

# Heritage & Buildings Newsletter

No. 7 - Autumn 2015



From **Ian Simpson**

**Heritage Officer for the Diocese of Liverpool**



**Cover photograph:** The East end of John Loughborough Pearson's 1885 masterpiece St. Agnes and St. Pancras, Toxteth Park. This lovely Grade I Listed church has just been awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant towards major structural repairs, including the replacement of the roof to the SE transept, visible to the left on this photograph. **Above:** A detail from the fine carved frieze at St. Agnes'.

**Rear Cover:** I make no apology for a third view of St. Agnes' church, an interior shot taken from the gallery at the west end and looking toward the High Altar. They don't build them like this anymore!

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If you would like any news items from your church, or an event you are organising, including in future issues of my [Heritage & Buildings Newsletter](#), please let me know. The deadline for inclusion in Issue #8 (Winter 2015) is November 24<sup>th</sup>.

Author's Note: this Newsletter consists entirely of my own personal thoughts, reflections and opinions from my work as Heritage Officer. It is NOT an official publication of either the Diocese of Liverpool or Historic England and is not to be taken as such. References to third party publications or websites are for information only and no liability is accepted for the content of these or for the results of any action taken in reliance upon them.

Ian Simpson MBA CBIFM, September 2015



## Welcome!

The summer is fading into what we hope will be a pleasant autumn... and once again it is time to make sure our church buildings are in a fit condition to face whatever winter will throw at them. There's an old saying that a lot of berries in the summer means a bad winter is coming; if this is true then this year's bumper gooseberry crop could mean we're in for a taste of the Arctic!

So, where to start? I've said it before (and I'll doubtless say it again) but the most important thing you can do for any building is to prevent water from getting in. This means ensuring that the rainwater goods are in good condition: intact and clear. There shouldn't be any missing sections or broken joints between sections of guttering, and all the brackets holding them in place should be present. Any plant growth in gutters or hopper heads is a clear sign of a long-standing blockage and should be cleared without delay.

The downspouts should also be checked. Any missing or split sections should be replaced straight away, using plastic as a temporary measure if necessary. Here's a tip: it is better to check your rainwater goods when it is actually raining so you can spot any leaks or drips.

Now is the time to check the roof for missing or slipped slates or tiles as these are an obvious route for water into the building. Check the flashings as well – these are designed to stop water getting through between the roof and tower or between different sections of the roof. Unfortunately these are vulnerable to metal theft; if this happens rainwater ingress will occur.

Don't forget to check the roof for damage after any winter storms!

One way you can learn more about keeping your church roof and rainwater goods – and all the other elements of the building – in good condition is to come along to one of my Maintenance Training Days, details on p. 5.

As ever, if I can help you with any aspect of church maintenance or repair, or any other Heritage-related matter don't hesitate to contact me by phone (0151 705 2127) or by email [ian.simpson@liverpool.anglican.org](mailto:ian.simpson@liverpool.anglican.org). The postal address is Diocese of Liverpool, St. James House, 20 St. James Road, Liverpool L1 7BY.



**Holy Trinity, Parr Mount** is celebrating not just one but two substantial grant awards towards the project to make this historic church watertight and transform it into a community hub. £40K from the National Churches Trust and £15K from the Garfield Weston Foundation bring the total raised to almost £295,000!

Our front cover celebrates the award of £197,800 by the Heritage Lottery Fund to **St. Agnes and St. Pancras, Toxteth Park**. The money will go towards major structural repairs to the Grade I Listed church including stonework repairs and the final phase of re-roofing.

The next phase of the **Listed Places of Worship Roof Repair Fund** should be announced during September. Details will be available at [www.lpowroof.org.uk](http://www.lpowroof.org.uk) from the middle of the month. Applications will open in November with a deadline of 28<sup>th</sup> February 2016. As last time, I will be co-ordinating the Diocese's response and assisting with applications.

**Heritage & Buildings Newsletter** is available online: if you have missed any back issues, or flogged them on eBay (autographed copies fetch higher prices!), you can get them from <http://www.iansimpson.eu> as free PDFs.

I have updated my **Suppliers List** giving contact details for a range of building services from asbestos surveys to waste management. Email me if you want a copy but remember the list is provided as a free service to churches and inclusion of a business on the list does NOT constitute a recommendation!

