

St Helen's, Tarporley



The Delamere Horn – calling us to safeguard God's creation, and support the lives of young people.

In a corner of St Helen's Church, behind the organ and near the clergy vestry is a small stained glass window, easy to miss but which speaks of much of the history of this church and parish.

The central section of the window depicts St Francis of Assisi who is associated with the patronage of animals and the natural environment which is very appropriate for a rural church. To the left of St Francis is the crest of the Done family of Utkinton and to the right is the crest of the Arderne Alvanley family. At the bottom of right-hand window is an image of the Delamere Hunting Horn.

The Horn dates to AD1123 and is a symbol of the bailiwick of Utkinton Hall which was granted by the third Earl of Chester to Ranulf de Kyngeslegh. In 1244 it passed from the Kyngeslegh family to the Done family. Sir John Done was knighted by King James 1 at Utkinton Hall in 1617. He was the 19th Chief Forester and Bow bearer in Chief of the Forest of Mara and Mondrem (Delamere Forest), which role was concerned with the preserving of deer and safeguarding of trees in the forests.

The title and hunting horn has been passed down the hereditary line often through the female side. Names of the holders include Arderne, Crewe, Alvanley, Warrender, Baille Hamilton (Arden) 11th Earl of Haddington, Baille Hamilton, (Lord Binning) and O'Brien. The current holder, the thirty sixth, is Mrs Katherine Cowan elder daughter of Desmond O'Brien. It has been on display in the Grosvenor Museum from 1936.

Many monuments and tributes for donations in St Helen's Tarporley are linked to the Done family and bear some of the names listed above. In addition, next to church is the Done Room, a Grade 2* listed building, built in 1636 by Dame Dorothy Done of Utkinton Hall. It became the very first 'free school' for local children in Tarporley, before also serving the community as a Reading Room, Youth Club, Brownie Pack HQ, Band Practice Room and now retains that educational past by being used by a pre-school.

In the nineteenth century, the Done descendants help to fund expansion of the parish of St Helen's. Three further churches were built in surrounding communities: -St Thomas' in Eaton, St John and the Holy Cross in Cotebrook and St Paul's in Utkinton. St Paul's a dual role as a Church and a school; in the late twentieth century, St Paul's Church, Utkinton was closed but today still remains a Church of England Primary School within the parish.

The Delamere Horn therefore links Tarporley both to its past, present and its future: it is a clarion call, reminding the parish of its vocation to share God's love in our rural communities; it remembers the influence of the Done family in the church and community; it links to the history of the community of Utkinton and the church at St Paul's, as well as the important role that the parish has played (and continues to play) in the life and education of young people of the surrounding area. It also points towards the Church's continued responsibility to safeguard God's creation, something the parish is now engaging with through the Eco-Church scheme.