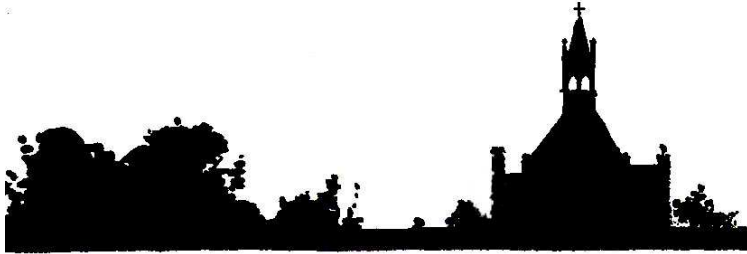


Ellerton Church Preservation Trust

www.ellertonpriory.co.uk



Awarded the CPRE Mark for 2005

For excellence, value and long-term benefit in rural conservation

Newsletter number 9

Spring/Summer 2010

Ellerton Priory launches its website!

By the time you receive this newsletter, the Trust should have launched www.ellertonpriory.co.uk – its new website. Some areas of the site are still under construction and it may take a little time for every section to be up and running, but you will be able to gain access to back-numbers of all our newsletters, get detailed information on our beautiful stained glass, see images all of our Christmas and gift-cards (and order them on-line), and find details of event at Ellerton Priory.

Importantly, you can also find out how to make gift-aided donations, which are essential to our continued success, and can contact us electronically. Please go on-line, test the site for yourselves, and let us know what you think of it. Naturally, we will be putting this newsletter on the site as well, but if you would prefer to receive copies by e-mail so you can send them on to friends who might be interested, just let us know. Of course, if you prefer you can still contact the trustees by writing to ECPT, 13 South Parade, York, YO23 1BF, by e-mailing yorkbear@hotmail.co.uk or by telephoning 01904 630097.

England's churchyards - a natural treasure

The churchyards of England are one of the most enduring features of our landscape. Over the centuries they have become sanctuaries for the living as well as the dead, where an abundance of native and naturalised wildlife can flourish. Our churchyards make up a significant area of land that has survived untouched by intensive agriculture, fertilizers, pesticides or urban development. Once they reflected the character of the countryside round them, but now they are islands of refuge for plants and animals lost from intensively farmed land. Churchyards were usually carved out of ancient meadowland or woodland, and are often rich in species associated with those habitats. Even small churchyards can contain over 100 different flowering plants or ferns, many rare or uncommon, and this varied flora creates an environment in which other forms of wildlife can flourish. Beyond a few very special places like the Lower Derwent Valley, the image of colourful, herb-rich meadows has been lost to the collective memory, but suitably managed churchyards can help to redress that loss.

The enormous importance of churchyards to wildlife was recognised as early as the 1970s, when it was accepted that many native plant and lichen species, and their associated insects, animals and birds, survived only in churchyards. Following discussions between Dr John Habgood, then Archbishop of York, and Sir David Attenborough, the Yorkshire Living Churchyards Project was launched as a joint venture between the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and the Diocese of York.

The principles of the Project are that a well-managed churchyard can be a place of reflection and inspiration for congregations, local residents and visitors alike; a beautiful setting for a church or chapel; a respectful environment in keeping with the purpose of burial and the interment of ashes; a haven for grasses, lichens, wild flowers, birds, butterflies, insects and other wild creatures. Of course, doing things well requires planning, careful management and a certain amount of effort. Grass paths and areas around recent graves can be close-mown, but other grassland areas should be mown or grazed less frequently to encourage a diversity of plants, grass-cuttings or hay should be removed (ideally as a productive crop), trees or shrubs of suitable varieties must be managed or planted, headstones should be left untouched to encourage lichens, walls should be re-pointed in lime mortar, and some patches of nettles should be encouraged as an essential food source for butterflies, moths, beetles and lacewings. This is how an increasing number of Yorkshire churchyards are being managed – often by cheerful groups of volunteers – and it is how we try to manage our ancient churchyard at Ellerton.

Elizabeth Hardcastle of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (1 St George's Place, York, YO24 1GN, telephone 01904 659570) is always delighted to hear from people or parishes interested in the sensitive management of churchyards, and to offer detailed information about the Yorkshire Living Churchyard Project.

Monks and religious lives in the middle ages

The word 'monk' comes from a Greek word meaning 'alone'. People have sought religious enlightenment throughout recorded history and the first monks lived isolated lives, withdrawn from the world. However, by the middle of the fourth century they were beginning to come together in small organised communities, just as they did at Ellerton, with non-religious or 'lay' people assisting with the day-to-day chores so that the monks, or their female equivalents, could concentrate on spiritual duties.

In the middle ages, Christian religious communities of many kinds flourished throughout Europe, following carefully planned routines of prayer, work and study based on the set of rules established by St Benedict, who lived from about the year 480 until 550. Monks were required to make a vow of poverty, chastity and obedience, and all property was held in common. In western Europe, different religious orders gradually developed different practices and approaches to the religious life and adopted different names; Benedictines, Augustinians, Cistercians, Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites and many more. However, the basic principle was the same, and remains so to the present day.