Don't forget - if you have any news you'd like to share with us, send it in to me - by email or post - by November 24<sup>th</sup>!

# Maintenance Training Days for 2015 and 2016

The final two Maintenance Training Days for 2015 will take place in October and in different parts of the Diocese to enable as many people as possible to take part. The dates and venues are:

**Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> October at St. Paul, Widnes**

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> October – venue to be confirmed**

In both cases the events start at 9.45am for a prompt 10.00am start and run through until about 3.30pm.

Topics covered include the enemies of a church building, how to carry out a systematic inspection and what to look for, how to draw up a maintenance programme for your church, and what to include in an Annual Fabric Report. The content is mostly equally applicable to both old and modern buildings (anything which is specific to one or the other is made clear) and participants from other Anglican Dioceses or from non-Anglican churches are warmly welcomed.

Lunch is provided (vegetarian / special diet options available), and you will be given a copy of my book on inspecting and maintaining churches and other training material to take home and cherish.

To book places on these courses send a cheque, payable to Boston Facilities Management, for £15 per participant to me at St. James' House, stating which course you wish to attend and whether you have any specific dietary requirements.

Dates for 2016 will be announced shortly, but the first two are likely to be in late April and early May.

## Gargoyles and Grotesques



One of the things I enjoy most about looking at churches is the huge variety of mythical and strange creatures that can be found high up in the stonework. The image above, taken at Oakham Parish Church in Rutland, shows a grotesque (left) and two decorated corbels. Decorated corbels became fashionable in the Norman period (c. 1070 to 1175) with grotesques and gargoyles appearing with the rise of Gothic architecture from the late 12<sup>th</sup> Century onwards.

Gargoyle and grotesque are not, in fact, interchangeable terms. A gargoyle is specifically a rainwater outlet – the term “gargoyle” comes from the old French word for “throat” from which we also get the modern verb “to gargle”. As such, a gargoyle does not have to be decorated; a plain trough sticking out at high level is technically still a gargoyle.

A grotesque does not play any part in rainwater dispersal. The word “grotesque” comes from the Italian for cave, “grotto”, as the earliest known depictions of these weird semi-mythological beasts were discovered in caves in Italy, long after their use in churches began. It follows that medieval architects when they were designing churches would not have used the term “grotesque” to describe these features.



Left: a gargoyle at the Bedesten, the 12<sup>th</sup> Century former Church of St. Nicholas in Lefkoşa, TRNC, proves that this form of decoration was common throughout Christendom. This church spent hundreds of years in use as a market during the Ottoman occupation of Cyprus.

St. Cuthbert's church in Halsall, dating from 1358, is one of the best-preserved medieval churches in our Diocese and boasts some fine grotesques, including this figure of a rather fierce-looking winged bull (right).



Winged bulls and some of the other monstrous creations to be found at high level on our ancient churches are not a mainstream feature of the Christian religion, so what is the inspiration behind them, and why are they there?

One theory which held sway for some time was that the masons who carved them did so to be in some way subversive. Recent studies of the way medieval masons were organised, and an understanding of the level of skill involved in producing such exquisite carvings with basic hand tools, suggest that this is not the case. Equally unlikely is the theory that they were a means of keeping alive pagan pre-Christian traditions. Those who paid for churches to be built were by definition devout Christians who built them to glorify God and to improve their lot in the world to come. They would not wish to spoil their chances of reaching Heaven by including the pagan deities whom they had renounced in this life.

The most plausible explanation is that they have an apotropaic function, in other words they are there to protect the building from harm, and specifically from evil spirits which, in the pre-Enlightenment world, were believed to be more or less everywhere. The rite of consecration for a new church included a prayer of exorcism to drive them out of the building and the gargoyles and grotesques were there to keep them out, perhaps literally by frightening them away.

As to the designs themselves, they should not be seen as an art form in isolation. I am convinced that these beasts come from the same source as the fantastic and often quite hideous creatures in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch or the mythical beasts in the illuminations of ancient manuscripts such as the Luttrell Psalter (digitised at [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk), the website of the British Library).



