

Prayer

God of love and truth and beauty,
for whose praise
this house of prayer was built:
open our eyes to glimpse your beauty;
open our minds to grasp your truth;
and open our hearts
to welcome your great love.
We ask this in the name of
Christ our Saviour.

Amen

Contact

The Parish Church | St. Mary the Virgin
Church Lane, Prestwich M25 1AN

www.stmarysprestwich.org

[@stmarysprestwich](https://twitter.com/stmarysprestwich)

Sunday Worship

8.00am and 10.30am

all are welcome.

 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND | CHURCH
FOR A
DIFFERENT
WORLD
Diocese of Manchester



10



Churchyard

Prestwich churchyard is one of the largest in the country, covering nearly 8 acres (3 hectares) - around the size of three championship sports grounds. The oldest gravestone dates from 1641. A separate leaflet is available with more information on the many memorials of interest. St Mary's churchyard continues to be a working burial ground and is a wonderful peaceful place for all who love nature, history and ecology.

History of the Building

Prestwich | Priest's dwelling

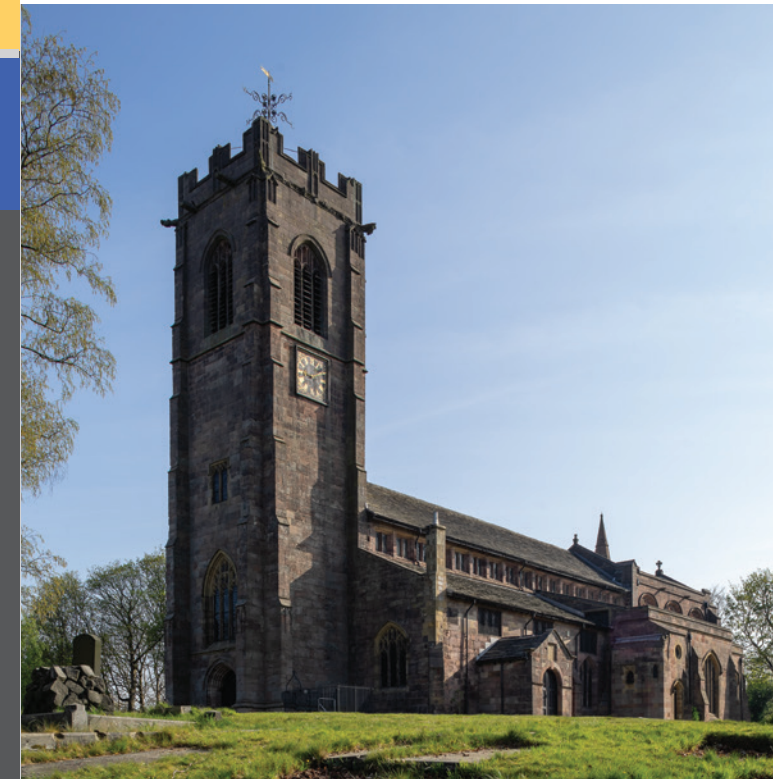
The earliest record of a priest serving Prestwich dates from around 1200 and the name Prestwich (derived from the Saxon words for 'priest's dwelling') suggests an even earlier church existed here. It seems likely that Christian worship has been offered on this site for more than 800 years.

Historians believe the oldest part of the present church is the tower at the west end of the building and the original parts of the main body of the church - we think that construction was from the late 1400's until about 1550.

Significant changes, rebuilding and renewals have taken place over the following centuries, including the rebuilding of the Lever Chapel on the south side of the church in 1731. A major extension to add a new chancel and sanctuary at the east end of the church was completed in the late 1800's. Repairs and improvements have continued more recently, including re-roofing of large parts of the building and improvements to the entrance area at the west end of the church in 2010.

The church is built of red sandstone.

St Mary's Church Prestwich



INFORMATION FOR VISITORS

[@stmarysprestwich](https://twitter.com/stmarysprestwich)
www.stmarysprestwich.org

A Warm Welcome



Welcome to St. Mary's Prestwich!
We are delighted you are here.

St Mary's is a Church of England parish which is committed to Growing, Giving and Serving. We aim to be an inclusive and diverse church where prayer and worship is at the centre of our lives.

The church building is an ancient holy place where Christian worship has been offered for more than 800 years.

Today St Mary's is a forward thinking and progressive community seeking to make sense of our lives in the twenty first century. We want to put our faith into action and to be a place of hospitality wherever you are on your life journey.

