

The Pilgrim Rabbit

Around and about St Mary's Church

Keeping you in touch

May-June 2020 (Special issue)

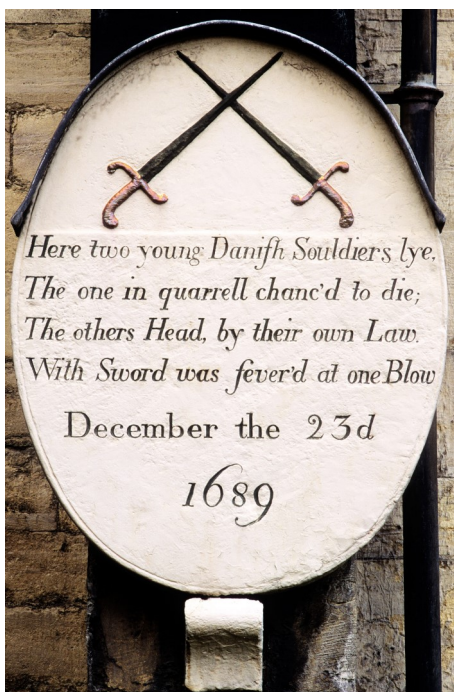


While St Mary's is closed for the duration of the COVID-19 situation we thought it would be useful to produce occasional issues of the Pilgrim Rabbit to maintain interest in the heritage of our beautiful church. Unfortunately we are not able to produce this as a physical copy at present, so please help us by sending this digital version on to anybody who might be interested. Anyone is able to opt in to receive future copies by emailing the church using the address on the back page.

The restoration of the Danish soldiers plaque

By Roland Deller, St Mary's Project Development Officer

With a footprint of 1552m², St Mary's is classified by The Cathedral and Church Buildings Division of the Church of England as 'very big' – the top of its gauge! Virtually every stone in our large church is in need of restoration. One of those stones – the oval tablet on the exterior of the south side of the chancel, which can be seen from Ladygate – is known as the 'Danish soldiers plaque' (reference number 34664 in the War Memorials Register kept by the Imperial War Museum).



Danish soldiers plaque before the latest decay, undated (Photo: Alamy)

Measuring approximately 1m wide x 1.5m high, this piece of the church chronicles a momentous event in the history of the town. It points to the special part which Beverley and the East Riding played in a turbulent and significant period of British history. Thus, contained in this little monument is a big story. And at the heart of this particular story lies human tragedy.

Prologue: a Beverley backdrop to a pivotal moment in history

Local man Sir John Hotham (grandson of another Sir John Hotham, who had refused Charles I entry to Hull in 1642, marking the beginning of the Civil War) was, like many Protestants in the country, nervous about having a Catholic King in James II – given the wranglings and bloodshed between Protestants and Catholics over the previous century and a half. He left in 1684 for the Protestant court of William of Orange in the Netherlands, who four years later deposed James, becoming joint sovereign of England with his wife Mary. The 'Glorious Revolution' saw the beginning of modern constitutional monarchy, and in this

significant moment John was by William's side. John was appointed Governor of Hull, and the people turned out on the streets to cheer his return to Yorkshire. The statue of King Billy on his horse in Hull shows the area's affection for this king. And in addition to bringing peace and stability to the country, William is credited with introducing it to gin!



Statue of King Billy in Hull (Photo: Alamy)

James II had fled to France and gathered supporters, against whom William's men fought in Ireland from 1689 – culminating in the Battle of the Boyne the following year. James' army was no match for that put together by William, who was sent troops by Denmark, the

Netherlands, and the Protestant factions of France, large in number and highly trained. Amongst these Danish troops were two soldiers, poignant personal figures against a large international historical canvas, whose story is now told by Barbara English and Hanne Hamilton:

'Here two young Danish Soldiers lye'

by Hanne Hamilton and Barbara English

(first published in CoScan Magazine, the magazine for the Confederation of Scandinavian Societies in the UK, in June 2019, and reproduced with kind permission)

On an exterior buttress on the south side of the chancel of St Mary's Church in Beverley, East Yorkshire, is an oval plaque showing two crossed swords with gilded hilts above a dramatic inscription:

*'Here two young Danish Soliders lye.
The one in quarrell chanc'd to die;
The other's Head, by their own Law,
With Sword was sever'd, at one Blow.
December the 23rd 1689'*

The antiquary Abraham de la Pryme (1671-1704), curate at Holy Trinity Church in Hull from 1698, records in his diary that late in 1689 'about six or seven thousand' Danish soldiers, 'the best equip'd and disciplin'd of any that was ever seen', had disembarked in Hull from Danish ships, in support of William of Orange (crowned William III, April 1689, after James II vacated the throne).

