

Uncovered memorial slabs in the chancel

A few months ago, when the carpet was lifted in the Chancel, 5 memorial slabs were found which aroused great interest especially after the discovery was made known in the newspaper. There was a large response and information was given which was a great help to me as I tried to resolve the mystery.

It would appear that in 1986, when the Cringleford Historical Society wrote the very informative history of St Peter's, they noted that there were 5 memorial slabs in the chancel, the earliest one dated 1508, the latest 1844. However when the DFAS (Decorative and Fine Arts Society) of Norwich did a very detailed survey of the church about 8 years ago, they noted that these slabs were no longer visible '...now that a fitted carpet had been laid'

Over the centuries, people in Cringleford have been buried in the churchyard or, if they were of high social ranking in the community, they might have been buried in the Church, usually in the nave which was the responsibility of the parishioners, the Chancel was the responsibility of the Priest. Of the 5 memorial slabs in the Chancel, one is a woman, Harriet Turner who died in 1844 aged 27, the wife of Charles Turner, the Parish Clerk and it is possible that he is a descendant of the John Turner, buried in the aisle and 3 belong to pastors of the church. The earliest one is Thomas Lyngton, a pre-reformation priest who was appointed in 1507 but died the following year. Remembered on the same slab is John Oliver who died in 1718 and was priest for 30 years. The slab of a third pastor, John Taylor who died in 1662 just after the Restoration and was appointed during the rule of Cromwell, was noted in the Church History booklet but the writing on it is now no longer visible. The 2 remaining slabs belong to 2 men who were Lords of the Manor and owned Cringleford Hall during the 17th and 18th centuries – John Pykarell, Gent and John Bates Esq.

John Pykarell died in 1707 having inherited the Hall in 1663 and also remembered on the slab is his younger brother, Robert who died in 1677, the year the Chancel was restored. Other members of the family have memorial slabs in the east and west end of the nave aisle, suggesting that they played an important part in the life of the village – indeed on all the slabs, relating to the Pykarells, the word 'gent' appears after the surname which means that although they were not a member of the nobility, they were a family of eminence and entitled to bear arms, - the family also had their own coat of arms. One of the slabs in the nave belongs to John Pykarell who died in 1625, his son, John, a grandson, William and great grandson, John who inherited the Hall from his uncle and who died in 1725. A second slab belongs to another Pykarell, Henry, his wife and 4 daughters. Other slabs belonging to the family are no longer visible, one belongs to William's son, Robert, a scholar at Cambridge who 'died in the flower of youth' aged 21 and an infant, Layer who died in 1722. These massive slabs were widely used often with an achievement in bas-relief and incised inscription in roman lettering and they generally lay over the mortal remains of the person or family they commemorated. Over time, floor monuments whether simple stone slabs or large structures were often moved around the church and maybe nowhere near the original site.

At the beginning of the 17th century, the Pykarell family, who owned other manors as well, notably Gissinghall and Roydon near Diss, became owners of Cringleford Hall when, in 1605, John Pykarell bought it from his brother – in law, Christopher Layer and it remained in the family for the next 151 years until it was inherited by a child, another John who later fell into debt, mortgaged the property and then sold it to John Bates in 1756. He too is remembered on a slab in the Chancel and was also

a man of some eminence having 'esquire' after his name and his own coat of arms – esquire means a gentleman of birth. John was a stockbroker in Sergeant's Inn Fields in London although he came from Norfolk and married his wife, Frances at Earlham Church in 1738. 13 years after he bought the property he died, leaving the Hall to his widow who stayed there until 1796 when she moved to Mulbarton and sold the property. Like John Pykarell whose slab lies beside his, John Bates had no heir.

One can only surmise why Harriet Turner, John Bates and John Pykarell were buried in the chancel. Certainly both of the men were of high social ranking within the community and in John Pykarell's case he was Lord of the Manor for over 40 years but it is still harder to guess why Harriet Turner was buried there when she was only 27 years old - in the case of the 3 priests it is more easily understood.