



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

# Heritage Project eNews

No. 21 August 2024



## What's happening next ...

### Heritage Talks Series 2024-25

Our first winter talk, on 1st October, will be

#### 'Annoying Ancestors' by Gay Evans.

This is an anecdotal take of what to look for and the pitfalls to avoid when researching your family - how our ancestors can unknowingly be annoying as they put obstacles in our way!

Gay is an engaging speaker, who returns to St Helen's by popular demand after her talk on The Last English Peer hanged for murder (Earl Ferrers) in our 2019-20 talks series.

Our winter talks for 2024-5 will be on Tuesdays at 7.30 pm in the Heritage Centre. There's a full list of talks over the page.

All talks cost £4 per person, payable on the door by cash or card. This includes light refreshments.

### FESTIVAL OF ARCHAEOLOGY TALK & TOURS 2024

On **Tuesday 9th July** we welcomed Mathew Morris, Project Officer at University of Leicester Archaeological Services, to talk about the recent Leicester Cathedral dig. He brought the project right up to date for our audience.

We also ran a tour of the church and a brand new tour of the churchyard, which attracted an astounding 38 visitors.

If you missed the tours and would like to know more about either church or churchyard, we'll be running them both again in October:

**Churchyard tour - Saturday 12th October at 2 pm**

**Church tour - Tuesday 15th October at 2 pm**

No need to book. Just turn up. Tours are free but donations are welcome.



# St Helen's Community Heritage Centre

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

## Heritage Talks 2024– 2025

**October 1st**                      **Gay Evans**                      **Annoying Ancestors**

*An anecdotal presentation of the challenges of genealogical research. Are your ancestors misinformed, or have they told a convenient lie? Has the scribe or transcriber made an error? Gay's talk aims to shed light on these potential challenges, together with encouraging you to start or resume your family's story.*

**October 29th**                      **Rachel Askew**                      **The Anglo-Saxon Sculpture of Breedon Priory Church**

*Breedon-on-the-Hill's church is best known for having one of the largest and finest collections of Anglo-Saxon sculpture in the country. But why is it there, who made it and what can it tell us about the Anglo-Saxon church that once stood on this site?*

**November 26th**                      **Anthony Yates**                      **The Bate & Kirkland families of Ashby: their lives, ancestry & descendants**

*Dr Thomas Kirkland, his life in medicine and music and his role in the trial and hanging of Earl Ferrers, this talk will be a tour across countries and continents, tracing the long ancestry of the Bates and later Kirklands from 1605 to the present day. There's even a role here for Bess of Hardwick!*

**January 28th**                      **Claire Strachan**                      **Small Things Forgotten: Churches & the little stories of Parish life in post Medieval England**

*Church buildings are regularly studied for their architectural grandeur, artistic significance, and historical importance in major political and social events in our country's history. Yet, beyond these prominent features lie countless subtle details that reveal fascinating stories of daily life. Claire Strachan will delve into these often overlooked aspects, exploring everything from timekeeping and music to graffiti and local superstitions. Join us to uncover the hidden narratives etched within the walls of sacred spaces.*

**February 25th**                      **Peter Liddle**                      **Roman Villas & peasant farms**

*Peter Liddle is a regular visitor to St Helen's and his talks always interest and amuse but never disappoint. Watch this space for more information.*

**March 25th**                      **Lesley Rowe**                      **Samuel Shaw (1635-1698): Little man with a big impact**

*How did a man ejected from the Church of England go on to become Ashby's celebrated schoolmaster?*



Facebook.com/sthelenschurch



Instagram.com/sthelenschurchandheritage

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



## Churchyard Stories

The group clearing the gravestones in the churchyard have completed their work and we are now going to record everything. We have records produced by the Museum in 2004 and it is clear that a number of gravestones are now absent. If you would like to help with this, we shall be meeting at **10 am on Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> August**. It would be helpful if you could bring a clipboard. This shouldn't take more than a few hours, but as we have found, there are some interesting graves which may detain us! Tea & biscuits will be provided.



