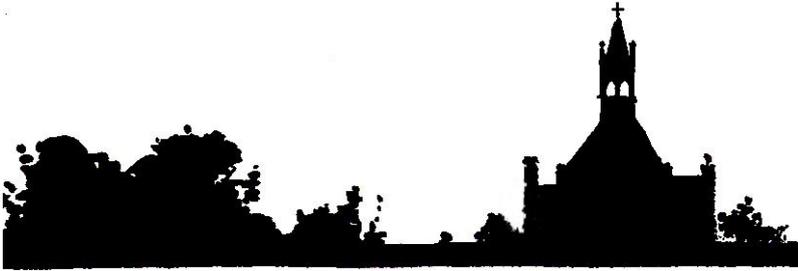


Ellerton Church Preservation Trust



Awarded the CPRE Mark for 2005

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

Newsletter number 11

Spring 2012

A delicate balance; to mow or not to mow?

The system of managing the Churchyard at Ellerton which has been in place for the last 15 years is designed to mimic the agricultural practice of taking hay from the land. Of course, hay-cropping has been an essential part of the management of the surrounding Derwent Valley for many hundreds of years, but there the system evolved partly in response to the annual Winter flooding and partly to provide farmers with a useful agricultural crop. However, mediaeval builders sensibly sited their villages and churches on slightly higher ground, so the churchyard at Ellerton has never been flooded by the river and is not required to produce a saleable crop. So why should we copy a system, which some would regard as being a not very wildlife-friendly way to manage a churchyard?

There is no doubt that it disadvantages some species, but it is hugely beneficial to others. And hay meadows, once so plentiful, continue to be greatly endangered. At the best of times nature conservation is a compromise between satisfying the needs of different, often competing, species – and competition is what makes for biological richness. Ellerton churchyard does not exist in a vacuum, and its management needs to take account of the aspirations and views of its neighbours.

And we must also remember what a churchyard is actually for; a place set aside for the burial and commemoration of the dead. People have been buried in Ellerton for at least 800 years, and in some other places for far longer. Relatives and friends have come to visit and remember them, and to place memorials to those they loved and admired. This means that churchyards are often mown or cropped to keep them tidy and to allow access for visitors and funeral parties. Over time some parts are gradually filled up, and the 'active' burials move elsewhere within the churchyard. Consequently, older areas become neglected or are less frequently mown and tidied.

Such 'benign neglect' can mean that wildlife of many kinds will find ways to flourish in harmony with the church and its surroundings. If, however, it turns into total neglect it will often lead to the churchyard being

taken over entirely by certain dominant or aggressive species such as cocksfoot, false oat grass or hogweed. It is often forgotten that the English landscape we now value so much is not really 'natural' at all, but is almost entirely the result of thousands of years of human intervention and management. At Ellerton our system is aimed at arresting the dominance of some species whilst selectively encouraging others to flourish.

If the entire churchyard was mown only very occasionally it would soon start to look unkempt and un-loved, which it certainly is not, and to create the impression that the church was neglected. On the other hand, mowing everywhere too frequently would leave it looking like any other heavily maintained, bright green lawn with almost no ecological value. Instead, we mow particular areas with differing frequency.

The footpath up to the church and around the west end is cut by a very kind volunteer, perhaps 6 or 7 times a year. A slightly bigger area is not cut until the cowslips have finished flowering, and then again during the Summer time. This régime helps to maintain a large and increasing cowslip population which cannot thrive elsewhere, and stops taller grasses from dominating. The remaining areas of the ancient burial ground, now closed for burials, are cut once during July and the resulting hay-crop is removed and used to feed cattle. These areas are then grazed in Autumn by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Hebridean sheep to reduce the re-growth of grass in preparation for the following year.



Over the last 6 years or so this pattern has seen a welcome reduction in the dominance of ranker grasses and perennial plants, and over the coming years we hope to encourage greater diversity and richness through sensitive and appropriate management.

