



St Helen's Church
Ashby-de-la-Zouch

Heritage Project eNews

No. 3 February 2018



Visit to Clifton Campville

We enjoyed a Research Group outing on Wednesday 24th January, organised by Ken Ward, one of our volunteers. Churchwarden Martin Browne took us on a comprehensive guided tour of St Andrew's, Clifton Campville, which has been described as 'one of the finest churches in England.' We visited the Chantry Chapel and the priest's room above it, which was well equipped with both fireplace and garderobe (medieval toilet). We've long wondered whether our own Priest Room could have been a Chantry Chapel at one time.

Afterwards, we were treated to tea and homemade chocolate cake. Needless to say, it was an excellent outing!



Welcomer training

We are holding training sessions in February and March for anyone interested in becoming a welcomer in either the Church (when the weather is warmer) or the Community Heritage Centre. There are three sessions, being held on Wednesday and Saturday mornings on 21/24 February, 7/10 March and 21/24 March (each session is repeated). They will run from 11 am to 12.30 pm (with tea/ coffee available from 10.30 am). The topics will include welcoming/ engaging skills, an introduction to the history of St Helen's Church and practical knowledge about the Heritage Centre and the church. New and existing welcomers are warmly invited to come along.

Heritage Talks

Mondays at 7.30 pm in the Heritage Centre

The final talk of our first season will be on Monday 5th March, when Dr Susan Brown will be talking about the Life and Legacy of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon.

Just £3 entry, which includes tea/ coffee and biscuits. Pay on the door

An appreciative audience enjoyed Dr Nick Gravestock's programme of Music of the Tudor period on 5th February.



Events

There are a number of activities coming up that I would love some help with. Please let me know if you have some time to give to these:

- **COSTUMES:** Making simple costumes for a play we are undertaking with Ashby C of E School in March: a pilgrim outfit, stonemason, medieval woman. These can be very basic and I know what they need to look like. I will have all of the fabric.
- **EASTER SCHOOL HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES:** On Monday 26th March and Wednesday 4th April we are holding family activity days, where we will be making sundials, sand timers, heraldry items and stained glass.
- **UNLOCKING YOUR STORIES:** Saturday 14th April. Bring along your photos and memories of St Helen's and learn about family history.

More activities will be on the next Activity Guide, out soon!

Llynda Baugh

Please speak to me or sign up using the online planner if you can help with activities or serve refreshments. Contact details on final page of this newsletter.

Heritage Wednesdays and Saturdays

Due to dark nights and cold days, we have amended our Wednesday and Saturday opening until Easter. We will be open between 10 am and 1 pm on these days. Have a word with Llynda or use our 'sign up' site to choose your volunteering dates online. Llynda's contact details are on the back page of this newsletter.

Heritage Centre progress update

We still have many things to do on the 'bricks and mortar' side of the Heritage Project. The Heritage Centre itself is still not finished. Work is ongoing to:

- Finish putting splashbacks in the kitchen
- Resolve the poor performance of the heating in the refurbished part of the building
- Commission the hearing loop within the Hastings Hall
- Erect a side gate to allow the garden to be enjoyed safely by younger users

The Heritage Centre garden is being tackled by a separate team within the church.

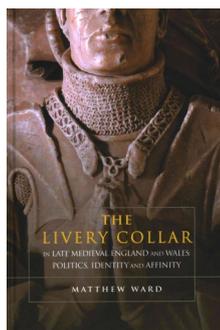
New Church Lighting

An exciting part of the project is the work on the lighting within the church itself. This starts on Monday 26th February. The lighting is being tackled in phases as funding becomes available. This phase will see the Chancel and Hastings Chapel lit properly for the first time, together with lighting to show the monuments on the side Nave walls. The new lighting will be triggered by visitors walking into the building, making it so much more welcoming. The lighting will be provided by modern LED units which are low energy and long life. Light levels provided by each lamp unit can be individually controlled and adjusted to allow lighting to be set for the different ways the church will be used.

Simon Starkey

Research Group News

At our last Research Group meeting on 13th February, we heard from researcher Heather Silver about her reading of Matthew Ward's book, *'The Livery Collar in Late Medieval England and Wales.'* Matthew Ward is an academic at Nottingham University, who published the book in 2016. It explains the provenance and use of livery collars, such as the one worn by our medieval pilgrim. They were high status items in the middle ages, usually given out by the monarch or high ranking lords. The one worn by our pilgrim indicates Lancastrian sympathies, with its 'SS' design. We don't know any more about our pilgrim yet, but this confirms our belief that he was someone of high status.



