

The Parish of St. John the Baptist, Ault Hucknall

VISITORS' GUIDE

Welcome. We hope that the details of our church history may help you to see why we love the place so much and may inspire you to rest a while and discover, as others have, that ‘the Lord is in this place’.

Our church has stood on the wooded hillside for well over one thousand years. The name itself ‘Hault (Ault) is thought to be a corruption of the French word ‘haute’, meaning high hence ‘Hucca’s high valley.’] There is a local tradition that a settlement existed at one time where the Griff Wood is situated, to the north-west of the church. Usually, Griff suggests a grove by the graves, so the church itself may be on a prehistoric site. Domesday Book (1087) refers to the existence of a priest resident in the parish. Other certainties are a Saxon Tympanum and a lintel dating from the 11th century.

Ault Hucknall in the 13th century was combined with Stainsby and Hardwick and administered by the manorial lords of Stainsby.

Ancient parts of the church include the beautiful narrow arch between the Chancel and the Sanctuary, the two large arches to the north aisle, a small loop window in the north wall, and the large arch between the Nave and the Chancel.

The Norman Chancel Arch

It has been suggested by some that what Pevsner dismisses as ‘jumbled up ornamental bits’ have been re-assembled ingeniously to tell a story. Hence, it is claimed that the carvings portray the Creation, the fall of Adam, the Flood and the Sacrifice of Faith made by Abraham. Looking from the left, one can see a beast on its back, said to represent the dragon Rahab (Job 9.13 and Isaiah 51.9), a name for Tiamet, the original chaos, followed by a shapeless form representing the universe before creation – without form and void.

Then came Adam and Eve, two further indistinguishable features, and next a serpent twisted in the form of a 'Staffordshire' Knot. There follows a conventional tree – possibly the Tree of Knowledge – and a figure pointing head downwards, followed by two angels standing upright holding flaming swords – representing the expulsion from Eden. Then follows a square cloud with slanting rain and the two chevron mouldings denoting water, the Flood, Noah, his Wife, the Raven and the Dove in that order. The final figure, it is suggested, may be a Ram – presumably from the story of Isaac's sacrifice. Around the whole arch is the Rainbow of Hope.

Thus, the arch is considered to have been used as a visual aid in preaching and teaching. As well as having a wealth of biblical stories represented in the carving. It could have portrayed 'types' or models of God's salvation in the story of Jesus, representing man in a fallen state, the sacrifice of the 'Son of Promise' (Isaac), the flood of the waters of Baptism, the redeemed race of humanity (Noah).

The North Aisle Chapel

The small window in the northwest corner is a typical 'loop' window. These were made in the period soon after the Norman Conquest. Often, they are about three feet high and six inches wide, being splayed on the inside. In the twelfth century, windows were glazed; the glass being inserted almost level with the outer face of the wall.

An interesting memorial (1703) can be seen on the north wall to Richard Hackett, a hardwick Park gamekeeper.

The tablet in the centre of the wall and the stained glass window are dedicated to Mrs. Georgina Catherine Jackson (nee Hallows), wife of WBM Jackson, Esq., of Glapwell Hall, and the daughter of the Rev Brabazon Hallows, Vicar of the parish 1874-1892.

The present altar was installed in the chapel in 1971; the Mother's Union Banner was presented by an anonymous donor in 1972, and

the Sanctuary lamp in 1986. The modern glass window has been much commended for its style.

After the nearby manor of Rowthorne had been gifted by King Henry II to Newstead Priory, as part of his penance for the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket (1170), its Canons of the Augustinian Order appointed the Vicar who served Ault Hucknall church and parish. Darley Abbey was responsible for a chapel of St. Andrew in Glapwell after 1154.

