Portrait of a Village

Part One of a Two part article

Moulton

by RUBY HUNT

MOULTON, one of the most agreeable villages in South Lincolnshire, lies 5 miles east of Spalding and forms part of the Wapentake of Elloe. To the approaching visitor the village appears snugly enclosed by its encircling trees but a study of the locality reveals how sprawling are its boundaries, while the names of adjoining hamlets—Moulton Seas End, Marsh and Eaugate—pin-point the one-time nearness of the water. Indeed, Moulton's early history is spattered with references to periodic enclosures of the salt marsh and from the time of the Roman Invasion the village has been lengthened by accretions from the sea. In 1613, when James I put much of the marsh on common offer to certain villages in Holland, the men of Moulton, quick to scent a bargain, were the only natives to take advantage of the royal gesture and 724 acres became theirs for £105 2s. 4d.! By 1615, the village had over 2,000 acres of salt marsh but bitterly resented outside buyers who were regarded as unwanted interlopers. The Earl of Argyle, granted marshland here in 1615, had not been able to embank it as late as 1698 because of "disturbances by intruders". From 1660 various Acts were passed to enclose the Salt Marshes but these Acts did not in themselves prevent catastrophe—in 1765 an unexpectedly high tide inundated much of the Common, drowning over 2,000 sheep, 7 beast and 13 horses. Petty Constables in townships near the coast gave warning to all seamen to attend the Admiral's Court and as late as the 18th century the Moulton Constable was compelled to appear at the Admiral's Court at Boston although at that time no business was transacted there. Marsh Reeves and Shepherds looked after the commons and the livestock thereon, expenses being met by a marsh rate of 1/6d. for each horse and beast and 3d. for each sheep grazed on the common.

The Annual Sand Fair brought an invasion of 20 or 30 heavily laden wagons to the Marsh which provided an ideal spot for the day's sporting activities. The grimmer side is revealed in the Moulton Overseers' Account Book in which we read of "£1 12s. 2d. paid for a child found on the Marsh" and later, "Funeral expenses for the body found on the Marsh—£3 2s. 2d.".

For many years the story of Moulton revolved around its two most glorious institutions—the Church and the School. The Church of All Saints stands proudly in the centre of the village, its Perpendicular tower and finely proportioned, crocketted spire commanding attention from afar—indeed it is said that within a twenty mile radius nearly 40 churches can be picked out from the lofty battlement. Referred to as "The Lady of the Fens" by reason of this 160 foot spire, All Saints was begun in the 12th century. Although Domesday has no mention of a church in Moulton it is certain that one existed—this early church, a small Saxon building of wood, probably thatched, stood on the site later occupied by the Bell Inn but had fallen into decay at the time of the monastic rivalry between the Abbeys of Crowland and Spalding—a rivalry which is reputed to have produced at least two of Fenland's glorious churches. Thorold, Sheriff of Lincolnshire, lived in Spalding and it was he who first founded the monastic cell at Spalding. His daughter, Lady Lucy, owned the advowson of Moulton and gave it to the newly formed monastery whose Prior forever referred to Moulton as his "farre ville". When the Crowland monks erected a splendid church at nearby Whaplode, the Spalding Priory rose to the challenge, employed the same masons and began the building of Moulton's magnificent church.

The church's history is one of varying fortunes and reflects the ever changing pattern of the ages—the famous 'Moulton Images' incident became a legal precedent, the result of which was widely quoted in a famous law suit involving Exeter Cathedral. It was in 1684 that the villagers applied for a faculty to enable them to decorate the church walls with paintings of the Apostles but the idea displeased the puritanically minded vicar, the Rev. Tallents, and a bitter wrangle between parson and parishioners ensued. Sir Richard Lloyd, Dean of the Arches, pronounced in favour of the parishioners and said that the "setting up of pictures was an honest and pious intention to beautify the Church".

