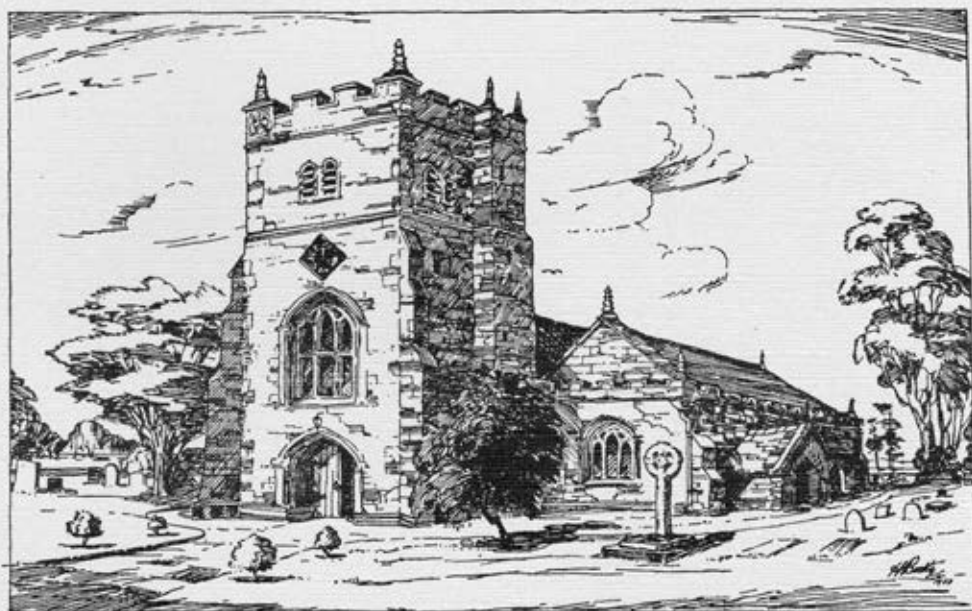




ST. MICHAEL'S-ON-WYRE PARISH CHURCH



The Ancient Church of St. Michael, St. Michael's-on-Wyre.

