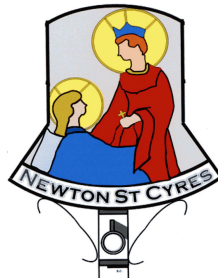


NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP



It is always good to learn to look at the world around you with new eyes, and I now know that the tower at Stoke Canon church is a rectangle and not a square. When you drive past, (and only if you are a passenger!) turn to look backwards and you can see that the side facing the road is longer, to be more impressive to the passer-by. Our talk on Thursday was on Towers and Bells of Netherex Parish, but was centred on Stoke Canon church, and was given by Derek Jackson who has been researching its history.

The church was in need of expensive restoration, particularly the roof, and it took over half a million pounds to get the building back into order. Funds came from English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund, the latter requiring 12 talks about the church and bells as part of the arrangement, hence Mr Jackson's presence in Newton St Cyres.

It is well known that the Victorians rebuilt many churches in England and Stoke Canon was no exception. The medieval church was too small for the growing parish population: it had 110 seats, of which only 20 were free (the rest being assigned pews) and seats were even crammed into the tower area. After the rebuild, there were 450 seats, with 380 being free. The tower was the only section of the building not to be demolished, but a survey of the building has revealed that the curved medieval roof timbers were reused for the sanctuary end of the church in the 1836 rebuild. We were shown pictures of early engravings which showed the church before and after 1836, so you could see how much larger it became, and also how the rebuilt church was whitened in some way, looking quite different from the stone of the original tower.

Another surprising piece of information was that the round staircase turret on Stoke Canon church, which is very similar to the one on our church here, was added on at a later date (in Stoke in the 15th century). A church tower can be climbed by a series of internal, usually wooden, stairs to reach the bell platforms, but an outside stone spiral can be added. At Rewe church the spiral goes only half way up, but at Newton St Cyres and Stoke Canon it goes all the way to the roof.

The second section of the talk was on the bell founders who made the bells for the local churches, Exeter cathedral and indeed the whole south-west. The Pennington Family of Exeter were foremost in the seventeenth century and the Evans family of Chepstow, and also Llewellins and James of Bristol in the 19th century. Newton St Cyres has 2 Evans bells from 1733, and in an interesting reference back to our talk on Norton Cross last autumn, there is an Inventory of 1553 which lists 4 bells at Newton St Cyres and 2 at Norton Chapel.

Early church bells were made of 2 sheets of flat metal, bent over, and clergymen would wander from place to place, then ring the bell to summon worshippers and gather a flock. By medieval times, however, there were over 400 churches in Devon but 1000 or more chapels, often at the junctions of the parish boundaries (e.g. Cowley Bridge as mentioned by Nick Baker in his talk). Mr Jackson showed us a map of where the main bell casting floors were in Exeter, but it is also the case that bell founders would go to a locality and cast the bells on site. Of course they would make tripod cooking pots and similar things as well, in the meantime.

Bell casting was clearly thirsty work, shown by the Warden's Accounts in Rewe 1780 listing '*licker and vittels*' as considerable items. We were told quite a bit of interesting detail on the costs of bells, the metals used (largely copper, with iron and silver), and how old bells are re cast or re used. In

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1885 the bell frame and 2 bells at Stoke Canon cost £138. In 2011 re casting two bells cost £9,068. Inscribing bells is expensive now, but 'Come let us Ring for Church and King' and 'Prosperity to those that love good bells' are inscriptions on two of our bells, and I think add to the 'personality' of the bell.

Meetings are usually on Thursday evenings in the village hall club room and start at 7.30pm.

Everyone is welcome. There is a small charge of £2 which includes tea and biscuits.

For further information contact Jean 851337 Isobel 851351

Next meetings

- May 16th Colin Hart Metal Detecting – History beneath our Feet 2. Colin will bring a different set of exhibits from last year.
We shall also be opening the list of names for the June outing.
- June 15th Outing to Pynes and Woodrow Barton led by Nick Baker followed by Tea.
NB A Saturday afternoon. We shall meet in the Village Hall car park at 1.45pm so that we can share cars and we should expect to return by 5pm or soon after. The cost will be around £6. Both houses have an interesting connection with Jane Austen. If you are keen to join us add your name to the list at the May meeting or ring Jean 851337 or Isobel 851351.
- Sept 19th Helen Turnbull - The Story of a Manor – Chudleigh 1050-2012

We have no special membership arrangements. Everyone is welcome. If you would like further details ring Jean 851337 or Isobel 851351