In August that year, William had signed a treaty with Christian V of Denmark, hiring 7000 men, including officers, priests ('whom they call'd pastours'), cooks and women – for which Christian received 350,000 rigsdaler while William was to be responsible for pay and provisions. Many of these mercenaries were temporarily billeted in and around Beverley. On 9 December 1689, near

York, the Danish Corps swore an oath of loyalty to King William.

This proved an ill-fated transaction, and not only for the two memorialized soldiers. The mercenaries duly embarked from Hull for Ireland to help William's second-in-command, Frederick, Duke of Schomberg, quell the Irish Catholic rebels; but a storm in the North Sea scattered the fleet. Some ships were blown to Catholic France, where (as non-Catholics) the men suffered imprisonment and torture. Other ships were blown to Holland; some got back to Hull.

Writing of his encounter with the mercenaries around Beverley, Abraham de la Pryme records that they were 'all stout, fine men [...] mighty godly and religious. You would never hear an oath or ugly word come out of their mouths'. They adhered to a strict discipline in social conduct and church observances. 'Although they enjoyed strong ale,' Abraham wrote, 'I only witnessed when I was amongst them – and that was all winter – five or six who were drunk.' They were, however, allowed to play cards on Sundays when the church service was over – though 'in many places the people would not abide the same but took the cards from them.'

During their crossing from Denmark, two of them, Lieutenant Daniel Straker and Cornet Johannes Frederick Bellow (clearly the Yorkshire folk's version of their Danish names – perhaps, in Danish, Streicher and almost certainly Bülow), had been quarrelling – perhaps (the old, old story) over a girl? On 15 December they found themselves alone. During an ensuing duel Straker was gravely wounded and died. According to Danish Articles of War duelling was forbidden and when it caused death it carried the death sentence. Bellow was court-martialled under the jurisdiction of the Danish Commander-in-Chief, Duke

Ferdinand Wilhelm. The grim outcome was known in advance.

In Beverley's archives there is an account of what local tradition preserved of events on the day of the execution. Mr Empson, freeman of Beverley, who was alive in 1892, recalled having been told it in 1830, by the 86-year-old Mrs Southeran of Westwood Road, Beverley.

A scaffold was erected in the marketplace and two cartloads of gravel were scattered around the base to soak up the blood. Mounted soldiers surrounded the scaffold to ensure order, for the event drew crowds from near and far. As St Mary's bell tolled, shrieks were heard from the many women present when the sword (the last ever used for execution in England) fell upon Bellow's neck. Mrs Southeran had the story from her mother who lived to be 80 and who in turn had it from her mother, Mary Hopwood who lived to 104 years of age and, as a girl, had accompanied her mother to witness the execution.

The soldiers' burials (Straker's on 16 December, Bellow's on 23 December) were recorded in St Mary's burial register. Entries in the Danish archives record that the two were interred side by side at St Mary's and that the memorial plaque was made and engraved under instruction from, and at the expense of, the Danish Chief Cuirassier who himself composed the English verse inscription.

It was unusual for a church to commemorate such a violent secular incident; but Abraham asserts that the Danish troops were 'mighty good-natured and kind and civil' and that 'the English were, all over hereabouts, extreem kind to them and gave them free quarter' – perhaps the good folk of Beverley were deeply touched by this tragedy just as they were preparing to celebrate Christmas.

The plaque has historical interest for Anglo-Danish relations c.1690, and for the important role Danish soldiers played under William's leadership. It

is also the earliest among modern written records of Danish mercenaries serving in a foreign land. It has not yet proved possible to establish precisely who the two officers were, or their dates of birth. Whether any family members still exist to preserve a memory of ancestors commemorated thus in Beverley is a question it could be interesting to resolve.

Sadly the plaque is now severely weathered and the lettering is fast becoming illegible – in part owing to well-intentioned painting of the plaque at various times since it was carved. Whilst it has been deemed beyond repair, the good news is that permission has been received to carve an exact replica, which will be hung in its place, to preserve this significant piece of history for the town.



The Danish soldiers plaque in its current state (Photo courtesy of Andy Burrell, Inspecting Architect)

The work will be undertaken by Alan Micklethwaite, a renowned stone carver, in demand with cathedrals across the land, who conveniently for us lives in Driffeld! The original plaque will be made safe to prevent further damage, and will be stored in the Priest's Rooms, alongside the

array of artefacts there, which have been well preserved by the lack of central heating and constant environment in those rooms.

