

# NEWBURGH

## *A Short History*

*by John Whitehead*



**The Red Lion**

**The Newburgh Association**

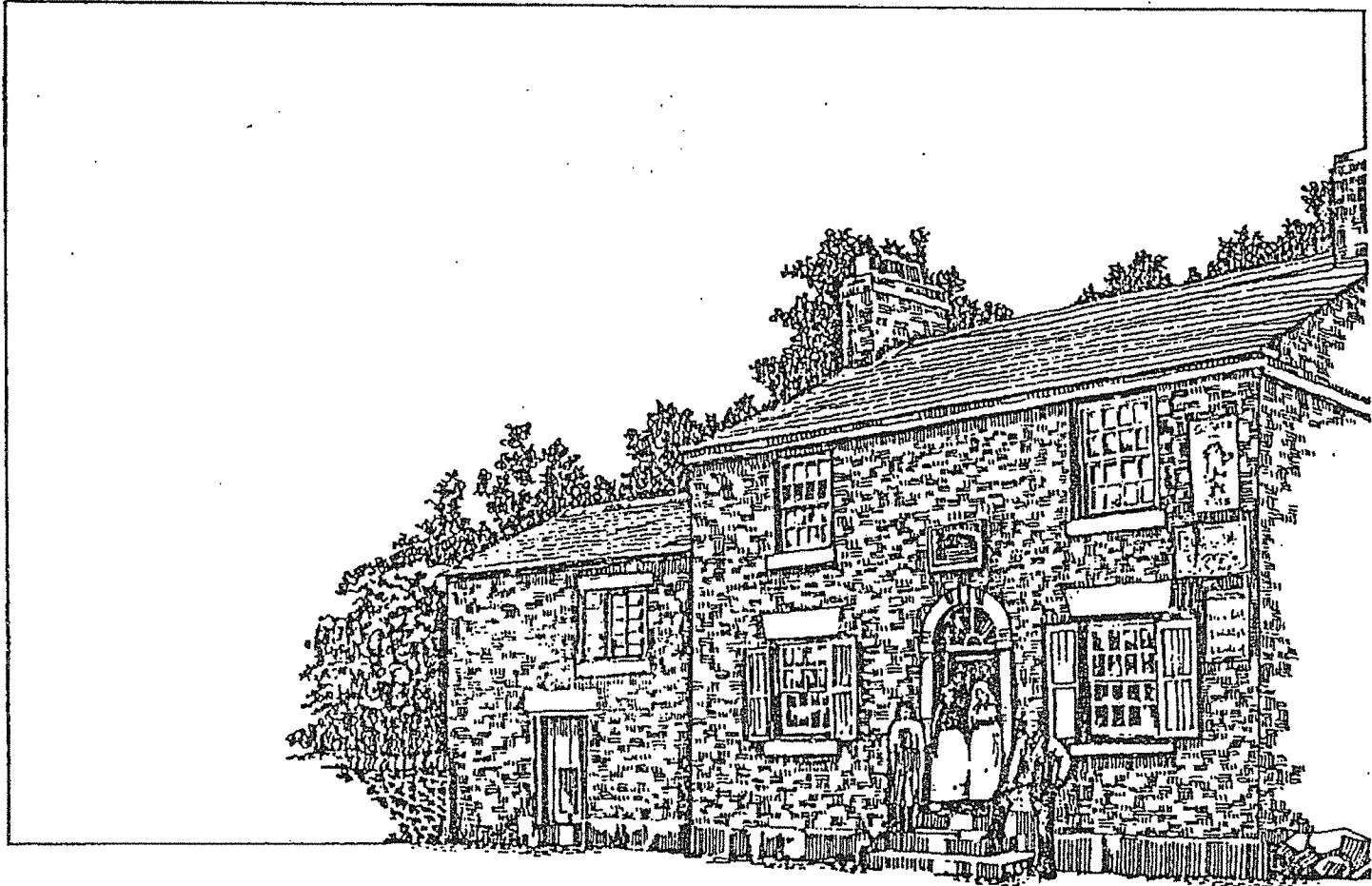
## A SHORT HISTORY OF NEWBURGH

NEWBURGH is a small village, five miles to the east of Ormskirk. It is built on elevated ground sloping to the north and east down to the river Douglas. To the south of the village the land rises gently towards the village of Dalton and Ashurst Beacon, which dominates the surrounding countryside. Newburgh now has a population of over 1,000 people, having grown rapidly in the last few years due, in the main, to the extensive new housing developments alongside and behind the main Wigan to Ormskirk road.