We also learned that William Hastings, who built the church, was given a livery collar by King Edward IV. After William's death it was passed to his son, Edward. We don't know where it is now. Look out for more on this in next month's newsletter.

The next meeting of the Research Group is Tuesday 27th March at 10 am, in the Hildersham Room. If you are interested in joining us, either come along on the day or contact Julie Starkey.

News on the Mundi Memorial

Moirack Ackers from the Church Monuments Society paid a visit to St Helen's recently to talk to our Research Group about our alabaster memorials. A chance remark from her led us to Robert Mundi's will, which is in the care of the Leicestershire Records Office.

It would seem that our research had reached a dead end in the past because we got his name wrong! In fact, he's Robert **Mundi**! We're still deciphering the will, but it turns out that he was a tailor and that at the time of his death he had a wife called Aline and two sons, Edward and Richard. Richard was still a minor and Robert's lands and property were left in the care of his mother until he came of age. Other bequests were made to various religious houses - including Gresley Abbey and Langley Priory.



Margaret Lane Plaque

In 1998 a plaque in memory of the 15th Earl of Huntingdon and his wife, Margaret Lane, was put up in the Hastings Chapel. Margaret Lane was a well-known writer.



Margaret Lane (1907 – 1994), the Dowager Countess of Huntingdon, a British author whose works included books about Peter Rabbit's creator, Beatrix Potter, died in Southampton, England. She was 86.

Miss Lane's two biographies of Miss Potter were the basis of "The Tale of Beatrix Potter," a two-part BBC dramatisation shown on "Masterpiece Theater" on WNET in 1984 that was praised as a simple yet intense story with just the right touches of unflinching reserve.

Miss Lane's two books, "The Tale of Beatrix Potter: a Biography" (1946, Warne and Viking Penguin) and "The Magic Years of Beatrix Potter" (1978), were praised in the London newspaper *The Independent* as enriched by Miss Lane's own "exquisite sympathy with animals."

When "The Tale of Beatrix Potter" was published in the United States, it was lauded for its deep understanding of Miss Potter, who helped Miss Lane with the book, and for its vivid depiction of Miss Potter walking the hills and moors, gathering material for stories and pictures.

Miss Lane's 1975 book "Samuel Johnson and his World" has been called one of the very best modern works on Johnson. Her 1953 book about the writer Charlotte Bronte and members of her family, "The Bronte Story," won praise as an outstanding literary biography. And her 1965 novel "A Night at Sea" was lauded for its poignancy and narrative suspense.

Her other books - she wrote more than two dozen, all told - included "A Calabash of Diamonds" (1961), a personal account of an African safari; "Purely for Pleasure" (1967), a collection of essays, and "The Day of the Feast" (1968), a novel. She also wrote children's books.

The daughter of a journalist, Miss Lane studied at St. Hugh's College, Oxford University, worked as a reporter for some years and went on to become a critic as well as an author.

Her 1934 marriage to Bryan Wallace, son of the writer Edgar Wallace, was dissolved in 1939. In 1944 she was married to Francis Hastings, the 16th Earl of Huntingdon, a mural painter and Labour minister in Clement Atlee's government, who died in 1990. They had two daughters, Selina and Harriet.

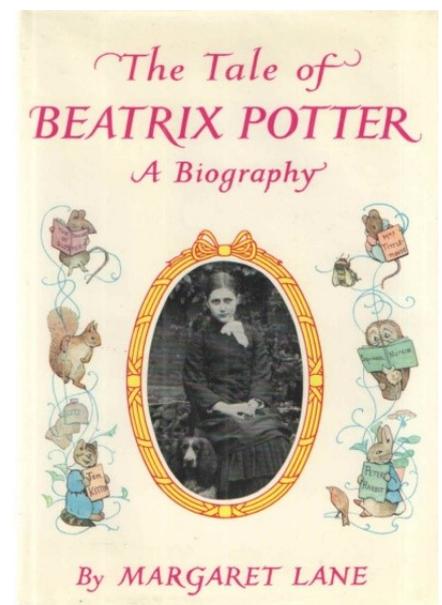
Anne Heaton

Sources:

<http://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/21/obituaries/margaret-lane-86-british-writer-on-beatrix-potter-and-the-brontes.html>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-margaret-lane-1394635.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Lane



St Helen's Church Vaults - what's under there?

