

The *Dead Ringer* team clean up at Lastingham

On Saturday 30 October last, a group of devotees of Sydney Ringer from Leeds, Manchester and Glasgow gathered at Lastingham, North Yorkshire. There lies buried the man most properly credited with ‘inventing’ experimental physiological salines. Sydney Ringer has been known to the parishioners at Lastingham principally as the benefactor, in 1879, of the very substantial ‘restoration’ of their ancient church. That project (costing over £4,000 then – equivalent to well over £250K in today’s terms) was to commemorate the tragic death of his elder daughter Annie at her own 7th birthday party. (Despite having an eminent physician and physiologist for a father, she choked on a plum stone. Of course, this was at a time before the simple, but highly effective, Heimlich manoeuvre that might well have saved her had become established as routine first-aid.)

The graveyard at St Mary’s was in need of several person-days of labour. The day before our visit, the vicar, Rev Dr Alastair Ferguson, had had felled, or tree-surgically thinned, a large number of trees that excessively shaded the graves. The potential to build a bonfire to rival any in the UK last year couldn’t be resisted by the Phys Soc pyromaniacs. However, despite free access to kerosene, matches and enough wood to build an armada, any guy atop the pyre would have suffered a very slow burn indeed. We held the previous week’s moist weather to blame rather than Derek Steele for the disappointing ‘inflammation’ (see photo – DS with petrol can, but eyebrows intact; don’t try this at home).

The volunteer group spent the fine autumn day working through the churchyard, clearing the tree-felling debris and generally tidying as best we could. A brief lunch break at the adjacent *Blacksmith’s Arms* helped to see us through a long day. We finished up later in the vicarage as guests of Alastair Ferguson and his wife Denise.



Clockwise from above: The team was (left to right) David Eisner, David Miller, Clive Orchard, Mark Boyett, Stephen O’Neill, Matthew Lancaster (head only!), Derek Steele and Sandra Jones. (The railing at our feet surrounds Sydney and Ann Ringer’s common grave and, with the cross over it, their daughter Annie’s grave); Annie Ringer; Derek Steele; Clive Orchard, David Miller, Rev Alastair Ferguson and Matthew Lancaster proving that science and religion can’t cut it ... even with two saws; the tower and western end of St Mary’s, seen from beside Ringer’s grave (photos by David Eisner)



Parish meeting records that they have from Ringer’s time provided some fascinating reading – he once seems to have upset fellow parishioners over a voting-rights dispute. Luckily for the *Dead Ringer’s* group, the clocks went back on 30 October giving extended recovery time after a strenuous, but thoroughly enjoyable day.

The church itself was started in the year 801 on the still more ancient site of a monastery founded by St Cedd and St Chad 1,350 years ago (*i.e.* in 654). It has a crypt that is apparently unique for an English church, being entered down a stair from the centre of the nave. This access was part of Ringer’s renovation, though the crypt has remained virtually unchanged since the time of William the Conqueror. It is still a site of



pilgrimage and enjoys very large visitor numbers, perhaps over 20,000 *p.a.* This figure belies the tiny, secluded nature of Lastingham village itself, but is testament to its attractions.

Under the auspices of the Society, a plaque has been commissioned to commemorate Ringer within the church. David Miller and others are writing a booklet describing Ringer and his place in biological and medical science intended for the lay reader which will be made freely available to church visitors. We hope that by informing at least some of these visitors, both Ringer’s work and physiology itself will become a little more familiar to the public.

The *Dead Ringer* Society