*Photo shows St Helen's Church and graveyard prior to the church extension in 1878-80.*

There is currently a display about Ashby's burial places at the Museum, set up to complement our work; do drop in if you have time. Hurry! It ends on 31st August and it's well worth a browse.

## Research news ...

**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)**

*Ian Scruton has been delving into the stories of members of the Hastings family buried at St Helen's. Two of Ian's research articles are included below.*

*The first is about William, Lord Hastings, who raised the tower of St Helen's in 1474 and who built the Hastings Tower at Ashby Castle.*

## **500 YEARS OF COMMEMORATION**

When he made his will in 1481 Lord Hastings said *"the king of his abundant grace for the trew service I have don... hath willid and offred me to be buried in the Colledge or Chapell of Saint George at Wyndesor in a place assigned in the which Colledge his highness ys disposed to be buried"*. (Lord Hastings' wife, Katherine Neville, the sister of "Warwick the Kingmaker," was to be buried in St Helen's.) St George's Chapel was being built by Edward IV at the time as a church for the Knights of the Garter.

Little did the two men then know what fate had in store for them. Edward IV died in 1483 at the age of 40 to be succeeded by his 12 year-old son Edward V with his uncle the Duke of Gloucester as Protector. Of St George's Chapel only the chancel was finished and building works were halted for a number of years. However, the Duke of Gloucester declared Edward IV's children illegitimate and took the throne for himself as Richard III. He had Lord Hastings executed, presumably because he thought he would support the claim of Edward V.

Richard III clearly allowed Lord Hastings to be buried in St George's Chapel because the contract for his chantry dated 1503 provides for *"divine service dailey and duely to be kept and ministered within the seid chapele where the body of the late Lord now lieth buried"*. St George's Chapel Windsor have kindly supplied us with a transcript of the contract for Lord Hastings' chantry which was drawn up by Dr Hannes Kleineke.

Lord Hastings' wife Katherine and his son Edward gave St George's Chapel the manors of Farmanby and East Halgarth in Yorkshire to produce an income of £20 a year (equivalent to about £17,500 today.) The contract provided that there would be a service each June marking the anniversary of Lord Hastings' death (his "obit".) Payments were specified of 3s 4d to the Dean, 20d to each canon, 8d to each vicar and the verger, 6d to each clerk, and 4d to each chorister. 20s was to be given to the poor of Windsor and 20d to the bell ringers.

The contract also provided for *"an honest priest to say daily his divine service."* His annual salary was to be £8. The masses to be held on each day of the week were specified. The necessary equipment was to be supplied and every vestment was to *"have the seid lords badges and armes broudred on it."* A house was to be provided to be known as *"the Lord Hastingses Chantry Prestes Chambre."* Katherine and Edward Hastings appointed Sir John Cowell as the first chantry priest.

Most Chantries were abolished when the Church of England was established but there were some exemptions and St George's Chapel was one of these. However, Lord Hastings' Chantry Priest from 1571 to 1585 was John Marbeck who was in fact the Colledge's organist and not an ordained priest at all. It is therefore assumed that the role had become a sinecure by this stage. The appointment of chantry priests at the Chapel ceased altogether in the early 1600s.

However, in the case of the annual services for individuals (the obits) Elizabeth I directed that they should all be combined into a quarterly service and these continue until the present day.

The form of words used is: *"Now, as in duty bound, and in obedience to the statutes and*

*ordinances of the College, we thankfully remember before God, our Founder, patrons and benefactors, whose liberality established the service of God in this place, and built and adorned this Chapel, and has nourished the growth and well-being of the College through the centuries.*

*In the first place we pray for those in whose memory chantries, obits and suffrages were instituted during the Middle Ages in this Chapel.... Among Knights of the Garter, we name... William, 1st Lord Hastings, and Katherine, his wife”*

*Ian's second piece concerns William Hastings' grandson, George.*

#### **WHERE THERE'S A WILL .....**

The will of George Hastings, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Huntingdon, provides a vivid illustration of the religious turmoil of the Tudor period.

