

**ELSENHAM VILLAGE HISTORY SOCIETY**  
**MINUTES OF MEETING 13<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

**MEMORIAL HALL ELSENHAM**

**Those Present:**

Ray Franklin Chairman	Paul Salvidge	David Verlander
Heather Salvidge	Mike Rea	Margaret Rea
Chris Bush	Diane Bush	Avril Braidwood
Roger Clark	Phyllis Clark	Valerie Austin
Campbell Dunn	Lynda Dunn	Caryl Benner
Felicity Savage	Peter Clear	Carol Wylde
Jean Beeston	Ian Beeston	Brian Tulley
Sue Tyler	Vic Dowsett	Janet Tulley
Mike Tyler	Tony Bailey	Jacky Bailey
Christine Hall	Sue Beeston	Stuart Pimblett

**Apologies:**

Ian Jackson	Moyra Jackson	Peter Johnson
Sue Johnson	Jean Platt	Tony White
Anne White	Kevin Wood	Tim Snow
Tony Eatson	Gloria Eatson	Colin Smith
Teri Williams		

Your Secretary apologises for missing Tony & Jacky Bailey from the attendees on the circulated minutes of the last meeting.

We welcome Sue Beeston and Stuart Pimblett as new members.

1. The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present and Roger Clark, our guest speaker for the evening.

2. **Minutes of the Last Meeting 9<sup>th</sup> March 2017**

The minutes were accepted as correct and signed off by the Chairman.

3. **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

#### 4. Guest Speaker Mr Roger Clark

The Chairman introduced Roger Clark who's topic for the evening was the story of St Mary's, Elsenham.

Roger started his talk by saying that he was indebted to Gordon Barker who probably knows more about the church than anyone else. Gordon has said that whenever one visits the church there is always something new to be seen as the light at different times of the day and through the seasons reveal different patterns within the fabric of the building.

In 2010 the church celebrated its 900<sup>th</sup> birthday making it the oldest building for miles around. Although some historians have dated the original building to 1110, much of the building's origins are shrouded in mystery. The first recorded mention of a church in Elsenham dates to 1070 when a man named John, nephew of Waleran and son of Ralph gave it as a gift to the Abbey of St Stephen in Caen, Normandy. Towards the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, another document records the gift of the church by Beatrice, Lady Say to the Benedictine Priory at Walden. Somewhere between these two dates the present church building was put up, possibly on the site of an earlier Saxon church.

The church features stone blocks used for the quoins at the corners and around the windows that were probably imported from Northern France. These were infilled with flint and rubble and a number of roman tiles or thin bricks. There are three "pudding stones" in the South wall. These are large rounded pebbles whose size and colours gives this type of stone the appearance of a Christmas pudding. Instructions given to the Norman builders were to re-use as much material from earlier buildings as possible both to save money and so the local people did not feel they had lost their old church. The tower and South porch were added in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the vestry or North porch was built by the Victorians.

This then forms the Chancel and the Nave and up until the Reformation 500 years ago these areas were kept quite separate, divided by a stone or more commonly, wood screen. There is evidence of a wood screen in St Mary's where examination of the top of the Chancel arch reveals socket holes where the upright posts that supported the screen would have been located.

The first windows in the Norman building were small, high up and unglazed being closed with shutters. There are two fine examples in the North wall (now glazed thankfully) and the remains of two others, bricked up in the South wall, we must thank the Victorian modernisers for preserving these examples. The two windows in the south wall of the Nave are 15<sup>th</sup> century and that in the North wall a little older. In the Chancel there is another Norman window and the large East window is 15<sup>th</sup> century although the stained glass is modern. It is believed that this window had stained glass in mediaeval times but that has long

gone. The only surviving fragment depicts a leopard's head and can be seen in the Chancel south window. The present stained glass in the middle light of the East window is a memorial to a previous Vicar and the inscription reads "In Memoriam Edward Sant Priest, Vicar 1902 – 1924 RIP" The left and right lights are a memorial to Guy Le Warren Smallwood who made his money as a broker in Calcutta before retiring to Elsenham. On his death £102 was raised by public subscription and the windows installed in 1935.

