

A Brief History of Gilmorton – The Golden Village on the Moor.

Gilmorton is in the Domesday Book of 1086 and is called “Mortons”. It had a population of about 140. The name is thought to be derived from Old English: *Gilden* (or *glyden*) meaning “golden”, and *morton*, “town on the moor”.

In 2004 two metal detector enthusiasts, exploring the farmland on the way to Kimcote, discovered a treasure hoard of 1254 Roman coins from around AD 296. Some coins were retained by the British Museum and many are on display in Lutterworth museum.

Excavation of the rare and historic motte and bailey castle appears to place it being built in the period 1066-1216. Initially it may have had a higher, conical motte supporting a timber tower, and was certainly more than a temporary fortification. This was surrounded by a timber palisade, on a bank, remains of which survive to the south west of the motte.

The motte and bailey nearness to the parish church shows a striking link between them and the manor. Fishponds were constructed west of the motte which was later lowered in height. Also in this area are ‘humps and bumps’ which shows early settlement remains.

It appears that in medieval times the village was obliged to provide a trained a squad of archers who could be called upon for military service should the monarch need them. It is thought to be an early form of army reserve.

There has been a place of worship here since at least 1209, and All Saints’ church is thought to be Saxon in origin. The base of the tower is of 15th century construction; the present building was reconstructed in Victorian times, being re-dedicated in 1861. In 1884 the tower suffered severe storm damage and was restored in 1909. In former times the church was referred to as Old Hallows, and the present Church Lane was known as Old Hallows Lane. The bells were restored by Taylors bell foundry in Loughborough in 2013. In 1872 the Congregational Chapel opened, its Manse being added in 1880; it was sold in the late 1980s.

There are details of ‘Gilmorton Parsonage homestead at the end of Oldhallows lane’, as far back as 1674. This is now the site of the present school building, being modified and extended since 1960. The new Rectory was built in 1960 on what were allotment gardens.

The original school, its surviving part being part of The Crown inn, was founded in 1774 by Mr Edward Chandler, whose family have lived here since 1568. The Grey Goose restaurant was formerly The Talbot, and The Red Lion was a hotel in the early 20th century.

In 1851 the population was 899, in 1971 it was down to 577, now it stands at 976, with further building in 2015 pushing that number to over a thousand. Post WW2 many council houses were built, as well as a dedicated police house and nurse’s house in Turville Road. Many old cottages were demolished to make way for modern houses.

Over the centuries several local families have been a key feature of village life, these include the Mackanesses, Bloxsom, Chandler and Burdett.

Gilmorton was on an important route for cattle drovers and Flat Lane was a direct link between Leicester and Northamptonshire. Since the Inclosure Act of 1777 many road verges were used as allotments until inter-war years.

Many festivals and celebrations have been held over the years, including a school street pageant, for which the police closed the village to traffic, culminating in crowning a May Queen and a May Day pole dance. Also Harvest Festivals, Royal wedding and jubilee street parties, millennium, beer festivals, flower shows and carol singing around the streets and pubs.

Work for villagers was mainly in agriculture until the mid-20th century, provided by at least 20 farms. In 1978 there were six working farms in Gilmorton village, reducing to four today, as well as 11 other farms in the parish. The Inclosure Act of 1777 started the consolidation of land. The present tower windmill was built early in 1800s but a storm in 1915 wrecked the mill, after over 300 years of service. At the start of Mill Lane there was a framework knitters factory in the early 1900s. A lemonade factory was operated in Victorian times, and it is thought that agricultural machinery repairs were carried out where Burdett Close is today. There were several hauliers, blacksmiths and farriers, wheelwrights, joiners and cobblers. Other recent businesses have included printing, hairdressing, garages, gift shops and toy model making, and currently a thriving security fencing business.

Shops have been very important in village life, the current store, tea room and Post Office attracting custom from around the area. In the 1930s to 1960s there were about 20 shops, including butchers, bakers, dairy and grocers. The largest was the Clayton Willey store which opened in the 1890s as speculative venture, based on the hope that the newly planned Great Central Railway line would come through Gilmorton.

Many local men and women served as combatants and in supporting roles in both world wars. The names of many are commemorated on the roll of honour plaque in the village hall. During WW2 many aircraft flew from nearby RAF Bruntingthorpe, with one Wellington bomber crash landing just short of The Crown.

In 1984 the village hall burnt down but was replaced by a new building designed by a local architect. In 1992 a large sports pavilion was opened to serve a new extensive playing field.

At the time of writing this, in 2015, the village is a flourishing and active community.

By Bob Morris