

Welcome



Welcome to Shaw

Shaw & Crompton is a town and civil parish within the Metropolitan Borough of Oldham. It lies on the River Beal and is popularly referred to simply as Shaw. The introduction of textile manufacture during the Industrial Revolution began a process of rapid expansion in many parts of Lancashire and unplanned urbanisation in Shaw began when hundreds of workers were drawn to this community, chiefly to work in the many mills springing up in the area.

A building boom began in Shaw & Crompton during the mid-19th century, when suitable land for building factories in Oldham was becoming scarce. By the late Victorian era, Shaw had emerged as a densely populated mill town and was a hive of industrial activity. Forty-eight cotton mills, some of the largest in the United Kingdom, stood within the town. At the height of its cotton spinning history, and as a result of an inter-war years economic boom associated with the textile industry, Shaw & Crompton was reported to have more millionaires per head of population than any other town in the world! The export of cotton goods from traditional English industrial towns began to decline after the Second World War (1939-45) and the last mill in Shaw closed in 1989.

Welcome to Holy Trinity Church, Shaw

*“Without music, there is no mystery;
without mystery there is no God;
and without God, there is no faith.”*

The Barchester Chronicles by Anthony Trollope

Holy Trinity Church, Shaw, has stood for over 140 years, offering to regular members of the congregation, to the parishioners and to the occasional visitor, the opportunity to step aside from the cares and concerns of daily life and to spend time, alone and with others, in the company of God. There are no membership requirements, other than wanting to explore further the mystery of God’s involvement in the world, and God’s involvement in particular with the people of Shaw & Crompton.

Holy Trinity Church, as you see it today, is the third church on this site and was opened for public worship on Trinity Monday, 5th June 1871. This fine building was designed by the architect Richard Drew.

This noble church replaced the old Shaw Chapel, which was described as “*a hideous building on a piece of rising ground, surrounded by many graves.*” The plain and functional preaching house had, by the 1860s, been allowed to fall into ruinous condition and its general appearance was not a cause for rejoicing. The site of Shaw Chapel is approximately where the church car park now ends and the graveyard begins and is marked by the shaft of an ancient cross.

Holy Trinity Church reflects the changes of fortune and taste which took place within the wider Church during the Victorian era. This local expression of a new church is chiefly the result of the mills and their associated wealth. The church building is an imposing structure and was built in the Decorated Gothic style, at a cost of £9,000. The burial tablets from the old chapel were preserved and placed in the new church.

Externally, the imposing tower is raised up high over the busy town of Shaw. The beauty of the building, with its soaring arches and gleaming stained glass, was built deliberately to provide a glimpse of heaven, to raise the hearts and minds of those hundreds of mill workers who were employed in the forty-eight mills within the town.

Mrs Mary Cocker was an adherent of the Tractarian or Oxford Movement, which had formed within the Church of England from 1833 onwards. This revival sought to restore to Anglicanism much that had been lost at the Reformation (and since) in terms of the form of worship and the importance of the sacraments. Arising from her enthusiasm and munificence, and also other people’s generosity, the new church was a physical expression of her unshakable faith. Not just a place to hear long (and dull!) sermons it was a powerful place for the celebration of the Word of God (the bible) and the Sacraments (in particular, the Mass).

Mrs Cocker and her wealthy friends ensured that this building was a place of meeting for parishioners, a place of beauty and peace, and above all, a place for people for whom daily life as a mill worker was generally hard and grinding. The Tractarians saw their churches as ‘a window into paradise’ where the veil between earth and heaven was so thin that worshippers could have a glimpse of the heavenly glory beyond their humdrum existence.

Holy Trinity Church was a building which boldly proclaimed the presence of God among God's people. It became an important and dignified setting for the rites of passage, such as Baptism, Marriage, Confirmation and Funeral. It was a building in which the local people of Shaw could feel at home and which they could be proud of.

Mary Cocker shared her aspirations with her great friend and confidant, the Revd George Allen MA, a High Church Anglican, who served as the Vicar of Shaw from 1878 – 1902. They wanted the church to be filled with lovely things, not least stained glass, mosaics and carvings. Similarly, Father George Allen, who was an excellent musician and had a great love of church music, wanted the church to be filled with fine music. He strived to raise the beauty of the services to a level which engaged all of the senses in worship. The visual aids, the colour, the movement, the choral music, and the mystery of the worship gradually transformed this place and brought the people to the very gates of heaven.

The theology and piety of the Victorian churchman and woman, and their Anglo-Catholic worship, is now very unfashionable. Its quiet contemplation and spirituality is far removed from the world which most of us inhabit. Sadly, social change and demolition have all too frequently destroyed the signs of community, the places of beauty, the centres of excellence, and the pointers to heaven that these church buildings were. But, thankfully, some remain as places of pilgrimage and continue as living centres of worship, still serving the community for which they were intended.

In the last decade, Holy Trinity church building has been wonderfully restored, supported by English Heritage. This involved a huge amount of work, and the result of all that effort is to be seen today. Holy Trinity continues to offer the best of all that we are and all that we have to the glory of God. It seeks to provide all who come here with a place of sanctuary, refuge, stillness and encounter with God, who involves God's own self with the all busyness of our daily lives.

You are not just welcome – you belong.

You are not just a visitor – you are part of the story.