# St. Michael on Greenhill, Lichfield - a history

## Part 1.  From the Romans to the Reformation - Lichfield and St. Michael's to 1535

Chris Baker

St. Michael on Greenhill - a history; Part 1. From the Romans to the Reformation - Lichfield and St. Michael's to 1535

# The author

Chris Baker was born and brought up in the parish of Pensnett, in the Black Country, and attended Bromley County Primary School and Brierley Hill Grammar School. He then studied Engineering at St. Catharine's College, Cambridge, from where he gained his MA and PhD. After spending some time working for British Rail in Derby, he moved back into academia – firstly to the University of Nottingham, and then to the University of Birmingham, where he taught fluid mechanics to several generations of Civil Engineering students. His research interests are in the fields of wind engineering, environmental fluid mechanics and railway aerodynamics. He is a Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers, Institution of Highways and Transport, the Higher Education Academy and the Royal Meteorological Society. He retired in December 2017 but continues to work on various aspects of railway aerodynamics as Emeritus Professor of Environmental Fluid Mechanics at the University of Birmingham.  He is also an Anglican clergyman attached to the parish of St. Michael-on-Greenhill in Lichfield.

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# Preface to Parts 1 to 4

The word "church" of course primarily refers to a gathered body of Christian believers. Nonetheless in popular usage it has come to refer to the building in which such a body of believers meet. And some such places have very long histories of their own. One such is the church of St. Michael on Greenhill in Lichfield. This is a very ancient worship site and has probably been the focus of some type of ritual activity for the last 1500 years. The church itself is less ancient, first appearing in the historical record in the twelfth century but it has an interesting story to tell. Here we tell that story in four parts – the first from the Romans to the Reformation; the second from the Reformation to the end of the eighteenth century; the third for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries up to 1945; and the fourth tells the stories of some of those buried in the church's large graveyard.

Obviously, a history of this type uses material from a wide range of sources. The approach taken here is to try to make the text as readable as possible, by not including detailed references, but using web links to specific sources and details of the more general sources that have been used have been put in the bibliography that is given at the end of each part.

# Chapter 1. Archaeology, religion and ritual

St. Michael's church and its large, seven-acre graveyard stands on the top of Greenhill, 103m above sea level, looking down on the shallow low-lying Lichfield valley to the north and west. Although no reference to the church can be found in the historical record before the twelfth century, there are very strong indications that its site on the top of Greenhill, and indeed the wider Lichfield area, was of some ritual significance very much earlier than that. Whilst the earliest signs of human activity in the area were provided by the discovery of Mesolithic flint chippings on Greenhill itself, the earliest indication of ritual activity of any kind is that there is a probable mid-winter sunset alignment of the Bronze Age Woodhenge site at Catholme (dating from around 2000 BC) with the Castlebank hilltop - the site of a later Iron Age fort. This alignment passes directly over Greenhill and the Pipehill ridge. Whilst the accuracy of the alignment (to within a few tenths of a degree) suggests that it is intentional, its meaning can only be surmised. One common ritual association of such mid-winter sunset alignments is with rituals regarding ancestors and the dead, and this might be the first indication that Greenhill has such associations.

By the end of the Iron Age and the coming of the Romans in the first century AD, the Birmingham University historian Steven Bassett has shown that a number of trackways converged on Lichfield from all directions, towards fords or causeways that crossed the Leomansley Brook that ran through the valley, which was probably quite damp and marshy. He comes to this conclusion because the pattern of field boundaries in the area was crossed by the Roman road of Ryknield Street, indicating that the pattern was in existence before the Roman invasion. He further showed that many of the roads in the

area actually conformed to the field pattern, which implies that they are pre-Roman. One of these "conforming" roads, in the immediate vicinity of Greenhill, was the one that is today represented by Church Street and Burton Old Road, which crosses the edge of Greenhill and extends from Lichfield to the north east. One can only speculate why the area should have been so well provided for in connections to places in the locality, but it suggests it was a place of some community significance, perhaps in terms of its ritual associations.

The first historical mention of the Lichfield area is in the Roman period when the road known as Watling Street was constructed on the high ground to the south of the Lichfield valley. Letocetum (Wall) was a staging post on this road for both civil and military traffic from the south towards Vircomium (Wroxeter) and beyond. As elsewhere during the Roman period the religious landscape was no doubt complicated. In the latter part of the period there may well have been a Christian presence at Wall and there is a record of a now lost bronze bowl inscribed with the chi-rho motif found there, and a stone with the same symbol has also been found. Trevor James conjectures that the Roman army may well have brought the worship of Mercury with them for which Greenhill became a focus. One of the attributes of Mercury is that of a psychopomp, the gatherer of the souls of the dead. In Christina iconography, this role is taken by the Archangel Michael, and this possibly led to the eventual displacement of the cult of Mercury with the church dedication to St. Michael, the Christian psychopomp.

