



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

Heritage Project eNews

No. 8 January 2019



Since our last issue ...



These lovely ladies took part in our **wreath making** workshop at the end of November.

We spent a happy Saturday morning making wonderfully scented orange and lemon **pomanders**.

The Hastings Hall was packed to bursting as parents brought in babies and toddlers to create **Christmas cards** from hand and footprints.



A packed Hall for our **Heritage Talks** series. This photo (left) shows an attentive audience at our December talk, listening to Dr Rebecca Gregory of Nottingham University, talking about the origin and meaning of Leicestershire place names.

Our January talk left us with standing room only, as popular speaker Peter Little unveiled his newest talk, on the Civil War in Leicestershire, with particular reference to our site.

Heritage Wednesdays and Saturdays - forget those January blues!

St Helen's Community Heritage Centre is very much still be 'the place to be' on Wednesday and Saturday mornings.

Displays

As usual we will be offering a warm welcome, tea and coffee, and a chance to look at our Heritage Centre displays. Our Heritage Centre exhibition programme is in full swing. We are currently very excited about our brand new display boards, which will be in place soon.

The photography exhibition, with some stunning images of St Helen's taken by members of Ashby Photography Club, has moved on to Sharp's Pottery in Swadlincote, to be replaced by an exhibition on **church music**. Learn more about the wonderful tradition of choral music at St Helen's. It's well worth a look, if only to see the extraordinary head wear sported by our choir in the 1970s! If your interest is truly piqued, you can also find out how to join our choir.

From mid-February, we will have a new exhibition, currently being researched, on **pilgrimage**. Pilgrimage was a big business in the middle ages, which continues to this day. Meet our very own St Helen's pilgrim. Learn about pilgrimages past and present. Can you help us with this exhibition? Have you been on pilgrimage yourself? Do you have a stamped 'pilgrim passport,' a plastic water bottle in the shape of the Virgin Mary, a badge or certificate of pilgrimage or a photo you are prepared to share? Could you share your personal pilgrimage story for possible inclusion in the exhibition. Please get in touch with Julie Starkey (contact details on the last page of this newsletter).

Chat and Play

Every Saturday morning you are invited to 'Chat and Play at the interactive cafe'. Our heritage toy box is full of traditional toys and games; you might like to join in the community jigsaw; or try your hand at some crafts - there will always be plenty to do for the young and young at heart and there will be cake!



Knit-stitch-play



On Wednesday mornings from 10.30-12.30 we have a '**knit-stitch-play**' session. Bring along your current craft project or play one of our board games.

Do come and enjoy a cuppa and join in the fun. Tell your friends too – we look forward to seeing you!

Education Update

An assembly is planned for Packington Primary School later this month.

Rachel has also been in discussions with Ivanhoe college about a creative writing session, working on "found poetry" with Year 7&8 children, exploring our archaeological finds and words in and around the church!



If anyone is interested in helping with any of this, please contact Sharn in the office. The work with Ivanhoe students is likely to take place in February/March.

Research update

The latest in a series of articles on the 7th Earl of Huntingdon by Ian Scruton. How, asks Ian, did the Earl manage to do so much work on the church when he had so little money ...

In a Persian Market

The 7th Earl of Huntingdon carried out extensive work in St Helen's between about 1680 and 1700. He erected a gallery at the west end of the church. In the upper half of the chancel arch he installed carved woodwork, 30ft high, which incorporated Charles II's coat of arms. He put a wooden reredos behind the altar and an ironwork screen in the chancel. He installed extensive wainscoting throughout the church. He moved the alabaster chest tomb in the Hastings Chapel against the wall and put a monument with the coats of arms of Francis Hastings and his wife, Katherine Pole, above it. (He wrote in August 1694: "I have been this summer, att a considerable charge, to repair and beautifie a monument of Francis Earl of Huntingdon"). He gave St Helen's a number of items of church plate. Finally, he had his own monument carved by Grinling Gibbons.

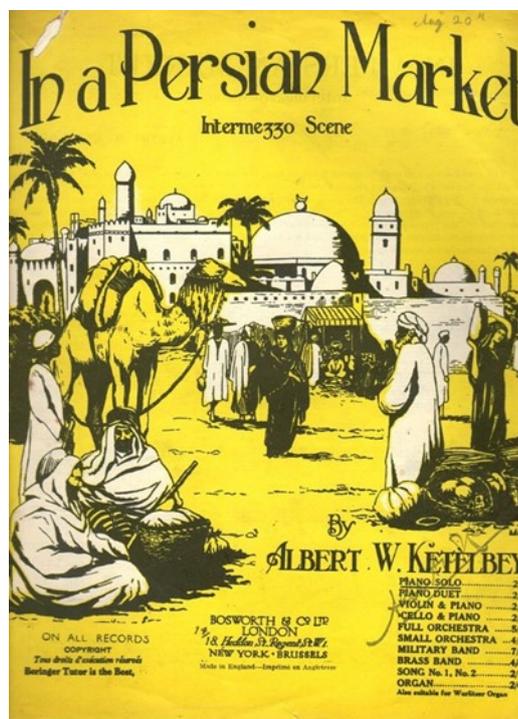
But the Hastings family was broke. (The Earl's father had spent time in the Fleet debtors' prison). So where did the money to pay for the work come from?

The 7th Earl married the daughter of Sir John Lewis. A contemporary account says that John Lewis "acquired a large fortune in India and Persia". He worked for the East India Company between 1643 and 1653, firstly in India and then, in a more senior role, in Persia. The East India Company was set up in 1600 with the aim of importing spices from the East Indies. However, the Dutch were so firmly entrenched there that the Company turned its attention elsewhere, particularly to India.

