



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

# Heritage Project eNews

No. 18 March 2023



## Since our last newsletter ...

### CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS - Introducing 'Discover Arts'

During February half term, our children's workshop was all about the classic children's book, 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar.' Primary school age children used recycled textiles to create their own hungry caterpillars, whilst learning more about different art forms and the book's author, Eric Carle. Each child received a certificate from 'Discover Arts' for their work.



We are now a registered centre for 'Discover Arts' and plan to hold regular workshops in which children can learn more about the arts in a fun way, producing their own art work to take home. Look out for our next 'Discover Arts' workshop during the school summer holidays.

### CHURCH TOURS

In November 2022 we welcomed Melbourne U3A group and we are looking forward to welcoming Burton U3A in mid April. The group from Melbourne loved their tour and particularly appreciated our finger pillory!

Our experienced tour guides have a wealth of knowledge about St Helen's which they would love to share with your group.

### HERITAGE TALKS

We're now almost at the end of this season of Heritage Talks, and what a season it's been! Since re-starting the talks and moving to Tuesday evenings, our audiences have been bigger than ever. Thank you all for coming out on cold winter evenings. We hope you'll agree that this season's talks have been both varied and fascinating. If there's a local historical topic you feel we haven't yet covered, please get in touch. We're already booking speakers for next winter.

In January we were joined by Mike Hawkes, who talked about graffiti in medieval churches, with an emphasis on Leicestershire. His talk was illustrated with photos of the graffiti he has encountered over the years.

Rachel Askew, Heritage Officer at Breedon Priory Church, was our speaker in February. Her topic was Catholic resistance and subterfuge at Breedon. Far from hiding their faith in an age which was openly hostile to Catholicism, the Shirley family flaunted it, expressing themselves through the monuments they built. For instance, did you know that crosses were banned in churches for a couple of hundred years, yet there is one built into a 17th Century box pew in Breedon church?

## A bit of background on crosses in churches, from Anne Heaton:

The Cross represents the meeting of God and Man, finding Godhead in flesh. As such it became contentious from the early Reformation, the 1540s, and like all things perceived as Catholic idolatry, had entirely effectively disappeared from English churches by the end of the English Civil War, in the 1640s.

The first cross reappeared in the church of St Mary and St Nicholas at Littlemore, Oxford. It was built by the architect Henry Underwood in 1835-6 for John Henry Newman, then an Anglican vicar and founder of the Oxford Movement. (Later he converted to Catholicism and is now Saint John Henry Newman). It caused an enormous scandal; the dozens of visitors to the new church, which was described as 'chaste and severe', were horrified. Peter Maurice, the then chaplain of New College, Oxford, wrote 'I felt an indescribable horror stealing over me, as I carried my eye towards the eastern wall of the building, and beheld a plain naked cross, either of stone or a good imitation of it, rising up and projecting out of the wall, from the centre of the table of communion.' People also objected to the hassocks and small amounts of colour in the otherwise plain east window.

How much we take for granted the symbols found in a parish church now! They are all Catholic.

This doesn't apply to Cathedrals, by the way. They retained much of their symbology.

*Note: Anne's information is largely taken from: 'Unlocking the Church: the story of a revolution' by William Whyte OUP, 2017.*

## Events Coming up ...

### CONCERTS

We have a regular programme of high quality concerts at St Helen's. Recent visitors, baroque quartet Galliarda, were fresh from an appearance on Radio 3. Mosaic will be performing a varied programme of a cappella vocal music on 10th March and Concordia will delivery Vivaldi's Gloria and other joyful music on 1st April. See our website for more information on concerts.



## Sew It, Don't Throw It



We've all got clothes that we don't wear – maybe because they need repairing, they don't fit well or we're just a bit fed up with them. Fast fashion means that more people are buying more clothes but wearing them less – leaving many garments languishing in cupboards and drawers, being thrown away, or donated to charity shops. We're excited to launch a new St Helen's eco-project, helping our local community to reduce the number of unworn garments and the amount of textiles going into landfill.

We want to start to change the view that clothing is 'disposable' and encourage people to repair and alter so that items can be worn for longer and not add to household waste, to encourage people to reuse what they already have, and to recycle garments into something else.

## Sew It, Don't Throw It ... (continued)

This project has been made possible by funding from Leicestershire County Council through the Shires Environmental Grant Scheme which will enable us to buy the equipment needed so that everyone can take part. It will initially run through the spring, summer and autumn of this year and will be delivered by three retired textile tutors. They will be running a series of workshops including using a sewing machine, different types of mending, decorative repairs, alterations, refashioning garments, repurposing garments, making home furnishings and gifts, and making fabrics from scraps - in fact just about anything that can be done with unwanted fabric.

There'll be lots of things going on in addition to the workshops - events, talks and school holiday activities for families. The sessions will be fun and social and participants will become peer support networks encouraging each other to put the learning into practice. We're already aware of the wellbeing benefits of being creative so taking time out to make things and to be with others can be good for you, while making a commitment to reuse and recycle and to encourage others to do the same will be good for our communities and the planet.

