A Short History of All Saints' Church, East Meon

By Michael Blakstad

Cover image: All Saints Church today. Photograph © Richard Gaisford

Title page

A Short History of All Saints Church is a guide to the historic building and to the place the church played in the community of East Meon, starting with its foundation in the 7th century and concluding with its lockdown during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. It is based on research conducted by East Meon History Group and contains maps and floorplans plans by David McCutcheon made possible by a grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

HLF logo

ISBN number XXXXX, published by East Meon History Group, designed by Art Bypass, printed by Xxxx.

Fig 1 All Saints Church and the Hall and Court Farm. Photograph ©Richard Gaisford

Introduction

Christianity arrived in East Meon soon after the village was first settled in the 7th century AD; for the previous 10,000 years farmers had grazed and cultivated the high ground above the Meon Valley. A group then settled at the foot of what is now Park Hill, a mile and a half from the source of the River Meon; either St Wilfrid or St Birinus established a church in *Aet Mene* (or *Menes*) which soon became an important parish, a Hundred and two manors, *Menes Manor* and *Menes Ecclesia,* of which the bishops of Winchester were the lords. The original Saxon church and bishops' palace were replaced in the 11th and 14th centuries by magnificent buildings which have been superbly preserved to the present day.

Throughout the Middle Ages the bishops and their stewards held court and resolved disputes in the Hall of The Court House, while All Saint's Church was the centre of worship and of local government. The diocese drew produce, rents and tithes from the land and re-invested some of it in the church building: Henry of Blois donated the magnificent Tournai font and Peter des Roches added the south nave and lady chapel.

East Meon has made two brief appearances on the national stage. Firstly, in 1644, Cromwell's Parliamentary army encamped in East Meon prior to the battle of Cheriton; the Roundheads removed the vicar and any remaining traces of 'idolatry', incidentally also causing an outbreak of *war typhus* while they were there; secondly, attempts by a nineteenth century vicar to increase his income brought East Meon briefly into the Westminster spotlight with the passing of an '*Act for the Tithing of Turnips'*. The church building avoided extensive Victorian alteration but was deftly refurbished in the early 20th century by Sir Ninian Comper. The 21st century has already seen the sympathetic addition of a church hall and the Millennium Embroidery, the appointment of a female vicar and the first recorded closure of the church during the coronavirus pandemic.

Anglo Saxon East Meon

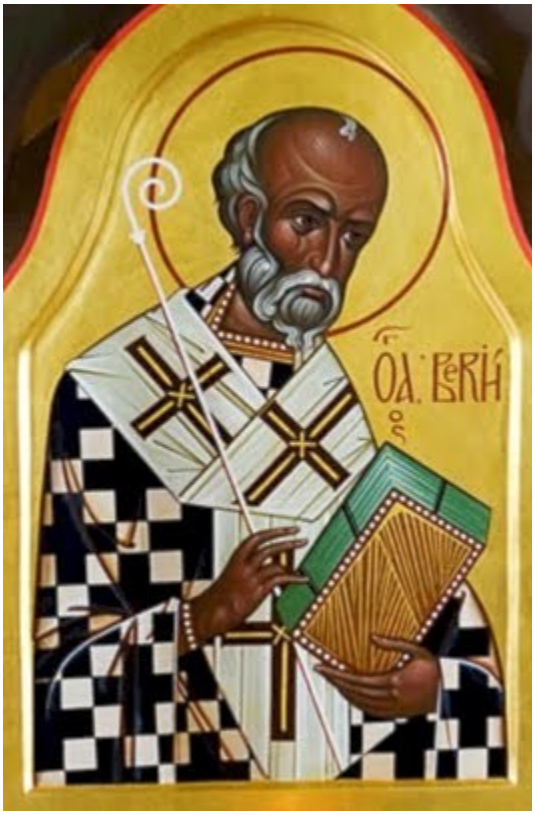
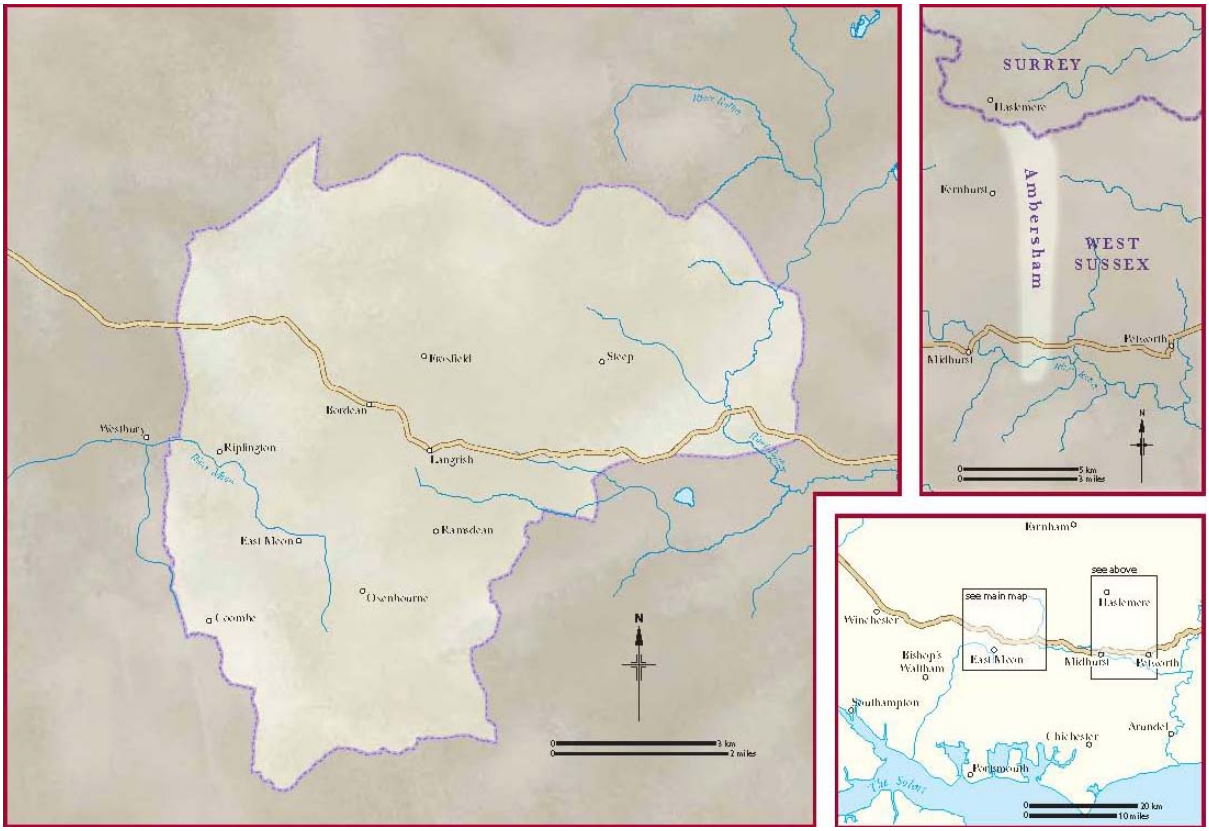


Fig 2 St Birinus

Fig 3. St Wilfrid

One of two missionaries probably brought Christianity to East Meon. Bishop Birinus was a Frank who came to Kent with Augustine of Canterbury on a mission to convert the West Saxons. He landed in 634 AD in *Hamwic* (today's Southampton) and established a church at Porchester; he died in 649. The other candidate is St Wilfrid, a Northumbrian noble and a controversial bishop: he was expelled in 678 by the Northumbrian king Ecgfrith and forced to go south on a mission to convert the South Saxons (the '*Kingdom of Sussex'*). Wilfrid was based in Selsey until recalled to Northumbria in 686.

The parish of East Meon appears to have grown rapidly in importance: it was probably a *mynster*, a form of *monasterium;* a church served by a community of celibate laymen rather than a single priest, a hub for a network of churches and a base for missionary work.[i] Royal or aristocratic patronage provided minsters with security and recruits, and East Meon's status is confirmed by the Saxon charter of 970 AD which recounts that King Edgar granted to his grandmother Eadgifu '*that famouse place which the locals have always called Aet Meon*'. There are no traces of the original Saxon church: the Norman building was erected on top of it.



