

# A HISTORY

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**THE** village of Oakley is five miles west of Basingstoke. Its present population numbers around 6,000. The village consists of Church Oakley and Malshanger in the parish of Church Oakley and East Oakley which is actually in the Parish of Wootton St Lawrence.

In the 1960s when Basingstoke was designated a 'new town' and vast overspill rehousing from London took place Oakley itself underwent huge housing programme.



Some archaeologists consider Oakley (not Ockley in Surrey) to be the site of the Christian Saxon King Ethelwulf's (father of Alfred the Great) victory over the pagan Danes in 85AD. The main Danish fleet of 350 ships ran into the mouth of the Thames, took and sacked Canterbury, then London and proceeded to attack Wessex. They were met by King Ethelwulf (*left*) with the whole army of Wessex at 'Oclei' near Basingstoke and utterly defeated so much so, that the fame of the battle is recorded in the Anglo-Saxon chronicles.

The change of the name from Oclei to Oakley occurs in many sources and certainly Oakley near Basingstoke is situated where the Roman road from Winchester to Silchester and London crosses Harroway - a point of great strategic importance where another great battle was fought with the Danes 20 years later. Battledown is an area on the eastern edge of the parish near the point where the Harroway and the Roman road cross at right angles. Here are five or possibly seven bowl barrows and a large oval tumulus named White Barrow on the opposite edge of the Harroway; the graves of men slain in battle.

The Lord of the manor soon after the Norman conquest appears to have been John de Port son of Hugo or Hugh de Port to whom William the Conqueror portioned out much land in Hampshire. King William I was of course supported by Pope Gregory VII and accepted papal spiritual superiority and worked to separate the church from state but ensured that the pope could only exercise authority in England with royal approval.



The reformers made significant gains under him. It is recorded in the Domesday Book that there was a church on Hugh de Port's estate and it is thought that the present church occupies the same site.

The church in the twelfth century had a nave the size of the present one and a chancel. A south aisle was added about 1180 - 1190 and the present west arch of the south aisle is of that date. At this time in history there was a great increase in monastic orders and their influence lead to a spirit of revival or renewal within the church at large. This may well explain the need to expand the size of the church in Oakley.

In support of this theory it is fascinating to note that in 1130AD Henry de Blois, bishop of Winchester "gives and confirms the church of Oakley, with the lands, tithes and everything appertaining to it, to the Monks of Sherborne, to be held as freely as John de Port, in whose manor it is situated, had granted it to be held". The monks seem to have gradually possessed themselves of other lands in Oakley, besides the glebe lands, and the name of at least one Oakley man occurs among the list of the society, who retired into the Cloister at Sherborne. From this cloister came the Rectors of the Church thereafter - they appear to have held their incumbency subject to the annual payment of 6s.8d (33p).

It seems probable that the Rectory of Oakley remained in the hands of the Monks of Sherborne as long as their convent existed and that at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries some of the lands, church, tithes etc which they possessed were granted to Colleges at Oxford and some to private individuals whose descendents still possess them.

During this period of King Henry's dissolution of the monasteries in England the patronage of the Church in Oakley was handed to Queens' College, Oxford, in the year 1538. This patronage is still in existence today and indeed the current arrangement is that the College and the Parish take it in turns to have the final decision of choice of new incumbent.



The 'famous son of Oakley', William Warham, was probably responsible for the building of much of the church tower and also a house at Malshanger. An octagonal tower, which was part of the house, may still be seen there.

On approaching the west door of the church the 16th century work of the lower part of the tower and the two modern upper stages can be seen clearly. The third stage of the tower contains the bell chamber.

Above the west door are carved a goat's head, part of the coat of arms of William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury and a bent arm holding a sword, the Warham crest. In the centre are the words of Archbishop Warham's motto AVXILIV M EVM A DINO (*My help is from the Lord*).



In a window in the south aisle is an old stained glass figure of an archbishop which is believed to have come from the Church at Wootton St Lawrence. There is a tomb in the wall of the south aisle with brasses commemorating Robert and Elizabeth Warham who died in 1487. Their eldest son William was born in 1450 in the middle of the Wars of the Roses. The family were well known in the district and in 1463 lands which run from Malshanger to Ibworth and a farm called Sheredown were leased to a Robert Warham.

On the top slab of the Purbeck marble tomb is an inscription which reads in translation "*pray for the soul of Robert Warham who died 1 October 1487 and Elizabeth his wife who the same year on the 15 day of September. May God receive their souls.*"

William was educated at Winchester College and in 1475 was admitted a Fellow of New College, Oxford, where he took holy orders and studied law. His success in London law courts attracted the attention of Henry Tudor who sent him on several missions to the continent. During the course of these travels he came into contact with some of the great Renaissance scholars, in particular, Erasmus, of whom it has been said laid the egg of the Reformation which Luther hatched.

Apparently Warham gave very generous gifts of money to Erasmus to enable him to visit Cambridge and engage in the intellectual debate characteristic of the English Reformation. It is possible that his gentle influence helped smooth the Church reformation process. Sir Thomas More who knew Warham well records that he was a charming host and a man who spent so much money on Church repairs that he died 'incredibly poor'.

In 1502 Warham was installed as Bishop of London and became keeper of the Great Seal of England. Two years later he rose to be Lord Chancellor and then in 1504 was enthroned with great magnificence as Archbishop of Canterbury. It is interesting to note that he took an oath of allegiance to the Pope - this was the last ceremony apart from one during the brief restoration of papal authority under Queen Mary - at which an English Archbishop acknowledged this allegiance.



Five years later it was Warham's duty to crown the young King Henry VIII and his wife Katherine of Aragon at Westminster when Warham was nearly 80.