In the period after the withdrawal of the Roman army in the fifth to seventh centuries, the religious landscape seems to have become yet more complicated. An old Welsh poem entitled "Lament for Cynddylan" refers to *Caer Lwytgoed*, which is identified as Lichfield. The poem contains the following lines.

*They could not repay me enough.*
*I used to have brothers. It was better when they were*
*the young whelps of great Arthur, the mighty fortress.*
*Before Lichfield they fought,*
*There was gore under ravens and keen attack.*
*Limed shields broke before the sons of the Cyndrwynyn.*
*I shall lament until I would be in the land of my resting*
*place*
*for the slaying of Cynddylan, famed among chieftains.*
*Morial bore off from in front of Lichfield.*
*Fifteen hundred cattle from the front of battle;*
*four twenties of stallions and equal harness.*
*The chief bishop wretched in his four-cornered house,*
*the book-keeping monks did not protect.*

Now this elegy is from a ninth century source and, although an undoubtedly fine work, is probably not that reliable in historical terms. The events it describes cannot be dated precisely but scholars would put this event, if it happened, around 640 AD. But historical scepticism aside, the important point is the mention of the book-keeping monks and the bishop - presumably at that date, members of a Romano-British church. Steven Basset sees this as evidence that the Lichfield area was a diocese of the Romano-British church, perhaps centred on St. Michael's itself. We will consider this further in the next chapter.

As well as possible associations with the Roman pantheon and with the early Romano-British church, there are also indications, through place name evidence, that the area was a [centre of worship of the Germanic / Nordic pantheon of gods](#)- Ing-Freyr at Ingle Hill to the south of Freeford manor and in the name of Freeford (Freyr - ford) itself; the worship of idols at Weeford; the ritual significance of horses at Statfold (horse field) to the east;

Tyr at Tymore near Whttington; and the cult of Woden at Wednesbury, who also had the attributes of a pscychopomp. The names of Freyr (which means simply Lord), one of the Vanir, is associated with sacral kingship, virility, peace and prosperity, with sunshine and fair weather, and with good harvests and suggests the possibility of a fertility cult of some form. Scholars are now coming to the view that, rather than a mass Anglo-Saxon invasion in the post Roman period there was rather a gradual spread of Germanic cultural and religious influence across the country at the time with only limited migration from the Anglian and Saxon lands, and a large degree of population, continuity, Also, it seems that this cultural influence ebbed and flowed to some degree. Thus, one might expect different religious and ritual practices to co-exist at the same time and such a complexity of religious environment is not unexpected.

Based on the few occasions that Michael appears in scripture, in the apocalyptic books of Daniel, Jude and Revelation, the primary images of Michael developed as a healer and as a protector of the church as well as a psychopomp. He is commonly depicted as standing on a serpent, symbolising the devil, or, less commonly as holding scales in which to weigh souls. Many churches that bear the dedication are to be found on hilltops sites - perhaps associated with the celestial battle between good and evil. The location of St. Michael's on Greenhill is obviously consistent with this.

Now up until the last century, the name of Lichfield was either interpreted as "field of the dead" or as "boggy ground near a stream". The former reflects the medieval legend of the martyrdom of 999 Christians at Lichfield, during the persecution of Diocletian between 284 and 305, seemingly first mentioned by Matthew Paris, a monk at St. Albans, in the thirteenth century and without any basis in fact, although it does seem to have been well absorbed into

Lichfield folklore. The second was proposed in the seventeenth century and of course fits the general topography of the area. The accepted wisdom now is that neither of these explanations is linguistically possible, and that the name ultimately derives from *Letocetum* or Wall. The argument identifies *Letocetum* with the Welsh form *Letocaition*, meaning brown or grey wood. The hypothesis then seems to be that this went through a number of forms - *Letged*, *Luitcoyt*, *Lwytgoed* as in the poem described above, and then the old English *Lycced*, to which *-feld* was then added, meaning open land. The name thus means "open land near the brown / grey wood". The first recorded form of the name in English is *Lyccitfelda* in 715, and *Liccidfeld* in 737. Be that as it may, the association of Greenhill with the psychopomp St. Michael, still allows the traditional association of Lichfield with the cult of the dead to be maintained to some degree.

