

THE STORY OF MILTON MALZOR

BY THE
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RECTOR

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DEDICATION

To those, through whose sacrifice of the best years of their life, or even of life itself, during the Great War (1914-1918), our national freedom was preserved and our priceless heritage in the monuments of our historic past remained unscathed, and more particularly

TO MY BROTHER,

THE REV. JAMES EVANS,

Lieutenant in the Welch Regiment,

to the Memory of

my former pupil and old friend

CHARLES TREVERBYN GILL, B.A.,

Exeter College, Oxford,

and Lieutenant in the Manchester Regiment,

who fell gloriously at the Battle of the Somme,

July 1st, 1916,

and to

THE MEN AND LADS OF MILTON,

who responded gallantly to their country's call,

this book is dedicated in all gratitude.

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A PREFACE TO THE 1997 REPRINT

BY THE RECTOR

Richard Ormston

To have a thoroughly researched and well-documented village history is rare indeed. However, this book by Edward Evans does not merely record Milton's past. Many references to the village, the land, and surrounding villages are as topical as they were nearly 80 years ago when Mr Evans was Rector of Milton. The map on the rear cover shows the ancient river bed: Today we continue to experience the extraction of sand from the alluvial deposits around Milton, as we have for several decades. The links with Collingtree through the churches and the communities are just as strong, and at the heart of Milton is the village school, as it was so many years ago. Some things though have changed. What would Mr Evans have thought of Hunsbury on the horizon, or the constant roar of motorway traffic? Milton must have been so much more intimate and rural in his day.

Edward Evans put his pen down long before Europe was plunged into the Second World War. He had proudly listed the Milton men who served in the Great War (1914-18), noting those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Accordingly it is fitting that we now record the names of those Miltonians who gave their lives in the 1939-45 War: Jack Digby, Harvey Folwell, Ronald Mallard, George Newcomb, William Oxley, George Pell, Leonard Proctor, Wyvil Raynsford and Bernard Rose.

Over the centuries Milton Church has been lovingly cared for by generations of parishioners. The ancient stones bear witness to the many structural changes that have been made as each generation has adapted the building for the use of our community. We must remember that our beautiful Church is not a museum but a house of prayer: a place to worship the living God. It is the focus of delight and anticipation at baptisms, of joyful celebration at weddings and of sadness at funerals. Down the centuries tens of thousands of Miltonians have come together to share the key moments of their lives within the walls of our Parish Church. I am pleased to say that, due to the work of the Churchwardens and Parochial Church Council over the centuries, the building is in an excellent state of repair. Recently we were encouraged to receive a letter from the Lord Bishop of Peterborough congratulating everyone who helps maintain Milton Church to such a high standard. However, there are always projects and regular repairs to undertake, so all proceeds from sales of this book will go towards the upkeep of the Parish Church of Holy Cross, Milton Malzor. We appreciate everyone's help in keeping the Church as a place of welcome to parish-

ioners and visitors today and for generations to come.

The idea for the reprint of this book came from Alistair Muir, and my thanks go to him for taking the project through to the final publication. The second debt of gratitude is to Gordon Wills who lives in The Manor House today with Avril Wills. He undertook with his colleagues at MCB University Press in Bradford to arrange the printing of this magnificent volume. Without that generous assistance we would not have this continuing record of one Northamptonshire village, now available once again.

Alistair Muir and Thomas Jones,
Churchwardens

Colin Neal,
Deputy Churchwarden

1924 PREFACE

THIS work was begun soon after a short but nearly fatal illness that laid me by the heels in the autumn of 1920. Forbidden much bodily exertion during the long period of convalescence that followed, I amused myself with compiling what was intended to be merely a little pamphlet on the history of our beautiful church at Milton for the benefit of my parishioners. I little dreamt, however, when I first put pen to paper for this purpose, that I had embarked on a task the absorbing interest of which would cause it to assume proportions beyond what I ever intended or even expected.

The book has been written, as it was at first undertaken, especially for the villagers of Milton, that they should know something of the history of their own church and parish, of the people who lived here long ago in some of the houses still standing, the conditions of their life and their varied occupations. As its title implies, I have tried to present this chronicle in a simple form, without taking too much for granted, my chief aim being to let it be understood by all.