FEAR OF POPERY

Nevertheless, fear of popery was so great in the 18th century that many chancels were still disused and it was a generation after the Restoration before the altar was moved to the East end of the Moulton Church. There are three piscinas showing the position of the three old altars and a recess which appears to be a plain Easter Sepulchre—the Screen, one of the finest examples of medieval woodwork in South Lincs., was installed around 1490.

One of the most interesting features is the Adam and Eve font, one of three in the church's possession. The oldest, a rough, hollowed out stone block was lost for many years and eventually discovered in a stable by the Rev. R. Jackson in 1868. The Adam and Eve font, placed in the church in 1709, is thought to be a copy of the one in St. James', Piccadilly and is one of the very few in existence. These early, mounted fonts had scriptural scenes depicted round the base and were often brightly coloured—traces of colouring can still be seen on both Adam and Eve who must have looked most attractive when first commissioned. As a protection against holy water being stolen for use in black magic the font, like many others, was covered with a lid suspended on a sturdy chain. Superstition was rife—Mary Gunnel, a suicide, was buried, a stake driven at her side, at midnight in unconsecrated ground in Woodhouse Lane while Broadwater Lane was the final resting place of at least one of life's unfortunates.

The year 1868 saw many changes in Moulton Church and at least one unusual happening. A parishioner, Amelia Lea, made headlines in all the scientific journals after being bitten by a bat while singing in church—whether in protest at the quality of her singing we have no means of ascertaining but for the rest of her life the poor lady went into fits of prolonged sleep as a result of the unfortunate incident. The Restoration of the Church, to which Queen Victoria subscribed £200 as well as £100 to the Church Mission and School Fund at Moulton Seas End, saw many of the old fittings removed—new seats were substituted for old—not entirely to the liking of many who saw the allocation of prominent seats as favourites to the chosen few. In carrying out the restoration programme, many coins and Nuremburg tokens were found and evidence of former wall frescoes came to light. The old three-decker pulpit, once draped in black every Good Friday, made way for a new one from which the Rev. R. Jackson preached a thank-offering sermon. This Service, lasting from 11.30 a.m. to almost 3 p.m. and attended by close on 1,000 people, was followed by a lunch held in the Grammar School field. Catered for by mine host of the Axe and Handsaw, the menu was staggering in both quantity and variety. Whether anyone was afterwards in a position to ring out the bells history does not relate!—the oldest bell, 1588, is one of the few in Lincolnshire to date back to Tudor times; the dearth of bells usually being attributed to Cromwell's puritanical zeal in melting them down for ammunition. One of Moulton's bells fell victim to a disastrous fire caused by an over anxious sexton. In all the 200 years in which the family of Skeath served the Church, no member is as noteworthy as the unfortunate Ben who, in 1784, accidentally caused irretrievable damage to the No. 4 bell. This was the year of severe frost and Ben, anxious to keep the clock machinery running, decided to leave a fire burning in the belfry. He not only achieved his aim, but fire caused by burning oil, badly damaged both bell and bell frame—the latter still bearing scorch marks when removed in 1826. Ben's chief interest must have been in the machinery rather than the clock itself for in the early 1800's the old wooden dial of the timepiece had only one hand and half a face! The following entry appears in the Churchwardens' Accounts for 1784:

> Oct. 21st. Paid at Wm Dawson's when Church on Fire—7/11d.
> Paid for the engines coming from Spalding when Church on fire—£1 1s. 0d.

Did this occurrence weigh on the minds of the churchpeople when in 1831 they voted to purchase a village Fire Engine but only ON CONDITION it be kept IN MOULTON CHURCH? Be that as it may, the previous source of fire fighting water was by then replaced by what is now the Village Green. At the time of the 1784 episode, the Green, then a stagnant pool, was known by the curious name of the SHALL PIT and it was not until 1822 that it was "ordered that the Shall Pit be filled up at the expense of Ten Pounds by Messrs. Johnson and Woolley". Mrs. Reeks of Whaplode, whose father Mr. Robert King was then Chairman of the Parish Council, has one of the original leaflets bidding parishioners to meet in the Vestry Room to "re-consider the matter as apparently an earlier meeting was mistakenly believed to have been a 'select' and not a 'public' one, thereby preventing

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Opposite page: George Inn and Hepworth's Butcher's Shop, c. 1908.