Map 1: The medieval Hundred of East Meon, including the tithing of Ambersham in West Sussex

By the time of the Norman invasion, East Meon was the administrative and ecclesiastical centre of a Hundred which included the tithings of Langrish, Oxenbourne, Ramsdean, Coombe, Riplington, Steep and Froxfield (as well as Ambersham, located between Midhurst and Petworth, improbably described as '*part of Hampshire'*). The same geography also defined the *parochia,* or parish, of East Meon and two manors, *Menes Manerium* and *Menes Ecclesia* which are listed separately in Domesday.[ii]

Norman East Meon

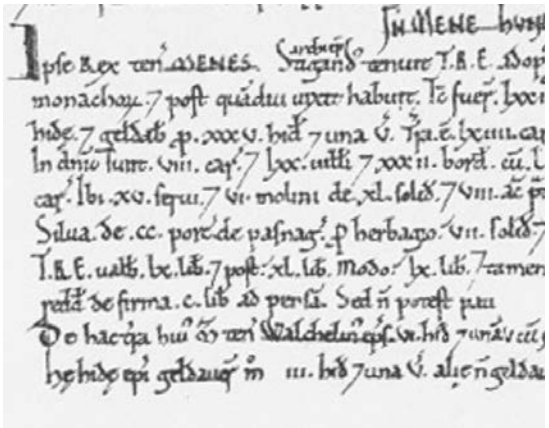


Fig 4. Domesday entry for Menes Hundred

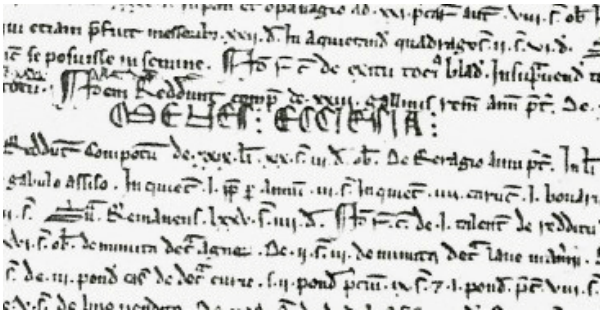


Fig 5 Domesday entry for Menes Ecclesia[iii]

For almost the whole of the millennium the bishops of Winchester were lords of these two manors and the Hundred of East Meon; these comprised their largest Hampshire estate. As rectors of the parish they received the 'greater' tithes, one-tenth of the produce of the open fields let to *villeins* (tenant farmers) as well as the rent and the output of the land they farmed, using serf labour, *in demesne*. Their palace at what is now known as The Court House was visited occasionally by the bishops and their guests, and more regularly by their stewards who presided over court hearings in the hall. The permanent residents were *famuli:* household and farm workers who managed the farmyard, or *curia,* which had both a tithe barn and a manorial barn, the latter housed the produce of the diocese's own lands. The curia also housed farm equipment and animals, including ploughs and carts, oxen and horses, which were used both on land farmed *in demesne* and by tenant farmers.

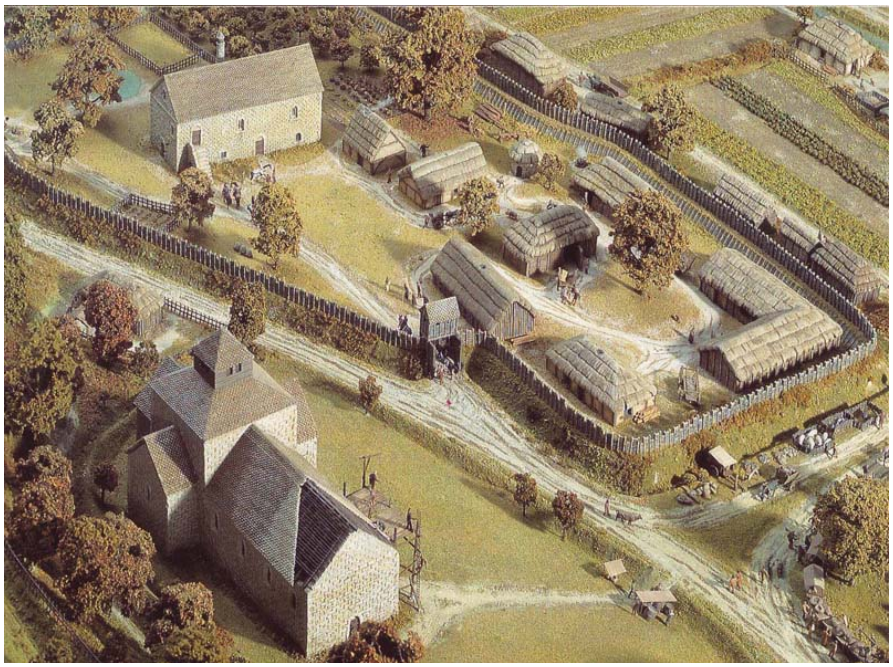


Fig 6. Detail of model reconstructing East Meon at the time of Domesday, showing the Saxon church (left), and the Hall and curia of Court Farm (above). © Musée de la Tapisserie, Bayeux

The vicar of All Saints served the parish *in vice* (vicariously) in place of the bishop. He received the lesser, or *vicarial,* tithes, which amounted to one-tenth of the produce of the curtilages of the cottages where families cultivated vegetables, and kept chickens and pigs for their own consumption.[iv] The vicar also owned *glebe* land, which he cultivated himself, and received fees for ceremonies such as baptisms, marriages and funerals; he may have been paid a benefice. Because he could read and write, the vicar was paid to write documents such as wills on behalf of parishioners and to teach the children of those few farmers who could afford to pay for education.

He lived rent-free in a vicarage, probably on the site of today's White House opposite the lych-gate. The parish included chapels in Froxfield, Steep and Ambersham, as well as two '*chapels of ease*': St Mary's in the Field near the source of the River Meon and St Nicholas at Westbury House. It would have been difficult to ride to all the

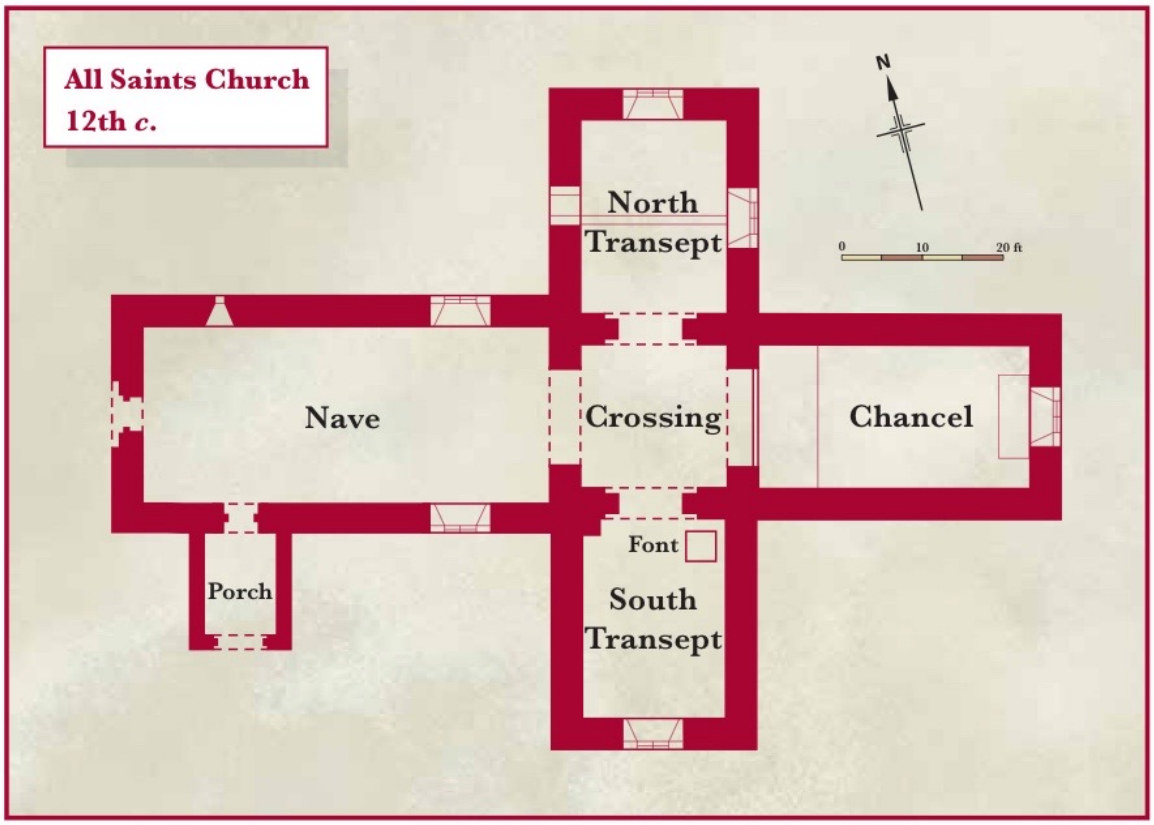
outlying tithings on Sundays and holy days, and masses were probably said by curates, men of humble birth and poorly educated. They were appointed by the vicar and their wages were determined by him: in 1346, the standard wage for a curate was £3.6s.6d a year (the equivalent of £2,500 in today's money).