A few words of explanation are required as to the contractions and other things unusual in modern print.

1. The inverted comma in, or at the end of, a word. This signifies the omission of a letter or

letters by contraction, such as “p’rill” for peril, “p’rish” for parish, “com’ons” for commons. I have adopted this form of denoting a contraction, but sometimes I have used the usual horizontal stroke.

2. The “j” in Roman numerals. When the letter “i” came at the end, it was written “j,” as “ij” for ii, “xvj” for xvi, “vij*d.*” for vii*d.* This method is still used by members of the medical profession in the writing of prescriptions.

3. In the money accounts, the letters “li” or “lb” stand for £. They, as well as our £, are shortened forms of the Latin *libra*, a pound.

4. Most people know that “ye” in old documents stands for “the,” the “y” being really a contracted “th.” In the same way, when “yt” is thus found in this book, in extracts from old writings, it stands for “that,” i.e. “th’t.”

Though it chiefly concerns Milton and Milton people, there is much in this book that may prove of more than local interest. I have been at some pains to verify every statement of fact by examining documents at the Record Office in Chancery Lane, the British Museum, the Lambeth Palace Library, the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and by correspondence with the sub-Librarian of the Vatican Library at Rome. Other documents consulted were: the Episcopal Registers of Lincoln and Peterborough, mediæval Wills, Deeds, etc., the local Enclosure Award and Map, the Milton Parish Registers and Vestry Minute Books.

Everyone from whom I sought help or advice has been most kind and sympathetic. I wish to record my thanks to Major C. A. Markham, F.S.A., for his valuable advice and the use of his published works elsewhere acknowledged ; to Beeby Thompson, Esq., F.G.S., F.C.S., of Northampton, for providing me with copious notes on the geology of Milton ; to the Very Reverend the Dean of Peterborough for the loan of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* ; to my old fellow-student, H. S. Kingsford, Esq., M.A., F.S.A., Assistant Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries ; to my neighbours, the Rev. H. Isham Longden, M.A., and the Rev. H. Liveing, M.A. ; to J. W. Hall, Esq., of Peterborough ; to Christopher Smythe, Esq., J.P., for permission to examine the old Deeds belonging to St. John's Hospital, Northampton, and to E. M. Alexander, Esq., of Mortimers, Milton, for allowing me to inspect Deeds and Wills of the Montgomery family. The late James Asplin, of the Manor, Milton, who had shown a great interest in the progress of this work, provided several valuable hints and very kindly allowed me to consult the Title Deeds of his manor. I also wish to thank the assistants at the Northampton Probate Registry for their unfailing courtesy and the patience with which they bore my frequent invasions of the Office. My task, too, was rendered all the easier through the help afforded me by my dear wife, whose skilful fingers tapped off on the typewriter page after page of my manuscript which, sometimes written very quickly and with numerous corrections, was in many places no easy

matter to read. Her aid and sympathy I acknowledge with deep gratitude.

For photographs of the church and St. Catherine's Chapel my thanks are due to my brother-in-law John L. Hopkins, Esq., and my nephew Harold Walter Manser, Esq. Of the other illustrations, Miss H. M. Asplin drew the delightful sketch of The Manor. Mr. E. M. Alexander contributed an old sketch of Milton House made before the road was lowered, and Major C. A. Markham, F.S.A., Editor of *Northamptonshire Notes and Queries*, very kindly allowed the use of the block for the illustration. Mr. J. C. Emery, of Milton, willingly lent for reproduction an old sketch, in his possession, of Milton Church as it was prior to 1856, and Mr. John A. Townsend, of Milton, drew for me his beautifully executed plan of our Wheel Window. I am grateful to them all for the help thus willingly afforded.

Without the aid of friends it would be impossible for me to publish a work of this description and I sincerely thank those who have helped me with generous subscriptions towards part of the very heavy expense.

