

Gough Walks no.3

A yard of duffers.....



Yorton and Broughton, in Gough's day, were outside the Parish of Myddle. Today the parish extends to within a few metres of the main Shrewsbury to Crewe railway line, (although the Station itself is still outside the parish boundary), and so on this walk we follow Gough from his place of schooling, to places where he had houses, and some that he physically had moved.

Yorton Station was much improved in the early years of the last century, to cater for the sister of a gentleman who lived in Shotton Hall, in Harmer Hill. The Hall, in Gough's day, was owned by a William Watkins, and remained in that family until 1919 when it was acquired by the Marquis of Cambridge. His sister was quite well known, at the time, after all, she was the Queen.

Yorton Station had a new waiting room added, so Queen Mary could await the Royal Train at her ease.

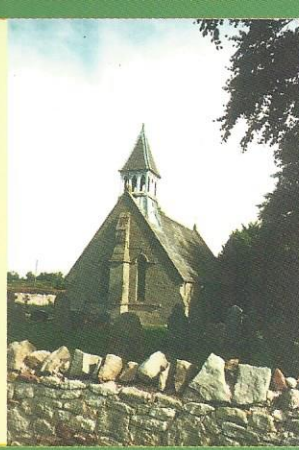


But now to the duffers. As you go past the Jubilee tree at Broughton, and after the houses, there is a bend in the road. A field starts here (on the left hand side), and continues almost as far as the present day church. This field, in Gough's Day, was known as Duffers Yard, which, according to Foxall in his Book of Shropshire Field Names, is a corruption of Dovehouse Yard, reflecting the importance of doves and pigeons as a food source.

Gough loved to be able to show off his wide general knowledge, and so we can say, today, that Yorton was simply a form of 'Overton', whilst Broughton got it's name from a 'Burgh' or castle. Much of Gough's own learning took place in Broughton, under the watchful eye of the Rector, Mr Sugar. The school was probably in the old church, long since demolished, but at the end of the walk you will have the chance to go and see where Richard proved he was neither a duffer nor a dunce!

As we walk past the new Broughton Church, it is perhaps worth thinking about just how many buildings in Gough's day were moved. This church was built new, after the older one was demolished in 1858, but other buildings fared better: The Red Lion, was moved from by the "Lich gate", the corner cottage at Marten was moved there by Andrew Acherley from near his barns. The Meare House (Moss Farm) was moved when Haremeare was drained and the "Cheife house" which we will pass on this walk was moved twice.

These accounts are well documented in Madge Moran's article "Re-erecting Houses in Shropshire in the Late Seventeenth Century" (Royal Archaeological Inst. 1989).



Gough loved to quote, whether ancient Latin, or people of his own lifetime. For example "This makes me remember the saying of that famouse Dr. Goddard, who when I was a youth was much conversant and had great practice in this country. Hee gave that souveraine potion called Goddard's dropps. Hee was used to say that hee was confident that many English people were buryed alive; for if they had been kept in theire warme bedds for forty-eight houres many of them would have recovered."

Professor David Hey, to whom we must all give thanks, in his notes on Gough's text, explained that this Goddard (1617 - 75) was Gresham Professor of Physic and inventor of many secret remedies. 'Goddards drops' were reputed to consist of a preparation of hartshorn (ammonia), together with such bizarre irrelevancies as the skull of a person hanged or a dried viper!

What prompted Gough's reminiscence on this occasion was the strange tale of Richard Owen, who lived at the Goddens, where our walk takes us today.

" This Richard Owen was seized with a violent fever which in a few dayes deprived him of his reason and understanding butt not of his speech, soe that hee talked anything that came in his fancy and was like a man in a frenzy, soe that they had much to doe to keep him in bedde..... his sicknesse brought him soe weake that his speech failed and att twelve days end hee dyed, and according to the usuall manner hee was laide strait upon his bedde, his eyes closed and onely one linen sheet cast over him. Thus he continued one whoale day whilst his wife was takeing care to provide for his buriall..."