The 11th/12th century building

Fig 7. Archbishop Stigand depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry

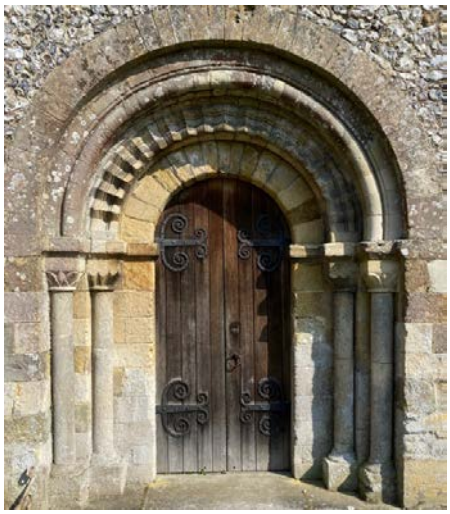
A sentence in Domesday reads: '*Menes, land of the King. Stigand held it before 1066 for the use of the monks; later he held it for his lifetime.*' Edward the Confessor had permitted Stigand, Archbishop of Winchester, to take over the See of Canterbury at the same time, a position of power and wealth which moved the Pope to excommunicate Stigand; on his death in 1072, King William dispossessed the diocese of domains including East Meon, which became a '*royal peculiar*'. In the 1140s, King Stephen restored the two manors to his brother Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester from 1129 to 1171. Ownership reverted to the Crown twice in the 12th century but finally reverted to the diocese.

The church of All Saints was built in the late 11th and early 12th centuries, funded first by the Crown and subsequently by Henry of Blois. The original Norman church was cruciform in shape, consisting of nave, chancel and transept; the Victoria County History suggests that '*the excess of width of the nave over the chancel and transepts, unusual in a cruciform building, points to the former existence of a nave and chancel church'.* In other words, it must have been built on the footprint of a substantial Saxon church, of which nothing remains.[v]



Map 2. Floorplan of the original Norman church

The west door and the bell-openings of the tower have rounded arches with zig-zag carvings, typical of Norman (or '*Romanesque*') architecture, and capitals decorated with scallops. The arches in the crossing are simpler, with triple pillars and scallops again carved on the capitals. The inner door to the porch is also from this period, and Pevsner suggests it may have been moved there from the south wall when the south aisle was added.[vi]



Figs 8 & 9: Norman arches of west doorway and bell openings in tower with zig-zag carvings; the capitals of the pillars are decorated with scallops.

Figs 10 & 11 Norman arches in the crossing leading to north transept (left) and to chancel and south transept. Photographs © Richard Gaisford

All Saints has been described as one of the finest examples in southern England of Romanesque architecture, and it has been compared with another of Henry of Blois' creations, St Cross in Winchester. Henry of Blois was also Chancellor of England and the richest and most powerful man in the country after the king. He gave East Meon its greatest treasure, the Tournai Font which was originally placed in the south transept but was moved to its present position when the south aisle was later added. It is generally believed that the font was carved in Tournai, in what is now Belgium, shipped across the channel and up the River Meon. But Henry did establish a workshop in Winchester to which he imported Tournai craftsmen, so All Saints' font may have been carved there and carted to East Meon.

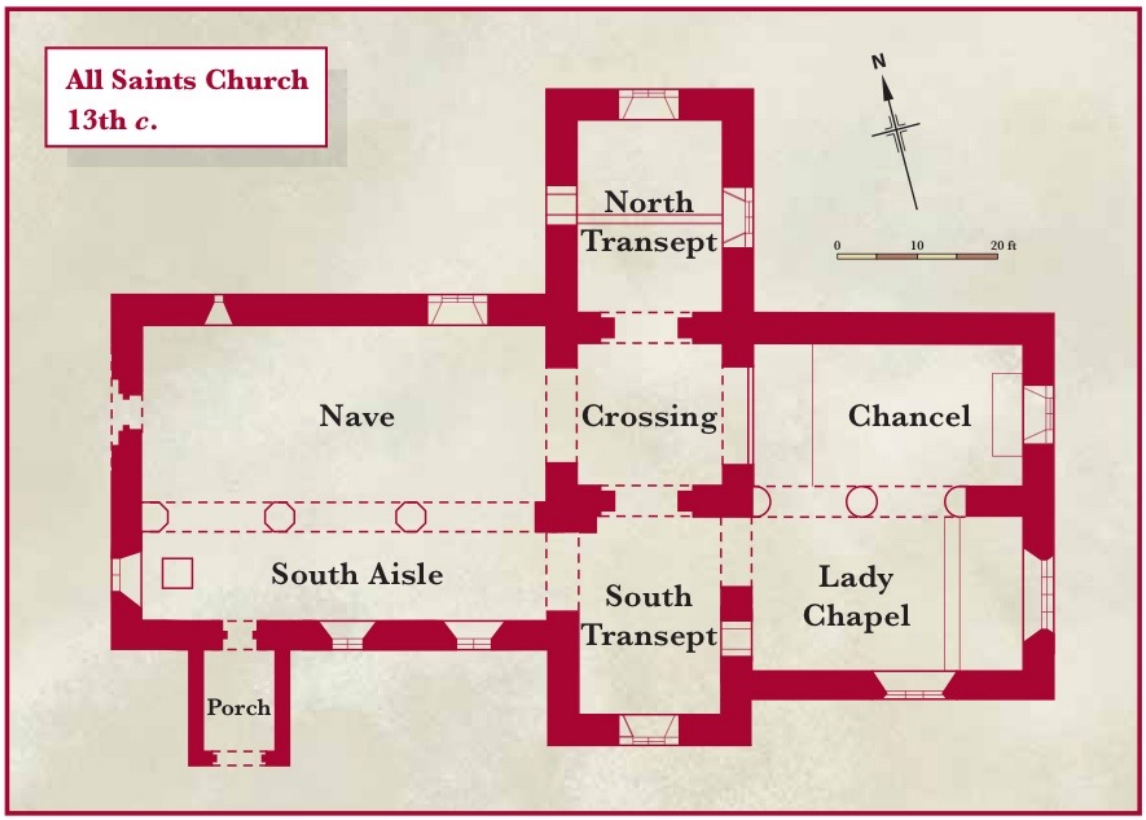
Fig 12 The Tournai Font, originally placed in the south transept. © Dr John Crook

Fig 13. Eve is created and eats the forbidden fruit. © Dr John Crook

The Victoria County History describes this font as *'one of the best examples of a class or black marble fonts, one of four in Hampshire*'. The others are in Winchester Cathedral, St Michael's, Southampton and St Mary's, Bourne.

The 13th century

In the 13th century many churches were expanded to allow for extra altars to accommodate the 'celestial bombardment' of extra masses for the souls of prosperous residents who had left money for that purpose. Furthermore, a period of sustained fine weather and ample crops led to a growth in population requiring extra space for larger congregations. Abundant produce yielded substantial returns and Bishop Peter des Roches (1205 – 1238) invested heavily in luxuries including deer parks and fishponds in East Meon.[vii] It was probably des Roches who enlarged All Saints by widening the church to the south and adding the south nave and Lady Chapel. Expanding to the north was not an option because the building is set against the slope of Park Hill.



