

= St Helen 's Church , Ashby @-@ de @-@ la @-@ Zouch =

St Helen 's Church is the Anglican parish church of Ashby @-@ de @-@ la @-@ Zouch , in the deanery of North West Leicestershire and the Diocese of Leicester . Although there was a church in the town in the eleventh century , the core of the present building mainly dates from work started in 1474 , when the church was rebuilt by William Hastings at the same time that he converted his neighbouring manor house into a castle . The church was refurbished in about 1670 to create more space , but the large and increasing size of the congregation led to further work in 1829 , and a major rebuild in 1878 ? 80 , including the widening of the nave by the addition of two outer aisles .

The sandstone church has a tower at the west end , and its nave is wider than it is long due to the extra Victorian aisles . St Helen 's Church has some ancient stained glass at the east end , and the Victorian windows on the nave and towers form a coherent narrative of the life of Jesus . Other fixtures include some important funereal monuments , and a font , pulpit and carved heads by Thomas Earp . The finger pillory is a rare item , once seen as a humane form of punishment . The church has a long association with the Hastings family , its patrons for four centuries , and became a centre for Puritanism under Henry Hastings , 3rd Earl of Huntingdon . The " Puritan Earl " brought a series of radical figures to the town , including Anthony Gilby and Arthur Hildersham . St Helen 's Church is a nationally important building , with a Grade I listing for its exceptional architectural interest .

= = History = =

= = = Foundation to 1547 = = =

There is little documented history of Ashby @-@ de @-@ la @-@ Zouch before the Norman Conquest , although Roman coins were found in the area , and the town 's name has both Saxon and Danish elements . It has an entry in the Domesday Book , which suggests that it had about 100 inhabitants in 1086 , and subsequently grew in importance under its La Zouch and Hastings lords , notably William Hastings .

It is recorded in Domesday that a priest was resident in Ashby , and that the church dedicated to St Helen consisted only of a nave . In about 1144 , Philip Beaumais , lord of the Manor of Ashby , granted the church , its lands and revenues to the Augustinian community of Lilleshall Abbey , which retained possession until 1538 . A 2013 excavation found evidence of a two @-@ story vicarage dating from this period , but the building fell into disrepair following the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the site was cleared in the English Civil War of 1642 ? 49 .

Parts of the current nave and chancel date from the fourteenth century , but the church was rebuilt and enlarged by William Hastings in 1474 , at the same time that he erected the tower of his nearby castle . The new , larger church included a nave with aisles and chapels adjoining the chancel . The tower , Hastings Chapel , and some buttresses and windows still remain from the fifteenth century .

= = = Reformation and after = = =

The English Reformation inevitably affected St Helen 's Church . Edward VI 's 1547 injunction decreed that all images in churches were to be dismantled or destroyed , including stained glass , shrines , roods , statues and bells , and altars were to be replaced by wooden tables . Damage during the Civil War was minimal , although there are pike marks on the stonework . The church may have been fortified as part of the defences of the castle , a Royalist stronghold .

Around 1670 , the church was refurbished , a gallery was built at the western end of the nave , and the carved reredos and a large wooden Royal coat of arms , now at the west end of the nave , were acquired at the same time . An inspection report at the end of the eighteenth century commented on the dirty transept walls , and the need to install the equivalent of a cattle grid to keep pigs out of the churchyard . Rich crimson hangings in the church had earlier attracted the attention of a thief . The

increasing congregation led to the replacement of the pews and the construction of galleries down both sides of the building in 1829 , but a more extensive rebuilding was undertaken in 1878 ? 80 , by James Piers St Aubyn . The galleries were removed and the two outer aisles were added during this period , a chapel was converted to a vestry and improvements were made to the Hastings Chapel . The cost of these works has been estimated as between £ 16 @, @ 000 and more than £ 18 @, @ 000 . Later developments included the expenditure of £ 13 @, @ 000 between 1963 and 1968 to combat deathwatch beetles found during rewiring , improvements to the heating system , and a rededication in 1974 , the quincenentary of the church .

St Helen 's Church is the parish church of the English market town of Ashby @-@ de @-@ la @-@ Zouch in Leicestershire . The parish is currently in the deanery of North West Leicestershire , the Diocese of Leicester and the Province of Canterbury .

