



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

# Heritage Project eNews

## No. 6 September 2018



### Endings and new beginnings

We recently said goodbye to our Heritage Officer, Llynda Baugh, who has moved on to other projects after producing some wonderful events for us over the past two years, culminating in our recent success at the Leicestershire and Rutland Heritage Awards. Llynda's final event was Heritage Open Days and 'Hello Heritage' at the start of September, when she and the team introduced visitors to our 'extraordinary women,' a fitting swansong for a bubbly livewire who will be missed by us all.

With every ending comes a new beginning. The Heritage Team, working with our Heritage Lottery Monitor, thought long and hard about the priorities for the remaining nine months of the project. We have created two distinct roles.



*Jill, Sharn & Llynda in the office, toasting Llynda's future - cake is, of course, an essential part of the process!*

**Sharn Stinson**, who has been working with us for some time in an administrative role, will take on the new post of Project Operations Manager. Sharn will manage the project day to day, ensuring completion of method sheets and a contact and resource directory, enabling and co-ordinating our ongoing, volunteer delivered, activity programme, keeping the project profile high in the community via leaflets, posters and social media and managing the budget. Sharn has a strong project management and administrative background. We are excited to have her on board.

Equally exciting is the appointment of **Rachel Grevatte** as our new Education Development Co-ordinator. Her role will be to set up our offer to schools, focusing on reaching children between the ages of 5 and 14. She will develop a primary school assembly as well as delivering school sessions using handling boxes and other materials and resources. Whilst delivering these pilot sessions, Rachel will train and mentor volunteers to continue the work. An exhibition of pupils' Heritage Project related work is also planned for the Heritage Centre. Rachel is a qualified teacher with extensive classroom experience who has also developed resources for primary pupils using museum collections in the Museum of London and Leicester City Museums. Since 2004, she has combined work as a Heritage Learning Consultant with part time work as a classroom teacher.



If anyone is interested in working alongside Rachel on our offer to schools, please get in touch with Sharn.

### Want to know more?

If you would like to learn more about plans for the next nine months of the Project, volunteer update meetings are being held in the Heritage Centre on Wednesday 3rd October and Saturday 6th October at 11 am. It will help with catering if you can tell us which session you are attending. Contact details are on the last page of this newsletter.



*Llynda with our Chair, Susan Boardman-Weston, collecting a Heritage Award*

It's been a busy old summer. I think we'll all remember the summer of 2018 for its unrelenting heat, but here at St Helen's we opened our doors not just to welcome in the warm weather, but to welcome primary school children and their carers every Wednesday to take part in fun heritage related activities. We made bells, clay pots and stained glass windows, dug for archaeology, experimented with printing and were almost overwhelmed by the interest in weaving.

Here's a selection of photos. You may spot some of our helpers having fun as well!



## Activities for adults

Not content with providing fun activities for children, we also put on lots of fun events for adults this summer

Thirty three people attended Bob Trubshaw's talk on **Anglo-Saxon carvings in Leicestershire**. I am sure we will never walk past one again without looking for good fighting evil, mythical creatures and exotic flowers never actually seen by those who carved them.



On a similar theme, a group of enthusiastic graffiti hunters enjoyed a day looking at **medieval graffiti** not just in St Helen's but also at the castle and Staunton Harold Church. They learnt about masons marks, ritual protection marks and the popularity of simply leaving your own name on a wall. If you want to learn more, have a read of Ken Ward's fascinating article later in this newsletter.



Our **Bells Open Evening** in August was also very popular, with lots of people coming along to learn about church bells and to have a go at ringing.

Our handbell group was re-formed for the evening, not having rung together for several years. Such was the enthusiasm that the group is now being revived!

The 'big bells' were equally popular.

Several people signed up to learn to ring as a result of the evening.



## Trent Valley Church Heritage Trail - Prayer, protest and power

At the end of July, St Helen's was one of 7 local churches to take part in the first Trent Valley Church Heritage Trail, a joint event between The Churches Conservation Trust, St Helen's Heritage Project and The National Trust.

Churches taking part included St Michael & St Mary's, Melbourne; St Mary & St Hardulphs, Breedon; Holy Trinity, Staunton Harold; St George's, Ticknall and St Giles, Calke Abbey, as well as St Helen's.

The Trent Valley was dominated by the local landed gentry until the nineteenth century. Local families such as the Hastings, Shirleys, Beaumonts and Harpurs established their estates, including Calke Abbey, Coleorton and Staunton Harold, and were the patrons of their local churches.