Map 3. 12th century addition of South Aisle & Transept, Lady Chapel and Porch

The south wall of the 12th century church was removed, and the chancel was separated from the new lady chapel by an arcade with '*sturdy round pier, round capitals and abacus and big hollow chamfers in the arches*' – Pevsner - and the nave by '*very short octagonal piers'*.[viii] The new altar, like the main one, would have been of stone, set against the east wall, and the priest would have conducted the service with his back to the congregation. The nave and the chancel were separated by a half-arch and the Tournai font was moved from the south transept to the south-west corner of the church. The steeple was added to the tower arches in around 1250 and may be the earliest surviving timber framed spire of its kind in England or Normandy.[viii]

Fig 14. The south aisle with Early English arches. Photo © Richard Gaisford

Fig 15. The steeple was now added to the tower. Photo ©Chris Warren

As rector of East Meon, the bishop was responsible for repairs to the chancel (and today's owners of rectorial properties still incur '*chancel repair liability*'). In the 15th century the north and east walls of the chancel were rebuilt and the work is commemorated by a rebus of Bishop Langton on the outside of the east wall: his arms include a pair of elongated dragons each wearing a barrel, or '*tun'*, his arms being a pun on his name – '*long-tun'*. Another carving on the east wall contains the arms of Prior Hinton and the monastery of St Swithun of Winchester.

Fig 16. The rebus of Bishop Langton on the east wall,

The medieval church

Fig 17. The nave and chancel today.

Photo © Richard Gaisford

Today's visitors to All Saints Church today see clean, painted walls, orderly rows of pews and elegant church furniture; they can walk around the chancel and Lady Chapel with their altars. The medieval experience was very different – the church was dark, smelly and uncomfortable. The walls of the nave were heavily decorated with '*moralities*' and paintings of biblical scenes and in the 14th century the chancel was hidden from the congregation by a heavy rood screen carved with saints and floral patterns. At the top of the screen were depictions of Calvary, with scenes of Doomsday painted on the archway above it. Parishioners caught only glimpses through the wooden screen of the priest's coloured robes and of altar pewter and silver glimmering in candlelight.[ix] (The candles were made by elderly parishioners from wax purchased by wardens; parishioners also paid for vestments and altar ware.)

There was no seating in the nave, apart from a bench or two along the outer walls for the elderly and infirm. Windows were tiny and the floor was beaten earth, with the occasional gravestone of wealthy parishioners who had left money in their wills to be interred within the church walls.[x] Ordinary parishioners were buried in unmarked graves in the churchyard where dogs prowled and often entered the church itself: rushes were strewn on the floor to absorb the filth and to cushion kneeling, while incense helped to hide the stench during services. Parish accounts record that fresh straw was bought before saints' days. What would have been lacking was music. Some churches boasted a portable organ, but the full-blooded version we see today did not arrive until the19th century.[xi]

In the 13th century, some benches were introduced in the nave for prominent parishioners and these further reduced the available space. Fire buckets, long ladders and poles for extracting burning thatch were stacked along the west wall along with the parish '*herse'*, a frame of metal or wood, hired out for funerals. The lych gate was the right width for the hurdle or coffin to be rested across it until the priest was ready to start the funeral service.

The church in the community

Use of the church building was not confined to religious services on high days and holidays: throughout the week it served, inside and out, both as a community centre and as the administrative hub of the parish. The most important function combined the roles of today's Parochial Church Council and the lay Parish Council; it met in the '*vestry*' in the north transept and took its name from it;[xii] at annual meetings yeoman farmers and other worthies were elected to the Vestry as church wardens, sidesmen, overseers of the poor and surveyors of bridges and roads. They were unpaid but they were responsible for raising money from parishioners and employed the sexton, clerk, constables and other officers, including included the '*beggar-banger'*, responsible for driving out itinerant paupers who tried to establish residence in the parish, and the '*knocknobbler'*, whose job it was to drive dogs out of the church. The parish vestry was recognised in 17th century legislation as the most effective arm of local government and continued in this role, under the supervision of local JPs, until the 19th century when they were replaced with district and town councils.

While the diocese held Courts Leet and Manorial Courts in the Hall at the Court House to administer its lands and resolve disputes with tenants, the church ruled on issues from sexual morality to wills and inventories: the Archdeacon's court met from time to time in the western end of the church. The nave also housed meetings of the whole parish and many forms of social activity as well, including the convivial '*church ales'* held on feast days. (Beer was safer than water and was brewed by the wardens in the vicarage: the children drank '*small beer'*.)

Markets

An important fair was held each year on Lady Day (25th March) in a field near the source of the River Meon: '*St Mary in the Fields'*, '*Fair Field'* or '*Chapel Close'* belonged to the diocese which collected tolls from the traders. The main commodity was livestock, but tradesmen travelled up to 25 miles to sell farm equipment: carts and wheels, harness, horseshoes, nails, sawn timber, tar and fearsome chemicals to treat sheep-scab; unemployed farm labourers also touted their trades.

Unofficial markets popped up in the churchyard of All Saints especially on feast days; these were frowned upon by the diocese. They comprised '*stalls'* – temporary wooden huts – but by the 14th century many stalls had become semi-permanent structures which could be bought, sold and inherited. In 1321, Thomas le Mason left to his wife and brother two stalls '*next to the stile*' of the church yard; a third stall was later surrendered by Thomas le Barrer. In 1339 Peter le Mason passed his to Richard le Ridler. These surnames suggest a demand for building materials at this time: Richard le Ridler probably sieved, or sifted, sand and lime for mortar, while Peter le Mason was a stoneworker; their stalls were probably the medieval equivalent of a builder's yard.

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The Black Death

Fig 18. Clergymen, the frontline carers, were often themselves victims.

So much rain fell between 1315 and 1322 that crops failed year after year; the weather became dangerously unpredictable: dry and warm summers were interrupted by strong winds and storms. Bad harvests provided insufficient food for a growing population: the summer of 1348 was particularly wet with grain rotting in the fields. England was ill-equipped to face the catastrophe of the Black Death, a combination of pneumonic and bubonic plagues which killed around 25 million Europeans. It arrived in Hampshire in October 1348 and spread rapidly mainly through the system of drove roads along which carters transported the produce of the bishops' estates to Winchester. The clergy, who tended to the sick and buried the dead, were particularly vulnerable: in three years, 48.8% of the clergy in the diocese died.

The vicar of East Meon from 1341 to 1361 was John Ace, who had one curate at All Saints and two more looking after Steep and Froxfield. He was seldom in East Meon since he acted as Notary Public for the Bishop, which necessitated his presence at Wolvesey Palace in Winchester and probably saved him from exposure to the plague. The work of the parish was carried out by his curates, who probably did not survive, while the parish as a whole lost between a third and a half of its population. In 1349, 72 '*fines'* were paid on the transfer of land due to the death of tenant farmers; taking into account their wives and children, the village probably lost about 240 farmers and their families out of a population of 840; poorer residents presumably died in even greater numbers. There was another devastating outbreak in 1361, and five others between then and 1405.

Following the Black Death, a shortage of serfs made it impossible for the diocese to cultivate all the fields which it had farmed *in demesne;* arable fields were turned over to grazing sheep and farms were let to their tenants: one example was Bereleigh where a sub-manor was created and separately recorded in the Pipe Rolls. The power of the diocese was beginning to weaken.

Figs 19 & 20. 14th century corbels representing one of the bishops' stewards and his wife

Reformation

Even before Henry VIII and the Reformation, many churches saw their rood screens and images removed. Under Henry, Edward, Mary and Elizabeth there was a bewildering ebb and flow of removal, destruction, restoration and renewed removal. The holes in the pillars to the west of the central transept of All Saints show where brackets once held the rood screen and there are faint traces of a mural on the north-east pillar of the transept. Any remaining screens and stone altars were removed under Henry and Edward, hastily restored under Mary, then taken down again under Elizabeth. They were replaced with wooden tables; the stone slabs which had formed their tops were made to serve as paving or even grave markers. The gravestones which had punctuated the floor of the nave in All Saints' Church were now clustered together to form the floor of the Lady Chapel.

