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Swanton Morley – Information Handbook

A SHORT HISTORY OF SWANTON MORLEY VILLAGE

Swanton Morley is a large rural parish situated in the heart of Norfolk, 3 miles north east from the market town of East Dereham, 12 miles east of Swaffham and 16 miles west from the 'fine city of Norwich'. With many first class views of the surrounding countryside, Swanton Morley's 14th Century parish Church of All Saint's overlooks a picturesque valley leading to the River Wensum. The main road is known as Town Street and continues towards Dereham under the title of Greengate; whilst a road branching to the east of Greengate is known as Woodgate rejoining the Dereham road some 1.5 miles from Swanton Morley church. The road out of the village to the north is now known as Mill Street but was formerly Goosegate.

Traces of past human settlement in Swanton Morley have been found by Parish Councillor Mike Balaam which can be seen in his collection of Roman and Mediaeval coins and other artefacts located within the modern day boundaries of the village. Whilst not much is known about our predecessors, we can however pinpoint the earliest record of our village which is mentioned in the Domesday Book. Published in 1086 A.D. it simply indicates, "there is a church, with 1 and a half acres, worth 2 pence"! With a village population fast approaching 1900 inhabitants in 1998, it is a far cry from the 32 parishioners who lived here in the 9th century Saxon hamlet of Suanetua. This settlement was located near the church and the 'green' of the present day Swanton Morley Bowling Club.

The old Saxon name for Swanton Morley was Suanetua, meaning 'joining of two waters', which, through common usage over time, the modern name of Swanton came into being. Another version put forward by some historians is that the bird,- the Swan-, and the suffix Tun, or town are

the more likely explanation on the origin of the place name of the village. To differentiate between the 3 Norfolk parishes with the same name of Swanton, the later distinguishing titles of Abbot, Novers and Morley were added. They are so called by reason of the links to the Abbot of Holme near North Walsham and the De Nuiers or Movers family, lords of the manor near Melton Constable. The latter half of our village name was adopted in the early part of the 14th Century, in honour of the Barons De Morley who were Lords of the Manor between 1316 and 1475 and played a large part in the history of the village. The De Morley ancestors are believed to have come to this country during the Norman conquest and were granted lands in Norfolk. Memories of the De Morleys can still be seen today in the foundations of their ancient castle on the banks of the River Wensum.

Over time, a number of distinguished people have lived in our village. Amongst them is Robert de Morley, the Lord of the Manor in 1341, who was Admiral of the Northern Fleet at Sluys in 1340 and saw service at Crecy in 1346 and also at the Battle of Calais the following year. He was also the Constable of the Tower of London during the reign of Edward III. Alice Lovel, the granddaughter of Sir Robert de Morley and daughter of the Lord of the Manor in 1476, William Lovel, was born in 1466 and later married Sir William Parker, standard-bearer to Richard III. Another was Henry Ainsworth, born in 1517, who was a great classical scholar, and a leading figure in the formation of the early Congregational Church in the eastern part of the country. As a 'non-conformist' he was subject to religious persecution by the established church and fled to Holland to continue his work. One of the leading families in Swanton Morley in the late 16th century were the Bedingfields. Sir Henry Bedingfield was Lord of the Manor and also the Constable of the Tower of London, which made him the guardian of Princess Elizabeth, later to become Queen Elizabeth the First. The name lives on in the naming of Bedingfield Road and the village Bedingfield Estate.

Swanton Morley also has strong claims to be one of the

ancestral seats of the forbears of Abraham Lincoln, the celebrated President of the United States of America. The original home of the Swanton Morley branch of the Lincoln family in the early 1600's, is believed to be in a house which formerly stood on a plot of ground at the junction of the Woodgate-Dereham road. It stood opposite the present day council houses, and adjacent to the existing farm buildings which were constructed in 1806 from old materials. Water was supplied from a well which still exists today in the orchard of the modern-day Lincoln House Nursing Home. Later in 1692, Henry Lincoln was a member of a 15 man jury who swore on oath the extent and ownership of each parcel of land in the parish. A map was produced and showed that a new Lincoln farmhouse had been built and was now located at a different place; at the junction of the Swanton Morley - Hoe road.

