THORNDON BEFORE THE CONQUEST.

By Rev. H. A. Harris.

We are usually well content if we can trace Village History down the ages to the Conquest. The Domesday Survey being the recognised cradle of the infant village, to which we turn for record of its infancy and name, but, alas, not of its birth.

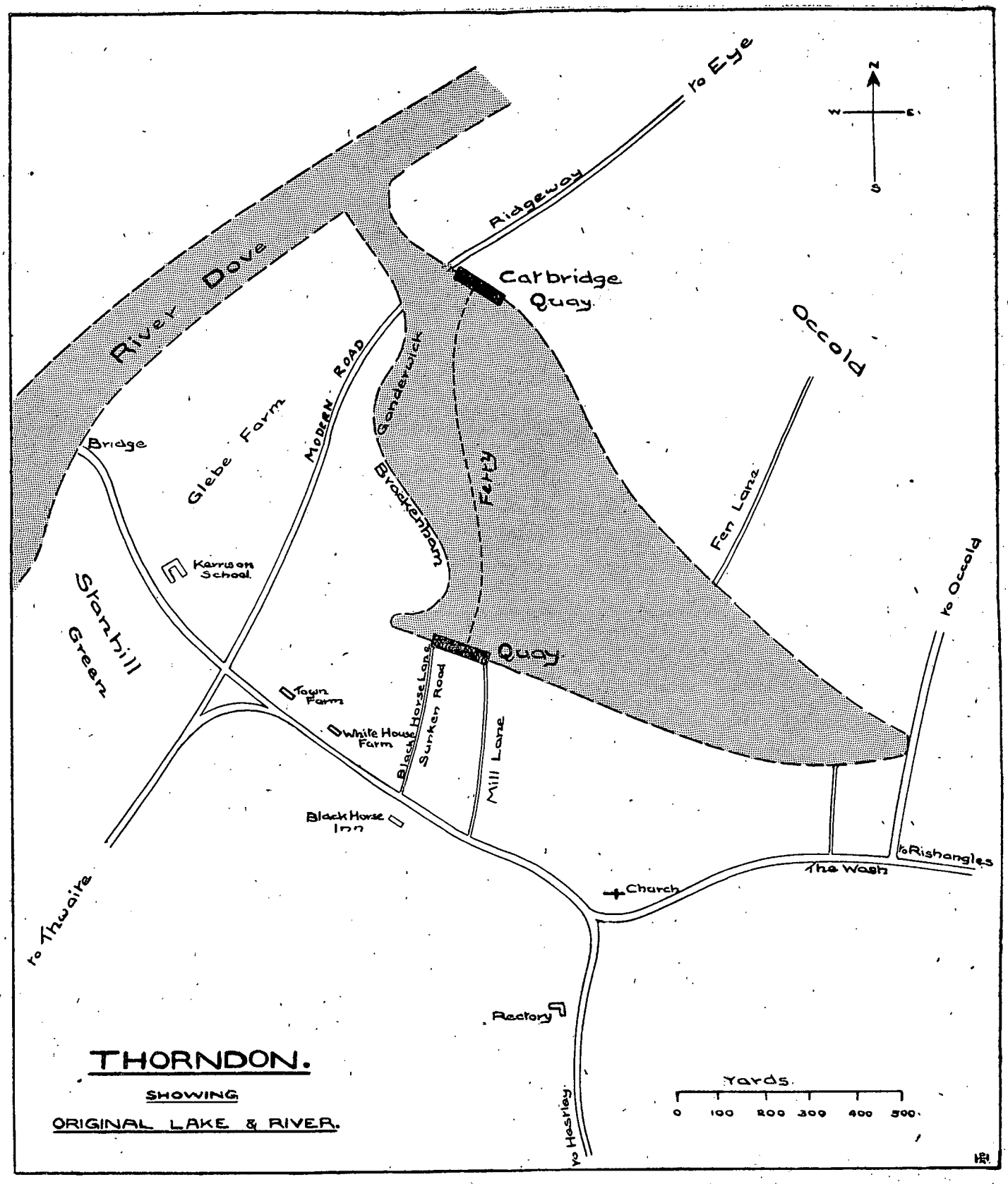
The name we find there is useful, for the adage "Nomen est omen," is of infinite value in Place-names, but we cannot always rely upon it as correct.

