

November 2015 - Maidwell



Speed signs urged us to slow, but went unheeded by the tail end of hurricane Kate, gusting through Maidwell at forty miles an hour, buffeting our cars. It takes a certain amount of courage to turn out for a walk on a damp day, when filthy, sheets of linen pass for clouds.

Despite soft syllables, November is cursed by an assonant rhyme. It has become a month associated with all that is sombre: gunpowder plots, Remembrance Sunday, Armistice Day. Added to this, we now had Friday's grim news from Paris. Far safer to stay at home in a warm bed as the world lurches and pivots.

'Should I go?' I asked the 'Universal Decision Maker', for despite the wind, the weather was mild and the impending rain might just hold off, though on the other hand...

"Yes," came the answer.

unequivocal



Others 'booting up' in carpark had wrestled thoughts. Against such Stuart and Ruth, must delighted to see how souls had gathered for Stuart informed us that a occupied the site since listened, for once when known as the 'Goat Inn', exploded here 'cracking before wrecking a nearby



The Stag's Head with similar uncertainty, have been many intrepid their walk. public house had 1766. Warily, we this pub was a fireball very loud' house.

Apparently, in the deluge that followed furniture had floated down the main road.

Even before such clutter littered the street, during the reign of Henry VI, 'supervisores' had to be employed here to prevent dung being dumped on the main road. Thankfully, we discovered no such obstacles.



Chinese Whispers have toyed with the original spelling of 'Medewelle' that the Norman scribes scribbled down, meaning a meadow and a spring; to give us today, 'Maidwell' and quite a different image.

Prior to 1066, twenty people lived here under the oppression of Leofric, Earl of Mercia who squeezed £0.30 a year from them. Following his death, his wife owned part of the village. A little known woman named Lady Godiva.

Mainou the Breton succeeded these au naturel, pre-conquest thegns, and with a conqueror's ease rattled £2 a year from Medewellians' pockets. Hard times indeed.

However, by 1351 according to a bailiff's account, King Edward III described Maidwell as, 'a manorial administration that has thrown in the towel'. Lawlessness continued in 1440, when on an estreat roll, several Maidwell men were fined for 'committing violence with swords'.



Not only money and goodwill petered out in this village, a strata of limestone, from which the great colleges of Cambridge were built, reaches its end here. The naturalist John Morton, described how, "this Limestone is of a Clay-colour... as it lies in the earth; But it whitens in the Air, and in the Fire." However, instead of building fine colleges, Maidwellians pulverized and burnt their limestone; and lime from Maidwell was highly prized. What with the noise and smell from limekilns and dung dumped in the roads we can imagine this village's malodorous air, no wonder men took to the sword, and the Manchester stagecoach only stopped if its horses collapsed.

Maidwell's twelfth century church towered over us, and beyond this church we entered fields.



Men and women once reaped these fields. In 1453, a man hoeing and weeding barley was paid 3d per acre, but a woman 2d. Outsiders were paid even less. In 1383, Agnes Carter was paid 1d per day for reaping, whereas Sarra, the wife of John Whithed, received 3d. Today, little has changed, November marking when women effectively work the rest of the year for nothing.

According to legends, Maidwell's maids bathed in the stream at Midsummer. Perhaps eager to maintain this tradition, Maidwell's men did not marry them. Only one man in five ever chose a local bride. Instead hurrying off towards Draughton, and wading through streams, in search of love.



To save wet socks, on one November in 1784, 'foot planks and new rails' were placed over the brook

creating a shortcut. Stuart warned from frequent use this footbridge could be slippery.



In 1858 the railway line was built, with locals insisting on a footbridge so that they could still reach Draughton. The ornate bridge still stands, though lacking planks. Leaving us to imagine what fun it must have been for Maidwell's children, as smoke puthered, and the steam train blew its whistle below them. Maidwell was not important enough to merit a station, and the nearest was sited over a mile away.



Walking along this abandoned railway cutting, we had shelter from the wind; and could enjoy autumnal leaves near benches placed in memory of those who had once also walked this way.



Further along, we discovered mosaics, whose rare blues further brightened the scene.



At Lampport Crossing, a motorcyclist kindly stopped to allow us to cross. Upon gaining the other side we admired a totem pole, before continuing along our way, not daring to go much further; for even if the article that appeared in Northampton County Magazine's 1920's edition, had been written by a certain Mr. L.E.G. Puller, his words concerning the next village held a certain chill: 'Hanging Houghton... where it was the custom to hang beggars as soon as they were seen.'

Not wanting to be so mistaken, Stuart wisely guided us onto a farm track. Here we crossed the brook where perhaps Maidwell's midsummer maidens once took their yearly bath, and Maidwell's Perpetual Peeping Toms chortled.

As well as this forgotten practice, Maidwell has forgotten words. One which once filled a widow's heart with dread, as she scythed the fields we now



skirted, being the word: 'heriot'. For whenever a tenant died, tribute had to be paid out of the dead person's belongings. Unfortunately, Maidwell's lord was not content with a prized, whittled stick or the deceased well-worn

Another dreaded phrase was 'boon-work', when villagers had to do a day's work for the lord for free. In 1428, four Maidwell men were arraigned for failing to do such 'boon-work'.

Oblivious of feudal concerns, we climbed a slight incline to be rewarded by open views.



Sloe bushes abounded near Blueberry Farm. Walking along this lane was easier. The wind had dropped, and in the distance raptors wheeled in the air.

We passed where a two metre dam once held back Dale Pond's extensive waters; and where sadly in 1911, sailor William Johnson, whilst bathing, drowned.



Maidwell proved also unlucky for Andrew Motion who described Maidwell Hall unpoetically as 'a prison run by sadistic sociopaths.' Adding, 'The headmaster, 'beat us if we walked with our hands in our pockets, if we left the middle button on our jackets undone, if we walked on the grass by the statue standing on one leg...'

With buttons fastened and hands in gloves, walking correctly on two legs, we returned to the village, and towards the Sunday lunch that awaited us; mindful of our beverages, for in 1842, poor Annie

Gardner, 'was whipped at the post... for standing on her head whilst being drunk and sent out of the village forever.'

Whether or not any Shamblers left the pub in such a manner, I cannot say. With many thanks to Stuart and Ruth for blessing us with a walk to remember.

