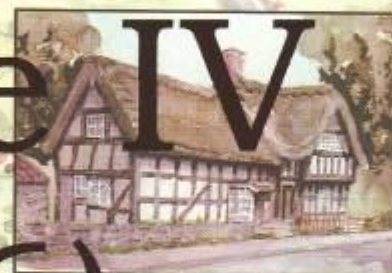


Living History

Yarpole Group Parish
2000



Volume IV
(2006)



Living History.

NEWSLETTER JULY 2006.

As most of you already know Chris and John Gunson intend to move to Devon and so, after five years as Chairman, John has relinquished the Chair. We are grateful to him for managing the Group from its inception to its present position of strength and we wish them both well in their new life. At our meeting on the 4th July Rhianon Tyrrell offered to accept the challenge and was duly elected as our new Chair.

In December 2004 after the public lecture by Nick Molyneux from English Heritage, we published an Article, (Bell Tower I) based on the dendrochronological evidence carried out by Ian Tyers of Sheffield University, on the age of the timber structure of the Bell Tower. Thereafter there continued to be speculation about the dating of the stone walls which surround and protect the timbers from the effects of the weather.

The "Bell Tower Study Group" (Nico and Martin Baines, Barrie Morgan and Ian Mortimer) have been looking at the evidence and in the attached Article (Bell Tower II) have come up with a probable interpretation.

Have a look yourself and see if you agree !

The other Article tries to unravel why Yarpole is mentioned twice in the Domesday Book.

"Its springtime and whilst looking out of my kitchen window at the blue tits nesting in their box, I noticed some nesting material cobbled together haphazardly next to it;

moments later a mistle thrush landed on it and continued to add to the pile. The nest was situated up against the nest-box and the tree trunk and supported by a branch underneath. This gave us a wonderful uncovered view of the nest. Over the coming weeks we saw them laying on the eggs; we watched three chicks hatch and saw each of them successfully fledge, all the time praying that cats, squirrels or sparrow-hawks would not ruin our daily natural soap opera unfolding before our eyes.



To watch these proud parents rearing their young right in front of our window was a real privilege and one we hope will be repeated next year." Thanks to Graham Brookes.

As we said in the last Newsletter, the Fishpool Valley is designated a Site of Special Scientific Importance for its varied wetland and woodland habitats, secluded situation and rich birdlife.

We now understand that English Heritage has been consulted and the proposals to 'restore' the Valley by clearing the self-set trees and shrubs, have been agreed and now just await funding.



As seen from the new 'hard-cored' path.

Have you ever wondered where Bicton Pool was ?



Find out at the Fete.

Yes, we will be at the Fete on Saturday 15th July and will have on display some of our current research projects and one or two Items we need answers to, as well as a display of photographs – both old and new.

So see you there !

And we could discuss maybe how you too can get actively involved in researching the fascinating history of our Parish.

Date of next meeting – Tuesday 22nd August, 8pm at The Bell.

A Domesday Anomaly:

According to the Domesday Survey there were two Manors of Yarpole: One, the 'Greater', was in the Hundred of Wolphy, and the other, the 'Lesser' was in the 'Ecclesiastical Hundred' of Leominster.

The 'Greater' Manor, although previously held by Richard Scrope of Richards Castle*, was, in 1086, held by Robert Gernon, directly from the King as a 'tenant in chief'.

It was described in the Domesday Book as;

3 hides which pay tax (one hide = 120 acres of arable land).

4 villagers and 8 smallholders with 3 ploughs.

Value before 1066, 25s; now 20s.

The other, being the 'Lesser', was included in the 'Ecclesiastical Hundred' of Leominster, which, as a single Manor, consisting of 16 'members', (one of which was 'Yarpole'), was one of the largest manors in all England. For reasons to be explained later, it had previously been held by Queen Edith (wife of Edward the Confessor), but now in 1086, was held directly by King William I, and occupied by Leofwin Latimer, as 'under-tenant', who also held "as much land in Leominster as is worth 25s".

It is described in the Domesday Survey as;

1 virgate. (= 30 acres of arable land)

It was waste (= uncultivated).

Now there are 2 smallholders with 1 plough.

Value 3s.

Had paid tax before 1066 and paid customary dues to Leominster.

Subsequently we hear no more of this 'Lesser' Manor of Yarpole and the probable explanation lies in the history of the monastery at Leominster:-

When, in 658, Merewalh, King of the Magonsaete, founded the 'Mynster' (monastery) at Leominster he endowed it with a considerable parcel of circumjacent lands including (a portion of) Yarpole and it is this 'portion' which would have been recorded in the 1086 as a separate Manor.

It would appear that the 'Mynster' was, at various times, a nunnery or monastery or both but during the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042 - 1066), it fell into disrepute because

"The virtue which resists the biting frost of adversity melts and dissolves in the sunshine of prosperity. A long and uninterrupted continuance of tranquillity had

introduced wealth and together with it, its inseparable companions, luxury and dissipation. Licentiousness of manners universally prevailed. The annalist of this period depicts in sad and melancholy colours, the general corruption and degeneracy. The contagion pervaded the monastery, relaxed its discipline, and polluted its walls. Even the beautiful and venerable abbess Edgiva, forgetful of the duties of her station, etc..”

Extract from *The Leominster Guide* by Rev. J. Williams (1808).