It was in this "new Mansion House", now the Angel Public House, that Richard Lincoln made a will in 1615 which disinherited his eldest son Edward, and gave his property in Swanton Morley and Hingham to his fourth wife and his children by her. Edward contested the will, but lost and retired to a cottage and 2 acres of land some 10 miles away at Hingham, Norfolk. It was from Hingham that Edward's son Samuel, the great, great, great, great grandfather of Abraham Lincoln, emigrated as an apprentice weaver to America in 1637. These links with the thriving weaving industry in this area during the 16th and 17th centuries can still be seen today. The stained glass coat of arms of the Coldham family in the Parish Church commemorate the family's high standing in the weaving trade. The Coldham family lived in Swanton Morley Park, which is now Park Farm.

As a rural farming community, the village has led a quiet and tranquil life. When most towns and villages were hit by death and disease during the time of the 'Black Death' in 1349, Swanton Morley remained relatively untouched. In England the Black Death was a prime cause of far reaching social and economic changes, due to the ensuing chronic shortage of manpower. It was around this time that the enclosure of land and sheep rearing were

introduced to the village. It was also in this period that the present Parish Church was built, somewhere between the years 1360 -1390 A.D. and consecrated in the year 1440 A.D. There are large gaps in the recorded history of Swanton Morley over the following centuries, but in common with other rural communities, people began to turn to cottage industries to supplement their farming incomes. It was during the 16th century when the wool trade began to fade, that new industries began to appear in Swanton Morley. From the Parish Registers and other sources, we know that weaving was carried out here in this period, which led to the erection of a fullers mill at the north west end of the village on the banks of the River Wensum. The mill was converted some time during the 18th or 19th century to a paper mill. It is believed that this change of direction in use, was due to the abundance of the rushes in the area and may have been influenced by the need for paper by the monks at nearby Elmham Abbey. The superstructure has long since disappeared, but some of the brick arches are still visible near the river bank close to the River Wensum waterfalls. The link with the paper industry is still maintained today in the name of one of the three village pubs, the Papermakers Arms.

Like many modern day rural communities, Swanton Morley can be proud of its history but has seen many changes. The old and the new go side by side. The old village industries of wool production, weaving and paper making have long since gone, replaced by new farming methods in agriculture and the myriad new industries which support modern life. Over the past 100 years or so there have been many changes. Where once Henry Lincoln walked across his fields, now hand-made chocolates are produced, sportsmen play cricket and householders in Lincoln Close tend their gardens. The Methodist Church erected in 1868 at a cost of £227 & 10 shillings served the Non-Conformist members of the village for over 130 years, before being sold recently to become a private house. The old village school in Town Street has undergone a few changes since it was first built in 1852. For over 60 years it was the centre of education for village children until 1917, when the new school in

