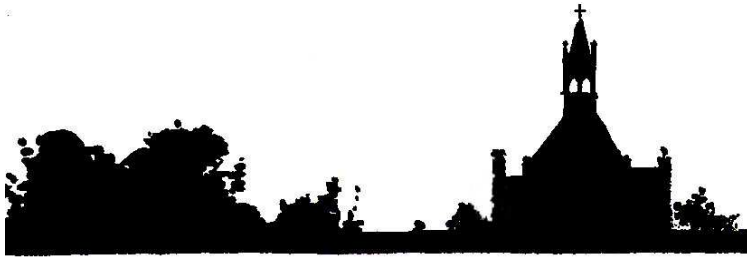


Ellerton Church Preservation Trust



Awarded the CPRE Mark for 2005

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

Newsletter number 4

April 2006

Josephine Michaela's great day

On a glorious, sunny Saturday last August a very special ceremony took place in our restored Priory church; the baptism of Josephine Michaela Marr, youngest of the Marr family of Ellerton House, and Rolf's little sister. It was probably the first baptism since 1977 and the first religious ceremony of any kind since 1978. The church was crowded to bursting with one hundred and fifty people, and what an extraordinary crowd it was; some were local neighbours, but others were relatives and friends from five continents who had travelled many thousands of miles to celebrate this Ellerton occasion. The event was sumptuous in every way. Lavender was strewn on the floor of the porch to be crushed underfoot, creating a calm, sensuous entrance as the guests walked through the sunshine, past the sheep in the churchyard, and into the into flower-filled nave. The unique space was overflowing with gorgeous arrangements, bouquets and posies of scented Old English flowers - plump roses, pale lilies and other blossoms creating a wash of mauves, blues, pinks and cream against the rough stone and plaster.

Quite rightly, all attention was focussed on Josephine and her family, sitting close to the ancient font under its spectacular, seventeenth century cover specially restored for the occasion. Cathy Otton-Goulder, a good friend of Ellerton church and a Church of England Reader, presided and gave a moving address describing the spiritual journey from childhood into the life of a loving and caring adult. Josephine herself responded by smiling broadly and going on a journey round the whole church, sharing her flowers and christening candle with friends and family alike. Then she was greeted with a loving song.

And the celebrations did not finish there. Afterwards the whole community was invited to a spectacular party in the Marr's garden where lavish food, singing, dancing and entertainment completed a perfect, sunny Summer afternoon.

Remembering Snowden Slights

Snowden Slights was surely the most famous wildfowler of the lower Derwent valley. He was born in July 1830, the second son of the schoolmaster at East Cottingwith, and took a keen interest in wildfowling from an early age. When he was about nine he began accompanying his father on wildfowling trips, and by the age of fifteen he was proficient enough to be allowed to go out on his own. Wildfowling was a winter occupation, so during the summer months Snowden laboured casually for local farmers, ran errands for his father or worked in the Kitchen garden. He watched the local basket makers, quickly learned their art, and eventually set up his own small basket making workshop.

A lot of wildfowling was done from a punt. Snowden eventually owned several punts; typically about 17 feet long, with a beam width of 2 feet 10 inches and a depth from keel to gunwale of only 10 inches. With this draught, he could follow his quarry into very shallow water indeed. Even when loaded with his famous 'big gun' the mean draught was a mere 4 inches! Snowden also owned a formidable arsenal, including the 'big gun' built for his father by the Arkill company of Beverley. This extraordinary weapon, which weighed 140 lbs, with a barrel 10 feet long and a bore of 1¾ inches, was muzzle-loaded and fired by percussion. Not surprisingly, it turned out to be a little unwieldy, so the barrel was eventually shortened to 9 feet and the weight was correspondingly reduced to around 100 lbs.

As for his quarry, the species he caught and the prices they fetched at market are well documented. Bittern would fetch 2/- (10 pence), spotted crake 6d (2½ pence), geese between 2/- and 3/6 (10 to 17½ pence), common snipe also 6d, teal 1/- (5 pence) and whooper swans between 6/6 and 7/- (32½ to 35 pence) each.

