

The East Pennard Church Footprints

East Pennard Church celebrated it's Patronal festival on All Saints' Day 2011 with a Benefice communion service officiated over by the Rev. Judith Jacks. With the restoration work now successfully completed, the service included a talk on the subject of-



The East Pennard Footprints

During the recent restoration of the church tower roof a number of imprints of footsteps were discovered in the old lead. This was taken away to be melted down and made into new sheets, but before this

happened the 14 footprints were cut out and saved.

The footprint shapes are etched with a sharp tool around the shape of each foot, and some are initialled and dated. Most were made in the 18th century but it is likely that earlier examples have been erased by weathering. Just like people nowadays write their initials in wet cement, so did people in past centuries leave their mark in inaccessible places. It is surprising to see how much smaller feet were only two hundred years ago.

The earliest one is dated 1740, initialled IP followed by A16. This is possibly Isaac Phelps, baptised at East Pennard in 1722, and A 16 probably means 'aged 16' or April 16th. In this year the two biggest bells were added to the bell tower. They were so big that the west doorway into the tower was remade with the windows above it being made shorter and the stone tracery removed. Maybe Isaac was helping with the building work.



In 1765 William Moody left his imprint. There were a number of Williams in the Moody family during the 18th century; it could have been William a boy aged 14, or William who had married Elizabeth Kingston at Pilton in 1741. There were at least 5 William Moodys buried in East Pennard churchyard during this century.

In this year, 1765, East Pennard had a new incumbent - The Reverend Aaron Foster, but he did not live in the village because he was also a Canon and lived in Wells. In fact for almost 80 years (1757-1840) East Pennard was deprived of a resident incumbent, with curates being employed for church duties. In 1790 The Reverend Henry Gould started his 50 year incumbency, but he never personally took a wedding, baptism or



funeral in East Pennard, and seldom visited his parish because of his Wells duties! Finally in 1839 the Rev Thomas Garrett was appointed and moved into East Pennard.

During this time the People of East Pennard may have been left to their own resources but there is much evidence that they took it upon themselves to maintain the fabric of the Church.

In 1787 £162 was raised by local rates to repair the lead roof guttering, and eleven and a half tons of lead were required. We know that the actual church roof had stone tiles at this time because there is a drawing of the church from 1833 in which they are still evident. In 1788 the turret clock was built and installed by a local man Thomas Higdon.



In 1798 William Cowper donated the candelabra hanging in the centre of the church, and in 1799 John Bennett repaired some of the church seats, the organ gallery, and repaired the roof, his workmen leaving two sets of footprints dated 1799. We also have the churchwardens' accounts for this year which are quite detailed.

Although the gallery was repaired at this time, parts of it are much older and the front of it is made up of medieval pew-end wood carvings. The Taunton area was renowned in the 15th century for its wood carvers, in particular a man known as Simon Warman whose style is very similar to the central gallery panel depicting a pelican feeding its young from the flesh of its breast. Brent Knoll church has similar carvings.



Moving forward into the 19th century, in 1815 Sarah Martin gave a legacy to the church with which the silver altar candlesticks were bought, and in 1818 the weather cock was put up on the tower. A guinea was paid for the bird, and £2. 7 shillings for the gold gilding painted on it.

In 1827 a further £28 was spent on leading the flat roofs and the initials of the church warden Thomas Richards and the builder James Allen were inscribed on the south side. These were not found during the recent re-leading work due to weathering.

There are two comparatively recent footprints completing the set from the 20th century. In 1930 at a cost of £66.7.6d the first electric lighting was installed by Cyril England and Maurice Stone, and work was done on the nave roof to combat the deathwatch beetle. Earnest Stone left his footprint at this time, maybe fitting the first lightning conductor! In 1990 a severe storm on 25th of January caused damage to the tower roof and Ellis and Co left their initials after doing the repairs. Who knows, in a hundred years time someone may find a date and set of initials from this tower refurbishment, and wonder about the people and times that it symbolized.

Jean Heal 2011