

Richard Gough
Historian of Myddle

The Village
and
The Castle

The Village of Myddle

The village of Myddle lies in a hollow, just off the main Shrewsbury to Ellesmere road, at the point where a secondary road, from Clive to Baschurch, crosses it.

Originally it was a Saxon settlement, called (*Ge*) *Mythleah*, “the wood by the junction of the stream” – see Bowcock’s *Shropshire Place Names*. However Dr David G Hey, in his book on *Myddle under the Tudors and Stuarts*, suggests that the junction with the secondary road, which was once an important through-road linking Oswestry with Market Drayton, and Newport, and much used by cattle-traders, may be the origin of the name. There was a stream in the hollow, but it is now so small as to be quite insignificant.

Between the years 1021 and 1242 the village was called variously, “*Muthla*”; “*Mulleht*”; “*Mhutle*” and “*Mudle*” – see Exwall’s *Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names*. By 1800 it had become “Middle”, but as there was frequent confusion with “Middletown”, a village on the near-by Welsh border, the Rev. Preb. G H Egerton, who was Rector of Myddle for fifty-eight years, proposed the spelling of “Myddle” which has been used since around 1878.

The village straggles down to the stream and on up to the crossroads. The Church and the Castle were built on the west side, at the highest point, on a less exposed and more defensible site. The sandstone used for their building and for the massive walls, which are common in the village and surrounding district, was quarried from the rocks along the Lower Road, between Myddle and Harmer Hill – where the “Goblin Hole” may also be seen. This was a cave which, according to Richard Gough, “was made into a habitation, and a stone chimney built up to it by one Fardo, after whose death one William Preece dwelt in it, after his return from the Wars”, in the reign of Elizabeth I. This was in the early 1600s and the house was then occupied until about 1966, when the last tenants left for the new housing estate on Myddle Hill.

In early times there were two wells in the common street. One, above the Church, at the *Well House*, owned by Mrs Bowdler, fell into disuse many years ago. The other covered by a pump, on the wall of the old School playground, was in use until piped water came to the village in the 1960s.

A 'stately wood' once stretched between Myddle and Marton, on the road to Baschurch, so thick that, as Gough says, "a man might go from Myddle, almost to Marton, and not see the sun above three times in that space of ground, for the branches and leaves of the trees"! It was felled in the reign of Charles II but the area is still called Myddle Wood. There are also glacial pools in places. Haremere Pool was drained in Gough's time but Marton Pool and Fennimere Pool still remain.

In the late 17th century new colonies developed in Myddlewood, Marton and other hamlets, which explains perhaps why an aisle was enlarged in the Church in 1744. However, in later years, under the Enclosure System, numbers shrank again. In modern times Harmer Hill has grown rapidly as a residential area, and considerable modernisation has taken place in Myddle itself.

The Castle

The Saxon Manor of Myddle with its surrounding hamlets, was probably given to Warin the Bald by Earl Roger de Montgomery. However, it appears to have been in the possession of the first John le Strange before 1165, and his descendants continued to hold it for centuries, save for a brief period in 1299, when the fifth John le Strange conceded it to one Ralph de Sherlee.

Gough described it as "a faire but small castle" though it was a ruin even in his time. The structure was "foursquare, within a square moat and had a square court within it". There was a large kitchen and a "pleasant room, supposed to have been a parlor", as well as a Hall, which Gough says was used for the meetings of the "Court Leet of the Manor of Mudle". The Castle was only two storeys high and had a flat roof. There was a tower and staircase on the northwest corner of the inner court, with a door onto the roof of the castle. A remnant of this tower can still be seen in the grounds of *Castle Farm*, the home of Mr & Mrs R Phillips. Gough says that part of this tower fell in an earthquake in 1688, and another portion was demolished in a gale at Christmas 1979 so that very little now remains. The Castle Park stretched across to Myddle Wood and down to Lower Road, where the stone for its fortification had been quarried.

It was a tradition that the Lords Strange lived for part of the year at Myddle, and part at Knockin, but in later years when the Manor descended to the Darby family, there was a Constable or Keeper at the Castle. Sir Roger Kinaston of Hordley was the last but one of these Keepers, and he was succeeded by his younger son known as *Wild Humphrey*. He neglected his duties shamefully, leaving Myddle to make his home in a cave at Nesscliff Hill, still known as *Kynaston's Cave*. The castle fell into ruins and "was never again inhabited".

The Pact of Myddle

In Sir J Edward Lloyd's work, *The History of Wales*, (Volume 2 Page 681) he mentions an important PACT, which was signed at Middle either in the Church or at the Manor House. It was signed on the 21st June 1234 by Llewellyn the Great of Wales and three Church Dignitaries of England, Edmund Rich, the newly consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Bishops of Lichfield and Rochester. This was ratified by the King, Henry III on the 7th July 1234 and guaranteed a truce for two years. The basis of the pact was adherence to the situation pertaining at the outbreak of the War, no new Castles to be built and no ruined ones restored on either side, but earlier conquests to be held.

After the first two years the Truce was renewed from year to year until Llewellyn's death, so that in substance this Pact of Middle was a Peace Treaty and the crowning achievement of the Welsh Prince's long and victorious career.

Richard Gough, the Historian of Myddle

MYDDLE has become much more widely known in the last 35 years through renewed interest in the writings of Richard Gough (1634 – 1723) called *Gough's History of Myddle*. This is a unique work and the first of its kind to be written.

