



In October 2007 the vicar of All Saints, the Reverend Terry Louden, gave a talk from the church pulpit to the village Garden Club. In it he described the history of All Saints.

Origins 7th Century to 1050



St Birinus

The Christian faith probably reached the Meon Valley in the 7th century. There is something of a debate about which Christian missionary was responsible for the growth of the faith in this area. Some students of history opt for a man called Birinus.

Birinus was probably of Germanic descent, but came as part of the Roman mission inaugurated by Augustine of Canterbury in 597. Birinus found the people of Wessex still heathen and decided to work among them. He established a church at Porchester on the Solent, and then gradually worked his way northward, baptising and teaching as he went.

He died at Dorchester on Thames in about 650, having founded a see there. The bishopric of Dorchester was then divided into two before the end of the 7th century, and the southern part became the diocese of Winchester.



St Wilfrid

The other missionary responsible for Christian work in this area was a man called Wilfrid. Wilfrid was born in Northumbria in 634, educated in the monastery of Lindisfarne, and subsequently in Rome. Wilfrid became a strong supporter of the Roman church customs as opposed to the Celtic ways of northern England.

He was a courageous and pugnacious character, firm in his convictions, to the extent that his enthusiasm led him to fall foul of civil and religious authorities. One such disagreement forced him to travel south, where from about 678-686 he was based at Selsey, where he was responsible for the conversion of the south Saxons – Sussex to you and me.

But his influence was certainly felt in these parts, and the Meon Valley Pilgrimage Trail, established last year, pays tribute to his mission and ministry among the Meonwara tribe. The trail is a journey along footpaths and bridleways following the 30 mile length of the river Meon from the estuary at Titchfield Haven upstream to the source here at East Meon. After his work here, Wilfrid returned to the Midlands, where he died, in about 710, at Oundle.

So who was responsible for Christianity reaching these parts – Birinus, or Wilfrid forty years later? We don't know, but we can certainly honour both of them. What we can say is that there have been Christians in this valley for close on 1400 years.

As a diocesan and parish structure was established throughout England, mainly during the time when Theodore of Tarsus was Archbishop of Canterbury (he was a contemporary of Wilfrid) parish churches began to be built. We know that there was a church here in Saxon times, because King Edgar granted lands to it in the 10th century, evidence of the importance of East Meon even in the pre-Conquest period. Very likely, the original church stood on this site, because of its prominent position on the side of the hill, overlooking the village. Nothing remains of the Saxon building, or if it does, we have not yet discovered it. There are, of course, churches in the valley where you can still see architectural evidence from the Saxon period, notably at Corhampton and Warnford. So who was responsible for Christianity reaching these parts – Birinus, or Wilfrid forty years later? We don't know, but we can certainly honour both of them. What we can say is that there have been Christians in this valley for close on 1400 years.

As a diocesan and parish structure was established throughout England, mainly during the time when Theodore of Tarsus was Archbishop of Canterbury (he was a contemporary of Wilfrid) parish churches began to be built.



We know that there was a church here in Saxon times, because King Edgar granted lands to it in the 10th century, evidence of the importance of East Meon even in the pre-Conquest period. Very likely, the original church stood on this site, because of its prominent position on the side of the hill, overlooking the village. Nothing remains of the Saxon building, or if it does, we have not yet discovered it.



There are, of course, churches in the valley where you can still see architectural evidence from the Saxon period, notably at Corhampton (left) and Warnford.