a

PAGEANT

in

celebration

of

St. Ippolyts Church 1087-1987

on

11th July

Today we welcome you all to St. Ippolyts, to celebrate the founding of the Church, here on the hill 900 years ago.

As you sit on what is now a green open space, picture yourselves as the villagers of long ago, whose homes were on this green where you are sitting now, and watch the pageant of life unfold before your eyes, as you sit at your cottage door in the evening sun.

The first sight to entertain you belongs outside the parish, and relates to happenings far away which touched but little on your lives. Nevertheless, it had a great influence on the future.

1066

King William has conquered England. As a newcomer, he is most anxious to create peace in his new lands, and cement this by intermarriage between conquerors and conquered. To further this end, he sends for his niece Judith from Normandy. She is to be married, as an act of conciliation, to a Saxon Earl, Waltheof.

Waltheof was described as a handsome man, exceptional in his generosity and courage, a devoted Christian who loved the Church and the poor. It appears to have been a good match at first, but then suspicion began to arise, and eventually Judith gave evidence that Waltheof was involved in a plot to cause rebellion. He was imprisoned for a year at Winchester, where he did penance by singing 150 psalms 'learned in childhood'.

His enemies came to execute him early in the morning while the people slept. Waltheof asked for time to say the Lord's Prayer, but on reaching 'Temptation' such tears and lamentation broke from him that he could not finish. He was executed without further ado and the severed head was heard by all present to say in a clear voice 'but deliver us from evil. Amen'.

Judith now becomes the central figure of our drama. She was filled with remorse over the betrayal of her husband, and to try to make amends, she founded a nunnery at Elstow, endowing it with three of her Bedfordshire manors. The rich rectory of Hitchin followed, and it was at the time of the Hitchin gift that St. Ippolyts was probably built, either by Judith as a further act of contrition, or, in conjunction with the nuns, to serve the needs of the neighbourhood and of the wayfarers who passed by in increasing numbers on the Hitchin Road.

1086

Twenty years have passed. King William has sent his vassals out to the farthest corners of England. He was a shrewd man, and wanted to know exactly what this new land was worth to him in taxes and value.

The Saxon Chronicle records that in 1085 'at Gloucester in midwinter ... the King had deep speech with his counsellors ... and sent men all over England to each shire ... to find out ... what ...

or how much each land holder held ... in land and live stock, and what it was worth ... The returns were brought to him'.

William was a man of speed, and very thorough. He used the sophisticated and experienced English administration to his advantage to collect the information in less than twelve months, and even sent a second set of commissioners 'to shires they did not know, where they were themselves unknown, to check their predecessors survey, and report culprits to the King'. Even in 1086 reports on junior staff, and an evaluation of their efficiency, was being made - and it's no different today!

12-13th centuries

Around 1118 nine French knights banded together for the protection of Christian pilgrims on the road to Jerusalem. Half warrior, half monk, they lived under the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

They rose rapidly in wealth and power, and were granted vast tracts of land, including the gift of land at Preston by Bernard de Baliol in 1147. They grew into a dangerous military power, feared both by kings and people, notorious for their cruelty, arrogance and licentiousness, and they were finally imprisoned and their lands forfeited in England in 1312.

Hildebrand wrote towards the end of the 13th century that 'they often take too much wine at their evening feast, and it is credibly reported that their cries and their unpleasing songs can be heard in the town' (of Hitchin) - an unlikely story, from three miles away, but it shows their reputation.

According to the legend, before any of them went out to fight, they rode over to St. Ippolyts to have their horses blessed. As they left, they took out their swords and carved a cross on the stonework of the church. Those who returned would come back to the church and enclose their cross with a diamond shaped mark.

1295

Life on the medieval manor was hard - very hard. The Lords of the manor were granted lands by the Crown, and land meant money. The manor was an economic community, and the Lord extracted money from everyone at every turn - he owned everyone and everything, and his wealth came from what he could extract from his manors.

As well as payment in cash or in kind to the Lord for his house and land, the poor peasants had to pay to get married; pay to be buried; pay to inherit; pay to enter into an agreement with a neighbour; pay for <u>not</u> paying to enter into an agreement with a neighbour; pay to bring a case to court; pay for <u>not</u> bringing a case to court; pay for being at court; pay for <u>not</u> being at court. The only event in his life for which he did not pay was being born.

The manor courts were held to administer the estates, to deal with minor infringements of the law, titles and inheritance (Court Leet and Baron), and the View of Frankpledge, the system whereby every member of a tithing was answerable for the good conduct, or damage done by, any one of the other members. In fact the Court could deal with anything short of serious crime or theft, murder or sudden death, when the Coroner had to be present, and it would then be dealt with at the Hundred Court or County Assize.

Fines or fees varied from manor to manor, according to who was involved, and whether the act had diminished the value to the lord of the person concerned. A widow marrying outside the manor would be lost as a source of revenue, and a woman detected in 'fornication' had not only lost value as a wife, but had undermined the position of the lord to determine whom she might marry, and would be fined heavily.

It was to everybody's advantage to attend the manor courts, because it was the only written record of changes of property, or decisions made, and could be later referred to in cases of dispute.