What, no Ellerton olympics? ...then let's mark the Jubilee instead

As the Summer progresses, most people will probably grow very weary of hearing about the 2012 Olympic Games in London, so in a spirit of self-sacrifice, the Ellerton Church Preservation Trust has decided to do nothing to mark the great event. Anyway what on earth would we do? A weekend of 400m headstone hurdling? Synchronised lime-washing? A 4x4 hay-cutting relay? Perhaps not, although competitive international cake-baking might have its attractions....

Instead, we have decided to focus on this year's other national celebration; the Royal Jubilee. After all, the Olympic Games come round every 4 years but we have had to wait 115 years since the last British diamond jubilee, and Ellerton Priory does have a unique, albeit modest, royal connection already, and this is it.

In 2001, Stephen Warburton asked Alfred Fisher, the celebrated glazier and past-Master of the Worshipful Company of Glaziers, if he would make a window for Ellerton commemorating the Gilbertine canons who had founded the Priory in 1203. Alf agreed, suggesting that it might take up to a year. In fact nothing happened until 19th January 2004, when he telephoned and asked to speak to Stephen. He was understandably shocked when he learned that Stephen had died that very morning, and explained that the window was so late because shortly afterwards he had been asked to design and make one for the Queen's chapel at Buckingham Palace, and felt that the royal commission should take precedence.

However, apart from the red bars on the shield of arms (cut from a single piece of rare and precious 'gold-pink' glass) he had made the Ellerton window entirely out of off-cuts from the Queen's window. 'Please tell your visitors about your very unusual royal connection' he said. A few days later, more than 120 jewel-like pieces of beautifully painted glass arrived in York, carefully wrapped inside a whole toilet roll, ready to be leaded-up by Phil Thomas and installed by Keith Barley.

So, our major event to mark the Royal Diamond Jubilee will be this year's annual Ellerton Summer concert, given by **Cantabile**. This popular chamber choir – now definitely Ellerton's 'own' ensemble – will present a lovely programme, uniting the music of the period of the first Queen Elizabeth with that of the present Queen:

Garland of Song Echoes of the first Elizabethan age.

The eras will be linked by thrilling choral extracts from an opera about Elizabeth I composed for the coronation of Elizabeth II. Full details are given on the back page.

Another taste of Ellerton; ...more of Michael's delicious open-day cakes

Enjoy these recipes for two more fantastic cakes from Ellerton Priory's own expert baker-cum-pastry-cook. These were both popular at our Autumn Open day last year, and with any luck will be on the menu again this September, when Michael is promising to bake real, home-made Apfelstrudel.

Traditional 'nussecken' (nutty corners)

For the dough

250 grams self-raising flour
125 grams white sugar
1 teaspoon real vanilla extract
2 egg yolks
130 grams butter

For the filling and decoration

Apricot jam
200 grams sugar
1 teaspoon real vanilla extract
4 tablespoons water
200 grams butter
300 grams ground almonds or other nuts
200 grams chopped almonds, hazelnuts or walnuts
2 whipped egg whites
Chocolate (dark or light to taste)

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

Method

Rub together the dough ingredients, then line two 8" x 12" baking trays with baking paper. Divide the mixture equally between the baking trays, pat it flat and spread with a thin layer of apricot jam on top.

Bring the remaining sugar, butter, vanilla extract and water to boil in a saucepan, stirring continually. Remove the pan from the heat, and when the syrup has cooled a little, mix in the ground and chopped nuts and then fold in the stiffly beaten egg whites.

Spread the mixture over the dough and jam, and bake in the pre-heated oven for approximately 25 minutes. While still hot, divide each cake into 12 rectangles and cut each rectangle into 2 triangles. Leave in the trays to cool completely.

Melt the chocolate over a saucepan of boiling water. Dip the edges of each triangle in the chocolate, and place on a cooling rack until set. Now, make a cup of tea or coffee and enjoy this traditional German delicacy!

Fresh berry cake

For the dough

200 grams plain flour
50 grams white sugar
100 grams butter
1 egg
A pinch of salt

For the filling

3 egg yolks
125 grams white sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
200 grams ground almonds or hazelnuts
500 grams fresh berries (redcurrants, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries or a mixture of these)
3 stiffly beaten egg whites

Pre-heat the oven to 200° C

Method

Rub together the dough ingredients. Butter a 10" (25 cm) spring-form cake tin and use half the dough to cover the base and the remainder to line the sides. Bake in a pre-heated oven for 10 minutes. Set aside.