The Nave

The high-pitched timber roof is the 'Decorated' period (1300-1400). Note the two bosses, one over the west window and one over the Chancel arch. The former is of special interest, being carved in the shape of a man's head with a spray of oak leaves in the corner of the mouth. This represents the survival of old pagan ideas existing alongside Christianity. The Green Man, Jack-in-the-Green, Robin Hood, King of the May and the Gartlend are all names given to this figure. He represents a pagan God of fertility and played a prominent part at the Spring Festivals, when the trees were bursting into leaf. Note also the other carvings under the roof trusses. One of these has two heads, apparently depicting twins.

The arches between the Nave and the south aisle are a fine example of Early English architecture.

Paraffin lamps were in use until the 6th November 1959, when electricity was installed. Re-wiring took place 2003/4 when chandeliers replaced the inefficient high level floodlights. The thirteen chandeliers were each bought in memory of departed loved ones. Oil-fired central heating replaced solid fuel in 1973.

The South Aisle (immediately on your right as you enter)

The South or Cavendish Chapel was erected in the Perpendicular period of architecture in the fifteenth century. In pre-Reformation times, an altar stood under the east window (the Savage window). This window is of considerable interest, as it dates from 1527. The

Hardwick Arms, depleted of eglantine roses, in the second light, lower panel, is from a memorial to John Hardwick, father of Bess, Countess of Shrewbury.

The Savage Window (over the tomb of Ann, 1 Countess of Devonshire)

The 1st light, lower panel, portrays Lady Elizabeth Savage and her daughter, and the 3rd light panel is thought to be Richard Pauson, priest at the time. Sir John Savage, of Stainsby, died before 1543 and was buried in the church. Lady Savage was the daughter of Charles Somerset, Earl of Worcester, and a great-niece of Queen Elizabeth Woodville.

The Savage family, who held the manor of Stainsby for 300 years, originated from Sussex. A Sir John Savage of the 15th century was knighted on the battlefield of Agincourt.

The York Glaziers restored this window in 1984. From the left, the first three lights in the upper panel portray the Virgin Mary, our Lord on the Cross, and St. John. Over our Lord's head can be seen the Sun, which has an eye in the centre, representing the Glory of God. The fourth light is of St. Ursula, said in some legends to be a Princess, daughter of King Deonotus, King of Cornwall. Canon, the son of Aggripinius, a British King, sought her hand in marriage, but Ursula had made a vow of perpetual virginity. With a large company of maidens, she set out on a pilgrimage of the Holy places in Rome, and then to Rome, where she was received with great honour by St. Cyriacus, the Bishop of Rome. Canon sought her in Rome, where he learnt of her vow. He was converted and baptised, taking the name of Etherius. He journeyed with Ursula and her maidens to Cologne where they were attacked by the Huns, and Canon and the maidens were slain. Ursula was taken to their leader, who fell in love with her and wished to marry her. She rejected his offer and, in his anger, he shot three arrows into her breast, killing her. In the window, she wears the crown befitting her royal descent and holds an arrow,

signifying martyrdom. The group of maidens, presumably, are some of the 11,000 associated with St Ursula and her legendary story.

Below these figures can be seen the remainder of the inscription: “Pray for the welfare of John Savage, Knight and Elizabeth his wife, who had me made in the 1527 of our Lord.

The Bells

The Belfry contains eight bells of beautiful tone, bearing the following inscriptions:

Bells 1-3 are from Hallam Fields Church. These three bells were removed from the tower of that church together with another, which was taken to Derby Cathedral. Other bellringers took the five ancient bells of Ault Hucknall, together with three extra bells, to John Taylor’s Bell Foundry, at Loughborough. They had their own canons fitted together with roller bearings and were tuned. The bells were rehung in the tower by our own ringers and fitted for ringing. The Bishop of Derby re-dedicated the augmented peal on Sunday, 20th June 1976. The total cost was just over £3000. The ringers’ hard work saved the parish £4000. The ringers also refitted the ringing chamber and bell chamber with a new bellframe, false soundproofing and a ceiling.

Bell 4 John Taylor, Loughborough 1887. Hung to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

Bell 5 “Jesus be our spede 1590”. The bellmark has the initials H.O.; being those of Henry Oldfield, a noted bellfounder, of Nottingham.

