



THORNTON-LE-DALE.

Being the History of the People of
Thornton, Ellerburn-cum-Farmanby,
Roxby, Dalby, and Thornton
Marishes from the
earliest times to
the present
day.

By

REGINALD W. JEFFERY, M.A.,

Fellow and Tutor, Brasenose College, Oxford.

AUTHOR OF

"The Manors and Advowson of Great Rollright."

'The Industries of Oxfordshire' (V.C.H. Oxon. II),

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GENERAL INDEX.



Introduction.

I do not suppose for a moment that the pleasure of reading this book will be comparable with the pleasure I have had in compiling it. The history of 'Thornton-le-Dale' is, so to speak, the return to an old love, for I began making my first notes in 1899. Owing to circumstances, over which I had no control, my thoughts with regard to village history were carried south for some years; but as soon as I could, I returned to my former interest in the story of Thornton. Ever since 1894, when I first stayed with my cousin, the Rev. E. W. Heslop, the village has been to me 'the beloved village,' and during part of the last thirty-six years I occupied a house in it, and had a good opportunity of an intimate acquaintance with many of its inhabitants. The old days and old memories are passing away, and I have been fortunate in not only having documents put at my disposal; but also many of the older generation have assisted me by word of mouth. I have, in the past, often chatted with those who remembered very different days now a hundred years ago.

The Civil Parish of Thornton-le-Dale, comprises, to-day, the different Manors that go to make the titles of some of these chapters. Its total area is 9,689 acres, of which 2,680 ac. are arable and 2,620 ac. are permanent grass, 233 ac. woodland, and the rest mainly moor. The village, adjudged 'the most beautiful in Yorkshire,' is situated in Pickering Lythe Wapentake, on each side of its picturesque Beck, at the crossing of the Malton-Whitby and Pickering-Scarborough roads. Its subsoil is Kimmeridge Clay and Corallian Beds, the soil, gravel and limestone.

As in my other village history, I have tried to show in this, how its records may illustrate in miniature the history of the nation; but, in the case of Thornton, to show also that it was more than a typical example of an ordinary village throughout the centuries, because of it being within the important Forest of Pickering. I trust that, however barren the narrative, I have, at least, partly fulfilled these objects. If I have failed to convey the true historic interest of Thornton, and I quite realize that I have indeed failed entirely to convey its glorious charms of sparkling beck and purple-clad moor, I must bear the full blame. It is not for want of devotion to the place, nor for lack of assistance and kindness on all sides.



CHAPTER ONE

Early History.

*"Methinks it were a happy life,
To be no better than a homely swain."*

SHAKESPEARE.

"How blessed is he who leads a country life."

DRYDEN.

IN prehistoric times the district of Thornton was occupied by bears, elephants, hyenas and rhinoceroses, remains of all of which have been found in the neighbourhood.¹ These wild beasts were driven south during the Ice-Age; and it was this glacial epoch that created the chief beauties of Thornton, for the action of ice and water caused the innumerable 'riggs' and dales, and carved the 'slack ends', all of which are such features of this parish. After the melting of the ice, the Vale of Pickering, of which the dale of Thornton is an offshoot, was at one time a huge lake, and into this, water-courses worked their way, until, blocked by the slowly dissolving ice-sheet of what is now the North Sea on the east, they found an exit by the gorge at Kirkham Abbey on the west.²

With the retreat of the ice human beings appeared.³ Centuries later there were two main invasions; the earlier, or Gadhelic,⁴ left scarcely any traces, but the men of the second, or Celtic, settled in the neighbourhood, and remains of their habitation are still to be found. These are to be seen in the parish of Thornton, first, in the fourteen tumuli; one on Pexton Moor,⁵ two between

¹ In Kirkdale Cave, one and a half miles west of Kirkby Moorside. *Vide* Buckland, *Reliquiae Diluvianae*, and H. Schroeder, *Annals of Yorkshire* I. p. 229. For elephant's tooth and tusk at Robin Hood's Bay and Scarborough, *cf.* Young p. 786.

² G. Home, *The Evolution of an English Town*, p. 23. Dr. J. L. Kirk considers the north shore of this lake to have been at Thornton about the level of Low Mill Garth.

³ For existence of Preglacial Man *cf.* *The Times*, 2nd September, 1929; but on 13th September, 1929, Mr. Frank Elgee said that the earliest men in these parts lived approximately 4000, B.C.

⁴ G. E. Morris, *The North Riding of Yorkshire*, p. 19.

⁵ On 11th February, 1911, pieces of an ancient wheel were dug up here, where previously the gamekeeper, J. Green, had found a small portion, while ferreting.



Howdale¹ and the Whitby road, two in fields above Dalby, one on Dalby Warren, three south west of Red Dyke and five on the west of the Adder Stone.² Secondly in the Brythonic³ dykes or entrenchments, such as those along the top of the north-west edge of the dale above Ellerburn Banks and above the old Dalby nut-wood, or again above Ellerburn Wood near Whitbygate, or between Howdale and Kingthorpe Lane, or between Seive Dale and Swair Dale, beyond High Dalby. Thirdly in the flint and stone weapons which have been frequently unearthed, as an unbarbed arrow-head found in Nabgate, or an ash-leaved arrow-head in Sand Flats, or a spear-head, below the station. And lastly in the old flint workings⁴ on the top of Flainsey Warren, or in, the possible, iron workings in circular pits, such as three on Pexton Moor, regarded by some as pit-dwellings,⁵ by others as entrenchments abandoned as soon as begun,⁶ and by others as natural sink holes.

