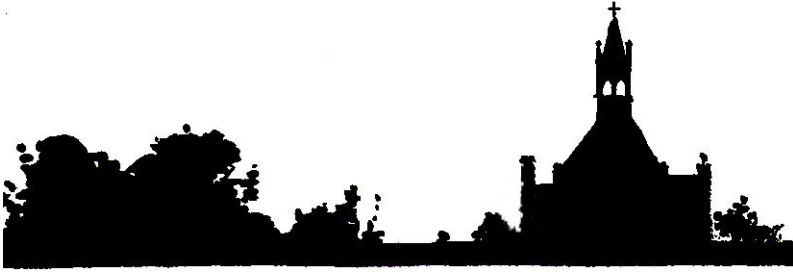


Ellerton Church Preservation Trust



Awarded the CPRE Mark for 2005

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

Newsletter number 10

Spring 2011

Living with birds; the joys and the challenges

It has to be said that the users of Ellerton church, have a bit of a love/hate relationship with the resident birds – something which occasional visitors are probably not aware of. Of course, birds are one of the great joys of the place, and everyone loves seeing huge flocks of waders taking advantage of the winter floods, hearing the magical piping of the curlews above the ings on a warm day, or watching the comic antics of the jackdaws above the church roof – despite their untidy habits.

However, when Stephen Warburton and Phil Thomas, who together with a couple of friends founded the ECPT, first visited the derelict church in 1991, the building was open to the elements, and open also to the birds. When eventually Stephen and Phil managed to get inside they found that the floor was more than a foot deep in the remains of dead pigeons and squabs, feathers, twigs, sticks, rotten wood from the floors and every kind of rubbish, all damp and bound together with more than a decade's worth of bird droppings. Understandably, the smell was overwhelming. And apart from the huge numbers of pigeons, jackdaws and whatever else was almost certainly benefiting from the shelter of the remaining roof, there were barn owls in residence.

When preparations were being made to restore the church, it was obvious that everything should be done to ensure the continued well-being of the owls. With the support of English Nature (now Natural England), the trustees and their architect, Peter Pace, drew up plans for an owl nesting box in the rafters of the nave roof, against the east gable. A carefully-designed narrow opening was created in the wall of the gable, and the box was built inside, high among the roof timbers. For a while, the back of the box was left open so that the birds could still get into the church while the smashed windows were boarded-up and the roofs sheeted over. By the time building works began, at the end furthest from the owl box, the owls were used to coming and going through their new front door in the gable, so the door at the back was closed and they were denied access to the interior of the church - but had a fine new house in compensation.

Since then, barn owls have regularly nested in the box, successfully rearing many broods of chicks, but some years they are forced to compete with the jackdaws who stake an early claim for the same space. From time to time the trustees assemble a scaffold tower below the nesting box and David Hargreaves, our intrepid wildlife man, ascends to the heights equipped with thick gloves, dust-mask, wrap-around goggles and lots of bin bags, to open the hatch at the back of the box and haul out great armfuls of the filthy sticks, plastic and sheep's wool from which the jackdaws build their nests and with which they prevent the owls from reclaiming their space. But we love our owls, and are proud of them, so we certainly don't mind doing a bit of housework to help them out.

We aren't certain whether they have actually nested in the church this year, but we do know that they are still around. Their droppings liberally splash the stone benches inside the porch, where they sit after eating and regurgitate the bones, fur and other inedible parts of their meals (or victims) in the form of the numerous owl pellets which we find scattered on the floor. Pellets are also regularly found at the base of the west wall below the bell-cote, and there are lime splashes on the walls above, so they obviously use that as a convenient perch in addition to the porch.