Fig 21. Faint traces, left, of a mural of saints or angels on the north-east pillars of the transept.

Photo © Richard Gaisford

Some of the destruction was freelance: in the quaint words of a 19th century historian: '*private fraudulence quickened into desperate exertion won the race against the King's Commission. Parlours appeared hung with altar cloths; tables and beds were covered with copes, fair large cushions reposed in windows and chairs; many a chalice entered the taproom or the pantry as a parcel gilt goblet'.*[xiii] Much of the destruction of the 1540s and 1550s was orchestrated, paid for, and controlled by the wardens.

In the reign of Edward VII the sermon become the chief vehicle for spreading new doctrines, and the means of conveying news on secular matters as well. Communion was now celebrated only two or three times a year, whilst Matins and Evensong were held every Sunday, at which the presence of every member of the parish was demanded. Coloured vestments made way for plain surplices. Portable organs, where they existed, were replaced by wind instruments. Singing gained ground in the reformed liturgy and music was now composed especially for church use.

Fig 22 Coat of arms of King James I

James I's coat of arms by the south porch was originally hung above where the rood screen had been, a sign that the King of England, and not the Pope of Rome, was now head of the church. It also marked the accession of the first Stuart monarch

Civil War

Under Charles I, Archbishop Laud, a high church man in today's terminology, decreed that the furniture of the chancel be restored to what it had been at the death of Henry VIII, with the table moved to the east wall of the chancel; communion was be taken kneeling, so communion rails were installed. Then, in March 1644, the Civil War brought the Parliamentary Army under Sir William Waller to East Meon: the infantry camped in Langrish and the cavalry in Frogmore. Meanwhile, Royalist cavalry took up position on nearby Winchester Hill to observe their movements and harry their foraging parties.[xiv] Any surviving stained glass, carvings or wall paintings were now defaced. The vicar of All Saints, John Shrigley, was one of over 2,000 Anglican clergy who were '*sequestered*' by Parliament because they did not match the puritan ethic of the protestants; he had been appointed in 1642 by Walter Curle, a Royalist Bishop of Winchester and a supporter of Archbishop Laud. Curle was deposed when Waller captured Winchester in 1645 and died in Soberton two years later. Shrigley was imprisoned and subsequently died in Essex.

On March 28th,12,000 men marched through the village to West Meon, turned up Vinnell's Lane and marched towards Cheriton where they met the Cavalier Army under Lord Hopton the next day. The Roundheads had pillaged any grain stored in the parish, resulting in famine especially among the poor; they also left a legacy of '*war typhus.'*[xv]

Waller's dissenters were probably responsible for the ghoulish remains of four men buried upright in a wood at Bordon, probably local recruits to Waller's army who had not demonstrated sufficient dissenting zeal; the graves were marked by the inscription '*Amens Plenty'* which is now mounted in the south transept. This may have been an ironic reference to the tendency of Puritan preachers and their congregations to punctuate their sermons with '*Amens*'.

Fig 23. Amens Plenty stone now in north transept

Restoration

Following the return to the throne of Charles II, Bishop Duppa of Winchester was reinstated as lord of the manors and rector of East Meon but titles to the church land were granted to the King's favourites. Sir Stephen Fox who had financed the Restoration was granted *'for faithful service to Charles II … farms, messuages and lands … at Church Farm and South Farm'* i.e Court Farm and the new farm near South Mill; Sir William Lewis of Bordean was granted '*keepership of the Park and Land … and of the deer in the gamepark .'*

There was now more interaction between minister and congregation, and the altar table was brought forward to the front of the chancel. Sermons could be interminably long and there are records of hour glasses being purchased, to be placed in the pulpit where both preacher and congregation could see them. All Saints' pulpit (*fig 27)* dates from 1706 and was originally in the church of Holy Trinity, Minories, near the Tower of London, which was demolished in 1899 and was brought to East Meon by Rev E.M.Tomlinson who had previously been the incumbent of Holy Trinity.

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In contrast with cathedrals, which retained their organs and trained choirs to perform the polyphonic music composed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, most parish churches rejected plainsong chant as being '*Romish*' and turned to the metrical version of the psalms and at a later date to hymns. Wind instruments and fiddles replaced the portable organ, possibly in a small band. '*Noise was a crucial element in celebration'*[xvii] and a heavy drain on the churchwardens' budget.

Of the surviving bells in the All Saints belfry the two oldest date back to the 18th century, a further six to the 19th; the newest, the treble and the second, were cast as recently as 1990, when they were all rehung with new fittings following a fund-raising drive in the parish which included the Hells Bells Ball in Mascombe Bottom on Park Hill.

The parish's role in civil administration grew further in the seventeenth century when Kings and Parliament took advantage of what was in effect an unpaid local civil service; parishes were made responsible for collection of the Poor Rate and the Overseers of the Poor for its disbursement. Meticulous accounts show how carefully this was done; providing you could prove you were born or had full residence in the parish, you would not starve[xviii]. (The Overseers were also responsible for seeing off any vagrant poor who might become a drain on the parish). By 1727, East Meon had its own workhouse administered by the church worthies; it survived until the 19th century when the government stripped parishes of their duties of local care and set up district councils and union workhouses in nearby towns. The paupers of East Meon's workhouse were moved to the Union Workhouse in Petersfield.

19th century

Nonconformists in East Meon

Andrew Lewis Boisdaune was vicar of '*Eastmeon with the chapels of Froxfield and Steep annexed 1763-88'*. On 25th February 1788 he wrote under '*Dissenters'* in his official Visitation Report: *'There is nothing of the kind in any of the parishes'.* In March 1851, a national census of religious attendance established that nonconformist denominations now accounted for nearly half the church-going population; in no part of England and Wales was it less than one-third. In East Meon, groups of dissenters initially met in private homes; by 1870 there were three imposing chapel buildings in the village itself and a further three in Ramsdean and Stroud.

Map 3. The first Ordnance Survey map of East Meon, 1869, shows the 'Providence Chapel' (Calvinistic) in what is now Chapel Street (the building opposite 690), the Methodist Chapel (699) behind the High Street and the Zoar (Baptist) Chapel (696) on Temple Lane.

Fig 24. The chapel on Temple Lane, originally Zoar (Baptist) and later Roman Catholic

Fig 25. The Primitive Methodist chapel behind the High Street

The proliferation of nonconformist sects owed much to increasing poverty and resentment of the established church: following the Napoleonic Wars, the repeal of the Corn Laws, the Inclosures (enacted in East Meon mainly in the 1840s and 50s), the mechanisation of agriculture and the growth of imported foodstuffs, all too many agricultural workers were forced out of their jobs and homes.

Not all the dissenters were impoverished: the Primitive Methodists met at first in Glenthorne House, the most imposing building in the High Street, owned by John Nathaniel Atkins, a leading shopkeeper, post-master and a considerable landowner[xix]. In 1867 they opened an impressive chapel (without the help of John Nathaniel Atkins, who appears by now to have jumped ship to the Baptists in Temple Lane.) Among the trustees were other prosperous tradesmen (William Tilbury, who owned the largest grocery store in East Meon, and George Noble, carrier).

Dissatisfaction with the established church was famously caricatured by Anthony Trollope and the vicar of East Meon from 1826 to 1867 appears to have stepped out of the Barchester Chronicles: soon after his installation the Reverend Thomas Cook Kemp increased his income from 'lesser' tithes by insisting that they include the value of turnips grubbed up for animal feed. The vicar was courting unpopularity: Kemp's annual income amounted to £18,000 (£232,000 in today's money) whereas a farm labourer in full employment would be lucky to earn £15 in a good year (£2,000).

The owner of Bereleigh, Captain Samuel Pechell RN, refused on behalf of less-well-off tenant farmers to pay the extra tithe. In 1832, Kemp took Pechell to the Court of the Exchequer which upheld the vicar's claim to extra tithes but in 1835 Pechell's brother, the newly elected MP for Brighton, proposed and succeeded in passing a Bill for the amendment of the Law as to the Tithing of Turnips' which reversed the Court's decision; the following year Parliament passed the momentous Tithes Commutation Act which led to a complete overhaul of tithes[xx].

