

Geography of Marston

Below is a collection of articles broadly related to the physical and human geography and development of Old Marston.

Geology

The name "Marston" originates from the Anglo-Saxon word "Merstun" which roughly translates as "Marsh Town". Ditching and draining of the land from late Saxon times have enabled the settlers to cultivate the land.

Marston is situated upon a patch of river gravels, which in ancient times was part of the river terrace of the River Thames. The narrow strip of gravel follows the route of Mill Lane and Oxford Road, which is slightly higher than the surrounding fields. The gravel provides a good foundation to build upon and was a good source of drinking water.

Surrounding the gravels are the heavy soils of Oxford Clay which have been used primarily for farming. The clay is not easy to build on as it can be very sticky and intractable in wet weather and dries and cracks in dry weather. Although in recent times building has taken place upon the clay areas, such as the extensions to Elsfeld Road.

At the edge of the clay it slopes down to the alluvial flood plain of the river valley. The Victoria Arms public house is situated at the edge of the clay overlooking the floodplain and is safe from flooding.

"Marston: A Case for Conservation" Occasional Papers No. 6 by Roger France, Published by Oxford Preservation Trust, Oxford 1988

A river may divide to flow round an obstacle: one branch will be 'stronger' than the other. Old channels will contain gravel. Old Marston stands on an island between two alluvium-filled channels.

[see Arkell Geology of Oxford pp 212-3]

Changing Land Use of Old 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, the 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”.

Written by Alun Jones.

In the 1900s the New Marston habitation was around the William Street area with farms etc. occupying the land along the Marston Road. Marston was once part of the ‘Manor of Headington’.

Marston did not have ‘gentry’ and was occupied by farmers, labourers, artisans concerned with farming, and other craftsmen.

The Turneys who lived in Bishops Farm, 41 Oxford Road, had connections with Grange Farm which now has another name, almost opposite. Mr Turney used to go to a farm in Kidlington and others in Woodstock according to his son Alan.

One would have to examine the deeds of the farms in the Marston area of around the 1800 and 1900’s to discover old names if any. There was a mill in Marston after which Mill Lane is named. At the end of the Lane is a Sescut Farm. The records of the old elementary school, now Church Hall, may help. Pupils came from Elsfield and Woodeaton to this school.

A girl called Sheila Miller, part of a traveller/fair family came to Mill Lane every winter for some years around 1940. Sheila’s surname was said to have been adopted from relatives who were millers.

Topographical Dictionary of England 1845

MARSTON (St. Nicholas), a parish, in the union of Headington, hundred of Bullingdon, county of Oxford, 1 3/4 mile NNE from Oxford; containing 396 inhabitants. In the Civil War in the reign of Charles I, the treaty for the surrender of Oxford to the Parliamentarians, was negotiated here, in the ancient mansion-house of the family of Croke, now converted into a farmhouse.

The parish comprises 1177 acres, of which 220 are arable, 950 pasture and 7 woodland; the meadows on the banks of the River Cherwell are luxuriantly rich.

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[S. Lewis, Topographical Dictionary of England (1845) (5th ed.)]

A Guide to the Architectural Antiquities in the Neighbourhood of Oxford 1846

Marston Church = see 'A Guide to the Architectural Antiquities in the Neighbourhood of Oxford', Oxford Society for Promoting the Study of Gothic Architecture. Parker, Oxford 1846 [City Ref L]

pp 185-188 ill.: ground plan; Sculpture over E. Window; dripstone termination; chancel door; arch south of Nave.

Last Sentence:

CROSSES: In the church-yard there was formerly a cross, which was taken down to mend the wall with in the year 1830; and in the village another cross, which was used about the same period to mend the roads with!

p188 (re Croke's house) This house was pulled down in 1843

On the Effects of Elevation and Floods on Health 1866

Marston, which is about a quarter of a mile from the River Cherwell is not much above the flood level and has more pools and stagnant water in it than I believe can be found in any other village in the neighbourhood. Annual deaths 1 in 53.2 persons. Average age 30 years 9 months. "The healthful condition of the lowest and dampest compared with those that are higher and dryer. The average death rate is 16% less in the valley than on the hills and the average life 7% in favour of these dampest and least exposed localities."

