

This is the Sixty-Second of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church

A POEM ABOUT THE NEW COUNTY BRIDGE

In the 3 December 1902 edition of the EDP it says that they are indebted to a Mrs (or Miss) Rosa A Rice for an old copy of some verses on "The New County Bridge at Swanton." She says that she hoped that the verses, although somewhat crude, may help later generations to understand the dangers and difficulties faced by earlier generations before the building of a bridge. She added a personal note, saying that the bridge was built by her great-grandfather, Mr Michael Jackson of Dereham.

Certainly to modern eyes the poem is somewhat reminiscent of those by William McGonagle, and one is tempted to smile patronisingly. However, it should be remembered that William Plowman, the author of the poem, was not a learned man, but he was writing about an event that was close to his heart and was of great importance to the village.

At the foot of the poem is a note by the Rev T.C. Munnings, who was rector of Beetley-cum-East Bilney, until his death in September 1883. This says:

"The foregoing lines are the production of a poor man who is a papermaker; and as, on account of a stagnation in the trade, he has been discharged by his master (who gives him an excellent character, and will again employ him as soon as he can). I have presumed to print them in the hope of being able to raise a small sum for his support during the time of his being out of employment. His name is William Plowman; he is self-taught and gives (as I think his lines will show) ample proof of an original and ingenious mind."

Here are some of the verses

Ye Norfolk men to me attend,
For now my harp is strung
This public structure to
commend
By poet yet unsung.

Speed then the music of my
strain
Soft winds upon your wings
And tell each Launditch
generous name
The muse their merit brings.

Where Wensum flows with
winding stream
By Swanton paper mills
There is a ford, that has long
been
Productive of great ills

*Plowman then devotes several
verses to describing the
dangers of the ford, and he
continues:*

Again I touch my loftiest string,
To sound your praises high,
Who'er this bridge did fling
And put the nuisance by

No more equestrians,
charioteers,
Gigs, chaises, tumbrils. wains
That wat'ry obstacle appears
That caused you anxious
pains.

The bridge is finish'd and
complete
'Tis strong in every part:
It is not grand, but firm and
neat,
And built by Jackson's art

I helped to lay the bridge's
base
I sing the topmost stone:
And now I wish it length of
days
With my last quiv'ring tone.