

# 1600s in Marston

Below are documents showing life in Marston in the 1600s.

## **The Manor House**

The earliest history of the house now known as the Manor House is quite uncertain, but at least one book speaks of its 16th century character. This would have described the one house which is now in two — the Manor House and Cromwell's House. What seems definite is that, in the times of James I, a young man called Unton Croke came down from his family home at Studley Priory and married a Marston heiress. He made her house "grander", although a later writer called it "a heavy stone building, erected without much attention to elegance or regularity".

Croke was shrewd enough to support the Parliamentary cause during the Civil War, so that his house was the headquarters of General Fairfax during the siege of Oxford, was visited by Oliver Cromwell, and may have been used for the signing of the treaty following the siege. Unkton Croke was a lawyer and seems to have prospered during the Protectorate to such an extent that, after the Restoration, he was obliged, and able, to put up a bond of £4000 for the good behaviour of his Round-head son. If you look at the memorial to father and son on the northern side of the chancel in the church, you will see the change in fortune between the two generations.

The Croke family interest had ended by 1690, when the house was lived in by Thomas Rowney, another wealthy lawyer who, early in the 18th century, gave the land for the building of the Radcliffe Infirmary. The Thomas Rowneys, father and son, both lived for a short time in Marston, but their political and professional interests were Oxford based.

The Victoria County History states that Marston was a village "where no one lived who pretended to the rank of gentleman".

Both village and house must have fallen on hard times because it is said that in 1801 the house was used to house six pauper families, and subsequently prisoners of war from Napoleon's army are believed to have made carvings on the orchard wall which persist to this day.

In 1837, William Turner of Oxford painted a watercolour of the house, showing the 17th century facade with stone drip moulds, stone mullioned bay windows on the two floors and an attic floor with windows in the gable. But in 1843 there was a fire which must have seriously damaged the front of, what is now known as, the Manor House, leaving Cromwell's House next door relatively untouched. The family owning the house [Sim(m)s] apparently then quarrelled and it was divided in two, with a wall built splitting the garden behind the houses, giving each half one pillar of the 17th century gate which had probably given access to the formal garden at that time.

In the 20th century both houses have tended to have families enjoying long periods of ownership, and who have genuinely cared for the historic buildings with architectural features dating back many centuries.

Much of the history of this old house can only be guessed — as the editors usually say “more research is needed”

## **Mercurius Aulicus**

The Mercurius Aulicus was the first regular English Newspaper. Below is a selection of articles relating to the Civil War in Marston, Oxford and the surrounding area written between 1643 and 1645 (in the English of the time)

### **p2 - 14 January 1643**

Order from HM to Oxon and Berks to furnish accomadation for his Army, and against wast and spoyle of corne, hay and other provisions (Madan 1186)

### **p3 16 January 1643**

Came out in print an explanation of the agreement of December 21 re billeting HM's horses in Oxon (Madan 1187)

### **p14 21 March 1643**

Booty of oxen calves and othe cattel from adjoining country brought to Oxford.

### **P15 26 March 1643**

An alarm about beating up of his quarters about Cuddesdon, Wheatley, Islip, etc. by the rebels of Aylesbury and Henley.

### **P16 3 April 1643**

Proclamation of 31 March for preserving corne and grass about the citie of Oxford (Madan 1300)

### **p22 27 April 1643**

HM's soldiers came at last to Wallingford, and next day to Oxford, where and in the villages adjoining they were disposed of by HM to refresh themselves

### **p62 3 December 1643**

HM's proclamation (d. 1 December) re taking away horses, cattell or other goods from HM's subjects (Madan 1497). HM's proclamation against taking free quarter or billet in the counties of Oxford, Berks or Wilts (Madan 1498)

### **p74 26 May 1644**

HM's army passed throw Oxford and incamped on the North side of the towne on Saturday May 25.

HM's Horse at Islip having been abroad all night to observe the motion of the enemy, betook themselves unto their rest after breake of day – so supine and careless that they had neither scouts nor sentinells upon the severall Avenues of the Quarters.

They were assaulted at 6 a.m. By a Running Regiment of Sir S. Luke, many taken in bed, others surprised before they could recover their horses.

Rebels went away with 10 prisoners and 20 horses.

The Weekly Scout speaks of 50 gentlemen taken – probably these 50 were made 500 by the time the report was well spread in London.