Right: View of Main Street, Moulton, c. 1900.

Lower right: Village Green, Moulton. View of Mill, and Mulberry House where the Mill owner, Mr. King, lived. Boyfield House is across the road.

Below: The Village postman, early 1900's, Station Road, Moulton.

Bread Delivery in Moulton, 1914-1918.

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the ones most interested from attending". The summons is signed, among others, by W. E. Foster—afterwards Sir William Foster—a distinguished Moultonian whose mother, a member of the local Hunnings family, claimed ancestry with Thomas de Multon, Lord of the Castle in the 12th century. Born at the Manor House, now the home of Mr. and Mrs. P. Clark, Sir William left money for the placing of an animal drinking trough on the Village Green but this bequest seems to have been overlooked for the only water on the Green is that which the Pump supplies. Forethought for the animal kingdom may have been engendered by his memories of hounds assembled in the pinfold waiting for the huntsman's horn when, once a year, the harriers met outside his family home.

The passage of time sees many changes. In earliest times the Fairs and Markets held in churchyards were profitable to ecclesiastical and lay lord alike, and Moulton profited with the rest. In 1292, however, Bishop Sutton, holding Court at Croyland, forbade Moultonians to hold their Fair but bade them set about repairing the campanile—an order which many believe to have originated the beautiful tower and spire. Throughout the years this spire has attracted numerous fool-hardy feats when various people have scaled the crocketted steeple. One man, fastening his babe-in-arms precariously to the top, summoned his frantic wife to survey his handiwork while another, Thornton by name, had the unnerving experience of dislodging the weather vane during his climb. To his credit, although poor in this world's goods, Thornton paid for a new vane—a fact recorded in the inner walls of the spire. None, however, was as enterprising as Ratty Bailey who, having tied his red kerchief to the top, retrieved it, repaired to the Swan Inn and there retailed the scraps at a shilling a time! Fortunately for these men, Moulton's custom of forcing miscreants to pay penance by standing in church enveloped in a sheet throughout divine service had long since been abandoned along with many more of the old practices. Gone is the 'stretcher' once used to carry the dead while the macabre 'iron feelers' used by the sexton to discover whether bodies were sufficiently decayed to warrant final grave covering have long since vanished.

The old wooden Poor Box, once used as the bell ringers' candlestick, must have witnessed many a changing scene. Guy Fawkes Day, traditionally earmarked for payment of the ringers' stipend, was a glorious excuse for a drunken revel when the ringers attended the Bonfire Celebrations and with a hideous clashing of bells celebrated every riotous 5th of November. The old Constable, fuddled by noon, still remembered to put in his charge to the County Rate:— "To watching Guy Fawkes—one day and night—10/-". It was probably after one of these junketings that some long-suffering soul wrote of the bells:—

"Holbeach pots, Whaplode pans,
Moulton organs, Weston ting-tangs".

One elderly lady recently remarked that Moulton was 'once full of old characters and wealthy landowners'—eccentricity was the prerogative of priest and parishioner alike. In the 18th century the Rev. Williamson held a running feud with one of his parishioners, Hardy by name. Goaded beyond endurance by this gentleman, the parson, after a particularly trying week, mounted the pulpit and, casting a venomous look at his victim, announced as his text, "There is no fool like THE FOOL-HARDY"! No-one knows what form Mr. Hardy's retaliation took, but many years later, two little old ladies living in a cottage adjoining the churchyard, had the disconcerting habit of listening intently to part of the sermon after which one of them would announce in a clear, high treble, "That'll do, thank you Mr. Ward, we've had plenty"!