1300

EPPALETS or HIPPOLETTS, vulgarly PALLETS, wrote Norden in 1598 (and we still have a multiplicity of spellings today), this place was dedicate to a supposed Saint of that name, that in his life time was a good tamer of colts, and as good a horse-leach: And for these qualities was deuoutly honored after his death, as all passengers by that way on horsebacke, thought themselues bound to bring their steedes into the church, euen, vp to the high aulter, where this holy horseman was shryned, and where a Priest continually attended, to bestowe such fragmentes of EPPOLETTES myracles, vpon their vntamed coltes, and olde wanton, and forworne Iades, as hee had in store, And did auaile so much the more or lesse, as the passengers were bountifull or hard-handed, but he that was coy of his coyne had but a colde and counterfeite cure.

1348-9

The pestilence or plague reached England in 1348. The outbreaks lasted more than twenty years, and it killed rich and poor, young and old, good and bad, with an impartiality and ferocity that struck terror and despair to the hearts of millions. Its cause was unknown and its course was totally unpredictable. Some towns and villages escaped untouched in one outbreak only to fall victim to the next one. Outbreaks continued sporadically over the next 300 years, and we can only guess which, if any, affected St. Ippolyts.

1455

During the Wars of the Roses in the latter part of the fifteenth century, the people of St. Ippolyts probably kept their heads down, and hoped not to get too involved. The manor of Maydencroft was still held by the Crown, so supported the Lancastrian side, but the Manor of Hitchin was held by the Duke of York, so supported him, as did the Manor of Langley, leaving St. Ippolyts sandwiched in the middle.

In 1455 the Yorkists were marching on London, and the Lancastrians came out to meet them at the battle of St. Albans.

1525

Henry VIII owned Maydencroft Manor, and was often in the area for hunting or for hawking. In 1525 the story is that 'The Kynge folowyng of his Hawke lept over a diche beside Hychyn with a polle, and the polle brake, so that if one Edmond Moody a footman had not lepte into the water and lift up his head, which was fast in the clay, he had been drowned; but God of His goodnesse preserved him'.

1656

The Poor Law Act of 1601 created parish officials to be overseers of the poor, and Thomas Bibsworth, a yeoman farmer of Brook End Farm, gave a poor house and rent free cottages for the poor, which stood by the Church.

Anyone who left his own parish and then applied for poor relief, was certain to be returned to his own parish, with the benefit of a whipping before he went, because no-one was going to provide money for anyone not belonging to their parish.

Thus we have:- From the register for Barnardiston, West Suffolk. 'Memorand : That James Killingback, of low stature, red hayre, full body, of an high coloured complexion, aged about 40 yeares, and Philip Killingback his wife, of middle stature, black hayre, aged about 40 yeares and 3 children of ye ages 10, 4 and 2, were assigned to passe from parish to parish by the officers thereof and next strait to Pollitts in Hertfordshire where (as they confess) they dwelt and inhabited laste. Hee whipt and they limitted to be at Pollitts within 10 dayes after ye date, which was ye 26 of August 1656'.

There was an Act for Raising Soldiers under which the overseers got £3 a head for each man they supplied. Usually they would supply single men without dependants. Sometimes, however, the overseer might find it more expedient to take the money and get rid of an extra mouth to feed, especially if he was running into trouble in balancing his accounts.

1666

The plague was followed by the Great Fire of London, which, even at this distance, was a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night. The whole countryside was terrified that the fire was coming nearer. Men were sent for, to go to London with pickaxes, spades and buckets. Everyone had instructions to keep buckets of water outside their doors. Not everyone obeyed.

1675

Some 600 years on, another link with Elstow had a great effect on this area, when an itinerant tinker called John Bunyan preached to the nonconformists.

The persecution of these dissenters was very cruel, and they were hunted and spied upon, so all their meetings were held in secret, with lookouts posted so they could disperse quickly before a constable or magistrate could find them.

Bunyan, according to tradition, used to preach in the chapel at Maydencroft, and there was a secret Friends meeting house in a cellar at St. Ibbs. Hidden deep in Wain wood is a large dell, and up to a thousand people would gather there in dead of night to hear Bunyan preach. Should it rain, four devoted women were always at hand to hold their aprons over his head to keep him dry. The six Foster brothers would be there to guard him, and lookouts posted round Tatmore Hills would quickly give warning of the approach of the constables.

1831

The 'Swing' Riots erupted in Kent in 1830, when many labourers were out of work. They blamed new farm machinery for this, rick and barn firing spread and rioting broke out in places, leaving the whole countryside tense and nervous. St. Ippolyts appeared fairly peaceful, although 24 special constables had been sworn in in case of need. However, for some reason, whether it was starving men or merely the St. Ippolyts men against the Gosmore men, one night in August, for just an hour, the village rioted.

1884

Thomas-Henry Steel was Vicar when the school was opened in 1847, and on Monday, March 8th, 43 children arrived to meet their new teacher, Miss Jefford. Her monthly salary was £2.1s.8d., plus half the children's fees of tuppence a week. An older child, Eliza Pedder, was paid 6d a week to help keep order, and Miss Ross came in several times a week to teach plaiting.

