

# History of Ellesmere Port Parishes



The first recorded Christian settlement was at Ince, which takes its name from the Welsh word "Vnys" meaning an island. On this site was a Norman Chapel, all traces of which are now lost, the Parish Church of Saint James being built on its site.

In 1093 Earl Hugh Lupus gave the Manor and Church to the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Werburgh, Chester and a Benedictine Community moved to take up residence and farm the area.

In 1172 John de Lacy, 6th. Baron of Halton, the Constable of Chester, whose ancestors had founded Norton Priory, gave the lands of Stanlaw and Stanney for the foundation of a Cistercian Abbey to be known as "Benedictus locus". The foundation was laid in 1172 and the Abbey completed in 1178. The first Abbot was named "Roberto".

There seems to have been some dispute as to the proper identity of "Roberto". Robert of Hastings has been suggested, although this seems most improbable, his life and death do not seem to coincide with the same period of time as the witnesses to the Charter and Seals which date to the foundation of the Abbey at Stanlaw. The Charter document between John de Lacy and Richard of Moore is not in dispute or its date as it survived as documentary evidence. The Robert referred to was either Robert I (1157 -1175) or Robert II (1175 -1184).

The Abbey grew in wealth due to the skill of the monks as farmers, and the patronage of nobles who gave gifts to the Abbots. Such was the patronage that in 1277 King Edward I rested at the Abbey on his journey from Birkenhead to the Cistercian Abbey at Vale Royal.

The site of the Abbey House at Stanlaw was on a sandstone outcrop with the River Mersey to the immediate east and the River Gowy to the south. Surrounding the Abbey was low land at sea level and this marshland extended to the next outcrop at Ince.<sup>1</sup> In 1279 there was a great storm in the Mersey Estuary and the waters overwhelmed the Abbey. The monks remained and repaired the damage.

In 1287 there was another severe storm and the tower of the Abbey was brought down. The monks showed great resilience but in 1289 there was a fire that damaged much of the building and yet more flooding occurred. Representation was made to the Pope for permission to leave the Abbey but this did not occur until 1294 when the monks moved to Whalley Abbey in South Lancashire. A condition of the move was that a cell of four monks remain at the Stanlaw Abbey. The Abbot, Robert of Haworth and four monks remained until his death in 1304.

The area was mainly forest with the exception of heaths such as Whitby. There were few roads, one being Portway which led from Whitby to Chester. There was also a bridleway that gave the monks access from Stanlaw to farmland at Whitby. Nobody was allowed to make a path through the forest without Royal permission. The Forest Laws had been enforced for some 250 years. The Black Prince, Edward, Earl of Chester raised much revenue from these laws and held special courts in Little Sutton in 1347 to ensure they were enforced.

King Henry VIII while responsible for the Dissolution of the Monasteries, issued an edict that lands under control of the Dean of Chester must not be harmed. While the King was alive nobody dared disobey, but on his death Sir Richard

Cotton seized Dr. William Clyve, Dean of Chester and put him in prison on a trumped up charge where he remained, until, granting the rental of the lands at far below their true value and so lands held by the Church for close on six centuries passed from the Church.

The power of the Church was broken in the time of Henry VIII and this continued in the reign of Elizabeth I who ensured people gave allegiance to the Church of England and Catholics "Papists" were dealt with harshly.

There were many historical changes in the area but persecution of Catholics continued. Returns were made of any known "Papists" by law until well into the 1700's. The Returns of Papists 1767 showed few Catholics remained.

"Catherine Coxhead -of Little Stanney -servant woman -has resided there for four months aged 16. Charles Reynolds of Little Stanney -labourer -has resided there 10 years aged 36. Anne, daughter of ye above Charles Reynolds aged 3 years. Signed James Stones, Curate of Stoake, Chester, August 26th. 1767".

The area of Stanlaw that became Stanlow and Stanney Grange remained farmland for many years and it was not until the town of Ellesmere Port started to expand in the 1960's that Stanney was affected. The farmland was purchased to build a large council estate with the first homes being occupied in December 1967. By 1970 there were, 1,176 homes and an estimated population of 3,677. Local families occupied 644 homes. 356 homes by Liverpool families moving into the area and 176 homes were occupied by families from other areas.