

## Parish geology & wildlife

The parish rises from north to south, reflecting the ability of the underlying rocks to resist erosion by water and ice. The southern half of the parish lies on the Middle Chalk, laid down on the Cretaceous sea floor about 100 million years ago. More chalk is hidden in the buildings of the parish: hard chalk (known as *clunch*) was quarried from local pits for use as building stone while soft chalk was heated to make lime for plaster and limewash, or to mortar cream-yellow bricks made from the Gault Clay. Some of the hard layers in the Chalk are *aquifers*, storing rainwater; the village lies where this water flows from springs, or can be reached with wells. The heavy clays of the Lower Chalk and the Gault form the lower ground to the north and east of the village.

The flower-rich grassland by the chalk pit is a good place to see how geology can influence wildlife: Common Milkwort is one of many plants here that prefer a lime-rich soil. Shrubs such as Hawthorn and Blackthorn are less demanding. For many centuries hedgerows containing these shrubs have been planted to mark field boundaries. Today they are also valued for the food and shelter they provide for wildlife. In late winter flocks of hungry redwings and fieldfares arrive to strip them of berries. Listen for skylarks singing above the fields in spring; they nest in sparse areas in the crops. Hares are becoming rare elsewhere in Britain, but in South Cambs you may still see them early on spring mornings. In high summer the uncut grassy margins of Ashwell Street and parish roads are full of colour, with yellow Lady's Bedstraw, purple Knapweed and pale lilac Scabious.



*Bright blue Common Milkwort and other wildflowers in the chalk grassland reserve by the Ruddy Pit.*

We hope you enjoy exploring the footpaths of Guilden Morden. As you walk these paths you are, quite literally, following in the footsteps of people who have lived and worked here for hundreds or even thousands of years. You are travelling across a landscape that was once an ocean floor and, more recently, lay under an ice sheet perhaps a kilometre thick. If your imagination fails there is wildlife to be seen in uncultivated corners such as hedgerows and field margins, the chalk pit, and in cultivated fields, too. All this with fresh air and gentle exercise to benefit your health.

Please remember that other people hope to enjoy the footpaths and wildlife of the parish. Please clean up after your dog and in spring and early summer please keep dogs on leads to avoid disturbing ground-nesting birds in the fields and hedgerows. Please take your litter home!

If you have any questions about the footpaths, or wish to report problems on the network, please contact the Guilden Morden Parish Clerk, ideally via email: [parishclerk@guildenmorden.gov.uk](mailto:parishclerk@guildenmorden.gov.uk)

*This leaflet was published by  
Guilden Morden Parish Council  
with funding from Awards for All.*



# Explore landscape, wildlife & history on the footpaths of Guilden Morden





## Parish paths & parish history

Roads and paths record the ways that people move across the landscape. Walking the footpath network not only provides exercise and pleasure, it's a direct link with those who walked here in the past and will walk here in the future.

People have lived and worked in Guilden Morden for several thousand years, leaving a legacy of tracks and roads as well as the remains of their buildings and possessions. ASHWELL STREET is one of the routes of the prehistoric Icknield Way, a network of tracks running along the Chalk from Norfolk southwest to Buckinghamshire and beyond. The people who left their flint axes near MOBB'S HOLE may have travelled here on Ashwell Street; the axes might have been used to clear some of the woodland that covered much of the parish 6000 years ago. Low mounds in the fields of Odsey are BRONZE AGE BARROWS, burial mounds nearly 4500 years old, worn away by centuries of ploughing. North of Odsey the parish and county boundaries and a path follow what may be an Iron Age boundary, the SHIRE BAULK. Iron Age relics, probably from graves, have been found elsewhere in the parish. The CEMETERY on the hill that later became the chalk pit is unusual because it contained Iron Age burials as well as Roman.

Guilden Morden was already productive farmland when the Romans arrived in Britain. A VILLA stood near Ashwell Street, with a good view of the CEMETERY. A ROMAN ROAD linking Cambridge with what is now the A1 ran through the centre of the village, and the remains of other Roman buildings were found in Odsey.

The Anglo-Saxons followed the Romans. COBB'S

LANE runs along a bank that may have been raised c. 1015 to mark the boundary between two Saxon estates. The remains of SAXON DWELLINGS have been excavated south of Ashwell Street, while fragments of Saxon pottery, amber beads and a sculpted boar (possibly a helmet crest) were found elsewhere in the parish. Two SAXON GRAVES, one containing a child and the other a young man and older woman, lay near Church Lane.