In this complex religious environment, in 669AD St Wilfred gave land at Lichfield for Chad to build a cathedral for his Mercian diocese. Bede records that in doing so, Wilfred gave Chad somewhere he considered suitable for an episcopal see. The religious and ritual importance of Lichfield described above might well be why it was considered appropriate. The Cathedral was on the current site, to the north west of the marshy ground in the bottom of the Lichfield valley, and was, according to Bede, dedicated to St. Peter. Chad was said to retreat to a lonely spot for spiritual contemplation and reflection with close companions. This was almost certainly the current site of St. Chad's church at Stowe (with the meaning of Holy Place) with its holy well where Chad was said to have preached to the people of Lichfield. Finburg has argued that the original cathedral was actually at the St. Chad's site and his retreat place was on Greenhill at St. Michael's. Unfortunately for the purposes of this book, there is no evidence at all to support this. After Chad's death, in

around 700, a funerary church was built to the north east of the original cathedral, and subsequent rebuildings incorporated this church and the original cathedral into one building, and the dedication was changed to St. Mary and St. Chad.

After the time of St. Chad, there is very little historical information on the development of the cathedral and town of Lichfield, and no information at all on Greenhill and St. Michael's other than one piece of archeological evidence. In the 1970s an excavation was carried out to the south east of St Michael's. Many graves were uncovered, one of which was a "crouched burial", with the corpse on its side in a crouched position. Such burials can indicate a pre-Domesday and perhaps a pre-Augustinian date - and thus indicate that the graveyard around the church was in use from an early date.

Lichfield emerges more fully into history at Domesday in 1086. The Domesday entry describes a very large land unit as shown in Figure 1 below. The grey lines are the 19th century parish boundaries that will be discussed below. The location of St. Michael's church is indicated by a red circle to the eastern end of a large parish extending westwards to Hammerwich. The extent of the manor can be seen to be significant. However, the ecclesiastical information given in Domesday is sparse - that the Manor was owned by the Bishop and that there were five canons.

**Figure 1. Domesday Lichfield**

(Regular type indicates places in the Manor of Lichfield at Domesday and italic type shows other places that were mentioned. Grey lines show 19th century parish boundaries. St. Michael's church indicated by red circle)

# Chapter 2. The prebends of Lichfield

In most parts of the country, parishes were formed in the 10th and 11th centuries, and once established the parish boundaries generally changed little between then and the nineteenth century. The situation in Lichfield was however different, and the local ecclesiastical organization seems to have been based on the estates of the canons of the cathedral, or Prebends as they were known. Each Prebend was allocated the income from specific estates for their stipend. These estates are also confusingly referred to as Prebends. As mentioned above, at Domesday there were five cathedral canons, and these can almost certainly be identified with the holders of the five ancient Prebends of Freeford, Weeford, Statfold, Handsacre and Longdon that were in existence before Domesday. These canons seem to have had special responsibility for presiding at mass in the cathedral, and appointed vicars, or deputies, that presided at mass in the city centre church of St. Mary's and at St. Chad's and St. Michael's. These vicars also had pastoral responsibility for those who lived on their estates. Whilst the Prebends were almost certainly based originally on geographically coherent estates, over the centuries they became fragmented, particularly in the city centre, where houses in any one street could be in a number of different prebends.  Thus the churches in Lichfield were not parish churches as such but were rather churches served by these vicars. As the years went by, more and more Prebends were created, based on income from estates around the diocese, and the number of Prebends grew to around 30, but the five ancient Prebends, with minor alterations, always seem to have retained pre-eminence.

The estates of the Prebends can be re-constructed to some degree from the information given in the Tithe

Apportionment of the 1840s, and these are shown on Figure 2 below, again shown in relation to the 19th century parish boundaries. The areas identified at the tithe apportionment are shaded, with different, solid, colours for each Prebend. The parishes with the same names as the Prebends are indicated by dotted colours, on the assumption that these were originally part of the Prebend. These areas can only reflect in a rather poor way the original extent of the estates, which will have been much altered by many centuries of land exchanges and re-organisations. With regard to St. Michael's and what was to become its parish, the figure suggests the following points.

- Freeford prebend covered much of the area of St. Michael's parish to the south of Greenhill (G), but also extended a long way to the east to the southern portion of Fisherwick (F) at least. It also contains Hammerwich (H) and perhaps other areas to the west.

- Statfold prebend covered the north of St. Michael's parish in Streethay (SY) and again extended eastwards to Statfold (SD) itself, taking in the northern part of Fisherwick.

- The extent of both prebends suggest that they once contained much of Whittington parish (W), which was presumably removed from them once the prebend of Whittington was established in the early 12th century.