Beat together the egg yolks, sugar and vanilla extract until light and creamy. Gently mix in the ground nuts and all the berries, then fold in the stiffly-beaten egg whites. Pour into the cake tin and bake in the pre-heated oven for 30 minutes. Allow to cool in the tin, remove and decorate with a little icing sugar if you wish.

'Anorak Corner':

Ellerton and the weird world of York font-covers

Alright, so this is deep in train-spotting territory, but the beautiful 17th century font-cover at Ellerton really is an important piece of furniture, so why not celebrate it?

The font itself is the vessel (usually of stone) which holds the water used for baptism. Ancient font covers were intended to protect the holy water in the font from superstitious abuse or pilfering. At first they were simply flat lids with locks, but gradually they evolved into elaborate spires of delicate woodwork, as at Thirsk or Halifax. There was a revival of enthusiasm for them in the mid-17th century, when lots were made which looked like octagonal wooden candle-snuffers – as at Northallerton, Middleton near Pickering, or Richmond.

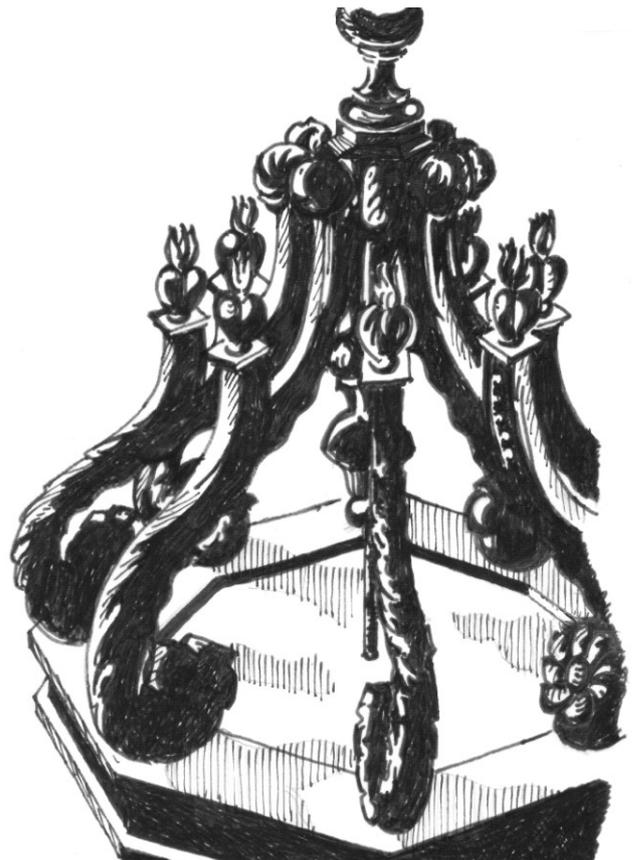
Ellerton's cover was 'made anew' in 1638 for St John's in York, and it is far more stylish and forward-looking even than many much later ones. It has a deep wooden lid from which rise eight carved leafy arms or scrolls,

each supporting a little flaming heart, and gathered at the top under an acorn and a plump gilded dove. It is the earliest of a group of similar font covers in the City, known as the 'York' font covers. Those in St Martin-cum-Gregory and St Mary Bishophill were made about 60 years later, probably by the same hand, and are far cruder. The font covers at St Martin Coney Street and in Holy Trinity Micklegate (originally made for York St Saviour) both date from 1717 and are closely modelled on Ellerton's, but carved with far more sophistication.

There are other 17th century examples within a few miles of York. Kirby Misperton's is Shaker-like in its innocence; just eight smoothly curving wooden blades. Crayke's is primitive and savage, with leaves like knobby hooks and a finial like an exotic weapon. Bossall has a very crude version of the Ellerton type as does Bolton Percy, where it sits like a fancy Restoration hat on top of an old-fashioned base with little Gothic windows in each side. Perhaps the most magnificent is at Knaresborough; an opulent version of Ellerton, with all the decorative details exuberantly beefed-up.

