



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

# Heritage Project eNews

No. 2 January 2018



## Turner was here!

**J**MW Turner visited Ashby in the summer of 1830. It was the most northerly point of a journey he made through the Midlands to find material for his series of "Picturesque Views in England and Wales". His sketches here focussed on the Castle and St Helen's.

He went to particular lengths in Ashby to make sketches from a variety of viewpoints. One sketch was drawn in Kilwardby Street. It is still possible to see the tower of St Helen's from there but the Castle is now hidden by buildings in Market Street. The watercolour he painted after his visit, "Ashby Castle" which features St Helen's in the background, seems to be a view from Windmill Hill.

Turner's method of working was to make sketches of the places he visited and then to choose one to be the subject of a watercolour painting. Engravings were then made of the watercolours so that prints could be produced. 24 parts of "Picturesque Views", each consisting of 4 prints, were issued between 1827 and 1838. A collection of all 96 prints was then published in 1838.

The present whereabouts of Turner's Ashby watercolour is not known but an engraving was made of it for "Picturesque Views". There is a copy of the print in Ashby Museum. We have no information about Turner's visit to Ashby other than the evidence of his sketches. His contemporary, John Constable, was a visitor to Coleorton Hall but there is no record of Turner having been there.

Ian Scruton

*The image of the engraving reproduced here is ©Tate Gallery.*



## Research Group News

**T**he next meeting of the Research Group is Tuesday 16th January at 10 am, in the Hildersham Room.

We're also having a Research Group outing on Wednesday 24th January, organised by Ken Ward, one of our volunteers. This will be a guided tour of St Andrew's, Clifton Campville, which has been described as 'one of the finest churches in England.' It's particularly interesting to us, as it has a Chantry. We've long wondered whether our own Priest Room could have been a Chantry Chapel at one time. Maybe our visit to Clifton Campville will shed some light on the subject?

We're also hoping to organise a visit to the Church of St Michael at Stretton-en-le-Field at some point. Watch this space!

## Heritage Talks

**M**ondays at 7.30 pm  
in the Heritage  
Centre.

**D**r Nick Gravestock will be with us on Monday February 5th at 7.30 pm with a programme of Music of the Tudor period.

On Monday 5th March, 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.



## 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 via the online planner: <http://signup.com/go/qDKKaPZ>

## Call for volunteers

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:

- 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.
- On the Wednesdays either side of the Easter Weekend, we are holding family activity days, where we will be making sundials, sand timers, heraldry items and stained glass. I have yet to design these but will need help with preparation of the resources – mainly cutting things out. I will also need help on the days delivering the activities plus help serving refreshments.
- The Wednesday and Saturday sessions restart this Wednesday (10th January) with refreshments being served from around 10.00am for people coming from the church service until we finish at 1.00pm. Help is always needed with these to set up, host and pack away.

I will be putting everything on the volunteering online planner. Please use this or contact me if you can help in any way.

Llynda Baugh



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

Funding raised by  
**The National Lottery**  
and awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund



The PCC of St Helen's Church, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, wishes to appoint a

**Administrator/Project Assistant**  
**8 hours per week**  
**£8 per hour**

to play a key role in the delivery of a Heritage Lottery funded project based in the newly-built Community Heritage Centre and St Helen's Church. This major project aims to bring to life the heritage and history of the Church and improve the experiences and learning opportunities for visitors of all ages.

The overall purpose of the post is to support the Heritage Officer to deliver a range of activities and events by undertaking administrative duties, assisting in organising events and activities and providing general support to the project.

The successful candidate will have strong administrative and organisational skills, a 'can do' attitude and be able to hit the ground running. They will need to be flexible and occasional weekend working may be required during busy periods. Ideally, the post holder will work two half days per week.

For further details and application form email:  
**[sthelensheritageinfo@gmail.com](mailto:sthelensheritageinfo@gmail.com)**

Closing date for applications **12 noon**  
on **Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

## Contacts:

**Llynda Baugh** - Heritage Officer - 07435 564236  
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## Volunteers' Christmas Get Together



16 people gathered on 19th December to enjoy an update on the project, followed by a quiz and light refreshments. It was a great opportunity to relax, laugh and chat together.

## The archaeologists' return!

At the end of November, Mercian archaeology returned to give us the results of geophysical surveys carried out in the church during the summer. Archaeologist Andy Gaunt reminded us of warmer times, when people in summer clothing surveyed church and churchyard, before leading us through a lot of technical detail to his interim conclusions (the final report of the survey won't be ready until the end of March 2018).

Thanks to this year's work, we now have an accurate outline of both church and churchyard. The width of all the church walls is documented and we can see that the Tower walls are at least twice the thickness of other walls around the building.

