

The History of St. Edmund's Church

The following article is an extract from A Guide to The Parish Church of St Edmund's, Castleton, Derbyshire.

There are more fascinating facts & pictures in the guide which is on sale in the Church.

The history of this interesting old church is dedicated to Saint Edmund, King of East Anglia. He was martyred after his defeat by the Danes in AD 869. The church dates back to the 12th century at least. It is not mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086, but the building as it stands today must have been started soon afterwards, either by William Peveril or his son. William Peveril, who was the illegitimate son of William the Conqueror, had been given the land for his castle in what is now known as Castleton. His father had made him bailiff of the royal manors in north western Derbyshire. By 1086 he had started building the north curtain wall of the castle and the village gradually grew at the foot of the hill.

During the Middle Ages the village was enclosed and protected from attack by an earthwork that ran in a semicircle from the rocks near the entrance of the Peak Cavern to the opening in Cave Dale. This came to be called the Town Ditch, but, even in the 18th century, an observer found 'it cannot be easily traced having been destroyed in many places by buildings and ploughs'

The site chosen for the church was a slight mound in the middle of this enclosed area, reflecting its importance in the village. Throughout the 12th century the patronship of the church was held by the custodian of the castle and the connection between the church and the castle was so close at that time that it was known as the church of Peak Castle. Henry III granted the governorship of the castle to his son Prince Edward who also received the custodianship of the church. When the Prince founded the Cistercian Abbey of Dernhall in Cheshire in 1269 he granted it the advowson of the 'church of the Castle of the Peak'. He thus fulfilled a vow he had made, when in danger at sea on his way back from a crusade in the Holy Land that he would grant certain manors and churches to the abbey. In 1297 Edward I, by another charter, transferred the abbey of Dernhall to Vale Royal in the same county. The rectorial tithes of Castleton were subsequently appropriated to the Abbey of Vale Royal and a vicarage was formally endowed. The Abbot was now able to claim the tithes of the village and also of the hamlet of Edale, which was within the ecclesiastical parish of Castleton. In 1329 a dispute arose over the rights to the tithes of animals pastured in Edale, between the Abbot of Vale Royal and the Prior of Lenton, who traced his claim to pasturage back to a gift of William Peveril. Queen Isabella, who was then lord of the castle, instructed that the matter should be investigated by an inquisition on oath and the claims of Vale Royal were preferred. The Abbey of Vale Royal continued to appoint the vicars of Castleton until it was dissolved in 1536. Henry VIII then gave the rectorial tithes and advowson to the Bishop of Chester. The present patron is the Bishop of Derby.