Above the South door, acting as a lintel is a stone coffin lid reputedly from the grave of a Knight Templar and below it the cill is a Purbeck marble gravestone from about 1280. The archway over the door is made of Roman tiles. The door itself is probably 15<sup>th</sup> century and has a large lock with an equally massive key – you'll need a big key ring!

The squint – or hagioscope – allowed worshippers in the left hand side of the nave to see what the Priest was doing at the Lord's Table, it hasn't been called an altar since the Reformation. The table itself is made of oak from the Elsenham Hall Estate and was placed in the church about 1906. The pews date from the same time and are alternately wide and narrow. The family had the comfortable seating whilst their servants sat behind them in the narrow pews. The pulpit is described as modern but how modern is not known, the base is said to be from 1625. The lectern is early 20<sup>th</sup> century whilst the modern font is from the 1960s or 70s.

One of the finest features of the church is an unusual double piscina which may originally have been set in the floor of the chancel. They date from the time before the 13<sup>th</sup> century when the water used for rinsing the chalice and the water used by the priest to wash his hands had to be poured away in separate bowls. After the rules were altered, the bowls were no longer required and were moved to their present position under a double arch of beautiful Early English dogtooth moulding c.1225.

On the chancel arch are two brass plaques, that on the south side dedicated to Alice Tuer who died in 1619 and on the other side is a plaque dedicated to her daughter Ann Field who died before her in 1615. It is amazing that these 400 year old plaques have survived although close inspection shows that at some time the words in the banners at the top have been defaced, possibly by Puritans during the civil war.

Hanging on the walls at the foot of the tower are two panels which contain the ten commandments, the creed and the Lord's Prayer and were probably originally hung either side of the table on the east wall as an early visual aid. Although they look like stone, they are made of wood and canvas and are very light. Also on the arches of the tower proving there is nothing new under the sun, may be found ancient

examples of graffiti depicting amongst other things, a crude coat of arms and a dog's head.

There are two chalices used for communion services. The Elizabethan bowl of the oldest dates from c1562 and is coupled in a holder which with stem and foot were supplied 50 years later in the days of James I, the original stem and foot having presumably fallen into disrepair. A case for this beautiful and unique cup was finally procured in August 1937 from Messrs Mummsy of Cambridge at a cost £1-5s-0d raised from the free-will offering fund. This chalice is beautiful but not very rare. There are around 142 of these Elizabethan chalices in the Diocese of Chelmsford alone. The reason is that when Henry VIII broke away from the Roman Church, he ransacked many churches and took away their treasures. Later in 1551, Edward VI ordered that "such plate that remaineth to be employed unto his Highness' use". When Edward died in 1553, his half-sister Mary restored the Roman Catholic religion so Churchwardens were put to the expense of replacing stone altars, images of the saints and removing the decorations ordered by Henry VIII. Five years later Mary was replaced by Elizabeth who promptly restored the Church of England putting the Churchwardens to even more expense reversing the changes of the last five years and buying new chalices, patens, bowls and crosses. A long explanation but it was these turbulent times that resulted in so many Elizabethan chalices being made. The second cup was presented to the church by Canon Alan Mackenzie who retired to Glebe End in the 1980s. For many years he had ministered to the Liverpool Diocese amongst the deaf community. His claim to fame reportedly was once being mentioned in a Beatles song, Eleanor Rigby. The line went "Father Mackenzie, writing the words of a sermon no one would hear".

The church has four bells inscribed as follows: 1<sup>st</sup> 'Johannes Greere me fecit anno 1572'; 2<sup>nd</sup> 'John Dier made this bell, 1600'; 3<sup>rd</sup> 'T Mears of London fecit 1819 and 4<sup>th</sup> 'S' with a crown, coat of arms and ornament – the marks of William Culverdon, 16<sup>th</sup> century. The bell frame was condemned and removed in 1958 when the tower was restored. The bells were subsequently re-hung for chiming from the base of the tower.