And it was dissolved with all its assets passing to the Crown to be held by Queen Edith. Following the Conquest in 1066, these crown lands would pass to William I.

In 1121, Henry I (1100-1135) granted the Manorial and Ecclesiastical Rights of Leominster to the Abbey at Reading.

With the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536 by Henry VIII (1509-1547), the Ecclesiastical Rights of Leominster passed to the Diocese of Hereford, and would now approximate with the Leominster Deanery, and the Manorial Rights were incorporated into the Crown Lands.

And then:-

*“ - - for Queen Eliz (1558-1603) granted the Mannor of Luston, late part of the Possessions of the cell of Lemster, and all Messuages, lands, royalties & in luston, Eyton and Lemster Marsh and in Yarpol, Bircher, Lucton, Kingsland Nelton and Aston to the said mannor belonging to Sr. James Croft** ancestor of Sr. Herbert, for life, and after to Edward Croft Esqr.- and the Heyres male of his Body, Here one of the Hallimots is held which did belong to the great Borough of Lemster- ”*

Extract from *'Blount's Manuscripts'* (1675).

The Lordship of the (Greater) Manor of Yarpole was at this time held by the Croft Family (having been acquired through marriage) and thus the two Manors of Yarpole were united.

*'Richards Castle' was one of three castles, in Herefordshire, built by Normans before the Conquest, and named after Richard Fitz (son of Scorb; at 1086, it was held by his son, Osbern Fitz Richard.

**Sir James Croft (1518-1590) was Privy Councillor and Comptroller of the Household to Queen Elizabeth.

The Bell Tower II:

It is now two years since the dendrochronological findings established the exact age of the bell tower timbers; but what of the walls ?

In 955, Athelstan, the then King of Wessex, decreed that each and every thane should erect a bell tower on his estate (at that time any freeman with 500 acres and a church and bell tower was entitled to the legal ascription of 'thane').

Such bell towers, if fortified, could act as a place of refuge or safe storage of weaponry or church relics or plate and the bell would have been rung not only to call to church and announce baptisms and funerals but also to mark important times in the day and act as a warning in times of danger.

So it is probable that the present bell tower would have replaced one that had fallen into disrepair and its presence today is due not only to the robustness of the original timber construction but also to the protection against the elements afforded by the walls and roof structure.

The timber bell tower, erected in 1196, would have served the earlier church which was to be replaced 150 years later by the present church; at which time the tower was heightened to provide the 'mediaeval bell frame' – dendrochronological examination of the new timbers indicate that this work was done between 1322 and 1366.

It is recognised that the construction of the original timber tower in 1196 and its subsequent extension (1322-66) is of a very high standard, carried out by expert skilled craftsmen; but the same can not be said of the walls so much of which has been built with re-used materials. Given that on completion of the building of the present church, the old church would have been demolished, one could postulate that certain materials used in the reconstruction of the bell tower could have been reclaimed from the demolished church.

The most obvious recycled items are the lintels above the window openings and above the door-frame



The window openings appear to be framed with broken pieces of old style, previously used, stone mullions.

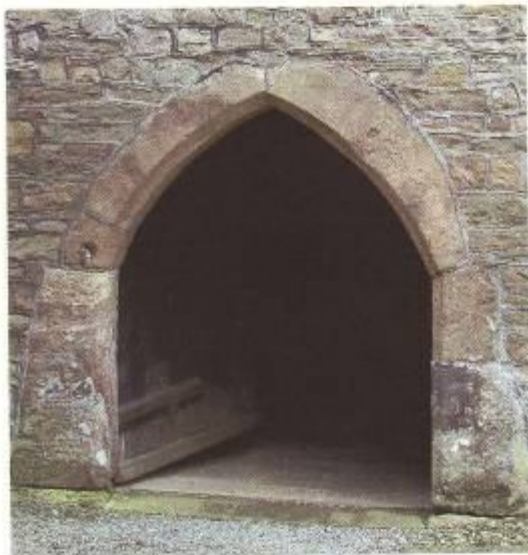


As to the door, the diagonal framing and much of the boarding is as the door was originally constructed, (no redundant fixings on either).



but there is evidence that the hinges have been moved to reduce the overall width to suit this opening. Note the position of the old rivet holes which indicate the previous position of the hinge.

This is indeed a grand door; too grand for the old church – so where did it come from?



The stones making up the door frame would also appear to have been re-used; the arched stones do not spring smoothly from their piers, indicating that they might have been made for a narrower 'Early English' style (1175-1250) archway and have been 'stretched' to fit the wide door.

These arched stones are probably from some elegant arcade and not from the demolished church – but from where?

The evidence would therefore suggest that originally the bell tower stood only as a timber structure possible with a protective wooden palisade and it was only later, after the old church was demolished, that the walls were erected – at first up to a height of eight feet and then, some time later, raised by another six feet.

And as for the small square openings apparently randomly spaced around all four walls, two pierce the wall, four are only open to the outside and at least five are obvious only from the inside; taken together they form two encircling lines around the tower – one line some 30 inches above ground level and the other at the level of the top of the window openings; their purpose was to take 'putlogs', or 'putlocks', on which scaffolding was erected – to assist the original construction and presumably left open for subsequent maintenance.



Yarpole Bell Tower Study Group (2006).