The Preface, though appearing at the beginning of a book, is the last to be written, and I feel I cannot conclude better than with these words of thanks. Collecting and arranging the material for this chronicle has proved a source of delight and a labour of love spread over the greater part of the last three years, done at intervals because there were long periods when I was unable to give it the necessary time and

attention. I trust it may prove to be at least of some pleasure and interest to those who in these modern days live here and love their village. The work has grown by degrees, "line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little," with corrections and additions as fresh discoveries were made. Now at last it is done, and I look back in review on the incidents of the past and all those people, long since dead, of the Milton of other days who have somehow become so well known to me, and with a sigh of regret that for the present the time of interesting and exciting discoveries is over, I lay down my pen.

B. E. EVANS.

MILTON RECTORY, NORTHAMPTON, 1924.

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Rev. H. Isham Longden, M.A.
Northamptonshire Bells. Thomas North, F.S.A.
Numerous Books on Law, History and Architecture.

For many hints I am indebted to Dr. Cox's "How
to Write the History of a Parish."

The Story of Milton Malzor

CHAPTER I

THE SANDS OF A BURIED RIVER-BED

NEAR the third milestone that marks the journey south from Northampton to Towcester, and within the proverbial stone's throw of the highway, but so tucked away as to be almost hidden from the casual glance of the passer-by, stands the little village of Milton. Officially, and in ecclesiastical documents especially, the name is expanded to the old-time form of "Milton *alias* Middleton Malzor," but in modern parlance it is modestly content with "Milton, Northampton."

A stroll along its mazy, winding ways reveals many a subject worthy of the artist's brush or the camera, since it abounds in picturesque thatched cottages grouped in artistic disorder. The architect of an antiquarian turn of mind will find much to interest him here, while those who love to delve deep into the hidden past can retell Time's ancient story from the clay or sand-pits with the darker gravel beneath, and give full rein to their imagination.

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It may not be out of place here to say a little about the rocks on which the village stands, and the conformation of the district in prehistoric times, for the great sand deposits in and around, providing as they do one of the staple industries of the village, seem to demand some explanation.

I am indebted to that eminent geologist, Beeby Thompson, Esq., F.G.S., F.C.S., of Northampton, for information on which this chapter is based and for copious geological notes referring particularly to Milton, with which he most willingly supplied me. There is no better authority on the geology of Northamptonshire and the neighbouring counties, and those who desire further knowledge on this subject are referred to his masterly contribution to the Victoria History of Northamptonshire.

In the first place, it should be known that within the area occupied by Milton, three different geological formations may constitute the subsoil. Two of these are decidedly old, their age running into millions of years. The third formation is comparatively recent, perhaps less than a hundred thousand years old.

The oldest of these formations found at Milton is called the Middle Lias and it may be upwards of a hundred feet thick. It consists mainly of sandy clays, with beds of hard stone at intervals. Lying deep down as it does here, it is only the top beds of this formation that are ever seen at Milton, and then but rarely unless a well is being made, for these top beds of the Middle Lias yield water. The topmost bed is about four feet thick and is known as the Marlstone Rock-bed.

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Several springs in Milton rise from this, for instance, those in the meadow near the allotments, and the well at the "Greyhound."

Resting on the top of the Middle Lias are found here and there thin remnants of the lower beds of what is known as the Upper Lias. This formation which, if fully present, would probably be upwards of 180 feet thick, consists of clay. Parts of this thick clay-bed may be seen in the neighbouring brickyard and towards Gayton. Here are many fossils, those most frequently found being different kinds of ammonites, like curled snakes, the bullet-shaped belemnites, the pretty shells *Lucina bellona* and *Arca elegans*, and the dainty *Leda ovum*.