We are never quite certain whether the Scribe of that day was more skilful than we are in catching and recording our local dialect from the lips of the Natives.

The scribe was usually Norman-French, and to his French ears it must indeed have been a puzzle to translate what he heard into the Latin we find in Domesday Book.

Dialect is a survival of the transition of language when words and syllables were in a fluid state and many letters interchangeable, so that the rough Drafts of Domesday book must have undergone considerable polishing before it assumed its final form.

Luckily for us the dead weight of the Masses who neither read nor wrote and never abandoned the pronounciation handed down to them by oral tradition, anchored names to something like their original form, before printing stereotyped an error.


THORNDON.
SHOWING
ORIGINAL LAKE & RIVER.
River Dove
Bridge
Glebe Farm
Karrison School
Starhill Green
Modern Road
Ridgeway
To Eye
Carbridge Quay
Occold
Fen Lane
To Occold
Gandercick
Brookenham
Ferry
Quay
Town Farm
White House Farm
Black Horse Lane
Sunken Road
Mill Lane
Black Horse Inn
To Thwaite
Church
The Wash
To Rishangles
Rectory
To Hoxley
Yards
0 100 200 300 400 500
N
S
E
W

The Domesday scribe gives Torneduna and Tornentuna as the name of Thorndon, but what combination of syllables the inhabitants poured into his ears, to be rendered into this Latin name, is lost for ever.

The name, however, is so apt and expressive of the situation as to leave little play for guess work. The village lying on a sloping incline which was once covered with Blackthorn.

One guess I may be allowed, as it is not mine but that of a former Rector of Thorndon. I found it, together with other jottings on the Parish and Rectory, in a curious manner. A stranger in the Midlands sent me a few legal deeds, etc., connected with Thorndon which had been thrown out of some lawyer's office as being valueless. He did not know how they got there but took compassion on them, thinking that even if of no value they might meet with a welcome at their old home—the Rectory.

Among the legal documents were a few odd scraps of paper containing personal notes by someone who does not sign his name, but was presumably Rector of Thorndon about 1780. This Rector does not like the unkind allegation that his village was Thorny, and jots down—Thorny? "I cannot perceive it." And proceeds patriotically to invoke every foreign language to support his conjecture that Thorn is a corruption of Teyrn, Tiern, Tiarna, etc.; passing into Saxon Thegn or Thane, meaning a noble. His contention being that Thorndon was originally Thanedune, signifing the Nobleman's dwelling on the Dune, the Dwelling being within the rectory moat.

He affirms that the Rectory is, or was, on the site of the old Manor House, for he says Thorndon Manor has now no Manor House, it was converted into the

Parsonage, together with the portion of Glebe attached. Which since the time of William I., at least, if not before, belonged to the Crown, and therefore required no Manor House. He gives reason for his argument by stating that no Parsonage would require such defensive properties as those possessed by Thorndon Rectory. He describes the exceptionally large moat surrounding it, and gives particulars, some of which are no longer evident. He states that inside the outer moat stood the house and garden, segregated from the barn yards by another transverse straight lined pond with a drawbridge over it. He goes on to say that in addition to these vast excavations there was a thick stone wall which formerly surrounded both house and garden within side the moat, of which several portions of the foundations remain there as hard as any stone itself.

Considerable alterations have been made since this was written, but the moat remains much the same, and its size is exceptional.

It is of the usual parallelogrammic shape, about 510-ft. long, by 225-ft. wide. Some sixty years ago the "transverse pond" was filled in. This pond or cutting converted the north end of the moat into an island approached by a drawbridge on the south, the island measuring some forty paces across from north to south.

This early yearning of my Predecessor to extol the name and fame of Thorndon by the adventitious aid of archæology, deserves recognition and supplement. More especially as Thorndon, even if its name does not denote nobility, does possess exceptional evidences of antiquarian dignity and venerable associations. The name Thorndon is more dignified than Thanedon as is the Creator in comparison with the Creature.

Some place names are written by the finger of Nature on the pages of the landscape. These need no translator—Iberian, Goidel, Brython, Roman succeed each other, but the picture remains the same, and each sees it symbolised in his own alphabet.

These descriptive place names are old—old as the landscape. They were recognised landmarks for camping grounds and rallying points of the Nomadic inhabitants long before permanent Settlements were established. Compare the adjoining Parishes of Thorndon, Eye, Rishangles (Rush hanger), Wetheringset, Thornham, and Stoke Ash. The first three are landmarks that have become villages, the last villages that have become landmarks.