(p21, [G. A. Powell (assistant in Oxford Museum, author of essay on Beneficent Distribution of Sense of Pain) Williams and Norgate 1866. Printed by Henry Alden, printer, Cornmarket

Street, Oxford) 'On the Effects of Elevation and Floods on Health: City Ref. Oxford Pamphlets 5-17

Pamphlets relating to the Public Health of Oxford L378.42PAM, 1849 – only Cholera death in damp valleys recorded was in Marston

Planning: Marston 1931

This is one of three villages – Marston, Woodeaton and Elsfield – which, lying to the east of Oxford and separated from its northern residential area of the Cherwell River, are somewhat inaccessible. With improved communication from Oxford, possibly by a new road from the Banbury Road, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Holywell Park and crossing the Cherwell, these three charming and comparatively unspoiled agricultural villages might form the nuclei for well-controlled residential development in the neighbourhood. Marston, the largest of the three, can hardly be expected long to escape an inundation of working-class houses from the near neighbourhood of Headington with which it is presently connected. Marston may also form one day an outpost of cottages to an important offshoot of buildings (possibly cottages) which may shortly discover the advantageous situation of the stretch of elevated land so near to Oxford, which lies in its vicinity. The new by-pass road will pass, as planned, north of Marston.

[Regional Survey, 1931, p48 – {Oxfordshire: a regional survey. Regional Planning Report: The Earl of Mayo, S. D. Adshead, Patrick Abercrombie OUP 1931}]

County Books 1945

East of the city worse things were to happen. Early in the twentieth century, in his modest bicycle shop, William Morris, patching tyres and straightening handlebars, dreamed of the combustion engine, and now homes for the workers, gimcrack in shed-speckled gardens, engulf the lyric slopes of Shotover, Headington's passionate village, mud-bound Marston and Littlemore's road to the hills.

[p. 97] (Oxfordshire. Joanna Cannon. The County Books) Robert Hale Ltd n.d. but just post WW2.

Vision of England 1949

Marston might please the 'Waterstock, Wytham and Waterperry' poet. There is a ferry over the Cherwell; a stubborn hold on the Oxfordshire village sense in some charming stone, thatch, and even pink wash; and the nearness to Oxford. But I think it is too near. Summertown and an arterial road and Headington hedge it about too closely. It would be easy to be there 'student and don', but hardly, I fear, 'countryman'. Still, it is, perhaps, more fortunate than any other village so close to the city.

[p89, 'Vision of England', Reginald Turnor. Elek 1949]

Shell Guide to Oxfordshire 1953

Marston (11), overpowering development outside Oxford. Village spread. The church has a lot of its old woodwork.

(Shell Guide to Oxfordshire. John Piper. Faber 1953)

James Morris 1965

The church at Old Marston is famous for its bell-ringing and has a delightful new bell loft of polish oak.

The parish church at Old Marston is a well-known centre of bell-ringing. In 1958 its ringers rang a world record peal of doubles, 12600 changes in 6 hours 20 minutes beating a record established in 1775, and if you look at the board in the belfry you will find that the methods they have initiated there include the Magdalen Bob, the Wadham Bob, the Nuffield Bob, and even one named for St. Frideswide. (p131 Morris)

The Victoria Arms at Marston Ferry, with a nice peeling inn-sign of the young queen, is a popular place to punt for breakfast on May morning.