Meanwhile, the pigeons have also transferred their attentions to the inside of the porch, nesting in the roof structure and on top of the wooden wall-plates where the walls meet the roof. This is a real nuisance because feral pigeons not only harbour fleas and other parasites, but their droppings and urine are very damaging to the fabric of the building and can carry serious human diseases. The trustees are investigating ways of blocking off these spaces so as to prevent their nesting activity, and we will keep you posted on our progress. However, we have spoken to the Hawk and Owl Trust, and have been relieved to discover that keeping out the pigeons will in no way discourage the owls. Most years we also have swallows, blackbirds and blue-tits nesting on other parts of the structure, the latter using improbably small crevices in the inner stonework above the entrance arch which presumably open into larger cavities within the wall. None of these is a problem to us, being neither messy nor pestilential, and are all very welcome additions to the ecology of Ellerton church.

A taste of Ellerton – delicious cakes to make at home

Regular visitors to Ellerton Open Days often comment on the impressive variety and quality of the cakes served at our refreshment stall – last year eleven different kinds of cake from four different countries! In recent years our enthusiastic chief baker and pastry-cook has been Michael Roesen, who has kindly agreed to share a couple of his delicious recipes with Ellerton Priory friends.

Apple and vanilla flan-cake

For the dough

250 grams self-raising flour
125 grams white sugar
1 teaspoon real vanilla essence
1 egg
1 dessertspoon water
125 grams butter
2 dessertspoons breadcrumbs

For the filling and topping

1 kilo sharp dessert apples (like granny Smith)
½ teaspoon cinnamon
2 packets vanilla pudding mix
(these should be the kind usually made with boiling milk - a good British equivalent would be vanilla blancmange powder or vanilla Symington's Table Cream)
750 ml apple juice
500 ml whipping cream
1 teaspoon real vanilla essence
A little sugar to taste
Cocoa powder for decoration

Pre-heat the oven to 180° C (about 15° to 20° less for fan ovens)

Method

Rub together the flour, sugar, 1 teaspoon of vanilla essence, egg, water and butter quickly in a bowl to make a dough, then place it in the refrigerator for 1 hour. Butter a 10" (25 cm) spring-form cake tin and spread half the dough on the bottom. Use the remaining dough to make a ring 2" (5 cm) high around the sides of the tin, like a flan case, and spread the breadcrumbs over the base. Set this aside for the moment.

Peel, core and quarter the apples, and cut each quarter into thin slices. Lay the slices in the dough case and scatter the cinnamon over them. Bring the apple juice gently to the boil and add the pudding mixes (or mix them cold and bring to the boil, according to the instructions). Pour the pudding mixture over the apples and place the tin in the pre-heated oven for 1 hour. Allow the cake to cool and store it overnight in a refrigerator.

Beat the cream with 1 teaspoon of vanilla essence and a little sugar to taste until very thick. Remove the cake from the tin, spread the cream over the top in a thick layer, and sprinkle with cocoa powder to decorate.

Walnut and raisin cake

Quantities for two cakes

6 eggs
2 cups sugar (1 white and 1 soft brown or muscovado)
1 teaspoon real vanilla essence
2 dessertspoons butter, softened
2 cups self-raising flour
2 cups raisins
2 cups chopped walnuts

Pre-heat the oven to 200° C (about 15° to 20° less for fan ovens)

Method

Beat the eggs, sugar and vanilla together with a mixer until thick and creamy. Blend in the softened butter for a few seconds on the highest speed. Mix in the flour on a slow setting until you have a smooth mixture. Fold in the walnuts and raisins by hand. Line 2 baking trays (c.9" x 12") with baking paper, spread the mixture between them, and bake in the pre-heated oven for twenty minutes.

The quantities can be halved to make a single cake.

Ellerton's architect; a great Victorian in Yorkshire

It now seems likely that the important English architect John Loughborough Pearson (1817-97), the man who designed the present Ellerton Priory church in 1846, was actually born in Belgium, probably in Brussels, but he was raised in Durham and always regarded himself as a Durham man and a true north-easterner.

Although he trained in London, and based his practice there, Pearson's superb work is to be found all over England, Wales and beyond; for example, the cathedral in Brisbane in Australia is one of his most inventive designs. However, his earliest churches are in Yorkshire, and he returned to the county many times throughout his long and distinguished career, creating typical examples of fine new Anglican churches of every kind, epoch-making restorations, sensitive repairs, new houses and schools, and even a few unusual stained glass windows.

