St. Andrew's Parish Church Cranwell, Lincs: a small church with a big history

Links from the Vikings to the Knights Templar to the Royal Air Force College Cranwell.

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The Parish Church of Saint Andrew, Cranwell Village, Lincolnshire.

Introduction.

The small village of Cranwell in Lincolnshire lies to the east of the world-famous Royal Air Force (RAF) Officers' academy, the RAF College Cranwell. The name Cranwell means approximately 'the spring where Cranes can be found' and the village was thought to have developed as a watering point for cattle and sheep, being situated on a naturally occurring watercourse. The village was later centred on the remains of a 14th Century butter cross, so called as the name originates from the medieval practice of marking the location of the village market with a cross, where locals would gather to buy and sell local produce such as butter, milk and eggs, the produce being arranged around the circular, stepped bases of the cross. Later enhancements to many butter crosses included the erection of overhead cover to offer shelter from the weather and many can still be seen in market towns across England.

First built in 1915 by the Royal Navy as the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) Central Training Establishment, with the first aircraft arriving in 1916, the naval air station was often mistakenly referred to as HMS Daedalus. This error, which is often still seen today in various articles, aros personnel stationed at Cranwell were held on the nominal strength of HMS Daedalus, which was an old hulk in the River Medway, and which was the administrative 'ship' to which all RNAS personnel

Ringerike from the tomb of Ulf Jarl

were posted when serving on other stations. (A similar practice was carried out during the Second World War, when RAF personnel posted missing or killed in action were posted onto the strength of the former RAF Central Depot, RAF Uxbridge, until their fate was officially known, and their records amended).

Upon the formation of the RAF on 1st April 1918, through the amalgamation of the RNAS and the Royal Flying Corps, Cranwell transferred into the ownership of the RAF. Lord Trenchard, the 'Father of the Air Force', selected Cranwell as the ideal location for the Officers' training college as the village has no public houses; (a situation that still pertains today); and therefore, the Officer Cadets would not have the distraction of going for a drink in the village.

Various clues still exist as to the Naval origins of RAF Cranwell; College Hall Officers' Mess has a lighthouse which is still active, and which is also the furthest inland lighthouse in the UK; one of the four Officers' Messes is called Daedalus Officers' Mess; and 'Lighter than Air Road' refers to the naval air station's origins as an airship base.

Although RAF Cranwell has three churches of its own, there are no graveyards so the graveyard of the local, historically significant parish church of St Andrew serves as the burial ground for the RAF station.

St Andrew's Parish Church – King Cnut (Canute), The Vikings and early history.

As one of the oldest; (if not the oldest); church in the county of Lincolnshire, St Andrews Parish Church is a Grade I listed building, set within a churchyard which is believed to be over 1100 years old. It is highly likely that the church was built around the time of King Alfred (c 849-899), but Cranwell certainly existed in the time of King Canute; in Norse 'Knutr inn riki', or in Old English 'Cnut cyng' and generally known as 'Cnut the Great'.

Cnut was the King of Denmark, England and Norway, which area was also known as the North Sea Empire. During the Viking invasion of England in 1016, Cnut rampaged through the Humber region, and gifted much of Lincolnshire; including Cranwell; as a war trophy and reward to one of his generals known as Ulf Jarl, who was also his brother-in-law, having married Cnut's sister Estrid Svendsdatte Ulf Thorgilsson. Ulf Jarl was a Danish Earl (jarl) and the father of the later King Sweyn II of Denmark, he also established the House of Estridsen, which ruled Denmark from 1047 to 1375. Some accounts hold that Ulf was murdered on Cnut's orders on Christmas Day 1026, following an argument over a game of chess on Christmas Eve!

Crowned in London in 1017, Cnut reigned until his death on 12th November 1035, being buried in Winchester Cathedral. The popular but apocryphal story of Cnut attempting to turn back the tide has different interpretations, the more popular being that he believed he had supernatural powers and could control the tides; however Henry of Huntingdon's 12th Century account records that Cnut was showing his fawning courtiers that in fact he had no such powers, and that secular power is irrelevant when compared to the supreme power of God.

