Historic records for St. Mary’s Church date back to the 11th century and there is evidence of a Norman church on this site. The name Prestwich is derived from the Saxon words for priest (Prest), and retreat or dwelling place (wych), indicating that there might have been a Saxon church on the site. The old part of the churchyard is enclosed by a circular boundary, which indicates a similar age.

It is almost impossible to say what is the age of the present church, but the present nave dates from the 14th century. About 1500, the tower was rebuilt and the roof was raised, at the expense of Thomas Stanley, the 1st Earl of Derby. The Wilton Chapel on the north side of the church was a pre-Reformation Chantry Chapel (rebuilt in 1889). The Lever Chapel on the south side was also a Chantry Chapel, rebuilt in 1731 and in 1874. The present chancel was built in 1889, by the Lancaster architects Paley and Austin.

Today the church seeks to be a welcoming and inclusive community committed to prayer and the Christian values of Love, Justice and Peace for all people.

**War Graves**

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission was founded in 1917 and cares for cemeteries and memorials in 153 countries where people from the British Commonwealth serving in the armed forces are buried. Over 170,000 who died whilst serving in the armed forces, are buried in cemeteries and churchyards in the UK.

During the First World War, four Red Cross Hospitals were established near Prestwich at Moorlands, Sedgley New Hall, Polefield Hall and Stanley House. They were opened in 1914 and used for the treatment of servicemen who were wounded or fell ill overseas, or were injured in training accidents in Britain. Most patients recovered and many of them returned to service, but those who died were buried at either St. Mary’s or St. Margaret’s near Heaton Park. There is a group of 12 war graves NW of the church. The servicemen died at Polefield Hall, either from their wounds or influenza.

Also there are individual war graves scattered throughout the churchyard, some marked with the Portland stone CWGC headstones and others with private grave inscriptions. All are recorded in the Churchyard register.

**Churchyard Marker Posts**

To help you find your family grave, the churchyard has been divided into sections. A churchyard marker post with the appropriate reference number is situated in the northeast corner of each section. These reference numbers correspond with those shown on the churchyard map.

**A place for reflection**

St. Mary’s Churchyard as well as being a working burial ground is a wonderful place for all those who love nature, history and ecology. At every turn there is a new view and unique discovery to make. For quiet reflection, there is no better place to remember a loved one or celebrate their life.

**How can you help?**

We are looking for enthusiastic volunteers with a little spare time and energy to help maintain our churchyard. For more information, please contact the church’s website on www.stmarysprestwich.org

**Prestwich Hospital**

60 acres of land at Prestwich Wood north of the village of Prestwich was acquired in 1847. The Asylum was opened in 1851, originally to house 500 inmates, and extended in 1863 and in 1884, becoming the largest asylum in England. Also in 1884, an agreement was reached between the Rector and churchwardens and the Asylum authorities to extend the churchyard for the burial of pauper inmates of the Asylum. The 1863 extensions of the churchyard included land alongside what is now Clough Drive, where many thousands of pauper inmates were buried in mass grave plots. The churchyard was again extended in 1925 and the south-west corner was used for similar mass burials.

A memorial was planned to be erected before World War Two but never went ahead. The present memorial to the patients was erected in 2006 to the north of the church.

**Prestwich War Memorial**

The Parish War Memorial erected in 1921 in the form of a cross of Portland stone with a bronze sword, replicates the design of crosses in British war cemeteries.