All but one of Pearson's first six churches are in East Yorkshire, and this was the region where he rehearsed his skills and refined a talent that would blossom into something close to genius. His first building of any consequence was the simple church at Ellerker (1843-44), built for a Durham friend whose son was to be the new vicar there.

Pearson's sound building work and dependable character clearly made a good impression locally, because four more East Riding churches followed in as many years; Elloughton (rebuilt after a serious fire), a charming little chapel in the garden of Wauldby Manor near Welton,

North Ferriby where he was able to build his first spire (he would become a celebrated expert), and Ellerton (1846-48). The last two were built by Simpson & Malone of Hull, a young firm of monumental masons who were keen to develop as builders and eventually became one of the leading firms in the region. Each of these designs was an advance on the one before, and Elloughton, Ferriby and Ellerton all incorporated re-used mediaeval features and stonework. They showed a real understanding of the character and value of ancient work that was still rare and noteworthy in the 1840s.

While Ellerton was rising, young Pearson designed his first two works of true power and originality; a widely admired church (now demolished) in west London, and the beautiful little lake-side church at Llangasty-talyllyn in Breconshire, where he also designed a country house, a lovely school and other buildings, all for the Raikes family of bankers from Hull with whom he had become friendly when designing Wauldby chapel for Mrs Raikes.

He returned to Yorkshire in the late-1850s, employed by Sir Tatton Sykes of Sledmere to carry out superb and imaginative restorations at Kirkburn (again with Simpson & Malone), at Garton on the Wolds and at Bishop Wilton, where he carefully distinguishes between ancient and new work in a way that is decades ahead of its time, and where he designed the stained glass in the east window in 1863. He also made designs for new churches at Thixendale and Wansford and for cottages at Sledmere, but sadly they remained on the drawing-board. Around 1860 he was responsible for the humble church and parsonage at Broomfleet, and built one complete new church for Sykes, at Hilston on the East Yorkshire coast, but it was destroyed during the Second World War.

Whilst working for Sir Tatton, Pearson created two of the most important British churches of the late-1850s for other local clients in East Yorkshire; the highly original Scorsborough for lord Hotham's agent, and for lord Hotham himself the breathtakingly lavish South Dalton, a virtuoso building which has one of the most thrilling and elegant spires built anywhere in the 19th century.

Pearson's major works of the 1860s include the astonishingly compressed, powerful little church at Appleton-le-Moors, together with the delightful school and the now-altered parsonage in the same village, and the grand new church at Wentworth in South Yorkshire. He built the huge new church at Headingley, Leeds, in the 1880s and a decade later designed the enlargement of the east end of Wakefield Cathedral, including the supremely elegant lady chapel, but did not live to see it completed.

Among many lesser Yorkshire works of his mature years were a reformatory chapel, a new church at Horsforth, a school and parish room beside the marvellous vicarage he built at Clifton in York – which remains one of his very best houses – and the former parsonage house at Wistow, now sadly spoiled. Apparently the fine little brick church of the 1880s at Hambleton, near Selby is Pearson's work, too. It is quiet and discreet, but the interior has a real sense of warmth and welcome. Unexecuted mature projects in Yorkshire included churches for Tockwith and

Whitwell-on-the-Hill, and several designs for schools, cottages and farm buildings.

He carried out many church restorations in the county in the fifty years between the late-1840s and his death in 1897. Among these Lastingham, where between 1872 and 1879 he re-constructed the east end and added the superbly daring and memorable stone vault on top of the mediaeval walls, is outstanding and nationally important. His contributions at Sigglesthorne (where he designed the excellent east window stained glass), Bishop Burton (again with Ellerton's builders, Simpson & Malone), Settrington (where he added a new chancel on the foundations of the lost mediaeval one) and Brayton are all notable and sometimes impressive, and he executed works of repair or restoration to at least sixteen other churches across the county.