Wolsey involved him in the unpleasant business of King Henry's marriage annulment. Warham was unable it seems to match the courage of his friend Sir Thomas More but in 1532, just before he died, he wrote a moving declaration of his loyalty, to the constitution of the Church in England.

A letter survives from 1839 from the Rector Matthew Harrison to the bursar of Queens College asking for necessary extension of accommodation in the Church due to lack of space. He stated that "for many years back it has been the wish of the parishioners of Church Oakley to increase the accommodation of the church, either by building a gallery or

by the addition of a new transept. There is already a gallery for singers, which overhangs the pulpit in so extraordinary a manner, as to have been a subject of complaint with everyone who has done duty in the church. Independent of this, it crosses the arch that forms the entrance into the chancel, thus not only cuts off the view of the church, but renders the conveyance of sound either to or from thence a matter of great difficulty".



The Rev. Harrison then details the numbers of persons (140) who were able to find seats within the church, but stated 20 persons (schoolgirls and teacher) were taken into the chancel plus other persons making a total of 28 (average). The main aisle was occupied by Sunday schoolboys and the actual number of unreserved seats was only 37. As the population was increasing in the neighbourhood the accommodation was far too small.

The letter then detailed proposed plans for the alterations necessary and gave details how the scheme would be financed. *White's Directory*, of 1859, states that the north transept had been added in 1841.

This is doubtless a reflection of the increased church attendance during the Victorian era and although for some it was no more than a veneer of respectability many servants of the wealthy were granted opportunities to attend church - the introduction of early Sunday morning services was largely made to allow the household staff to get back in time to prepare the Sunday lunch for the family attending Matins.

England at this time was at the height of her prosperity and the Church as a whole joined in this prosperity. Many clergy belonged to the families of industrialists and had considerable private incomes to supplement their stipends. Even those who had to depend entirely upon their benefice incomes were probably a good deal better off than they thought or than their successors are today!

Further signs of the clerical prosperity during the middle years of the 19th century show themselves in the expansion and extension of many of the old Rectories and vicarages. This can be traced at the old Oakley Rectory. The original house consisted only of the central part of the Rectory. The north end was an addition to the original Rectory as was the dining room and the drawing room and the two bedrooms above them. The original house must have been comparatively small. This prosperity was quite brief. Seldom in history have the homes of such a large body of men risen to apparent comfort and sunk again to comparative want within half a century.

The following discovery of the state of the Oakley Rector's cellar in year 1865 reveals a rector who was able to keep a well replenished stock - for himself but not the poor!

Port	Miscellaneous	87 bottles
Port	Blunden	12 bottles
Port	Shaman	42 bottles
Sherry	Miscellaneous	23 bottles

Sherry	Unknown	11 bottles
Orange	Hennekey	6 bottles
Brandy	French	6 bottles
Champagne	Pink	18 bottles
Port for the Poor		0

In 1864 the Rev John Monkhouse wrote to his parishioners setting out the need to increase the accommodation of the Church in order that "we may have a Temple meet for the Service of God where there may be no respect of persons but where rich and poor may be accommodated alike."

The village's population had increased to 550 including 80 - 90 at the Church School which certainly seems to underline the partnership between Church and School. It seems that a 'Free' or 'Endowed' school was erected in 1667 in Rectory Road, Oakley, which ceased sometime in 1870's. In 1852 a National School was built at the expense of Mr W Beach which now forms part of St Leonard's Centre. The building soon became too small and was extended in 1870's.

Details of the curriculum back in 1884 reveal, perhaps not unexpectedly, how much emphasis was laid on religious education. Visits to the school were made by clergy 3-4 times weekly to take prayers. It is fascinating to speculate how much influence the school had on the Church and vice versa. It is particularly interesting to note that the current Oakley Junior School is a 'Church of England Controlled School'.

In 1857 an article appeared in the *Oakley Magazine* detailing the progress of the restoration work of the Oakley Church and apparently these structural alterations were completed which included the removal of a north porch and doorway to allow for further seating, the building of additional stages to the tower and the provision of a new font in 1869. The bowl of the font was found in a farmyard nearby where it was used as a horse trough - there seems to be a good foundation for the story that it had been taken from the church by a former Churchwarden!

Elsewhere in the church there is much evidence of 19th century renovation. The pulpit is of Italian marble. The organ was installed in 1874 and the altar and eagle lectern are of oak and listed as being held by the church in 1888.

In 1963 a faculty was granted to remove the dwarf wall which divided the nave from the chancel to permit the installation of a new priests' stall. This also had the effect of opening up access to the altar for the congregation.

In 1966 modern doors between the porch and the nave were installed to aid conservation of heat following installation of a heating system.

The Church in Oakley certainly was impacted by the Anglican Renewal movement and in the mid 1980's the accommodation was insufficient for the size of the congregation and consideration was given to various ways of increasing the existing seating arrangements. It is detailed in the PCC minutes that 40 extra canvas chairs were purchased which could be put out in the aisles etc.

In 1991 the decision was taken to remove the choir stalls and two priest boxes to allow informal music groups to accompany the choir and/or singers. Plans were passed for the building of 'staging' to fit around the steps up to the

chancel to accommodate more personnel and also allow for drama and visual expressions of worship and teaching reflecting the changing style of churchmanship.

In 1992 a new P.A system complete with sound desk was installed including a loop system for the hard of hearing. Recordings of sermons continues today.

1995 saw the completion of the re-ordering of the chancel with the leveling of the floor.

In 1998 the staging had become rather worn and a new improved version was installed which necessitated the front pew on the north side being removed. The whole chancel was then carpeted which greatly improved the appearance and usefulness of the area.

St Leonard's Centre was rebuilt in 2009. The wooden extension being replaced by a two storey building.