Thorndon does not belie the claim of its name to an antiquity measureless to man.

The camping grounds of our earliest inhabitants must perforce have stood upon the edge of water ways, as our fertile clay soil was a dense and impenetrable jungle. This is clearly proved by so many villages in the neighbourhood being named from the trees and shrubs that marked their situation. Some actually testify that they are either a Thwaite, Field, Haw or Ride, that is a place where trees have been cleared, felled, hewn or ridded off, the name of the feller being often included.

There is a fascination in archæology which lies in producing mental pictures of the vanished past. There is a stimulus in painting these retrospective pictures every day in every way better and better. until anachronisms are eliminated and we see as it were the past synchronizing and blending harmoniously into the present. Like a jig-saw puzzle picture with every piece in place.

Village history is like opening a book in the middle and commencing to read the latter part of its half told story. We miss the first chapters but these pages are not blank. The letter press has faded and gone, but a few pictures survive, perceptive and empirical.

The first page, pictures Thorndon's thorny Down as it was in the days that are now long dead. A cold and dreary landscape of clay, formed by the deposit of debris left behind by the melting ice of the last Glacial Age, without vegetation and without life. The water from the melting ice cut a deep channel west of Thorndon and settled in a lake on the north, previously planed to a slope by its action and forming a hollow.

Water is the mother of all. She first made the Down and then clothed it with Thorns. The lake that lapped this Down, sloping to the water, was fed by streams bearing floating seeds from happier regions. The early bird and earlier beast would be used as means of locomotion by other seeds that live by their wits. Hard stone fruit, such as the sloe or whitethorn, which could not be digested, and would travel far, was among the first to arrive and grow. Stone fruit was earliest in appearance for Apples and pears, more noticeably pears, have a gritty core that was once a stone, but is now a "missing link."

This is our first picture of Thorndon. A verdant Down sloping to a lake at its foot.

Through ages measureless to man, vegetation spread up from the water edges shrouding all the countryside with dense jungle, forest and marsh until man made him tools of metal, capable of felling trees and digging drains.

As a maker of history the spade is mightier than the pen. Drainage has converted a wilderness into a garden and radically changed our landscape.

The mighty river on our west is now a negligible little streamlet and the lake on the north has vanished into grassland.

Up to the present time no one has turned back to this early picture of Thorndon with its prehistoric lake and, as I hope to show, its Celtic (possibly Bronze Age) Landing Stages, Ridgeway and Sunken Road.

The primitive picture portrayed by the name Thorn Down is a proof that this descriptive name was given to it when the Lake lapped its sloping shores and man viewed it from the water and not from the land. A traveller passing through the village is unconscious of any Down or undulation distinct from other ups and downs in the villages around, but the view from the hollow of the lake vindicates its title.

Drainage, supplemented by the felling of trees (which latter has decreased the rainfall) have between them lowered our water level some 5 or 6 feet, thus causing a metamorphosis so complete that the country side is hardly recognisable.

Standing on the edge of our streams at their present normal water level, we must imagine ourselves immersed in water 5 or 6 feet deep ,for in this position our eye level all around gives us a fair estimate of the water level in the olden days. All the land below this level having been formerly under water.

These statements need proof and proofs lie all around. The little stream that runs along the west is called the Dove and is a microcosm of its former greatness. Its

name has been preserved unchanged from Celtic times, when it was the Dubh or Dark water. The name undergoing the usual softening of Dubh into Duff and Dove in the same way as the name of the swarthy Hero Mac Dubh is now MacDuff. Here Prehistoric man and beasts wandered is shown by the many Neolithic flint implements that I have found lying just above the water level of those days. when it was the Dark river, shrouded in thorns and deep, thus being doubly dark. The Dove now runs by Eye and through Oakley Park into the Waveney and we have a local tradition that the River Waveney had its origin and rose in Thorndon Pool. This Pool lay about 300 yards south of Thorndon Bridge, covering several acres on the west side of the river and was fed by Springs at the bottom of the Pool which caused those who tried to plumb its depth to say it was bottomless. Continuous efforts at filling it in were not successful until about 60 years ago. This curious tradition conveys nothing except the fact that legends of Thorndon as an important watering place were once current.