George was the grandson of William, Lord Hastings. He was born in Ashby in 1488. George succeeded his father to become the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lord Hastings in 1506. He was created a Knight of the Bath at the coronation of Catherine of Aragon in 1509. He accompanied Henry VIII on a military campaign to France in 1513 and he was present in 1520 at the elaborate celebrations known as the Field of Cloth of Gold which marked the peace treaty between the two countries. In 1529 he was created Earl of Huntingdon.

At that time England was a Catholic country. However, Henry VIII's wish to divorce Catherine of Aragon put him on a collision course with the Pope. In 1530 the Earl was one of the signatories of a letter to the Pope asking him to grant the divorce and threatening dire consequences if he didn't.

It seems surprising therefore that when the Earl made his will in 1534 it was completely Catholic in content. *“He bequeathed his body to be buried in the parish-church of St. Elyne in Ashby de la Zouch.”* He left many of his religious articles to St. Helen's: *“his best pax of silver and gilt, with a crucifix, wherein were Mary and John”* and *“a sepulchre cloth of crimson velvet, embroidered with drops of gold; likewise another suit of vestments, of white tinsell, with two copes of the same; as also a suit of vestments of crimson velvet, which had the cross embroidered thereon with acorns.”*

He *“ordained that his executors should cause a thousand masses to be said or sung, in as short a time as might be after his decease, by secular priests and others, in the county of Leicester and other places adjoining.”* More specifically he *“ordained that his executors, out of the revenues of his lands in Woodcote, and Burton Hastings, co. Warwick, should provide two priests, to sing in the parish-church of Ashby, for the space of 20 years, for all Christian souls, with a salary of £6. 13s. 4d.”* This is equivalent to over £5,000 at today's prices.

Only months later the Act of Supremacy was passed which set up the Church of England and made Henry VIII, and not the Pope, Head of the Church. Presumably George then quietly disposed of his Catholic artefacts.

Two years later, in 1536, there was a popular uprising in the North of England against the suppression of the Catholic Church and the dissolution of the “lesser” monasteries. (The “greater” monasteries were not dissolved until 1539). This became known as the Pilgrimage of Grace and the Earl was instrumental in crushing it.

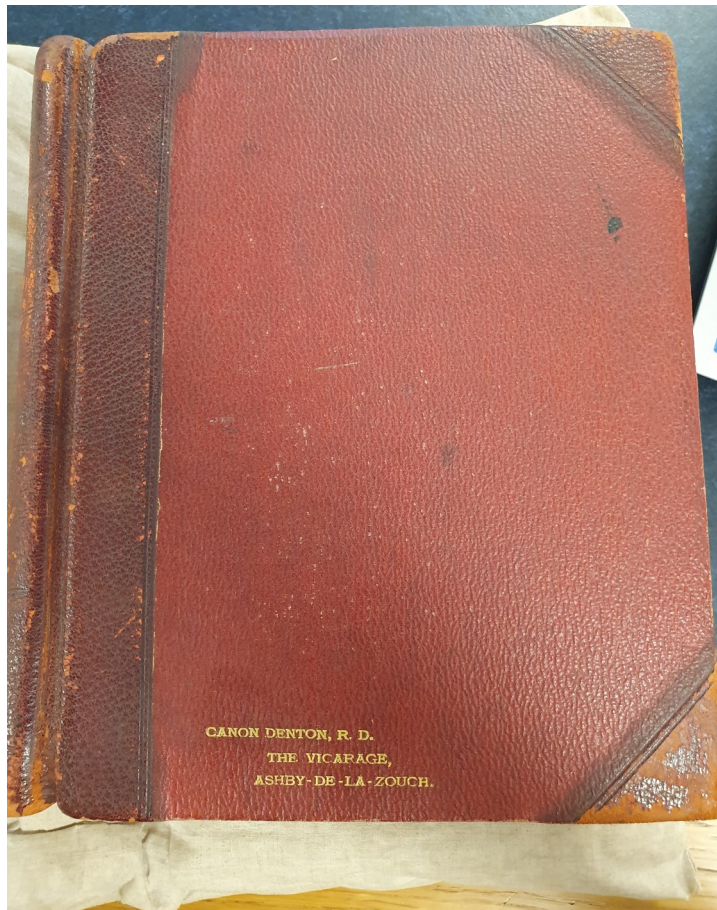
Subsequently George left Ashby to live in Stoke Poges. He died there in 1544 and was buried in Stoke Poges parish church.