Bell 6 “God Save His Church 1615”

Bell 7 D. Hedderley, Founder and below the haunch of the bell, D.H., D. Hedderley became a partner in the Oldfield firm at Nottingham.

Bell 8 “HS Nazarenus Rex Judaeorum 1664”. The bell mark is that of George Oldfield. This bell was hung to celebrate the restoration of Charles II and freedom of the Church of England from the yoke of Puritanism.

We take delight in hearing our bells rung on Sundays and at marriages. However, there is a need for more ringers (Tel: Mansfield (810460). The belfry is above the choir stalls and is Accessible from the north side of the church externally.

In 1974, the bellringers sought permission to re-hang the bells on modern bearings and, if possible, to add a sixth bell. The Derby Diocesan Advisory Committee offered three light bells from the redundant church at Hallam Fields, near Ilkeston.

Thomas Hobbes (The Cavendish Chapel)

On the floor of the Cavendish Chapel, immediately before the tomb of Ann, 1st Countess of Devonshire is a black marble slab covering the remains of Thomas Hobbes, one of England’s great philosophers. The Latin inscription reads:

“Here are buried the bones of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, who for many years, served the two Earls of Devonshire, father and son. A sound man and well known at home and abroad for the renown of his learning. He died in the Year of our Lord 1679 on the 4th day of the month of December in the Ninety first year of his age”.

Thomas Hobbes, the second son the of the Vicar of Charlston and Westport, was born at Westport, Malmesbury in 1588. It is said he was born prematurely owing to his mother’s agitation on hearing the reports of the coming of the Armada. Thomas started school at the

age of four and at six he was leaning Greek and Latin. At the age of fourteen he translated Medea of Euripides into Latin verse. In 1607-8 he graduated BA and was recommended to William Cavendish, Baron Hardwick, by the University of Oxford as a suitable secretary and tutor to both the 2nd and 3rd Earls of Devonshire.

In 1647 when he fell dangerously ill, Hobbes was urged in vain to become a Roman Catholic, but preferred to receive the sacrament from Cosin, later Bishop of Durham, thus proving his Anglican orthodoxy. In 1651 he wrote his celebrated work Leviathan. At the Restoration, the Bishops viewed him with suspicion, not least because he attended worship to receive the sacrament but turned his back on the sermon! In 1679 he died at Hardwick, and was laid to rest in Hault Hucknall Church and, according to the law of that time, was buried in wool. A fine portrait of Hobbes can be seen in the Long Gallery in Hardwick Hall (English School, 1676).

Near the easternmost window of the south wall on the floor of the Chapel can be seen [*a lighter area in the stone where until 2001**] a small brass memorial to Richard Pallison or Pauson, Vicar of Hault Hucknall 1513-1536/7 was sited. The inscription read:

“Pray for the soul of Sir Richard Pallison, Vicar of the Church, who died on that day that God called him after the 1536th year (of our Lord), on whose soul may God have mercy. Amen”.

(*See update 2002)

The Tomb of Ann, 1st Countess of Devonshire

Beneath the Savage window is a tomb surmounted by the five Muses in Derbyshire alabaster, representing Modesty, Prudence, Love, Obedience and Piety. The tomb was erected to the memory of Ann Keighley, daughter of Henry Keighley and wife of William, 1st Earl of Devonshire. The inscription when translated reads:

“In this tomb, under the figures of Modesty, Prudence, Love, Obedience, and Piety and of the subsidiary and guardian virtues, are placed and preserved the ashes of a most excellent woman, Ann Keighley, daughter and heiress of Henry of Keighley, in the Count

of York, Knight. She married the exalted nobleman, William Cavendish, Knight of Chatsworth, (afterwards raised to the Earldom of Devonshire) and bore him three sons, Gilbert, William and James, and as many daughters, Mary, Elizabeth and Frances. James, the youngest, sleeps beside his mother. William, Earl of Devonshire and Lord of Hardwick, the heir and now the only survivor, who wishes to preserve at the same time the memory of his dearest mother and brothers and sisters, had this monument made.”