- Weeford prebend was large and covered a broad are of land around the south and west of the city, including the area of St. Michael's parish in Burntwood (B).

So it can be seen that the area that was to become St. Michael's parish consisted of the remains of Freeford and

Stafold prebends, extending a long way to both the east and the west, and part of Weeford prebend to the west. But complicated as this is, it is not the whole story, and there is some indication in the record that St. Michael's was a parish church in some sense right through the Middle Ages. In the next section we will look at the chronological record through this period and address this, and other points, further.
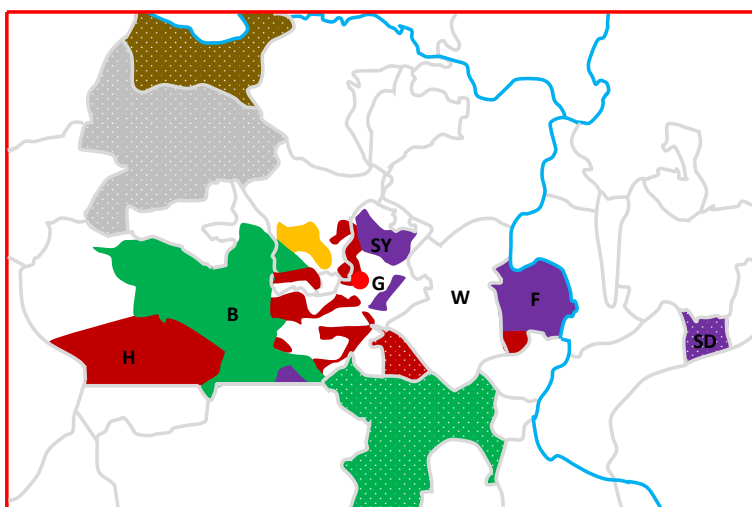


**Figure 2. Prebendial Estates in the Lichfield area**
(brown - Freeford; green - Weeford; purple - Statfold; orange - Gaia Major; gold - Handsacre; Grey - Longdon; no information exists as to which prebends contained the unshaded areas; Grey lines show 19th century parish boundaries. St. Michael's church indicated by red circle)

# Chapter 3. From prebend to parish

In the 1140s Bishop Roger de Clinton began the rebuilding of the old Saxon cathedral, and at the same time laid out the new town of Lichfield in its shadow. The nature of the Norman town can still be seen in the rectilinear street pattern that has persisted through the centuries, with the parallel streets of Frog Lane, Wade Street, Bore Street and Market Street and the two perpendicular causeways of Bird St. and Dam Street bridging the Leomansley Brook. The city centre church of St. Mary in the Market Place dates from that era. The church of St. Chad at Stowe was also rebuilt in the Norman period. St. Michael's however is not mentioned in the historical record until 1190. Three other local places of worship were also in existence by the early thirteenth century - the chapel of St. John's Hospital, which catered for the pilgrim traffic to the shrine of St. Chad at the Cathedral; the chapel of St. Leonard at the leper hospital in Freeford, and the chapel of the Franciscan Friary, all being used for public worship.

Around 1224, the Prebend of Freeford gave permission for all who died in St. John's hospital to be buried in the churchyard of the parish church and stipulated that all residents were to receive the sacrament at that church on feast days. This church was almost certainly St. Michael's and we thus have here a reference to St. Michael's as a parish church for the first time. But what parish? The five chaplains of the prebendaries are recorded in 1241 as having special responsibility for saying mass at the high altar and the "five parochial chaplains" appear again in 1330, Three of them are to say daily mass at St. Mary's, one at St. Chad's and one at St. Michael's. In 1384 the chaplains of Weeford, Handsacre and Freeford were required to go in procession to those places on certain holy days. Now whilst the first two had churches in these areas as potential destinations, it is not clear what the Freeford

destination might have been - perhaps Whittington Church, or perhaps the leper hospital of St. Leonard's hospital. Or it could refer to St. Michael's itself?

In 1344, William de Walton gave a gift to St. Michael's which we will describe further below. However, it is of interest to note here that the recipients of this gift were Sir John de Freeforde (knight), John de Tymhorne; Thomas de Thonnetorne, Nicholas le Marshall, Richard de Hopton, Robert de Fulfen and Henry le Taylour, who are described as parishioners of the chapelry of St. Michael, and to William Meys, Warden of the lights and fabric of the Chapel. Again, the question arises as to which parish they belonged to?