(p137) [James Morris, Oxford, Faber 1965]

Listed Buildings of Old Marston

Below is a list of some of the houses in Old Marston which have listed status. Information courtesy of Stephanie Jenkins – more information can be found at www.headington.org.uk

- **Long Farmhouse**, 10 & 12 Elsfield Road, Old Marston: Long Farmhouse is Grade I listed (ref. 1485/139). It dates from the early eighteenth century, and is built from limestone rubble. It has a plain-tile roof, and rebuilt stone stacks. The porch dates from the nineteenth century. The farmhouse has been divided into two houses numbered 10 and 12 Elsfield Road.
- **The Three Horseshoes**, 9 Oxford Road, Old Marston The Three Horseshoes pub, now a private house, is Grade II listed (ref. 1485/146). It dates from the mid- to late eighteenth century. It is built of limestone rubble, and has a plain-tile roof with brick gable stacks. It stands at right-angles to the White Hart behind. Until 1735 the building was a blacksmith's attached to a farmhouse, which explains its name. At the time of the 1901 census the publican was Richard Gurden (46). He lived at the Three Horseshoes with his wife Mary and their six children: Ethel (13), Margarata (12), Richard (9), May (6), William (4), and Hester (1). Also living with them were James's father, a retired publican of 79, and his sister Emily (53). Some landlords of the Three Horseshoes: • 1847, 1852, 1854: William Steel (also carpenter & wheelwright) • 1863: Hannah Steel • 1869: John Collingridge • 1876: Thomas Collingridge • 1883: Mrs

Sarah Collingridge • 1891, 1901: Richard Gurden • 1914: William Matthews • 1935: Harry Willis • 1947: Albert Newell Bishop's Farm, 41 Oxford Road, Old Marston

- **Bishop's Farm** is Grade II listed (ref. 1485/149). It dates from the early eighteenth century, and is built of limestone rubble, with a plain-tile roof. The house was restored in 1980, and won an award from the Oxford Preservation Trust. Some occupants of Bishop's Farm • 1914: Harry Joseph Nutt, a tailor • 1928: John William Buck, cycle dealer • 1935, 1943: Edwin Hubert Haynes • 1958: Gordon H. Davies and Martin Henderson
- **Court Place**, 33 Oxford Road, Old Marston Court Place is Grade II listed (ref. 1485/148). This former farmhouse dates from the early sixteenth century, and it was enlarged in the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century, and remodelled in about 1880. It is built of limestone rubble on a T-plan. On 12 March 1483 (Bridgwater Deed 115) Hugh Shurley of Sandford and John Bireton of Abingdon enfeoffed William Hye of Marston and his wife Elizabeth in a messuage and virgate of land in Marston called "le Courtplace" and a water-mill (all of which they lately had of the feoffment of William Haye). The farm was owned by Brasenose College from about 1500 to 1956, and a manorial court was held in the house. Important documents were signed "at the Court Place" in Marston at the time of the Wars of the Roses. At the time of the 1881 census the farmhouse was occupied by Henry W. Boughton, an unmarried man of 30, described as a farmer of 160 acres employing five men, three women, and two boys. He was born in Stanton St John, and was living in this farmhouse with his widowed mother, Fanny Boughton, and his 13-year-old London-born niece, Alice Wymark. He was still listed in directories as a farmer here in 1913, but the 1901 census shows a different family living in the house: George Cross (35), a farmer and dairyman, with wife Clara and their four children: George (9), Clara (7), Aubrey (5), and Ernest (2). Some other occupants: 1935, 1943: Charles R. Broughton, farmer 1947: John West was a dairy farmer at both Court Place and Grange farms 1958: Hugh Cardwell, D.Ph
- **Hill Farmhouse**, Mill Lane, Old Marston. Hill Farmhouse is Grade II listed (ref. 1485/145). It has a date-stone of 1767, and was extended in the late eighteenth century. It is built of limestone rubble, with a stone-slate roof with brick gable stacks. It is still a working farm, in the part of Old Marston now cut off by the bypass. Farmers at Hill Farm • Hubert Haynes from the early 1900s to after 1943 • Edward Haynes, 1947 • Kenneth Colman, 1958, 1964, 1976