I decided to have a wander in the church whilst I was in Ashby. There was a sign asking for volunteers and I decided to sign up after a meeting with Llynda about research. The rest is history as they say because I signed up and got hooked on finding out who is buried under the floor of the church.

I want to find out who is buried underneath the floor of St Helen's Church —to find their names, which will lead to their life being revisited. After many hours spent on Google I came across the will of Kateryn Hastings. She is quite important as she was the wife of William Hastings, who was beheaded on the orders of Richard the Third. I ordered a copy from the National Archives. In it, Kateryn, as stated as her final request, wished to be buried in The Lady Chapel of St Helens. I believe her last wish was granted because I have not found anything yet to tell me different. My next task is to actual pinpoint where her last resting place is beneath the church floor.

It was during looking on 'Find my Past,' looking at the Hastings family, that I found something that was to interest me more. The Right Honourable Alice Hastings, who was buried on the 21st January 1691, was recorded in the register as being buried in the vaults. But after rereading the information, it clearly said she was buried in the *new* vault. This caused some excitement as it clearly shows that in 1691 the Hastings family had a new vault which was under the Chancel. So obviously there is another older vault, which is my next line of research to see when this new one was built.



I am also looking at all the Hastings family that are buried in there and hopefully in time I will be able to write up who is in there and their dates. This is a really interesting subject which is leading me to many different pieces of information.

Tracey Lea

'Free and open seating' at St Helen's - there's more than you think to 'taking a pew'!

This is an extended version of the article in the February 2017 Parish Magazine.

The visitation of William Connor Magee, Bishop of Peterborough, to 'Ashby Parish Church' on 19th October 1882 was an important occasion, reported in national as well as provincial papers. St Helen's hosted clergy from the local Deaneries of West Akeley and Sparkenhoe. The proceedings began with 'merry peals' from the bells. The Chancellor of the Diocese held his court at 10 am, followed by Holy Communion at 11 am. After the service, the Bishop was conducted to a seat under the Chancel arch and the names of those clergy cited to attend were called. Most, we are told, were in attendance. Luncheon at the Queen's Head Hotel was 'very well attended' and followed by a 'most interesting Conference' in the Masonic Hall.

One of the major topics under discussion was 'free and open' seating in churches. Rev John Denton, Vicar of Ashby, spoke on this, "*The Bishop had called on him to speak on free and open churches, and on the weekly offertory, and he could speak from some little experience of both one and the other. He then described how before they restored the parish church of Ashby (in which they had that day assembled) at a cost of £12000, all the seats were appropriated, except under the west gallery. But when the church was restored, the churchwardens, the sidesmen and the congregation saw it was desirable that it should be a free and open church. Of course, he did not say that what suited one place suited all places alike, but now, after nearly three years' experience, they had good reason to be satisfied. The church, large as it was, was well filled, and sometimes crowded; and the offertory, which of course varied, was*

well supported.”

Canon Denton was supported by his fellow clergy, *“The Rev A F Tollemache, vicar of Whitwick, said the following system for the weekly offertory had answered very well in his parish:- on the first Sunday in the month the money was given to the poor, on the second Sunday to something wanted in the church, on the third to the lighting and warming of the church, on the fourth to meet the churchwardens’ expenses, and if there was a fifth Sunday it was for extra parochial objects. The weekly offertory was of very great strength to the church in a poor parish (applause).*

The Rev W C Hodgson, rector of Swebstone, said the system at Swebstone was to appropriate the aisles and leave the whole of the nave free, and it answered very well. His experience was that the poor gave much more freely than the rich, and in that way the offertory was of very great service, as people who gave something to the church valued it all the more (hear, hear).

The Rev E Z Lyttel, Woodville, said when he became incumbent, five years ago, the churchwardens were heavily in debt. He at once abolished pew rents and threw all the seats open, and the result was that they very soon got out of debt, and that day the churchwardens’ fees had been paid for the first time in the history of the parish (hear, hear).

The Rev E S Crane, vicar of St Andrew’s, Whitwick, said when he first came to the parish the quarterly collections came to £2 a year; now they came to 16 times as much. It was a very poor parish and the working of the weekly offertory was entirely satisfactory.

