

Keeping Pigeons in Parish Churches: Addendum

By

JOHN McCANN

The AMS has led the way with research into dovecotes and new examples and facts are constantly emerging. Indeed one delightful discovery of recent years is the dovecote created in timber on the tower of a cemetery chapel at Salford of c.1900, the birds being encouraged because of their symbolism as bringers of peace and repose. Further to the paper by Frank Pexton and John McCann in volume 54, 2010, on the associated theme of roosts consciously encouraged in churches, new information has emerged in the last year which we share with members.

Some additional information on this subject has emerged since publication of our paper in volume 54. Robert Walker has managed to gain access to the church tower at Llanwarne, Herefordshire, which Frank Pexton never achieved. He reports that the eighteen 'nest-holes' which George Marshall reported in 1939 (p.55) are in fact putlog holes, used for scaffolding, widely spaced as putlog holes normally are.

He also reports nest-boxes high in the church tower of Meifod, Powys (formerly Montgomeryshire), as illustrated (fig. 1).¹ There are twenty of them in two tiers, made of hardwood 1½in thick, apparently elm. The structure occupies the whole of the south side of the bell-chamber, and is supported on two pegs of triangular section and an iron spike driven into the mortar courses. The horizontal ledges are 7½in apart. The depth front to back is 10in, which includes the alighting ledges. The distance between the centre lines of the entrances is 14in. The partitions between nest-boxes are set square to the face. It is well-made but is undatable, except by the hand-made nails. It may have been raised complete, or it could have been assembled there from parts prepared more conveniently at ground level. The pigeons entered the bell-chamber through the louvred vents; fortuitously the inclined vanes are about 6in apart, the ideal spacing to keep out the larger birds of prey while allowing pigeons to enter freely.

He has investigated the church tower at Skenfrith, Gwent (formerly in Monmouthshire), (fig 2) and reports that there is no evidence that it has ever been used for domesticated pigeons, as was claimed in a leaflet sold at the church (p.80). Evidently the distinctive timber structure at the top was built as a bell-chamber some time after the stone tower was completed. The louvred side walls were intended simply to transmit the sound efficiently while keeping out the rain. There are comparable timber extensions to the towers of other parish churches nearby, e.g. at Cascob, Kerry and Llanidloes. (I must apologise for wrongly attributing Skenfrith to Cumberland. The late Frank Pexton had filed the Skenfrith leaflet under that county, and it sounded so much like a Cumberland place-name that I did not question it).

I must apologise also for a mistake on p.71. The sentence 'The east window . . . same position' is displaced from the description of Overbury, Worcestershire.

It seems likely that other columbaria will be found later.

John McCann



Fig 1. Wooden nest-boxes in the bell-chamber of the parish church at Meifod, Powys
(photograph: Robert Walker).



Fig 2. The distinctive timber structure that crowns the tower of the church at Skenfrith, Monmouthshire
(photograph: Matthew Saunders)

NOTES:

1 The nest-boxes were first reported by John Eisel (Eisel, J., *Bells of Montgomeryshire, Archaeologia Cambrensis*, vol. 134, p.190.