William, 1st Earl of Devonshire, is buried at Edensor.

The two Cavendish hatchments in our church have been restored recently on the generous instructions of the 11th Duke of Devonshire, the present patron of the ecclesiastical benefice.

In the Churchyard

Inscriptions on some headstones are in attractive copperplate writing. A monument west of the approach path by the yew tree bears a collection of tradesman's tools: an axe, a hammer, saw, compass, etc. It is understood he was a carpenter at Hardwick Hall.

There is also a stone over the grave of Rebecca Saunders, which tells the story of one of the periodic epidemics. The words are no longer legible, but older parishioners remember them:

*“Rebecca, I, the fever caught
Through washing clothes from Sheffield bought.
No-one could assistance lend
To save me from this untimely end.”*

Take a look at the very large slab over a grave near the cottage.

The blocked West Door

Observe, at the west end of the church, the blocked doorway. A large tympanum and a lintel are let into this external wall. Always, the tympanum is the space above the lintel and is invariable decorative. The lintel is a horizontal stone over a

door or window. Here, on the tympanum is the legend of St. Margaret of Antioch with the Agnus Dei and small animal. The lintel portrays the combat between St. George and the Dragon, a large cross separating the combatants. Thus, the dragon of the Apocalypse symbolises Satan, while the Cross, or Tree of Life, is the symbol of salvation.* Comparison may be made with sculptures at Kilpeck, 8m SW of Hereford, off the A465. It may be significant that both St. George and St. Margaret are among the traditional Fourteen Helpers In need, venerated for the supposed efficacy of their prayers on behalf of human necessities.

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*Since the character is expelling the dragon from heaven, scripturally this may be St Michael the Archangel rather than St George. The combatant is in Norman armour, up to three hundred years earlier than the adoption of George as the patron saint of England. (*ALB 2004*)

Update 2002

The brass plaque remembering **Richard Pallison** was re-sited on the north chancel wall in 1999 as it had been wearing by being trodden, and was becoming loose. The Victorian site was inappropriate, and the place chosen was above the probable place of his former effigy, as described by Pevsner. The effigy was removed by the Victorians in 1887. (see page 7)

The **kitchen fittings** were built in the NorthWest corner in 1995, and the same craftsman, Arthur Wyeld, fitted the storage cupboards on the west wall beside the font fitted in 2000 thanks to the grant by Open Churches Trust.

The circuitous **disabled access** ramp from the new south west gate via the west end of the church was placed in 2000 to by-pass the Victorian steps. The work was made possible mainly by a grant from the National Lottery. Its route was imposed by English Heritage so that the aspect from the south gate would remain unchanged.

The Savage Window was restored by York Glaziers in April 2001. The restoration of 1985 proved to be inadequate, and the internal microclimate was promoting damage. Isothermal glazing was fitted for protection, and the work took six months to complete.

A **toilet** for the disabled, external access, is sited under the tower steps. This was completed early in 2002.

Update 2003.

The recent Quinquennial inspection indicates over £100,000 of outstanding work, of which re-wiring is expected to be £22,000. English Heritage/Lottery have granted approximately £33,000 of £50,000 urgent identified structural and stonework repairs. Infestations of furniture beetle, woodworm and deathwatch beetle need urgent attention and an independent survey is imminent at time of writing.

Pastorally the parish of Ault Hucknall was linked with adjacent Heath for many years until the 1920s. Pastoral re-organisation in the 1990s with the reduced number of clergy available locally resulted in the creation of the United Benefice of Ault Hucknall and Scarcliffe which came into being by the Order in Council on 1st December 1999.

Update 2004

Major **tower stone and lead** restoration work took place in 2004 with the help of English Heritage and Derbyshire Historic Churches and Chapels Trust. Re-wiring and electrics were part funded by Viridor landfill tax via Derbyshire County Council Environmental Trust.

Anthony L Bell. Vicar: August 10th 2004.