

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

A VISITATION BY THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND'S MEN

Introduction

In order to appreciate the background to this snippet of Swanton Morley history it is necessary to try to present, in a very condensed and simplified form, some of the very complicated history of this period. If this a bit heavy for you, then jump straight to the next page!

Below are listed the principal players in the drama.

Edward VI was the son of Henry VIII and his third wife, Jane Seymour. He succeeded his father in January 1547, as a boy of nine who had strong Protestant leanings.

Edward Seymour, 1st Earl of Hereford, Duke of Somerset, was the brother of Jane Seymour. His power had steadily increased in the later years of the reign of Henry VIII, and when Henry died in January 1547, Hereford (as he was then) was by far the most important man in the kingdom. He succeeded in making himself Lord Protector to the young king, and in February he became Duke of Somerset. However, overall he was a failure. He did not succeed in conquering Scotland and his strong position became steadily eroded.

John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, Duke of Northumberland, was the son of Edmund Dudley, who had been executed on a false charge of treason by Henry VIII. As Somerset's power waned, so did that of Warwick increase. In October 1549 Somerset was put in the Tower, leaving Warwick to seize most of the principal offices of state. He effectively ruled England from late 1549 until the death of Edward VI in the summer of 1553. In 1551 he was made Duke of Northumberland. Somerset was executed in 1552. In 1553 the king fell ill, of what was to be his fatal illness and Northumberland persuaded Edward to leave a will in which he cut out both his sisters Mary and Elizabeth, and left the crown to his cousin, Lady Jane Grey (who was the wife of Northumberland's son, Guilford Dudley). But, when Edward VI died in July 1553 the country as a whole sided with Mary. Northumberland was executed for high treason in August. (He was the father of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, favourite of Queen Elizabeth I)

Two Acts of Uniformity

The first Act in 1549 established the *Book of Common Prayer* as the sole legal form of worship in England. The second Act in 1552 not only introduced a revised, and even more Protestant, *Second Prayer Book of Edward VI*, but also introduced penalties for people who attended other forms of divine service.

The state of England under Dudley (later the Duke of Northumberland)

Essentially the country was bankrupt. Somerset's war with Scotland had proved very expensive, and war with France had drained the treasury. Dudley had to take drastic measures, the first of which was to make peace with the French. In March 1550, under the Treaty of Boulogne, England handed over Boulogne to the French in return for 400,000 crowns. This, together with a 'subsidy' (tax) imposed in 1549-50 and profits made from the debasement of the coinage just about enabled Dudley to survive, but by 1552 the money had run out. But the second Act of Uniformity gave him an opportunity to raise some more cash because it rendered superfluous a large quantity of Church property. Among other things, each parish had to make an inventory of Church goods, and those goods considered superfluous under the new act were seized.

Kett's Rebellion

Just as an aside, note that in July 1549 Robert Kett's army of 16,000 men seized Norwich. It was John Dudley who on 23 August routed Kett's army and sentenced Kett to a lingering death in Norwich Castle.

Thomas Morley and the inventory of Church goods at Swanton Morley

Thomas Morley was rector from about 1550 to 1554. I have not been able to find any connection between him and the Sir William de Morley who left ten marks ((£6-13-4) to the church in his will dated 23 April 1379.

The first record that I have found of him was in 1552 when he and his churchwardens, John Davye and Richard Small, together with an 'inhabitant' called John Sooleye, had to compile the inventory of church goods for Northumberland's men

Richard Small is probably an ancestor of the Richard Small who was one of the 'supervisors' of the will of Richard Lincoln, ancestor of Abraham Lincoln, which was written in Swanton Morley in 1615. I am not sure if they are members of the same family as William Small who created the charity in 1654. The latter came from Hadleigh in Suffolk, but he must obviously have had associations with Swanton Morley, so it seems likely.

We have a full list of this inventory (note that the metal objects were only valued by weight):

One silver gilt chalice	worth	£3- 4s.
One silver pyx	worth	26s-8d.
One silver 'shippe' (incense boat)	worth	40s
Five vestments (specified)	worth in all	8s.
Eight copes (specified)	worth in all	11s-4d
One steeple bell	worth	£9
One little bell called the Gabriel	worth	8s.
The clapper of the steeple bell	worth	3s-4d.
The clapper of the little bell	worth	5d.
Total value		£17-1-9

Noted as 'reserved' (i.e. what they were allowed to keep) were the chalice and a bell, plus a surplice and a rochet (a sleeveless surplice); the latter were crossed off the original list and we do not know their value. So, assuming that it was the little bell, and its clapper, that they were allowed to keep, the value of the church goods remaining was £3-12s-5d. Thus Northumberland's men took goods to the value of £13-9s-4d.

However, there is also a note that two years earlier John Soolday and William Pennyman, churchwardens, sold a pair of censers and other plate to the value of £9-5s, and that they spent this on the 'reparation of the church in lead and timber'. It also says that sold (presumably more recently) was a silver and partial gilt cross for a sum of £10-9s, and that this was also spent on the church. This note was signed by a lady called Florence Semer.

So it would seem that the churchwardens made a cunning pre-emptive strike by selling off the most valuable items – worth a total of £19-14s - and converting them into something that Northumberland's men could not touch.

The rector's troubles were not at an end

The rector probably breathed a sigh of relief after the visitation was over, but much worse was to come. In my next article I shall talk about how he was forced to abandon his wife and move to another parish.