Manns Lane was opened to cater for the growing population. For the next 80 years it served as the focal point of village social life when it became the Village Hall. Sadly, since a more modern village hall was built in 1996 to serve the needs of the expanding community, the building has remained empty. However, it is hoped that a new use for this historic asset will be found in the near future. Another example of the 'new for old' change in village life, has been the transformation in three former 19th century farm labourers cottages in Elsing Road. After being renovated in 1987, these have now become Darby's Pub and Restaurant. With displays of a large number of agricultural artefacts and memorabilia which were in use during 18th and 19th centuries, it is also a grim reminder of the arduous and tough existence which our predecessors were forced to live. The history of our village would be incomplete without the mention of the major influences and changes brought about by others not born here. One important development in more recent times, has been the close links between the Swanton Morley residents and the Army and the Royal Air Force. During the war years, 1939-1945, the RAF airfield and personnel living there, played an important role in the war effort. Many different RAF and USAAF squadrons with a variety of military aircraft types were based here in Swanton Morley, the last being the Avro Anson and Percival Procter/Prentice aircraft attached to the Air Signaller's School which closed in April 1957. Brought into operational use by the R.A.F. in September 1940, the grass airfield has been the scene of some notable 'firsts' in its history. It was here in November 1941, that the famous De Havilland Mosquito aircraft first entered into service with the R.A.F. flown by 105 Squadron. A previous Commanding Officer of this renowned squadron was Wing Commander 'Hughie' Edwards who was awarded the Victoria Cross for his valiant leadership in low level operations against enemy shipping and port installations on the continent. Another notable event was the arrival in June 1942, of a small detachment of the USAAF which became the first American aircrew to fly on active service operations in the Second World War. On Independence Day, the 4th July 1942, twelve U.S. built Boston Bombers

were involved in the first joint British/American bombing mission on targets in German occupied Holland. Six aircraft from 226 Squadron RAF and six aircraft from the 15th Light Bombardment Squadron USAAF took part in the raids. It was from nearby Bylaugh Hall, that the Americans later established the headquarters of the famed 'Mighty Eighth' Army Air Force. On a lighter note, the popular wartime radio comedy programme 'Much Binding in the Marsh' (a fictitious Royal Air Force station), is believed to have been based on the day to day life of servicemen and women experienced by two of the main characters in the programme, Richard 'Stinker' Murdoch and Kenneth Home. Flt/Lt Murdoch was stationed at Swanton Morley as the Intelligence Officer on 226 Squadron in 1941/2 and was also active on the Station entertainment scene. Following the Government Defence Review in 1992/3, the decision to close RAF Swanton Morley in 1995 was made. The re-location of the Central Servicing Development Establishment and Maintenance Analysis Computer Division to RAF Wyton in Cambridgeshire, was thought by many local people to be the end of an era in the close links between the Armed Services and the village. After 55 years here, the two Technical Units and the last RAF flying unit based on the airfield, No 611 Gliding School, left in September 1995. However, on the departure of the Royal Air Force, new links with the Services were established with the arrival of the 9/12th Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales's); a famous British Army Regiment first raised in July 1715 as a result of the revolt of the supporters of the Stuarts against the rule of King George. From 1789-1791 Lieutenant the Hon. Arthur Wellesly, later to become the Duke of Wellington, served in the 12th.

The Barracks were named on 1st February 1996 after the distinguished soldier, Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, who was the first person to join the Army-as a trooper, and gain the highest rank achievable.

Whilst there may be many gaps and omissions in this brief history of Swanton Morley, it is hoped that by the time the next edition of this booklet is produced in 2 years

time, many other historical facts on life in the village can be unearthed.

SWANTON MORLEY CHURCH

At one time, Swanton Morley Church was the centre of the village; but with all of the recent developments this has meant that it is towards one end of the village. It still remains a focal point on the hill as you pass through from Dereham to Bawdeswell. The Church is a Grade one listed building and is well worth a visit, particularly on a sunny day when the light streams in from the windows and the impression is of spacious magnificence recalling a history of worship and thanksgiving to the glory of God. Like many of the English mediaeval churches up until the middle of the 16th century, the Church at Swanton Morley followed the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Although much of the internal colourful art and symbolism associated with Roman Catholic practices was destroyed during the time of the Reformation, our Church still retains many fine features. It is certain that another more ancient church existed on this site before the present one was built, sometime between 1345 and 1390. The Church is a good example of the transition during the latter half of the 14th century, from the decorated, to the perpendicular style of ecclesiastical architecture. The windows in the north aisle are mainly of the decorated style with just the beginnings of the perpendicular; whilst those in the south aisle are in the perpendicular style. It is thought that the north aisle and the nave were built first and may have been started before the Black Death in 1349. There are indications that more skilled craftsmen were employed in its erection than in the south aisle, not completed until about 1390. Skilled stonemasons were not so plentiful after the Black Death! Differences in skill levels can be seen in the single course of red flat tiles about 18 inches above the sill string course on the outside wall of the north aisle. Between these two dividing courses the flint work is finely laid in roughly squared courses, while above the tiling, it is flint rubble. Inside the south porch entrance, the carved wooden corbels, which feature the face of a lion and a human mask, are believed to be placed there to remind us to leave our fierce and ugly passions when we pass here. Dated 1711, the Royal Arms of Queen Anne above the door are fairly unique, in