This leaflet is designed to give you an overview of the history and heritage of the church, and to highlight important features inside and outside. We hope you find the information interesting and we invite your comments and feedback.

Do enjoy your visit to St Mary's today. We hope you find a warm welcome and we pray that St. Mary's may be a place where you can encounter the wonder of God.

1

Ceiling

The panelled timber ceiling dates from the 16th century, and has been much restored since. The roof bosses feature decorative carvings of flowers, fruit, foliage and stars. There are also five human heads. A bearded face above the site of the medieval high altar is said to be the likeness of Ralph Langley, Rector of Prestwich from 1493-95. This part of the church is known as the nave (from the Latin word meaning ship). The ship was an early symbol for the Christian church.



2

Candelabra

The 18th Century candelabra is topped with an eagle and child, a symbol taken from the emblem of the Earl of Derby who owned land in Prestwich at the time and made this gift to the church. Over the centuries the church has benefited from the generosity of many benefactors. The carved heraldic shields along the upper walls of the nave relate to various prominent local families and serve as a reminder of the links between church and community over time.



3

Wilton Chapel

The Wilton Chapel was originally a medieval chantry chapel where prayers were said for the dead. Later it became the family chapel for the Earl of Wilton, from Heaton Hall. You can see a 19th century Wilton family hatchment (a funeral monument) high up on the wall. The chapel was totally rebuilt in 1889. An aumbry, used for the storage of sacred vessels, carved into the first pillar, dates from the medieval period when an altar was situated in this part of the church.



4

War Memorial

This memorial was erected in 1921, at the same time as the stone war memorial cross outside the church. The painting of the risen Christ by the Welsh artist EW Tristram (1882-1952), is flanked by memorial boards naming the men of Prestwich killed in the First and Second World Wars. The memorial encourages us to remember those who serve in our armed forces today, and to pray for peace and justice in the world.



5

Lever Chapel

During the 17th century this chapel became the family chapel for the Levers of Alkrington Hall (then part of Prestwich parish, now in Middleton). Various brasses, originally coffin shields, referring to members of the family are displayed on the wall. Nearby is the Birch Chapel, built in 1875 and named after Canon Henry Birch, Rector of Prestwich 1852-84. Also known as the Lady Chapel (Lady referring to the Blessed Virgin Mary), this chapel contains the aumbry where the Blessed Sacrament of Holy Communion is reserved - a light burns by the aumbry to indicate the presence of Christ.



6

Chancel & Sanctuary

This part of the church dates from the late 19th century. The architects were the Lancaster firm Paley & Austin, who also designed the oak chancel screen and pulpit. The canopied wooden choir stalls are 19th century and the marble flooring was installed in 1910. The altar is the focal point of the church and is the place where the presence of Christ is celebrated in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The stained glass east window depicts Christ's crucifixion.



7

Rectors of Prestwich

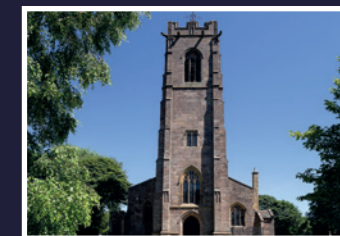
A historical listing of former Rectors (priests) can be found near the south porch. From 1409-1632 the church was served by eight successive members of the Langley family from Agecroft. This is believed to be the longest uninterrupted ministry by one family in the Church of England. Near the organ you will find an impressive marble memorial to Rev James Lyon, rector for 53 years from 1783. Priests are ordained to lead God's people in the offering of praise, the proclamation of the gospel and the ministry of the sacraments.



8

Tower

St Mary's church tower rises to 86 feet (26 metres) and was built in the late 1400's. There is an 18th century weather vane at the top. The tower contains eight bells, some dating back to the 18th century. A plaque on the wall at the west end of the church commemorates the worldwide radio broadcast of the bells of Prestwich in November 1942, following the battle of El Alamein. Reflecting their purpose to inspire worship, one of the bells is inscribed in Latin "Gloria Deo in Excelsis et in Terra Pax" (Glory to God in the highest and peace on Earth).



9

Parish Chest

The wooden parish chest, originally known as the 'great arke', dates from the late 17th century. It was secured with three locks and was used for storing registers of baptism, marriage and burial, as well as the financial accounts of the church. Church records are a fascinating window into the life and times of our ancestors. The accounts reveal information about the history of the building and tell of the work of the church over the years in the local area. The parish registers are now available online.