In the 1840s, the Diocese of Winchester invested in a substantial new vicarage for the Rev Kemp, neighbouring the church yard to the west.

The Victorian church building

There is no record of significant spending on the fabric of All Saints during Kemp's tenure, which means it did not suffer the fate of so many churches incongruously refurbished and elaborately decorated by enthusiastic Victorians. Kemp's successor, William Brodie (1868 – 1882) commissioned a distinguished architect, Ewan Christian, to restore the infrastructure of the church. Christian worked on the roofs, especially the Lady Chapel, chancel and transepts, and also on the spire. The three-faced clock came at this time Internally, box pews and the gallery were removed, and were replaced by the pews as we have them today.

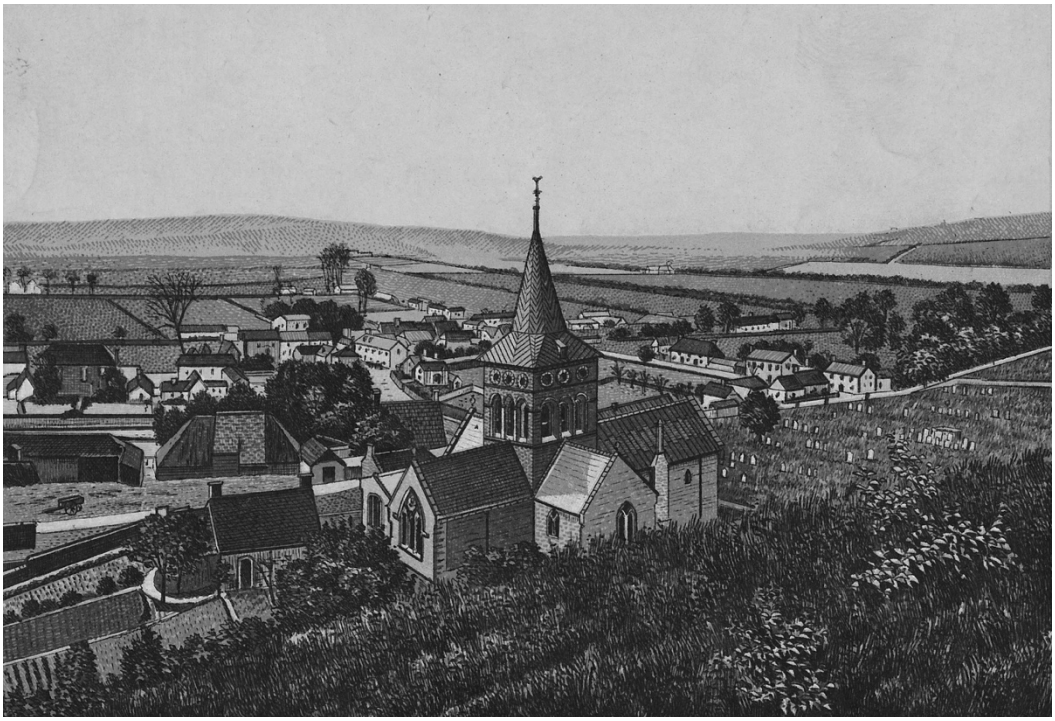


Fig 26. Engraving probably in the 1870s of All Saints Church from Park Hill. It shows the new three-faced clock and restored roofing and includes a cottage to the east of the church which housed the sexton.

East Meon National School

Sunday classes were given by the vicar in the north transept of All Saints Church and attracted as many as 160 children but until 1844 this was the only formal education available to most families. The first purpose-built 'National' (Church of England) school was built in 1845 at a cost of £696 on land donated by the Diocese of Winchester. The conveyance transferred a strip of *'roadside waste of the manor*' plus an even narrower strip of Church Hill Field to *'the Minister Church Wardens and Overseers of the Parish of East Meon*' upon trust for '*a School for the education of Poor Children'* and as a residence for the schoolmaster. The school year was dictated by the demands of the agricultural community, with terms starting late when harvests were delayed and children withdrawn from classes because their help was needed on the farm.

In the school's early days 60 – 70 boys and 50 girls attended; children of shopkeepers and tradesmen paid 3d a week, the rest 1d. Income from '*children's pence*' was augmented by annual payments from benevolent subscribers who included the Bishop (£2), Magdalen College (£2 2s), Lord Gage (£2), Sir William Joliffe (£2), John Bonham Carter (£4), G.T.Nicholson (£1) and the vicar (£1)[xxi].

Fig 27. Boys and girls at separate entrances of East Meon National School

The Church Institute

Fig 28. The Institute, *from The Square*

Fig 29. The function rooms

In 1887, '*The year of Jubilee of Queen Victoria*' a site of '*land and dwelling house*' was conveyed by its owner Henry Coles to the vicar of All Saints, Charles Patten Good, and other trustees of a charity to be known as the *'East Meon Reading Room, Library and Coffee House'*, otherwise known as the Church Institute, and it was a condition of its foundation that the vicar be one of the trustees: in fact a succession of vicars were chairmen of its management committee. In the days before radio and when literacy was still not universal, the Institute was the hub of social life; it had a games room with a billiards table, a stage where plays and music were performed, a dance hall and a library and reading room. A rifle range was added in the early 20th century[xxii].

The 20th century.

In the first decade of the century an enlightened vicar, The Rev Thomas Heywood Masters (1902 – 1922), engaged a distinguished Arts and Crafts architect, Ninian Comper, to refurbish All Saints Church.

Fig 30. Screen designed by Ninian Comper separating chancel and Lady Chapel

Fig 31 Comper's door to Lady Chapel

Fig 32. Angel on lectern

Fig 33 Stained glass in Lady Chapel designed by Ninian Comper

Comper's designs were sympathetic to the medieval architecture while adding striking new features to the interior of the church; his woodwork included the screens and doorway of the Lady Chapel, the lectern with its imposing angels, both altars and their riddel post; he also designed the stained glass in the east window of the Lady Chapel.

Photos © Richard Gaisford

Christian soldiers

The curate of All Saints had a busy Great War. Basil Denne Reed had to deputise for his vicar, the Reverend Thomas Heywood Masters, who had volunteered for active service at the outbreak of the Great War. He was 49 years old and suffered from chest congestion but was nonetheless accepted. He served first as a Red Cross ambulance driver and from 1915 as Chaplain to the 4th Army; he served in France, including the Somme, and was twice mentioned in despatches and awarded the CBE. In October 1918, a medical board sent him home on three weeks' rest leave suffering from debilitation – '*rest, tonic, change'* - but still managed to return to the front in time to witness the end of the war.

