

The Friends of All Saints Pocklington

- Summer newsletter June 2019

All Saints' crackin' porch

All Saints' porch is a cracking church entrance – in more ways than one. Not only is it, to use a colloquial epithet, a cracking (i.e. exceptional) piece of Victorian craftsmanship; it is also currently cracking up, literally, at an increasing rate, particularly at the front.



Above left: Les Slow discusses the porch floor with All Saints' architect, Alexa Stephens (centre) and her trainee. Above right: The worst of the wear and damage.

To give the porch floor its technical description, it is made from encaustic Minton tiles. And it is rated as an impressive example of such, with one West Yorkshire authority of church flooring saying: *"There are spectacular examples of Minton tiles, in the choir of Lichfield Cathedral, for example, and on a smaller scale in the porch of Pocklington Parish Church."* It is also noted by Pevsner as one of the notable pieces of Victorian church design in the East Riding.

But the porch floor at Pocklington is all the more worthy for the stories behind it. The floor was laid in 1884 as part of a new porch – All Saints was in a perilous state in the late C19th and it was perhaps lucky that only the porch, and not the main edifice, blew down in a great storm of 1880. The new porch incorporated some features of the original but was very different in other respects, for example it included side windows. And when it came to laying a new floor, the architect followed the fashion of the day by choosing encaustic tiles.

But what makes Pocklington special is that it was created from Minton tiles that were from designs by Augustus Pugin – famous names that both have a local connection.

Herbert Minton's pottery works in Staffordshire are world famous, less well known is that his sister married the vicar of Barmby Moor, Rev Robert Taylor. And when Herbert Minton died in 1858 he left the business to his nephews, including Robert

Minton Taylor who was born and brought up in Barmby (when St Catherine's, Barmby Moor, was rebuilt in 1850 it had received a special floor donated by Minton).

However, the Minton nephews appear to have not got on and subsequently went their separate ways, each manufacturing tiles under variations of the Minton name. The Pocklington floor warrants further research to uncover which branch of the family supplied All Saints in the 1880s.

Less fractious is that the tiles are based on designs by Augustus Pugin – the great Gothic revival architect, whose work included the Palace of Westminster (which also has Minton tile flooring that is currently being restored) and dozens of Anglican and Catholic churches and cathedrals amongst his designs; in addition to producing the artwork for the Minton tileworks. Though Pugin died in 1852 his tile designs lived on, though the Pocklington floor appears to include some later unique variations on the Pugin originals. And there is also a local link to Pugin – his literary agent was the leading C19th Catholic publisher, Charles Dolman, grandson of the last Dolman to be lord of the manor of Pocklington.

There is a third notable aspect about the church floor. There was a specific fund raising effort towards the new porch, including talks and concerts, which took some five years. But the porch floor itself was paid for by the schoolchildren of the parish.

All of that was over 130 years ago. The question now is what and how to repair and restore the damage? Some tiles at the front have shattered, while others are cracked or badly worn, while there is also a pronounced camber in the centre of the floor. Les Slow has had recent discussions with All Saints new architect, Alexa Stephens, who is investigating more fully. While some Minton tiling can be picked up second hand from reclaimed floors, the more unusual/unique designs might have to be specially made if the floor is going to be brought back to pristine condition.

Yet another notable Fisher descendent

A follow up to the Friends newsletter of earlier this year. It related the life and family of the Rev Arthur Fisher, vicar of Pocklington 1908-1921, and detailed how many of his offspring went on to notable things. One was missed out - more information has come to light that one of Rev Fisher's granddaughters, June Fisher, married Vane Bozidar, Olympic athlete, shipping magnate, Yugoslav politician and diplomat in exile, British Army major, art collector and philanthropist; with the next generation carrying on the London-based family shipping interests.