



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

# Heritage Project eNews

No. 13 January 2020



## Since our last newsletter ...

### Churchyard Orientation Board

The final element of our Heritage artwork was installed on Monday 6th January, opposite the Heritage Centre gateway. Our new Orientation Board includes a map of our site and photos and information about points of interest for visitors. Like our other Heritage artworks, it has been created by Mike Foster of Maltings Partnership, using photographs, plans and information supplied by us. We've also been pleased to include Ashby's new branding.

Particularly when the Church and Heritage Centre are closed, the board will provide a taster of what both have to offer.



Early observations are that it is being viewed with great interest as people walk through the churchyard.



### Co-op Community Fund



At the end of November, we were delighted to receive £5,387.75 from the Co-op Community Fund towards our garden project at the Community Heritage Centre.

Some of our garden volunteers are pictured here with the cheque ... and a wheelbarrow to bring it home in!

## Recent events ...

### Pomander making workshop

Saturday December 7th



### Festive Gathering for Volunteers

On Saturday, 14th December, we held a Christmas Party in the Heritage Centre to thank our loyal volunteers, who have so generously given their time to make our various activities, talks, workshops, craft days, etc such a success throughout the year.

Twenty people came and enjoyed a light festive lunch. The Hastings Hall was full of noisy chatter and hearty laughter.

Rev'd Mary, on behalf of the church, thanked all the volunteers for their invaluable service. I would also take this opportunity to add my heartfelt thanks to all of you too because without your support and hard work, the level of excellence we have built up would not be sustainable.



*Eileen Coombs (Volunteer Coordinator)*

## Events coming up ...

### Spring Concert Series (in the church)

29th February (Saturday)	7.30 pm	Barberama	30 strong womens' community choir, who sing unaccompanied four-part harmony in the barbershop style
21st March (Saturday)	7.30 pm	Cecilian Singers	Entente Cordiale - a mixed programme of choral favourites, including Lassus, Debussy, Gilbert & Sullivan, Flanders & Swann, Lennon & McCartney
5th April (Sunday)	3 pm (tbc)	Afternoon concert	Led by Philip King. Includes Cantabile Choir, B Natural Choir & S Derbys Music Centre Family Brass Band.

### Other events (in the Heritage Centre)

24th January 25th January	10-2 12-4	Coin Valuation Day	Willow Coins-buying & selling coins & banknotes. Specialist in modern British coins from 1816.
19th February (Wednesday)	10.30-12.30	'Heart-y Crafts'	A valentine inspired half-term craft workshop for all the family. £2 per child.
15th April (Wednesday)	10.30-12.30	Easter Crafts	Three fun activities for all the family. £2 per child.

## A Visitor to St Helen's during the English Civil War

On 14th June 1645, less than three weeks after his visit to Ashby, King Charles I's army was annihilated at Naseby, 7 miles from Market Harborough, by Parliamentarians under the command of Thomas Fairfax and from then on the King's army was heavily outnumbered. On 5th May 1646, he surrendered at Newark and was taken into parliamentary custody. Charles escaped to the Isle of Wight in 1647, but the 'second civil war' was over within a year and Charles was put on trial for treason. He was found guilty and executed at the Palace of Whitehall on 30th January 1649. Did Charles I pray in St Helen's during his short visits to Ashby, before and after the battle which was to prove the turning point of the war? We will never know, but from the evidence of a diary entry written by a royal guard, it becomes a possibility ...

Ian Scruton, a member of our research team, relates the events of May and June 1645:

On 27<sup>th</sup> May 1645 10,000 Royalist troops camped in and around Ashby. They were on their way to Leicester to attack the Parliamentary garrison there.

One of the troops was keeping a diary of his travels. He was Richard Symonds, a member of King Charles I's lifeguard, which was commanded by the Earl of Lichfield. Richard Symonds was an antiquarian and his diary includes information about the places he visited as well as details of the military campaign.

In his diary he records:

"Tuesday his Majestie marched to Ashby-de-la-Zouche, the head quarters of the Lord Loughborough. Earl of Lichfield to Packington.

Wednesday, May 28, 1645. His Majestie marched with his army neare Cole Orton, garrison of the enemyes."

His description of St Helen's includes the following comments:

"In the south chappel is a stately altar monument of alabaster, the two statues of a man and woman lying on the surface; he very old, with a long beard; in armes, and the robe and badge of the garter on the left shoulder; under his head this creast, vizt a bull's head sable."

He also mentions: "two or three new monuments of other families lately sett in the walls, small." The diary also includes brief comments about the churches at Packington and Coleorton.

King Charles captured Leicester and went on to meet the Parliamentary army at Naseby where he suffered an overwhelming defeat. Richard Symonds described the aftermath:

"Towards night this dismall Satterday, His Majestie .... marched that night (for now wee had left running) to Ashby-de-la-Zouch.

Sunday, June 15, 1645, his Majestie about ten of the clock in the morning left Ashby, and went to Lichfield that night."