Human beings have always had a great capacity for extrapolating beyond that which they know, using their imagination to conjure up new and quite amazing worlds. I believe that, just as we today have science fiction giving us the likes of “Star Wars” and “Andromeda”, in the medieval world before modern science the human imagination was often devoted to a kind of “religious fiction”, dreaming up the bestiary of realms unseen. Some of the results of their imaginings are preserved in stone for us to enjoy today.

They are not, alas, terribly well preserved in many cases as years of wind and weather – and the industrial pollution of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – have taken their toll. Many are now badly weathered and (as above, at Rochester Cathedral) their fearsome features have become eroded or, worse, lost altogether.



With the end of the Gothic Period in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century these wonderful creatures went out of fashion, only to reappear in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with the Gothic Revival. As many churches in our Diocese date from this period we have many examples of this art form to appreciate.

The example to the left is from Christ Church, Kensington, a wonderful Italianate building by the Audsleys which was sold in the 1980s and is now, most unfortunately, in a disgraceful condition although thankfully some repairs have been carried out recently.





Wigan is a fertile hunting ground for those who wish to see medieval-style mythical beasts.

At St. James with St. Thomas, Poolstock (left), a four-legged creature looks slightly sheepishly over its shoulder as it clings for dear life to the church.

This handsome Grade II\* Listed church dates from 1866 and is by the distinguished Lancashire architect E.G. Paley. It is replete with carvings and features in the Decorated Gothic style and well worth seeing.



All Saints Church in Wigan, largely rebuilt by Paley and Sharpe in the 1840s, is home to one of the best menageries of grotesques, ranging from caricatured humans (see [H&BN #5](#)) to some truly scary beasts. Firmly in the latter category is this example, left, with what appear to be two serpents emanating from its mouth.

This short article is of course only a brief introduction to this fascinating subject but I hope that it will spark a renewed

affection for, and appreciation of, these wonderful "creatures" which inhabit the higher echelons of many of our heritage church buildings. Happy spotting!

## Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk, Dordrecht



The magnificent mass of Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk (Our Lady's Church) stands protectively over the old city of Dordrecht. Visible for some distance as one approaches by river – the city is after all a network of islands – or by rail, the church is both a symbol of Dordrecht and the star among its many attractions. The Netherlands' oldest city (and former capital) is one of my favourite anywhere and I have stayed here several times since my first visit in 2002.

Also known as the "Grote Kerk" (Great Church), this is the largest church in the city although not the oldest – the holder of that distinction is the Nieuwekerk (New Church), dedicated to St. Nicholas, which dates from 1175 although little of its original fabric survives.

The Grote Kerk is a fine example of a Brabantine Gothic church whose current form dates from about 1470. The original chapel of St. Mary was built in 1285 and was greatly expanded in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century but then the church was badly damaged in the Great Fire of Dordrecht in 1457 and major repairs were needed.

The tower was added in 1504 by Antoon I Keldermans (the "I" denotes "the first", his son, also an architect, was Antoon II Keldermans) who designed a number of the Netherlands' most important buildings including Middelburg Town Hall.

The tower is 62m (204ft) high and would have been considerably taller had the octagonal spire been added. This was never done as the tower started to lean even before construction was complete due to the marshy ground beneath the church. Today the highest point of the tower leans 2.25m out of true but underpinning work carried out in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century has stabilised it.

The tower contains a carillon of 67 bells weighing 52 tonnes, which I think is the largest in Europe. There are few pleasures greater than listening to the Grote Kerk's carillon celebrating the hour on a pleasant Spring day, it really is the most wonderful uplifting sound.



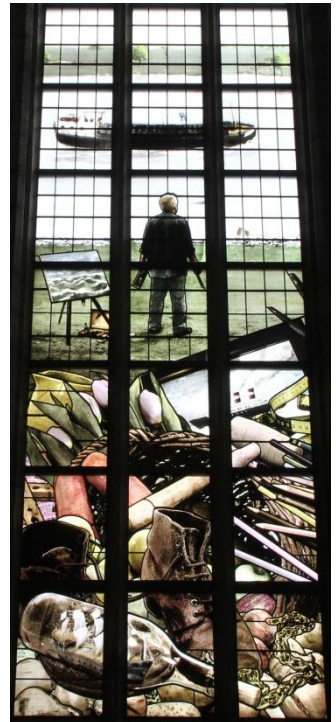
The interior of the Grote Kerk has an abundance of the high vaulting and arcading that you expect from the Gothic of the period. The whitewashed stonework gives the impression of light and space. The Protestantism of the church is clear from the fact that the relatively small and insignificant Holy Table is dwarfed by the pulpit with its remarkable carved wooden tester above.