Across the Green, revered by all, stood Moulton Grammar School. Time and authority have not dealt kindly with this now closed school but to generations of Moultonians the John Harrox Grammar School stood for all that was best in the world of education. Its founder, John Harrox, although not Moulton born, had connections with the Harrington family which had property

in the village. Here it was that the genial benefactor settled in a house which was to become the centrepiece of the Grammar School. Having invested in land which became readily available at the Dissolution of the Monasteries and realising what a blow education had received by the dispersal of these seats of learning, John Harrox by his will made on September 19th, 1560, ensured that education should not be neglected in the district of his adoption. His death occurred the following day and this far-sighted countryman—for many years a familiar figure seated on his stool at Sabbath worship—was interred in the Parish Church although the tombstone with its Latin inscription—'John Harrox rests here in the Lord, Worthy of a better memorial, 1560'—does not mark the spot exactly as many of the stones were re-sited during the 1868 Restoration. The school, originally thatched, went through a period of doubts and difficulties but, through the implementation of various schemes was eventually put on a sound footing and went from strength to strength. "Divers gentlemens' sons of good credit" attended but many years later, owing to a serious shortage of scholars, the Governors advertised in the London and Provincial papers to the effect that all children would be "well and carefully taught learned languages free of all charge EXCEPT FOURPENCE entrance fee".

CAME BY COACH

Until the beginning of the 19th century most scholars came from outside the area as the local farming community was not over anxious for its sons to learn either Latin or Greek—two essentials of the curriculum. The boarders came by coach along the old Turnpike Road whence travellers from Norwich and Birmingham called at the old Bell Inn. Imagine the relief of alighting at the welcoming hostelry after jolting along the rough, old roads whose 50 yard long ruts often made going difficult!

In 1856 two sections were established, the Upper and the Lower whose less academic curriculum attracted greater local support. Great rivalry existed between the two groups, the mortar-boarded Upper scholars referred to scornfully as 'Grammar Grinders' by their Lower School colleagues.

The School Badge, its Tree of Knowledge emblazoned with the words, "Pietas Plantavit, Probitas Firmavit", honours both John Harrox and the man who helped the school weather the storms of litigation. Edmund Burnstone, one of the first feoffees appointed, fought hard and long to establish what Harrox had initiated and thus it was that the Tree of Knowledge, planted in piety by the Founder, became rooted in Equity by the efforts of Edmund Burnstone. The School Badge has been worn proudly by many generations of schoolboys of whom at least one, young Master Bray, has since admitted that it was the attractive colouring of the cap which gave Moulton precedence when choosing his Alma Mater!

Barlow's thatched tuck shop, the Old Dorm and the New, Cricket on the Field—now ringed with 23 sturdy trees, sad memorial to the fallen in World War I—the Middle Tree and Sunday Church are all evocative to Moultonians. The 'Moultonian', first school magazine to appear in the district, had as its first editor, Kenneth Healey, who afterwards achieved the distinction of becoming the Rt. Reverend K. Healey, Bishop of Grimsby. This magazine appeared regularly from 1915 until the sad day in 1939, when, under its thirty-first Headmaster, Mr. J. G. Westmoreland, the Grammar School, so long a vital part of Moulton's life, finally closed its doors.

In spite of its close connection with the Church, Moulton School can claim but one man who was both local Vicar and Schoolmaster—James Assheton—and he it was who leased school land to William Ripley on condition that he planted 'nineteene long willow plantes annually' and brought a 'good, fat capon every Christmas day to the schoolmaster' in addition to working one day in harvest for him 'onlye for meat'. In 1722 John Chapman was Head and through him Moulton was closely associated with his brother-in-law, Coles, the great antiquary whose priceless records had not then been manuscripted for it was in Moulton Church that Coles commenced his first notebook "as a very young antiquary". One of the church windows commemorates another Headmaster, Alfred Stanley Hatt, who died in 1944. It was his father who, on his own introduction as Headmaster at Moulton was presented to the people with the pious hope that 'the Hatt would fit'! The shortest reigning Head was one who

