

THE CHURCH OF ST MARY & ALL SAINTS, DROXFORD

In its earliest and main parts the Church dates from the middle of the 12th Century (1150-1160). It is believed that a Saxon Church existed previously in the parish. St Wilfred is said to have converted the Meon Valley to the Christian faith in the second half of the 7th Century, about 660-670 AD. There is good reason for accepting this.

THE NORMAN CHURCH

This consisted of nave and apse chancel. The original walls of the nave remain today inside the present church as they were first built, except where they were subsequently cut into arches opening into the aisles. The massive square pillars, which are a feature of the church, are sections of the outside walls of the Norman building. The Norman chancel arch stands in its original position, but was raised about four feet in comparatively modern times, as can be easily seen. The fine Norman doorways in north and south walls belong to the original church.

AISLES & CHAPELS

In the 13th Century, the north aisle and chapel (now used as a vestry) were built. The 14th century saw the addition of the south aisle and chapel, with its canopied niche. The aisles were erected outside the existing walls, those being cut away to form arches. As the aisles were built, the carved north and south doorways were moved to the positions they now occupy.

TOWER

This bears, carved on a stone above the entrance, the date 1599. It is uncertain whether the date refers to the actual erection of the tower, or merely commemorates some Tudor restoration. There are five bells, the oldest bearing the date 1606.

RESTORATIONS

At the beginning of the 20th century (1903) during the incumbency of the late Canon John Vaughan, the church was most carefully renovated and some most interesting discoveries were made.

The walls of the two chapels were carefully examined, with the result of finding in the south chapel a piscina, and in the north chapel both piscina and aumbry, the latter in excellent preservation, the slots for hinges and door-bolt being plainly apparent. The scraping of the north chapel walls revealed traces of the 16th Century scroll decoration. The removal of plaster, which to some extent had covered up the Puritan desecration of the fine canopied niche in the east wall of the south chapel, showed, still remaining, some of the red and blue mediaeval colouring, and the rose of William of Wykeham in the centre of the canopy was uninjured. The niche no doubt contained a statue of the Virgin and Child.

The recumbent figure of a lady of rank that lies in the south chapel was put there during the restoration in the belief that it formed part of a stately tomb that had been destroyed by fanatical zealots of the 17th Century. The figure had been found, about 1820, buried in a meadow near the church, and was then taken to the church and laid behind the organ in the north chapel.

No information exists as to the identity of the person. It is conjectured that it may be the mother of John de Drockensford, who was the son of the local Squire and was keeper of the Wardrobe to Edward I, and Chancellor of the Exchequer to Edward II, and finally Bishop of Bath and Wells. His tomb is in Wells Cathedral.

The ancient staircase, which in mediaeval times led to the rood-loft, was found by boring the massive masonry of the pillar from which rises the north end of the chancel arch. The steps, broken, but distinguishable, can be seen by opening the carved oak door in the face of the pillar, behind the organ. Part of the door leading onto the rood-loft can be seen above the pulpit. No trace remains of loft or screen.

The Jacobean oak communion rails, which had been removed some years earlier, but happily not destroyed, were restored to their old place, as was the oak altar table, also Jacobean (but the latter was stolen in 1990 and had to be replaced).

The scraping of the chancel walls revealed part of the heads of two windows on the south side.

The 1903 restoration included the panelling of the sanctuary walls in

a fine dark wood harmonising well with the old oak of rails and altar. On the south side of the sanctuary a panel, which can be opened, covers a piscina and shelf.

The most recent change is a new stained glass window that was commissioned to mark the third millenium. The window was designed and installed by Vanessa Cutler, and is in the south-west corner, to the left as you approach the south porch.

MEDIAEVAL SUN-DIALS or MASS CLOCKS

There are four of these interesting relics. Two are in the south porch, one on each jamb of the Norman doorway, and two on the outside south wall, on the East jamb of the window of the south-east chapel, one above the other.

CHURCH REGISTERS

These date from 1633: but earlier entries are not continuous.

IZAAK WALTON

An interesting connection exists between this famous man and Droxford. Walton's daughter Anne married Dr. William Hawkins, who was Rector of Droxford as well as a Prebendary of Winchester. In his will, Walton left to his daughter Anne "all my books at Winchester and Droxford, and whatever in those two places are, or I can call, mine". There can be no doubt that Walton stayed in Droxford, worshipped in the church, and fished in the Meon. Walton also made bequests to Mr. John Darbyshire, who was then curate of Droxford, and to Mr Francis Morley, who was nephew of Bishop Morley of Winchester, and friend of Bishop Ken. He lived at the Manor House of Droxford, the house adjacent to the Church. A tablet to Anne, wife of Mr John Darbyshire, is on the north wall of the north Chapel, and the tombstone of his second wife, Frances Avedale, is in the floor of the north chapel. The monuments to the Morley family are near the font.

FORMER RECTORS OF DROXFORD

Several lie buried in the churchyard or under the church. Of the latter, the most interesting record is that of Dr Nicholas Preston who, as the inscription on his tombstone states, was one of the Royalist Clergy ejected from his benefice by Oliver Cromwell's Government. He returned to his rectory with the restoration of Charles II in 1660, having been dispossessed for ten years. The tomb is in the floor of the south aisle.