- **White Hart public house**, 11 Oxford Road, Old Marston. The White Hart, now housing, is Grade II listed (ref. 1485/147). It dates from the mid- to late seventeenth century, and is built of limestone rubble with a plain-tile roof. The bay on the far left was added later, probably in the eighteenth century. The building was originally a house belonging to members of the Croke family. It was converted into a pub in 1801, and was owned by Morrell's. At the time of the 1881 census Alfred Evans (42) who was living at the White Hart was described as a dairyman as well as a publican. With him were his wife Clara, his daughters Emily (17) and Lucy (15), and his son Arthur (15). Alfred (now described as a farmer and publican) was still at the pub twenty years later in 1901. Still living with Alfred and his wife was their son Arthur with his wife and three children, and they were also looking after another two of their grandchildren. Arthur eventually took over the pub. The White Hart ceased to be a pub in 2003 and has been converted into flats, with more flats built in its two large fields behind. Some landlords of the White Hart • 1800: Joseph Bleay • 1847: William Mills • 1852: Thomas Castle • 1854: Edward Capel (also coal dealer) • 1863: Mrs Hannah Evans • 1869, 1876: Mrs Anne Evans • 1881, 1883, 1901, 1913: Alfred Evans • 1914: Arthur Evans • 1928, 1935: Arthur Hayle • 1943, 1947, 1971: Lowden E.H. Hayle • 1974–1984: L.F. Long • 1984–1987: J. C. Pearce • 1987–1990: P. A. Lafford • 1990–1996: B. King • 1996: P. & T. Hargreaves • 1996–1998+: T. Clayton
- **Gate piers in back gardens of 15 & 17 Mill Lane**, Old Marston. A pair of gate piers dating from the mid- to late seventeenth century survive in the back gardens of the Manor House (15 Mill Lane) and Cromwell's house (17 Mill Lane). They are Grade II listed (ref. 1485/143 and 1485/144 respectively). The piers are built of limestone, and have ball finials. They were probably built as the entrance to a walled garden when the two houses were one, probably by Unton Croke (d.1670) or his son. Remains of the walled garden also survive. The Orchard, 20 Oxford Road, Old Marston.
- **The Orchard** is Grade II listed (ref. 1485/152). It dates from the early eighteenth century, and is built of limestone rubble. The farmyard was where Orchard Cottage at 18 Oxford Road now stands. The house was inherited from John Sayer, a butler of Balliol College, by James Langford. It then passed to Ann Langford, who sold it to William Loder in 1813. On Loder's death in 1818 it passed to his widow, Mary, who sold it to the Marston farmer, Richard Rippington. His widow inherited it in 1841, and she left it to her daughter, Mrs Mary Cannon, wife of the farmer William Cannon. In 1876 Mary Cannon left it to her daughter, another Mary, who had married John Honour, and the couple were living in the house at the time of the 1881 census. John was then described as a 39-year-old builder who employed six men and one boy, and the couple had seven children: Mary (13), Helen (11), John (9), Alice (6), Charles (4),

Margarete (2), and Henry (1). Also living with them was Mary's sister, Ann Cannon, an unmarried landowner of 34. The Orchard ceased to be a farm in the late nineteenth century. John Honour was still living at the Orchard in 1913, and a Mrs Honour lived here in 1935 and 1947. Some other occupants of the Orchard: • 1958: John Laker Harley (1911–1990), Botanist.