As well as religious centres, monasteries became the focus of learning and education, scholarship, charity and medicine. Many of them offered accommodation for travellers. A very large number were dedicated to looking after the poor and sick, especially the elderly who often had no other means of support. Most had extensive farm lands and supported a variety of small industries, which were intended to make them self-sufficient but were often a major source of local employment. Larger monasteries were frequently popular places of pilgrimage, and some became immensely wealthy through efficient husbandry, donations made by pilgrims, and legacies and gifts of land or money.



A detail from the 'Gilbertine window' in Ellerton Priory, designed and made by Alfred Fisher in 2004. It shows the arms of the Gilbertine order, surrounded by the names and foundation dates of three of its Yorkshire houses, with three mediaeval monks as stonemason, glazier and scribe..

Among the more prominent and influential Yorkshire foundations were the Benedictine houses of Whitby (founded in 657), St Mary's York (1055) and Holy Trinity York (1089), the Augustinian houses of Guisborough (1119), Kirkham (1120) and Bolton (1151), the large and wealthy Cistercian houses of Fountains and Rievaulx (both 1132), Byland (1135) and Jervaulx (1156), and the Carthusian house at Mount Grace (1398).

St Gilbert of Sepringham established the only monastic order actually founded in Britain. The 'Gilbertines' were unusual in a number of ways, and admitted both men and women – occasionally to 'double houses' of both canons and nuns. Life in their monasteries was famously austere and hard, with the men doing most of the physical work and the women living

strictly segregated lives of prayer. There were four Gilbertine houses in Yorkshire; Watton, Old Malton (both 1150), York (c.1200), and ours at Ellerton (c.1203) which was founded principally to care for thirteen poor, elderly men. A small house of Cistercian nuns was also established in the 12th century at Thicket Priory, just across the river from Ellerton.

Religious communities had often been subject to harassment by the authorities. When king Henry VIII declared himself Supreme Head of the Church in England in 1531, he gave himself the freedom to clamp down on them completely – partly because of the wealth and power which some larger houses had accumulated, and partly because he feared that they might pose a political threat if they placed their allegiance to the Pope above the Crown. On the pretext of sorting out monasteries which had become lax and ill disciplined (often on trumped-up evidence), or which had fallen into poverty, he started a programme of closure. Some senior monks and nuns were offered a pension if they returned to ordinary society, and handed their buildings, possessions and lands to the Crown, but many either fled abroad or were simply dispossessed and thrown out of their communities. Resistance could be treated as treason, and there were some executions.

Popular discontent with this process, and with the gradual erosion of Catholic traditions and practices, led to *the Pilgrimage of Grace* – an uprising of the common people against the king's 'evil councillors' which started in 1536 and was led by Robert Aske, a London barrister whose family lived in Aughton, the next parish to Ellerton. The rising eventually attracted as many as thirty or forty thousand 'loyal rebels' across the north and east of England. The king was frightened into promising to meet their demands (which included an end to monastic closures, a general pardon and a parliament in York), and the rebels dispersed. Henry, however, failed to keep his promise and a second uprising began and was ruthlessly suppressed. Aske was arrested, convicted of treason and executed along with more than two hundred other rebel leaders; lords, knights, abbots, priests, monks and yeomen.

By 1540 the monasteries as institutions had gone from England. Worship continued in parish and collegiate churches, and few great monastic churches became cathedrals, like Chester, Gloucester and Bristol, but most of the buildings were made uninhabitable and fell into ruin. The stone and timber were usually re-used, but the lands were dispersed (often among the king's supporters), and almost all of the great libraries and works of art were tragically destroyed, including the greater part of England's mediaeval music, which existed only in precious hand-written copies.

Today, people are sometimes confused about the difference between the various kinds of religious houses. A monastery is the general name for a building occupied by a community of monks. An abbey is a monastery governed by an abbot (or abbess, like Saint Hilda of Whitby) – the appointed head of the community who does not have to refer to a bishop or other authority when making decisions. A priory is home to a group of monks or nuns governed by a prior or prioress (lower in rank than an abbot or abbess) and is a subsidiary institution dependent on the 'parent house' or 'mother house' of its order.

Derwent Valley Conservation Group

Ellerton Church Preservation Trust is one of a number of organisations working within the lower Derwent Valley to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment of this marvellous place. Some, like Natural England, the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and the CPRE, are large and well-known, and can call on professional staff or significant resources. Others – like the ECPT itself – are much smaller and have simpler or more specific aims, but are just as vital. Their committed members provide most of the volunteer effort, passionate enthusiasm, and deep local knowledge on which so many aspects of British life depend. The Derwent Valley Conservation Group is one of these.

The Group was founded to respond to what its members saw as challenges to the natural vitality of the Lower Derwent Valley, and its principal concern is the threat to the ancient and naturally-dynamic management cycle of the herb-rich flood meadows posed by artificial changes to the water table and the embankment of the river. For at least a thousand years local farmers and sympathetic landowners, who understood the delicate and productive relationship between the river and the land, maintained the special qualities of the place. However, in the late twentieth century, the competing interests of coal mining, drainage, navigation and water abstraction have put enormous pressure for sudden, often potentially damaging, change on the topography and rare ecology of the Valley.