= = Description = =

St Helen 's Church has a maximum length of 41 @.@ 70 metres ( 136 @.@ 8 ft ) and is aligned at 25 ° north of east . The majority of English churches have an alignment within a few degrees of east , so this is an exceptionally large deviation from the norm . The sandstone church has a large , mainly fifteenth @-@ century west tower supported by corner buttresses and topped with battlements and pinnacles . The tower has a four @-@ light window and west doorway , and contains a spiral stairway to the bell and clock chambers and the roof . The chancel is adjoined by the former north chapel ( now the vestry ) on one side and the Hastings Chapel , set transept @-@ wise on the other ; it has three sedilia and a piscina on its northern wall . The nave is significantly wider than it is long , and has four bays with medieval inner north and south aisles and nineteenth @-@ century outer aisles . The Hastings Chapel , chancel and clerestory are embattled , and the former north chapel is English Perpendicular , with a window of the same style . The piers in the nave were remodelled in the fifteenth century , and have incised panels , as do some of the arches . This feature is of an unusual style , although it is seen also at Sherborne Abbey in Dorset and at St Peter and St Paul , Syston , Leicestershire .

The Chapel of St Michael and All Angels and the Lady Chapel are at the east end of the outer north and south aisles respectively , and contain twenty of the twenty @-@ eight stone heads carved by Thomas Earp of Lambeth in 1878 ? 1880 , mostly depicting biblical characters such as Salome and John the Baptist , or historical figures like St Helen and Martin Luther . Ten are paired on opposite sides of the five pillars defining the inner edge of the Lady Chapel aisle , and another ten are similarly arranged in the Chapel of St Michael and All Angels . The corbels of the north , west and south doors bear six more heads , those by the west door depicting Queen Victoria and Archbishop Tait ; and Jesus and Moses are higher on the corbels of the west window . The clerestory and the wooden roofs of the nave and south inner aisle are fifteenth century , but the rest of the lead @-@ clad roofing dates from the Victorian rebuilding .

St Helen 's Church was designated as a Grade I listed building in 1950 , recognising it as a building of exceptional interest . It is important not only for the medieval structures that remain , but also for its monuments and fittings . The Victorian restoration is also noted as being of high quality and in keeping with the older parts of the church .

= = = Furnishings and fixtures = = =

The church had much stained glass in 1622 that disappeared during the Reformation . The current eleven coloured glass windows on the north , west and south sides of the church were erected in 1879 by Lavers , Barraud and Westlake , each being named for its donor ; the scenes depicted tell the Life of Christ from the Annunciation to the Last Supper . The stained glass in the chancel and the Hasting Chapel was erected in 1924 , and most was once in the castle , although the earliest glass is a German , Swiss and Flemish work possibly originally from Farleigh Hungerford . The chancel 's east window contains arms of Richard I and Edward I and the south window includes " The Magi bearing gifts " and the arms of Catherine Parr . The Hastings Chapel south window has

several panels from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries , and one which could possibly be as old as the thirteenth century . The chapel 's east window also has some high quality work , including " The Last Supper " . The large west window in the tower is plain glass , as is the clerestory .

The rare finger pillory at the west end immobilised offenders without exposing them to the public degradation associated with the stocks . In the centre aisle hangs a large brass candelabrum donated by Leonard Piddocke , High Bailiff of Leicester , in 1733 . It is surmounted by a brass dove and was made by William Parsons of London . Some of the branches were stolen in 1776 , but soon recovered .

The Baroque wooden reredos of 1679 , probably by local man Thomas Sabin , has been compared favourably with the work of Christopher Wren and Grinling Gibbons , and the metal screen also made by an Ashby craftsman , John Staley , is also of high quality . There is a Royal Arms from the reign of Charles II high on the west wall of the nave . The alabaster pulpit and octagonal font were made by Earp in 1878 ? 1880 . The font is carved from a single block of stone and decorated on each face with Christian symbols , and rests on red granite pillars on a Portland stone base . The pulpit is similarly supported to match the font . A second , smaller font with a panelled stem is in the southwestern corner of the nave .

The church contains a pipe organ of uncertain date made by Kirkland of London at their Wakefield branch which opened in 1893 . Its most recent restorations were in 1935 and 1955 . It has three manuals and a pedalboard , and is described on the National Pipe Organ Register as being of an " unusual " type .

There is a north @-@ facing clock on the tower , and a sundial on the south side which was rediscovered and repaired in 2000 . The masonry shows that it was built at the same time as that part of the tower . The tower holds a ring originally of eight bells ; the earliest dates back to 1571 , but was recast in 1849 , and all eight bells were repaired by John Taylor & Co in 1886 . The bells were repaired and rehung again in 2006 using £ 42 @,@ 600 of National Lottery funding awarded from the Heritage Lottery Fund . The tenor bell was recast , and two new trebles were made , bringing the total to ten ; prior to the last recasting , the large tenor bell weighed 902 kilograms ( 1 @,@ 989 lb ) .

