

St. Paul's Church

St. Paul's Church, is a plain Gothic church, with straight headed windows with round-arched lights in the Henry VIII tradition. The construction shows a massive profession of faith in the past. (1) It has always been the centre of village life since 1671 when it was consecrated, although it had been built around 1669. More so in 1900 than it is in the year 2000, when we celebrate the birth of Christ, it has to be said, but nevertheless it still holds its place. Witherslack seceded from Beetham in 1811 to become a parish in its own right. Meathop and Ulpha, which were also in the Parish of Beetham, were joined to Witherslack as a parish in 1891. After a lot of argument with the Vicar, the tithes went to Beetham until the Incumbency changed.

John Barwick bequeathed money in his Will to provide a new burial ground because hitherto the dead had been carried on a perilous journey, particularly during the winter months, across the treacherous sands of the tidal estuary to the mother church of Beetham for burial. St. Mary's church situated near to the Manor House was in a 'ruinous state' after the Civil War. Therefore Peter Barwick and the parishioners petitioned the Bishop of Chester for a new church and burial ground and the present chapel of ease was built on land granted by Charles eighth Earl of Derby and consecrated by the Bishop of Chester in June 1671. Money was also left to provide for a school, no doubt remembering the journeys he had made to school with his brother (first to Heversham and then to Sedbergh). An income for apprenticeships, the 'poor mayd's portion' (that is a dowry), and for fuel for the aged and infirm of his native Witherslack.

Dean John Barwick was a remarkable man. Born in Witherslack in 1612 the eldest of five sons. John, Peter, Nicholas, William, Edward. In a book about Johns life (1) his brother Peter does not name his place of birth in the parish, but Nicholas inherits the family estate on the death of his father, and being the eldest son, farms at Askew Green. The parents George and Mary later bought a second farm, (High) Fell End, where William farmed. John Barwick went on to St. John's College Cambridge where he gained his BA in 1634 and an MA in 1638(2). He was a devout churchman and a staunch loyalist, and because of the problems between the church and state during the Civil War he acted as a spy for Charles I. Subsequently he and youngest brother Edward were betrayed, arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London on Good Friday without trial. (3).

On his release almost twelve months later, despite being in poor health, he worked tirelessly with his friend Sir John Otway, and others, for the Restoration of the Monarchy. In 1660, he was appointed Dean of Durham Cathedral. He was also offered the Deanery of St. Paul's in London in 1661. John was granted a Doctor of Divinity and appointed Chaplain to King Charles n. (4) He worked at St. Paul's

Cathedral until he died of consumption in 1664. He was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral in London; hence the church of Witherslack is dedicated to St. Paul. Peter Barwick, his younger brother, followed him through St John's College Cambridge and gaining a BA in 1642, followed by an MA in 1647, and he became a Doctor of Physic in 1655 and physician to King Charles 11. (5)

After John Barwick's death Peter was appointed Executor of his brothers Will and set about fulfilling his wishes. At a meeting with the parishioners one suggestion was that the church should be built of top of Yewbarrow but this was defeated by one vote.

The church was repaired and beautified in 1767 and underwent extensive restoration in 1861 and was renovated in 1880. In the 20th century it was given electricity, although as the photograph

shows it must have been quite atmospheric without it. The church has a number of yew trees in the churchyard, and as G.P. Jones notes in his book (6) in 1734 a 'man was paid a shilling in wages and sixpence for his meat while removing the yews. In 1744 a man earned three shillings cutting and transplanting the yews'. There is a custom that the yew trees represent the twelve apostles, and also as the yew tree is an evergreen it is therefore symbolic of immortality.

One of the quaintest customs is that surrounding the marriage ceremony. Whilst the bride and groom are in the church making their marriage vows, the children of the village place several garlands of flowers leading from the church, held at each end by one of the children to bar the path of the bridal couple. They are released as the groom throws money to them. This custom still continues today although we do not know when it began. In 1963 the Church Council thought they would do something for the elderly in the village and they started the Jubilee Club for the over 50's and 60's. In those days this took the form of the two music teachers from Witherslack Hall going down to the Parish Hall and entertaining them with music and song, always finishing with a cup of tea. Whist Drives followed and a good time was had by all. They were unable to get meals on wheels so it was suggested that once a week they would attend the Church Hall and be supplied with a hot dinner. There were 16 people when it started but in 1996 there were only 3 so it was closed down.

1971 was the Tercentenary of the Church and 'Three Essays' (7) were printed, bound and distributed to each child of the Dean Barwick School by the Very Reverend Martin Gloster Sullivan, the then Dean of St. Paul's in London who had celebrated a service in church.

In 1973 came the troubled question of where the Parish was going, because of the shortage of clergy. The Archdeacon gave us three options: to join with Crosthwaite and Cartmel Fell, or with Lindale and Field Broughton or with Levens. There was also the question of planning permission to build houses on the Vicarage land. The Archdeacon said there would be no decision made until the Pastoral Committee had their next meeting.

It was decided that Witherslack would join with Crosthwaite and Cartmel Fell, and that planning permission for the Vicarage would not go ahead. The deanery of Carlisle then wrote to the church telling them that the Deanery would sell the Vicarage, and that Witherslack had no claim on it. In 1977 it was the Silver Jubilee of the Queen and Prince Philip, and there was a church service and sports for the children and a bonfire. In 1995 when it was the 50th anniversary of Victory in Europe day, the whole village celebrated, and a church service remembered those who did not come back. There was also a bonfire set on Yewbarrow, which everyone enjoyed. The Vicarage, now the Old Vicarage, was built in 1843, and is now a Country Hotel and Restaurant specialising in fine food and wines and is run by Roger and Jill Burrington-Browne and Stan and Irene Reeves. To day Witherslack continues as it always has, but we share our Parish Priest, Rev. Michael Woodcock, with Crosthwaite, Cartmel Fell, and Winster.

The Vicars of the Parish of Witherslack 1901- present day:

1900 William Henry Scotter

1943 Basil Robinson

1950 Henry Dennis

1953 James Boyd Airton

1955 Thomas Young

1964 Bryan Gregg Fell

1975 Kenneth Partington

1996 William Greetham

2006 Michael Woodcock

The Churchwardens of the Parish of Witherslack 1901-2000:

1900 M.B. Hodgson & W.S. Hodgson

1937 M. Lambert & J.R. Thornborrow

1967 W. M. Jackson & W.M. Farrer

1982 J. Lawson

1990 Thomas A, Brennand

1995 Anne M. Duffin

1999 Hilda Jarvis

2008 Janet Read

Footnotes:

1. N. Pevsner Cumberland and Westmorland 1967 The Buildings of England.
2. The 'Life of Dean John Barwick' Peter Barwick 1724. A copy is in the Kendal Record Office.
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. G.P. Jones 'The Manor and Parish of Witherslack to 1850' 1971 Titus Wilson Kendal
7. 'Three Essays written for the Tercentenary' John Barwick D.D. by Elizabeth Jones M.A. 17th Century Painted Glass in Witherslack Church by J. T. Brighton M.A. Dean Barwick School and Charity by B.G.Fell M.A. H.C.F.

The History of Witherslack, Meathop and Ulpha - These page are taken with kind permission from a small book by Maureen James (B.A. Hons) Maureen says "thank you to all the

people who helped me put the book together, those whom I interviewed on tape, those who lent me photographs, books and wrote pieces out for me, and those who generally helped. With special thanks to Tony Brennand and Anne Walshaw and to Sarah Bradley."