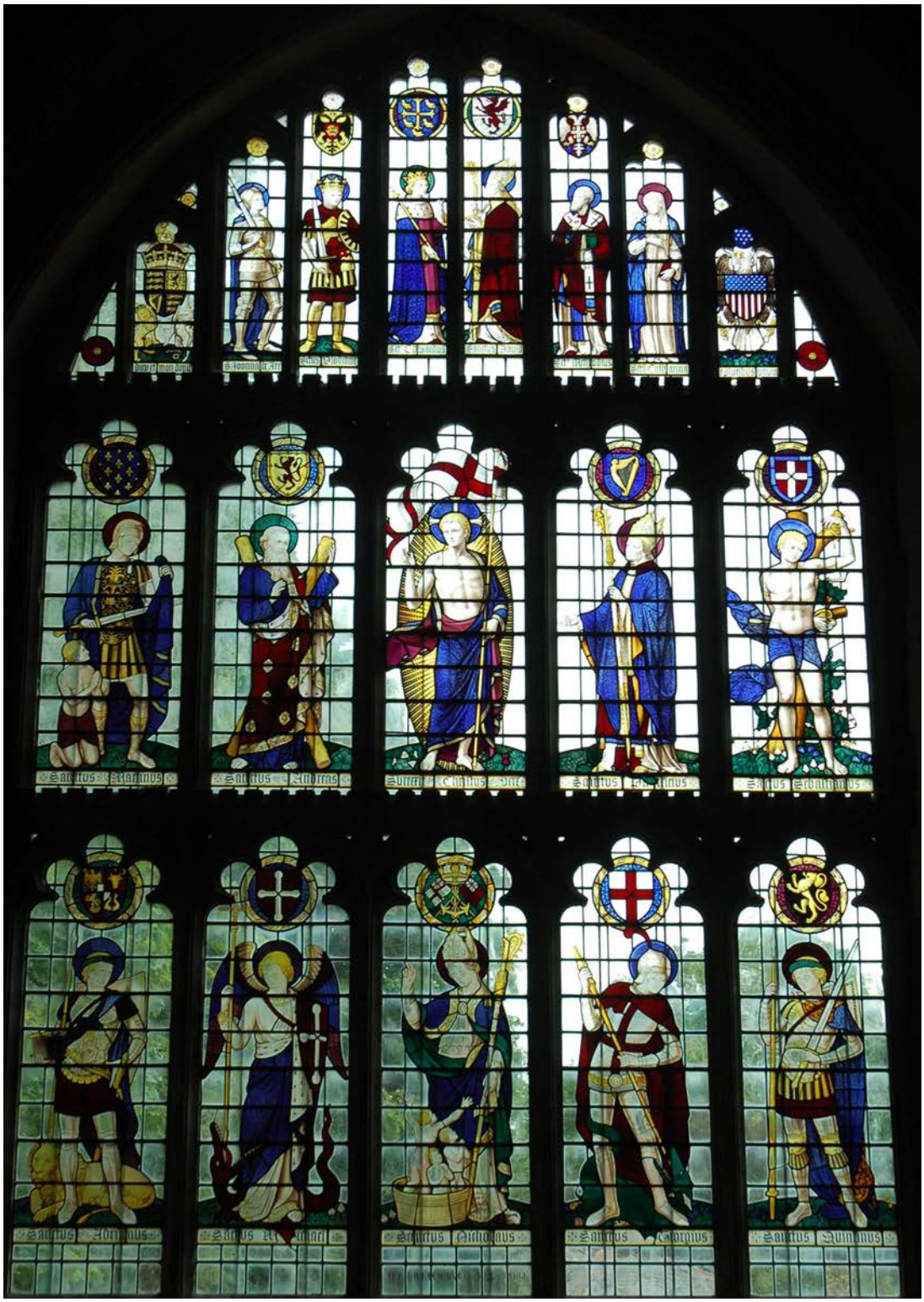


Fig 34. The East Window, Comper's memorial to the allied nations who fought in World War I.

Photo © Chris Warren

Fig 35. Dedication in 1923 of Comper's War Memorial in the High Street.

In 1920, Masters commissioned Comper to create two memorials of the war: the glorious East Window in the chancel of All Saints which features the coats of arms and the patron saints of the nations who fought with Britain in the First World War and the War Memorial in the High Street. In 1922 Masters was replaced by another war hero, the Reverend Arthur Stafford Crawley, who had volunteered in 1915 and served at Flanders as chaplain to the Guards Division (commanded by his cousin Lord Cavan); he won the Military Cross and bar.

Fig 36 WWII Home Guard outside the Vicarage (now 'Old Vicarage') in 1939. Rev Milne, seated next to the C/O Capt. Frank Colyer

Fig 37. Rev Saunders commanded East Meon's Cadets

World War II saw two vicars in uniform, but they remained on the home front: the Rev Charles Hamilton Milne (1931 - 1941) was second in command of East Meon's Home Guard while the Rev Frederick Alexander Saunders (1941 - 45) commanded East Meon Cadets.

The millennium

The turn of the millennium was marked by two parish initiatives: the building of a church hall and the creation of a large embroidery and frame which doubles as vestry cupboards. The early decades of the new millennium saw two unprecedented events, the installation of a female vicar and the church being locked down during the coronavirus pandemic.

Church hall

Fig 38. The Church Hall, to the left of the nave. Photo © Richard Gaisford

Despite the size of the church building, there had never been a hall in which parish groups could meet or social event be held. It was decided that one be built to celebrate the new millennium, tucked in between the nave and the slope of Park Hill. The project was led by parishioner Captain Christopher Cobley RN and a vigorous fund-raising campaign raised £221,000; architect Gary Seymour produced an elegant design in flint and oak[xxiii]. The Church Hall was dedicated in November 2000.

Millennium Embroidery

The lack of vestry facilities was tackled in conjunction with an initiative by parishioners led by Cathy Clayson to create a Millennium Embroidery: a tableau of the village and its life by needlewomen, men and children of the parish. A dual-purpose oak frame was constructed by an American cabinet maker, Steve Lamont, who was living in the village at the time, with cupboards and drawers at the back for robing and an illuminated frame for the tapestry at the front[xxiv]. The combined vestry and embroidery were installed in the north transept and dedicated in November 2008.

Fig 39. The Millennium Tapestry in the frame which doubles as a vestry

The first woman vicar

The ordination of women as priests had been passed by the General Synod in 1992 but it was not until 2014 that All Saints appointed its first female vicar: the Reverend Jane Ball came to East Meon from Salisbury where she had been chaplain to the Godolphin School. Her husband Jonathan is also an ordained clergyman and this was the first time that Jane's role in the church had taken precedence: Jonathan is now chief executive of the Royal Marines charity in Portsmouth.

Fig 40.. The Rev Jane Ball with church warden Olivia Hickling, right, and the crew of an octocopter (drone) camera shoot at All Saints in 2015.

All Saints is once again the mother church for a number of parishes which have been combined into an United Benefice: St John's in Langrish, St John the Evangelist in West Meon and the Church of Our Lady in Warnford. The Rev Jane Ball took on additional responsibilities as Dean of the Petersfield area. Among other initiatives she reinstated the church as a hub of village social life by introducing social events including '*Jane's Boys*' once a month at which the men of the parish were invited to take a drink with her in one of the village pubs and a '*Pop-up Choir'* in the other at which people with good voices and none impromptu communal singing.

Lockdown

On March 16th 2020, the prime minister Boris Johnson announced a set of measures designed to slow the spread of the vicious Covid 19 virus which had first been detected the previous November in the Chinese city of Wuhan. The entire population of England was to observe '*social distancing*', maintaining a two-metre distance from other people and to avoid meeting in groups of any size. This included church congregations; many parishes, including All Saints, responded with virtual services using social media to transmit their solitary celebration of the sacraments to parishioners. Jane emailed her parishioners: *"I will be continuing a daily pattern of prayer in our churches even though I am not able to invite anyone to join me … On Sundays I will visit each church during the morning and will let you know what time I will be there so that you can join me by praying at the same time in your homes"* Even this form of solitary celebration proved to be short-lived because on the following Monday the prime minister issued an even more draconian set of instructions, instructing people to confine themselves to their homes except for essential shopping and exercises; places where the public might still be meeting were ordered to close their doors including pubs, restaurants, sports grounds … and churches. On March 24th, Jane communicated once more: *"Following the Prime Minister's statement last night Bishop*