By 1871 there were 90 children on the register, and the school was reorganised into separate infants' and mixed schools, with a large new schoolroom built at right-angles to the old one.

1897

Herts Express. Saturday July 24th 1897

Marriage of Miss Carey and Mr W.H. Curtis

The marriage of Mr Wilfred Curtis, second son of Mr. Spencer H. Curtis, 171, Cromwell Road, S.W., to Miss Augusta Carey, only daughter of the Rev. E.T. Carey, M.A. Vicar of St. Ippolyts and Great Wymondley, was solemnised on Wednesday afternoon at St. Ippolyts Parish Church.

If one may trace omens for good or ill in the weather prevailing on such occasions - and a familiar saying would seem to sanction belief in such auguries - then the glorious sunshine that lent brightness and gaiety to the nuptial scene on Wednesday may be taken as an earnest that the future happiness of the twain then made one will be as unclouded as their many friends desire.

The officiating clergy were the Rev. J. Lingen Seager, M.A. and the Rev. Andrew Amos, M.A. curate-in-charge of Clare College Mission, Rotherhithe, S.W. There were also present in canonical robes, the Rev. Percy Amos, assistant curate of the Clare Mission, and the Rev. C.A. Barnes, curate of St. Ippolyts.

Miss Carey entered the church escorted by her father, by whom she was given away. Very handsome she looked in her dress of white satin with train of rich brocade, and tulle veil. Sprays of real orange blossom adorned the bride's hair, and her bouquet was formed of gardenias, stephanotis, and orange blossom, this being the gift of the bridegroom.

The three youthful bridesmaids were Miss Margery Hale, Miss Maude Pardoe, and Miss Lydia Seager, each of whom was attired in a dress of white accordion-pleated crepon; they wore white chip hats trimmed with chiffon bows and initial gold brooches, presents from the bridegroom, and bore baskets of coloured gloxinias.

The service was choral, the hymns sung being "The voice that breathed o'er Eden" and "O God, our help in Ages Past". Before the service Mr H.G. Moulden, FRCO, played appropriate music, and at its conclusion the "Wedding March".

The chancel of the church was tastefully adorned with ferns, cut flowers and plants from the nurseries of Messrs. Young of Stevenage, the decorations being the work of Mrs. and the Misses Dashwood. The south porch, too, was ornamented with flowers and, outside the church, the happy event was signalised by a floral arch bearing on one side the salutation 'Welcome! bride and bridegroom'; while on the other side the felicity of the married pair was invoked in the words 'Happy be thy union!'.

The wedding ceremony drew together a very large number of people - few less, it was computed, than a thousand. By their presence practically en masse the villagers may be said to have united in offering with one voice and heart a tribute of goodwill to the bride and her husband, and in marking their esteem of the bride's family.

To the felicitations of the villagers was added those of a considerable number of visitors from Hitchin and Stevenage. As the wedding party left the church they were greeted with showers of confetti and cordial cheers, the church bells mingling their glad tones with the chorus of congratulations and good wishes evoked by the espousal.

Mr and Mrs Curtis then left for Suffolk.

For those who had come from a distance lunch was served in the schoolroom. A photograph of the wedding party was taken by Mr Moulden of the Biggin Studio, Hitchin.

1914

The War in 1914 was entered into with a great deal of patriotism and optimism, and the feeling that 'it would all be over by Christmas'. However, some four years later only a few of the heroes returned to occupy the houses that were to be built for them at Waterdell and the Crescent. Twenty men of St Ippolyts never returned to see the modern changes of mains water and electricity, nor did their horses see the age of the motorcar.

The hectic Twenties gave way to the depression of the Thirties, and life was improving again until the war clouds began to gather once more.

1941

The years have moved on, and we come to the years of the second World War, vividly remembered by many of us, although we were young at the time.

The Phoney war was followed by the real one, Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain, young men being called up, and young women taking their places in the munition factories and on the land.

Years of make-do and mend, of scares when the church bells were rung to warn of an invasion, and it was a false alarm. Years of comradeship and the feeling of pulling together to win the war.

And silly happenings, like the cottager who heard a stray bomb fall one night, and to make a joke of it, stuck his head out of his bedroom window with a candle held at arm's length, 'to see where it fell!'

1987

And now we look to the future, as well as the past, and end with a message of hope. This is embodied in Daphne Rance's poem.

Dear God,

About nine hundred years ago you put a thought in someone's head
To build a chapel on this windy hill.

Here was a hazel wood
Cropped by the lord of Almshoe,
Banked and ditched from the lean cattle that grazed by the brook below.
Were there already shacks of cottar and serf?
Was there a road?
No knowing; nor who built.

But this we know most surely:
That for nine hundred years
The generations came in through the doors,
Came, - came - and went on coming;
Were carried wrapped and wondering to the font;
Were carried out, to lie in the earth of the hill;
And in between walked to your worship.

I walk in the same procession
And, neighbour, so do you;
And the child baptised today will follow us
(And that child's child),
Each touching an older hand in friendship or in family
Back through nine hundred years.

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