

INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF MIDDLETON-ON-THE-WOLDS

It is tempting, at first glance, to think that the name Middleton refers to the middle town of the wolds or bearing in mind its position on the pre-1974 map of the East Riding as occupying some kind of centre point of the county itself. The name however probably derives from "ton" old English for farm or estate, hence middle farm or estate. There is evidence of human activity and habitation in the area from earlier periods but the settlement probably emerged as a village in the late Saxon period.

The present built village forms part of a larger civil parish in the shape of an irregular rectangle consisting of some 3663 acres. It is approximately five miles from east to west and two miles north to south at its widest point. Being situated in the lower parts of the wolds the sub soil is predominantly chalk whilst the village itself in the lower parts has been described as being an extensive bed of glacial gravel and sand.

It is approximately eight miles from each of four neighbouring market towns, Driffild, Pocklington, Market Weighton and the county town of Beverley. The first named has however played a very significant role in Middleton's daily life and commerce.

The landscape of the East Riding differs from other parts of Yorkshire, a fact not lost on the renowned architectural expert Nikolaus Pevsner who stated that "the wolds, whether leafy hills or grassy hills, never rising to grandeur though the chalk cliffs of Flamborough Head do. But the comparison is Beachy Head, i.e. the south. The East Riding is decidedly more southern in character than the North and West Ridings."

Flamborough Head itself is the termination of the chalklands of England which stretch from Salisbury Plain through such areas as the Chilterns and the Lincolnshire Wolds but despite its low altitudes (the highest being 808 feet at Garrowby Hill) there can be a noticeable variation in weather conditions, particularly in the winter months.

The wolds today look prosperous and well tended, especially since the Second World War and all the technical innovations in farming but it was not always so. Archaeologists and historians have been fascinated by mysterious features of the area such as earth works and entrenchments, different land uses at different times and of course abandoned villages.

Middleton itself, bisected by the busy A614 has had the characteristics of an "open" village, that is despite the predominance of certain landowners contrasting features were tolerated such as Methodist chapels and public houses while other things were avoided such as estate village architectural conformity.

As with other places Middleton was affected by historical events but it is difficult for later generations to begin to understand what it was like to live through them. It is however worth the effort.