A Short History

From A.D. 640

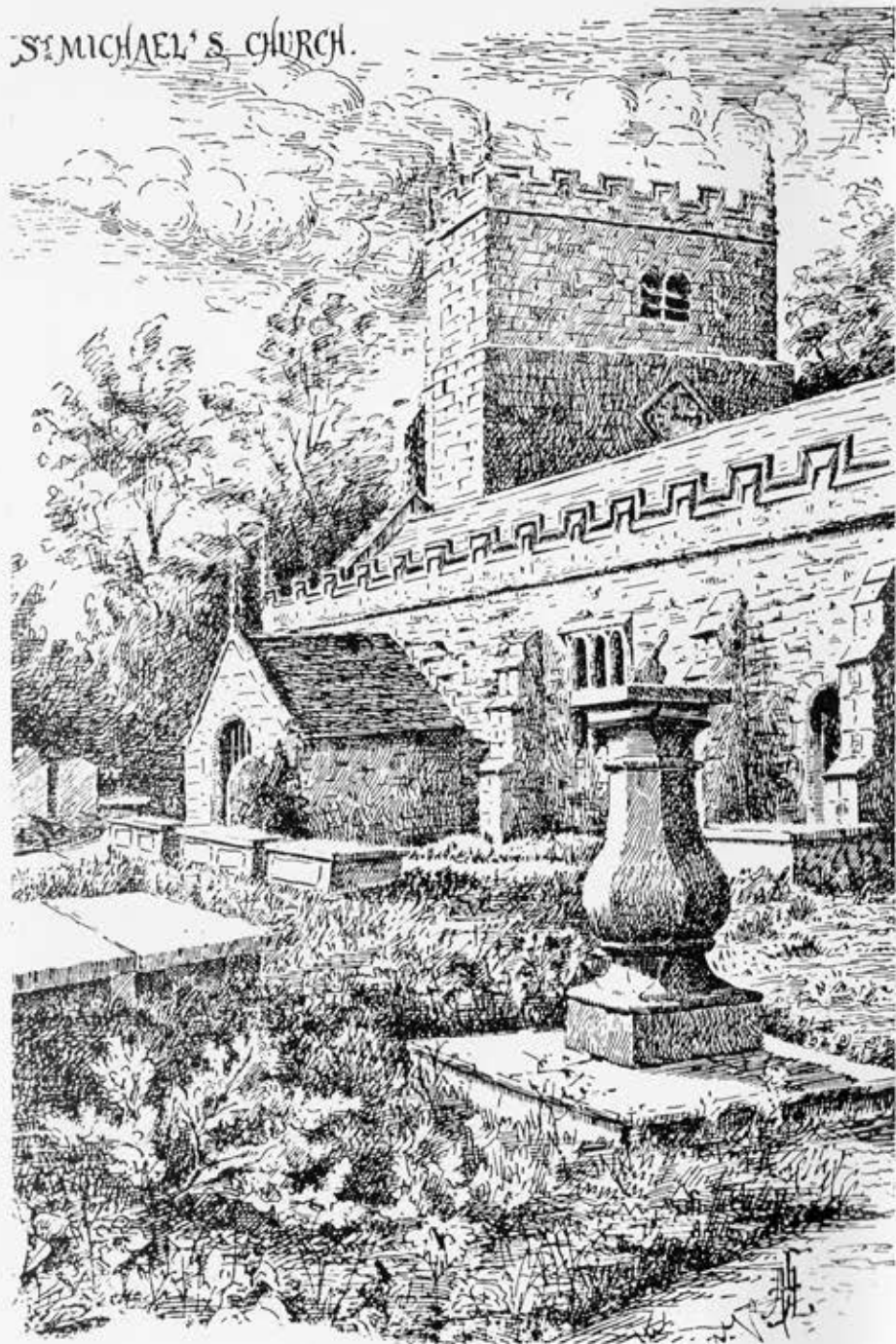
History of the Parish

According to tradition, the great missionary Archbishop of York, Paulinus, came to this part of the world in Saxon times and a church was built here c. 640 A.D. close to a safe crossing point on the nearby River Wyre. Nothing now remains of the original edifice but tradition has it that the stone base of the sun-dial in the churchyard was the base of an old Saxon cross. The church was dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel and included in its Ecclesiastical boundaries — EGLISTUN (Eccleston) EDELESUIC (Elswick) INSCIP (Inskip) SORBI (Sowerby) PLUNTON (Woodplumpton) and RODECLIFFE (Rawcliffe).

In the Domesday survey of 1086, the church was called MICHELESCHERCE and was one of only 3 churches mentioned as being within the Hundred of Amounderness. (The others being at Preston and Kirkham). A settlement existed here many centuries before the church was established — it lies in the Township of Upper Rawcliffe with Tarnacre which is still the name used in local Government circles. The combination of the names of the church and the river was first used in the 12th Century and the village has become known as St. Michael's-on-Wyre.

At this time, the patronage was in the hands of King John and remained in the hands of the Crown until the reign of James 1st. The advowson has since been owned by a number of people including past vicars of St. Michael's and has been held by the Hornby family since 1789. No fewer than 4 vicars of St. Michael's have held the title of Archdeacon of Lancaster since the position was created in 1870 — including the present vicar, The Venerable Kenneth Gibbons. The names of Rectors and Vicars since A.D. 1203 can be seen on the board on the south wall of the Tower.

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH.