The most peculiar and interesting geological phenomenon, however, is that certain thick, moderately wide, sand-beds cut deeply into the geological formations which are referred to above. They take the form of an elongated, curved valley mainly on the east and south of Milton village. These sand-beds, which are from twenty to forty feet deep, with a width varying up to half a mile, can be traced for about eight miles on the south of the Nene Valley through the parishes of Heyford, Bugbrooke, Rothershorpe, Milton, Collingtree, Courteenhall and beyond to Preston Deanery; north-westward they can be traced as far as Hillmorton near Rugby. All the evidence goes to show that these sand-beds occupy an old river valley, as old as, possibly even older than, the present great valley of the Nene. The probable history of this deposit is sketched below :

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The last great events in the geological history of this country occurred during what is known as the Glacial Period. Through some cause or other the climate grew colder until at last great ice sheets, in the form of glaciers, gradually crept down from the north over Scotland, the north of England and almost to the present Thames Valley. The ice itself, and the great floods which preceded and followed it, very greatly changed the surface of the country, ploughing it up in some places and elsewhere piling up heaps of material on it, especially filling up old valleys with boulder clays. On the melting of the ice, the subsequent great floods were largely responsible for the size of the present river valleys and for their gravelly contents, but it is quite possible that these valleys do not in all cases coincide with earlier ones.

This great series of events occurred very many thousands of years ago, and lasted for some thousands of years. However, there is adequate reason for believing that so far as a succession of hills and valleys and stream courses is concerned, the country was much the same before that time as it is now. Quite a number of these old-time valleys are known that have been filled up with glacial material and never cut out again, so that they remain to this day as "buried valleys."

It is one of these buried river courses of old that we have in Milton, and we think we know when it was filled in with sand and why it was not reopened again by the river after the Glacial

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Period. Long before that time, how long, of course, we do not know, this prehistoric river ran by Milton along a course now marked by the sand-beds. Then came the period when the great ice sheet crept down from the north and stopped in its advance just before reaching Northamptonshire. The summer floods were greater and more prolonged than any person has ever seen in this country, and by these the river-bed was first deepened and widened, and afterwards filled in with sand. But how do we know these things? Well, only strong currents of water could have carried away all the finer clayey matter of a turbulent stream and have left a clean-washed, current-bedded sand and gravel such as we find. We know that the currents were strongest at first because of the steepness and even cliff-like character of the clay borders in some places, and the coarser material near the base. We know that the real glacier of the Glacial Period had not then reached Milton or Northamptonshire, because there are no "erratics" or distantly derived stones in the sand-bed, such as a glacier would inevitably bring, and demonstrably did bring later.

For the reasons above given, the sand deposit is sometimes spoken of as Pre-Glacial, but Preliminary-Glacial would appear to be a more appropriate term.

This Pre-Glacial valley and its stream evidently debouched into the Ouse Valley towards Olney. Then, after the sand had been deposited early in the Glacial Period, the ice sheet, in its

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advance, penetrated into Northamptonshire. The river at Milton became changed into a river of ice that slowly but irresistibly forced and rent its way along. Frozen in the ice were great lumps of clay with erratics in the form of carboniferous limestone and other material, and these were carried onwards by the sluggish current.

So far the Glacial Period has been spoken of as one, but actually there were milder intervals in it which caused a retreat of the glaciers through the melting of the ice. Thus it is that we find great deposits of boulder clay and other material from the glacier, about Salcey Forest and Yardley Chase, forming athwart the direction of our river and preventing it from continuing its way to the Ouse Valley. Naturally, the ice as it passed over the beds of sand deposited in the river at Milton must have carried off a good portion of the upper layers of sand. Though some few of the erratics that were deposited on the surface of the sand were left, to be found here and there at the present day, the rest of the boulder clay and stones was swept down stream by the great floods that followed on the melting of the ice during the milder intervals.

One such interval in particular was a very long one, probably lasting for some thousands of years, after which the great ice sheet crept down again from the north, and once more passed over Milton, lasting for some thousands of years. Again in its preliminary stages sand was probably deposited, and although the ice again carried away a great portion of the upper

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layers, there still remains a good residue. This long interval of warmth is generally known as the Inter-Glacial Period, and during it the district about Milton, in common with others, was doubtless the haunt of animals now totally extinct, or extinct so far as this country is concerned, such as the mammoth, rhinoceros, hippopotamus and others. Primitive man was also here, with other animals that still exist. A fossil tooth, the right lower canine of a horse, was found about ten feet below the surface in the railway sand-pit in Barn Lane just before these pages went to press. Remains of this period, known as the Inter-Glacial, have, however, rarely been discovered at Milton, but the neighbouring parish of Gayton has yielded them. In this connection, the following quotation from Baker's *Northamptonshire* (II, 271) under "Gayton," is interesting :