Of course, the so-called 'York' type is not unique to Yorkshire. Haddon Hall chapel in Derbyshire and Stone in Staffordshire have fine simple versions, although Arksey in West Yorkshire has by far the weirdest. Font covers like Ellerton's can even be found across the Netherlands, Denmark and Northern Germany.

And did you want to know any of this obscure stuff? Perhaps not, so welcome to anorak corner!



The Ellerton font-cover, showing the little flaming hearts

Events at Ellerton Priory, Spring and Summer 2012

Please make a note of these dates in your diary, and share them with your friends.

Saturday 19th May

The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's **Yorkshire Living Churchyards Project** is holding a **Churchyards Study Day** at Ellerton Priory Saturday 19th May. The church will be open from 11.00, and there will be ample car parking. We begin with a guided tour of Ellerton Priory church, describing its setting and history, followed by a lunch break. Bring a picnic, but tea, real coffee and mouth-watering cakes will be on sale. At 2.00 there will be an illustrated presentation on *God's Acre; A Sanctuary for the Living* after which there will be a chance to ask questions about the effective management of churchyards and their importance to wildlife, and to discuss the traditional management of this particular churchyard (see the article on the front page of this newsletter) and the surrounding landscape of the Derwent valley. For further information contact Elizabeth Hardcastle at the YWT on 01904 659570.

Saturday 5th and Sunday 6th May

Come and join us for as much or as little as you like of our **Working and Maintenance Days**. This year we have lots of lime-washing to do, some pointing to repair, chandeliers and benefactions boards to hang, gullies to clear out and other odd-jobs. Equipment and hot drinks will be provided, but bring your lunch and wear sensible or sacrificial clothing and stout boots. 11.00 am to 4.30 pm.

Sunday 15th July

Cantabile sings a *Garland of Song* for the 2012 Royal Jubilee

The wonderful summer concerts given by the Leeds-based chamber choir **Cantabile** (www.cantabile-leeds.org.uk) have become a firm and popular fixture in the Ellerton Priory calendar. This year they will be singing at Ellerton on Sunday 15th July at 3.00 pm, bringing a fantastic programme of music associated with queens Elizabeth I and Elizabeth II to celebrate the Royal Diamond Jubilee. **Cantabile** will sing a set of joyful songs from *The Triumphs of Oriana*, written in 1601 in homage to the first Elizabeth ('Oriana' was one of her several flattering nick-names), and three thrilling and atmospheric choral works by Vaughan Williams, Ireland and Finzi from *A Garland for the Queen*, written to commemorate the coronation of the second in 1953. They will be linked by the elegant **Choral Dances** from *Gloriana*, an opera by Benjamin Britten about the loves of Elizabeth I written to mark the start of the second Elizabethan age. **Cantabile** will include a handful of the loveliest and best-known English choruses and songs – ideally suited to the superb Ellerton acoustic – and hope to be joined by talented young instrumentalists from the University of Huddersfield **Early Music Ensemble**.

Tickets for this very special Royal Diamond Jubilee event have been held at £6.00 each (£3.00 for children and the 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. As always there will be ample car parking close to the church, but come early to be sure of a good seat.

Sunday 9th September

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 9th September. This year's theme for our exhibition and demonstrations will be **Stained Glass!** As regular visitors know, Ellerton has a particularly beautiful collection of fine traditional and modern glass celebrating local history, wildlife and people – including monks, lawyers, architects and wildfowlers, heraldry, birds and insects, horses and griffins and even cannabis! Richard will be on hand to tell you all about churchyard moths and creepy-crawlies, there will be art activities for younger folk and of course there will be generous portions of our famously delicious home-made cakes, local produce, a tombola, second-hand books, plant sale, cards, guidebooks and lovely black Hebridean sheep grazing the churchyard. Why not join them, and bring a pic-nic to share with friends, or have lunch in Ellerton's great village pub? Phil's entertaining 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.

Later in the season we hope to host a study day for the **Pocklington Camera Club**.

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 Priory church is the last building at the far end of the village, and access is via a fairly level grass path and two small steps (ramp and help 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).