Despite the growth the village has managed to maintain its 'Olde Worlde' dignity and charm and, in the last three years, has twice come second in its class in the Best Kept Village competition. It is only a matter of time before the ultimate accolade comes its way.

The origins of Newburgh are shrouded in mystery and darkness. It is generally accepted that there was a small settlement in the area long before the Normans invaded our shores in 1066. Although the name, Newburgh, does not appear in the Domesday Book, reference is made to an unnamed berewick within the area of Lathom which could possibly have been the village. Even if it was so, the population would have been very small. In 1086, when a census was taken, the whole of the 'hundred' of West Derby, which stretched from Southport to Newton-le-Willows and from Leyland to Warrington, contained no more than 5-600 people. That was in an area that now includes Liverpool, Southport, St. Helens and Ormskirk, to name but a few.

The area around Newburgh, nine hundred years ago, was heavily wooded with a great deal of peat moss in the low lying areas stretching towards the coast. The rest of the area was bleak moorland and was considered to be very poor. The sparseness of the population was understandable. Gradually, however, the



**Post Office (formerly an inn)**

area started to prosper and Newburgh grew in stature and became the centre of the area.

How the village got its name is not known. It is an enigma for the term 'burgh' is uncommon in Lancashire and is generally associated with more northern settlements such as Jedburgh and Edinburgh. Right up until the last century Newburgh was, in fact, pronounced 'Newbruff' by the inhabitants of the village and the surrounding countryside. This is typical of both Norse and Anglian pronunciation which increases the evidence of an early existence for the village.

Newburgh came into its own in the 14th Century. In 1066, the Lathom estates, of which Newburgh was a part, were held by a local Saxon landowner called Uctred. After the Normans had gained control of most of the estates of Britain, Lathom, along with many other large estates in the North West, became part of the vast estates of the Barony of Manchester. However, in 1162 Lathom reverted back to Saxon control when Albert Grelley, the then Baron of Manchester, gave large areas of land to Orm, the son of Ailward, on his marriage to his daughter Emma. The land was inherited by Orm's son, Siward, who held the estates during the reign of Henry 11. Siward's son, Henry, received further grants of land from the Barony of Manchester and it was his son, Robert, who first took the name De Lathom, after the estate. It was also Robert De Lathom who founded Burscough Priory in 1189, twelve years before his death in 1201. It was his grandson, also called Robert, who inherited the estates in 1232, who was the first of the De Lathoms to be knighted when he was honoured by Henry 111 for good service. He added to the honour in 1249 by granting Sir Robert De Lathom the Castle of Lancaster and the county of Lancashire to be held during the King's pleasure.

The Lathom estates, in the hundred of West Derby, grew rapidly during Sir Robert's tenure and, by the time he died in 1290, his son Nicholas was able to inherit one of the leading estates in the North of England. Unfortunately for

Nicholas, he did not live long enough to enjoy it and he, in turn, was succeeded by his Brother, also called Robert. It was this Sir Robert De Lathom who, in 1304, was granted a Royal Charter by Edward I, giving him the right to hold a weekly market and an annual fair at any site he wished to choose on his estates.