The Danish Plaque project will cost approximately £6000. We are hugely grateful to the Friends of St Mary's, Beverley Civic Society, and anonymous donors, for contributing to the monies needed to undertake the project. A small amount remains to be raised and we would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in making a donation: you would be helping to preserve a precious piece of the town's history. Please contact our treasurer, Anne Mansfield, if you would like to make a gift: by post to 2 Wheatsheaf Lane, Beverley, HU17 8BA; by email to mansfield.anne08@gmail.com; or telephone 01482 865205.

On a personal note, Danish connections have run like a thread through my life, and so it gives me great pleasure to see this project coming to fruition. As a sixth former growing up in Beverley, I had the privilege of going on a European work experience exchange scheme to Aarhus: we welcomed some lovely Danes here, and I had the opportunity to travel there. I then spent my career in London working for a leading Scandinavian private equity firm, a claim to fame of whose was bringing together two great Danish bakers, Ole & Steen, forming the fashionable chain of artisan bakeries which now reaches from Copenhagen to London.

World Gin Day takes place next month on 13th June. If you are celebrating that this year, maybe think of King Billy, and this key moment in history, and the two Danish soldiers.

Two heritage sites in the area linked to the story:

St Mary's Church, South Dalton

At an impressive 208 feet (63 metres), the spire of this splendid



St Mary's Church, South Dalton (Photo: Alamy)

neo-Gothic church is the tallest in the East Riding, and can be seen from miles around. In pride of place is the tomb of Sir John Hotham, who died in 1689, very shortly after his heralded return from the Netherlands; underneath an effigy of Sir John leaning on his right elbow is featured a prominent skeleton to remind the viewer of man's mortality.



Monument to Sir John Hotham 2nd Baronet in St Mary's Church, South Dalton. (Photo: Austen Redman, Creative Commons licence)

The tomb was moved from an older church by his descendent, another Lord Hotham, when he commissioned this new church in the late 1850s from the renowned architect John Loughborough Pearson (who worked on over 200 ecclesiastical buildings in England and designed Truro Cathedral; he built a dozen East Riding churches and restored many others). The church also features lizards and dragons carved into the pews, coloured floor tiles, and intricate stone carvings of fruits and flowers in the porch.

Danish Seamen's Church, Hull

The Danish Seamen's Church is much easier to miss, amidst the busy traffic

We want to hear from you

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stmarysbevnews@gmail.com

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of Ferensway, but represents a fascinating piece of Hull history. Given the city's trading past, Danish ships docked in Hull with cargoes of cattle, bacon, butter and corn, and by the nineteenth century Hull had a sizeable Danish population. The first Danish Seamen's Church in the world, St Nikolaj was established in 1871 to serve seamen, Danish residents and Scandinavian emigrants temporarily resident in Hull *en route* to the New World. Today's 1950s building replaced the older church damaged in the war, and continues to support the Scandinavian community in the region. It also houses a small classical-style organ by the world-renowned Danish firm Frobenius.

And a little further afield...

In Aarhus, the celebrated Moesgaard museum has a particularly fine collection of Danish swords, well worth a visit if/when international travel is safe and permitted. The museum also contains, amongst its thousands of artifacts, Hørning Church (a reconstructed early Danish stave church), and the world's best preserved bog body, from the 3rd century BC.



Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus Denmark
(photo courtesy of Media Department Moesgaard Museum)

Red letter day for St Mary's and the curious carvings project

By Roland Deller

We are thrilled to announce that at 7am on Monday 22nd June St Mary's will be launching a brand new history section of its website. These pages will provide visitors with some attractive new content celebrating the history and heritage of our beautiful church, written especially by our very own Dr Jennie England. We hope that the pages will also entice people who have never visited St Mary's before to plan a trip for when it is safe and permitted to do so. This will build on the new series of heritage video podcasts which we have released on the site in recent weeks, which we hope you have been enjoying!

22nd June will be an auspicious day to go live as it is also the day on which we release to the national media the story of the new carvings inspired by The Chronicles of Narnia by CS Lewis. The models for those carvings have now been approved by The CS Lewis Company Ltd and so it is full steam ahead with the stone carving by Matthias, his partner Kibby – who designed the carvings – and their team of craftsmen.

22nd June also happens to be the day on which the reign of Richard II began in 1377. One of the kings of England featured on our magnificent chancel ceiling, Richard's personal badge was the white hart (an archaic word for a mature stag). The white hart appears in the painting of Richard II on St Mary's ceiling, as it does in the



Richard II on the ceiling of kings (Photo: John Duncan)

famous Wilton Diptych – the small portable diptych painted for Richard, now in the National Gallery. In a future blog, Jennie will be taking a closer look at Richard II as well as other kings on our ceiling.



Wilton Diptych (Photo: National Gallery, Wikimedia Commons licence)

For now, we leave you with a photo of our white stag boss – appropriately, a creature which also appears in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.



White stag boss (Photo: John Duncan)