

Fig. 1 Nave roof



Fig. 2 Chancel roof



Pilton church has recently had extensive work carried out to its roofs which involved erecting scaffolding to enable the timbers to be treated. This gave an opportunity to examine the roof during the works which resulted in a number of new discoveries being made. This report gives an overview of the roofs and illustrates some of the carvings that were found.

Pilton is very fortunate in retaining historic timber roofs to the porch, nave, north aisle and chancel which still retain their historic form and date from the fifteenth century. The porch has a collar beam roof carried on stone corbels with wooden carvings and bosses, the nave and north aisle both have tie beam roofs with vertical post carried on stone corbels, spandrels, decorated wall plates and tie beams with attached angel bust and open tracery within the trusses, the chancel has a panelled roof with carved foliage at the intersections and angel with large outstretched wings along the wall plates.

The first illustrations show the porch roof which although restored is basically medieval, it has a number of interesting features that can be easily seen from ground level. It has six stone corbels which support the wooden roof, on the east side are a king with a crown and beard (Fig. 2), an angel holding a shield who wears a topknot on her head (Fig.3) and a man with a beard, long hair and hat (Fig. 4) whilst on the west side are a lady (Fig. 5), an angel holding a shield (Fig. 6) and a queen with a large crown, long neck and prominent shoulder; the line of her upper clothing is just visible as a thin line (Fig. 7). In the centre of the roof is a wooden boss showing the head of a bearded man with staring eyes and large teeth with foliage carved around the top of his head (Fig. 8). The wall plates are decorated with small rectangular shaped foliage and have crenellated tops.



Fig 3 King corbel



Fig 4 Angel corbel



Fig 5 Man corbel



Fig 6 Lady corbel



Fig 7 Angel corbel



Fig 8 Queen corbel



Figs. 9 & 10  
Carving of head  
in porch



The roofs of the nave and north aisle are low pitched and are of a type frequently found in Somerset; they both have six bays but that to the north aisle is much narrower. When originally constructed they would probably been brightly painted as seen at St Cuthbert's church, Wells and Evercreech church but the only colour remaining is on the nave roof nearest to the chancel arch. This may however be because the section of roof nearest the rood screen was often more highly ornamented and is known as the ceillure. The painted angels hold shields and stand on clouds, they appear to be feminine with long flowing locks painted yellow and are dressed in white surplices with gold collars and cuffs lined in red, all have red painted lips and black irises to the eyes; the wings are mostly replacements. The illustrations show details of these painted angels, that on the first tie beam west of the chancel arch has a red cross with trefoil ends on a black background, in the top left hand quadrant is a gold painted Virgin holding the Christ child (Fig. 11), on the east side of the tie beam is an angel holding a shield with a red cross painted on a red background (Fig. 12), on the north side of the easternmost bay is an angel holding a black shield with a crucifixion cross placed on a green painted hill around which are red tear drops, the cross has a long spear on the left hand side and a long handled sponge on the right side (Fig. 13). On the south side of the east bay is an angel holding a shield with a green Crown of Thorns painted on a red background (Fig. 14), the angel on the tie beam over the chancel arch holds a black painted shield also painted with red tear drops which has a ladder placed on the left side with a classical column on the right and a whip laid across its centre (Fig. 15). Fig. 16 is another view of the angel in Fig. 12 showing the large

foliage boss located below it, these are painted gold in the easternmost bay of the nave roof, note also the small gold painted foliage carvings that also decorate the timbers at the eastern end of the nave roof. Within the corners of the roof at the east end are elongated foliage carvings painted gold with further foliage within the spandrel below that retain traces of red paint between the foliage (Fig. 17). Fig. 18 shows a side view of the painted angels and Fig. 19 illustrates a replacement angel to enable comparison to be made with the medieval originals.

In addition to the painted angels, a number of other carvings are located on the nave roof timbers which are difficult to see from the ground, at the west end in the centre is a man's head with large eyes and grinning toothed mouth (Fig. 20) whilst on a rafter above the open work tracery filling the truss west of the painted angels is a man's head (Fig. 21) with two faces joined together one of which has a hand in its open toothed mouth which may indicate that he has tooth ache, the main head wears a medieval type hat with a curled cut brim.



Fig 11 Angel with Virgin and Child



Fig 12 Angel with Red Cross



Fig 13 Angel with Spear and Sponge



Fig 14 Angel with Crown of Thorns



Fig 15 Angel with Ladder Column and Whip



Fig 16 Angel with Red Cross and Painted Boss



Fig 17 Spandrel and painted foliage



Fig 18 Angel (side view)



Fig 19 Angel (side view)



Fig 20 Head at West end of Nave Roof



Fig 21  
Toothache  
Head

The roof to the north aisle are unpainted but has a number of carvings on the rafters and spandrels which are difficult to see from the ground together with other variations not found on the nave roof. The most visible carvings are located on the spandrels of the roof and include a 'green man' with a protruding tongue and foliage emerging from his mouth (Fig.22), an upside down angel with a bulging tummy and long fingers (Fig. 23) and foliage

such as the 'Tudor' rose in Fig. 24. Hidden in the rafters are other carvings such as a smiling face with foliage around its head (Fig. 25) a head with bulging eyes, toothed mouth and twisted moustache (Fig. 26) and an owl (Fig. 27) which may be relatively modern. The angels appear to be replacements as shown in (Figs. 28 & 29) but have been well carved; they include one playing the bagpipes that may be medieval (Fig. 30),



Fig 22 Green Man



Fig 23 Upside down angel



Fig 24 Tudor Rose



Fig 25 Head with Foliage



Fig 26 Toothy Head



Fig 27 Owl



Figs 28 and 29 Replacement Angels



Fig 30 Bagpipe Player

The roof of the chancel is slightly later in date and is of panelled construction, it is divided into a six sections divided by moulded beams with carved foliage at the intersections which are sub divided into a further four sections. Wall shafts rise up from stone angel corbels to support the main cross beams of the roof whilst around the wall plate are angels with wide outstretched wings. Figs. 31 to 32 show the main construction of the roof with its foliage decoration whilst Fig. 33 shows a foliage boss. Figs. 34 to 37 show the angels around the wall plate which appear to be largely contemporary with the roof, note the different positions of the wings on some angels which may indicate later alterations.



Fig 31 Chancel Roof



Fig 32 Chancel Roof



Fig 33 Details of Foliage Boss



Figs 34 and 35 Chancel Roof Angels



Figs 36 and 37 Chancel Roof Angels



A number of ceramic pulley wheels (Fig. 38) were found attached to the wall under the roof which these may have been put in place during the World War II to enable blinds to be pulled up providing a blackout in the church during services.

Another important feature of the roofs which should be noted are the stone corbels, these are mostly of a standard type with angels holding up shields or books (Fig. 39) but other variations exist including an angel holding a cloth in the chancel (Fig. 40) and one with original writing painted on the shield in the north aisle (Fig. 41).



Fig 38 Pulley



Fig 39 Angel Corbel



Fig 40 Angel Corbel with Writing



Fig 40 Angel Corbel in Chancel

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