

A LITTLE HISTORY OF SOUTHCHURCH

By Mike Penry

Episode 13: THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY – CHURCH AND MANOR

The two most notable Southchurch men in the Eighteenth Century were George Asser and Thomas Drew, both lords of the manor. George, whom we have met before as the man to whom Joseph Outing paid rent for use of the foreshore for oyster cultivation, purchased the Southchurch estates from the Earl of Nottingham. On his death in 1738, they passed to his only child Elizabeth, wife of the Rev. John Davies, vicar of Barling, before passing in turn to their daughter Elizabeth Asser Davies. The latter Elizabeth married Thomas Drew; he survived his wife and was in possession until his death in 1795.

The earliest description of the Old Church is that given by Salmon in his History and antiquities of Essex (1740), whose work was repeated and added to by Morant in his work of the same title published in 1768. The latter states:

“The Church and Chancel are of one piece, and of equal size and bigness, both tiled. On a tower of stone, containing bells, is a spire shingled...This church hath been lately new pewed, ceiled and beautified, and a gallery was erected at the west end in 1756, at the charge of Thomas Drew and Elizabeth his wife. Their arms are in the front.”

The gallery was probably a minstrels' gallery. During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, before organs were in common use in churches, metrical versions of the psalms were sung to the accompaniment of instruments played by the parish “musickers” in the gallery. Instruments might include the violin, flute, clarinet, violincello, bassoon, trombone, oboe and cornet; there is a delightful description of such a musical band in Thomas Hardy's early novel Under the Greenwood Tree.

Abridged extract from Under the Greenwood Tree by Thomas Hardy:

“Times have changed from the times they used to be,” said Mail. “People don't care much about us now! I've been thinking we must be almost the last left in the county of the old string players? Barrel-organs, and the things next door to 'em that you blow wi' your foot, have come in terribly of late years.”

“More's the pity,” replied another. “They should have stuck to strings as we did, and kept out clarinets, and done away with serpents. If you'd thrive in musical religion, stick to strings, says I.”

“I can well bring back to mind,” said Mr Penny, “what I said to poor Joseph Ryme (who took the treble part in Chalk-Newton Church for two-and-forty year) when they thought of having clar'nets. ‘Joseph,’ I said, says I, ‘depend upon't, if so be you have them tooting clar'nets you'll spoil the whole set-out.’ I said.” “And what came o't? Why, souls, the parson set up a barrel-organ on his own account within two years o' the time I spoke, and the old quire went to nothing.”

“Robert Penny, you was in the right,” broke in the eldest Dewy. “They should ha'stuck to strings.” “Strings for ever!” said little Jimmy. “Strings alone would have held their ground against all the new comers in creation. But clarinets was death.” “And harmonions” William continued, “Harmonions and barrel-organs' be miserable. Miserable dumbledores!”

“Right, William, and so they be - miserable dumbledores!” said the choir with unanimity.

It is recorded that in 1852 Mr Charles Page loaned to the Southchurch churchwardens a clarinet and a violincello on the understanding that they were to be returned when he wanted them.

There is a tablet in the Old Church over the rood loft steps bearing the Drew family's arms. It carries the following inscription:

Here lyeth the body of Elizabeth Asser Drew, wife of Thomas Drew and granddaughter and heir of George Asser Esq, late of this parish.

She died on 13th November 1761 aged 32. To whose dear and valuable memory this monument is erected by her disconsolate husband.

Here also lyeth the body of Thomas Drew Esq. Lord of the Manor, Deputy Lieutenant and one of his Majesty's Justices for this County and for many years Lieut. Col. Of the 1st Regiment of Essex Militia. Died 24th February 1796 in the 81st year of his age.

And of George Asser Drew, their only son, who died 17th March 1775 age 19 and Margaret Drew, second wife of Thomas Drew, who died on January 5, 1827, in the 82nd year of her age.



A list of the estates of Thomas Drew, compiled in 1795, provides an interesting snapshot of Southchurch in the late Eighteenth Century:

On Southchurch Hall estate:

Barnfield; Long Mead; Porters Field; Three Acre Marsh; Crooked Marsh; Southchurch Marsh; Home Marsh; Lane Field; Long Marsh; Great Marsh; Home Field.

On Southchurch Wick

Church Field; Footpath Field; Hither Footpath Field; Farther Footpath Field; Furzey Field; Cloathes Yard Field; Peartree Field; Home Field; Great Laymans; Middle Field; Bourne Green Woodfield; Orchard Mead; Wick Mead.

Buttery's estate

Hill Marsh; Pond Marsh; Further Marsh; Middle Marsh; Long Marsh; Great Marsh.

Wyatt's estate

The Chess Way

That's 14 "fields", 3 "meads" and 12 "marshes". The drainage and reclamation of lower Southchurch still lay in the future.

Come back in a couple of weeks' time for Episode 14: "The Jane Austen Years".

- A wealthy absentee rector.
- A curate who rode to hounds.
- Princess Charlotte stays at Southchurch Lawn.

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