



The Friends of St Peter's Newsletter

Number 4 – Spring 2015

Introduction by the Chairman of the Trustees

The new Rector, the Reverend Canon Tim Pilkington, became a Trustee of the Friends of St Peter's on 10th December 2014 when we welcomed him to his first Trustees' meeting. We all very much look forward to working with him in the years to come.

We held a successful Social Evening on 21st January entitled Progress and Projects, comprising short talks and discussion. Paul Crosland outlined the activities and plans of the Rectory Cemetery Group, David Pearce discussed Monumental Brasses as History, and Christopher Green spoke about the Royal Coat of Arms in the Church. The Rector also spoke briefly about his ideas and plans and we are grateful to all of them for their excellent contributions. During the course of the evening other topics mentioned included the seeking of funds to restore the Bryceson organ, the need for a new Guide to St Peter's and the important matter of the re-ordering of the west end of the Church, the planning for which is at a very early stage.

The next social event will be held on Wednesday 30th September 2015 in the evening. Further details will follow in due course, but in the meantime please note the date in your diaries.

Finally, I would like to make a plea to our members and the readers of this Newsletter. We would greatly welcome your ideas as to what you would like to see the Friends doing for you and for the whole Berkhamsted community. Please do get in touch – my email address is below.

Peter Williamson

Patrons and Trustees

Patrons

Carolann Smith Dorrien
The Venerable Jonathan P. Smith, Archdeacon of St Albans

Trustees

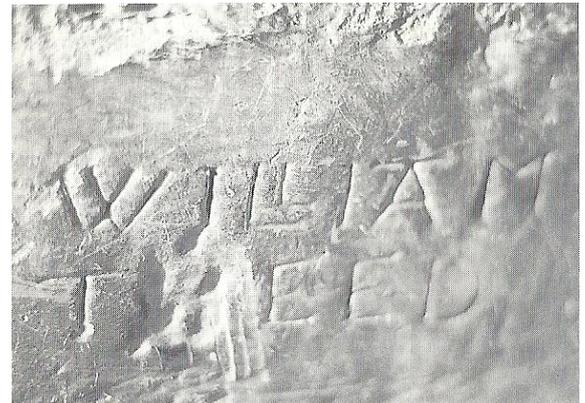
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(peter.williamson47@btinternet.com)
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Church Graffiti

What might be considered an act of vandalism today may, tomorrow, be of historical interest - certainly of curiosity. The desire to immortalise one's name runs in all of us. There are famous graffiti on most historical buildings, and we can search for them in our own St. Peter's Church. It is only with the age of the paint can and spray gun that they arouse our indignation.

Outside the ringing chamber, high up in the church tower, but only to be seen when stooping low, is a square-dressed stone with a name elaborately carved, and so deeply carved that the edges are still sharp. The carver must have lain outstretched across the flight of steps and chiselled away for quite some time. It was not an act of impulse, but a lengthy, private, meditated act of self-memorial.

The age of the inscription is apparent from the bold capitals and the barred 'A'. The lettering is typical of the seventeenth century. The name is of interest: William Theed. I hoped at first, that it was headmaster Theed from Incent's Grammar School who had crept up there for this act of petty vandalism, but he was John.



However, there were two William Theeds in Berkhamsted in that century of tumult, and both were likely to have been related to the headmaster. One was the churchwarden in 1647, and the other was appointed as 'surveiour of highways' in 1699.

My bet is that the carver was the churchwarden. Oh, lackaday; first they countenance the removal of other people's memorials from the church, and then they carve and perpetuate their own names.

David R.A. Pearce

The Lady Chapel

The Lady Chapel is one of the oldest parts of St Peter's Church, built probably in the first quarter of the 13th century. The stone vaulting of the roof is an early example of rib-vaulting, and is an unusual refinement in a parish church of this date. The windows are not part of the original 13th century fabric. Their tracery and decorative detail place them in the middle years of the 14th century, which must be the time when they were inserted.