### **P75 27 May 1644**

Proclamation of HM (signed and dated 24th). The County of Oxon to give contribution (acc. To proclamation of 14th) in Butter, Cheese or Bacon according to the market price (Madan 1645)

### **p76 29 May 1644**

Last night rebels under the command of the Earl of Essex made several flourishes in scattered parties within sight of Oxford and came over the Thames in whole bodies at Sandford Ferry, and this day marched within 2 miles of the Towne, with Drum and Colour towards Islip: some of them being so wanton as to leave the body, and come in parties towards the Workes.

While they were in the Bravado, a shot was made by Sir John Heydon from one of the Great Ordnance on Saint Clement's Bulwarkes, which fell so happily among them (though at a very great distance) that it killed a trooper, and hurt one of their horses, and put them in such a fright, they ran presently toward their body.

### **P29 2 June 1644**

Battles around Gosworth Bridge 'a commodius passage over River Cherwell'.

### **3 June 1644**

King at Woodstock orders withdrawal of troops on the Charwell back to the workes at Oxford [and then went on the 'Night Flight']

### **9 June 1644**

Proclamation to store corne and other victual for three months

### **p79 10 June 1644**

The Lords of the Privy Council set out an Order dated 8 June for present comfort and relief of such wounded soldiers as were under cure in or about the City of Oxford

### **p91 6 October 1644**

Sunday. This weeke had a sad beginning – at 2 o' Clock this afternoon a fire began on NW side of the City of Oxford, which burnt many of the Townes-men's houses..... God's providence directed this flame from the chiefest and best parts (for no church, college, hall, magazine or victuals or ammunition suffered any damage)... [Rebels of Abingdon suspected of having the fire started] also the Great Fagot monger [Major General Browne] had before promised it (if it lay in his power) telling several persons of quality that if he could not fire Oxford, he would burn as much as he could, and therefore next morning set fire to Botley Mill, which he burnt quite downe, lest the poore country folk should have bread to eat. And persisted ever since to destroy country villages – sweeping all away – poor people following to Abingdon, weeping and beggin a pittance to keep alive this winter. Browne told them 'if you have anything left, it is your best course to carry it away quickly, for Parliament commanded me to take all I can and to burn the rest before the King comes!

## **P103 4 June 1645**

"He took his leave this day of Oxford. 'Tis fit to tell you what he did there.

Sir Thomas came to besiege Oxford (you'd not believe it but we assure you 'tis true.) His scattered horse appeared near Cowley (May 19) passed over Bullington Greene to Marston with Horse and Foote (May 21) showing themselves on Heddington Hill towards Oxford, and began their siege. Made a Breastwork on E. side of Charwell, and over the River near Marston, dispatcht up a bridge, for which General Brown found wood, and Oliver Cromwell ironwork. You must not passe this bridge till you take notice of the day, for this very day 22 May (when Sir Thomas sat downe before us) is markt in Booker's Almanack, with this wholesona Apothegm 'Better to sit still than to rise and fall'....

May 26 Sir Thomas put over 4 regiments of Foote and 13 carriages at their new bridge over Charwell. He's Headquarter was at Marston, and Cromwell's at Witeham, and Brownes at Wolvercote....divers rebels were killed on the North and East parts of Oxford.

But the Governor seeing the rebels such quiet besiegers that they fought only with Perspective Glasses resolved to quicken them. At 1.a.m. On the Monday morning, he went himself with near 1000 Horse and Foot toward Headington Hill (a mile from Oxford) where the rebels kept a guard of Horse and Foot. While far advanced the rebels vapoured, the Governor sent colonel Walter, Sir Thos. Gardiner and Captain Grace toward Bullington Greene, who fetchet a compasse and fell on the rebels, so that of 137 musketeers, but one escaped and the rebel horse ran and left their Foot to be cut to pieces, if the Governor had not given quarter.

52 rebels killed, 92 prisoners with their captain, one Gibbons, 30 or 40 coves, stolen back again by the rebels, through negligence of the guard."

"The truth is the rebels had a most wretched time of it. So as Oliver Cromwell was weary of it, and packt away with a few troops towards Cambridge.

Sir Thomas resolved to conclude his mock siege and therefore for farewell sent a trumpeter to the Governor for exchange of some prisoners which were in Oxford Castle though (said Sir Thomas) 'tis not usuall to exchange prisoners in a siedege.

The Governor sent him thanks for his seasonable Intelligence for till then he never had any notice of a siedege, there being not one Alarme ever given to the Garrison, during all these fifteen days Sir Thomas lay near Oxford.

