

WINTER IN MILTON – LONG AGO



Weathering the cold, drab months of winter, I think back to the days when snow and ice brought Milton to a standstill – and some folk starved. My ancestor George Milway dredged oysters for a living; when the creek was frozen over, the boats were stuck fast, leaving George and his family in a fix.

Milton in those days was remembered by local author Denham Jordan (1836-1920):

“Quays, shipyards, and wharves are all silent, the quietness of the snow is over all. Brigs, luggers, barges, sprat- and shrimp-boats, could be seen in that land-locked harbour, ice bound, when the tide was up. Skiffs and punts were hauled aboard or they would have been ground into splinters.”

A silent town, one long street, men walking backwards and forwards on the hard trampled snow in front of their houses as if they were on the decks of their vessels; every one of those sea-booted and thickly guernseyed fishermen and fowlers was smoking his pipe. Stout hearts they needed to bear the roughnesses of that hard time; but they got through. Those that could help did their best, and when matters got better again, their goodness was remembered and repaid.

In the surrounding countryside, folk fared no better – *“When the wind blew direct from the sea, snow drifted over wide stretches of fields in vast winding-sheets, smothering all; hedges, with only the topmost twigs showing, were natural bulwarks to protect the narrow tracks, where, in severe winters, snow lay waist-deep. Some lonely cottages would be covered up to their chimneys. Then was the time to prove of what stuff the marshland dwellers were made; they gathered from all quarters and dug out the buried homes. Each farmer possessed a snow plough, and the merry jingle of the bells carried about the necks of the powerful horses bore in advance glad tidings of help to those cottagers who were prisoners beneath the snow-drifts.”*

Nowadays, the main concern for some of us is whether our rubbish bins are emptied on time.

Michael H Peters
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quoting Denham Jordan
“A Son of the Marshes”