Besides these traces of very early inhabitants, there is the pottery, found in the garden of Low Mill Garth, which dates a little nearer modern times, possibly fifty years before or fifty years after the birth of Christ.⁷ This pottery⁸ consists of some almost whole cookery pots⁹ mostly *vesicula*, (a few with notches in the brim), some isolated pieces of La Tène type with incised design, several scraps of Terra Sigillata, a clay object, possibly a spoon or a toy or a votive boat, perhaps a model of a coracle, and a crutch shaped pottery handle said to be from a

¹ On 11th February, 1911, one of these barrows in Monklands was found to contain a human skeleton and an earthen vase. The latter was like a round jar with straight sides curving to the base. It was ten inches high. Although broken it was skilfully restored by Dr. Kirk of Pickering.

² Probably the ashes of important men only were interred in these 'Howes' or *tumuli*, cf. F. Elgee, *Moorlands of North-East Yorkshire*, p. 24.

³ F. Y. in M. P. p. 259.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.* p. 157. 'Where the chippings, *spiculae*, remnants of flint of divers characters as plainly showed that flint implements and weapons had been manufactured there, as the matters commonly lying about a blacksmith's shop show the vicinity (past or present) of the forge.'

⁵ Ord, *History of Cleveland*. Ord's view is strongly attacked F. Y. in M. P. pp. 162-166.

⁶ Compare the pits above Ebberston, *vide Arch. Jour.* LII. p. 266. Mediaeval references to iron-works speak of *fossas* which suggest open-cast workings or a very elementary type of bell-pit. cf. Y.G.S. XIII. p. 456, and G. Barrow, *Geology of North Cleveland*, p. 59.

⁷ R. G. Collingwood, Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford, kindly gave me this date. These discoveries were made between 1922 and 1923, by L. G. Rowland, of Goathland, Esq. In January 1930 it was hoped to find remains of a house in Low Hall Garth on the west side of Maltongate. Dr. J. L. Kirk had trenches dug without any more result than a few pieces of Roman pottery.

⁸ Some pottery of the *vesicula* type was turned up when Low Mill Garth was being built in 1913.

⁹ These are now in the Pickering Museum.



house urn such as those found in Italy. Two Roman bronze brooches have also been discovered, one, with red enamel, of the *Aucissa* pattern, but without the signature, which points to a native copy of an imported type common on the continent about 43 A.D., in use under Claudius and even later.¹ From this evidence it is clear that there must have been Romano-British in, what is now Thornton, in the very early days of the Roman occupation² after the ferocious Brigantes had been either massacred or reduced to law and order; and it is not altogether surprising considering how near Thornton lies to the Roman *Derventio* [?] or Malton and to the Roman camp of *Delgovitia* [?] or Cawthorne,³ which is known to have been a military centre in the first century A.D.⁴

After the Roman legions left this island, about 406, the Picts probably burst through The Wall, and, with fire and sword, swept down from the north;⁵ though the sparse population of this particular district, being far from any main route leading south and being sheltered on the north by a rampart of moorland, may have escaped desolation. A century later, about 520, the Angles came, and their leader Aella marching northward from the Humber, may have gazed from Settrington Beacon on these parts; but seeing no advantage in floundering through the marshy valley of the Derwent, almost certainly turned west in his conquest, and sought the wealth of Malton and of York, rather than the bleak poverty of the wild moorlands of the north-east. After his establishment of the Kingdom of Deira, Angles would settle in Thornton where the land had already been prepared by the Romano-British and had been partially reclaimed from moor and fen.⁶

One of the first known excitements for the people of this district was in 664, when King Oswy of Northumbria, with Bishops Colman and Wilfred, made their way with their enormous

¹ I am indebted to Dr. J. L. Kirk for this information.

² Possibly as early as the arrival of Ostorius Scapula, c. 50 A.D. Dr. J. L. Kirk would place the occupation of the site at 70 A.D.

³ R. G. Collingwood, Esq. considers that Cawthorne only shows signs of first century occupation.

⁴ Young, p. 733 suggests, with no evidence, that Thornton was a post on the Roman road between Scarborough and Cawthorne. But as Cawthorne was limited to the first century, and as Scarborough has no proof of existence earlier than the fourth century and as there is no sign of a road between the two, [cf. F. Elgee, *Early Man in North-East Yorkshire*], Mr. Collingwood feels unable to agree with this view. To call Malton '*Derventio*' is still a doubtful point but Messrs. Corder and J. Kirk in '*Antiquity*' II. 5 p. 51 are in favour of it.

⁵ After writing the above I see that the same suggestion is made in Arch. Jour. LXXI. p. 44. Cf. '*Antiquity*' IV. 15, p. 315.

⁶ Cf. Seebohm, *English Village Community*, p. 436.