All through the night his wife and sister sat by the fire, but suddenly heard a great sound like a sigh, and thinking it was some beast outside, took a candle, but found nothing. They went into the chamber where Owen was lying and perceived "noe alteration" in him.

Later they heard the same noise again and went to his room and stayed with him. After some time they saw his mouth open, and he gave a soft sigh. The women warmed the bed-clothes and laid them upon him.

"by the time that it was day the couler came in his face and hee opened his eyes on his owne accord, and by noone hee recovered his speech, though very weakely.

Safe from being buried alive, Owen eventually recovered fully and lived 20 more years.

"Do you know, my deare, I have a splitting headache!"

Everywhere else on these walks words in speech marks indicate Gough's text. Here we have gone one better. These two stone carvings were once part of a decorative dripstone around the door of 24 Wem Road, Harmer Hill. The house had belonged to the Bickertons, descendants of Gough so, with the architectural evidence of



the house itself, Madge Moran concluded that this was, indeed, the final resting place of the Cheife house. She speculates that the carvings are of Richard and his wife Joan. The house, of course, is greatly changed since Gough's day.

Before moving to its present site, the Cheife house had been moved before. The father-in-law of Richard Owen (of whom we've just heard) lived in Newton on the Hill, and his house then eventually went to Thomas Hall.

"This Mr. Hall pulled downe the cheife house, and sett itt up againe att the end of the lane which leads from Newton to Haremeare Heath."

As you pass the by the chapel (seen here) and village hall, and turn up Newton Lane, just look over the hedge on the far corner and you will see a new cheife house - or at least a water pumping station. That was where the cheife house stood before moving to the Wem Road.



On walk 4 you will read of Scoggan. He had a great-nephew, Richard Preece the third. He "marryed Mary Hancocke, of Wem, an ale-woman. Shee was thought to be a light huswife, and he proved to be a light fingered person, and at last hee was sent to Shrewsbury goale for felony, where he hired a silly boy to procure him instruments to breake prison. The boy brought him a bar of iron and a broaken broome hooke, and with these he pulled out severall stones ... and soe escaped, but left the tooles behind him..... It was found that the siley boy had these things from a neighbour's house the day before; and soe the poore boy was hanged, and Preece escaped..."

As you leave Newton (we do not know from where the cheife house began its travels), you will pass over a field known as Marl Piece, after the crumbly soil made of clay, sand and chalk.

Later you pass through the Bull Field, still known as this today, and back at Broughton, if you turn left and look over the fields you can see a small clump of trees that surround the site of the old Saxon church where Gough learnt Latin, in the late 1640's.

For a closer look, go up the road to your left for fifty metres and there is a finger post showing a footpath that brings you close to the site.



From the station at Yorton turn left go under the railway bridge and turn left at the Jubilee Tree. Pass Broughton Church and take the first turn left down to Yorton Heath. Next turn right up a green lane passing the old chapel and at the top of the track turn left up Godings Lane to Harmer Hill. Cross the main road and turn right.

At the Post Office cross the road and go 200 metres to a pair of cottages thought to be an old house moved from Newton. Just before the cottages cross back over the road and the field to Harmer Hill Village Hall and Chapel.

Turn right. Follow the narrow pavement and then turn right up Newton Lane. Opposite the first house there is a green lane to your right. Before taking this turn carry on for some 300 metres down into the hamlet and see Gough's house. This is on the left and is now called Newton House.

Return to the green lane, turn down it into a field. Go round the pond and follow the hedge. Cross the bridge over the ditch and continue to the main road.

Turn left and proceed some 20 metres up the main road. Take the stile on the right and follow a path down through the fields to Yorton. You come between houses and the Jubilee Tree is 30 metres to your right.

300 metres to your left you will a clump of trees which surround the remains of an old Saxon church. The Church was pulled down in 1858 and the new one built on higher, drier ground half a mile to the east.

Proceed back under the railway bridge to either the station car park on your right or to the Railway Inn on your left.