Sir Thomas made a bonfire [sic] of his new bridge and went quite away.

*[Mercurius Aulicus. A Diurnall communicating the Intelligence and Affaires of the Court to the Rest of the Kingdome. The earliest regular English Newspaper, edited (by Sir John Birkenhead) printed by H. Hall in Oxford for W. Webb. Offices in Oriel College. F. J. Varley. Blackwell 1948. Printed by Alden & Blackwell (Eton) Ltd, Eton College]*

## **The English Civil War in Marston**

On 29th October 1642, Charles I entered Oxford to make it his capital, and the city and the surrounding area became the nerve centre of the Royalist war effort.

Marston had its brief period at the centre of the final crisis of the war three years later, in the spring and early summer of 1646, when Parliament's New Model Army besieged the city. The village filled with Parliamentary soldiers as Sir Thomas Fairfax, Captain General, made his headquarters in the Mansion House, owned by Union Croke, a successful Parliamentarian lawyer, and effectively squire of the village. Part of this is now known as Cromwell's House, a typically inaccurate C19th label, for almost certainly Oliver Cromwell, Fairfax's second in command, was based at Wheatley, though he may well have ridden over at times to consult with Fairfax.

He was also likely to have been present when one of the Army chaplains, William Dell, preached a fiery sermon, probably from the pulpit of St. Nicholas Church, and later printed. On 7th June, 1996, the 350th anniversary, we re-enacted part of this sermon in St. Nicholas Church, though the congregation was spared the full two hours of it, and the Vicar skilfully reduced it to some 20 dramatic minutes.

By the spring of 1646, the King was in the hands of Parliament's allies the Scots. With no army or money, he sent orders to the remaining garrison in Oxford to negotiate the surrender. Negotiations took place in the Mansion House\*, so there must have been much coming and going of Fairfax and his leading officers, and the Royalists.

On 24th June the remains of the Royalist army marched peacefully out of the city and laid down their arms. No further damage was done in Oxford and the neighbouring area. Marston presumably emptied of soldiers as they marched in to occupy the city.

It is likely many of them were cavalry troopers – a stirrup of the correct date was found in the churchyard some 30 years ago, and is now in the Ashmolean. Another was found by Mr and Mrs Harley in the garden of their house called the Orchard – opposite the new building which replaces the village shop and Post office. They also found a small cache of robinett balls (a robinett was a small type of cannon) -perhaps lost by a careless trooper? – and many fragments of C17th tobacco pipes as well as later ones, mainly in the part of the garden where there used to be a pond, and, it is thought, a blacksmith's forge nearby.

Villagers – and soldiers – may have sat round the pond smoking while they waited for horses to be shod. Similar fragments or pipes are still sometimes dug up in other Marston gardens. We have one further glimpse of the effect of the war on this small village. At the time of the restoration of Charles II in 1660, a petition was submitted (amongst many others) for some redress for the suffering of wartime:

And the complainants showed that the town of Marston lay low in a very dirty waterish soil ...and in the time of the late wars, and by reason of the garrison of Oxford, the said fields and lands did for the most part lie fresh and fallow, and could not be husbanded to any prof it...and their houses were much ruined and decayed, and wasted, and their trees cut down and employed for the use of the said garrison, and a great part of their meadows spoiled by

the digging of the turfs for the making of bulwarks... and the complainants cattle plundered and taken away by the Parliament soldiers....

*Adapted from a talk given to the Civic Society in 2007 by Rosemary Kelly, published in Marston Times January 2008, Reprinted by kind permission Jan Sanders, Editor*

## **Croke Family**

The Croke family lived in Marston during the 16th and 17th centuries and lived in the Manor House and produced some prominent persons. Below is a collection of articles on the family, some of whom are buried at St Nicholas Church.

### **From: The Beauties of England and Wales... J.N. Brewer vol xii, pt ii. 1813 pp262-3**

Marston, a small village near Headington, was long a residence of the Croke family, who took an active part on the side of the parliament in the Civil War. Of this family was the careless and eccentric Charles Croke, who, indifferent to all parties, passed the prime of life wandering around the world, with little fortune, and with no pursuit. He published an account of these rambles, under the name of Rodolphus, in a book entitled "Youth's Inconstancy", printed in 1667.