Confirmation is found in the names of localities on this stretch of the River Dove. A little below Thorndon is Braiseworth Haven, Catbridge fields, and Gun pool, whilst up stream above Thorndon Pool is the site of Thorndon Mill, mentioned in the Domesday Survey. Gunpool evidently marks the scene of a Danish battle, whilst Cat bridge may also point to a Celtic battle. The Celtic word Catu a battle, being a favourite compound in names of Celtic origin. Local colouring is further given by the Oldest Inhabitants, who tell of large iron anchors found along our river bed.

As water ways were the main roads of olden days it is not surprising that Thorndon situated on a river which was a main thoroughfare, and also having a

lake or broad connected with this river, and forming a harbour off it, was a place of importance.

The Catbridge fields, which have been mentioned before, lie on the north of the channel or cut, which connects our river and lake, while on the south lies Ganderwick. Ganderwick is low lying land extending over several acres at the mouth of our lake and was, as the name informs us, a creek.

Bearing in mind that Ganderwick was a deep water creek, it is remarkable that an ancient Ridgeway, as those old ways that follow along the edge of a water course are called, runs abruptly into the water at Ganderwick. The obvious conclusion being that here was a ferry or landing stage. Later, as draining lowered the water, the ferry gave place to a Ford, and later still to the tiny bridge called Catbridge. The name of this bridge gives cause for conjecture. I have already suggested it as the site of a Celtic battle. The word " bridge " is of course quite modern in comparison with the prefix Cat, which defines and locates the bridge. Bridges being named after the locality, rarely vice-versa. The Celtic custom was to place the defining element last, giving us Ceiscat, becoming later Brigcat. It seems so unlikely that these syllables would be reversed that we may postulate the suffix bridge, to be a late addition.

That this name is Celtic is further upheld by local tradition for the older generation of Thorndon folk pronounce the name as Cad bridge and correct you if you call it Cat bridge. Cad therefore is the earlier form. Our language is dowered plentifully with this word from Celtic sources, but no A.S. nor Scandinavian word suggests the possibility of a like double descent. For which reason we must pass over Gat, Gut, Gate or Cut which otherwise lend themselves to the present name and site.

Having found a road and located a quay on the north side of our lake it was then necessary to find the corresponding quay and road on the south side. As the quay at Catbridge lay at the end of the lake, the opposite shore presented about two miles of coast at any point of which a landing might be made. As this was a ferry not a ford, the landing point need not be the nearest dry land by the shortest route. I reasoned that as drainage lowered the water the channel requiring a ferry would gradually narrow. Travellers would therefore walk further and further down across the drying lake before stepping on to the ferry, until at last they could walk across on dry land and the two paths from the two quays that followed the ever receding ferry would meet, the old water way imperceptably merging into a path way. Such a path exists to-day, running diagonally south east from Catbridge for about half a mile until it touches rising ground between Black Horse Lane and Mill Lane. This pathway showing us the old cinder track of the long-ago ferry.

Black Horse Lane is a labouriously excavated sunken road very similar to Catbridge Ridgeway, as it also ended in deep water or a quay. That it was a quay is well attested as it is marked by these two lanes, one at either end. Mill Lane was a right of way within living memory, but now the entrance from the Street is covered by the Mill Barn. This ancient right of way once led to the quay, but now to nothing but fen, too soft for cattle and if there was not a quay or ferry here there is no justification for either the sunken road or right of way.

This quay lies in a back-wash creek in which vessels could shelter and be concealed from enemy ships, raiding on the river or mouth of the lake.

In the Bronze Age there was a Settlement here, for various implements, weapons and a cinerary urn were dug up when bush-draining the high land that skirts this creek, called Brakenham. A spear head, knife, gouge, awl and some socketed celts are now in the British Museum whilst the cinerary urn in is Bury Museum.

Brakenham covers an area of some 25 acres of high ground that rings the lake from Ganderwick, opposite Catbridge Quay to Thorndon Quay. A typical early Settlement site on the margin of navigable water. It is Thorndon's birth site, its cradle being a Bronze Age Settlement on Thorn Down.