For many years there has been structural movement in the Lady Chapel and monitoring over the past 15 years has shown that the east wall is slowly but progressively leaning outward. The visible evidence of this movement is a gap above the more northerly window in the east wall. The late Christopher Morris investigated this problem, suggested a possible cause and devised a scheme to alleviate it.

During the past year, the Buildings Committee has begun to follow up this work, seeking advice more widely from architects and structural engineers. An important aspect of this investigation is gaining a thorough understanding of what is happening in the roof space above the stone vault of the Lady Chapel. This is the space between the vault and the lead covered timber roof above it. This space is accessed through the door set high up in the east wall of the North Transept. Within this space is a structure of massive wooden beams that supports the rafters and boarding on which the lead roof is laid. There is ample headroom to walk about within this space and to inspect both woodwork and stonework.



There are fascinating glimpses of the past in this space between the vault and the lead roof, relatively untouched by schemes of restoration and re-ordering. Visible in the rubble stonework of the walls are enigmatic fragments of dressed stone from former building work of unknown age. Among the rafters are two which are clearly parts of an ancient wooden screen, economically recycled into the roof; and on the wooden beams are numerous graffiti, chalked by carpenters and others who have worked up here in the past. Among the more legible are:

William Hunt 1724
John Bourne 1758
Richard Barlingham 1770
William Burns 1778 Carpenter
Robert Harcourt Loader Clerk of the Works



Robert Harcourt Loader was Churchwarden from 1788 to 1803 and his name also appears with the date 1797 in the gold leaf inscription that lies behind the oval panel on which the lately restored Royal Coat of Arms of Queen Elizabeth I is displayed. His time as churchwarden was evidently one of active restoration in the church.

Among all this interest there is also evidence of the problems that will have to be addressed. Some of the main beams of the roof structure, which were originally embedded in and supported by the walls, have so rotted away that they are no longer in contact at all with the wall. They are now supported on piles of stone and bricks that rest on the stone vaulting, which was never intended to bear this load.

Resolving these problems will be costly. The Friends will undoubtedly have a role to play in raising the necessary funds. If you wish to contribute to this project, or have ideas for raising funds, please get in touch with one of the Trustees.

The Rectory Lane Cemetery Project

As we work towards a submission for grant assistance from the Heritage Lottery Fund, we are gathering as much information as we can on the history of the Cemetery, how it was organized and operated, and the stories of the people buried there. Here are three extracts that capture some of the fascinating material that is coming to light.

The Opening of the Cemetery

The Hertford Mercury and Reformer for 29th October 1842 records:

Great Berkhamstead – The New Burial Ground at this place was consecrated on Friday the 14th inst., by Dr Kaye, Lord Bishop of Lincoln. His lordship arrived from White-hall place, by the one o'clock train from London; and after paying a very short visit to the Rectory, proceeded to the Parish Church, where the service was performed by the Rev. J. James, the Curate.

I like the picture of the bishop stepping off the platform at Berkhamsted, and after a whirlwind visit to the Rector, squeezing this dedication ceremony into his busy schedule for the day.

A procession was afterwards formed of Bourn's Charity, the National, and the Free Grammar School. His lordship, and about thirty clergy of the neighbourhood, accompanied by the most respectable tradesmen, and followed by a large number of spectators, proceeded to the ground, upon which the ceremony of consecration was performed.

The article acknowledges the philanthropic gesture of the Countess of Bridgewater, who donated the ground she had purchased nearly two years previously. It also remarked that:-

'Messrs. Lane and son have had men busily engaged in planting evergreens, &c.'

Some of these trees that began as seedlings at Lane's nurseries situated near St John's Well can still be seen in the Cemetery today.

The Bier

Another exciting discovery has been the whereabouts of the cemetery bier, which would have wended its way many times between the Parish Church and the Cemetery. Christopher Green managed to track it down to Pitstone Museum where it has been recently restored. It bears a metal plate with the wording: 'This bier is the property of Berkhamsted St Peter 1922'

Does anybody recall or have any photographs of the bier in use?