Through their patronage, these families shaped local churches to display their power, to reflect their religious views, and to be a place of worship.

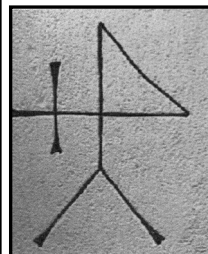
We attracted a steady stream of visitors on the day, including a representative of the Leicester Diocese. If you would like to read more about her impressions on the day, copy and paste this link into your browser: <https://www.leicester.anglican.org/trent-valley-church-heritage-trail-finding-god-in-ancient-buildings/>



## Medieval Graffiti – A New Skill Learned

St Helen's does it again! Through the organisation of a fascinating study day a whole new world has been revealed to me. On 28<sup>th</sup> July I attended a day's course on Medieval Graffiti at the Heritage Centre. The course leader was Alison Fearn, an expert in a strange world. When she began to reveal to us the complexities and history behind graffiti I was both enchanted and intrigued.

Firstly we found that there are many types and styles of graffiti which can be found and that we needed to use a special method to find these items. Graffiti can mainly be discovered in churches, castles and mediaeval houses.



*A Merchant's Mark  
– used to mark a  
merchant's goods  
and property*

What these etchings mean can be interpreted in many ways but by and large, there is mainly a religious context.

Medieval graffiti can come in both words and symbols. We quickly learned a new word, *apotropaic*, which means ritual protection marks. They can be circular patterns, pentangles, six pointed stars, crosses and a variety of visual designs. Other examples of graffiti can be the written word, ships, animals, human figures, masons' marks and many other types.

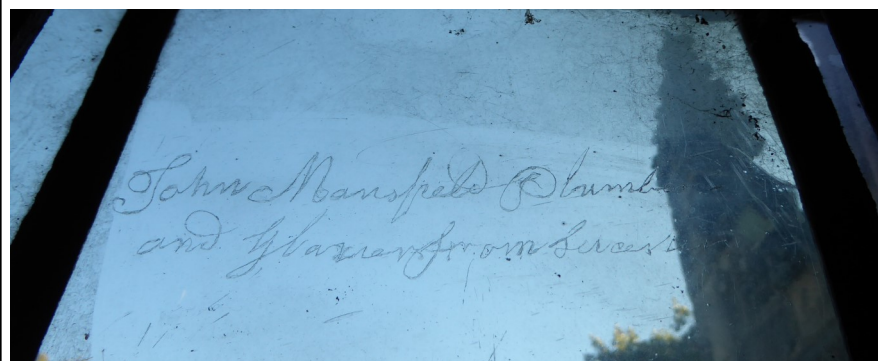
We were taught how to undertake a proper survey of buildings and how to identify anything that we might uncover. The normal method used to find graffiti is to hold an LED torch at an oblique angle to send light across the surface of the material being searched. This should reveal much more than using a conventional beam.

The first practical exercise was the survey of St Helens itself. We looked at the finger pillory first, little thinking that anything would be discovered. We were surprised to see that there are at least 6 'daisy wheels' inscribed on the pillory. These wheels were used to give protection against evil – it is believed. We wondered if anyone has ever seen these symbols – probably not for several hundred years!



*Daisy wheels*

We then searched around the church for other graffiti. There are some traces but we didn't have enough time to carry out a thorough survey. We did, however, go up to the Priest's Room and there found etched in the glass



details of the glazier who presumably repaired the glass there. It tells us the name of the glazier from Leicester, John Mansfield, and the date he fitted the new panes in the windows. It is dated 1773 - a quite remarkable find.

After lunch we visited Ashby Castle and searched for graffiti there. We did find some masons' marks in the old chapel

but the weak sandstone with which the castle is built erodes so badly that even if there had been etchings they have mostly disappeared. There are quite a few examples of graffiti up the Hastings Tower – mainly signatures - and some can be seen that date from the 1700's.



*Staunton Harold Church*

Our final visit was to Staunton Harold Church. The church construction was begun in 1653 during the period when church building was banned by Oliver Cromwell. Sir Robert Shirley lived in the previous Hall and gave his life to build the church. It has many interesting features including ancient flags/box pews and a fine hand painted paneled ceiling. We did find some graffiti scratches in the box pews. There are pictures etched in what would have been servants' pews, of mainly birds and animals. In the tower there are some words and signatures by members of the Shirley Family from the 1700 and 1800's.

