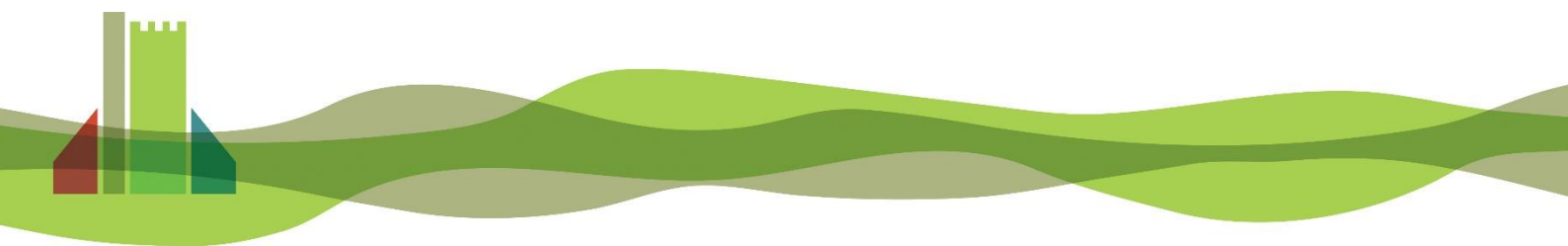


St Swithun's Day Service

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Today, the 15th of July, is St Swithun's Day. Swithun was an Anglo-Saxon bishop of Winchester from 852 until his death in 863. Swithun was originally buried outside the Old Minster at Winchester, supposedly so that water from the church roof could fall on his grave, and passers-by could walk over it. He was adopted as patron saint of Winchester more than a hundred years later, and when his body was transferred inside the new basilica on 15th July 971 legend has it that there was a heavy shower of rain, which resulted in the proverb:

*St Swithun's day if thou dost rain
For forty days it will remain
St Swithun's day if thou be fair
For forty days 'twill rain nae mare*

So if the legend is true, we will have today's weather for another forty days.

Another legend concerning Swithun is that he restored the eggs of a woman who had dropped them after being jostled on the bridge at Winchester. You can see a wall painting of this event at Corhampton Church.

Since before the time of St Swithun, with a very brief interlude during 17th century, the church and manor of Droxford for much of their history have belonged to the Bishops of Winchester. A number of these bishops were powerful and influential men. Today we will consider how the church here at Droxford developed during the times of some of them, with some hymns and readings from the same periods.

It is possible that an Anglo-Saxon church existed at Droxford during the time of St Swithun, possibly founded by Wilfrid during his mission to the Meon Valley late in the 7th century, but the first historical record we have of a church here is not until the Domesday Book, compiled in 1086 under the orders of William the Conqueror twenty years after the Norman invasion of 1066. The Domesday Book was a survey of much of England and parts of Wales. It tells us that Droxford had always been in the hands of the Church, with at that time 32 villagers, 13 smallholders, and 6 slaves. There were two mills, and a church valued at 20s.

The Bishop of Winchester at the time of the Domesday Book was Walkelin, a nobleman who was related to William the Conqueror. He began to build the present cathedral in place of the Anglo-Saxon minster of Swithun's time. It was completed in 1093, and on 15th July, St Swithun's Day, the monks carried the relics of St Swithun into their new church, where his shrine became a destination for large numbers of pilgrims.

Psalms would have been recited or sung in the church at this time. Let us stand and sing Hymn 100, which is a setting of Psalm 100.

For much of the next century, from 1129 to 1171, Henry of Blois was the Bishop of Winchester. He was a grandson of William the Conqueror, and brother to King Stephen. Henry of Blois was a powerful political figure, and also a great sponsor of new buildings, including Wolvesey Castle in Winchester, and Bishop's Waltham palace, and he began the construction of St Cross Hospital in Winchester. He was also responsible for the building of smaller churches. The Norman parts of the church here, which are thought to date from about 1150 to 1160, including much of the fabric of the nave and chancel, the chancel arch with its distinctive Norman zigzag carving, and the north and south doorways, are from his time, and may well have been constructed under his sponsorship.

The Bishops of Winchester were responsible for appointing rectors to the living of Droxford. In some cases they may have appointed rectors who shared similar religious philosophies. In other cases appointments were made to provide a favoured individual with the financial income from the parish. Perhaps the most unusual appointment was Poggio de Florenzia, who appears to have been Rector of Droxford in 1423. Poggio was in England at the invitation of Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester from 1404 to 1447. Back in Italy Poggio had been personal secretary to the Pope. He was a noted Renaissance scholar, a friend of the Medicis, and later in life was to become Chancellor of the Republic of Florence. He never took up Holy Orders, and we do not know if he ever carried out religious duties at Droxford. The patronage of Henry Beaufort may simply have been to provide him with the income from the parish.