that they show both the English and Scottish lions together; an arrangement of the royal arms which only lasted 7 years until her death in 1714. The other interesting feature, is that the painter may have been the village carpenter who made a mistake in the motto at the bottom. He wrote, DIEVIT MON DROIT instead of DIEU ET MON DROIT. It is thought that one of the oldest memorials in the church, is the brass inscription on a floor slab near to the font asking us to pray for John Bone. Whilst this is undated, there is little doubt that it is from the late 15th century. There is also a memorial slab near to the vestry door which is the grave of Susanna Neve who died in 1672. The Le Neve family were Rectors of this parish for over 150 years, from about 1592 until 1742. It was around 1592 that Robert Le Neve first started to compile a record of births, marriages and deaths in a register which went back to the year 1538. These Parish Registers are noteworthy because they were started much earlier than many other parishes, and also record the christening of the children of Richard Lincoln. One entry shows that Ann, daughter of Richard Lincoln, was christened on the 6th May 1599. The Church Bell Tower rises to almost 100 feet above the surrounding countryside, and houses five bells with a space for a sixth bell. Recently, some cleaning and restoration work has been carried out. When the Royal Air Force station closed in 1995, the personnel paid for the clock to be restored and this is commemorated with a plaque on the Bell Tower door. The RAF has made a great contribution to the life of the village, as well as having connections to the Church. The main east window contains the badge of the RAF and there is a window to the left, adjacent to the vestry, which shows the history of the Units which have served at RAF Swanton Morley. This east window also records the historical connections between some of the leading families in Swanton Morley who have contributed to the history of the village and Church. Amongst the stained glass coats of arms depicted, are those of the Morley, Lombe, Parker, Le Neve, Jegon and Bedingfield families. Others represented are the Emblem of the Trinity, the See of Norwich, East Anglia, and the Lincoln Seal. The Usher arms are also included because the Rev. R.N. Usher was

Rector when the window was fitted. The Seal of Richard Lincoln is believed to represent the families of these yeoman farmers and their links with the Church. Richard Lincoln may have been Churchwarden at Swanton Morley from about 1599 until his death in 1620 and Henry Lincoln, his grandson, was a Churchwarden in 1686. A Bible donated by Henry Lincoln at this time, is held by the Church. Why so large a Church? The usual explanation for such a large church is that men built to the glory of God, rather than to the size of the congregation. A number of less spiritual suggestions have been put forward to explain the reasons why this should be so. Firstly, because church attendance was virtually compulsory in days gone by, all the people in the village would have attended. In fact, at Easter in 1662, records show a congregation of 250 communicants, plus of course those who were not confirmed. With this attendance the Church would not have seemed so very big. Secondly, because of the intense rivalry between the different Lords of the Manors of the time, each wanted to outshine the other. Perhaps this is one reason why our Church is so large; because the local Lord of the Manor, Sir William de Morley, wanted his to be the finest. On a more pragmatic level, the idea of storing wool in a Church was not thought to be inappropriate during the 15th century. Perhaps the Church was an integral part of the wool trade, and no part of life was considered as secular. Stone buildings were almost non-existent in villages such as ours, and the west end of a Church may have been regarded as being well suited for the storage of wool.