KING OFFA AND THE BATTLE OF BENSINGTON?

The Battle of Benson, in which King Offa, leader of the Mercian tribe defeated King Cynewulf of Wessex took place in 779 C.E. Offa now occupied Benson, a significant prize in the 8th century, when Benson (or Bensington as it was then known), was the administrative centre for a large royal estate, extending along the Thames Valley as far as Henley.

In those days, St Helen's Church was a simple wooden building, founded by Birinus, serving the area which included Henley, Nettlebed and Warborough. Historians suggest that following his victory in 779 CE., King Offa, who was a Christian, rebuilt St Helen's Church in stone. This would be in character because Offa was known for his generous gifts to churches.

The myth that King Offa built a palace at Benson sadly lacks any documentary evidence. However, historians think he would probably have needed a large hall to accommodate his retinue and councillors. Archaeologists have uncovered many Saxon bones, weapons and pottery in the area surrounding St Helen's Church.

Offa's Dyke was built to defend the Mercian kingdom from the Welsh kingdom. It extends for 120 miles from the mouth of the Wye in the south to the estuary of the Dee in the north. Offa introduced silver and gold coinage to his kingdom and was the first of the Saxon kings to have a vision of a united England. His reign lasted from 757 to 796 C.E.

The following books were used for reference.

Edith Ditmas	The Ditmas history of Benson
Kate Tiller	Benson, a village through its history

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Caput ethelredi regis