- **Cross Farmhouse**, 2 Oxford Road, Old Marston. Cross Farmhouse is Grade II listed (ref. 1485/151). It dates from the early seventeenth century, and is built of limestone rubble. The blind bay on the left is part of a former barn range, demolished in 1964. At the end of the eighteenth century the farm was owned by Thomas Rowney of Oxford, followed by his son, and it then passed to a family named Phillott. The Rippington family owned it in the nineteenth century, farming it themselves until 1885. The Haynes family then took over as tenant farmers, first Richard Haynes, and then his son Edwin in 1887. Edwin, at the age of 52, can be seen living here at the time of the 1901 census with his wife Helen and their four children. Walter (24, an ironmonger's assistant), Hubert (21, a worker on the farm), Charles (17, a cabinet maker's assistant), and Raymund (14). Edwin Haynes bought the farm from the Rippingtons in 1920. Charles Henry Haynes farmed here in 1935 and Raymund Haynes from at least 1943 to 1964.
- **Primrose Cottage**, 65 Oxford Road, Old Marston. Primrose Cottage is Grade II listed (ref. 1485/150). It dates partly from the mid- to late seventeenth century, and partly from about 1900, and is built of limestone rubble with timber lintels, with a thatched and old plain-tile roof. No. 63 was one-up, one-down cottage, with an outside wash-house at the rear adapted as a kitchen and toilet, and was occupied until about 1969 by Bert Ward and his wife.
- **Halford House**, 8 Boults Lane, Old Marston. Halford House is Grade II listed (ref. 1485/131). This former farmhouse dates from the mid- to late seventeenth century. It is built of limestone rubble, with a concrete plain-tile roof and brick gable stacks. Former occupants: • 1935, 1937: John Matthews • 1958: D.L. West • 1964: Henry A. Osmaston • 1976: John Willoughby Tarleton Allen (1904–1979), Colonial educationist and Swahili scholar.
- **Church Farmhouse**, Church Lane, Old Marston. Church Farmhouse is Grade II listed (ref. 1485/132). It dates from the early eighteenth century, or possibly earlier, and is built of limestone rubble, with an old plain-tile roof and brick stacks. Church Farm belonged to the Loder family in the eighteenth and first part of the nineteenth century. The Haynes family owned the farm from the later nineteenth century until

about 1980. Albert Haynes is listed as a dairy farmer here in 1935 and simply as a farmer in 1947. Harold . Haynes farmed here in 1976.

- **Church of St Nicholas**, Elsfield Road, Old Marston. The Church of St Nicholas is Grade I listed (ref. 1485/134). Parts of the original thirteenth-century church remain, but the exterior dates from the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The chancel arch (above and below) has traces of medieval wall-painting. Below is an alabaster wall monument to the family of Sir Richard Croke (died 1683), son of Unton Croke. The arms at the top show Croke, quarterly, on the fesse, a label, on a martlet, sable: these denote the eldest son of a fourth son. The church has a hagioscope or squint (below) to allow members of the congregation sitting in the south aisle to see the altar.
- **Alan Court**, 13 Mill Lane, Old Marston. Alan Court (formerly Home Farm) at 13 Mill Lane is Grade II listed (ref. 1485/140). It dates from the early to mid-seventeenth century, and was extended in about 1800 and remodelled around 1900. It is built of limestone rubble, and has an artificial stone-slate roof. On the right is an attached barn or outbuilding. It is now a private house, but was formerly the farmhouse for the large dwelling known as the Manor House that stood on the site of 15 Mill Lane and 17 Mill Lane. At the time of the 1901 census, this house was occupied by Francis Haynes, the 38-year-old farmer of Home Farm, and his wife Mary. Their eldest son, Francis, was already working on the farm at the age of 14, and they had three younger children still at school: Sidney (11), Cecilia (7), and Bernard (5). When the house was owned by Mrs Wood in the mid-twentieth century, May dancing was performed on the large circular lawn every year. Some other occupants of Alan Court: • 1943, 1947, 1958: Mrs E. F. Wood.
- **Manor House**, 15 Mill Lane, Old Marston. The Manor House at 15 Mill Lane, together with its front wall, is Grade II listed (ref. 1485/141). In 1617 Unton Croke married Anne Hoare and through her inherited land in Marston. He rebuilt the house that stood on the site of the present 15 and 17 Mill Lane, and it became known as the Mansion House. It was used as Fairfax's headquarters during the siege of Oxford in 1645, and the Treaty for the Surrender of Oxford was signed here in 1646. Much of the western section (off the picture on the left) survives as Cromwell House, but the part of the house to the east was destroyed by fire in the mid-eighteenth century and in 1843 it was rebuilt in its present form as shown above and named the Manor House. Some later occupants of the Manor House: • 1883, 1891: Mrs Sims • 1907: Robert Cave • 1914: Robert Cave and Miss Cave • 1915: Miss Cave • By 1928 to after 1964: Arthur Henry Vernede.