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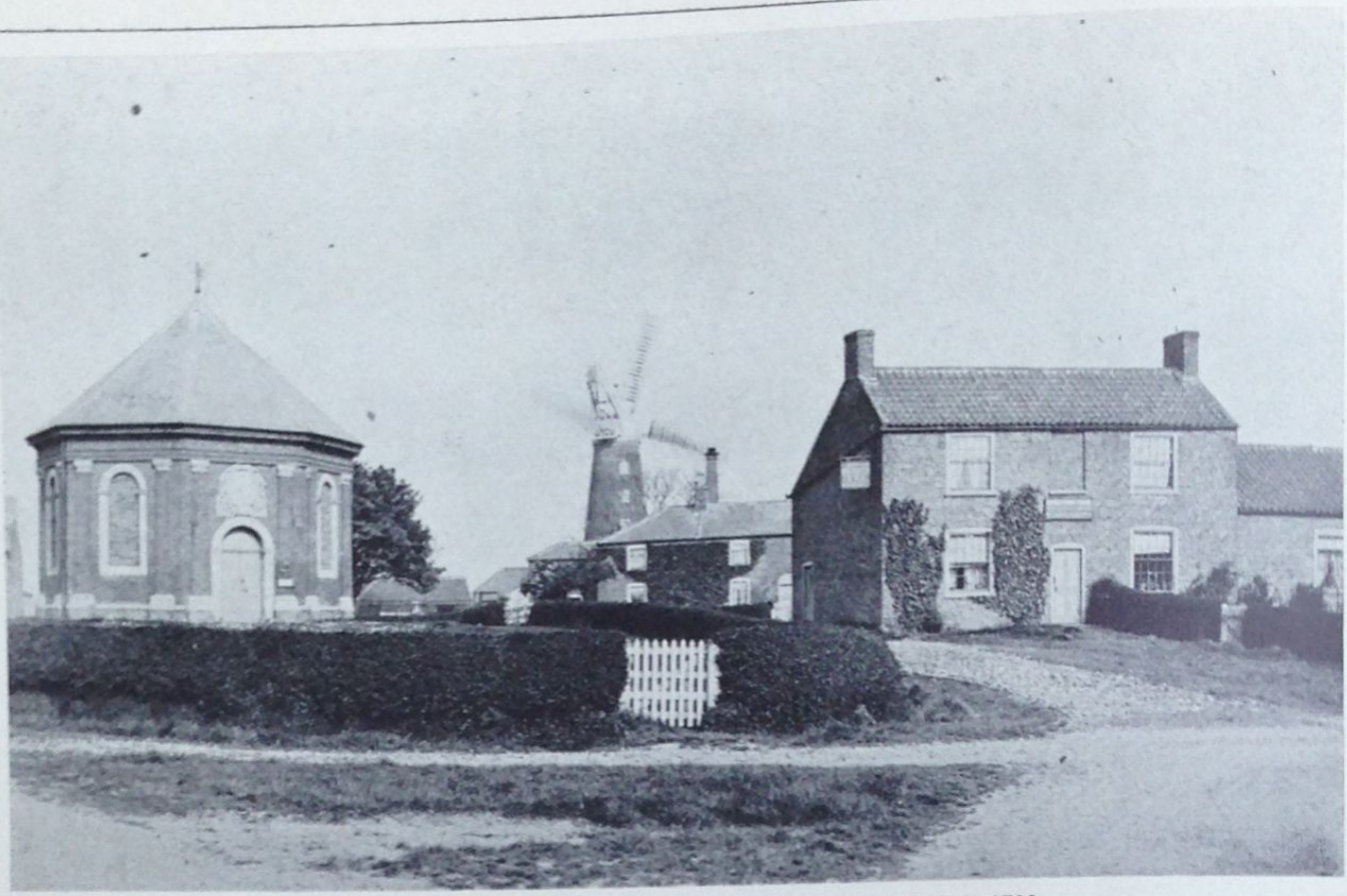
Village Pump during the first World War.