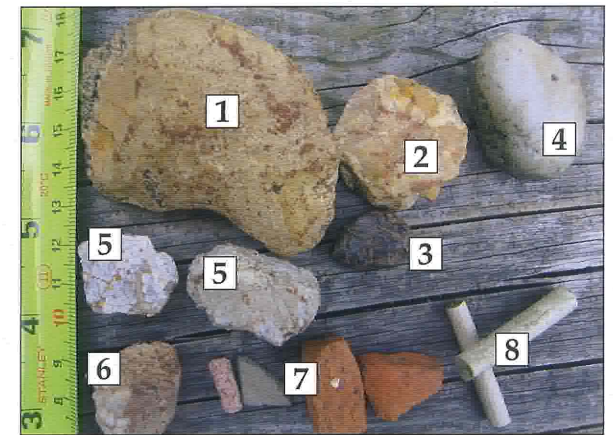
The earliest written record of Guilden Morden is the Domesday Book. In 1086 the Mordens were still grouped together as *Morduna*, meaning 'Marsh-hill' (a name that makes sense if you approach either village from the north over what was once low, wet ground). By the 13th century this Morden was known as 'Guilden', meaning rich or productive.

Guilden Morden village formed as settlements on a track running south from Tadlow to the Icknield Way grew together over the centuries. Little Green and Great Green, Church Street, Pound End, Town End and a group of houses along Fox Hill and Trap Road were once all separate places. A small settlement near Ruddy known as *Redreth* was last mentioned in the 14th century. The precise location is unknown, but in the 1520s Barnwell Priory in Cambridge was still appointing hermits to its chapel, *Redderia*. Odsey appears to be another small, relatively isolated hamlet, but the land in Guilden Morden was once a medieval grange, a farm producing goods for Warden Abbey in Bedfordshire.

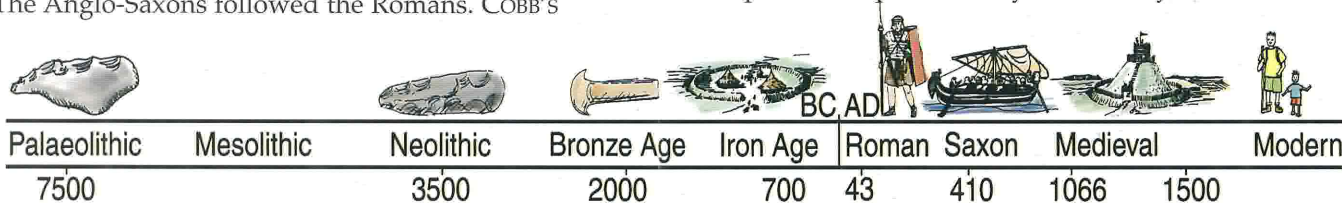
Like its neighbours, Guilden Morden has always been a farming community, although medieval records list the associated industry of straw-plaiting for hats as well as a brickworks, weavers, and chandlers. 'Numerous sheep' were kept here, but the most important crop was barley, sent to Royston and

London to become brewers' malt. About 500–600 people have lived here almost since records began, but the population rose to over 1000 in the 19th century heyday of coprolite mining. In this area *coprolites* are phosphate-rich nodules found in layers in the Gault and Lower Chalk. The most famous bed, the *Cambridge Greensand*, lies at the junction of the two rocks. Properly treated they became a valuable fertiliser: across the county these clays were turned over in trenches dug by hard-working and poorly-paid coprolite miners.

The open fields were enclosed in 1805, after which the low-lying meadows such as *Pelhams Cow Common* near the river were drained and ploughed. Guilden Morden is still surrounded by farmland, but has grown in size with many residents now travelling to work in London or Cambridge.



Found beside footpaths in Guilden Morden: 1. a badly-worn fragment of ammonite (Cretaceous); 2. flint containing a fossil brachiopod (Cretaceous); 3. fragment of phosphatic nodule; 4. a rounded piece of quartzite probably brought here by a glacier; 5. 'pot boilers', heat-shocked flints used to boil water in non-fireproof containers (probably Neolithic); 6. a fragment of quern (Roman); 7. potsherds (Roman and medieval); 8. clay pipe stems (19th century).