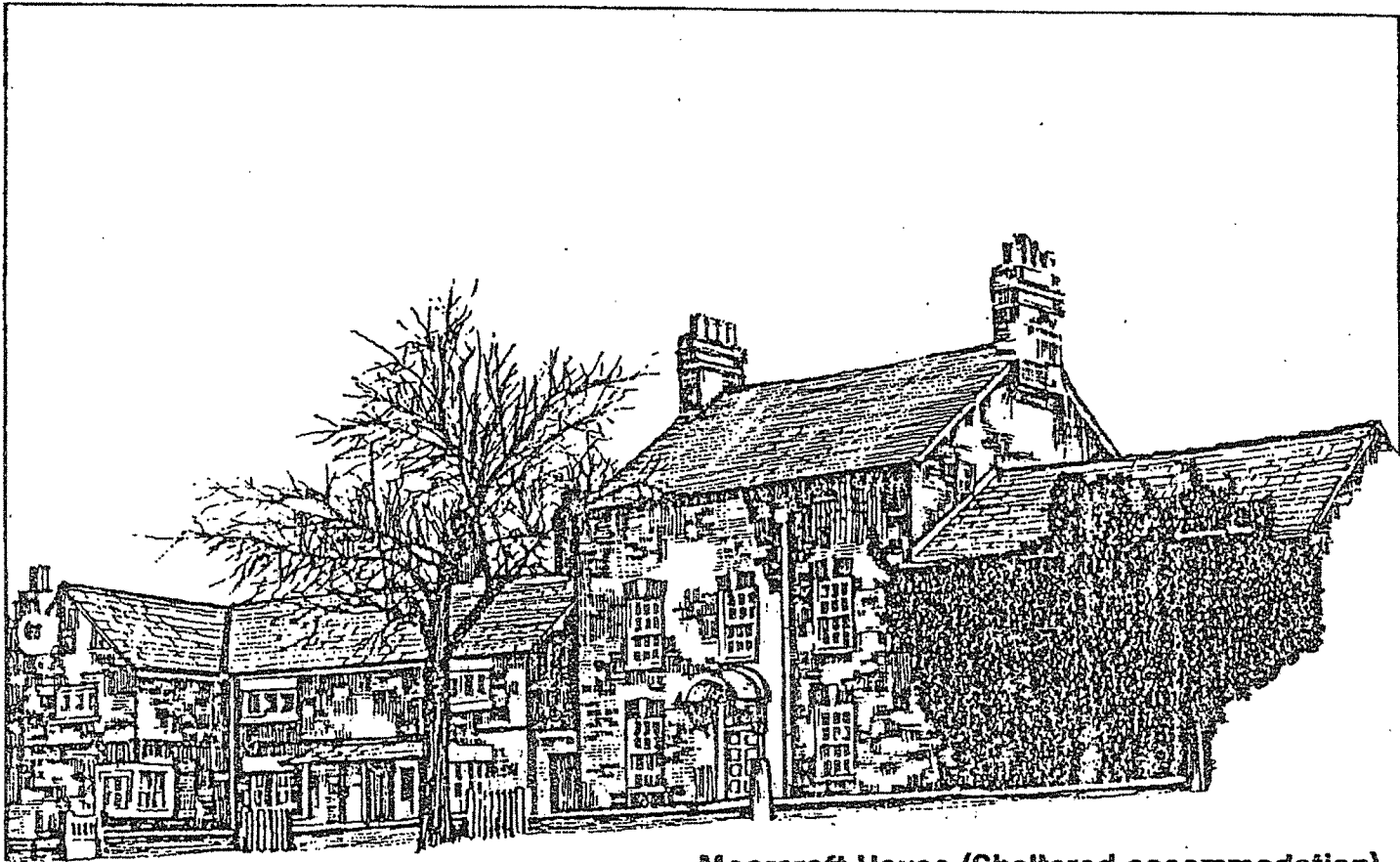
Sir Robert chose Newburgh, a growing village close to his county seat, Lathom House. From that day on Newburgh grew rapidly and became one of the most important centres in the area and a natural centre of commerce for the region. The weekly market and annual fair became regular features of the village life and continued for 600 years, dying only in the early years of this century, when the town of Ormskirk became the natural centre for the area.