As you approach the church from the village square the most dominant feature is the tower. You may have noticed a plaque above the west door with the date

1599. This is thought to be when the present tower was built, or enlarged from an earlier structure. At the time Thomas Bilson, who himself had been Rector of Droxford in 1583, was the Bishop of Winchester. His main residence was at Southwark on the south bank of the River Thames. The land he owned at Southwark included Shakespeare's Globe and a number of other Elizabethan theatres.

At about the time that the tower of Droxford church was being constructed, Shakespeare was writing one of his most famous plays – Hamlet. So it is perhaps appropriate to hear some words from that play, in which Polonius gives advice to his son Laertes:

*And these few precepts in thy memory
Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar;
The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel;
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel; but, being in,
Bear't that the opposed may beware of thee.
Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice;
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgement ...
This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

Hymn 110 is an arrangement of the 23rd Psalm by George Herbert, who lived during these times.

The reason that the tower was built or enlarged in 1599 may have been to provide extra space to accommodate the large mechanisms that were needed for change-ringing bells. The first bell of this type in Droxford, a treble bell which is still in place today, was installed in 1606. Do you know how many bells there are in the tower now?

Church bells may suggest another piece of writing from this period by the metaphysical poet John Donne:

No man is an Iland, intire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.

The date of 1599 on the tower might also remind us of the birth of another famous Englishman. Do you know who it was? Oliver Cromwell was born in 1599. He became leader of the Parliamentarians during the English Civil War. During the period of the Commonwealth and the Protectorate, from 1646 to 1660, there was no Bishop of Winchester, and in Droxford the rector, Nicholas Preston, was replaced by an Independent minister, Mr Robert Webb. It is likely that any images and wall paintings in Droxford church that had escaped the Reformation in the 16th century were removed or destroyed at this time.

The poet John Milton, who lived from 1608 to 1674, and wrote *Paradise Lost*, was a supporter of Oliver Cromwell and the Parliamentarians. We can now sing some of his words in Hymn 204, a setting of Psalm 136.

Some Bishops of Winchester had family connections to Droxford. George Morley was bishop from 1662 to 1684, shortly after the Restoration of the monarchy under Charles II. He was the uncle of Francis Morley, who lived at the Manor House, and whose impressive memorial is located near the font. There is another memorial nearby to Sir Charles Morley, the elder son of Francis Morley, who became Chancellor of the Diocese of Winchester.

Isaac Walton the famous angler, had been a friend and fishing companion of John Donne, who we heard from earlier, and later lived in the residence of Bishop Morley in Farnham Castle. His daughter married William Hawkins, rector of Droxford, and Isaac Walton spent some time at house of Dr Hawkins in the Close at Winchester.

Dr Hawkins was a prebendary of Winchester Cathedral, and it would appear that he spent much of his time there rather than in Droxford. In 1684, during his incumbency, the Churchwardens had to report, amongst other things, that the

Minister had been absent for three parts of the year. It is likely that Isaac Walton would on occasions have stayed at the Rectory in Droxford, since he was a friend of the curate, John Darbyshire, and perhaps spent some time fishing in the River Meon.

William Garnier, rector of Droxford from 1801 to 1831, was married to Lady Harriet North, daughter of John Brownlow North, bishop of Winchester. William Garnier laid out the Rectory garden and, together with the Rector of Meonstoke, a relation of his who was a great lover of trees and an expert in their cultivation, he planted the Beech Walk in order that they might walk under pleasant shade to each others' houses.

In 1810 Droxford was the richest living in the Meon valley, worth £799, and William Garnier employed curates to carry out church services. In 1810 Edward Nott was paid £75 per year plus £15 towards accommodation. William Garnier became Lord of the Manor of Wickham in 1819.

At this time Droxford church had box-pews, made of oak. There were also galleries at the east and west ends of the nave. The gallery at the west end had private pews for some members of the congregation. The east gallery was for singers. The atmosphere in a village church of this time is captured by Thomas Hardy in his novel *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

The gallery looked down upon and knew the habits of the nave to its remotest peculiarity, and had an extensive stock of exclusive information about it; whilst the nave knew nothing of the gallery folk, as gallery folk, beyond their loud-sounding minims and chest notes. Such topics as that the clerk was always chewing tobacco except at the moment of crying amen; that he had a dust-hole in his pew; that during the sermon certain young daughters of the village had left off caring to read anything so mild as the marriage service for some years, and now regularly studied the one which chronologically follows it; that a pair of lovers touched fingers through a knot-hole in their pews in the manner ordained by their great exemplars, Pyramus and Thisbe; that Mrs Ledlow the farmer's wife, counted her money and reckoned her week's marketing expenses during the first lesson – all news to those below – were stale subjects here.