Cranwell was originally part of the ancient wapentake of Flaxwell. A wapentake was the Danelaw equivalent (approximate) of an English Hundred and derived its name from the Norse practice of marking one's presence at a gathering, and on occasion marking one's vote, by the brandishing of weapons. Some historians believe that only citizens who were entitled to bear weapons were entitled to vote, the proof being the brandishing of those weapons at the taking of the vote – the 'wapentake'. The practice of wapentakes had largely been replaced by other functions such as electoral districts by 1882. Cranwell remained under the control of the Norsemen until they were defeated at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in September 1066, a mere three weeks before the Battle of Hastings in which King Harold II was in

turn defeated by William The Conqueror.

Little now remains of the Saxon church, most of the masonry is Norman and there is a striking arcade of Norman arches. In the north aisle, there are the remains of a hogs-back grave with Norse ringerike which are unique to Lincolnshire.

The ringerike, now mounted on the wall of the aisle, are probably the remains of the tomb of Ulf Jarl. It is likely that the Normans destroyed Ulf's tomb when the Anglo-Saxon church was extended by the new Norman lord, Gilbert de Gaunt. The extension took the form of the addition of the north aisle which was separated from the nave by the colonnade of Norman arches which still exist today. The ringerike were discovered in the early 20th Century in the foundations of the north aisle when the organ chamber was constructed.

St Andrew's Parish Church and the Knights Templar.

2 ½ miles to the north of the church is the small parish of Temple Bruer. Bruer is a corruption of the French bruyère, meaning heath. The Temple Bruer Preceptory is one of the few Knights Templar sites in England where there are any remaining ruins still in existence, and it is a registered monument and Grade 1 listed building.

It was the headquarters of the Templar's Lincolnshire estates and properties and consisted of several buildings surrounding a large round church. As an order of military monks, unsurprisingly the Templar's preceptory was protected by a large defensive wall, with access being controlled through a substantial gatehouse.

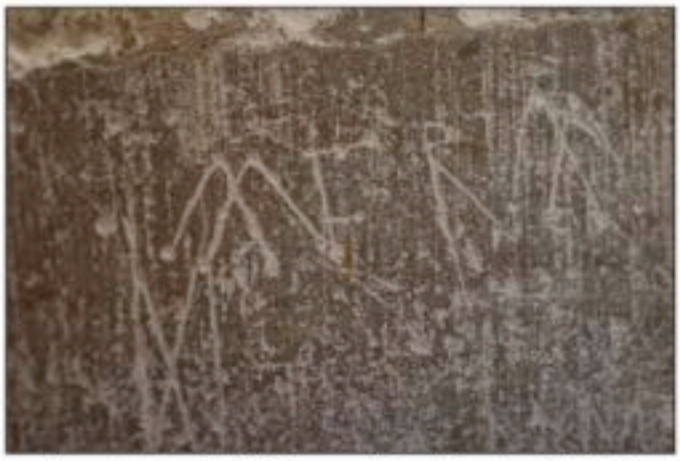
Temple Bruer was the wealthiest Templar preceptory outside London, founded well into the reign of King Henry II, and the tower that remains standing dates from the 13th Century. It was one of a pair of towers attached to the chancel of the church. The Knights Templar owned extensive lands, and used an area bordered by Cranwell to the south, Byard's Leap to the west, and probably Navenby to the north, as military training areas where the Knights learned their military craft, manoeuvring their forces across the countryside.

It is believed that the Knights Templar may have visited St Andrews on several occasions, possibly on their way to the Crusades, as there are subtle clues to the Templars in the north aisle of the church. Best observed under blue light are etchings of Knights' horses roaming the countryside on their training manoeuvres; and carved into the stone is the letter 'M' in the form of overlapping inverted Vs, a known Templar sign for the Virgin Mary.

