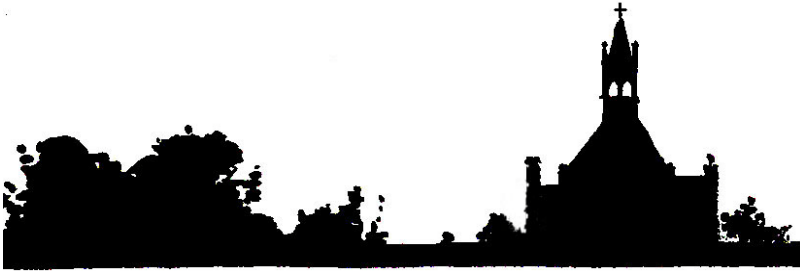


Ellerton Church Preservation Trust



Awarded the CPRE Mark for 2005

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

Newsletter number 12

Spring 2013

Unseasonal flooding - a beautiful warning?

On Boxing Day 2012 two ECPT trustees took a friend to Ellerton Priory for the first time. He had known Stephen, first Secretary to the Trust, and had been aware of the Priory project and the significance of the Lower Derwent Valley for many years, but had never been there. We drove from York by way of Elvington and Sutton, then round the Valley to Aughton, Bubwith, Thorganby, and finally Wheldrake.

There could hardly have been a more atmospheric time to visit, or to experience the dramatic reality of the relationship between the river and its once-dependant villages. Churchyard and church looked splendid, and the floods were spectacularly high; certainly as high as in 2003, and perhaps higher. Looking over Ellerton churchyard wall, or even better standing on top of it, the waters could be seen covering the ings and Abbey Garth, lapping to within 60 or 70 feet.

Driven by the cold to take shelter behind the wall, from where the exposed margin of Abbey Garth was all-but invisible, we stared westward across a vast expanse of shining, pewter-coloured water. It was as though we stood on the prow of a ship, lofted amidst crowds of wheeling, crying, honking birds.

Owl-pellets littered the stone benches and floor within the porch, so clearly the residents were happy, and when we walked inside, into the Priory's marvellous liquid light, we were surprised to discover that the church didn't even feel damp. Remembering the mediaeval image of the Church as a ship of souls, we stood in the nave (from the latin *navis*, ship) and imagined ourselves in an ark surrounded by Noah's drowned earth, whilst all around birds searched for land newly bare.

This had been a holy place for more than 800 years, but after long decline, the departure of organised religion, and complete abandonment and terrible damage, it has now been revived and re-dedicated to secular things. This change of purpose prompted thoughts of *Dover Beach*, Matthew Arnold's wonderfully evocative mid-19th century poem of the decay of religious belief:

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar....

For Arnold the sea is a complex metaphor for faith, sensibility, and the tides of history, and is also an image of the unstoppable power of nature. The small-ness of human concerns, especially those religious certainties which Ellerton was built to serve, are regarded by the poet as increasingly meaningless in the face of the blind, inexorable forces of the natural world, trivial beside the vast spans of geological time, and fanciful in a world being reinvented and interpreted anew by science.

In the past, flooding on the Yorkshire Derwent seemed to be regular and seasonal. Three or four predictable wet months each year were part of the rhythm of life, and man's relationship with the Winter floods dictated the pattern of land management which made the place so special. But now the floods tend to linger longer, and even to occur in wet Summer months, wrecking the hay-crop and robbing the ings of their economic purpose and historic rhythm. We can no longer depend on the old certainties.

That afternoon, the view from the bridge at Elvington was almost unearthly; a burnished sea with floating trees. It was better, even more elemental, approaching the bridge and causeway at Bubwith, where we had to roll the car slowly through a ford simply to trigger the traffic lights. The drowned ings were making an Amazon of the Derwent, with gleaming sheets of water flowing between fields and through hedge-bottoms as though pouring over some immense weir. Distant to the north-east, Aughton churchyard seemed a small island crowned with a bright limestone tower like a lighthouse.

Matthew Arnold famously ends his poem by suggesting that love and integrity may be all that we can depend on in a world of such spiritual and material chaos that,

....we are here as on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Surely Arnold's *ignorant armies* must include ourselves, and all people in the developed world who are hugely

wasteful of resources, especially fossil-based fuels, yet so reluctant to address their long-term effects that we are prepared to risk the survival of the earth on which we are wholly dependent. Ironically, those fuels include the coal which was created over thousands of ages beneath what became the Valley, torn out in less than a decade, and burned in a few hours to produce (as mere waste) the gases which are now suffocating our planet and probably causing this unpredictable flooding.

The Ellerton Priory exhibition theme for 2013 will be *The Flood*, an exploration of ideas about flooding and their implications in a world with an increasingly precarious climate (see *Events* on the back page). It may be that longer and more unpredictable periods of flooding, perhaps balanced by periods of drought, will become a regular part our future. And most people in today's Britain probably have faith in many things other than religion to come to their aid.