It was also in the 14th century that the De Lathom family died out and the vast Lathom estates changed hands. Sir Robert De Lathom died in 1369 and was succeeded by his son, Sir Thomas De Lathom, who led a merry and eventful life for twelve years before he, too, passed on, leaving the estates to his son, also called Thomas. Unfortunately, he died shortly afterwards without a male heir and the estates passed to his young daughter, Ellen, who was born only a few months before her father's death. The King appointed stewards to manage the estates for the baby girl but, she too died at an early age in 1390. Ellen was only 8 when she died and the estates reverted to the other children of Sir Thomas De Lathom, her father's brothers and sisters. By that time only Isabel was still alive and she had married Sir John Stanley in 1385. Sir John Stanley had obviously spotted the possibilities at a very early stage in the proceedings because, as soon as he married Isabel he had staked a claim for the Lathom estates in her name, at the expense of the young Ellen. His claim was rejected and he was forced to wait until the girl's untimely death before he was able to lay legitimate claim to the Lathom estates in 1390.

The Lathom estates remained in the hands of the Stanley family until the 20th century. The first Earl of Derby was Sir John Stanley's grandson, Thomas, who received the honour in 1484.

The 13th century was a difficult and trying time for the poor people who lived on the Lathom estates. Change and upheaval, intrigues and machinations, must have left them bewildered and more than a little afraid of the future. In the meantime, Newburgh had continued to grow and the weekly market, held on the village green in the centre of the village, was always well attended with stalls and booths selling local merchandise, including the famous 'Newburgh Fairing cakes', very similar to Eccles cakes, and Newburgh cheese, which was renowned as the best in Lancashire. The annual fair was held on the eve, the day and the morrow of St. Barnabas's Day, the 20th June. It was always a truly festive occasion complete with merry-go-rounds, toffee stalls and aunt sallies, and all the fun of the fair. There were masquerades and the village sports events which, as the years went by, ousted the original reason for the fair, cattle buying and selling, as the main attractions. Buying and selling became secondary to enjoyment and amusement.

The importance of Newburgh during the middle ages was reflected in its customs. For example, until 1832, the villagers elected a mock corporation which met regularly in the Red Lion Inn. Each year they congregated around the village cross during the fair and elected a new mayor for the year. This event preceded another important custom held on that day, the drinking of large quantities of ale. Another important custom, which only died out in recent years, was the election of the Court Leet. Every seven years the villagers held an election to appoint twelve men to the Leet. Each one of the twelve was entitled to two sixpennyworths of brandy on his election and each was given a particular job to perform during his term of office. Regular meetings were held in the Red Lion, of course, to discuss each members' progress. Two of the jobs members had to undertake were ale tasting and window looking. The ale taster's position usually required a man with 'a pigskin stomach and an iron constitution' because he was entitled, whenever he felt inclined, to call for and drink samples of the ale sold in the local hostleries to test its quality. If the quality of the ale was not up to standard it was



**Moorcroft House (Sheltered accommodation)**

Ormskirk and Wigan. The local population did what they could to get food to the besieged garrison and achieved some success because, early in 1645, Fairfax broke off the siege to take his army off to more worthwhile pickings. Lady Derby took the opportunity to join her husband on the Isle of Man, leaving Lathom House in the capable hands of her right hand man, Colonel Rawstorne. Fairfax and his army eventually returned to renew the siege and, this time he was successful for in December the house fell and Rawstorne surrendered. Fairfax's men looted the house and then tore down the towers that had caused them so much trouble.

After the restoration the Lathom estates were returned to the Derby family. However, Lathom House was so badly damaged that they decided to move their family seat to Knowsley Park, near Liverpool, where the Derby family still reside. Lathom House was partially rebuilt by the 9th Earl but, in 1724, it was sold to Sir Thomas Bootle. However, the Derby family only gave up the title to the house and not the vast estates, which included Newburgh. It was not until the early years of this century that the land in Newburgh was eventually sold off by the family and now they hold title to very little of the land in the area. As for Lathom House, it was eventually pulled down and only the chapel and the stables now exist. In 1960, a glass research laboratory was built on the site by Pilkington Brothers, another well known local family.