"Near the Banbury Lane wharf are rather extensive brick kilns. In those adjoining the wharf yard to the north is a diluvial bed from which my sister obtained in the winter of 1835 some interesting relics of mammalia—the humerus bone and fragments of the teeth of the Mastodon ; the tibia of a full-grown, and portions of a tooth of a young Elephant ; part of the tibia, teeth and tusks of the Hippopotamus ; parts of the skull, humerus, tibia, vertebræ and teeth of an Ox ; tibia and teeth of the Elk ; horn and prong and portions of ribs of the Deer."

No record has hitherto been made of the discovery of remains of contemporary animals below the sand-beds we have referred to as

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occurring at Milton and a number of other places, hence the following is of particular interest.

In the spring of 1920, curiosity led me to the sand-pit close to the brick kilns since erected by Mr. W. T. Asplin. At the bottom of the pit was the dark gravel that had evidently formed the bed of the ancient stream that flowed there before the Glacial Period. Working at the foot of the high cliff of sand was one of Mr. Asplin's men, Mr. George Ager. As I watched him loading a cart with sand, and mused on the strange creatures that long ago had roamed near the bed of that river, I asked him casually if he had ever found any fossil bones while digging there. I was in the very act of speaking when he struck his spade into the sand and turned up a bone. Our astonishment at the coincidence was great, especially as he assured me it was the first bone he had ever discovered while thus employed. When first brought to light it appeared as fresh as if just taken from the animal and was actually covered with a greasy film, but after exposure to the air it gradually became chalky and showed its character. Fortunately, it had lain on the dark gravel at the bottom of the deposit, having been there some time before the sand made its appearance.

I submitted the find to Dr. A. S. Woodward, F.R.S., Keeper of Geology at the Natural History Museum, S. Kensington, and he wrote in reply : " It is the metacarpal of a rather large horse, evidently fossil."

So this solitary fossil bone, found as it was on

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the surface of the river gravel beneath the sand deposit which, at that spot, was about thirty feet deep, indicates that horses existed in this district in those ancient days, about one hundred thousand years ago, or more.

The darker and coarser gravel-bed below the ordinary sand certainly points to the gravel being a real river deposit earlier than the infilling sand. If so, the bone that was found resting on it and beneath the sand may be considered Pre-Glacial, and consequently a very rare find.

Although the sand marks the course of this ancient river, it is not now one continuous bed. Various little brooks made their way across the sand and during the course of ages deepened their channels and formed valleys through atmospheric influences. Thus, wherever a break occurs in the line of sand, there will be found a little valley caused by a brook.

When the Glacial Period came to an end, possibly eighty thousand years ago, the geological formation of the district remained practically unchanged, to the great benefit of modern inhabitants in times of drought. Not only do the Marlstone beds yield a copious supply of beautiful water, but it must be remembered that the sand-beds rest upon the gravel strata above the clay. Now the sand being a water-bearing bed, and the clay impervious or water-tight, the gravel between consequently abounds in springs, so there is always plenty of water to be obtained in Milton. During the great drought of 1921, when neighbouring villages ran so short of water that it was actually sold by the bucket,

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whilst the citizens of Northampton were rationed as to their water supply, there was always plenty and to spare at Milton.

Centuries roll by and the dawn of history brings its light to guide us. The woad-stained Ancient Briton, of the tribe of the Coritani, drove his scythed chariot along the valley, and the Druids practised their mysterious rites in the dense forests that grew here. Then came the conquering Cæsar, and the tramp of the Roman legions echoed along Watling Street not far away. Afterwards we read of the Saxon Conquest and then the incursion of the Danes, when we find the district forming part of the Danelagh. At last, when William the Conqueror comes with his organising skill, the light of recorded information breaks upon us clearly and surely, so that we begin to pick up with more certainty the particular threads that, woven in the loom of Time, form the warp and woof of the story of Milton Malzor.