Pearson's work is never merely clever or showy, and it never sets out to impress. The colours tend to be subdued and there is usually little sculptural decoration (although there is often fine stained glass). At first sight his churches can seem cool and rather serious, and only rarely is there a real 'wow' factor – although there are magnificent exceptions like the spire at South Dalton, or the interior of his wonderful masterpiece, St Augustine, Kilburn, in north London. Pearson's is a quiet, thoughtful art of balance, light and shade, of crisp line and structure, and of calm, beautifully contrasted spaces.

All of us who know and love our church at Ellerton have much to be proud of – including 'our' architect – and no serious 'church-crawler' or lover of Yorkshire and its beauties or history should miss an opportunity to visit South Dalton, Bishop Wilton, Wentworth, Appleton-le-Moors or its magical neighbour, Lastingham.

The re-building of Ellerton was a small, but vital step on Pearson's long journey to greatness, and marked the end of the apprenticeship of a remarkable 19th century artist.



A carved limestone head-stop above the inside of one of the west windows at Ellerton Priory.

Events at Ellerton Priory, Summer and Autumn 2011

Please make a note of these dates in your diary, share them with your friends, and remember to check our website www.ellertonpriory.co.uk

Sunday 17th July, 3.00 pm

Cantabile sings of Spanish Treasure!

Many of you will remember the wonderful concerts given at Ellerton Priory over the last three years by the chamber choir **Cantabile** – www.cantabile-leeds.org.uk. Despite being based in Leeds, **Cantabile** is fast turning into Ellerton's own resident choir! This year they will be singing again at Ellerton Priory church, on Sunday 17th July at 3.00 pm, with a programme which highlights the exotic beauties of Spanish music – and contrasts them with a few treats from their recent hugely successful concert in Leeds.

This year is the 400th anniversary of the death of Tomás Luis de Victoria, widely regarded as the greatest Spanish composer of the late Renaissance. Victoria wrote music of dazzling perfection and intensity which will be superbly at home in Ellerton's warm acoustic. **Cantabile** will combine a selection of his short pieces with some 20th century Spanish favourites, including fantastically warm and witty folksong arrangements, filled with the smouldering rhythms of guitar and tambourine, and a gorgeous anthem written by the great 'cellist Pablo Casals. The programme will include a selection of atmospheric English, American, German and even Hungarian delights which explore in music the themes of day and night, light and darkness.

Tickets for this not-to-be-missed **Cantabile** concert cost £6.00 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. Refreshments are included in the ticket price, including perfect Summer-afternoon wine and soft drinks, and as always there will be ample car parking close to the church. Come early to be sure of a good seat.

Saturday 20th and Sunday 21st August, 11.00 am to 4.30 pm

Come and join us for as much or as little as you like of our maintenance days; painting downpipes and ironwork, cleaning out gullies and gutters, lime-washing, polishing, and a general clean-up before the September Open Day. Equipment and drinks provided, but bring lunch, and wear sensible clothing and stout boots. 11.00 am to 4.30 pm.

Sunday 11th September, all day

This year the church and churchyard will once again be open for National Heritage Open Days from 10.30 am to 5.30 pm on Sunday 11th September. Our theme has yet to be decided – last year's Owl exhibition will certainly take some beating – but we will do our best to have something intriguing and interesting for all the family.

Weather permitting, Richard will again be on hand to help you discover things you never knew about moths and creepy-crawlies, there will be art activities for the younger folk and of course there will be generous portions of our famously delicious home-made cakes and refreshments, fine local produce, a tombola, a second-hand book sale, a plant stall, gifts, cards, guidebooks and some lovely black Hebridean sheep grazing the churchyard. Why not join them, and bring a pic-nic to share with your friends, or have lunch in Ellerton's great village pub? Phil's comprehensive guided tours of the whole site will be at 11.00 am, 1.00 pm and 4.00 pm, and he will be on-hand to answer questions all day. This year there are new historic furnishings to see, and the interior of Ellerton Priory will be looking lovelier than at any time since it was closed more than 30 years ago. And who knows, we might even have finished the lime-washing at long last!

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 in the car park field, please. Nearby is *The Boot and Shoe* - a really friendly, traditional village pub with great ales, where very hearty meals can be booked in advance (01757 288346).