Detail from the Hastings tomb, showing the Garter crest

## Heritage Talk Series 2019-2020

First Monday in the month at 7.30pm, Hastings Hall, St Helen's Community Heritage Centre. £3 including light refreshments

### January 2020

*"Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages ..."*

You may recognise the line above from the Prologue of Geoffrey Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales', arguably the most famous English pilgrimage story, written at the end of the 14th Century. On Monday 6th January, we were joined by the ever interesting Peter Liddle, who talked about Medieval Pilgrimage to and from Leicestershire. In the Middle Ages, many people took long and dangerous journeys to make a pilgrimage to well known pilgrimage destinations such as Jerusalem, Rome or Santiago de Compostella, but some pilgrimages were much closer to home. Peter discussed pilgrimages made by local people to well known English destinations such as Canterbury, Walsingham and Bury St Edmunds, but places for those with little time or money to travel also included Breedon on the Hill, Repton and Wigston. The latter two both have connections to St Wistan, a Mercian prince who was assassinated and regarded as a martyr. During his talk, Peter handed round several replicas of pilgrim badges, the medieval equivalent of the fridge magnet or book mark we bring home from tourist destinations today. The most famous symbol of pilgrimage is the shell, as seen on the hat worn by our own pilgrim, in St Michael's Chapel.



*Pilgrim badge showing Thomas Becket (British Museum)*

There are still two talks in this series to look forward to:

**February 3rd**

**Steve Woodward**

*'Pushing up the daisies: the flora & fauna of churchyards'*



*Steve has visited all Leicestershire & Rutland churchyards, searching for the plants and animals that find sanctuary within them. His wide ranging talk will cover everything from spiders to celandines, mosses to mining bees, peregrines to polypodies! Come and learn more about what's under your feet.*

**March 2<sup>nd</sup>**

**Gay Evans**

*'The Last English Nobleman to be hanged for murder'*

*A tale of wealth, marriage, separation and a murder, centred on Staunton Harold Hall and the Palace of Westminster. One of the key characters in the story is our very own Doctor Thomas Kirkland.*

*4th Earl Ferrers  
Engraving, 1810.*



## Sparrows?

There's a large chest near the north door of the church. You've walked past it every time you've entered the church, but I suspect you've just seen the things on its top. Look again: it has two locks and is of solid oak construction. This is our Parish Chest. In it, in days gone by, would have been stored the parish documents: churchwardens' accounts, vestry minutes, pew rent records, etc. In common with most churches, these records are now in the safe keeping of local County Records Offices.



On a recent trip to ours, in Leicester, I accessed some of our churchwardens' accounts. These are financial documents, listing money which came into the church from donations, legacies and land rent, and what it was spent on. As you might imagine, there is a long list of items for use in services – wax, new surplices; things to mend the building and paths – nails, planks, bricks; payment for workmen and a man to sweep the snow from the paths. But on every page there was the curious payment for sparrows! Lots of sparrows!

The payment was actually for the heads of sparrows brought to the churchwardens as evidence that they had been caught and killed. For over 300 years parish authorities were required by law to make payments for the killing of most wild birds and animals. At the start of 1533 Henry VIII was embarking on major political and religious changes as a result of his break with Rome. The government was afraid that food shortages might cause social unrest, and therefore began to take steps to protect food supplies against competition from wildlife. Every parish was to provide and keep in good repair a crow net with which to catch crows, rooks and choughs.

In 1566, in the reign of Elizabeth I and against a background of rapidly rising food prices, the pressure on wildlife was stepped up and extended to mammals as well as birds. Payments were now to be made by the churchwardens (rather than the rector), to be paid from a rate raised for this purpose. A reward was to be paid not only for crows, rook and choughs, but for various birds of prey, ravens, magpies, jays, starlings, green woodpeckers, finches, herons and even kingfishers. Those who produced unbroken eggs were also to be rewarded. The amounts of the rewards varied between a penny for 12 heads or six eggs up to 4d. for the head of an osprey or heron.



A similar tariff was listed for wild mammals considered as vermin: fox, badger, polecat, weasel, stoat, wild cat, otter, hedgehog, rat, mole...The only other wild animals that were not covered by the Act were red squirrels and small mammals like dormice, voles and shrews. The Act was renewed twice in Elizabeth's reign and only finally repealed in 1863.

A final note in our churchwardens' accounts expresses a certain frustration with the situation. The record for May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1814 states: "By order this day agreed at the vestry meeting, the churchwardens are not to pay any money for sparrows - or hedgehogs also!"

Thank goodness we live in different times, or we would have no wildlife left in the countryside!

**Anne Heaton**

## Events to look forward to later this year ...

**Friday 8th - Sunday 10th May 2020: Ashby Arts Festival at St Helen's**  
**Art installation** (details to follow)

**Wednesday 27th May: Family Craft activities in the Heritage Centre**  
**10.30-12.30**

**June: 'Pimms & Hymns' outdoor songs of praise**

**July: Leicestershire Festival of Archaeology at St Helen's**  
**Guided tours & a Heritage Talk**

**School's Out: Summer Holiday Activities for all the Family**  
**Wednesdays 29th July, 5th, 12th and 19th August. 10.30-12.30**

**Look out for our newsletters & posters around the town, plus our Facebook page, for up to date information on all these events.**

## Guided Tours & Talks

If you belong to, or know of, a group of people who would like a tour of the Church, or a talk about the Church and Heritage Centre, please contact us for details via

*[sthelensheritage@gmail.com](mailto:sthelensheritage@gmail.com)*

We offer tours at a time to suit your group. Refreshments include tea or coffee with delicious home made cake.

Our volunteers will also come out to talk to your group. We have a number of prepared talks, covering different aspects of St Helen's Heritage story, or we can tailor our presentation to your requirements.

## How to contact us

Our website: [www.sthelensheritage.co.uk](http://www.sthelensheritage.co.uk) Our Facebook page: **St Helen's Heritage Ashby de la Zouch**

Email: [sthelensheritage@gmail.com](mailto:sthelensheritage@gmail.com)

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