

History by the yard at Eynsham

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IT IS widely believed that nothing is more doomed to failure than a co-operative venture involving a group of artists - something to do with their supposed temperament.

Yet, to judge from the finished article, this problem does not seem to have cropped up among the ten Eynsham artists who have just completed a giant frieze illustrating the major incidents in the village's history. Such is the consistency of the work that you could almost imagine it had been done by one person.

The frieze was the idea of Mrs Margaret Garland who thought it

would provide a suitable centre-piece (actually it's all round the walls) for the Jubilee exhibition in the Bartholomew Room on the village square which has been arranged jointly by the Eynsham Arts Group and the Eynsham History Society.

Each of the artists was responsible for one, or in some cases two, of the scenes and they were all traced from the drawings on to a sheet of white

calico, with suitable captions.

The story told by the frieze begins in 500 BC with the establishment of an Iron Age settlement in the village, then leaps a thousand years to 571 AD when the Saxons built a ford over the river at Swinford and captured Romano - British Eynsham.

Next comes the first reference to Eynsham Abbey, built in 1005 and which flourished for more than 500 years until its destruction after Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. The scene [depicted right] illustrates the monks fleeing from the Abbey in 1066 after the Battle of Hastings.



The market, for which Eynsham was long famous, has its origins almost as long ago: it began in 1100 when a charter was given by Henry I.

A scene in 1186 records the Henry II nomination of Hugh from Burgundy [above left] as Bishop of Lincoln - a Diocese including Eynsham Abbey.

One hundred years later, in 1296, we are shown an artist's impression [above centre] of the serious fighting at the village's Pentecostal fair between folk from Eynsham and a group of

Oxford undergraduates who had come over to join in the fun. This serious outbreak of animosity between Town and Gown resulted in the death of a number of the students. I think the artist may have used a little too much imagination in involving monks in the fight.

Richard II's visit to the Abbey in 1390, a view of St Leonard's Church in 1580 and Market House in the seventeenth century are followed by an artist's attempt to capture the beauty of Venetia Stanley, whose family held the

Abbey and its lands from the time of the dissolution until 1649 when they were sequestered under the Commonwealth.

Miss Stanley, who married Sir Kenelm Digby, the author of the first printed cookery book, was twice painted by Van Dyck. A copy of one of the portraits is included in the exhibition, and there's also a brass rubbing of her father's memorial tablet in St Leonard's Church where he is buried.

John Wesley's visit to the village is recorded in a scene depicting the near-fatal accident he had at

Swinford. He was on his way to preach at Southleigh and Witney when his mare slipped at the causeway and he nearly drowned. Five years later he would have had no problem for by then the fourth Earl of Abingdon had built the Swinford Toll Bridge which of course still stands today.

Sad to say, the same does not apply to the railway whose arrival in 1861 is recorded in the last scene of the frieze [below]. It was closed some years ago and its former route now forms part of the new road skirting the village.

The frieze was the idea of Mrs Margaret (Peggy) Garland (right) – photo Sue Chapman

Visitors to the exhibition - which will be open for the next week - will also find an interesting relic of the railway on display - the mile post which once marked the spot 71¼ miles from Paddington. The interesting thing about this is that its supporting column is made from a section of railway line used during the Great Western's broad gauge days.

Postcards, prints and paintings are also included in the exhibition as well as more unusual items - a policeman's truncheon from 1834 and pieces of carved stone from the Abbey which because of their decoration did not find their way, as the rest of the stone did, into other buildings.