From a 19th Century Engraving

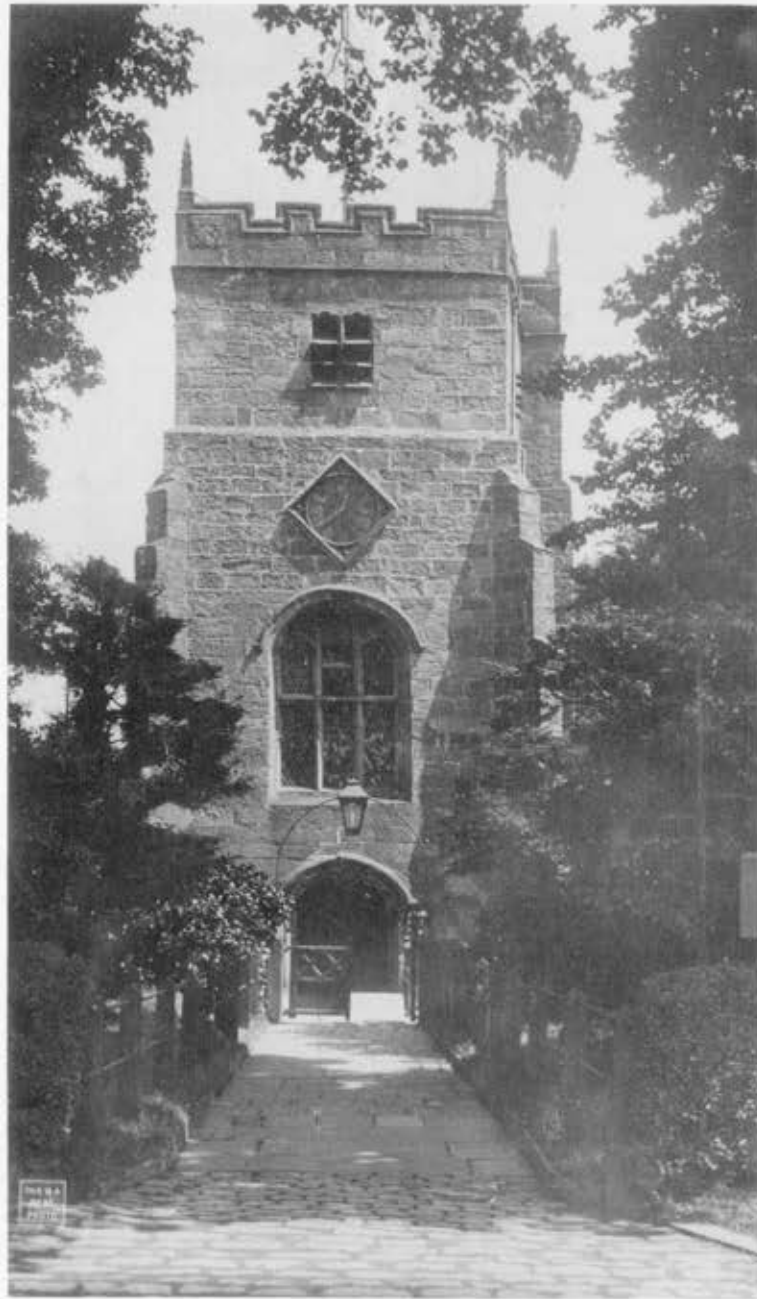
History of the Church

The fabric of the church, in Architectural terms, can be described as being 'Late Perpendicular' — having been added to at various times in its existence. The church was reconstructed in the 15th century although parts of the structure date back to the 13th century and possibly earlier.

Much of the masonry of the church consists of rubble with yellow sandstone dressings with areas of red sandstone in the east wall being of a much later date. From the 16th to the 19th century the church was lime washed **both** inside and out and traces of lime can still be found on the outside of the south wall.

The Chancel and Nave arcades and part of the north wall are probably 14th century. The Butler chapel, on the north side of the nave, dedicated to St. Katharine, was founded c. 1480 A.D. by John Butler of Rawcliffe Hall. At the east end of the south aisle, where the organ now stands, there existed a further chantry dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and founded by William Kirkby c. 1520 A.D. These chantries and a Grammar School which was held in the church, were dissolved at the time of the Reformation. The Butler chapel fell into disrepair and was restored by John France of Rawcliffe Hall in 1797 and again in 1953 following the ravages of death watch beetle.

On the parapet of the tower at the N.W. angle can be seen the arms and initials of Henry Butler and the date 1611 which date can also be seen above the doorway of the south porch. Apart from the addition of the vestry (built before 1825) the church has looked very much the same since 1611.



St. Michael's Church c. 1906

Interesting Features

The **LEPER** window can be seen near the angle of the tower and the west wall of the south aisle. This small lancet window, which is now filled in, is thought to be 13th century. Through this window, lepers and others with contagious diseases could receive Communion and obtain alms of bread whilst observing the service inside the church.

The **TOWER** was built c.1549 A.D. in which year John Singleton gave '40s towards the church and the building of the steeple and 10s towards the bells'. A **CLOCK** was first installed in the tower in 1671 — this was replaced in 1850 and the large pendulum can be seen swinging on the south wall of the tower.

