

Saint George and the Dragon

It is said that after the siege of Acre, the King of England embarked for the Adriatic, taking with him a curious little “cokadrille” which was given to the King with other gifts in return for the support given to the claim of Lusignan to the throne of Jerusalem. These serpentes or cokadrilles were later described as “Zalowe” and raised above 4 feet with short thighs and great nails and talons. At the time of the gift it was thought to have been a dragoun or insect and was less than a span long. When the King, disguised as a pilgrim passed through Germany he carried this “dragoun” with him and very inconvenient it must have been as it waxed greater

Fortunately the King had ample funds, indeed it was in consequence of his lavish expenses that he was unmasked and thrown into prison by Leopold, Duke of Austria. He seems all though his difficulties, to have prescribed his “dragoun” — presumably Leopold did not think it worth taking and was actually glad to be rid of this troublesome pet and prisoner. Anyway, the King ultimately brought the beast to England and lodged it in a strong cage at the Tower of London. It is thought to have been the beginning of that menagerie which was lodged there for about 550 years and only removed in 1831.

Meanwhile the “cocodrille” had grown enormously and one summer day a few years later lashed out with its ponderous tail, smashed the cage to bits and escaped into the Thames. For weeks or months nothing was heard of the “insec” despite proclamations and offers of reward.

Time passed and swimming, crawling, ravaging it found its way to that small settlement on the banks of the Stour called Withermundford. The few natives were terrified at the new arrival and a rumour spread among them that it could only be pacified with human sacrifice and so long as the supply lasted they fed the creature with virgins.

Doubtless the temporary prodigality of food kept the “cocodrille” well and happy — but the supply of food gave out and the natives, at their wits end sent to Sir George of Layer de la Haye, son of Eustice Earl of Boulogne telling the gallant knight that there was a fierce dragon which had settled with them and which they had tried, in vain to slay with arrows which bounce from its hide and then had pacified it with virgins but, alas, there were no more virgins in the hundred.

The villagers besought Sir George to travel through the forest and slay the ravenous beast. Sir George, accordingly armed himself and his horse and came to the succour of the much suffering community.

The brave knight attacked the dragon at the place where the bridge now stands and an ugly bridge it is now compared to the picturesque bridge it replaced. Sir George chased the dragon, which really put up a poor fight, and slew it, according to tradition about where the Grange now stands.

From then to this day, the Parish has been called Wormiton, Wormington and Wormingford in memory of the “Worm” or early word for Dragon. It may be that the “insec” was wounded in that part of the glebe the children now call “Bloody Meadow”