

Swithun was Bishop of Winchester, the principal diocese of the Kingdom of Wessex, from AD 852 until his death on 2nd July AD 862. This was during the time when England was still divided into several kingdoms and when the Danish invasions were beginning.

Little is known of Swithun's life, but he left a reputation for charitable gifts to those in need and for the building of churches. On his death he was buried, as he had requested, just outside the west door of the cathedral (known as the Old Minister). A 12th century historian says that he did this so that his grave *'might be subject to the feet of passers-by and the raindrops pouring from on high'*.

A hundred years later, when King Edgar had achieved supremacy over most of England, a major reform of the English Church was begun. One aspect of this was the establishment of communities of monks in several cathedrals. During the enlargement of the Winchester Old Minister, Bishop Ethelwold brought the body of Swithun into the church on 15th July 961.

Before the establishment of the formal process of canonization, such a "Translation" of relics was the effective declaration of a saint. This date is the one which is celebrated as his feastday.

His body was translated again in AD 974, and yet again into the present Winchester Cathedral in AD 1093. His shrine remained a popular site of pilgrimage throughout the Middle Ages, and accounts of his many miracles were written. One Life, dating from about AD 1000, tells that the monks had grown tired of getting up at night to sing *Te Deum* every time a healing was declared, and that the Saint appeared and sent a messenger to call Bishop Ethelwold to rebuke them for their sloth. The writer of this Life says that it is obvious that *we must not pray to God's saints as to God himself, because he alone is God and above all things, but we should truly pray the saints to intercede for us with the all-ruling God who is their lord, that he may help us.*

There is no historical explanation for the traditional saying that the weather of 15th July will determine the weather for the next forty days, but there is some meteorological evidence that about the middle of July a pattern of weather often begins which lasts until the end of August.

There is a beautiful illustration of Saint Swithun in the *Benedictional of Saint Ethelwold*, which can be seen via Wikipedia, under 'Saint Swithun'.