

HERITAGE CIRCLE

Dave Steward, Master Mason Hawes of Occold

Dave Steward gave a meticulously researched talk about Master Mason Hawes of Occold to the July meeting of the Heritage Circle at Rickinghall Village Hall. Hawes is a shadowy figure as there is uncertainty about his first name, no images exist of him, and it is unclear whether he had any children or other family. However, he was a very skilled stone mason who had a considerable impact on a number of churches in Suffolk and South Norfolk.

Over his career which extended from about 1410 to 1440, Hawes developed characteristic features in the design of stonework on Suffolk churches. The possibly the summit of his work was at St Andrew's Church, Wingfield. The church was built in the 14th Century by Sir John de Wingfield. On his death, an endowment supported nine priests to pray for the souls of Sir John and his family. The church was extended in the early 15th Century and the accounts of the building work name Master Hawes as the stone mason. The church still has characteristic features of his work. The nave was raised up and clerestory windows were added to let more light into the church. Similarly, the other larger windows in the church have common traits used by Hawes. There are ornate cross braces and mini arches unique to him. The columns in the church also bear the distinctive design employed by Hawes. There are carved shields which appear to have a ribbon which is pinned to the column. The same is true of the font in the church as there are carving of lions and angels with interlocking wings around the sides of the bowl. In addition, the front porch is typical of the style employed by Hawes. The arch around the entrance has been squared off and there is a decoration of flowers and crowns to embellish the doorway. All of the work demonstrates the skill and grace of Hawes as a stone mason. The accounts for this building work at St Andrew's Church state that stone had to be brought from Lincolnshire and Burwell as the flint rubble available locally could only be used for the walls. The total rebuilding, including the fees for Hawes, was £75.7s.4d!

It is possible to see the characteristic work of Hawes in a number of other churches in Suffolk, especially in the area around his home village of Occold which is near to Eye. St Mary's Church at Burgate has a tower dating from the 14th Century but further work has been undertaken on the building periodically but some areas show evidence of the work of Hawes. There are carvings inside the church of coats of arms which appear to be pinned from a ribbon, the font has been damaged but it is possible to discern angel designs from the workshop of Hawes, and there are three small cross braces in the main windows. At St Peter's Church, Palgrave, the doorway displays signs of the work of Hawes. It has elaborate decoration and the arch has been squared off. Within this space of the squaring, there is an image of St George to the left of the door and a dragon to the right.

Dave Steward gave his audience an authoritative account of the design of a number of churches and highlighted the continuing testament to the considerable skill of the work of Master Mason Hawes.

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be at 7.30pm on Wednesday 26 August at The Village Hall, Rickinghall IP221HD when Tim Holt-Wilson will give a talk about the history of Redgrave Park. Further information about the Heritage Circle is available on its website, www.heritagecircle.onesuffolk.net.

Gerry Gurhy