The ancient manor house in which his father resided still remains, and is now partly used as a granary. The church is a pleasing Gothic building, constructed at different periods, but with a commendable uniformity of style. Near the porch are the mutilated fragments of a cross; and on the exterior of the yard, at the point where the several approaches to the church unite, are the more perfect remains of a second cross, with three ranges of kneeling places.

## **The Kingdom's Intelligencer**

The Kingdom's Intelligencer (28.6.1660) said of the 17th Horse, "That the soldiery may see affection that his Sacred Majesty hath for the army, he hath been pleased to do them so much honour as to take the regiment that was lately Colonel Unton Croke's, for his own which is now styled the Royal Regiment." It was taken into the King's army as the Royal Regiment of the Horse and is now the Royal Horse Guards (The Blues).

*[p306, Col. H.C.B. Rogers, Battles and Generals of the Civil Wars 1642-1651.] Seeley Service 1968*

## **Croke Church Monuments**

The Chief monument in ye church ov Merston, near Oxon, is yt of Sr Rich. Croke, (son of Unton Croke) where he is characteris'd as being a man of Great Virtues, & belov'd by King Charles I and II, & by all good men, & was universally lamented at his death. Wch is so false, that 'tis well known that for his Breach of ye Articles made to Penrudduck, after he had surrender'd himself up to him, upon the Defeat of his Enterprise in behalf of the king (then in

Exile) at Salisbury, as that he should have his Life &c., he, the said Croke, was made a Serjeant by Oliver, and became so universally hated, for yr treacherous Action, & several other most notorious Instances of Knavery, that no one could give him, of his son Unton Croke, who was as bad, a good Worde; tho' 'tis acknowledged yt he was a very fair spoken man, & by his insinuating way of Behaviour got a large Estate, wch however never prosper'd.  
[CEDoble ed. *Hearne's Collections i (1705-7) OHS (1884), 82*

## Sarjeant-at-Law

I have said somewhere that Unton Croke of Marston was made Sarjeant-at-Law for the perfidious service his son did at Salisbury against the Cavellers in March 1654-5, which is true for he was made serjeant in June 1655 (22nd). Sir Richard Croke, borther of Colenel Unton Croke also Serjeant-at-Law, 20 years Recorder of Oxford d. 15 Sept. 1683.

Woods comments on Marston Church epitaph

(1) utrique Carolo dilectissimus (1) 'Charles I knew him not'

(2) religione vere Catholicae semper devotissimus (2) 'he alwaies ran with the times and his religion was as venal as his tongue'

(3) toti humano generi amicabilis (3) '

he was hated by many for his smooth, false, and flattering tongue.'

The said Sir Richard Croke, knight, married Elizabeth, daughter of Martin Wright, sometime alderman and goldsmith of Oxon; which Elizabeth, dying 27 March 1683 was buried in St Martin's church, Oxon, near the grave of her father. The had issue-

(1) Wright Croke, sometime of Lync. Coll. and afterwards barrister of the Inner Temple. He lives at Marston and in the later end of 1684 he then being about 26 of age married his maid ??? Croney, daughter of John Croney of St Micheals Parish, Oxon, chandler

(2) Charles Croke, lately of Linc. Coll., now of the Inner Temple.

[Wood: *Life and Times, i.196*]

## Shark and Coward

1684 September 4 Wright Croke or Merston, eldest son to Sir Richard Croke, was posted up for a shark and a coward in Day's coffey house [entered Lincoln College 26 July 1675 age 17. He has a set of Latin Verses '

*Landes Lingual Saxonicae' in Theatri Oxon Encaenia, Oxon 1677] [ibid iii 108]*

## Problems of the Past in Marston

The Marston countryside between the River Cherwell and Headington has changed much over the last three hundred years. But some fields remain with their hedge boundaries still marking the change in farming methods brought about by enclosures since the post-war Agreement made in 1655 during Cromwell's Commonwealth and ratified in 1661 by the Court

of Chancery after the Restoration. Here is an extract from the Agreement which describes the sorry conditions the farming community of Marston were suffering. (The English has been slightly modernized).

“(And the Complaynants shewed that) the Town of Marston lay low, in a very dirty and waterish heavy soil, upon the River of Charwell very near to the walls of the City of Oxon. and were far more fit and convenient for pasture than tillage; and that in the time of the late wars and by reason of the Garrison of Oxford the said fields and lands did for the most part lie fresh and fallow and could not be manured and husbanded to any profit of the Complainants; and their houses were much ruined, decayed and wasted and their trees cut down and employed for the use of the said Garrison and great part of their meadows were spoiled by digging of turfs for making the bulwarks in and about the said Garrison; and the Complaynants cattle plundered and taken away by the Parliamentary soldiers and forces, so that when the wars ended in 1646 ... land could not be reduced to the former condition and goodness without a present greater charge than they were able to bear... .”