The complexity of the parochial situation can be judged from the report of a Visitation to the prebends in 1356 - effectively an inspection of the clergy and churches to ensure all was in order. The first day of the visitation inspected the Prebends of Handsacre, Longdon, Statfold and Weeford within the city itself, and the entire Prebend of Freeford, both inside and outside the city, together with the chapels in Freeford (St. Leonard's?) and St. Mary's itself. This was based at St. Mary's. On subsequent days the Visitation related to those parts of the Prebends outside the city, in addition to the Prebends of Gaia Minor and Bishophull, and also to the churches of St. Michael's and St. Chad's.  The visitations were based at different churches - Weeford chapel for Weeford Prebend; St. Michael's for St. Michael's church and Statfold Prebend; Longdon church for Longdon Prebend; and St. Chads for the Prebends of Bishophull and Gaia Minor and for St. Chad's itself. From all of these points one can perhaps come to the conclusion that, whilst there was much interchange between Prebends, and no direct relationship between the individual prebends and specific churches, St. Michael's was mainly associated with the Prebends of Freeford and Statfold, which it can be seen from Figure 2 originally had

territories that stretched from the area around the church to the east for considerable distances. In so far as St. Michael's was a parish church in the centuries following Domesday, it was most likely as the parish church of the prebend based parishes of Statfold and Freeford.

By the late 15th century, this system was breaking down and a re-organisation took place in which the church of St. Mary's was constituted as a Vicarage, with the vicar paid a stipend of £30 14s from the income of the Prebend's estates, from which he had to pay for curates at St. Mary's, St. Chads and St. Michaels. Gradually the parish boundaries in the area became firm, and these are shown in Figure 3a for the Lichfield area and Figure 3b for the wider area. It can be seen that St. Mary's encompasses the city centre, other than the close, St. Chads takes in the north of Lichfield, and St. Michael's encompasses Streethay, Greenhill, the St. Johns area, Burntwood and Hammerwich. Figure 3b shows the outlying areas of St. Michael's parish at Fisherwick, Statfold and Haselour, which were mainly in the Prebends of Freeford and Statfold. The first recorded Curate at St. Michael's was Richard Tatton in 1523, the priest of a cathedral chantry. There seem however to have been no further such appointments till much later in the century. In 1560 the parish boundaries are still described as vague and uncertain by a visitor to the city.

As the Reformation approached in the early sixteenth century there were probably seven places of public worship in the wide area that was ultimately to form St. Michael's parish - St. Michael's itself, the chapel of St. John's Hospital, the chapel of the Franciscan Friary, the chapel of the former leper hospital of St. Leonard's at Freeford, and the chapels in the townships of Hammerwich, Haselour and Statfold. St. Leonard's continued as a public place of worship after the hospital was closed and possessed, sometime in the fifteenth

century, vestments, books, a cross, a censer, a pyx, and candlesticks. The chapels of Hammerwich, Haselour and Statfold can all be dated, on architectural grounds, to the twelfth century. Of these seven places of worship, the Franciscan Friary and St. Leonard's chapel were not to survive the reformation.

Now in chapter 1 the argument of Steven Basset was mentioned that suggested that St. Michael's was the centre of a British Diocese in the late antiquity period. This was based on modern parish boundaries that show St. Michael's as a large land unit from which the parishes of St. Mary's, St. Chads and the Cathedral close seem to have been extracted. The material discussed above shows that the situation was far more complex. It may well be that the large area belonging to Lichfield in 1086 was originally the core of a diocese that could either have been based at Wall or perhaps on Greenhill, as the latter is certainly a religious site of some antiquity, but there seems no direct relationship between the boundaries of this diocese and the much later parish of St. Michael's.
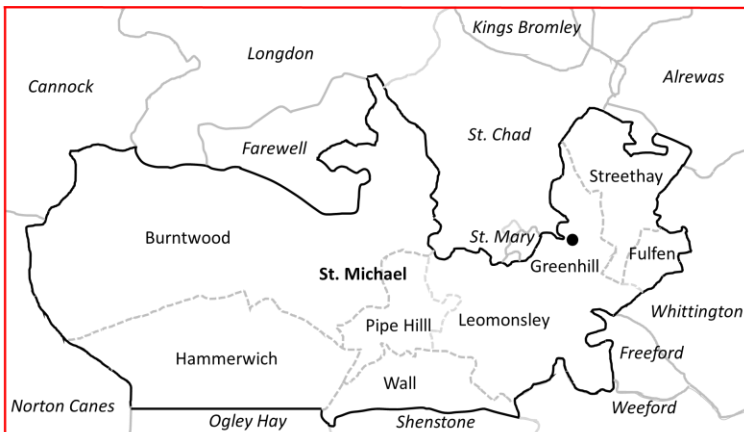
a) Parish and township boundaries in the Lichfield area
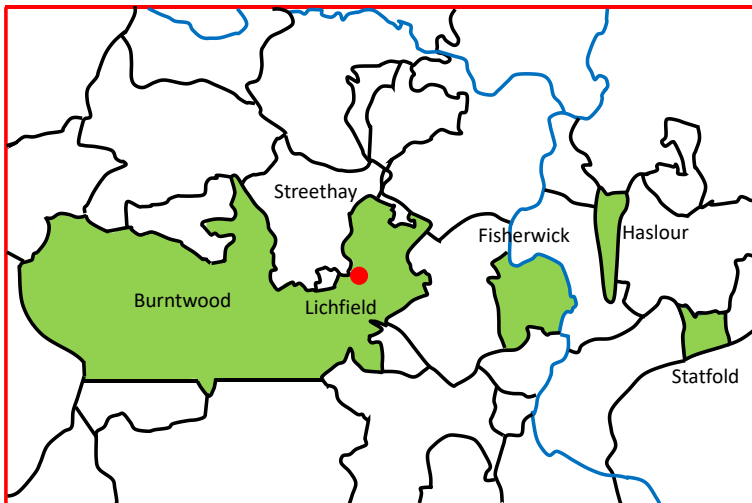