Interest was first aroused when Mrs Veronica Bamfield, now of Shrewsbury, took a series of evening classes on Gough's History in the School at Myddle in the winters between 1962 and 1966. She also broadcast a talk on the subject on *Midlands Radio*, in the spring of 1965, as a result of which the original manuscript

came to light after many years. It was in the possession of a Mrs Bickerton, a descendant of Gough's daughter Anne then living in Herefordshire, who offered it to the Shropshire County Council. They were very pleased to acquire it and it is now in the Archives of the Shropshire County Records Office.

Further interest was shown in 1974 when Dr David G Hey, of Leicester University, published his book on *Myddle under the Tudors and Stuarts*, based on the work. He also edited a new publication of Gough's in 1981. Another edition, by Professor W G Hoskins was printed about 1969/70.

RICHARD GOUGH was born in January 1634 at Newton on the Hill, in the Parish of Myddle. He was the son of Richard Gough and Dorothy Jenks of Cockshutt. He had one sister Dorothy. In the Myddle Parish Register for 1634 the entry of his baptism runs: *1634. Jan 18. Bap. Richardi Goughe, f. Richardi Goughe de Newton et Dorothiae*

His ancestors came from Tilley in the Parish of Wem, where a Richard Gough died in the year 1538 at the age of 83 years. In 1539 the younger son of this man became the first of five Richard Goughs to live at Newton on the Hill and by 1701 they were one of the 'most ancient families' in the parish. Their house still stands and is now the home of Mr & Mrs R Wycherley. Proof of its authenticity was discovered by Mr H D G Foxall, author of *Shropshire Field Names*, while studying the Tythe maps of the district.

Richard Gough (the fifth) attended the Village School at Myddle under Mr Richard Rodericke, who later became one of the Chief Masters of the new Adams Grammar School in Wem, which opened in 1650. He mentions an incident during the Civil War which he calls "the only skirmage which took place in Myddle" when Cornett Collins was shot at the smithy near the church. Mr Rodericke was sent for to pray with the dying man and Richard accompanied him and saw Cornett "lying on the bed, and much blood running along the floor". He would then have been about 12 or 13 years old.

He went on to a small School at Broughton about a mile from his home and was taught by Mr Willian Sugar or Shuker, the long serving Minister of Broughton and Curate of Clive and Grinshill. At these Schools he learned Latin and acquired a love of the Classics. He says, however, that his best education was under Mr Robert Corbett of Stanwardine Hall, about six miles from his

home, who employed him as his Clerk, and with whom he received his training in the Law. Later he was Steward of the Manor of Albright Hussey and Battlefield, both of which were possessions of the Corbetts. He served on the Shropshire Grand Jury and was very active in Parish matters. He was also Trustee of his uncle's Apprenticeship Charity which continued until recent times – about 1952.

Richard inherited the property at Newton on the Hill in 1660 when he was twenty-six years old and married Joan (or Joanne) Wood of Peplow about the same time. They had five sons, two of whom died in infancy, and three daughters. The three remaining sons pre-deceased their father. Only one daughter, Anne, married and her descendants were Gough's heirs. Richard was evidently a Church Warden in 1662, as his name appears on a Bell in Myddle Church.

He began his famous book in 1700 when he was sixty-six year old widower. His wife Joan had died in 1694 and he was living with his two daughters, Joan the eldest and Dorothy, the youngest, at Newton on the Hill. His book was written in two parts. The first part, entitled *Antiquities and Memoyres of the Parish of Myddle*, is in much the same vein as Camden, and other Antiquarians of the period. The second part, *Observations concerning the Seates in Myddle and the Families to which they belong*, is unique and, as Dr David Hey says, one of the most valuable sources for Social Studies of the 17th and early 18th centuries.

Gough had the novel idea of drawing a plan of the pews in the Church and writing the history of each family occupying them. The social structure was strictly formal, the gentry's private pews being at the front. The farmers and craftsmen were next and the cottagers at the back. Parish Meetings were called in cases of dispute, or before the erection of a new pew. Gough had a great sense of history – and of humour – and considerable skill in writing. He wrote from his own knowledge and memory and recorded stories and folk-lore culled from ancestors and neighbours over the years. His praise and criticisms were impartial, and as he says, wrote "Nothing of Malice" – and is very readable.

His book was first published privately in 1834 but this was an incomplete copy and it was again published in 1875 when the

editor had access to the original manuscript. The proofs were carefully compared and revised by the Rev. Preb G H Egerton, then Rector of Myddle.

Richard Gough was a widower for twenty-nine years and died in February 1723, at the age of eighty-eight years. It is believed that he was buried at Myddle where his wife had been buried in the Chancel in 1694.

Myddle is now much more conscious of the worth of this unique book. This short history was originally compiled in 1984 by Miss E M W Rogers (former Head Teacher of Myddle C R Primary School) as a tribute to mark the 350th Anniversary of the birth of RICHARD GOUGH.

The Gough Walks

A small group of residents of Myddle and Harmer Hill decided to celebrate the 300th Anniversary of the writing by Richard Gough of his various notes and diaries which were later published many years after his death under the title "The History of Myddle".

Each member of the group studied about 20 pages of the book and noted the various Manors, farms, houses and tenements. Richard Gough describes the families living in these properties, including the hardships, the scandals, the humour and the tragedies of everyday life.

The "Walks" are designed to link together the various properties and other places of interest and were "walked" by members of the "Gough Group" assisted by the Shropshire County Council's Countryside Volunteers.

The six walks - which are about 4 to 6 miles each - are contained in a plastic pack and can be purchased from the church in Myddle.