The demise of the Templars was largely orchestrated by King Philip IV of France, an ardent Catholic whose military ventures had largely bankrupted France. He saw the Templars as a threat, but also as a source of restoring his wealth. Dante called Philip the 'Plague of France', such was his ineptitude. Philip turned his aim on to the Catholic Church first, assassinating two Popes before installing his puppet Pope Clement V. He also moved the Papacy from Rome to Avignon in France. He then targeted the French Jews, in a single day arresting all the French Jews, confiscating their money, and banishing them from France. He then orchestrated the arrest of all Templars, on 13th October 1307. Ignoring the Papal decree that the Templars were answerable only to the Pope, he accused them of heresy, infanticide, homosexuality, and pagan practices such as worshipping false idols and refusing to observe the sacred rituals of the Catholic Church. Philip tortured the Templars until confessions were extracted from them.

Pope Clement tried to intervene to save the Templars, but he failed to do so and 54 Templars were declared guilty of the charges by Philip, and burned at the stake. The Knights Templar were officially disbanded by Pope Clement in 1312. The Templar's leader, De Molay , was acquitted of the charges but he was not released; Philip wanted De Molay to reveal the location of the Templar's treasure, but his refusal to give Philip the information, combined with his public retraction of earlier confessions extracted under torture,

Depictions of Knights Templar on horseback.



The inverted double V sign motif used by the Knights' Templar to denote the Virgin Mary.

Herita

Long and short quoins on the NE corner of the church, and the bellcote at the far (west) end of the nave.

Bellcote and narrow arched windows from the west end of the nave

inevitably perhaps resulted in a declaration of guilt by the King, and his execution by being burned at the stake. The Templars were no more.

Architecture.

Many churches around England contain a mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Norman architectural features, and historically there was some confusion with architectural historians often assuming that certain features were Norman when in fact they dated from the last years of the Anglo-Saxon period. Indeed, English Heritage has occasionally used the church as a training location, sending architects to St Andrews to assess and catalogue the various differing aspects of the church's architecture.

The church consists of the following aspects of Anglo-Saxon and Norman architecture: nave with a north aisle (rebuilt in 1812), vestry, chancel, porch (to the south), bellcote (west end of the nave), Norman arcade with four bays, round arches, circular piers, with scalloped capitals, remnants of a Saxon cross (north aisle) decorated with interlace, wooden rood screen from the 15th century (restored 15thC south door (heavily restored), 15thC roof (nave and north aisle), octagonal tub font, long and short quoins, narrow round-arched windows

It also has a magnificent stained-glass window by the famous Herbert Bryans (1855-1925), depicting The Annunciation. Most of the stained glass windows were made by Bryans, the remainder being completed in his studio after his death; the exception being a small window in the west wall of the north aisle, which contains remnants of the old glass which was smashed during the Reformation. The windows made by Bryans all have his 'signature', a discreet greyhound somewhere in the window. (More recently the great military and railway artist, the late Terence Cuneo, used a similar device in his paintings; his paintings always included a small mouse somewhere in the picture).

Font.

The font in St Andrews is also very unusual. Originally, baptisms were conducted in rivers, as one requirement was for baptisms to be carried out in running water, as evidenced by Christ's baptism by St. Peter in the River Jordan. Indeed, it is thought that one of the reasons that St. Andrews was built on its current location was its proximity to the natural watercourse. Eventually the requirement for running water was relaxed, and fonts were established in churches. In 1236 it was decreed that fonts should be protected by a lockable lid, believed to be to prevent the use of the Holy Water for nefarious purposes by witches in pagan ceremonies. The font at St Andrews was secured by a steel bar over the lid, secured by a hasp and staple arrangement; highly unusually, the font still bears the staple and the scars from where the hasp was fitted.