b) St. Michael's parish

**Figure 3. 19th century parish boundaries**
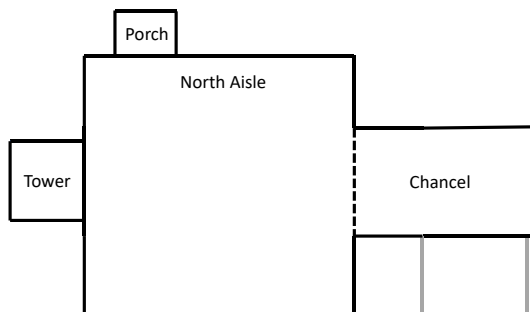
# Chapter 4. The earliest buildings

The nature of the earliest buildings at St. Michael's can only be surmised from an examination of the existing fabric. The earliest surviving fabric indicates that in the 13th century the church consisted only of a nave and a short chancel (see Figure 4a), without the current side aisles or tower. A lancet window (in the Early English style) on the west wall opening into the tower was once an external window (Figure 5). A change in stone work on the north wall of the chancel also clearly indicates its original length. The roof was lower than at present, roughly corresponding to the height of the current chancel. Possible indications of the roof line can again be seen in Figure 5. The very simple nature of the building in relation to the more ornate contemporary forms of St. Mary's and St. Chad's could mean one of two things - that it was a simple funerary church designed to serve the graveyard, or that it was a much older church of a simple form such as might have been built pre-Domesday. The fact that the length of the nave and chancel is rather greater than most late Anglo-Saxon churches would suggest that, if it was from that era, it was regarded as a significant site. A south aisle was added in the 14th century in the Decorated style, with an entrance door halfway along its length opening onto what we now regard as the back of the church (Figure 4b). After that the various reconstructions of the building by different authors do not agree in terms of what was done and when. But essentially by the Reformation in the early sixteenth century, the chancel had been extended to its current length, with wider windows along the side and a large east window, a tower added at the west end, and the roof raised to allow the construction of the clerestories. At this stage the nave and chancel were both at almost the same height - that of the current nave. In the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries the north aisle and porch were added in the Perpendicular style (Figure 4c).
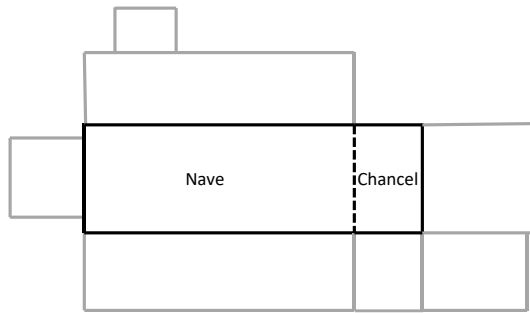
a) Thirteenth century
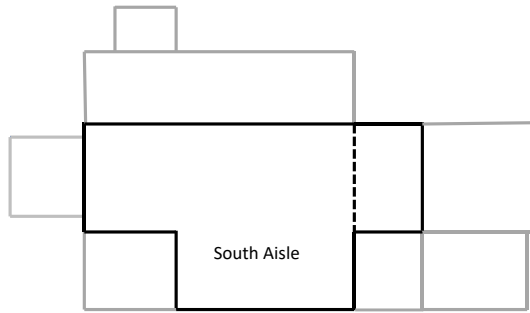


b) Fourteenth century



c) Sixteenth century

**Figure 4. The earliest buildings**

(Grey lines indicate floor plan of contemporary buildings)

