

FORA ANNUAL OUTING – 24 JULY 2019

DORCHESTER ABBEY

- Dorchester village and Abbey located on historic site between rivers Thames and Thame
 - Evidence of long-standing human activity - Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age
 - Wittenham Clumps, Dyke Hills
- Roman fort and settlement – with earth defences
- Continuing Saxon settlement

- Early Christian centre for Wessex and Mercia
 - Conversion of Saxons by St Birinius, 635 – baptises King Cynegils at Dorchester, with St Oswald (King of Northumbria) standing as sponsor
 - Cynegils and Oswald grant land at Dorchester to establish bishopric of West Saxons, covering Wessex and Mercia
 - St Birinius buried at Dorchester, 650 – remains moved to Winchester, 690s

- Diocese established three times
 - Wessex diocese moved to Winchester, 660s
 - Mercian diocese moved to Leicester and Lindsey (Lincoln), 670s
 - Mercian diocese re-founded at Dorchester, 870s, when Leicester occupied by Vikings
 - 1067 – Remigius is first Norman Bishop of Dorchester, Leicester and Lincoln – stretches from Thames to Humber - Remigius moves see to Lincoln, 1072-73

- Medieval Dorchester
 - Cathedral church continues as college of secular canons
 - 1140 – re-founded as Abbey by Bishop Alexander of Lincoln – Arrouaisian Augustinian canons (like Notley)
 - 1224 – claim to have re-discovered body of St Birinius at Dorchester
 - 1230-80 – extensions to north transept, later developed into chancel aisle
 - 1290-1300 – start of re-building of Abbey in Decorated gothic style
 - south chancel aisle to house new shrine to St Birinius
 - choir extended – new windows, including Jesse window
 - C14th – more building in Perpendicular style
 - West tower
 - South Nave aisle added for parish worship – also ante-chapel to shrine
 - Norman lead font
 - C13th Monument – swaggering knight – possibly William de Valence the younger (d. 1282)

- Abbey
 - Foundation post-dates church – claustral buildings follow standard pattern but on north side
 - Church (nave) used by town for worship – C15th visitations show active town use of whole church
 - Valued at £160/2/6 in 1535 - Surrendered 1536 – 1 Abbot and 6 canons

- Post-dissolution
 - 1544 - Granted by crown to Sir Edmund Ashfield of Ewelme – later bought by Richard Beauforest of Dorchester for £140 (value of lead on roof)
 - 1554 – Beauforest bequested eastern part of Abbey church to parish - buried in Lady Aisle
 - Church transferred to parish – like Romsey, Tewkesbury, Christchurch, Great Malvern
 - No claustral buildings remain, except guest house (tea shop)
 - 1602 – west tower rebuilt
 - C17th – north transept partly demolished
 - C19th – restoration work by Butterfield (1847-58) and Gilbert Scott (1858-78)

Dorchester Abbey, Church and People 635-2005, Ed. Kate Tiller, 2005

Warwick Rodwell, Dorchester Abbey Oxfordshire. The Archaeology and Architecture of a Cathedral, Monastery and Parish Church, 2009