In the present day, the church building is in good repair and there are no urgent or expensive repairs required. Money for the maintenance and upkeep of the building is raised by the Fabric Fund who over the years have raised many thousands of pounds which have recently paid for repairs to the stonework of the West window and improvements to the car park. Their biggest event is the annual Christmas Tree Festival on the first weekend of December which attracts hundreds of visitors and raises a considerable amount for the fund.

There is a service very Sunday at St Mary's and another in the Village Hall that tends to attract young families. There are also regular Sunday services in Henham and Ugley and an evening service in Henham. The

Vicar, Gary Townsend, is soon to be joined by an Assistant Minister, Gary Tubbs who takes up his duties at the end of September (2017) focussing on the new housing in Elsenham. There is also a team of lay preachers that enable the church to hold five or six services every Sunday.

Looking to the future, planning permission has been granted to build an annexe to the north of the main building to house toilets, somewhere to serve refreshments, a new vestry and some storage. It has taken three years to get planning permission due to the rarity of the church and it's setting particularly the North wall. Conditions of the permission include an archaeological survey – will we find evidence of an earlier building? – and also a bat survey to determine when work can take place without disturbing the bat population.

Roger concluded his talk by saying here's lots more that hasn't been talked about and invited everyone to visit the church and have a good look around. Who knows you might spot something that nobody has ever noticed before.

After the talk Roger displayed some of the Parish registers he had brought along and Malcolm Robinson showed off an album of photos taken in 1933 showing his father Joe, amongst others, repairing the roof following a deathwatch beetle infestation. 21,600 tiles were removed from the roof and subsequently replaced.

Secretary's Note: I am indebted to Roger for the loan of the text of his talk to aid the accuracy of my notes. All mistakes therefore, are mine alone.

## **5. Open Forum and Any Other Business**

### **5.1 Clavering Art History Day**

This year's Study Day will be an Art History Day arranged by Elizabeth Allen. Among the artists discussed will be Sir George Clausen much of whose work was painted in NW Essex. Others will be Sickert, Steer, Sargent and Whistler. The date is Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November and tickets cost £15. If anyone who would like to go please let your Secretary know and he will make the necessary bookings.

### **5.2 Quarterly Report**

The Secretary apologised for not having prepared the Quarterly Report prior to the meeting but told members it would contain items about the Elsenham Parish boundaries that David Verlander was researching, book sales and the Memorial Chapel.

### **5.3 Memorial Chapel**

Work to refurbish the Chapel has stalled of late mainly due to lack of funds. A number of grants have been explored but in the main they are either too little, aimed at charitable bodies (not Councils) or requiring significant match funding. If any members have any ideas for sources of funding please get in touch with your Secretary.

### **5.4 Elsenham Jam Factory Talk**

On Thursday October 5<sup>th</sup>, Ray Franklin will be presenting a talk on the Elsenham Jam Factory to Stansted Mountfitchet Local History Society. The talk will be held in the Crafton Green Centre, off Chapel Hill, at 8pm, visitors are charged £2 for day membership.

### **5.5 Book Sales**

Copies of the History of the Robin Hood PH were still available at £3 but there were only a few copies left of Broom Farm – A History. We still have good stocks of our previous books and the Committee has decided to offer these at a special price to members i.e. For The Duration £4; Elsenham School £2 and the Pantomime Society £1. All three will cost £5. Please contact the Secretary to order.

## **6. Date of Next Meeting**

Our next meeting will be held on Wednesday November 8th at 8pm. Our speaker will be Bill Hardy from Bishop's Stortford who will talk about The Bishop's Stortford Union and Elsenham poorhouse

## **7. End Note**

Roger Clark very generously declined any payment for his talk so we took a collection for the St Mary's Fabric Fund that at the end of the evening raised £87.61. Thank you to everybody who contributed.

**ENDS**