Hospital Sunday—event raised money for local hospitals, c. 1928.

Empire Day 1921—hoisting the flag with the Rev. Poynton.

Thanksgiving Service after the first World War, on the Village Green.



The octagonal church of St. James at Moulton Chapel, built in 1722.

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was appointed, died suddenly and was buried the same day as his predecessor while conversely, the Rev. William Maugham presided over the school for 51 years. The old Grammar School-room built during his tenure carried an entrance stone bearing the inscription, "W.M. 1792". In this Head's day the income was so poor that he was allowed to supplement it by assisting the vicar on condition that he kept 'a proper assistant' at school but in 1807 it was disclosed that the only assistant was the Headmaster's grandson who was not yet 14 years old!

GIFT FROM ALIEN SHORE

In 1805, the 55th Anniversary of the Church Choir was celebrated after service by a feast at the Carpenters Arms where a colossal rump of beef was served. No doubt the Rev. Maugham's large family gladly availed itself of the opportunity—except the sailor son, Theophilus, whose gift to his land-locked family—a parrot from an alien shore—was found many years later in the School Garden where it had been ceremoniously buried by the sentimental Headmaster. It is through the Rev. Maugham that Moulton claims connection with the well known author, Somerset Maugham, whose great-great-great uncle he was. The majority of the family achieved no such fame, content to occupy life's humbler spheres. In the Overseers Account Book of 1788 we learn that Robert Maugham, undertaker, was paid 10/- for "expenses of eating, drinking and sitting up with James Carrat"—all to no avail however, for over the page we find a further outlay of 7/10d. "for bringing the corpse up to town, and carrier". Fifty years later, yet another Maugham had become Overseer of the Parish.

The old Account Book reveals much of 18th century rural life. The Workhouse loomed large in the fears of the communal poor and in 1779 these people were subjected to the indignity of being 'badged' before being sent to Thomas Alvey, the Workhouse Master. To prevent indiscriminate begging from parish to parish the system of badging had been devised as long ago as the 1600's and the Moulton Overseers, following this trend, compelled the poor to parade with the hated badge M.P. (Moulton Poor) on each right sleeve. Badgered as well as badged, compulsorily vaccinated (a Cholera Hospital was built in 1833), forced to work for the master and continually harassed in return for meagre rations, coarse clothes and scant medical attention, the Paupers' lot was in striking contrast to that of the Master who was entitled to their labour as well as to many perquisites of his office—strangest of all being the ownership of all roadside hay or £5 in lieu of same! Cleanliness was regarded as next to Godliness and yet in 1795 we find "Paid for powder to kill lice—£2 3s. 3d.". The writer, overcome with indignation, added in brackets, "A SCANDALL upon THIS PARISH", followed by a heavily pencilled note to "NOTICE THIS". Outward moral rectitude brooked no deviation and in 1811, the Overseers, to avoid embarrassment 'Paid Wilson's daughter getting out of the Parish—(Pregnant)—5/-". Those who stayed were directed into domestic situations and were subjected to close scrutiny by their employers. In 1822, Mary Sewell was only to be allowed new clothing 'on bringing a satisfactory letter from her mistress'. Meanwhile those who directed affairs often profited by virtue of their office. So blatant had this become that in 1822 a Vestry Meeting decided that men who could not get work at the usual 1/6d. per day, should be set to work on the roads and no longer allowed to labour for farmers at 1/- per day—the Overseers making up the deficiency while, ten years later, the Vestry decreed that the Parish Officer should no longer clothe the poor OUT OF HIS OWN SHOP.

The second and final part of
Ruby Hunt's Portrait of a Village
MOULTON
will be in the March edition of
Lincolnshire Life