Work carried out in the summer has also reinforced our knowledge of the orientation of the church. Whilst many Christian churches face east, St Helen's does not. It's aligned at an angle of 63 degrees from due north. Why? Could it be that it was laid out to point towards the sunrise on Easter Day?

This is where all the technical detail came in. Thankfully, Andy didn't test us on it at the end, but here's the gist of it!

Basically, the sun rises at 63° on 1<sup>st</sup> May in each solar year, so now that is the day our church is pointing directly towards the sunrise. However, our calendar year differs slightly from the solar year and is adjusted by the addition of an extra day every four years.

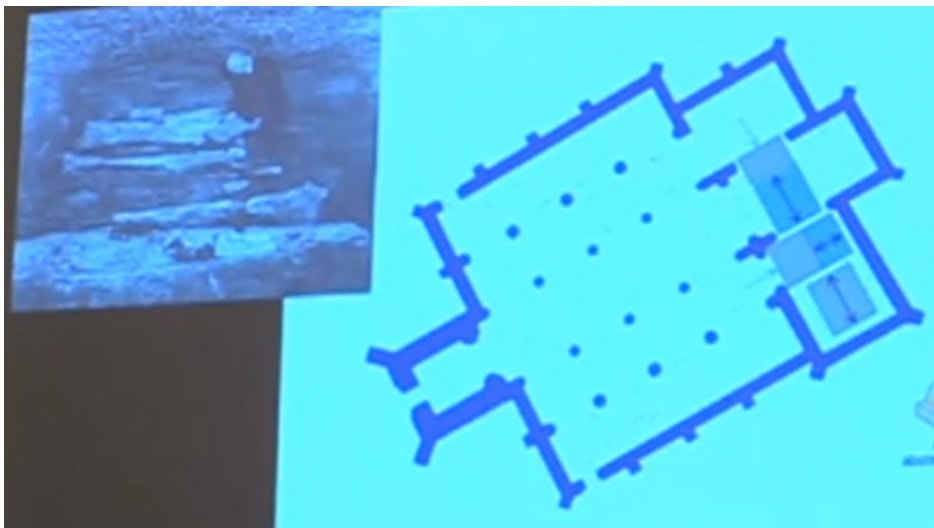
Just to complicate matters further, when St Helen's Church was built, people were working to the Julian Calendar, by which St Helen's would be aligned with sunrise on 22<sup>nd</sup> April each year. The Julian calendar, first implemented by Julius Caesar in 46 BC, was followed by Britain and her Empire until 1752. Unfortunately, it had an inbuilt error of 1 day every 128 years, due to a miscalculation of the solar year by 11 minutes. This affected the date of Easter, traditionally observed on March 21<sup>st</sup>, as it began to move further away from the spring equinox with each passing year. For this reason, Pope Gregory XIII introduced his 'Gregorian Calendar' in 1582, though this was not adopted in Great Britain until 1752, when Britain 'lost' 11 days. Incidentally, when the Gregorian Calendar was introduced to Great Britain, people mistakenly thought their lives would be shortened by 11 days!

To cut a long story short, if the theory of St Helen's being built to point towards the sunrise on Easter Day is correct, then that gives us a list of years in which its construction could have started. Pevsner's history suggests that parts of St Helen's were built in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, and Andy and his colleagues tentatively suggested that the central pillars in the nave, beneath their 15<sup>th</sup> century cladding, could possibly have been constructed a century earlier. If we look at dates when the sun rose at 63° on Easter Day, this gives us the years 1318, 1329, 1356, 1375, 1386 and 1397. Looking at the 15<sup>th</sup> century, we have the year 1470 – four years before the widely believed construction date of 1474.

William Hastings, who built the core of the current church, was a close associate of King Edward IV, who was overthrown and went briefly into exile in 1470. Could William have laid out the church in 1470, then been unable to return to continue construction until more favourable times? Research continues, but we may never know.

Anticipation in the audience increased as Andy moved on to talk about surveying using ground penetrating radar inside the church, particularly in the Chancel and Hastings Chapel. Little surveying was done in the main body of the building due to fixtures and fittings – ie. the pews. However, the much more open areas of Chancel and Hastings Chapel meant that accurate surveying could take place. Radar reflections below the floor in both areas clearly showed curved ceilings with cavities below them. This confirmed the location of two barrel shaped vaults. Taking into account the building alignment of 63° from north, one faces approximately east-west beneath the Hastings Chapel and one faces approximately north-south beneath the Chancel. History records three vaults in this area and

Unknown person in the vaults. 1950s or 1960s.



Areas coloured blue show vaults definitely located.

Possible vaults shown in grey.

Note: thickness of the Tower walls compared to others in the building.