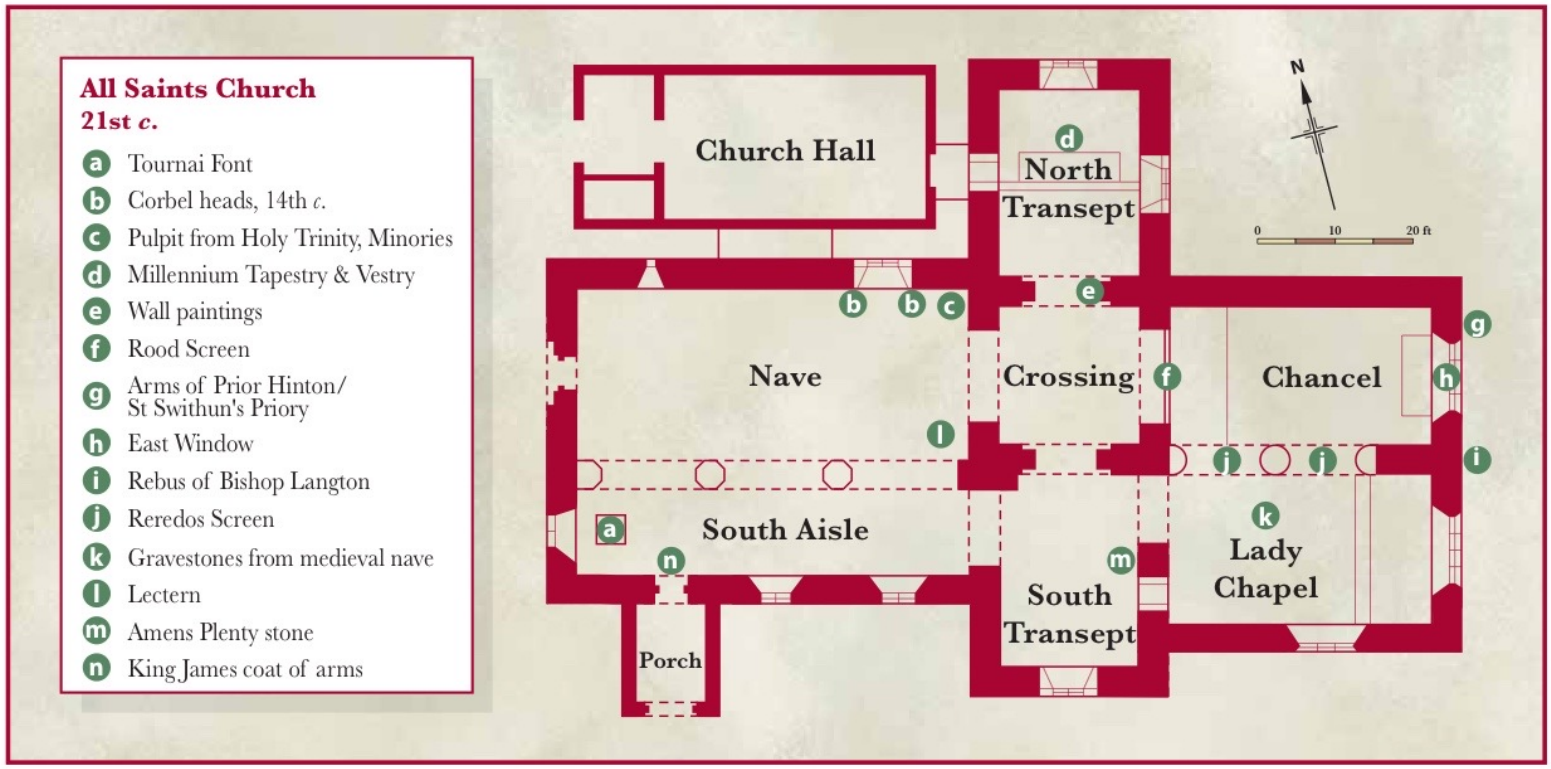
Christopher sent an email asking all of us, including clergy, to do as the Prime Minister has asked and to stay at home…. I am not aware of any other point in our history when churches have had to lock their doors".

It is unlikely that Covid 19 will affect as many East Meon villagers as the Black Death, which removed at least one third of the population, probably including the curates who had been left by the vicar, John Ace, to run the parish. As far as we know, All Saints remained open throughout that plague; it is to be hoped that when it reopens later in 2020 the church and the nation will have less profoundly affected than by the 14th century pandemic.

Postscript

Today All Saints serves a population approximately the same size as in the Victorian period but a congregation which is a fraction of the size. Since the early 19th century the parish has had no responsibility for local government but its church wardens bear a heavy workload in managing the fabric of the building which regularly suffers from thefts of lead from its roof as well as other expensive repairs to a building which is, in parts, 900 years old. All Saints was described by Nicholas Pevsner as *one of the most thrilling village churches in Hampshire*[xxv]. 'Amen' to that, or perhaps, '*Amens plenty*'

The church and church hall today



Endnotes

[i] Yorke, Barbara*, Wessex in the Early Middle Ages p 183*. Map taken from *Minsters and Parish Churches*, ed J.Blair, has three minster churches in the Meon Valley: Titchfield, Bishop's Waltham and East Meon – all sites of palaces of the bishops of Winchester

[ii] [It is not possible to define precisely the boundary of *Menes Ecclesia,* which may have altered over the centuries; the name is used in a survey in 1567 to list lands in the tithing of Oxenbourne as well as Meon Park and Court Farm. This map shows lands listed as tithe-free in the 19th century 'Tithe Apportionments' survey, which include Lower and South Farm, some of which were part of *Ecclesia.* Most of the lands were farmed *in demesne',* directly by serfs belonging to the diocese.

[iii] Blakstad, Michael *Farming the Valley.* East Meon History Group 2019 *Medieval Farming in East Meon'* for a more comprehensive account of East Meon as recorded in the Domesday Book https://www.eastmeonhistory.net/ftv/medieval-farming-in-east-meon/

[iv] The ancient system consisted of three separate tithes: *Praedial Tithes* which were calculated on income from produce (corn, oats, wood &c), *Mixed Tithes* which were calculated on the income from a combination of stock and labour (wood, pigs, milk &c) and *Personal Tithes* assessed on income derived from labour.

[v] Bullen, Crook, Hubbuck and Pevsner *The buildings of England, Hampshire: Winchester and the North* Yale University Press 2010p 241

[vi] Bullen, Crook, Hubbuck and Pevsner *The buildings of England, Hampshire: Winchester and the North* Yale University Press 2010p 241

[vii] Blakstad, Michael *Ibid.* for an account of the luxuries enjoyed by the bishops of Winchester *pp 36 – 38.* Roberts, Edward *The Bishop of Winchester's Fishponds in Hampshire 1130 – 1400,* Hampshire Field Club & Archaeological Society, 42 1986 p 125

[viii] Bullen, Crook, Hubbuck and Pevsner *Ibid* p 241

[ix] During the Middle Ages only the priest received the wine, which meant that meant that only a small cup – a chalice – was necessary. When the body of adult parishioners was admitted to communion in both kinds, the chalice was replaced by a much larger communion cup.

[x] After the Reformation, the gravestones in the nave of all Saints were all moved to the Lady Chapel, where they can be seen today

[xi] The cost of producing books meant that only the priest had access to the score, and he intoned the service as best he could. Congregational singing was not an established practice, but there were occasions when the '*husky, tuneless'* voices of the peasantry made themselves heard.

[xii] All Saints, despite its size and importance, appears not to have had a separate vestry; the present vesting area was built as part of the frame of the Millennium Tapestry in the early 21st century.

[xiii] Dixon, Richard W. *History of the Church of England from the Abolition of the Roman Jurisdiction,* London 1878, 111, 453

[xiv] Hopkins, David *The Civil War in East Meon 2017.* http://www.eastmeonhistory.net/wars/the-civil-war-in-east-meon/

[xv] Blakstad, Michael *Pestilence, Famine and the Civil War. Mortality crises in East Meon 1600 – 1660.* Hampshire Studies 2018

[xvi] Dixon, Richard W. *History of the Church of England from the Abolition of the Roman Jurisdiction,* London 1878, 111, 453

[xvii] Cressy, David *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* London 1987 pp86 - 103

[xviii] Blakstad, Michael *Farming the Valley.* East Meon History Group 2019 pp 64 – 66.

[xix] Charles Wooldridge, deputy registrar of the Diocese of Winchester, certified Glenthorne as *the Dwellinghouse and Premises situate at East Meon in the said county and now in the occupation or holding of the Primitive Methodists and intended to be used as a place of Religious Worship by an assembly or congregation of Protestants …*'.

[xx] Blakstad, Michael *The Tithing of Turnips – a Hampshire Village in the Westminster spotlight.* Hampshire Studies 2018.

[xxi] For more documentation and photographs about the National School: https://www.eastmeonhistory.org.uk/content/catalogue_item/east-meon-national-school

[xxii] Blakstad, Michael *The Village Hall and Institute* PDF can be downloaded at: www.eastmeonhistory.org.uk/content/catalogue_item/institute-library

[xxiii] For documents and a report by Chris Cobley on the Church Hall project, go to: https://www.eastmeonhistory.org.uk/content/catalogue_item/architecture-2/church-hall

[xxiv] For pictures and more information about the Millennium Tapestry go to https://www.eastmeonhistory.org.uk/content/catalogue_item/architecture-2/millennium-embroidery

[xxv] Pevsner, Nicholas and Lloyd, David *Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* The Buildings of England University Press, Yale. 2002 P199