And so, Enclosure was agreed and done, with surveying and hedging and ditching, and the preservation of “all Public ways and passages which were and had been used and enjoyed through the same for all the king’s people”.

*Alun T. Jones, 28 February 2008*

## **Thomas Palfreman**

10 Dec 1666 Thomas Palfreman, MA of CCC drowned in Charwell by King’s Mill coming from Merston (where he had been eating and drinking most of the day) at 12 a clock at night... Not found till March 5 following and the same of following day buried in St Clements chancel by the fellows of CCC.

*[ibid ii.94]*

## **Dispute over Road Repairs 1681**

Indictments Indictments Oxfordshire Trinity Sessions 1681

Marston Road from Marston to Oxford out of repair for three furlongs 13 yards wide. The inhabitants of Marston should repair it. [p28]

Epiphany 1681 1. Inhabitants of Marston, for a highway out of repair, being three furlongs in length of the road from Marston to Oxford, 10 yards wide, called Marston Lane. [p.59]

Recognizance Epiphany 1681 1. viii Wright Crook of Marston in £40, before Gilbert Ironside, Vice-Chancellor. For his appearance at the next sessions Noted: Non solutum comparuit et exoneratur [p58]

Petty Jury Panel for Marston highway case (see 1. and 2. above):

- Frank Page of Wheatley
- Thomas Cox of Garsington
- Nicholas Hasey of Wheatley
- Edward Nash of Arncott
- Thomas Caplin of Piddington
- John Stevens of the same
- William Robbinson of Cassington
- John Mortimore of Beckley
- John Hinton Forest Hill
- William Webb of Burcott
- William Almont of Burcott
- Robert Day of Burcott

## **Charles Darling**

1681 3 October ...early in the morning died my cousin Charles Darling at Merston near Oxford in the church of which parish he was burying on 4th. He was sick about a week.

*[ibid ii 556]*

## **Marston Road 1682**

1682 [in July and August] was the highway from neare the end of St Clements Church to the way leading to Marston pitched with peebles and hard stone, for two carts on breast – the middle part with peebles and the two collateralls or flankerswith hard white stone. Begun and carried on by Dr John Lamphire with a collection of money. The workmen were in pitiching it, July, August, September and part of October; a contribution amongst scholars and some townsmen.

*[ibid iii25]*

## **Wife of Hunt 1686**

1686 24 March ... Wife of ... Hunt of Marston heare Oxon was brought to bed at one birth of two sons and two daughters, living, but died soon after. They were borne early in the morning, March 24; and the next day, being Holyday, divers from Oxford went to see them.

## **Robert Day of Burcott**

Frank Syms and Mark Bolt of Marston were on the panel (but not sworn) in the case of John Guy of Hook Norton (assault on Thomas Wise).

Richard Smith of Marston sworn to Petty Jury in the case of John Miles (of Witney, labourer, 'for using the mistery of a fuller without apprenticeship')

Trinity Sessions 1688

Joseph Hew of Marston (with William Hatton of St Clements) sworn to Grand Jury for Bullindon Hundred.

## **Journey to Marston**

Our next journey will be out at the eastern entrance of Oxford for the following places: MARSTON, THE RADCLIFF LUNATIC ASYLUM, JOE PULLEN'S TREE, HEADINGTON, BARTON AND FOREST HILL

MARSTON is about one mile from Oxford, and a road leads directly to it proceeding in a northerly direction from the Wycombe Road. The walk to Marston is exceedingly pleasant, agreeably diversified by scenery of a quiet nature, though unrelieved by rising ground. The church is dedicated to St Nicholas and in the chancel are several members of the Croke family: their ancient seat is yet remaining; it was made use of in May 1646, in the treaty for the surrender of Oxford.

Returning to London Road, and about a hundred yards from the road to Marston, is a lane which brings the traveller to the Radcliff Lunatic Asylum.

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## **John Dewer**

John Dewer of Marston, aged 35...served apprenticeship nine years to his father, worked on the Sheldonian, top storey of New College quadrangle. *ibid.*, 65 Witnessed will of Mary Smith, sister of Arthur Frogley. She died at Marston in 1696.

*ibid.*, 53 n. 20