Newburgh people had, for hundreds of years, relied on the De Lathoms and the Derby family for their bread and board. Most of the local people worked on the estate in some capacity or another. However, as the years went by and Newburgh grew in stature, reliance on the estate became less and less and new industries and livelihoods became apparent: Mixed farming by tenant farmers was the main industry in the area right up to the 19th century. Then coal was found and coal mining was established, not only in the area around Newburgh, but also in the surrounding districts of Parbold and Skelmersdale. The Leeds to Liverpool canal passed through the Douglas Valley and soon saw constant and



his responsibility to report the matter to the Court Leet, for appropriate action to be taken. The duty assigned to the window looker was not the right to leer at girls through windows, but to ensure that all those villagers who were rich enough to afford to have glass in their windows paid the appropriate window tax. In an area which is now famous for its window glass, this now seems to be rather a significant task.

Over the years, Newburgh enjoyed its position as the centre of commerce and there was little to spoil the area's quiet and peaceful existence. Historically, Newburgh has little to offer and its name never appears in history books whether for famous or infamous deeds which may have taken place there. However, during the civil war in the mid 17th century the whole area seethed with military activity as the Parliamentary forces, under the command of Sir John Fairfax, laid siege to Lathom, the home of the Derby family and Lords of the Manor, including Newburgh. Newburgh was outside the walls of Lathom House and was left to the tender mercies of the assaulting army. The loyalty of the villagers was with the Derby family and they had to watch helplessly as Cromwell's army tried, for two years, to break the resistance of the defenders.

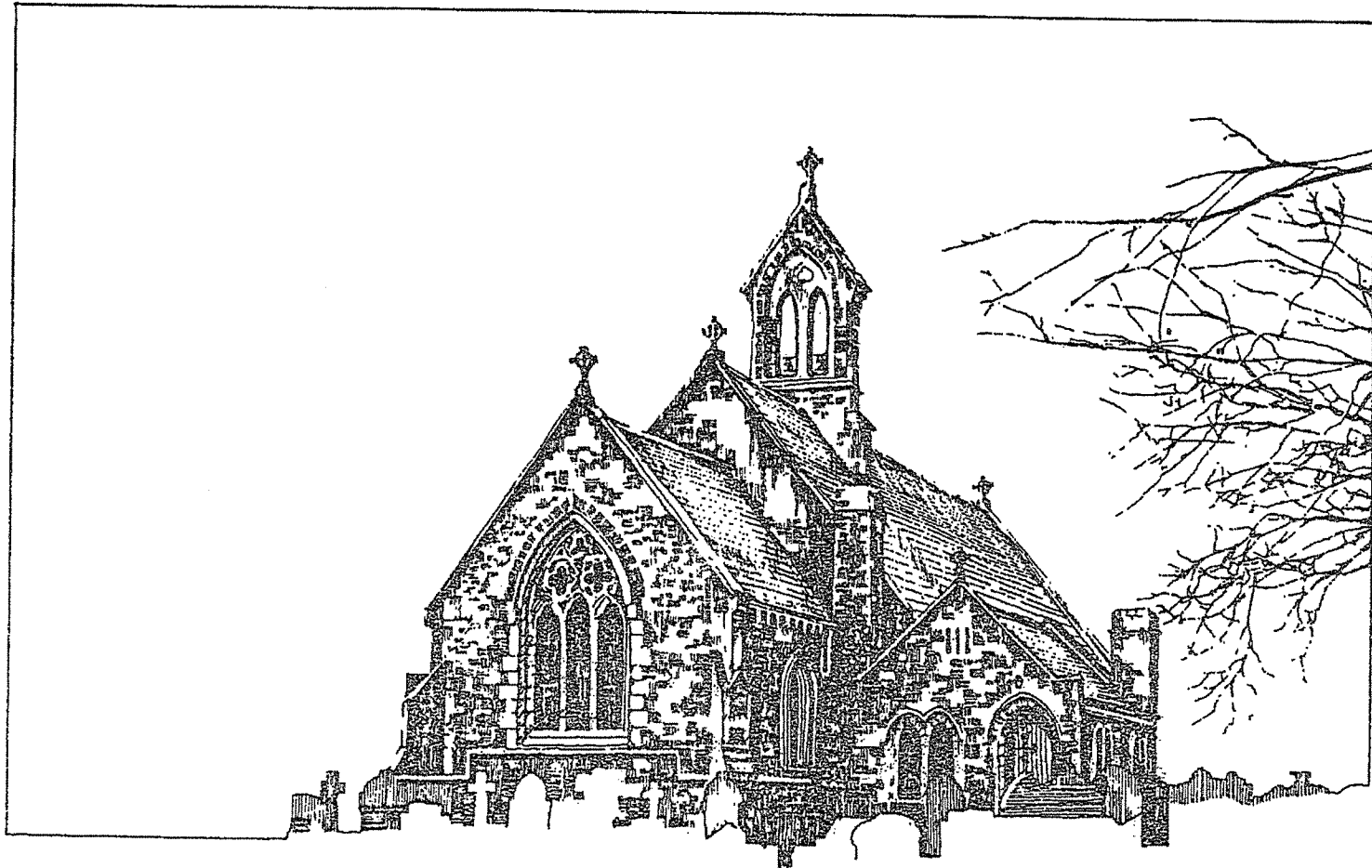
The De Lathoms had built the house as a fortress on a piece of flat moorish, springy land about a mile and a half to the west of Newburgh. The main house was surrounded by a wall six feet thick on which stood nine large towers, each with six cannons. On the outside of the wall was a moat twenty four feet wide and six feet deep. Further towers dominated the gateways through the walls into the centre court. The house itself had a large tower in the centre, known as the Eagle Tower. Fairfax laid siege to the house in 1643, just after the Earl of Derby had fled to his estates on the Isle of Man, leaving his wife behind to conduct the siege. The first siege lasted for more than a year before the parliamentarians agreed that the house was impregnable and tried, instead, to starve the occupants into submission. The army lounged around, just out of range of the house, with the officers enjoying billets in