As well as drawing attention to the pulpit and dignifying it, the tester performs the function of amplifying the preacher's voice for the congregation to hear throughout the building. In effect it is a 17<sup>th</sup> Century sound system.



There is a lot of stained glass here, much of it depicting uniquely Dutch events and scenes. Being quite high, photographing it from floor level results in some distortion as in the above detail of the St. Elizabeth's Day Flood Window which records the devastating and tragic events of 18<sup>th</sup> November 1421 when much of the low-lying Hollandsche Waard was inundated. 6,000 people were killed, a huge area of farmland was destroyed and Dordrecht became cut off from the rest of Holland, losing its status as the country's capital as a result.

The Guild Windows, dating from 2006 and the work of Teun Hocks (detail, right), were donated as a celebration of the Guilds' contribution to the life of Dordrecht over the centuries. Items produced by each of the Guilds are included in the designs albeit piled up along the riverbank and looking more like detritus than a showcase for the city's trades!





The Grote Kerk still contains plenty of evidence of its Medieval past. Particularly interesting is a wall painting (detail, left) which survived the whitewashing first carried out in 1572 when the building passed from the Roman Catholic church to the Protestants. Presumably it owes its survival to having been hidden behind either panelling or furniture which couldn't easily be removed at the time.

The choir stalls date from the late 1530s and feature some very elaborate and intricate carvings. The misericords (small seats designed to give support to someone who had to stand for a long time singing or praying) feature a range of carved scenes both from the Bible and from everyday life.



*What is going on here? Answers on a postcard, please...*

There are three organs. The principal one is by Rotterdam organ-builder W.H. Kam and dates from 1859 although it sits within the case of the original organ, by Nicolaas van Haagen, of 1671. A restoration of this instrument was completed in 2010. In addition there is a 2007-built replica of a Silbermann organ, designed specifically for the music of J.S. Bach, and a 1785 cabinet organ. All three are tuned slightly differently and so could never perform together.

This is a church which takes visitor welcome seriously, recognising that against a background of declining church attendance and limited availability of funding (sounds familiar?) the building needs to earn its keep.

Guided tours are available for a small charge, there is a well-written guide book and a shop selling souvenirs and religious books (the latter mostly in Dutch of course!) and overall I think the Grote Kerk is an exemplar of a working church which is also a well-run visitor attraction.

A virtual guided tour is available via the church's website (<http://www.grotekerk-dordrecht.nl/>) but there is of course no substitute for visiting in person. If you wish to climb the tower for magnificent views across the surrounding rivers and countryside (and Rotterdam, weather permitting) it will cost you just €1, but be warned, it is a stiff climb!



A particularly nice touch is the Stonework & Restoration display which tells the story of the church's most recent renovation (1982-7) and the ongoing repair and maintenance work complete with examples of real stones, tiles and fixings many of which are normally too high up to see closely. This simple but effective educational display should inspire other churches undergoing restoration to include something similar in their funding proposals as a way of making the work meaningful and relevant to a wider audience.

## Just For Fun!

Unfortunately, space didn't permit a "Just For Fun" in **H&BN #6**. The question this time is, where is this window? It is one of the poorest Victorian windows I've seen, taking as its subject Jesus' distress at the death of his dear friend St. Lazarus. Sadly the representation of Jesus, with one of His Disciples looking over his shoulder, makes Him look like a two-headed ghost.



The window isn't in the Diocese of Liverpool, if that information helps! As ever, no prizes, just the fun of taking part.

## In **H&BN #8**...

We look back into Liverpool's rich Victorian church landscape and visit **Dr. M'Neile's Iron Church** in the first of two articles about the life and times of one of the city's legendary (and highly controversial) churchmen. Our look at Europe's Best Churches continues with a visit to **St. Peter's, Meverley**, on the border between England and Wales. We will reflect on the **CVTA's 2015 Symposium** and - of course! - there will be a **Seasonal Health & Safety** feature. Bah! Humbug! Due out around the end of November.