We currently have a fantastic exhibition in our Community Heritage Centre, which is full of heritage textiles, patterns and sewing equipment. It will bring back fond memories for some and we hope it will inspire others to learn to use one of our brand new sewing machines or to pick up their hand sewing needle and get started.

This event is being launched with a **Sew It Don't Throw It Open Day** on Saturday 11th March, which will be followed by a series of workshops. All workshops are FREE and are bookable via our website, booking for the first ones going 'live' on Friday 10th March.

### List of Workshops planned so far

Saturday 25th March	Introduction to a sewing machine
Tuesday 4th April	Make a carrier bag dispenser using basic sewing machine skills
Saturday 15th April	Mending and repair
Tuesday 25th April	Know Your Sewing Machine
Tuesday 9th May	Introduction to sewing, dressmaking & simple alterations
Saturday 20th May	Clothing alterations
Tuesday 13th June	Glasses or phone case
Saturday 17th June	Crazy patchwork
Saturday 24th June	Make an apron
Tuesday 27th June	Zipped bag for toiletries or for cable & chargers
Saturday 22nd July	The no zip cushion cover

### Talks

Saturday 1st July	Clothing and Sustainability
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More workshops and talks will be added soon.



## Heritage Talks Series 2022-23

The final talk for this winter will be on **March 28th at 7.30 pm - Professor Peter Ackers -**

### **RELIGIOUS NONCONFORMITY & THE EARLY LEICESTER LABOUR MOVEMENT**

Leicester was a major stronghold of the Churches of Christ. Peter, Emeritus Professor in the History of Industrial Relations at Loughborough University, will talk about their influence in the Boot & Shoe worker co-operative movement, as well as the Great War conscientious objection movement.

A new series of talks will begin in September 2023. Dates for your diary are:

Tuesdays 26th September, 24th October, 28th November, 23rd January,  
27th February & 26th March. There will not be a talk in December 2023.

## CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS

### **MAY- WOOLLY WEAVING**



Our May half term children's workshop will be on **Tuesday 30th May, from 9.30-12.**

If you've attended our workshops in the past, you may remember our hugely popular 'woolly weaving' workshops. Well, 'woolly weaving' is back in May. We have lots of ideas and plenty of wool. We're looking forward to seeing what 4-11 year olds create on the day.

### **JULY & AUGUST**

This year, we'll be hosting two summer holiday workshops - one on archaeology and an Arts Award workshop based around stained glass windows. More details to follow. Keep an eye on our website.

## **FESTIVAL OF ARCHAEOLOGY 2023**

This year's National Festival of Archaeology runs from 15th - 30th July, with the theme 'Archaeology and Creativity.' In Leicestershire, the Festival will run from 1st - 30th July and is already well into the planning stages.

There will be talks, tours and events all over Leicestershire & Rutland, including at St Helen's. At St Helen's, we are currently planning guided tours and a children's archaeology workshop, but watch this space for more information.





## Research News

A small, dedicated group of people continue to research the history and people of St Helen's Church. Ian Scruton has been looking at the connection between St Helen's, St Margaret's in Blackfordby and Lilleshall Abbey in Shropshire and in the process has made a discovery which may well lead him down a new research avenue.

### ONE VICAR, TWO MASTERS?

The right to appoint the Vicar of St Helen's was originally held by the Lord of the Manor of Ashby. However, some time around 1145 Philip de Beaumeis, then Lord of the Manor, and his brother Richard, who was Dean of a church in Shrewsbury, founded an Abbey at Lilleshall in Shropshire. Philip gave St Helen's and the church at Blackfordby to the Abbey. This meant that it was now the Abbot of Lilleshall Abbey who had the right to appoint the vicars of St Helen's.

However, a document in the Lilleshall Abbey archives dated 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1385 shows that this arrangement did not always run smoothly.



*Lion tile found on the site of St Helen's medieval vicarage, which matches tiles at Lilleshall Abbey.*

*Radulf Newebonde, priest of the diocese of Lincoln, brought letters of Hugh de la Souche, knight, nominating him to the vicarage. The abbot, with the advice of the convent, asserted that Sir Hugh had no right to the presentation, which had belonged to Lilleshall time out of mind; whereupon Radulf, on bended knee, begged to be presented to the vicarage by the abbot and convent, which they did, by way of charity, on their own authority and asserting that no other person had such a right.*

As well as the two churches, Lilleshall Abbey was given a substantial area of land around Ashby and Blackfordby. Sheep were reared on the Abbey Grange and there would have been canons from the Abbey living here. In 1735 the Earl of Huntingdon had a map of his estates drawn up and this has field names on it. Just up the hill from where Burton Road School is now are two fields called Upper Abbots Close and Nether Abbots Close.

Presumably the Abbey Grange extended to the edge of Ashby in the Middle Ages.

Radulf Newebonde is not on the list of vicars on the Incumbents Board in St Helen's so clearly there are still gaps in our knowledge.

