



Milton Abbas Old Town Project

The impact of an enforced move on the lives of ordinary Dorset people in the 18th century - exploring the archives.

Milton Abbas Local History Group have begun a large project on the community and social history of the Old Town of Milton Abbas. We know that the old town of Middleton had been in existence from the foundation of the monastery in 934 and was once one of the largest towns in Dorset. It became a hub of the road network until all was swept away by Lord Milton and Capability Brown in the 1770s, leaving Milton Abbas an isolated rural community well off the beaten track.

What these 18th-century changes meant to the ordinary people is a mystery, nor do we know who moved into the new village or who left the area. The whole episode must have been traumatic for the community. It is probable that the yeoman class left Middleton for good, and the new village was just for the estate workers, resulting in a complete change of its social structure.

The Aim

To create a social history of the old town of Middleton by researching the lives of ordinary people. This is a unique project and we cannot find any examples published of a similar rural village. The results will be published as booklets, presentations and exhibitions.

The Archives

There are many threads which need to be researched, including family history, wills, Churchwardens Accounts, Overseers of the Poor Books, baptisms, marriages, deaths, 18th century social changes, pests, plagues, agricultural improvements, religion, education, etc. We have access to an archive in a private collection, and there is a good run of documents for this period for Milton Abbas at the Dorset History Centre.

1771
May 7

The 1 Month Disbursements

Gave Mary biles in Need	0	1	0
Gave William Ford in Need	0	1	0
Gave James Stickley Wife in Need	0	5	0
Gave Mary biles in Need	0	1	0
Gave Sarey Tucker in Need	0	1	0
Paid for Parchment	0	1	0
Gave Mary biles in Need	0	0	6
Gave Sarey Tucker in Need	0	1	0
Gave Wm Ford in Need	0	1	0
Gave Sarey Tucker in Need	0	3	0
	0	4	0

A tiny section of the Overseers of the Poor Book for 7 May 1771.

The Project

We have a core team of enthusiastic people. We have already identified a large number of sources of original material which will unlock this history, and there is certainly much work to be done in researching, transcribing and writing up. We would like lots of people across Dorset or elsewhere to help, share and join in our fascination as we look at a thriving market town turn into a rural village.

What makes this project different is that it will focus on the lives of the ordinary people, who tend to leave less of a record than the landowners.

We have the facilities for research and for the publication and exhibition of our findings. We have an initial core of volunteers from Milton Abbas but anyone interested in this fascinating social history project could join us. Family historians would be especially welcome.

Join us to unlock the secrets of an abandoned town

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