## Medieval Graffiti - a new skill learned (*continued*)

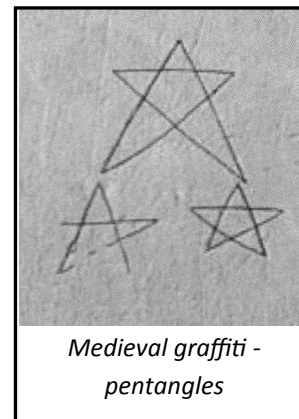
In the church entrance we found quite a number of pentangles in the plaster work. It seems that the current churchwardens were unaware of these symbols. Without LED's these symbols are virtually invisible. The significance of pentangles is today seen as marks of the devil but in medieval times the 5 points represented the wounds of Christ on the cross.

So, a great day of fascinating experience and education. The following week the St Helen's History group paid a visit to Polesworth Abbey and church. Some of us took our torches and again found various examples of ancient graffiti. Some days later I went to the building in Leicester called the Magazine, a fortification from medieval times and I found many fine etchings made by prisoners held in the Magazine including French prisoners.

The topic now has gripped me and I will carry my little torch whenever I travel to old buildings. I see that Haddon Hall has a special event to search for Apotropaic Marks in October – I'll be there to follow up my new hobby.

Without the excellent Heritage Centre historic lectures this would have never have happened. Thanks!

*Ken Ward*  
*Research Volunteer*



## How to find out about our Project

Our website: [www.sthelensheritage.co.uk](http://www.sthelensheritage.co.uk)

Our Facebook page: **St Helen's Heritage Ashby de la Zouch**

## Woolley Wednesday

**H**eritage volunteer Mo Clark was the mastermind behind a hugely successful weaving day for children during the recent school holiday. So impressed were their parents that they requested a weaving day of their own once the children were back at school. 'Woolley Wednesday' was born!

I went along on the day as a kitchen helper but, like everyone else, was soon drawn in to the weaving process. Mo had come prepared, with her own large loom and lots of meticulously



constructed small cardboard looms. She also had boxes full of wool in different colours and textures plus ribbons and beads galore.

The event was due to end at 12.45, but when I left just after 1 pm it was still going strong! People just kept on coming in. This is one which will have to be repeated - often!

Put my name down for the next one please Mo!

*Julie Starkey*



*Weavers hard at work*

## “Modest but Satisfying”

St Helen's is a Grade 1 Listed Building. One of the reasons given for the designation is that: “The church retains an outstanding collection of funeral monuments from the C15 – C18, including an alabaster chest tomb of c1561 and a wall monument by Kent with sculpture by Rysbrack of c1746”. The two monuments specifically mentioned are those for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Earls of Huntingdon. (William Kent was the leading architect of the time and Michael Rysbrack the leading sculptor). There is a third Huntingdon monument in the Hastings Chapel, that for the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Huntingdon. I decided to look at this first, assuming there would be little information about it. I thought this would make it easier to work out a template for then doing a write-up of the more prestigious monuments.

I started by skimming through the 170 pages of transcripts of the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl's correspondence in the Historical Manuscripts Commission's volumes of extracts from the Hastings family's archives. I came across a letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> October 1698 from the Earl to Mr Gibbons about the carving of his monument. A search on the internet confirmed that the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl's monument was carved by Grinling Gibbons. This is not mentioned in any of the St Helen's guide books and so presumably was not known about locally. Grinling Gibbons is considered to be England's pre-eminent wood-carver. A recent programme about him on BBC4 explained that wood-carving went out of fashion during his life-time so he had to turn his hand to stone-carving.

J D Stewart, in a 1963 article in the Burlington Magazine, thought the monument had been moved from its original position. He says: “Its present position, so high off the ground as to make even photography difficult, is doubtless to be explained by the monument below it to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquis of Hastings who died in 1851”. However, the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl had installed extensive wainscoting in St Helen's. (This can be seen in a photograph taken before the 1878-80 alterations which is on the wall of the north aisle. The photo is now sitting at a jaunty angle in its frame after I took it down to see what was written on the back. This seems to have been too much for the antique piece of string holding it up).

A little of the wainscoting is still left in the Hastings Chapel and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquis's monument is set into it. The 7<sup>th</sup> Earl's monument is positioned just above the wainscoting and so it seems to me that this is probably where he wanted it to be (he was meticulous about every aspect of the monument).