Snowden died in 1913, and is buried at East Cottingwith. Described as a fine sportsman, and a good-natured, honest and generous man, he will soon be commemorated at Ellerton Priory with a new stained glass window, designed by Andrew Anderson. It will celebrate not only his place in local folklore, but also the unbreakable link between man and landscape.

Our living churchyard

Today's countryside provides few habitats suitable for the rich diversity of plants and animals which were widespread only a century ago. Of these habitats, hay meadows and unimproved pastures have disappeared most rapidly - an amazing 97% lost in the fifty years up to 1984. In many places, churchyards - sacred spaces, grazed by sheep and mown with a scythe for centuries - are now the only places where meadow wildlife thrives, and the headstones provide a perfect home for lichens.

Recognising this, the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust set up its Living Churchyards Project to promote best practice in managing the churchyards of Yorkshire for the benefit of wildlife; primarily by ensuring that traditional hay meadow management is maintained, showing that this need not create an overgrown wilderness and encouraging local people to become involved.

At Ellerton, we do not have the benefit of centuries of continuous traditional management. Like the Priory church itself, the grassland in the old part of the churchyard also fell into dereliction. But while buildings can be repaired fairly quickly with skill, money, energy and good will, restoring grassland habitats takes time and patience. When Stephen Warburton, co-founder of the Ellerton Church Preservation Trust, first saw the church falling into ruin, he also recognised the importance of restoring the churchyard as a wildlife haven. He encouraged the clearance of elders and brambles and led the annual hay cut with great determination.

This year, the churchyard will receive its tenth haycut since the formation of the ECPT. Tall grasses still dominate, but there is already a surprising diversity of plants. Butterflies, like the ringlet, are now breeding. A 2001 survey found 44 lichens, including several rarities. To monitor how all the species are adapting to our management of the churchyard, we are setting up a wildlife database. Please help us by recording any species you see in the churchyard. Records should include the species observed, the date of observation and your name. We would like regular visitors to send a list of their findings at the end of the year, but records sent at any time would be invaluable. Please send information by post to ECPT 13 South Parade York YO23 1BF or email to wildlife@ellerton.org or just push a piece of paper under the church door!

Events at Ellerton Priory, 2006

Please put these dates in your diary, and share them with your friends.

Sunday 28th May

A special event to unveil the magnificent memorial to Stephen Warburton (at 11.45am), combined with a celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and **a chance to purchase a limited edition art print** created by Mark Hearld for the YWT Memorial Appeal. 10.00 am - 5.00pm, exhibitions and many family wildlife activities throughout the day. Wonderful cream teas. Bring a picnic! Details on enclosed leaflet.

Sunday 21st May

Church open 1.00pm - 5.00pm in conjunction with Ellerton Open Gardens.

Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th June

A working weekend for enthusiastic volunteers, including lime-washing inside the church works in the churchyard, 10.30am - 4.30pm both days. Bring overalls, stout old footwear, work-gloves and lunch.

Sunday 25th June

Continuing the activities of the previous weekend, the details are the same.

Sunday 10th September

Please note the date of our **2006 Heritage Open Day** which we hope will once again be the highlight of our year. Further details in a later mail-out.

Friday 15th September

A private visit and guided tour for the Friends of Kettle's Yard, Cambridge. The trustees will always try to accommodate group visits (01904 630097).

Saturday 16th September

Advance notice of the 2006 Stephen Warburton Memorial Lecture. Details will soon be available from: helen_kirk@tiscali.co.uk

Directions to Ellerton

Ellerton is 13 miles south-east of York, just off the B1228 York-Howden road. The church is the last building at the far end of the village. Access is via a grass path and two steps. There is an excellent traditional pub in the village, the Boot & Shoe.

Ellerton Church Preservation Trust has benefited from generous funding from the Local Heritage Initiative. LHI is a partnership between the Heritage Lottery Fund, Nationwide Building Society and the Countryside Agency



A sandstone beast on the bell-cote at Ellerton Priory



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