



S.A.L.H.S

website: www.salhs.org.uk

Stanstead Abbotts Local History Society

The Parish Churches

Issue 2

Editor—Terry Collins

August 2012

St Margaret's Church.

On Friday 20th July, a small group from SALHS met at the church where they were escorted around by Ruth Swallow one of the Church Wardens.

Although locally just called St Margaret's church its real title is 'The Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary at St Margaret Thele.'

The building you see there today is all that remains of a church dating from approximately 1100ad. In about 1247 Roger de Burun made arrangements with the Bishop of St Albans for a new church to be built in the area. Some 70 years later Sir William Goldington and his wife Margaret were Lord and Lady of the Manor and made St Margaret's a collegiate church with the Chapel being dedicated to the Virgin Mary, meaning that the monks could pray for the souls of the Lord and Lady of the Manor and other people of nobility.

By the early 15th century most of the buildings were falling into disrepair and the College was closed. The present church is the old chapel and all that survives of the more extensive buildings.

We started off looking at the glass screen which has beautiful engravings depicting the four seasons and some local connections to the church - this work being carried out by Ruth's late

husband Arthur Swallow.

Under the main altar lies the body of Henry Lawrence, nephew of Oliver Cromwell, who held the office of Lord President of the Council of England, he was allowed to keep his head and retire to a minor manor in Hertfordshire (St Margaret's manor house was next to the church) because he did not sign the death warrant of King Charles 1st.

Ruth concluded her tour upstairs in the organ loft giving us a demonstration of the 1830 barrel organ. Playing a rendition of 'O Worship the King' Following our tour the ladies from St Margaret's church laid on some welcome refreshments for the group.

Continued overleaf



Charlie Lovick

Both for those who knew Charlie personally and for those like me who only got to know Charlie relatively recently it was a great shock to hear of his sudden passing. He will be sadly missed by everyone. Charlie volunteered to be the Secretary of SALHS when we launched the history society in April. His energy and good humour helped us through those early weeks as we got onto our knees. His drive and commitment helped take us forward to our present position. We have much to thank him for and will miss him greatly.

Ian White CBE . Chairman SALHS



The Parish churches—Continued

St James Church

SALHS members were shown around the church on Sunday July 29th by Mrs Trower. She explained that St James had been the parish church of Stanstead Abbots for over 700 years. Probably on the site of an earlier Saxon building and certainly 12th century. Its position on a hill a mile from the village meant that as the village expanded a newer church nearer the centre was needed and so St Andrews was built and consecrated in 1881.

This position on a hill is of some speculation for the story goes that the building was to have stood in the valley below but every morning when the Builder went to the site to continue working everything had been moved to the top of the adjacent hill, some blamed the Devil and some the monks of Waltham Holy Cross who became Lords of the Manor at about the same time.

The estate and church passed through many hands including Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. In 1977 it was taken over by the Churches Conservation Trust who began a programme of restoration work.

The entrance porch is 15th century, leading to a 13th century doorway. The 15th Century tower was the work

of William Stowell master mason of Westminster Abbey. The north wall of the Nave is of 12th Century origin, being made of far cruder materials commonly used in the Middle Ages.

The interior of the church has a number of outstanding features, the 15th Century tower arch frames the organ in its Gothic case, built in 1864 it is still hand pumped as there is no electricity in the church. The belfry above contains three bells.

The font is in three parts a 13th Century bowl, on a 15th Century stem with a 19th Century wooden cover. The box pews date from approx. 1710 and below the concrete bases there are said to be brasses.

The pulpit is the most unusual feature not only for its construction but also its location. Made of oak in the 16th Century, the bottom level is the parish clerk's pew, above that the readers pew and then the pulpit itself. Its position means that services are unusual as the congregation is focused on the pulpit in the centre of the church for most of the service.

Everyone thanked Mrs Trower for an interesting insight into the original parish church of Stanstead Abbots.



St James Church

18th Century box pews and three tier pulpit shown on the left.

SALHS needs a new secretary

The Society needs a new secretary following the passing of Charlie Lovick.

This is an important position on the Committee and members of the Society are invited to put their names forward.

The Secretary needs to be good with people, happy using e-mail and Word and be comfortable preparing agendas and minutes of meetings as well as liaising with people both inside and outside SALHS. The time commitment is not substantial now that all the basic arrangements for the Society are in place.

I would be happy to discuss the role with anyone considering the position. Please do consider applying, it is essential that the Society has a new Secretary as soon as possible to help take our Society forward.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Ian White CBE

Chair Tel: 01920 870384

Forthcoming Events

Fri September 14th Talk and guided tour of Stansteadbury. 7.30pm.

Members Exclusive This is now fully booked. We hope to have another tour later. Meeting details to be advised shortly.

Fri October 19th Quiz Night in the Parish Hall. 7.30pm. £8.00 per head. Maximum 8 per table, to include Ploughman's supper. Bring your own drinks. For tickets contact Terry/Glenis Collins 01920 420084

Fri November 9th In Memoriam. Talk by Terry Collins, in the Parish Hall. 7.30pm Looking in more detail at some of the names on the 1914 - 1918 War Memorial.

Fri November 23rd Maltings in Hertfordshire Talk by Guy Horlock. 7.30pm At the Maltings, includes tour and visit to the Maltings museum.