The 7<sup>th</sup> Earl in his letter to Grinling Gibbons says: “I desire you to forbear carving the arms [*i.e. coats of arms*] till you have finished the rest of the monument, and not to go about them till you first acquaint me. I like not your painting of the arms on Sir Humphrey Ferrers at Tamworth, Mr Poole at Radborn nor the Duchess of Somerset at Westminster, which were all your work”.

I have been to see the Grinling Gibbons monuments at Radbourne and Tamworth. They are in the over-the-top style that seems to have been fashionable at the time. In his book “The Work of Grinling Gibbons” Geoffrey Beard describes the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl's monument in St Helen's as “modest but satisfying”.



*Wainscoting on the south wall of the Hastings Chapel, installed by the 7th Earl*

## Why is there no memorial in St Helen's to the Puritan Earl?

**H**enry Hastings, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Huntingdon, ("the Puritan Earl") was one of the most illustrious members of the Hastings family. When Queen Elizabeth fell seriously ill with smallpox in 1562,



*The 'Puritan Earl' on the alabaster chest tomb in the Hastings Chapel*

the Council met to consider who should succeed her if she died. Robert Dudley, Elizabeth's favourite, proposed Henry, his brother-in-law, as a suitable Protestant candidate. Elizabeth recovered and in 1572 she appointed Henry President of the Council of the North, effectively her regent in the North of England. Henry was buried in St Helen's but there is no memorial to him. Why is this?

Henry was in Newcastle on a mission to investigate problems with the defence of the Scottish Borders when he was taken ill. He made his way back to York intending, after a short rest, to travel on to London to report his findings to the Queen and Lord Burghley, her chief adviser. However, Henry's health deteriorated and he died in York on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1595.

Henry and his wife had no children so his brother, George, succeeded him as Earl. At his death Henry owed £18,000 to the Queen and £17,000 to other lenders (equivalent to a total of over £1.6 million at today's values).

Henry did not make a will. His wife was advised not to make any funeral arrangements because this would mean she would become responsible for his debts. His brother, George, was also reluctant to get involved for the same reason. Queen Elizabeth became concerned, saying Henry should have a funeral fitting his status, although she too was not prepared to pay for it.

There was talk of Henry being buried in York but George said that it was Henry's wish to be buried in the family vault. Lord Burghley tried to get George to act but it was not until 26<sup>th</sup> April 1596 that Henry was buried in St Helen's with a lavish funeral in accordance with the Queen's wishes.

However, there is no monument to Henry in St Helen's. The only commemoration is the figure of him at the end of the alabaster chest tomb he erected in memory of his parents.

**Ian Scruton**

**Research volunteer**

## Research meetings

**O**ur most recent Research Group meeting was held in the Community Heritage Centre on Tuesday 25th September. 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 7th November at 9.30 am.

If you are interested in joining us, please contact Julie Starkey via email or phone. (details on final page of this newsletter).

Coming up in the next few weeks ...

## Church open

From 1st October, we will be changing to our winter opening times. The church is open to visitors all day, every day, but we will have welcomers in the Church every Wednesday between 11 am—1 pm and every Saturday between 10.30—1 pm.

When there is not a welcomer on duty, you can still pick up one of our self-guided tour leaflets or use your phone to log in to one of our audio-visual tours.

## Heritage talks

Our Heritage Talks season kicks off at 7.30 pm on Monday 1st October, with Peter Rose coming to give a musically illustrated talk on the history of the violin in church music. Learn about the 'west end' galleries of 17th Century churches, including St Helen's, where musicians sat to play.

The talks will continue on the first Monday of every month, right through to March 2019. Check our Facebook page or website for further details. Just £3 per person. Tea/ coffee and biscuits included.

## Photography exhibition

Ashby Photography Club recently visited the church on bell ringing evening. Come and see our lovely church building and our bell ringers through their eyes. Free exhibition this October in the Heritage Centre.

## The Big Draw

Back by popular demand this October half term. Free event in Church and Heritage Centre on Wednesday 24th October.

## Christmas Wreath Making

Always wanted to make your own Christmas wreath for your front door? Now's your chance. Saturday 24th November in the Heritage Centre. £10 per adult. Booking essential, via our website.

## Pomander Making

And here's an event for adults and children to enjoy together. Come along on Saturday 15th December to make your own pomander to take home. £1 per child.

***All these events, and more, are detailed in our latest Guide to Activities and Events leaflet – out now. Pick up your copy from Tourist Information, in the Church or in lots of other places around the area.***



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### Heritage e-news - next issue

The next Heritage e-news will be published on Thursday 15th November. All contributions to Julie Starkey by Monday 12th November please.