**Figure 5. The west end of the nave, showing early
external window and indications of lower roof line**
(Photo by Maureen Brand)

During the successive stages of building, the church would
of course have continued to be surrounded by the large
churchyard. Around 1530, on the eve of the Reformation,
the churchyard was used for grazing animals, and it is
more than likely that this was how it was used for many
centuries before that. Trevor James argues that such a use

is consistent with what would have been a seasonal movement of livestock across the huge Lichfield estate, with summer grazing for sheep and cattle in places such as Hammerwich and Ogley Hay to the west and Statfold and Haselour to the east, with the animals being confined in the graveyard in the winter months - and with the market and slaughter house conveniently placed on Greenhill just outside the city gates.

# Chapter 5. Chantries and legacies

In the early Middle Ages, worship at St. Michael's would have been quite unlike worship today. It would have been centred upon the daily celebration of the Latin mass, by one of the Prebend's chaplains. This would have taken place at the high altar, with the priest and a server to say the responses. There may or may not have been others present to watch - and in particular to observe the crucial part of the liturgy at the elevation of the host during what we know as the Eucharistic prayer. The mass on Sundays and on festivals would have attracted a congregation, but most would not receive communion and of those who did, only the priest would receive both bread and wine, with others simply receiving the bread. Sermons or homilies would have been few and far between.

The masses said by the chaplains would have been supplemented by daily chantry masses to pray for the souls of the chantry benefactors, with the chantry priest supported by the income from the benefaction. We know of only a small number of chantries at St. Michaels. In 1273 Robert de Hulton founded a chantry to pray for his soul, that of his wife Hawisse and his forebears buried in the churchyard, supported from a gift of land and rent income. Masses for this chantry were still being celebrated in 1394, although somewhat later this chantry was absorbed into the chantry of St. Radegund at the cathedral. In 1344 William de Walton gave three acres of land for two hundred years to "*parishioners of the chapel of St. Michael and to William Meys, keeper of the lights and fabric of the chapel*". The gift was made to provide a light in the chapel on feast days for William during his lifetime, and after his death for his soul and the souls of his wife Margaret, Master Adam Walton, and Isabel de Rokeby. It was also for the support of a chaplain celebrating on 6 February, the morrow of the feast of St. Agatha. He also made a

contribution to the Hulton chantry to support the chantry priest. The chantry masses would have taken place at separate altars to the daily celebration of mass, either at the east end of one of the aisles or on the north or south wall. There is no indication how many altars were in use at St. Michaels in this period. However, by 1406 there were three clergy celebrating masses at St. Michael's and it is likely that these would have been chantry masses.

At a somewhat lower level of benefaction, in 1349 Maud Atwell gave land to St. Michael's. the income from which was to be used for candles and a mass on St. Mark's day, and in 1508 Thomas Chatterton gave rent from land in Fulfen and Streethay to maintain a light before the statues of St. Mary and St. Catherine in St. Michaels.

Whilst the performance of the mass was the main ritual of the medieval church, there were a range of others. The clergy would have said, probably privately, some or all of the services of the hours of the church, although some might have been said in the church building. The sacraments of baptism, marriage and unction would have been administered to all parishioners however those were defined. Baptism would take place within the church around the font, which was probably, in this period, near the church door on the south side of the church. Marriages would have taken place outside the church or in the porch, with the vows exchanged between the couple themselves and the priest adding a blessing and acting as a witness. Unction would have been given close to the point of death, and the funeral service that followed would have taken place around the grave. Requiem masses would have been held in the church itself but were restricted to the more prominent members of local society.

The rituals that would probably have been embraced most enthusiastically by parishioners however were the processions that would have been held at the major

festivals - the candle procession at Candlemas in early February; the palm procession on Palm Sunday; processions and pageants at Easter and Pentecost, and the procession of the consecrated host at Corpus Christi. These would have involved perambulations within the church and also around the church and in the wider area, with vested clergy, candles, incense and much ceremony. These were all curtailed by the Reformation of the 1530s and 1540s that reached its zenith in the reign of Edward VI in the early 1550s. However, in 1553 Mary Tudor came to the throne and the counter reformation began. In the churchwarden's accounts of 1557, we find numerous entries that give a snapshot of what was required for worship that year, which almost certainly also reflects pre-Reformation practice. Entries record payments for the purchase of wax to make candles, including 8s for 7lb of wax for the Paschal candle and a large taper, 4d for "*charcolle and ffrankensens*" for use in a censer; and 6d to the Clerk for the "*carryenge of the Cross and canapeys*" on Corpus Christi. Within a few years all these ceremonies would cease with the accession of Elizabeth and the return to something like the Edwardian Reformation. Nonetheless it is in liturgical processions such as these that we should probably look for the origins of the Greenhill Bower at Whitsundtide (Pentecost).