*There is a brief history of St Giles Church, Stoke Poges available online, including information about the Hastings Chapel there. Follow this link to learn more:*

[https://www.stokepogeschurch.org/Groups/326774/Our\\_History.aspx](https://www.stokepogeschurch.org/Groups/326774/Our_History.aspx)

## Canon John Denton's Anecdote Books

Julie Starkey is currently researching the life of Canon John Denton, vicar of Holy Trinity, Ashby from 1856-1875 and of St Helen's between 1875-1903. She recently spent a fascinating day in the university library in Cambridge, where Denton was a student, looking at his two literary diaries.



Denton started the diaries as a new student at St John's College in 1848 and continued to write in them his whole life. The first book contains explanatory pages at the beginning on how to keep a 'common-place book' or 'literary diary' after the manner of John Locke (1632-1704), a philosopher and political theorist.

The books are filled with passages copied down by Denton from his reading and include works by Greek philosophers, excerpts from novels and reflections on love and marriage.

It is clear that Denton read widely and thought deeply on many topics and that the books provide a reflection of his state of mind at different stages of his life.

## Hello Heritage

North West Leicestershire District Council have kindly produced an information Board to our design, to display in the Churchyard during 'Hello Heritage,' in September.

There will be free 'Hello Heritage' events taking place across the district throughout September. You can download a free programme of events by clicking on this link: [https://www.nwleics.gov.uk/pages/hello\\_heritage](https://www.nwleics.gov.uk/pages/hello_heritage)

## Hello Heritage...

St Helen's Church - Churchyard Stories [www.sthelensashby.net](http://www.sthelensashby.net)



**An Ancient Burial Place**  
The earliest church built here was Anglo-Saxon, so the churchyard is probably at least 1000 years old. It may contain as many as 10,000 burials.

We have no way of knowing who the earliest burials were, as gravestones were not used until later – all ours are 18th and 19th century. Most of our gravestones are made of local Swithland Slate. Some are in very poor condition now.

For centuries, our churchyard was the only burial place in Ashby, so it accommodated everyone, whatever their faith. In the 1850s it was declared full. The increase in population in Ashby meant that burials needed to happen elsewhere. In 1857 the churchyard was officially closed and burials since then have taken place in the 'new' cemetery on Kilwardby Street. Only interment of ashes happens now, near the north door.

If you'd like to trace an ancestor buried at St Helen's, please get in touch.



**Samuel Mason**  
Governor of the Ashby Workhouse, who died in 1847. One of the well-known Ashby people who was buried at St Helen's.



**The Dunn tomb**  
Many of these larger tombs with brick vaults beneath have been damaged or lost over time. This one is in very poor condition now.



**William Fletcher**  
Just 7 months old when he died in 1821. Note that his grave is inscribed 'of the Wesleyan Itinerancy'. Most children's graves are at the east end of the churchyard.

**Heritage on your doorstep...**

For more information visit [www.nwleics.gov.uk/helloheritage](https://www.nwleics.gov.uk/helloheritage)

