

## **A few words from the Vicar ....**

*'Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. (Acts 20:28)*

There is no news to report on the Ainsworth & Radcliffe Team front this month.

I appreciate the subject has dominated my newsletters over the past few months and, quite possibly, some of you might be getting a little fed up reading about it, but the subject is of crucial importance for the future of the Church here in Ainsworth and Bradley Fold.

Nonetheless, let's have a rest from the subject this month!

Of course, as we look to the future, it good to be mindful of the past and this is especially so in this, our 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

Well, our 'sort of' 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary. What do I mean by 'sort of'?

Strictly speaking the Church is the Body of Christ; all those people who choose to follow Jesus. This means that the Church has existed in this area for as long as there have been Christians living on Cockey Moor.

And that is where we enter the realm of speculation for the fact is we do not have a clue when the first locals became Christians.

We know that Christianity first came to these shores when we were under Roman occupation sometime in the Third Century. So was it then?

Possibly because locally there have been various archaeological finds dating from that era (burial urns

containing cremated remains, pottery, coins etc.) so we know people were living here then. There is even good reason for speculation that Ainsworth is the site of the Roman era settlement known as Coccium, although this is disputed as Wigan is also considered to be a likely site. But it does not matter whether Coccium was at Ainsworth or Wigan because we cannot possibly know whether any of its inhabitants at that time were Christian.

Although Christianity survived in pockets after the Roman Legions departed in 407, it seems more plausible that the Church in this area (in the sense of Christian people rather than a building) dates from the conversion of England during the Anglo-Saxon period.

At that time this part of Lancashire was a chaotic border region between the kingdoms of Northumbria and Mercia, but was nominally under the control of the Mercian kings. In 669 St Chad was appointed Bishop of Lichfield and tasked by the Mercian king with the conversion of his kingdom. This rather suggests the people in this area became Christian (at least nominally) sometime in the late 7<sup>th</sup> Century.

Of course, this tells us nothing about where our Anglo-Saxon forebears worshipped. Indeed, there is no evidence of a church building in this area at that time, which suggests that folk probably travelled to a nearby settlement with a church.

The earliest written evidence for the existence of a church building in Ainsworth dates from 1515 when the 'Chapell of Cokkeymore' was mentioned in the records of a court case. When the chapel was actually constructed, we don't know. All we can say is that we know there has been a church or chapel standing on the same site as our present church since the late Middle Ages.

All this is a round about way of saying that 2015 is as good a year as any for us to celebrate our 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

And I am glad to say that, having made a false start with a Flower Festival (which, for those of you who don't know, is not now going ahead), various events to celebrate are beginning to come together:

- On 28<sup>th</sup> June we have an anniversary service during which we will celebrate memories of our Church from years gone by. The date has been chosen because it is the nearest Sunday to the anniversary of the consecration of our present church building (30<sup>th</sup> June 1832).
- Following the main service on 19<sup>th</sup> July the Social Committee are organising a 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary lunch.
- The Churchyard team have really got the bit between their teeth and are organising an open weekend 25-27 September. As part of this they have persuaded me to organise another celebration service on 25<sup>th</sup> September and a friend of Andrew Lowe's is writing a special anthem for the occasion.
- Finally we hope to hold an 'Oktoberfest' celebration in early October (date to be confirmed) courtesy of Jimmy Tew and his Bavarian band.

If you have any ideas for other events (and are willing to put the work in to make them happen) please let me know.

Of course, the 500<sup>th</sup> is not all about special events; Venitia is making a new cloth for the Communion Table and, as soon as we know we have enough money, we'll order those new pew cushions.

So, 2015 will be a year to remember!

Every Blessing

*Dave*