

Sandbach History Society Report of the June 2024 visit Acton Parish Church

21 members of Sandbach History Society recently visited St Mary's Church, Acton, near Nantwich. Acton church is of very early foundation; two priests are mentioned in the Domesday Survey. There was probably a place of worship on this site before this date and in 1897 a collection of carved Anglo-Saxon stones were discovered and can now be seen inside the church.

In the 12th century, Acton church and lands were given by Hugh, Baron of Wich Malbanc, to the monks at Combermere Abbey. In the 13th century the bishop ordered the community to appoint one of their number to reside permanently in the parish. The first vicar of Acton is recorded as Nicholas (1288–1300).

Over the centuries, the church has expanded and has been altered. There is evidence of 14th and 15th century building. There have also been three significant restorations. The first was necessitated by a storm in 1757 causing the top of the tower to collapse onto the nave roof. The tower was rebuilt (albeit not to the original height) in the early Gothic Revival style.

The second restoration was never considered to be completely satisfactory and the church you see today is the result of the late 19th century restoration, the architects being Austin and Paley.

The interior of the church has a number of interesting features. They include the canopied wall tomb of Sir William Mainwaring of Baddiley and Peover, who died in 1399, and the tomb commemorating the Wilbraham family with the recumbent effigies of Sir Thomas Wilbraham and his wife (c1660). There is a Norman font (some think it may be Saxon) and the Anglo-Saxon carved stones, mentioned earlier. There are four stained-glass windows by the renowned manufacturer, Charles Kempe.

After a talk on the history of the church and another on the church bells, the Society members were able to take "Tea at the Tower" – home-made cakes, tea and coffee – before choosing to explore the interior of the church, the belfry, or the churchyard. In the churchyard can be found the grave of A N Hornby. He captained the English Test Cricket Team against the Australians at the Oval in 1882. They lost and so was born "The Ashes" by the burning of the wickets. The alms houses can be seen on the edge of the churchyard, established by Sir Roger Wilbraham in 1613. Acton Grammar School once stood to the north of the west door of the church. In 2017, church volunteers came together with the idea of establishing a café under the tower. The aim was to provide the opportunity for people to appreciate the

beauty and tranquillity of St Mary's as an ancient building whilst at the same time enjoying some home-made refreshments. The Sandbach visitors rated this very highly. Visitors are always made very welcome: every Sunday, 2.30 to 4.30pm. The church also organises monthly walks – see www.stmarysacton.org

A new season of Sandbach History Society talks will begin in September. The first one, on 3rd September is a talk by Margaret Roberts entitled "Focus on Fodens: an early history of Fodens Ladies football team. The programme for 2024/25 and other details can be found on the Society's website www.sandbachhistorysociety.org.uk The website also contains reports on previous meetings, details of local history-related events and other interesting things.