heavy traffic taking the coal both east and west to the larger towns of Wigan and Liverpool for sale.

The coal did not last for very long, and today little can be seen of what was a busy, bustling industry. Even down by the canal, the wharves that were so active a hundred years ago have now disappeared together with the road down to the canal from the centre of the village and the bridge over the canal used by the coal wagons. Mining inevitably brings with it new industries, both good and evil, and Newburgh was no exception. By the early 19th century, the small village of Newburgh boasted five inns - The Red Lion, The Golden Lion, the Wheatsheaf, the Horse and Jockey and the Eagle and Child. Only one survives, The Red Lion which, itself achieved fame in the hayday of the Court Leet and Mock Corporation. It is now a very fashionable village pub complete with a first-class restaurant. The Horse and Jockey became, at various times, a slaughter-house, a tailor's shop and, in more recent times, the village post office and store, which it remains to this day. The other inns have long since been converted into private houses or, in one case, a livery stable.

Other local industries included a pottery which, for many years, produced general household pottery which was sold through the streets of the district and at the weekly market. It is still remembered today by a house which carries the name Mug Cottage. Unfortunately, no examples of the wares produced there exist. The old village cobbler plied his wares from premises beside the village green which have since been restored and are now used as a private house. The farrier's shop and the village smithy have both disappeared and have been replaced with modern dwellings, but the village bobby's cottage can still be seen at the top of Smithy Brow.

Education over the years has never been the strongest point of any village community up to the 18th century. Newburgh was no exception and it was not until 1714 that the first purpose built school was built through the generosity of a local boy who had enjoyed the benefits of a good education. He was Thomas



**Christ Church**

Crane and he had gained a Masters degree at Oxford in 1670. He became curate of Winwick before endowing the school in Newburgh and returning to become its first full-time teacher. The school and a house were built to the west of the village green and can still be seen, although both are now privately owned houses. Crane endowed the school with an annual income of £15, plus the income from a freehold estate in the neighbouring village of Dalton. Eventually the school outlived its usefulness and was replaced by a much larger building, erected by the Church of England towards the end of the 19th century. The church had come to Newburgh in 1858 when Christ Church was built allowing the villagers to pray within their own parish boundary for the first time and saving the long journey either down into Parbold, in the Douglas Valley, or to the Lathom estate chapel which had been and still is used by local christians since 1500.

Newburgh is still a pleasant, beautiful village spoiled only by the endless streams of traffic rushing along the narrow roads always in a hurry, never pausing to view the beauty, charm and picturesqueness of a village which has withstood the ravages of time and man far better than most.