

THE VILLAGE WHERE THE CATHOLIC FAITH NEVER DIED.

Chideock with its sandstone thatched cottages and its 13c parish church of St. Giles is at peace and only small signs of its turbulent and heroic past exist. On a hill overlooking the village once stood an imposing castle. This was completely destroyed by Parliamentary forces in the Civil War. A large cross 21ft high, now stands on the site commemorating the Chideock Martyrs, seven men from Chideock who were cruelly put to death for their catholic Faith.

The history of the area goes back to Roman times but for our purposes we start when King Henry broke with Rome in the Act of Supremacy. In 1534 he was declared the Supreme Head of the Church of England. Saints Thomas Moore and John Fisher were martyred in 1535. There was intense persecution of Catholics & those in Chideock started going to the castle for worship. After Queen Mary restored Catholicism, Queen Elizabeth I broke with Rome in 1558 & a new Act of Supremacy issued together with the Act of Uniformity, which abolished the Sacrifice of the Mass in 1570. Pope Pius V excommunicated her and forbade Catholics

to recognise her as Queen. In retaliation it was made a treasonable offence for any Catholic Priest to be in England & any lay Catholics open to prosecution as potential Traitors.

There were a number of owners of Chideock Castle. In 1479 the village of Chideock and its Castle passed by marriage to the Arundells of Lanherne, a hugely powerful and strongly Catholic family. Sir John Arundell spent some time in prison for his beliefs. In 1576 he dispersed his people in Cornwall and made his base in his Castle in Chideock. During the Civil War the threat from the Puritans in Lyme Regis led to fierce fighting in which the castle changed hands several times. Finally in 1645 General Fairfax, the Parliamentary Commander-In-Chief, took the castle for the last time and ordered its destruction. After the Restoration the estate was returned to the Arundell family, who by now no longer resided in the area.

In 1802, Thomas Weld of Lulworth Castle, a relation of the Arundells, bought Chideock Estate for his sixth son Humphrey. He built the present Manor house in 1805 and converted a barn on the site, which had been used for secret Catholic Worship, into a modest chapel. In 1829 the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed granting full political and civil liberties to Roman Catholics. Humphrey left the Estate to his son Charles who enlarged the manor and transformed Humphrey's chapel into the beautiful Church of Our Lady we know today. This was completed in 1872.

Chideock Manor and estates were sold to the Coates family in 1996. The Church and its land remain in Trust to the Weld family.