The aims of the Group are to monitor the local environment and work with other groups (the East Yorkshire Bat Group, the Ponds for People Trust, Pocklington Canal Amenity Society, the Friends of Skipwith Common, Ellerton Pond Management Committee and others) to make representations to elected bodies, to campaign on behalf of traditional farming and drainage patterns, and to promote wider awareness and appreciation of this magical place. The Derwent Valley Conservation Group is the same age as the ECPT, and the two organisations have always been good, co-operative friends. They share with a number of other local bands of committed people a common vision of a sustainable and cherished cultural landscape, rich in wildlife, creatively managed for the future, but based on a deep understanding of tradition and respect for the achievements of the past.

If you would like to join the Derwent Valley Conservation Group, or ask about them and their activities, the Membership Secretary is Janet Cawston, Field View Cottage, Green Lane, East Cottingwith YO42 4TT. Telephone: 01759 319068.

Publications and gifts

We occasionally get requests for copies of the talks which Phil Thomas gave on *Aughton and the Pilgrimage of Grace* in Aughton church in 2002 and 2008. If you would like to request them, please send your contact details either by e-mail to yorkbear@hotmail.co.uk or by post to ECPT, 13 South Parade, York, YO23 1BF and we will be pleased to e-mail or post copies to you. Remember, we also have a wonderful range of Christmas cards, gift cards and post cards, and informative guides to Ellerton church and its important stained glass. All of these can be ordered directly through our website www.ellertonpriory.co.uk and are also available in the church at events and Open Days.

Some events at Ellerton Priory, Summer 2010

Make a note of these dates in your diary, and please share them with your friends.

Sunday 18th July in the afternoon

'Country Matters' - a musical celebration of nature by **Cantabile** and friends.

Many of you will remember the thrilling sell-out concerts given at Ellerton Priory in 2008 and 2009 by **Cantabile**, 'our' own Leeds-based chamber choir. This year **Cantabile** are singing again at Ellerton, on Sunday 18th July at 3.00 pm. Their exciting programme will explore the life of the land through the choral music of four centuries: from individual birds, animals and flowers (a blue bird, a white swan, a lamb, an evening primrose, a sprig of thyme and a whole bouquet of glorious roses) to pictures of the landscape and its beauties (the woods, waters and skies of England, the flowers of the field, creatures basking in the magical radiance of a queen); from a brief glimpse of man working and walking the land, to the secret prayers of frightened animals crowded in Noah's Ark, and the whole created world seen as Christ's own paradise garden. Tickets for this not-to-be-missed **Cantabile** concert cost £5.00 each (£3.00 for children and disabled) and can be purchased on the door or reserved in advance by leaving a message with yorkbear@hotmail.co.uk or on 01904 630097. Plentiful refreshments will be available, including perfect Summer-afternoon wine, and there is ample car parking near the church. Come early to be sure of a good seat.

Sunday 12th September all day

This year the church and churchyard will be open for National Heritage Open Days from 10.30 am to 5.30 pm on Sunday 12th September. Our theme for 2010 will be OWLS, with an exhibition and some special owl nature and art activities for families and young people, and Richard will again be on hand to help you discover things you never knew about moths and creepy-crawlies. Once again there will be generous portions of our famously delicious home-made cakes and refreshments, fine local produce, a tombola, a second-hand book sale, guidebooks, cards, and lovely black Hebridean sheep grazing the churchyard. Why not join them, and bring a picnic to share with your friends, or have lunch in Ellerton's great village pub? Phil's comprehensive and ever-popular guided tours of the whole site will be at 11.00 am, 1.00 pm and 4.00 pm, and he will be here to answer questions all day. This year there will be some new historic furnishings to see, and the interior plasterwork and lime-washing will at last be complete! Last year we promised visitors a fully restored interior, but applying four layers of superb lime plaster takes huge amounts of time, skill and care. It could not be rushed, and was not finished in time. However, this year it will be finished, and the interior of Ellerton Priory will look lovelier than at any time since it was closed more than 30 years ago.

On the previous day, 11th September, the fabulous church of St Martin-cum-Gregory, Micklegate, York, will be opened by The Stained Glass Trust.

Oh, and last year's raffle winners were: first prize to Lesley Charlesworth, second prize to Grace Senkans, both of Ellerton, third prize to Mr C Williams of Hull.

Directions to Ellerton Priory

Ellerton is 14 miles south-east of York, just off the B1228 York-Howden road, which is accessible from the north via the A64/A1079 or from the south via the A163 at Bubwith. The church is the last building at the far end of the village, and access is via a grass path and two small steps (ramp available). We have plentiful car parking, but no dogs are allowed in the car park field, please. Nearby is **The Boot and Shoe** - a friendly, traditional village pub with great ales, where very hearty meals can be booked in advance (01757 288346). **PLEASE NOTE** that during the Summer months of 2010 the bridge at Elvington may be closed for repairs. This will not affect travellers from the south via Bubwith, but those approaching from York or the A64 may have to follow diversions from the A1079 which will add 5 or 10 minutes to the journey.