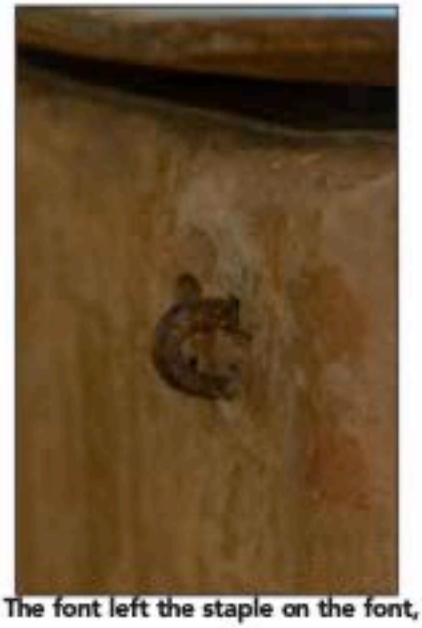
The font cover was made from a ceiling boss taken from the great hall locally, when the hall was demolished.

Rood screen.

With the exception of some obvious repairs, the Rood Screen is original 15th Century. It is assumed that the rood itself i.e. the cross and possible side figures, were removed and destroyed during the Reformation.

Pews

Extensive restorative work was carried out between 1897 and 1934, including these pews which replaced the 'box pews' that were previously installed. The oak wood panels which formed the new pews were recovered from Cranwell Manor House. The Thorold family owned Cranwell Manor from the 16th Century, demolishing the Manor House in 1816 when they moved to a new mansion a few miles away at Syston Park, near Grantham. The



The font left the staple on the font, the font and right evidence of the hasp.

15th Century Rood Screen

farmhouse for Hall Farm was built on the site of the demolished manor house, and the remains of the servant's quarters were incorporated into the Old Hall Farm House in Wylson Close. The Thorold's long association with Cranwell is commemorated in the name of one of the local streets, Thorold Avenue.

Roman roof tiles

Buried in the exterior wall of the south aspect of the building are roof tiles from a Roman Villa discovered close-by. The villa had been known about since 1818, but it wasn't until 1928-1929 that personnel from RAF Cranwell excavated the site.

Pews made from timber reclaimed from Cranwell Manor house.

They uncovered the remnants of a Roman villa of a courtyard configuration, consisting of a bath house at the north-west corner of the quadrangle, and another 7 rooms. Debris from the villa was discovered strewn all around the area, including roof tiles that appear to be identical to the tiles used in the wall at St Andrew's church. Evidence was discovered of tessellated pavements in the hypocaust and other rooms. There were seven mosaics discovered at the site and which appear to be 4th century, and the tesserae include blue- grey pieces which are not believed to be of local origin, but probably originated from Leicestershire.

Roman roof tiles used as gap fillers, south wall

Early External Marks

One problem of early times was that of timekeeping; how to tell when to toll the bells to call the faithful to prayer. Marks in the south façade of the church give clues to one method of doing so. Generally, although not exclusively, sundials consist of a flat dial or face, with something placed to cause a shadow to fall on the face of the dial, the subsequent movement of the shadow as the sun tracks across the sky being used to ascertain the time. There are two examples adjacent to each other in the south façade of the church.

Modern External Marks.

19th Century Ordnance Survey symbol

Directly under the narrow-arched window on the West wall of the nave there is a stone on which is carved an arrow pointing to a horizontal line; this is an Ordnance Survey Bench Mark. These marks were cut into buildings and walls by Ordnance Survey staff during the 19th Century as part of the OS mapping of the UK to establish accurate mapping of the height of the UK land mass above mean sea level. It was policy to have about 5 bench marks per 1 Km in rural areas, but about 30 to 40 in urban areas, and at the height of the programme there were some 500,000 benchmarks around Great Britain. About half of those have now disappeared with the demolition of buildings, and they will not be replaced as no longer needed with the advent of GPS and satellite mapping,

Other Markings - May Day Costumes.

One of the pagan festivals that was still observed

Rudimentary Sun Dial, south wall, A second Sun Dial, with stick demonstrating how the shadow was formed, from which the time was worked out.

by otherwise Christian communities was the May Day festival, celebrating fertility in nature. Villages had their own costume styles and made fresh costumes each year, as the costumes were burnt as part of the end of the festival, and the resultant ashes spread over the land to encourage fertility for the coming crop season.

