

Our Early Years :



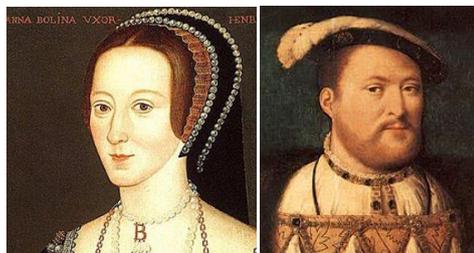
*The invading Normans
who started it all.*

The village of Malpas originated as a Norman settlement in the late eleventh century, marking the disputed border between England and Wales, the name itself meaning dangerous road. The original Baron of Malpas was Robert Fitz Hugh, one of whose duties was the appointment of the Rector. In time the Barony passed to the Brereton, Cholmondeley and Drake families, along with the gift of the Rectorship. Nowadays appointments are made on the recommendation of the Patronage Committee, a group of underemployed local worthies.



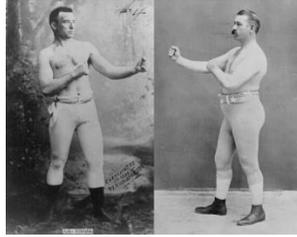
The Brereton tomb

Visible evidence for these earlier times, lies in the two private chapels in the church, one each for the Brereton and Cholmondeley (pronounced Chumley) families. Both of which contain magnificent alabaster chest tombs, surmounted by carved effigies of their occupants. In the case of the Breretons, Sir Randle and Lady Eleanor, their son William became a courtier to Henry VIII and was apparently destined for great things. But in the turmoil surrounding Henry's decision to rid himself of Anne Boleyn, William, along with several other men, including her own brother, was accused of adultery with Anne. The charges were probably false, the only evidence being from paid informers or the result of torture, but the outcome was never in doubt and in 1536 he was beheaded on Tower Hill.



Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII

The position of Rector of Malpas was, most unusually, split into two parts sometime in the thirteenth century, following a disputed inheritance. This prompted local use of the little known word *moiety*, meaning one of two parts into which something has been divided. Thus for several centuries Malpas had a Rector of the Higher Moiety and a Rector of the Lower Moiety who were obliged to share the church building between them - with varying degrees of amiability. This entertaining standoff was unfortunately ended in 1885.



Settling a clerical dispute

A noteworthy former Rector of Malpas was Reginald Heber, the well known hymn writer and later Bishop of Calcutta, after whom the successful local school is named. However, in terms of noteworthiness it has to be mentioned that our current Rector, Canon Ian Davenport, has been appointed a Queen's Chaplain, which makes him an official member of the Royal Household, a most well deserved honour. It is hoped that, unlike his predecessor, this royal courtier won't lose his head.



*Reginald Heber,
our former Rector*



*Canon Ian Davenport, Queen's Chaplain,
our present Rector*

To answer a common question on this subject; the difference between a Rector and a Vicar is that the former holds the freehold of the parish and was, historically, self financing. The main difference now seems to be that, should there ever be such a thing as a problem Rector, they would as freeholders be more difficult to get rid of. For those of a curious disposition, it may be worth Googling the Rector of Stiffkey to see how the church got rid of him.

St. Oswald's Church:



In the centre of the village

The church remains a haven of calm and spirituality and, after more than 600 years, is still in daily use for its original purpose; the glory of God. A Grade One Star listed building, it is recognised as one of the finest mediaeval buildings in the county and is freely open to all.

Apart from our regular services, there are frequent concerts and we receive visitors from all over the world.

The original place of worship on this site was a wooden chapel for the eleventh century Motte and Bailey fort, around which Malpas was formed. The only surviving part of this being the Motte, or mound, adjoining the churchyard, on which the fortress keep stood.



Motte and Bailey fort

The present church is built on the highest point in the village and forms the heart of our community; its dedication being to Saint Oswald the early Christian King of Northumbria. Construction of the present nave and tower was begun in the second half of the fourteenth century. To put this into a historical context; the King at that time was Edward III, the father of the Black Prince. Chaucer was at work in London, producing some of the first literature in the English language, and only ten years earlier the Black Death had killed over a third of the people. (As a percentage of today's population that would be a staggering 23 million.)



Black Death

In about 1480 the side walls and roof of the church were significantly rebuilt. The north and south walls were demolished down to the window sills, and the present much larger windows installed. The nave was raised to incorporate a row of clerestory windows and the new, almost flat, roof fitted. The line of the earlier steeply pitched roof can still be seen on that part of the tower visible inside the church.



Sunshine on the sandstone walls

In the 1960s the then Rector, Canon Rylands, and his wife Denise undertook a major renovation of the internal ceilings. The mediaeval carved angels and shields were cleaned, repaired and repainted and are one of the crowning glories of the church. The magnificence of this restoration gives some clue to the exuberance of the original decor, in which the roof beams were painted in red and gold and the stone walls whitewashed, with various highly

coloured biblical scenes on top of that. In contrast, the current interior, whilst undoubtedly moving and beautiful, is a model of civilised restraint.



The nave ceiling

Originally, as with all other churches of that period, there would have been no seating for the congregation. However, in 1680 box pews were installed which were then rented out or sold to specific users who would put their name on the pew door. The chancel still contains three fifteenth century stall seats with carved misericords, one showing a distinctly un-Christian mermaid admiring herself in a mirror.



The vain mermaid misericord

The church has a full peal of eight bells, which ring to announce services, to commemorate national events, and for that best of all possible reasons: to simply to celebrate being there.



The bell ringing team

For more detailed and scholarly information there are, for a modest fee, booklets available in church, or you can refer to: John Betjeman's "Best British Churches" or Simon Jenkins' "England's Thousand Best Churches".