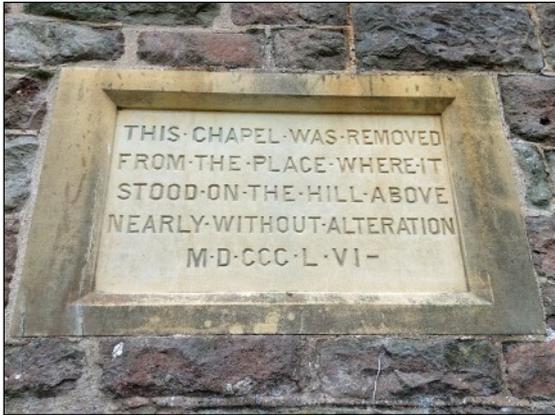


HISTORIC AYLBURTON - 2

John Harrison

I had a very pleasant autumn walk recently around our Church in Aylburton and I was very interested to see several historical gems housed in our Church. They all have a connection to a fascinating past.

Most villagers will know that the Chapel on Chapel Hill was removed stone by stone, numbered and relocated to its present site on Church Road in 1856. The original Chapel had been there from at least from 1219 and was dedicated to St. John the Baptist. It became St. Mary's sometime before 1750.



At the west end of the south aisle there appears a beautiful stained glass window in memory of Nevill Coghill (19.4.1899 – 6.11.1980), translator of *The Canterbury Tales* and an English literary scholar. The Coghills were an illustrious family and lived in the fine Georgian residence at Savran House on Chapel Hill. In 1968 the 6th Baronet Coghill, Marmaduke Patrick Nevill Somerville TD, DL (18.3.1896 – 6.1.1981), published the exploits of his forebear, Nevill Josiah Aylmer Coghill (1852-1879) entitled "Whom the Gods Love". The latter was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously for trying to save the Queens Colours whilst being relentlessly pursued by Zulu warriors following the fateful battle of Isandhlwana prior to the famous engagement at Rorke's Drift (see the film "*Zulu Dawn*").



The bell is another interesting feature and dated 1733. It was cast by William Evans (1690 -1770) son of Evan Evans I who began making bells in Chepstow in the 1680s. He seems to have



taken over a pre-existing bell foundry in Welsh Street, Chepstow, which was possibly derelict when Evan Evans I started up there. The existence of a Bell House there is known from a will in 1605. There is nothing of it remaining but there is a heritage trail pavement slab at the location in Welsh Street, Chepstow with details of the foundry. The Evans' memorial inscription slab can still be seen inside St Mary's Priory Church at Chepstow.

Two items that are probably contemporary to our great Aylburton cross deserve a mention. The medieval pulpit is gothic in design and dates from at least the 14th century. Stone pulpits are mainly found in Gloucestershire (17), Somerset (20) and Devon (10). This pulpit is important as it is one of only 60 medieval pulpits that still survive in this country today.



What is perhaps older is the fine font which is starkly rudimentary and of significantly solid construction. Every Medieval church contained a font. It was close to the main entrance of the church in the area known as the baptistery. The puritanical zeal of the Reformation caused many medieval church fonts to be lost, defaced or destroyed. Whatever could not be melted down or sold to enrich Henry VIII and more particularly the subsequent Protestant reformers was treated with callous disdain. Reformer fundamentalists forbade the use of the beautiful fonts, many of which were subsequently destroyed, and demanded that a simple basin be used instead. Could ours be one of these plain fonts perhaps?

