

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

HOW DID SWANTON MORLEY GET ITS NAME?

This is a question that I frequently get asked, and the answer is not straightforward, so I thought that it might be helpful if I set down what I know.

Information from Steer

For a long time I have relied on a typescript booklet "A short history of the village of Swanton Morley" which was produced in January 1944 by a local architect, Mr F.W. Steer, and much of the following is taken from his booklet. In order to understand some of the name changes which took place it is first necessary to look at the lords of the manor of Swanton, which would eventually become Swanton Morley.

The lords of the manor of Swanton

The survey for the first part of the Domesday Book was carried out in 1086; this was, the so-called Little Domesday, and it only covered Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, but it did so in greater detail than did later parts.

William the Conqueror gave the lordship of the manor of Swanton to a man called Eudo, but there is more than one possible candidate. We do know, however, that he was the immediate predecessor of Ralph de Beaufoe, who was himself either the son or the nephew of William de Beaufoe, Bishop of Thetford. Ralph himself received considerable gifts of manors in Norfolk at the hands of the Conqueror.

The Rye family

Ralph's only daughter and heiress, Agnes, married Hubert de Rye II, Governor of Norwich Castle and second son of Hubert de Rye I, who came to England with the Conqueror. Thus, when Ralph de Beaufoe died, the lordship of Swanton came into the hands of the Rye family, and it remained there until the death of Hubert de Rye IV, Baron of Hingham, in about 1187.

The Marshall family

Hubert IV's daughter and heiress, Alina, brought this estate in marriage to her husband John Marshall, nephew of William Earl of Pembroke. However, John Marshall predeceased Alina, dying in 1235, and the lordship went to their son, John, who died without issue and was succeeded by his brother William Marshall, Baron of Rye. Two further generations of the Marshalls were then lords of the manor, John who died in 1282/3, and William who died in 1314 leaving three children. These children were a son John, who died without issue, and two daughters, Dionese and Hawse.

So, during this time the manor of Swanton was held by the Le Marshal family and was called "Swanton Mareschal." We can find this name used in documents dated 1286, 1332 and 1333

The Morley family

It was the above Hawse who brought the manor of Swanton to the Morley family by her marriage to Robert de Morley.

The two other Swantons

I shall begin by noting that a dictionary of the Anglo-Saxon language states that the word "suan" translates as "swan" and the word "swán" translates as "swineherd".

Now, Steer's booklet also includes a section on the derivation of the place name and he confirms that the Domesday Book lists this parish as "Suanetua". Steer goes on to note that Swanton Abbot is given in Domesday as "Suanettuna" and Swanton Novers as "Suanetunam". These last two places have the Saxon ending "tun" or town, whereas the Domesday name for Swanton Morley definitely ends in "tua", apparently derived from the Saxon "twa" or "tu", meaning two. According to Parkin this suggests a place situated near the junction of two rivers, and Steer tends to support this.

Later, the distinguishing titles of Abbot, Morley and Novers were added as suffices to the name "Swanton", to indicate who owned the respective manors, namely the Abbot of Holme, the Morley family and the Nowers or Novers family.

For a while the manor was distinguished from the other two Swantons by the names of neighbouring manors. Thus we find that in 1329 it was distinguished as Swanton-juxta-Belhawe (Bylaugh); in 1343 as Swanton-juxta-Northelmham, and in 1347-8 as Swanton-juxta-Hoo. From then on the parish carried the Morley name almost continuously. The only instances of another title being used were in 1371, and again in 1631, when the curious name of "Hungry Swanton" or "Hungriswanton" is mentioned in the cartulary* of Walsingham Priory. Maybe this name refers to a period of famine.

*a volume containing transcripts of original documents

Prof. John Morley's explanation

In late 2016 I received an email from a Prof. John Morley, and it turned out that he had only recently (2013) had published in *The Annals of Genealogical Research*, a quite lengthy article *The Origins of the Morleys in England and their early appearance in Wales*, Vol. 9, No.1, (2013), 1- 61.

He suggests that places and people named Morley are probably derived from the Saxon or Old English words *mor* or *more* (moor) and *lege* or *lei* (meaning a lea, clearing or meadow). However, he goes on to say that in the Domesday Book the hamlet of Swanton Morley was simply called "Suanettuna", which he said meant town or settlement of the swineherds. However, I have checked with an on-line version of Domesday, and Steer is correct; Domesday does indeed say "Suanetua". This would appear to mean "two swans". I found nothing about a swineherd. Maybe I can find out more about this later.

The carved wooden corbels in the chancel

In an earlier article I talked about the hammerbeam roof and the carved wooden corbels in the chancel. On both sides the third corbel from the eastern end is a "rebus" or play on words. These two corbels both show a swan together with a little barrel or tun. Now we do not know the exact date when this roof was built, but it was presumably complete in about 1440 when the church was consecrated. So at this time the name of the manor must have sounded like Swan-tun or Swanton. Thereafter the manor continued to be called Swanton Morley, even though it passed into other hands and this branch of the Morley family became extinct in 1475.