### Ian Scruton

Here's a glimpse into what motivated Anne Heaton to begin on her journey of historical research:

### Does Heritage really matter?

*It all started with the Heritage Project, the years a group of us spent raising funds, working up plans and researching St Helen's. At the end of the initial 3 years it was necessary to evaluate the project, to work out how the £600,000 plus of public money had improved public interest and engagement in the church building. An unexpected spinoff for me was a decision to undertake a postgraduate degree in Parish Church Studies (Heritage, History and Fabric) at York University.*

*As a science graduate, this needed a big change in my (very rusty) academic skills, and the first term was challenging. A great tutor helped, and by the second term I was feeling like a historian.*

*Unfortunately, Covid struck at this point and I was unable to do much research, though I could take in the outside of St Helen's and the churchyard in my daily walk! Mostly it was online, though, but with access to lots of amazing material. I could even access York University library by requesting a photocopy of a relevant chapter of a book I needed for my work.*

*The course covered the spread of Christianity in England from the Anglo Saxons to the present day. It covered sources of evidence, the history of medieval society, the use, care and conservation of the parish church, the future of churchyards, the art and architecture found in churches, the development of the liturgy, and the impact of the Reformation and the Victorians. I felt for a long time as though I was living in a medieval society!*

Those of you who came to the talk Julie Starkey and I gave as part of our Winter Heritage Talks series in November 2022 will have heard something about how St Helen's represents all the changes to a typical parish church between the high medieval period to the present day. It was rebuilt on the core of an older church in the 1470s by the wealthy Lord William Hastings, almost certainly in atonement for his deeds in the Wars of the Roses. The inside – without the side aisles at this point – was plastered and painted with elaborate and colourful wall paintings, representing Bible stories, the saints and the Virgin Mary. The inside of the building was dark, with stained glass windows (not those we see today) and images and icons lit by candles. A stone altar stood at the east end; a painted screen decorated with more saints and possibly William Hastings as the donor, separated the chancel – where the general populace did not go – from the nave, which the people felt was theirs. Here, after services, would be markets, games and dances, spilling out into the churchyard which was considered nearly as sacred as the church itself.

The Reformation, beginning in the 1540s and ending with the Civil War in the 1640s, brought huge changes. Icons and paintings were swept away, to be followed later by stained glass windows. Music became the domain of the Cathedrals, with only psalms sung in churches. The chancel was a storage area for the domestic wooden communion table. Seating became the norm, because the focus was on the Word of God in the bible, with long sermons from a high pulpit in the nave, with a sounding board so everyone could hear. Communion was infrequent. Processions were banned, as were vestments. Baptism continued, but images of the sacraments on the font were damaged to eradicate the power thought to be vested in faces and hands.

It wasn't until the mid-nineteenth century that this was to change again, with the rise of the Oxford Movement and the Cambridge Camden Movement. The first



*Medieval stained glass at St Helen's. The medieval glass in our windows is, sadly, not original to the church. It was donated in 1924 from other properties owned by the Hastings family, the church's patrons for several centuries.*

## Does Heritage Really Matter? ... continued

re-introduced elements of the Catholic church, the liturgy and symbols we expect to find in St Helen's today. The second group – Cambridge students whose ideas affected 80% of English parish churches – focussed on the 'awe and wonder' of churches, encouraging churches, which were in any case being rebuilt to accommodate larger congregations, to introduce a romantic idea of a medieval church: symmetry, colour, vestments, processions, candles, flowers... everything we see in St Helen's services today. Our church was late in making the changes, extending and altering the inside of the church in the late 1870s. Box pews, galleries, the pulpit and the font were swept away and replaced by beautiful Victorian craftwork – well, except for the pitch pine benches we sit on today, which were the cheapest machine-made available at the time!

And so to the future. Most churches will close as congregations dwindle, and we therefore have to find a use for our 9000 medieval parish churches which punctuate the skyline of England in a way found nowhere else on the planet. The answer lies in engaging the community, making them own and use the building, as it was in the medieval period. Researching and learning to appreciate the history of our churches, the precious art to be found in them, and understand what we have inherited from our forebears, is at the heart of this: HERITAGE MATTERS!



*Traditional robed choir at St Helen's. Advent Carols.*

**Anne Heaton**

## Conservation Work on our Monuments

David Carrington of Skillington Workshops is visiting St Helen's this April to examine the Nundy monument on the west wall and some of our 'at risk' monuments in the Hastings Chapel and to write conservation reports. The work is being paid for by a grant from ChurchCare, with the PCC funding the balance of the cost. We are hoping that remedial work on the monuments will be carried out in due course.

### Research Interests and queries

If you have a research interest, or a query about St Helen's history, please get in touch via: [sthelensheritage@gmail.com](mailto:sthelensheritage@gmail.com)



**Keep an eye on the "What's On" pages of our website and on our social media for future events.**

**Website: [www.sthelensashby.net](http://www.sthelensashby.net)**

**Instagram: [sthelenschurchandheritage](https://www.instagram.com/sthelenschurchandheritage)**

**Facebook: [St Helen's Church Ashby de la Zouch](https://www.facebook.com/StHelenChurchAshbydeZouch) (NB: please ensure it's our official FB page-which has no hyphens in the name of our town)**