

HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE

If you walk into the church at Dolton, turn around and look up, you will see a coat of arms above the door (photo right). Many of you will have seen this and thought little of it, but why is it there?

Toward the end of the reign of Henry VIII an order was made to place a coat of arms in every church, although this wasn't compulsory. The oldest I've found so far dates from the reign of Charles I, and that is at Ashwater. Those at Launcells and North Hill in Cornwall are also from his reign but are undated.

At the Restoration when Charles II ascended the throne it was then made compulsory to have the coat of arms set up in all churches, so most date from this time or later. I have to presume that at some time there was probably one at Dowland, and while it seems that many were discarded during Victorian refurbishments, there was no such refurbishment here, although it could have gone during the "commonwealth" period (1649-1660) when many were thrown out and never replaced. Some were painted directly on the walls so may exist under centuries of whitewash.

The arms at Dolton are painted on boards and dated 1760 which was the beginning of king George III's reign. Many others date from his era since his was one of the longest reigns – a record broken first by Victoria then our present monarch.

The symbols on the shield in the centre are, if you follow the language used for such things (no, me neither!) "*Quarterly, 1st, England impaling Scotland. 2nd, France. 3rd Ireland. 4th Hanover. Per pale and chevron. 1, gules 2 lions passant guardant or (Brunswick); 2, or semée of hearts, a lion rampant azure (lunenburgh); 3, gules a horse courant argent (Westphalia). Over all on an inescutcheon gules, the golden crown of Charlemagne.*" That's quite enough gobbledegook! If you look carefully you will notice the rose of England is shown under the lion and the thistle of Scotland is under the unicorn. In all, a lot of lions for a country which has none, but then unicorns are pretty scarce too.



Compare this with the coat of arms at Hatherleigh which are also George III, there they have updated the arms after 1814 where the French fleur-de-lis has been removed following a "spot of bother" that England had recently had with some French chap called Napoleon at that time. Apart from this update it bears all the characteristics of having been painted by the same artist. The colours there being slightly more vivid, perhaps because it is a bit newer. The newest one I've found is a Victorian coat of arms at Colebrook dated 1865 and very few were made after that time.



The quality of the drawing does vary greatly from place to place. It is fair to assume that the artists had probably never seen a real lion so had nothing to compare it with, hence the lion at Satterleigh looks about as ferocious as a kitten (left), and the unicorn has 3 knees on one



leg! However, there is little to beat the comical lion at Honeychurch (above right) that looks rather like a bad pantomime dame, although in Honeychurch's defence they do have two coats of arms, which is highly unusual.

Some are not as well looked after as ours at Dolton; at East Down in a storage area along with all the cleaning materials and step ladders there is a ripped filthy canvas which is all that's left of their coat of arms. In the case of Cheriton Fitzpaine there has been a poor attempt at restoration of a 1665 example, which makes me think it would have been better left alone.

North Devon once had a tradition for decorative plasterwork, particularly around Barnstaple (Stafford Barton contains some examples). These artisans were clearly employed in the creation of some three-dimensional coats of arms and probably none finer than just across the Torridge at Meeth where there is an unpainted plaster example dating from the time of Queen Anne (1704). Most others have been painted at some time such as the 1638 example at Ashwater or the rather fine workmanship at Langtree, but again there are bad examples such as a modern poor-quality paint job applied to the plasterwork at Marwood (It looks like it was done by a decorator rather than an artist).

As stated above, the French emblem was removed in the early C19, but the wording of the title of this article remained. It is thought to have been something said by Edward III (1327-1377) and if you don't know, it is roughly translated as "Shame on him that thinks evil of it"

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