

Based on three talks by Barry Willcock

looking at what was happening in Britain and other parts of the world, from 1066 and describing the possible consequences for people here in Ainsworth.

The first mention of Ainsworth (Aynesworth) appears to be in Great Inquest of Service of 1212, where it is described as part of the Manor of Middleton that was held by Roger de Middleton “for a knight’s fee”, but that it was then part of a parcel of land given by Roger de Myddleton to “God, the Abbot and the Canons” of the Praemonstratensian Abbey of Cockersands, near Lancaster. There was speculation as to whether the name Cockey comes from Cockersands. Since no one at the meeting knew of a mention of Cockey Moor prior to this, it remains unresolved.

There were other events, including the Crusades and the Black Death and this is likely to have had an impact this on the villagers here; and at the time of the Mappa Mundi there was limited understanding of the extent of the world.

Henry VIII’s reign was the time of the first mention of a church in Ainsworth. During the Reformation, when Henry declared himself head of the church in England, a change of ownership of the village followed the dissolution of Cockersands Abbey in 1539. The Abbot and older monks were given pensions, and among the possessions of the abbey were 73 milking cows valued at £41.5s. The lead and flashings on the church roof and other buildings.

When Henry’s daughter Elizabeth became Queen there were numerous plots to remove her and even assassinate her, and a cold war existed between England on the one hand and Spain and the Papacy on the other, culminating in the Spanish Armada of 1588. Just a few years earlier, John Saxton’s map drawn in 1577 shows Ainsworth as Cockley Chapel and Ainsworth Hall.

Following Elizabeth’s death, the Stuart kings (James I and Charles I) ruled until the latter’s quarrels with parliament led to the Civil War. A troop of Royalist soldiers under the leadership of the Earl of Derby mustered on Cockey Moor in preparation for an attack on Bolton, a parliamentary stronghold, and in 1644 a fierce battle took place in and around Bolton. The Earl of Derby was later beheaded in 1651 near the market cross in Churchgate. There is speculation as to whether the name of Knowsley Street may have originated because Derby’s estates included Knowsley Hall near Liverpool, and the road leads to Barrack Fold where it is thought he paraded his troops

It was during this time of the civil war that Commonwealth Commissioners appointed by parliament visited the area and reported that the "Chappell" (in Aynsworth) is fit to be made a Parish Church, and all Aynsworth Hamell, which is in Middleton Parish, is fit to be appropriated unto the said Parish Church of Cockey" together with Haslam Hey, Brightmet and Harwood which are "fit to be appropriated into the new parish of Cockey". However, nothing came of this. The church seems to have housed services of many different religious denominations, with a mixture of Church of England services and preaching by various "dissenting" religious groups taking place at different times of the day.

Following the restoration of Charles II as King in 1660, a series of Acts of Parliament were passed designed to make life difficult for the nonconformists (those who refused to acknowledge the Church of England). They were banned from holding municipal office, the Book of Common Prayer was made compulsory at all services, and those who were or had been nonconformist ministers were banned from coming with 5 miles of their former churches.

Following James II (the last of the Stuart kings) England was ruled first by William of Orange (a protestant) and his wife Mary and then by Mary's sister Anne. It is from this time – 1690s to 1720s – that the earliest gravestone in Ainsworth churchyard dates. Mr Jonathan Dorning was born in 1690 and died in 1726. For the last 12 years of his life the king was George I, the Elector of Hanover, who spent most of his time in Germany and never mastered the English language. During his and the reign of his son (George II) and great grandson (George III) several buildings were constructed in Ainsworth that still remain; The Unitarian Chapel (1715), Knowsley Cottages (1730s), The Duke William (1737) and Hooks Cottage (1773) are among these. And finally, the gravestone of Esther Horrocks in the churchyard was laid in 1778, the year that HMS Victory, Nelson's flagship at Trafalgar, was completed and commissioned.

The third part of Barry's presentation examined some of the main features of British and World history in the 18th and 19th Centuries and how these affected people living in Ainsworth. In the 18th Century, changes in how Britain was governed, including the development of the office of Prime Minister, the impact of the American War of Independence and the way French Revolution influenced changes in other countries were outlined. Changes in industry, particularly the textile industry, owed much to the inventiveness of people who lived in the Bury and Bolton area, and the shift from domestic to mill-based spinning and weaving was a major feature of Ainsworth's history during the later 18th and early 19th centuries. The long war against Napoleon culminated in the battle of Waterloo in 1815, and an Ainsworth man, Henry Rostron, a soldier in the King's Dragoons, is recorded as having been killed at Waterloo. In the nineteenth century, developments included the transport revolution with the building of canals and later railways; the expansion of the right to vote for a member of parliament (for men – for women this did not come until the early twentieth century); the Chartist movement setting out claims for the reform of parliament; the progression of cooperative ventures such as the building of club houses for and

by the workers in stone quarries in Ainsworth leading to the Rochdale Pioneers in 1844 and the Ainsworth Industrial Cooperative Society some twenty years later; changes in crime and punishment ranging from the transportation to the colonies of those convicted of even minor offences to the establishment of police forces; scientific discoveries that transformed medicine and surgery; and developments in education following the acceptance by the government of a responsibility for the welfare and improvement of the life of children and the financing of schools. This period of 200 years saw a significant expansion of the population throughout the country, a shift from a rural to an urban way of life for the majority and changes in life styles on a scale unprecedented at any earlier time in history. Even this, however, was in many ways a lesser change than occurred in the twentieth and early parts of the present centuries.