= = = Hastings Chapel and memorials = = =

The Hastings Chapel contains a number of family monuments , including a large alabaster tomb for Francis Hastings , 2nd Earl of Huntingdon , who died in 1561 , and his countess , Catherine . The monument was carved by Joseph Pickford to a design by William Kent . A memorial to Theophilus Hastings , 9th Earl of Huntingdon , who died in 1746 , is on the east wall and is by Michael Rysbrack . His widow , Selina , founded a training college for evangelical ministers , and a sculpture of her in mourning , also by Rysbrack , is placed by her husband 's memorial . The countess herself is remembered through a large brass plaque in the chancel floor . The larger of two vaults containing the coffins of the Hastings family lies beneath the chancel , and the smaller and older one is under their chapel .

The Lady Chapel contains a wall memorial to Arthur Hildersham and a painted wooden bust of Margery Wright , who died in 1623 . The inscription below records that she had given £ 43 to provide gowns for the old and needy of the town . The Chapel of St Michael and All Angel has a recumbent alabaster effigy known as " the Pilgrim " . The subject holds a pilgrim 's staff and other symbols such as a wide hat with cockle shells . A dog lies at his feet . The fifteenth @-@ century figure was originally brightly painted , and depicts a person of noble birth . It is believed to represent Thomas , the third brother of William Hastings . A number of carved alabaster memorial slabs were removed when the church was re @-@ pewed in 1829 . Only one survives , a memorial to Robert Mundy , who died in 1526 , and his two wives , both named Elizabeth ; it now stands upright by the west wall .

The arch gateway at the western end of the churchyard bears a skull and crossbones at the top of each pillar . The memorials in the churchyard are mainly dated 1750 ? 1850 , and most are lined against the churchyard 's south wall or are flush with the ground . Some show fine carving ,

commensurate with commercial success . They include the memorials of French @-@ born wine merchant Jean Gaudin and the Litherland brothers , founders of Royal Crown Derby . From 1804 , French prisoners of war were quartered in Ashby , and those who died before their release , or who stayed and married local women , are also buried in the churchyard . A group of memorials are for members of a prosperous local family , the Mammatts . Edward Mammatt , church organist for 40 years and a successful scientist despite being blinded at age six , also has a monument in the church , and one of the Victorian windows is dedicated to his widow by their sons .

= = People = =

The advowson of St Helen 's Church , including the right to nominate the vicar , was owned by Lilleshall Abbey until 1508 , when it passed to the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield . The Dissolution of the Monasteries led to the transfer of the patronage to Francis Hastings , the 2nd Earl of Huntingdon , and it remained with the Hastings family until 1931 , passing then to John G. Shields and his descendants . The names of the vicars are known back to Roger in 1200 .

Henry Hastings , the third earl , was a zealous promoter of puritanism and founded Ashby Grammar School to provide education in accordance with his religious views . Anthony Gilby had lived in exile in Geneva during the reign of Mary , but was invited to Ashby by the earl and made the town a nationally important centre for radical Protestantism . Attempts by the church authorities to discipline him failed , and he died after 25 years spent preaching and pamphleteering . Hastings ' influence meant that between 1562 and 1632 Ashby had a succession of Puritan ministers . The last of these was Arthur Hildersham , another influential figure who sought to internationalise radical Protestantism , but became vulnerable to the strictures of his bishop after Henry Hastings died in 1595 . Hildersham was barred from preaching or deprived of his living for 17 of the 38 years of his incumbency , Earl Henry was interred in St Helen 's after a lavish funeral befitting his status as Lord President of the Council of the North .

= = Services and congregation = =

As of 2015 , the church is managed as part of the " Ashby and Breedon Team Ministry " , which also includes Holy Trinity , Ashby @-@ de @-@ la @-@ Zouch ; The Priory Church of Saint Mary and Saint Hardulph , Breedon on the Hill ; St Mary the Virgin , Coleorton ; St John 's Chapel , Coleorton ; All Saints Church , Isley Walton and St Matthew 's Church , Worthington . The church operates " Little Fishes " , a mother and toddler group , and its street pastors work in outreach and liaison with the town community .

The Ashe lectures , endowed by Francis Ashe in 1654 , provided for weekly lectures in the church by a " godly , orthodox and ordained minister " . This was later amended to allow for at least one lecture each year . Twentieth @-@ century lecturers include Geoffrey Fisher , Donald Coggan , Donald Soper and George Carey . In 2014 , the church received a £ 43 @, @ 500 grant from the National Lottery fund to improve its visitor facilities .