A curious find was made some 60 years ago when deepening a ditch at the Mill Lane end of the quay, consisting of a "cart load" of nuts mixed up with timbers. This must have been a cargo of nuts sunk with the vessel that shipped them at her moorings. My reason for thinking that they were embarked at Thorndon is because close to, in Thorndon, is Hestley Hall, on Hestley Green, mentioned in the Domesday Survey and by its name proving that this neighbourhood was noted for its hazel nuts. My informant could not describe the timbers more than as large pieces of wood. It was this vast quantity of little nuts and how they got there that occupied all his attention. He agreed when I suggested that perhaps they were parts of a boat and proceeded to tell me of a large boat that was dug up somewhere near, a floating tradition giving neither locality nor date.

A beautifully bevelled celt of greenish grey stone of slate like texture was dug out of the Peat opposite the quay and about 400 yards out into the lake. It is $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by $3\frac{1}{2}$ tapering to $2\frac{1}{2}$ and weighs $3\frac{3}{4}$ lbs., and is now preserved in Thorndon.

There was no fixity of tenure about a Bronze Age Settlement, they were sporadic and could have had no other name than that of a locality. A sufficient postal address would have been—At Thorn Down. But when the Romans left our land to protect their own, it was only the Roman officers and Romans proper that departed. The soldiers of those legions and their auxiliares from the Rhine and from the Elbe who had come to conquer remained to form our earliest Anglo-Saxon settlers. They were married men with families and goods, unprovided for and left to look after themselves.

Free from military control they would wander down our Roman road seeking suitable places for settling, and this old Settlement still inhabited and kept clear by a few friendly Brythons and only a mile from the Roman road would suit them well. According to their custom they would give it a name more local than the general expression of Thorn Down. We would expect some jungle name, emphatic of the Thorn jungle around, such as we have in Brakenham. If it had been a very small settlement it would have been Braketon, if of earlier date Brakeworth.

Folk memories are long and stubborn and the new name never dominated the situation or extended beyond the palisades that ringed the Hamlet in the Brake, becoming merged in the Parish of Thorndon by the time of the Domesday Survey. The greater includes the less.

At the time of the Conquest Thorndon Lake was a shallowing broad, though the river was navigable for some 300 years later. As the water drained away Thorndon lost her lake, harbour and quays. Her commerce was deflected to other routes and travellers passed her by. Her prosperity waned when pro-

hibition changed her from a "Wet State" into a "Dry State." And the Holy Rood of Thorndon, once a most popular Pilgrimage, became inaccessible.

It is not idle imagining to assert that her lake and water ways gave her an importance in the past above that of neighbouring villages. Restore the lake, replace the water, and we would have one of the loveliest sites in Suffolk, attractive for boating, fishing, and excursions. Thorndon would be reborn, the more beautiful daughter of a beautiful mother.

Time cannot obliterate fame or greatness, nor has she done so, for indelible souveniers from the vanished past survive in Thorndon.

In olden days history was written with the spade, not the pen. It is the caligraphy the archæologist learns, and loves to read. With spade for pen and water for ink our forefathers traced the letters of his life story. His war entrenchments, his encampments, his domestic moats, his meeting places, even his grave, are delineated by this pen, though the ink is often dry.

A moat is usually considered conclusive evidence that an important personage constructed it. In village history a moat is the sign manual of the spade, endorsing a rich man's cheque. Many a village boasts its one or two moats as evidences of eminence in the past and no one denies it. Upon this assumption Thorndon founds, in part, her claim for former greatness.

Everywhere the parish is cut up by moats and remnants of moats. A huge moat encircles Hestley Green whilst at Lampits a moat encloses an area of 8 or 9 acres, evidently dug to accommodate the collective families and cattle of Thorndon (and perhaps the

neighbourhood) when raiders entered our lake to loot the village. At the Lodge are two moats, one a domestic moat the other a Dovehouse moat, 300 yards to the north west is a double moat or moat within a moat. Hestley Hall, Hill House, the Rectory and farm adjoining and Short's Farm all have large moats. whilst ten other houses have remains of moats attached.

Moats are difficult to date. Every man's house was his castle. Ringing all the changes of construction and defence, in Suffolk, from prehistoric days to Tudor times, upon ditching, palisades and water. And of this we may rest assured that as soon as man acquired cattle and invented the spade so soon did he utilise the latter to protect the former. And from his busy spade work in Thorndon, from her lake with its harbour, quays and water ways we have enlightening illustrations of energy and prosperity in the past. A past over leaping two thousand years.

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