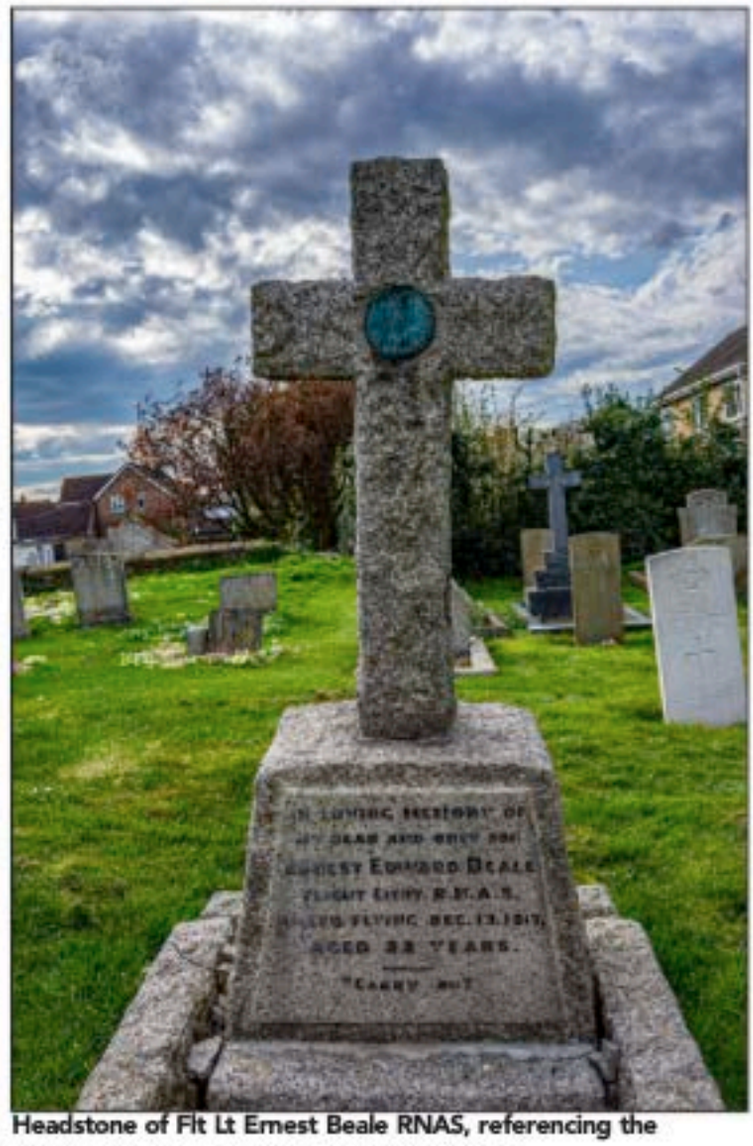
However, the tradition of keeping the costumes true to the pattern for each village became a problem, which was overcome by the villagers scrawling the costume patterns in the walls of the church, normally in a location which was unlikely to be seen by the parish clergy. However, in a presumed demonstration of the parish's disdain for the clerical authority, in St. Andrews the patterns are etched into the stonework right inside the south doorway of the church and are readily apparent.

Military Graves in St Andrew's Churchyard.

The churchyard easily catered for the burial needs of the small local community, but the development of the naval airship base and its subsequent growth as a flying training school has meant that the churchyard has become fuller over the decades. Indeed, there are graves evidencing the development of British military aviation training from the days of airships, through World War One, the inter-war years, World War Two and beyond.

There are three categories of military graves; War Graves from periods of active service; Service Graves of serving personnel who died outside the active service; and Retired Service Personnel Graves. There are some 200 military graves, including 72 War Graves, and 40 Retired Service Personnel Graves. There are 25 graves of First World War airmen, and 58 from World War Two. Most of the graves are from student pilots and instructors who died from aircraft crashes in training.