The **BELFRY** contains 3 bells (not open to the public) — the oldest bell, the treble or French bell, is dated 1458 — the other English bells being dated 1663 and 1742.

On the north wall at the east end of the Sanctuary can be seen an interesting **15th CENTURY MURAL** which was brought to light in 1956 during restoration work. The mural depicts the Ascension and even though it is faded, the head of the Virgin Mary, (with halo), several Apostles and one foot of Christ ascending into the clouds can still be made out. Other murals came to light in 1854 during earlier restoration work and one of these depicted the devil chasing after sinners or lost souls.

On the east wall of the Sanctuary to the left of the altar, can be seen a **13th CENTURY PEDESTAL** upon which an effigy of St. Michael once stood. A **PISCINA** of the same period in the south wall of the Sanctuary and used for ablutions at the Communion service can also be seen. The relatively low position is due to the fact that the floor has been raised on a number of occasions.

The seating of the church was completed by Reverend William Hornby in 1854 — a number of older pews being repositioned in the south aisle where the dates 1666, 1668, 1679 and 1694 can be seen along with the initials of several churchwardens. Before 1854, pews were owned by individual parishioners and disputes often occurred when the owner found someone sitting in his family pew.

Stained Glass

The stained glass window in the east wall behind the altar dates back to 1907 when it was dedicated to the memory of Archdeacon William Hornby and his wife Susan. It represents our Lord in the centre light with St. Peter (North) and St. John (South) on either side. In the upper lights can be seen the four Archangels Raphael, Michael, Gabriel and Uriel. The window in the Butler chapel was dedicated to the memory of Archdeacon Phipps John Hornby, who died in 1936. An interesting piece of 16th century Flemish glass can also be seen in the Butler chapel. An 8" roundel depicts a sheep shearing scene and has 'Junius' (June) engraved on the lower part. Similar pieces of glass which are said to have come from the Butler chapel can be seen at Rawcliffe Hall and depict other months and seasons of the year. A modern stained glass window in the west wall of the south aisle depicts the parable of the sower.

Memorials

A number of brass wall plates can be seen — the most recent of which was dedicated to the memory of those who died in the Abbeystead disaster of May 23rd, 1984, when 13 people from St. Michael's and three others lost their lives.

The Benefactions board on the south wall lists the names of a number of benefactors including Ralph Longworth who, after his death, continued to haunt the place until the Vicar laid his spirit to rest ordering that it should not re-appear "so long as the ivy is green and the river runs down from the hills".

The Graveyard

The graveyard contains the remains of several vicars of St. Michael's — the oldest grave is dated 1658. To the south east of the porch can be seen two coped body stones with a square portion at the head and a third nearby with a rounded top. Traditionally, these stones are called the "Soldiers stones". In 1643, the Earl of Derby took possession of a Spanish ship which had been wrecked in the Wyre estuary. The crew were turned loose into the surrounding countryside and became wandering vagabonds. Two of these men died and were said to have been buried "near the yew tree in St. Michael's churchyard".



ARMS OF BUTLER ON TOWER.

The Vicar writes:

Even this ancient church which we try to describe in this booklet does not contain the whole story. The Church in any place is the community of Christian people; those who have been baptized on this spot over the centuries; those the Bishop has Confirmed; those who have knelt at the Altar for Holy Communion; those who have come to pledge their lives to each other in Holy Matrimony. The great moments of life, the happiness and the sorrow, the pain and the gladness all taken up into the eternal life of God. The clock reminds us of time, the tower of the strength of God, the churchyard of the frailty of the human condition, the church by the river of renewal and refreshment, of peace and joy.

As you go round the church and kneel to say a prayer think of the people of St. Michael's-on-Wyre past and present and of your own parish church.

Lord Jesus Christ who art the light and surpassing glory of the Holy City of God; Glorify and lighten with thy perpetual presence this earthly house built for thee. Be pleased to accept and inspire its worship day by day, the praise of thankful lips and the prayers of faithful hearts; who livest with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kenneth Gillman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

*Archdeacon of Lancaster
Vicar of St. Michael's-on-Wyre*