

If you live in Steeple Aston, you probably see the church everyday: perhaps in a glimpse between houses, in the rear-view mirror as you drive to work, or walking past it to go to the school, pre-school or village hall. Almost certainly, most villagers have been inside it at some time, as regular worshippers or for funerals, weddings, baptisms and school services.

The church is totemic to village life and so its history and architecture should be familiar to most of us. SAVA's exhibition last month proposed that there was much to be reminded of and much to be revealed perhaps for the first time. Judging from the reaction of many leaving the exhibition resolving to look more closely next time, it was a solid claim to make. Clear, well-lit photographs of the windows, ceilings, doors, corbels, pew ends and memorials along with comments served to focus the attention on all these individual aspects of the church which might not be noticed in a hasty tour. The head illustrated here might be an example. The origins, building and restorations were also featured in well-illustrated detail, as were some features not often revealed – the bells and church silver. As for something revealed for the first time, who knew there was a “pin dial” on the south wall? The advice is to go on a sunny day, taking a straight stick with you, if you want to know the time.

The churchyard and graves survey, the result of both past and recent study, is a fascinating history of the graves of those villagers who lived in our houses in the past and is well worth reading. These memorials and those inside the church are reminders of memento mori. The graves of the wealthy lie amongst those who existed on Parish Relief.

Another reality to be faced is that the church has been considerably altered over time with much rebuilding (and therefore destruction as well) at certain times in its history, particularly in 1842, so that possibly none of the 1180 church remains and only a fraction of the C13 version. When Judge Page erected the monument to himself and his wife in about 1730 it involved the removal of many now unknown treasures in that part of the church. Yet, it is probably the best known and remarked upon of the church's features today.

Changes to the current church have been proposed and have been questioned. The issue of changing much revered institutions recalls Theseus's paradox, more commonly known as Trigger's Broom. In an episode of “Only Fools and Horses”, Trigger is the road sweeper who shows a photo of himself with his broom – the “same” broom, he says he has always used. He then reveals it has had 17 different heads and 14 handles. When asked how it is the same broom, he points to it in the photo as proof. In relation to the church, maybe the SAVA exhibition serves the same function as that photo.

SAVA's fully-illustrated book called “The History of Steeple Aston Church” is at the printers as you read this. It will be on sale at the Village History Centre, price £9.95, from Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> December onwards. The perfect Christmas present, and a permanent record of the exhibition.