

Rain or Shine?

Turning on the radio a fortnight ago, I realised it was St Swithin's Day (15th July). Legend has it that whatever the weather is on that day it will last for 40 days. I checked the day's weather. The optimist in me thought 'great it's not raining today', whilst the pessimist in me thought 'oh dear I hope we don't have to suffer this dismal cloud cover for the next 40 days'. Time will tell!

There is a strong local connection. St Swithin (originally written Swithun) was an Anglo-Saxon Bishop of Winchester. He died in 861AD and was scarcely mentioned in any documents in his own time. Apparently, on his deathbed he begged that he should be buried beyond the North Wall of the Cathedral where passers-by could walk over his grave and raindrops from the eaves would drip onto it.

St Swithin was chosen to be the Patron Saint of Winchester Cathedral during a period of reform around 971AD. Subsequently many other churches in this area were dedicated to him.

After he was pronounced Patron Saint his body was moved inside the building. His main shrine was transferred to a platform above and behind the high altar in the new Norman cathedral in 1093.

One theory as to how the legend arose was that on the day his body was originally moved he showed his displeasure to those carrying this out by providing a heavy shower to fall upon them.

Scientists explain away the legend by saying that the jet stream that affects our weather in the UK settles into a pattern which holds reasonably steady until the end of August. Thus the weather that is in place on 15th July will probably predominate for the next 40 days.

That maybe the scientific connection, but I still check the weather on St Swithin's Day.

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