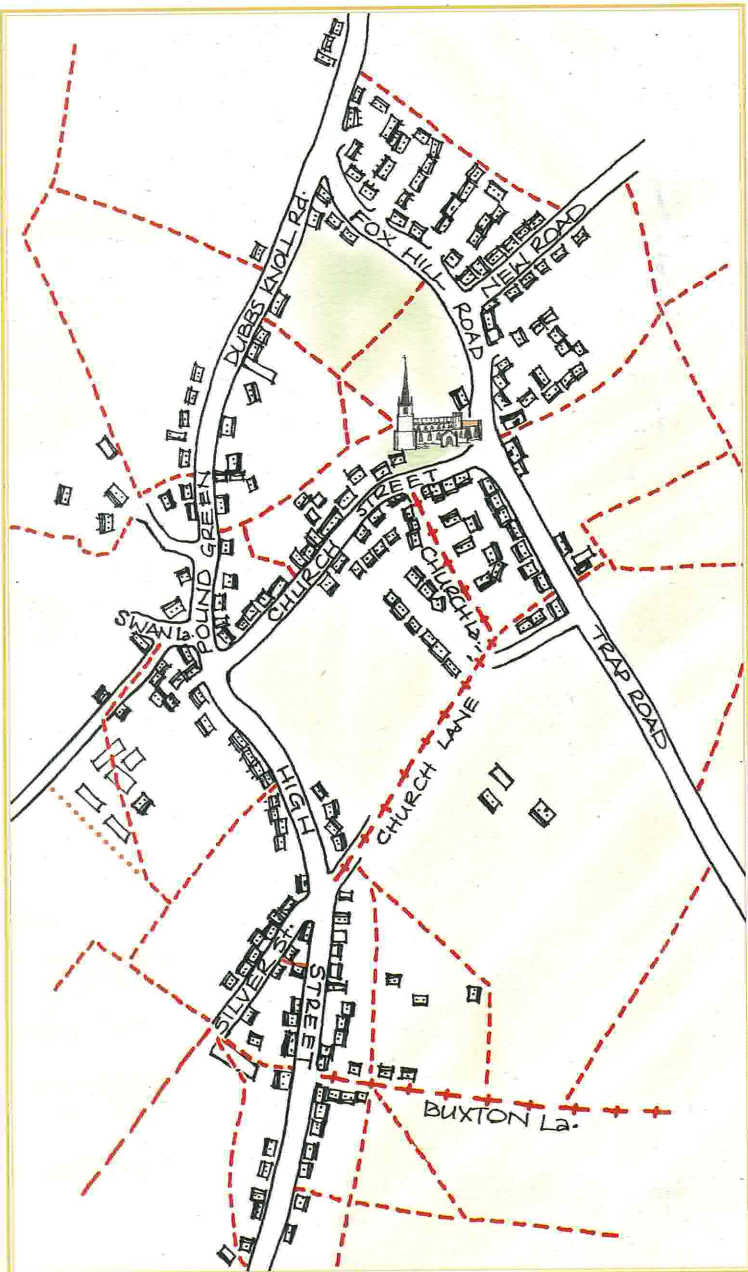




- Key**
- Public footpath
  - Public bridleway
  - Public byway
  - Other paths, including permissive paths.
  - Parish boundary
  - County boundary

1. HOOK'S MILL was *hoksmelne* in 1381. This is probably the site of the mill recorded in the Domesday Book. It is not open to the public.
2. LITTLE GREEN
3. GREAT GREEN
4. MORDEN HALL was built by Thomas Haselden, Controller of the household of the unpopular John of Gaunt, after a party of rebels burnt his original house during the Peasants' Revolt in the 14th century. Morden Hall is one of the finest moated sites in the county.
5. TWEEN TOWNS or MILLENNIUM WOOD
6. WHITEPONDS WOOD (Steeple Morden)
7. THE VINEYARD track was granted in Guilden Morden's Enclosure Act to provide Ashwell's commoners access to their Cow Common (grazing land) until Ashwell itself was enclosed in 1858. The track remains a pleasant walk, named for adjacent fields.

Many paths within the village will take you close to houses and across private gardens. Please respect the privacy of the owners, be particularly careful not to make excessive noise, and keep dogs under control.



COBB'S LANE (most of which is in Steeple Morden) is part of a road that ran from Tadlow, on the Cambridge-Oxford road, south to Odsey and what is now the A505 (part of the Icknield Way). This was probably the most important route through the village in the Middle Ages and possibly even earlier; it runs along a bank that may mark an Anglo-Saxon boundary.

A 13th C figurine found here in the 19th C may indicate the site of the Chapel Redderia.

A Roman villa stood somewhere near the cemetery and Ashwell Street.

A Romano-British cemetery near the chalk pit was excavated in the early 20th C.

ODSEY was an estate given to the Cistercian Abbey at Warden in Bedfordshire by William Peverel in the 12th century. By 1160 the Abbey had established a *grange*, a large farm, on the lands. By 1400 it had passed to Barnwell Priory. After the Reformation the estate passed through many hands. In 1705 Robert Chester established a racing stables for horses to run on Odsey Heath (in Hertfordshire). In the 1720s the Duke of Devonshire remodelled the stables and built Odsey House, a sporting lodge and jockey house; Herbert Fordham built the mansion known as 'Odsey' c. 1865, possibly on the site of the original grange.