Finally, although it was much more of a social rather than a liturgical celebration, it is worth mentioning that in the same accounts, we read that 3d was also paid for "*bredde and ale*" on Shaw (Shrove) Tuesday, a time when the last of the winter provisions were used up, often accompanied, to the disgust of many of the Reformers, with much gluttony and drunkenness.

# 6. For the repose of the soul

In the restoration of St. Michael's in the 1840s (see Part 3) a 13th century tomb of a civil lawyer was discovered in a recessed arch in the north wall of the chancel, showing an effigy on stone with a dog at its feet (Figure 6). This has been taken since then to be that of William de Walton who has already been mentioned, although there is no direct proof of this. Indeed, if it was indeed a thirteenth century tomb, it dates from 50 to 100 years before Walton's time and could as easily be Robert de Hulton or some otherwise unknown worthy. But can anything more be said of these two individuals, who are the first recorded members of the laity associated with the church? The answer simply, is a little, but not very much. Interestingly both the de Hulton and the de Walton families originate in Lancashire, in those days actually a somewhat remote part of the Diocese of Lichfield. Little, Middle and Over Hulton are to the around six miles to the east of Wigan and Unes Walton about eight miles to the north of that town. So it seems almost certain that the families were acquainted with each other, if not actually related. Around the middle of the thirteenth century, Robert de Hulton acted as a witness in a land sale in the Lichfield area, and it seems likely that this is the same Robert as set up the chantry in 1273 to pray for the souls of his wife and himself. A Richard de Hulton is found acting in the same way late in the century, and in 1262 Thomas de Hulton was one of those who brought actions against others with regard to contraventions of Forest Law in Cannock forest. These may well have been related.

**Figure 6. The 13th century effigy**

(Photos by Maureen Brand)

With regard to the de Walton's, their manor in Lancashire is reasonably well documented in the 12th and 13th centuries, but they seem to have lived for a large part of their time in Lichfield. Adam de Walton was Chancellor of the Cathedral from 1276 to 1292 and Precentor from 1292 to his death in 1301. It is likely that he was also the same Adam who was a priest at the church in Wigan in 1299. He seems to have been a liberal giver of alms, and many paupers came to his house. His property seems to have ultimately come to William de Walton and his wife Margery of Lichfield, after the deaths of closer relatives. William had two daughters Maud and Agnes. In 1344 or 1347, he granted the manor of Ulnes Walton and other places to Henry Earl of Lancaster for a rent of £50 per year, payable in Lichfield where he lived. The land William gave to fund the chantry consisted of two acres at Berry Hill to the south of Lichfield, half an acre at Culstubbemerch (possibly Upper St. John's St.), and half an acre at Goldhord, which cannot be identified.

If the effigy in St. Michael's is indeed a 13th century civil lawyer, then it is probably more likely to be that of Robert de Hulton of that century who was engaged in legal activities in that period, rather than the land-owning aristocrat Willian de Walton of the 14th century. Nonetheless the fact that Walton did make a contribution to the de Hulton chantry suggests that the families were related in some way.

# Bibliography for Parts 1 to 4

Much of the basic information found on this site has been taken from three sources - two volumes of the Victoria County History and the early nineteenth century work of Thomas Harwood. All are available on line.

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- [A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 14,](#) Lichfield Edited by M W Greenslade. A detailed thematic account of the city of Lichfield and outlying townships, including Burntwood. Victoria County History - Staffordshire.
- Thomas Harwood (1806) ["The History and Antiquities of the Church and City of Lichfield:: Containing Its Ancient and Present State, Civil and Ecclesiastical; Collected from Various Public Records, and Other Authentic Evidences"](#)

In addition, much use has been made of the UK census collection and material relating to St. Michael's at Staffordshire Records Office

- [UK Census collection](#)
- [Records of St. Michael's Church, Staffordshire Records Office](#)

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Finally, for those interested in the celebrations of the ritual year, the following book by Ronald Hutton is a good read.

- Hutton R (1996) "The Stations of the Sun – a History of the Ritual Year in Britain", Oxford University Press

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