

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

The mystery of the date of foundation of the Friends of All Saints

Here we come to a fairly modern mystery, namely when was the group, known as the "The Friends of All Saints' Church" founded? I was recently given what was said to be the first Minute Book, and indeed it does contain the minutes of the "inaugural meeting" which was held on Friday, 27 May, 1994. This meeting was chaired by "Rusty" Ironside, and there were thirteen people present. Unfortunately, there was no full list of those present, although it did list the fourteen people who sent their apologies! However, many of those present can be identified by looking at the proposers and seconders of the various motions. These motions included electing Alfred Hyde as the first chairman. Incidentally, the file also contained a copy of the Rules of the Society which were approved at the same meeting.

However, by coincidence, another document has also recently come into my possession, and this muddies the waters somewhat. This is a little book which principally contains, bound together, copies of *The History of the Hundred of Mifford* and the little booklet *Swanton Morley Church* by Rev. R. N. Usher. The latter was published in 1945 and it contains a recently written chapter on the village's recently discovered connections with the ancestors of Abraham Lincoln. But what interests us here is the fact that, bound in at the back of the book, is a single page document headed "Friends of Swanton Morley Church, Norfolk". You will see below that this refers to a group of Friends which was in existence at that time. No one to whom I have spoken has heard of this group, and no reference was made to it at the above inaugural meeting. So, if anyone can throw any light on this early group, I should be very interested.

This document did not copy very well, so I have transcribed it below

President: S.C. Keith, Esq., Swanton Morley House, East Dereham
Hon. Sec: W. Lake, Esq., Bylaugh, East Dereham

The object of this Society is to provide an annual income to be expended on the re-furnishing and improvement of this ancient and celebrated Norfolk church. There are many items which are required to restore some of its medieval splendour, and it is impossible for these to be provided and the fabric kept in repair without generous assistance from outside the parish.

You are therefore earnestly requested to associate yourself with the restoration work which has already commenced and which needs large funds to continue.

The best way in which you can help is by becoming one of the Friends of Swanton Morley Church. The minimum annual subscription is five shillings, but it is hoped that you will supplement your subscription by a donation which will be used towards the cost of any specific item. A programme of works which it is desired to carry out is displayed in the church or can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary of the Society.

This was followed by a membership application form.

A little confusion was caused by the fact that the name of the President, was given as S.C. Keith, Esq. However, I have spoken to James Keith and he has confirmed that it was his grandfather Edward Charles Keith who was living in Swanton Morley House at that time, so this must be a typographical error (the letters 'E' and 'S' are close together on a typewriter keyboard).

So far, I have only searched the notes that I made some time ago on the collection of "Parish Leaflets", held by the Record Office, which cover a period from 1927 to January 1941 (although some are missing). There is much talk about the dire state of the structure, and of major work being done on the nave roof, but there is no mention of a Friends group. Incidentally, what did amuse me in one leaflet, dated May 1936, was a letter which appears to have been part of a continuing correspondence between the above Mr E.C. Keith and the Editor (the Rector?), about what he regarded as the dull nature of the services being responsible for empty pews! I do wish that I could find the rest of this correspondence.