

This is the twenty-sixth of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church

THE PRAYER BOOK THAT WAS PRESENTED TO THE CHURCH IN 1755

Having written about the Lincoln Bible, I thought that you might be interested to hear something about another old book that the church holds. This is a Book of Common Prayer which was presented to the church in 1755, and which by the look of it was very well used. It remained in the church until 1975 when new legislation required that such books should be transferred to a central location where they could be properly cared for. However, in 2007, the Archive Centre informed the diocese that they could no longer provide storage space, so these books were returned to the parishes to be looked after as best they could. So we have it once more! If anyone wants to see it, give me a ring on 01362 637592.

On the front of the cover, it says

SWANTON MORLEY 1755
MATTHEW SOUTHGATE GENT: } CHURCHWARDENS
JOHN WILSON GENT: }

The date is presumably when the book was presented to the church.

The title page says that it was printed in London by Thomas Baskett, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty; and by the assigns of Robert Baskett. It is dated 1751, and it will be shown later that that it must have been published later than 8 October of that year.

Who were these churchwardens?

One of my many self-imposed tasks is to look at who was living where in the village at the time of the 1692 survey of Swanton Morley, and what happened to their land during the next century. There is quite a lot of documentation available, and the names of both the above churchwardens crop up from time to time, but I have not done any systematic research. So I will just give you a couple of facts. (i) There is a memorial at the west end of the north aisle to Matthew Southgate who died in 1762, aged 59, and to his widow Frances who died in 1775, aged 67. (ii) John Wilson is shown as being the clerk to Swanton Morley Church in the Voting Register for 1768.

What is interesting about this book?

Now, there are probably thousands of Prayer Books of this era in churches throughout the country, so it is not very valuable, but I thought that you might like to look at two things:

- (i) The special prayers of thanksgiving, which you will not find in a modern Prayer Book. These were first included at the command of King George II on 12th September 1728, and they were not removed until 1859.
- (ii) The prayers for the royal family. These have been modified in manuscript to take into account the various deaths that took place in the royal family while the book was in use.

The special prayers of thanksgiving

These are included in a section of the Prayer Book that was inserted directly after the section on the Consecration of Bishops.

The first is the form of service to be performed yearly on the 5th day of November. It is a service of:

“Thanksgiving for the happy Deliverance of King James I, and the Three Estates of England, from the most traitorous and bloody intended Massacre by Gunpowder: and also for the happy Arrival of his Majesty King William on this Day, for the Deliverance of our Church and Nation.”

Now the Gunpowder Plot was, of course, on 5 November 1605, but I didn't know that it was also on 5 November 1688 that William III landed with his army at Brixham, forcing the Catholic James II to flee to France.

The other special services commanded by George II were on:

30th January: "being the day of the Martyrdom of King Charles the First."
(*This was the day on which Charles I was executed in 1649*)

29th May: "for having put an end to the Great Rebellion by the Restitution of the King and Royal Family, and the Restoration of the Government after many years interruption."
(*This was the restoration of Charles II in 1660*)

22nd June: being the Day on which His Majesty began his Happy Reign"

I was going to write that this was the day on which George II succeeded to the throne in 1727, when I found that all the reference books give this day as 11 June, not 22 June. However, this discrepancy can be explained if we look at the changes that were made to the calendar in 1752.

The start of the year changed from 1 April to 1 January in 1752

For centuries the clerical and legal year in England had been taken to start on 1 April, so that 1700, for example, would run from 1 April 1700 to 31 March 1700. The next day would be 1 April 1701. Then England decided to align its calendar with neighbouring countries by changing the start of the year to 1 January. This was achieved by making 1751 a short year of 282 days, running from 25 March to 31 December. Thus, 1752 began on 1 January.

The Julian calendar was replaced by the Gregorian calendar

Since before the birth of Christ, the calendar that had been in use throughout the western world was the Julian calendar, which was not very accurate. In fact, on average it gained about 11 minutes per year when compared to the solar year as defined by the times of the equinoxes. By the 16th century it was some 10 days ahead, and the Church decided to do something about it. In 1582 Pope Gregory introduced a much more accurate calendar and dropped the ten days that had been gained. The last day of the Julian calendar was Thursday, 4 October 1582 and this was followed by the first day of the Gregorian calendar, Friday, 15 October 1582.

One by one the Catholic countries adopted the new calendar, but the Protestant countries were slow to do so. England did not adopt it until 1752, by which time eleven days had to be lost. The days chosen for deletion were 3 to 13 September 1752, the day after Wednesday, 2 September, being called Thursday, 14 September.

This explanation is confirmed if we look at the very end of the section on special prayers, where George II includes a later instruction which does indeed amend the date to 11 June. This instruction is dated 8 October 1751, so we know that the book must have been published after this date.

However, we are still left with a mystery, because the above date of 8 October 1751 is *nearly a year before* the calendar actually changed! I can only assume that, knowing that the calendar was about to be changed, the royal clerks made sure that the prayer books then being published would remain up to date.

Next time

Next time I shall look at the other feature of interest in this Prayer Book, the changes that were entered in manuscript by the churchwardens to reflect the changes that took place in the royal family.