Working for the East India Company at that time was challenging. The voyage to India took between 7 and 8 months. The arrangements in Persia were particularly problematic. Trading was a royal monopoly and so the Company had to make all its purchases in the capital, Isfahan. From there the journey to the Company's port at Gombroon (modern-day Bandar-Abbas) could take up to 6 weeks. The climate in Gombroon was brutal. A Company employee described it as "a most pestilous place". There was a high mortality rate caused by a combination of the heat, contaminated water, disease and excessive drinking.

Trading conditions were also difficult. The Company originally wanted to import Persian silk but this was beset with problems and they moved on to spices, drugs, pearls and carpets. At the peak of the trade in the 1620s the Company had no more than 10 traders in Persia, but by the time John Lewis was there this had dropped to 4. He said the native traders were as "*subtill, cunning and injenious dealing merchants as any under the cope of heaven*".

In 1622 the East India Company's fleet had helped the Persian army to dislodge the Portuguese from Ormuz, where they had been able to control shipping in and out of the Persian Gulf. As a reward the Company was supposed to receive half of the customs duties on goods passing through but John Lewis complained that: "*the Persians began to delude and cozen the English*



In a Persian Market (Continued) ...

when dividing the spoil taken at Ormus, so they have ever since continued in their deceitful practices, making every merchant's house, at their pleasure a customhouse whence they carried on business unknown to the Company, in order to defraud them at the end of the year and not pay them a seventh part of their just due". He estimated the loss at £23,000 a year (equivalent to over £2 million at today's values).

On his return from the east, John Lewis occupied prominent positions in the commercial world of London. He bought Ledstone Hall in Yorkshire from another impoverished aristocrat, the Earl of Strafford. In 1660 he was a member of the deputation that went to The Hague to meet Charles II at the end of his exile and he was knighted there. For his daughter's marriage to the 7th Earl of Huntingdon he provided £4,000 (in money and goods) and estates bringing in £600 a year.

Ian Scruton

Volunteers' Christmas Get-togethers

We held two get-togethers for our volunteers in December to thank them, update them on developments and ask their opinion. Around 20 people came to the Saturday session and 10 to the Wednesday one. Rev Mary Gregory came to both sessions and thanked the volunteers for all their help over the past few months.

Sharn described what she has been doing since taking over her new role and thanked everyone for their support. Susan passed on details about access fobs, name labels and how to record cash takings. We asked for feedback about the signing-in systems and agreed to keep both the manual (sheets in the kitchen and on the church notice board) and the internet systems going.

Sharn said that she will be asking for additional volunteers to help with the set up and breakdown of workshops, along with help in distributing flyers and leaflets when necessary. She invited everyone to tell her if they need any training or updates on the kitchen or other aspects of the Heritage Centre. We discussed having a meeter/greeter person at the front of the Heritage Centre - both for workshops and for normal opening days – and agreed that it helps to make newcomers feel more welcome.

We spent some time talking about providing activities on open days that will attract men, women and children. Any additional ideas will be very welcome. We also had an open time for questions in each session and received helpful comments and suggestions.

It wasn't all work. Refreshments included mulled wine. Two printed quizzes – Christmas facts and Ashby photos – were available to fill in any spare time as people arrived. Answers were provided at the end of each session. Hopefully a good time was had by all. We'll set up similar events before Easter.

Susan Boardman-Weston

Chair of the St Helen's Heritage Team



Coming up in the next few weeks ...

Heritage talks

Our season of Heritage talks continues on Monday 4th February, when Moira Ackers, a member of the Church Monuments Society, will be talking about the Burton Alabaster Men of the 16th Century, with particular reference to the work of Richard Parker. He designed and made our magnificent table tomb, which stands in the middle of the Hastings Chapel, as well as many other fine monuments.



We round off this season's talks on Monday 4th March, with updates from our own research volunteers on their recent investigations. Among other topics, learn more about the Hastings family, the archaeology beneath our feet and the Victorian extension.

Check our Facebook page or website for further details. Just £3 per person. Tea/ coffee and biscuits included.

Church Tours

Come along at 11 am on the first Saturday of each month for a guided tour of our fascinating church, led by someone who knows and loves it. £3 per adult. No need to book. The next tours will be on Saturdays 2nd February and 2nd March.

February Half Term craft session for children

Learn to Weave Workshop; make a loom and weave your own personal design to hang on your wall. Extremely popular and lots of fun for all ages. Or **Make a Friendship Bracelet**; Create your own customized friendship bracelet to wear or give to your friends.

In the Heritage Centre on Wednesday 20th February, 10 am-2 pm. £1 per child.

How to find out about our Project

Our website: www.sthelensheritage.co.uk Our Facebook page: **St Helen's Heritage Ashby de la Zouch**

Research meetings

Meetings are informal and are a chance to share our research findings and ideas.

As a research group, we have access to the online research resource, 'Find My Past' and to two laptop computers. Our next meeting will be on Wednesday 30th January 2019 at 9.30 am.

If you are interested in joining us, please contact Julie Starkey via email or phone. (details below)

Contacts:

Sharn Stinson (Project Operations Manager) -
07435 564236 - sthelensheritage@gmail.com

Julie Starkey (research) - 07906 288841
julie.starkey0@gmail.com

Heritage e-news - next issue

The next Heritage e-news will be published on Thursday 28th February. All contributions to Julie Starkey by Monday 25th February please.