Was our dramatic December voyage to Ellerton a sign of things to come? And might these beautiful floods signal some permanent change in man's thousand-year-old relationship with the river and the land?

*Abandoned to ivy and the vandals -
the chancel south window at Ellerton in the early 1990s*

Simple ways to help the Trust face the future...

It would help the Trust enormously if all our friends were prepared to receive these newsletters by e-mail rather than by post. If you are happy to do this, please send an e-mail to the ECPT chairman or treasurer at yorkbear@hotmail.co.uk or ann@annsotheran.co.uk giving your name and postal address, so that we can identify you and remove you from the usual mailing list.

Please include a note to the effect that you are happy to receive e-mail information from us. We promise that we will not share your address with any third party.

Are you perhaps thinking of making a Will, or making changes to your existing Will? The trustees would be pleased to provide all the information you need to make a bequest to the Ellerton Church Preservation Trust. Taking on a beautiful historic building on a sensitive site, important for its archaeology and natural history is a challenging and expensive business; even more so when the trustees are committed to using only the best traditional craftsmanship. Leaving a bequest to the Trust would be a wonderful act of faith in the future of this very special place, and would help to ensure its long-term survival and continuing development.

...and how we might begin to develop Ellerton Priory

Now that the church and churchyard are repaired and in good heart, it would seem to be a good time to start exploring possible future developments. We would love to demonstrate our commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility in new ways, but the range of activities we can offer will always be limited without toilet and kitchen facilities and more storage space.

Originally we intended to put a toilet and kitchen inside the vestry, and although the roof, chimney and copings were repaired, major work remains to be done to the stonework, glazing and joinery of the vestry door and window, and the interior. These were all omitted from the first phase of re-building because we simply did not have enough money, and given the constraints quite rightly imposed by the Disability Discrimination Act it is no longer possible to install a toilet there. However, if we could raise the funds to restore the vestry properly, it would be perfect for a drinks kitchen, quite a lot of carefully arranged storage space and a small changing area.

Harvesting rainwater from the church roofs could make the whole site self-sufficient in one major resource. An exciting and responsible scheme of this kind would depend on us being able to store the harvested water (perhaps in the former underground heating chamber), purify it sufficiently to make it drinkable, and pump it manually to where it is needed, but the technology could easily be incorporated into a comprehensive plan for the restoration and adaptation of the former vestry.

There is enough space immediately north of the church to construct an accessible external toilet, and in English churchyards there are now plenty of examples of toilets neatly concealed within sensitively-designed sheds. The soils underlying the pings might make some forms of environmentally friendly drainage impossible, but many different portable, eco-friendly or composting systems are now available and improving access to the north side would be a simple matter. Of course, raising the money and gaining permission for these projects will be challenging, but they would undoubtedly transform how we could share and enjoy Ellerton Priory in the future.

Another taste of Ellerton; ...even more of Michael's delicious Continental cakes

Enjoy these recipes for two more fantastic cakes from Ellerton Priory's resident expert baker-cum-pastry cook. Like the recipes in previous newsletters, these have both been served at our September Open Days, and were a great hit with visitors.

The mole-hill cake is not only delicious (if you like bananas), but looks fantastic, especially with a marzipan mole on top. It is a perfect cake for children's birthday parties.

Mole-hill cake

For the cake mixture

5 eggs
160 grams butter
160 grams sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
200 grams self-raising flour
80 ml milk
2 tablespoons cocoa powder

For the filling and decoration

5 bananas
3 pots (each 8 to 10 fluid ounces) of double cream
A small amount of marzipan (optional)
Cocoa powder for dusting

Pre-heat the oven to 180° C

Method

First separate the eggs. Beat the egg yolks, sugar, butter and vanilla extract with a mixer until white, smooth and creamy. Slowly add the self-raising flour and cocoa powder, and mix until blended. Beat the egg whites separately, and fold them into the cake mixture. Butter a 10 inch (25 cm) spring-form cake tin, pour in the mixture and bake in the pre-heated oven for 30 to 40 minutes. Remove from the tin onto a cooling rack.

When the cake is completely cold, use a sharp knife to make a circular cut ½ inch deep and about 1 inch from the edge, and gradually remove the centre until you have a base of cake with a higher ring around the edge. Roughly crumble the pieces you have removed, and set them aside.

Slice three bananas in half length-ways and lay them evenly in the cake base. Whip the double cream until it is firm, mash the remaining two bananas and fold them into the stiffened cream. Spoon the banana cream over the cake and shape it to resemble a circular mole-hill. Press the previously crumbled cake pieces all over the hill of banana cream. Finally, dust the cake with cocoa

powder and (if you wish) shape the snout and paws of a mole from marzipan. Press them lightly into the top of the cake as though the mole is emerging from its burrow. Keep it cool in the refrigerator before serving.