Charles Sumner, bishop of Winchester from 1827 to 1869, also had a family relationship with Droxford church because his niece, Anne Sumner, had been married to the rector, John Adair Griffith Colpoys.

During the time that Bishop Sumner was in office, the furnishings of Droxford church were completely renewed. The galleries that had been fitted at the east and west ends of the nave were removed, and the oak Georgian box pews were replaced with the Victorian pine pews that we still have today, although there were many more then than there are now. When first installed in 1847 they came right up to the chancel, and extended into the corners of the church. On 30th March 1851 it is recorded that church attendance at Droxford was 163 in the morning, and 185 in the afternoon.

More Victorian furnishings were to follow in St Mary & All Saints. The lectern was donated to the church in 1867. The pipe organ, which was removed just a few years ago, was originally installed in 1873, and the pulpit was a gift from the church of St Matthew's, Denmark Hill, in 1882. The church as it is today would look quite familiar to the late Victorian congregations.

The medieval deanery of Droxford had contained 32 parishes. It was reformed in 1856 by Bishop Sumner, and new deaneries were created.

We will now sing one of our most familiar Victorian hymns – Hymn 115 – *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*, by John Greenleaf Whittier.

The Diocese of Portsmouth was created in 1927. Droxford is now part of that Diocese, and in the Lady Chapel we have a memorial to Dr Neville Lovett, the first bishop of Portsmouth from 1927 to 1936, and subsequently Bishop of Salisbury, who retired to Droxford in 1946. But we should remember that this church was shaped for much of its history by being part of the Diocese of Winchester, under the authority of its bishops going back to Anglo-Saxon times, such as Swithun, right up to the early part of the 20th century.

Notices

Prayer

Some later reports suggest that he had great piety, that he travelled through his diocese on foot, preferred to entertain the poor rather than the rich, and had an enthusiasm for building and restoring churches.

At times he supported his brother, King Stephen, but at other times changed allegiance to Matilda, daughter of Henry I, as we can hear in this extract from near the end of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles:

After that, the bishop of Winchester, Henry the brother of King Stephen, spoke with Earl Robert and with the empress and swore them oaths that he would never more hold with the king his brother, and cursed all the men who held with him, and told them that he would give up Winchester to them, and had them come there.

18th century Church of England a place of laxity and complacency, only reformed under Charles Sumner from 1827 (resigned seat in 1869). Charles Sumner made appointments that were in his gift to like-minded evangelicals.

On 30th March 1851 recorded that church attendance at Droxford was 163 in the morning, and 185 in the afternoon, out of a parish population of 2005 (including Shedfield & Swanmore).

We will now sing Hymn 156 – Come down, O love divine –written by another Italian, Banco da Siena, who lived during this period.

Hymn 156 – Come down, O Love divine (3)

'The Presentm's of the Churchwardens of the Parish of DROXFORD for the year 1684:

... all is well ... saveing ... that the rooffe of our Church and some of the Windows want some small mending which shall be done forthwith.

We have a register Booke but it is of Paper.

Wee have noe Paper booke for the registering of preachers but it shall be provided ...

Wee have a Chest which is at present out of use ...

Wee have no such Terrier as is ... mentioned ...

The Minister of the place hath usually beene absent 3 (partes) of the year and present one att severall seasons ...

The Perambulation hath not been yearly observed but with intermission; ...

The gallery of Mellstock Church had a status and sentiment of its own. A stranger there was regarded with a feeling altogether differing from that of the congregation below towards him. Banished from the nave as an intruder whom no originality could make interesting, he was received above as a curiosity that no unfitness could render dull.

Thomas Hardy, in his poem *A Church Romance*, captures the atmosphere of a country church of this time, with galleries and musicians, just before the accession of Queen Victoria, and the period of widespread Victorian restoration.

*She turned in the high pew, until her sight
Swept the west gallery, and caught its row
Of music-men with viol, book and bow
Against the sinking sad tower-window light.*

*She turned again; and in her pride's despite
One strenuous viol's inspirer seemed to throw
A message from his string to her below,
Which said: 'I claim thee as my own forthright!'*

*Thus their hearts' bond began, in due time signed.
And long years hence, when age had scared Romance,
At some old attitude of his or glance
That gallery scene would break upon her mind,
With him as minstrel, ardent, young, and trim,
Bowling 'New Sabbath' or 'Mount Ephraim.'*

At this time Shedfield and Swanmore were part of the parish of Droxford, and did not have their own churches. Chapels of ease were built at Shedfield in 1829, and Swanmore in 1845, and they became independent parishes in 1894.