche containing a stoup for holy water inside the pillar between chapel and Chancel.

The Manchester architects, Travis & Mangnall, designed a new Chancel and Vestry in 1861. The east window was filled with stained glass as a public memorial to Mary Margaret, Countess of Wilton, who died in 1858. A stone reredos carved by the London sculptor, James Forsyth, was erected by Canon and Mrs Birch as a memorial to their son, Henry, who died of scarlet fever aged 8 in 1863. Canopied choir stalls were also provided. Alterations to parts of the structure had been carried out in 1858, when an exterior stair turret was built to give access to the newly raised belfry floor and a new west window placed in the tower.

The body of the church was repewed in 1860 in oak to a uniform design, which survives in the present Nave and aisles.

A major alteration to the Church took place in 1888 - 89, when the Lancaster architects, Paley & Austin, were employed to design a new Chancel, Organ Chamber and two-storey Vestry. Architecturally, Paley & Austin's designs bear comparison with the highest European standards of that time. The exterior of the new extension was built of best quality, selected flecked Runcorn sandstone, chosen to harmonise with the Collyhurst sandstone of the old building. Selected Stourton sandstone was to be used for internal facings and dressings. The niche over the east window and the sedilia and credence were carved in situ from the solid by Messrs H J & S Miles of Lancaster (Fig. 25).

The stained glass from the 1861 east window was rearranged by Shrigley and Hunt of Lancaster to fit the new window, the choir stalls were doubled in number by Mrs Birch on condition that the reredos was retained, a new altar of carved oak was given by the Guilds and a brass lectern was donated anonymously. The enrichment of the austerely handsome, late Victorian

Chancel was completed with a new pulpit and chancel screen designed by Paley & Austin in 1895 as a memorial to James Chadwick of 'High Bank', Prestwich. A north porch by the same architects was added in 1895.

The intimate atmosphere of the Wilton Chapel, with its private gallery decorated with curtains and cushions the colour of the family livery did not survive the rebuilding of 1888 - 89. The grand neo-Classical monument to the first Earl of Wilton, who died in 1814, did not survive its temporary storage in the Hearse House during building works, with only two fragments still in church. Memorial tablets remain to Sir Edward Egerton, Sir Thomas Grey Egerton, Mary Margaret, first wife of the second Earl and the third and fourth Earls of Wilton. Of great historical interest is the painted canvas Hatchment carried at the funeral of Mary Margaret in 1858 (Fig. 26). This has recently been restored at the expense of the eighth Earl of Wilton. A War Memorial screen was erected in the Wilton Chapel in 1921, with a central panel (painted by Prof Tristram) the gift of the mothers of the Fallen. A War Memorial cross commemorating the Dead of the Parish was unveiled in the churchyard in 1921. It was designed by Isaac Taylor as an exact replica of the crosses for the British Cemeteries in France designed by Sir David Bromfield.

The Lever Chapel has one monument of note - the ornate marble tablet commemorating Rev William Assheton, Rector 1685 - 1731. In 1932 the gallery was removed, the floor lowered and the pews re-orientated. The entrances to the Lever and Rasbotham vaults were revealed along with a number of brass coffin shields. The oldest shield is inscribed 'Sir Darcy Lever Knight and Doctor of Law Departed this life August 12 1742 in the 39th Year of his Age' (Fig. 27).

A pillar in the Nave has on it two memorials, one to the memory of Ann Kenyon, who died in 1706, and the other to her husband, Edward Kenyon, Rector, who died in 1668. The sculpted heraldic crest to Rector Kenyon's monument is built into a wall in the Hearse House, next to a tomb slab carved with a cross and a pair of shears, the latter the 'badge of office' of an unknown mediaeval housewife!

Next to the Chancel arch is a rare, double sided brass plate or palimpsest, engraved with the armorial bearings of Anna, wife of Rector Isaac Allen, who died in 1634.



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25) *The Chancel.*

26) *The Wilton Hatchment (photo by I Pringle).*

27) *Lever Coffin Shields (photo by I Pringle).*

On the north aisle wall is a modern memorial to Thomas Henshaw, founder of the Oldham Bluecoat School and the Manchester Blind Asylum, who died in 1810 and who is buried near to the inner door of the south porch.

Suspended from the Nave ceiling is the brass candelabrum, dated 1701 and inscribed 'given by the Pilkington Side instead of a garland' and topped by the Derby crest of the Eagle and Child (Fig. 28).

The inscription refers to the annual Rushbearing ceremony, when carts decorated with garlands and laden with new rushes were brought to church from all parts of the parish and laid on the floor. Rushbearing was a time of celebration for rural folk who made merry at the nearby Church Inn.

The registers of baptism, marriage and burial for the Parish, beginning in 1603 and the Church Wardens Accounts, beginning in 1647, were, until very recently, stored in the 'Great Arke' or Parish Chest housed in the upper Vestry. This massive oak chest with three iron locks was purchased in Manchester in 1665 and served its original purpose for over 300 years.

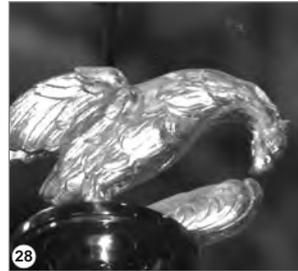
The stained glass is mainly the work of three firms - Ward and Hughes, Clayton and Bell, and Shrigley and Hunt.

The east window, originally by Ward and Hughes, is richly sombre in tone, whereas the west window, by the same firm, is deliberately brightly coloured to catch the light of the setting sun. The glass is a public memorial of 1885 to Canon Birch, whose former pupil, the Prince of Wales, headed the subscription list.

The three stained glass windows in the Wilton Chapel date from the 1890s and have the typically jewel-like quality of glass by Clayton and Bell of that period.

Shrigley and Hunt designed the glass for the clerestory windows in the Chancel and Organ Chamber between 1898 and 1927, with depictions of figures as varied as St Peter, Moses, St Alban and King Alfred.

In addition to the architectural and historical treasures described, the Conservation Area also contains a remarkable number and variety of trees, which give to the whole environment the feeling of an urban forest - especially when viewed from the top of St Mary's Church tower! (Fig. 29)



28) *Eagle and Child* (photo by I Pringle)

29) *View from the church tower* (photo by I Pringle).