Donauwellen

(Waves of the Danube)

For the cake mixture

3 eggs
175 grams sugar
350 grams plain flour
4 teaspoons baking powder
2 tablespoons cocoa powder
About 750 ml of bottled or tinned cherries
Sunflower oil or rape-seed oil
Milk

For the topping

1 packet vanilla pudding mix (the kind usually made with boiling milk - a good British equivalent would be vanilla blancmange powder or vanilla Symington's Table Cream)
Milk for the pudding mix
125 grams unsalted butter
200 grams of chocolate (preferably dark)
2 tablespoons chocolate-hazelnut spread (like *Nutella*)
1 tablespoon oil (as above)

Pre-heat the oven to 180° C

Method

Whip the eggs and sugar to a smooth cream and slowly mix in two tablespoons of the oil. Gradually add the flour, baking powder and 175 ml of the milk, mixing them until blended. Line two 8 x 12 inch baking trays with baking paper, take **half** of the mixture and divide it equally between the trays. Mix the cocoa powder and two tablespoons of the milk into the other **half** of the cake mixture, divide it and spread it carefully over the first layer in each tray.

Drain the cherries and spread them evenly over the cake mixture in each tray, pushing them in gently until the tops are just showing. Bake in the pre-heated oven for 25 to 30 minutes. Remove the cakes from the trays and place on a rack to cool.

Make up the vanilla pudding mix as directed on the packet. As soon as it is cooked, cover it with a layer of cling-film so that it does not form a skin and allow it to cool to room temperature. Beat the unsalted butter until soft and add it to the vanilla pudding one spoonful at a time, folding it in. Spread this creamy vanilla mixture over both cakes.

Finally, melt the chocolate and stir into it the chocolate-hazelnut spread and a tablespoon of oil. Carefully cover the cakes with this chocolate spread and leave them in a cool place for a few hours before cutting each cake into about fifteen rectangles for serving.

Events at Ellerton Priory, Spring and Summer 2013

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

Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th June, from 11.00 am to 5.00 pm

Practical maintenance days

Come and join us at any time between 11.00 am and 5.00 pm on our two working days at the Priory church. There are lots of jobs to do, some involving a bit of skill, but many only needing enthusiasm and elbow-grease. Jobs include: lime-washing inside the church, some rubbing down and preparation before lime-washing, a bit of re-pointing on the church and lots on the churchyard wall, cleaning out gullies and gutters, lime-washing, cleaning and polishing woodwork, hanging chains for the chandeliers in the nave, re-grading the earth in a few areas of the churchyard, and a general clean-up in advance of our concert afternoon in July. Equipment, materials, drinks and biscuits provided, but bring lunch, and wear sensible clothing and stout boots.

Sunday 14th July at 3.00 pm

Ellerton Summer afternoon concert

Leeds chamber choir *Cantabile* returns to Ellerton this Summer with a rich and stylish trans-Atlantic programme. *Old York to New York* is bursting with three centuries of music from Britain and the Americas - from spirituals to the blues, folk-tunes to show-tunes, Purcell to Tin Pan Alley. *Cantabile* has promised us a glorious morsel by Benjamin Britten (a truly great 20th century musician, in his centenary year), haunting miniatures by Purcell, inspiring little masterpieces by Sir Hubert Parry (best known for *Jerusalem*), thrilling arrangements of well-known African-American spirituals elegantly contrasted with humble and moving folksongs, and even some sultry, smoochy popular ballads from Hollywood and Buenos Aires. And there may be a surprise instrumental soloist! Tickets are £7.00 each (£3.50 for children and the disabled), available on the door or reserved in advance at yorkbear@hotmail.co.uk or on 01904 630097. Refreshments are included in the ticket price, including crisp Summer afternoon wine, soft drinks, and tea and coffee.

An 1847 grotesque stone head on the bell-cote at Ellerton



Sunday 15th September

Heritage Open Day

This year church and churchyard will 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 will be **The Flood**, and will explore the meaning and impact of flooding through the ages, including the dramatic effects of recent un-seasonal local flooding and its implications for the landscape, the environment and land and water management. Refreshments will be available with generous portions of Michael's near-legendary cakes and pastries, and there will be a local produce stall, a tombola, a plant stall, guidebooks and cards. Richard, our resident wildlife expert, will be on hand, and Phil's celebrated tours of the whole site will begin at 11.00am, 1.00pm and 3.30pm. Both will be here all day to answer your questions. Lovely black Hebridean sheep should be grazing the church-yard, so why not join them, and bring a pic-nic to share with friends, or have lunch in Ellerton's splendid village pub, **The Boot and Shoe**?

Directions to Ellerton Priory

Ellerton is 14 miles south-east of York, just off the B1228 York-Howden road, 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 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 in the car park field, please. Nearby is **The Boot and Shoe** - a traditional village pub with great ales, where hearty meals can be booked in advance (01757 288346).