The Rev C Williams, Coalville, had found his experience the same.

The Bishop, in closing the discussion, expressed his gratification at the departure of the old square family pew. With the pew had gone one of the great difficulties in the way of free and open sittings. The system of pew renting had also almost vanished, he was thankful to say. He hoped all seats in our churches would soon be free in the sense that they were not the exclusive property of anyone ... He thought we were going on fairly well in the right direction. We were getting at the principle of free and open churches and the application was a matter of tact, courtesy and judgment, and good sense. He was very thankful for what he had heard as to the weekly offertory – which was the scriptural plan, the plan of the church, and a successful plan – inducing the poor man to exercise his privilege of giving his trifle to the church which was bound to make him value it more.”

With our 21st Century eyes, it’s hard to imagine this debate now, but in the mid-nineteenth century there was a huge argument going on. The ‘Compulsory Church Rate Abolition Act’ in 1868 forced the issue. Until then, a tax was levied on every house and land owner in every parish for the benefit of its parish church. This paid for church upkeep, expenses and salaries. Of course, nonconformists objected – why should they pay for the upkeep of a parish church they didn’t attend, to the detriment of supporting their own churches? After 1868, the parish church could still levy a tax on land and householders if it chose to, but payment of it was voluntary.

Not only were householders and landowners obliged to pay a tax, they had to pay again for their seat in the church building. At St Helen’s, the only ‘free’ seats until 1878 were at the back of the centre aisle, beneath the west gallery. A ledger now in the care of the County Records Office lists the pewholders at St



Helen's between 1843-1851. The pews were numbered in sections and amounts paid recorded in the ledger, which ran from 1st July-30th June each year.

Pew rental became controversial nationally in the 1840s and 1850s. The legal status of pew rents was questionable and it exacerbated a problem with a lack of accommodation in churches. In 1853, William James Conybeare commented on the pew system in his "Church Parties" article in the *Edinburgh Review*, stating that it was the Anglicans who had adopted the slogan "Equality within the House of God". Clearly, some parishioners at the time were more equal than others. The early 19th century Commissioners' churches were only required to offer 20% free seating. Attitudes began to change.

When the Bishop of Peterborough granted the Faculty for the extension of Ashby Parish Church in November 1877, it stated *'that the seats would be free and dealt with by the churchwardens according to law.'* With the move to the Town Hall in May 1878, the congregation started as they meant to go on. The Parish Magazine of June 1878 records the following:

"We have now been a whole month in the temporary church (at the Market Hall) ... The temporary Church is (as the restored Parish Church will be) free to every worshipper, rich and poor alike, and we may again remind our readers that there are ample demands for the money given at the offertories ... (which) ... have all to be met by the free-will offerings made at each of our three Sunday services."

For the very first time, a total of offertories was recorded in the Parish Magazine. In the first five Sundays of the new regime, (26th May-23rd June 1878) a total of £22 4 1 was collected. Month by month, the magazine records the total given and how it is dispensed.

Of course, no change is easy or unopposed. Rev Canon J Erskine Clarke, the preacher for the evening service on 31st March 1880 – the day St Helen's re-opened after extension – likened the church to a palace. He told his listeners, *"the palace is not for man for his enrichment. There are churches which are built as mere speculations, they are planted in a well to do neighbourhood, a popular preacher is secured, an ornate service perhaps is provided, pews are let and when expenses are paid the balance goes to the speculator who has built the 'palace' for his own enrichment."* The House of Mammon, not the House of God.

Opinions were changing, however. In his New Year address to the parish in January 1881, Canon John Denton wrote, *"let us hope that the seats being 'free and unappropriated' will prove a wise and good plan. There is much respect due to the feelings of those who prefer appropriated seats, and in the adoption of the free and open system the very good feeling which has been manifested is most gratifying, and I beg gratefully to acknowledge it."*

As we take our seats on the *"very massive and admirably well adapted seats of varnished pitch pine,"* installed by our ancestors in 1880 let us spare a thought for those who embraced change and made everyone – rich and poor - welcome to the parish church.

Julie Starkey

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Heritage e-news - next issue

The next Heritage e-news will be published on Thursday 12th April. All contributions to Julie Starkey by Monday 9th April please.