Depictions of the village's May Day costume patterns, south doorway.



Headstone of Flt Lt Ernest Beale RNAS, referencing the origins of RAF Cranwell as an RNAS station.

Close up detail of the 'Death Penny' on Flt Lt Beale's headstone, these were awarded to the next of kin of WW1

Cranwell Village itself was not untouched by war, as six young men who died in the First World War are commemorated on a tablet on the north wall of the church.

One of the notable burials in the churchyard is that of Group Captain Robert Wardlow 'Bobby' Oxspring. Gp Capt Oxspring was a Battle of Britain fighter pilot and was described in historian and author Terence Robertson's book 'Dieppe: the shame and the glory ' as "one of the Battle's greatest aces". The then Flight Lieutenant Oxspring I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) on 8th November 1940, his medal citation reading:

"One day in September 1940, Flight Lieutenant Oxspring was engaged on an offensive patrol with his squadron. Whilst acting as rear guard, he sighted and engaged several Messerschmitt 109's 3,000 feet above. After driving them off, he led his section in an attack against a large formation of enemy bombers and succeeded in destroying a Dornier 17 at short range and in damaging two Heinkel III's. He has at all times led his section with skill and determination and has destroyed six enemy aircraft." (The London Gazette. 8 November 1940. p. 6440.)

Oxspring survived the War despite being shot down twice, amassing "13 solo kills with 2 shared, 2 probable kills and 4 solo V-1 flying bombs destroyed and 1 (flying bomb) shared" (Hall, Peter (2001). No 91 'Nigeria' Squadron. Osprey Publishing. p. 122. ISBN 978-1-84176-160-2.)

He retired from the RAF in 1968 having achieved the rank of Group Captain. He racked up an impressive number of medals, with a DFC and two bars, an Air Force Cross (AFC), the Dutch Airman's Cross, and campaign medals the 1939-45 Star with clasp 'Battle of Britain', the Air Crew Europe Star with clasp 'France and Germany', the Italy Star, and the War Medal 1939-1945.

Also buried in the churchyard is Lance Serjeant Charles Frederick Bristow of 22 (Bomb Disposal) Company Royal Engineers. L/Sjt Bristow was born in Cranwell on 10th October 1898 to a farmer, Fred, and his wife Rose. Charles served during the Great War and after the War. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Charles volunteered again, serving in the Pioneer Corps in France and being evacuated during Operation Dynamo at Dunkirk. He transferred to the Royal Engineers and trained in Bomb Disposal. L/Sjt Bristow was mortally wounded on 1st April 1942 when he was assisting Lieutenant John Percy Walton RE, of South Manchester, defuse a British 'Yellow Peril' balloon

Grave of Battle of Britain fighter ace Group Captain 'Bobby' Oxspring DFC ** AFC.

bomb. Charles Bristow's speciality was bomb disposal. He and Lt Walton were both awarded the George Medal when, on 5th November 1940, they made safe a 250Kg bomb that fell inside a gasometer at Romford, Essex. The bomb was fitted with a clockwork time delay and an anti-disturbance device. They could work for only twenty minutes at a time because of the gas and an air raid was in progress at the time.

On 1st April 1942, again with Lieutenant Walton and near Great Wakering, they attempted to defuse the British Yellow Peril balloon bomb. The bomb

Grave of Lance Sergeant Charles Bristow, GM (Royal Engineers)

exploded killing Lieutenant Walton instantly. Lance Serjeant Bristow died of his wounds three days later on 4th April 1942 in St Georges Hospital in London.

When L/Sjt Charles Bristow was buried with full military honours in St Andrews Churchyard, Cranwell, he was 43 years of age and left behind his widow Elsie and three daughters. His medals and remnants of the parachute from the Yellow Peril bomb that took his life passed into the possession of his great grandson, Colonel Carl C. Harris, of Her Majesty's Royal Marines.

Lt JP Walton GM was buried in the Commonwealth War Braves Commission's (CWGC) Section of the Southern Cemetery, Manchester.

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