1922 Bier of St Peter's

A Chance Visit

Finally, Simon Armstrong who happened to be in Berkhamsted on a one day visit in February from his home in Budapest, was able with the help of the Friends, to locate the grave of his great-uncle William Henry Sutton (1890-1953) and his first wife Madeleine (1896-1936). Bill became a Captain in the RAMC in the First World War and was awarded an OBE in the Second having risen to the rank of Colonel. Simon then found another memorial to other members of his family. To his surprise, his great grandfather, Alexander Arthur Sutton (1861-1941) is also buried in the churchyard after a distinguished medical military career serving in India, Africa (West and South) as well as WW1. Decorated many times he finally became a Commander of the Order of the Bath in 1917 and was awarded the Order of St Sava by the King of Serbia in 1918 after serving there. In the 1911 Census, Alexander and his first wife Annie Aubert and their four children, including William who was then a medical student, were listed as residing at Cowper House in Cowper Road. Only a year later, Alexander was out in West Africa when Annie died unexpectedly of a chill in Berkhamsted, aged just 48.

Despite travelling widely and not being resident at the time of their deaths, both Alexander and William, father and son, retained their roots in Berkhamsted and chose to be buried in Rectory Lane with their first wives, both of whom had died in their forties.

Simon is keen to donate funds to have the two memorials repaired – we hope we can steadily tackle the many toppled or damaged headstones and memorials as a result of establishing links with the families who own them.

This gives a brief hint of the richness of the material which has come to light since the Project was launched. This research is invaluable for understanding and demonstrating the significance of one of Berkhamsted's least known but most intriguing spaces - which the friends of St Peter's are determined to see cared for and enhanced over the next few years.

Charitable Status

The Friends of St Peter's has been granted charitable status by the Charity Commission, and is now registered charity number 1160314.

Programme of Events June – October 2015



- 6th June Chiltern Chamber Choir Concert 7.30 p.m.
7th June Rectory Lane working party 2.00 – 4.00 p.m.
13th June Petertide Fair, St Peter's 10.00 a.m. – 3.00 p.m.
20th June Bridgewater Sinfonia Concert 7.30 p.m.
5th July Rectory Lane working party 2.00 – 4.00 p.m.
2nd Aug Rectory Lane working party 2.00 – 4.00 p.m.
5th Sept Berkhamsted Choral Society 7.30 p.m.
6th Sept Rectory Lane working party 2.00 – 4.00 p.m.
13th Sept Heritage Open Day, St Peter's Church and
Rectory Lane Cemetery
17–20 Sept Bach Festival – Performance of all Bach's
organ music
19–20 Sept Oktoberfest
30th Sept Friends of St Peter's Social Event 8.00 p.m.
Film 'Life on the Home Front in Herts' and
Talk on Berkhamsted Parish Memorials of WW1
3rd Oct Bridgewater Sinfonia Concert 7.30 p.m.
4th Oct Rectory Lane working party 2.00 – 4.00 p.m.
24th Oct Antony Hopkins Memorial Concert 7.30 p.m.

Website News

The development of our new website is currently nearing completion. It is far more informative and helpful than our interim pages, and we hope you like it. We are looking for someone to help to keep these web pages up to date. No web development skills are required, just the ability to key in new items for publication. It is not an onerous task, so if you feel you can help, please contact one of the Trustees.

Become a Friend

To join the Friends please use this application form (or a photocopy of it). Alternatively, you can download an Application Form from the Friends website: www.stpetersberkhamstedfriends.org.uk

Personal Details:

Title:
Full Name:
Address:
Postcode:
Telephone:
Email:

Subscriptions

Individual	£12
Family	£20
Corporate	£50

Gift Aid

My subscription payments **should/should not** be treated as Gift Aid donations (delete as appropriate)

Bankers Standing Order

Bank Name:
Bank Address:
Postcode:

Please pay The Friends of St Peter's Church
Great Berkhamsted, A/c No. 64109216, NatWest
Bank (60-02-21) the sum of:

£	Amount in words
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Beginning on :

Date:

and annually thereafter until further notice, charging my account:

Account Name:
Sort Code:
Account Number:

Date:

Signature:

