



Chairman's Welcome

It is a pleasure once again to be writing a few words for this eighth Newsletter and I hope that it gives a flavour of the "who" and the "what" of the Trust. I would like to start by thanking Keith Goodman for picking up the Ride+Stride event four years ago and bringing the organisation of it up to date, and I congratulate him on achieving valuable funds for the Trust from last September's event, shared with the churches which took part. Keith reports that over £18,000 was raised with two groups raising over £1,000, and five more between £500 and £1,000! Two riders rode over 40 miles, one visiting 42 churches and the other 37; there were some riders in their 80s, and Martha who was eight visited 16 churches. This is impressive fundraising, and also illustrates the way in which our churches are loved by cyclists, horse riders, walkers, and drivers of all kinds. We are dedicated to keeping these buildings in good repair so they continue to be beacons for travellers as well as all the other roles they play in today's society. (See inside for the report on St Helen's, Trowell.) I am delighted that Margaret Lowe has agreed to take over the organisation of the Ride+Stride from Keith; the Trustees are enormously grateful to her and I hope that 8th September 2018 will be a great day for riding and striding for churches.



Another date for your diaries is Thursday 14th June when Sir John and Lady Peace have kindly invited the Trustees to hold their Summer Party at Cauntun Manor, followed by a talk in St Andrew's church on Dean Hole's roses by the current Dean of Rochester. If this whets your appetite please get in touch with the Trust's secretary for tickets.

Richard Brackenbury - NHCT Chairman

Friends' Visit to Thurgarton and Lambley Men in Pants: The Thurgarton Wrestlers



Fig 1. The Thurgarton wrestlers, photo Ellis Morgan

A recent visit of the Friends of Nottinghamshire Historic Churches Trust to the churches of Thurgarton and Lambley gave us the chance to see two very different buildings, both fascinating in their own way. Thurgarton is a fragment of a much larger Augustinian priory church from the 13th century and Lambley is a little 15th century village church that was built to commemorate the parents of one of England's most powerful men in the middle ages, Ralph, Lord Cromwell, the builder of Tattershall Castle. We had the chance to visit the undercroft of Thurgarton's monastic cloister, thanks to the generosity of the owner of the house that now stands over it, and to see the outline of parts of the monastery in what is now their garden.

What attracted our attention inside the church was the unexpected sight of a pair of nearly naked wrestlers, the men in pants, carved on the underside of a medieval seat (Fig. 1).

Wrestling is one of the most ancient sports, making an early appearance in the Epic of Gilgamesh from Mesopotamia about 4,000 years ago, in which the king subdues a wildman by wrestling him to the ground, after which they became friends. There are plenty of ancient carvings that show the match, although the protagonists are usually shown in the nude. Clothed figures of Jacob wrestling with the angel take us into the middle ages as an illustration of the story from the book of Genesis, of Jacob wrestling all night with a figure representing God, and getting his hip dislocated as a result.



Fig. 2. Wrestlers in baggy shorts, from *The Luttrell Psalter*, c.1325-50 © The British Library Board.

There's no angel in the scene at Thurgarton, and this is a sporting bout, with two male figures grappling each other in a fierce embrace. They are nearly naked, dressed only in close fitting shorts but also wearing belts. Looking at medieval images of other wrestlers it's clear that being naked apart from shorts was the preferred garb, although baggy ones were more common. The 14th century Luttrell Psalter pair (Fig. 2) have long and more baggy shorts, as do many others. Wrestling moved into the upper echelons of society in the Renaissance, and there was even a manual written in the 16th century in Germany that showed young men the finer points of unarmed combat, but of course the illustrations showed them fully dressed in fashionable clothes. Wrestlers today tend to wear lycra outfits like other athletes, except in the case of Cumberland wrestlers who dress like 19th century strongmen in combinations with decorated pants over the top. What the Thurgarton wrestlers have, apart from their shorts, are very prominent belts; the figure on the left has a belt made of twisted or plaited material and this is what his opponent is using to tackle him with (Fig. 1). A second, very similar pair of wrestlers, are on a seat in Nantwich church, dressed in the same way in little shorts with separate belts (Fig. 3). This was clearly an important part of the sport and even on the rare occasions when the men

were fully dressed, as in the early 13th century manuscript from Oxford, it's the belts that are providing the grip (Fig. 4). This is a version of the sport that still exists today. Belt wrestling claims to date back into the mists of time and has its own rules, for bouts indoors, outdoors and even in snow, and has been formalised as a sport, but this is a more recent development, dating only from 2005. The intention is to get your opponent to fall over by grappling with his belt. The evidence of these images is that the sport was certainly around in the middle ages.



Fig. 3. Nantwich parish church, misericord, the belted wrestlers. Photo Elizabeth Oliver



Fig. 4. Clothed wrestlers from an early 13th century manuscript from Oxford. © The British Library Board.

So why are these wrestlers in a church, especially on furniture used by medieval clergy? The answer is that these are a sort of medieval secret. The carvings are under the seats called 'misericords', from the Latin word for 'pity', since they allowed the clergy to remain standing during long services but to have something to lean against. The carvings have a unique feature, which is that they are invisible for most of the time. A priest leaning on the seat would block the view of it, and when the seats weren't used they were folded down and the carvings were then out of sight. This gave the medieval carvers the chance to carve all manner of images and there's a lot of mischief to be found, foxes dressed as clergy preaching to geese, angry wives beating miscreant husbands, and wrestlers.

Dr Jenny Alexander - NHCT Trustee

NHCT Trustee Profile

Dr Chris Brooke

Dr Chris Brooke has been a trustee since the Nottinghamshire Historic Churches Trust was formed in 1986. He and the late John Severn first proposed the idea and were founder trustees.

Brought up in Lancashire and Cheshire, Chris went to Sandbach School and then Southwell Minster Grammar School when his family moved to the town. In 1976 he went to the University of Bradford where he read for a BSc in Archaeological Sciences. His PhD followed in 1987, this time at Nottingham, where he worked in the field of archaeological remote sensing. His research involved the use of scientific, non-destructive methods of recovering archaeological information from buildings, excavations, and sites under survey.

Chris now had to find work and for several years he undertook consultancy work and short-term contracts: with Nottingham Castle, English Heritage, the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, and Hirst Conservation at Sleaford. In 1989 he was appointed Head of Heritage and Resources within the planning department of Leicestershire County Council, a position he held for 15 years until, in 2005, he moved to The National Trust for Scotland in Edinburgh. There he held a number of positions including Director of Conservation. Chris has also run his own freelance consultancy.



Chris specializes in remote sensing. In laymen's terms this is about using photography, digital-image analysis, environmental study and other methods of archaeological site survey which do not necessarily require digging, or other forms of destruction, to find answers to archaeological questions. He is also much involved in the history and related archaeology of churches – he has sat on the Diocesan Advisory Committees for both Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, and with Church Buildings Council (at one time known as the Council for the Care of Churches) in London – and the recording and conservation of historic buildings.

Away from the day job, Chris lectures in medieval archaeology and history. He has a particular expertise in the development and investigation of churches, demonstrated by his role in the Nottinghamshire Historic Churches Trust, and also in his position as archaeological editor for the Southwell and Nottingham Church History Project.

Chris has written over 30 papers and several books. He has also held visiting lectureships in several universities, including York and Leicester De Montfort. He is an Honorary Associate Professor in the Department of History, at the University of Nottingham, and an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Geography at the University of Durham.

Chris is widely recognised for his archaeological skills and knowledge. A Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and the Royal Historical Society, he is also an Associate Fellow of the Remote Sensing and Photogrammetry Society, and a member of many professional organizations both nationally and in the East Midlands.

He loves climbing church towers – the more challenging the better – and for this reason he always has the latest and most powerful torch which he can find on the market, quite apart from cameras and other paraphernalia which necessarily accompany him to the top! He has also used his skills in working with maps and information technology to locate many lost churches in the county. These are churches which no longer have any physical survival, but they can be located in documentary sources, and then mapped. Throw in his expertise in bell frames, cross slabs and dendrochronology, and Chris is almost the complete church expert rolled up in a single bundle!

For over 30 years Chris has laboured on behalf of the Trust. He does it because he has a passionate commitment to conserving our churches, despite the financial and other difficulties which make this so problematic. We hope he will continue with this work for many years to come. Chris is inspired by a Biblical motif: *And he was afraid, and said, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."* (Genesis 28:17).

Professor John Beckett - NHCT Trustee

St Helen's Church, Trowell - Renewal Project

In AD 801 when Trowell was a tiny Saxon settlement in the kingdom of Mercia, permission was given for a church, made from wood and wattle, to be built at the request of the people. In AD 1080 the church was re-constructed from local sandstone on the same site, and 100 years later the church was largely rebuilt, and what is now the chancel would have been the whole church at that time.

Since the 12th century there have been many changes and additions in response to the requirements and traditions of succeeding generations. In the Middle Ages, the church would have been the only community building in the village, hosting many events, meetings and festivals other than Sunday services. Whilst remaining primarily as a place of Christian worship, our renewal project seeks to return the use of the church building to the people, much as it would have been prior to Victorian times, but fit for use in present day society. Church buildings have never been about serving the past but about enabling current communities to come closer together and closer to God.

The present improvements have been four years in the planning but were initially driven by a desire to install a modern, energy efficient heating system which would keep the church warm, even in the coldest winter weather. An enthusiastic sub-committee soon realised that renewal of the heating system offered opportunities to make the church more adaptable to modern needs. This became known as the Renewal Project.



Excavation of the chancel floor



Project completed - the finished floor

Completion of the project has provided the church with most of its new facilities. As well as benefiting from efficient economical heating, the new insulated floor is at one level right through to the communion rail giving full disabled access. Upholstered chairs replace the old pews. A new glazed oak outer door at the porch replaces the old iron gate. A new audio/music system is installed complete with an induction loop facility for hearing aid users and the video/data projection system is unique in the village for community use. The new altar table and lectern designs are the result of ideas developed by the project committee. The scheme has cost about £125,000, of which over £60,000 has been raised by the congregation in direct giving and fund raising efforts, with the rest coming from grants. St Helen's very much appreciated

the grants from the Nottinghamshire Historic Churches Trust and the East Midlands Airport Community Fund which have enabled us to creatively reuse the building and provide quality community space, and also our grateful thanks to everyone who has pulled together and given generously to make this happen.

Revd Dr Andy Lord
Rector

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