



Torpel Trail

POINT 1 on the Trail is close to the cabin, looking north into the field and towards the road.

1. ROMAN SOLDIERS MARCHING UP KING STREET in the first century AD

Our last campaign was in sunny Spain. We are feeling cold and wet; the weather gets worse the further north we go. We have just marched 5 miles on the Roman Road from the bridge over the River Nene, leaving behind the smoking chimneys of the pottery kilns and iron smelting furnaces at Durobrivae. We are making an overnight stop on the last patch of dry ground before attempting to cross the swampy valley ahead. The River Welland has changed its course again and there are no bridges. The road runs along the top of a raised bank but the water can reach up to our waists at the river crossings.

2. A SAXON FAMILY RECENTLY SETTLED IN THEIR NEW HUT AT THE ROADSIDE in the year 600

There was no spare land for us back home so we packed up all our belongings, some vegetable seeds, a couple of sheep and a few hens. We sailed across the sea and up the river and found all we had hoped for. A group of huts called Torpel. There are trees to build a hut and reeds for thatching, water from a well, even some other new arrivals with a plough and some oxen which we all share. The light soils are easy to work and we cultivate and grow our wheat, oats and barley in long strips. There is even space for a



garden plot where we shall grow our leeks, onions, peas and beans and very soon will enjoy apples and pears from our own trees.

Walk across the field away from the cabin – to the right of the pylon and towards the mound.

POINT 2 on the Trail is by the fallen tree, looking ahead at the ditch and the mound.

3. AELFRIC THE SAXON, ORDERED TO OVERSEE THE EXCAVATIONS AND WOODEN TOWER in 1066

Our men put up a good fight against the Norman invaders but the king's men burnt down our houses and we had to give way. We were told to dig deep ditches and pile up the earth and stone on a mound in the middle. Then we had to cut some trees down to build high fences and a tall square tower to protect the new lord and his family.

I'm told that over 200 towers like the one at Torpel were built soon after the Normans came here.

4 . ROGER DE TORPEL, A NORMAN KNIGHT AND THE FIRST LORD OF TORPEL MANOR soon after 1066

I sailed across the Channel from Normandy and fought at the Battle of Hastings. Another Norman warrior called Tuold was asked by King William to be Abbot of Peterborough Abbey. He chose me to be one of his knights. I have to provide 6 armed horsemen to fight



for the king. Our first task is to protect Peterborough and its Abbey from the combined attacks of the Saxons and Danes who are based at Ely.

As a reward I have been given land and am one of the largest landowners in the area. My land is in strips scattered across Ufford parish, 9 nearby parishes and another 3 near Oundle.

POINT 3 on the Trail is on the far (south) side of the mound, looking first down towards the pond and then looking back over the mound.

5. ROBERT DE TORPEL, THE LEPER LORD in 1146

The first Roger de Torpel was my grandfather. I was fit and healthy in 1130 when I became lord. Then I gradually lost the feeling in my hands and feet, which became paralysed and like claws, followed by the loss of my hair and eyebrows. I was told that I had leprosy which is very infectious and cannot be cured. I have had to hand over the manor to my brother, another Roger. I am now living as a monk in the leper hospital at the Chapel of St Leonard at the edge of Peterborough.

6. RALPH DE CAMOYS, NEW LORD OF TORPEL

William de Torpel had no children when he died in 1242 so the Manor was handed down to his sister, Ascelina, who is my wife. The Manor is doing very well. Since 1264 we have had the right to hold a market every Thursday and a 3-day fair every year. My family and I have moved out of the draughty old



wooden tower and into our comfortable new house which has wooden floors and plastered ceilings.

Walk back over the mound in the direction of the pylon pausing to look at the course of the main entrance way from the kissing gate.

POINT 4 on the Trail is close to the pylon

7. JOHN DE CAMOYS, WHO GOT INTO DEBT in 1280

It was my grandfather, Ralph, who made Torpel Manor great. We all enjoyed living in the new house and visitors came to join the hunting parties after he re-stocked the deer park. The village folk liked our Thursday markets and people come from miles around to our September fairs.

My money problems have been a terrible blow to me. They were partly caused by difficulties at my other manors in Essex and Norfolk and I just found myself getting more and more into debt.

On top of all this and I feel embarrassed to admit it to you, I have had to face another dreadful scandal. My wife, Margaret, left me and went to live with another man. This is just unheard of among all my circle of friends.

I have no option now but to give up Torpel and sell it to the King, Edward 1, to repay the money I owe. I am the last of the Torpel knights.



[Note about what happened next. His wife claimed a third share of Torpel income but she lost her case when it was heard in Parliament at Westminster.]

8. GEOFFREY, REEVE OF TORPEL MANOR IN 1300

My job as reeve is to make sure that all the work on the land belonging to the manor is done well and that everyone pays their rent and taxes. I hand over the money to one of the monks from Peterborough Abbey when he rides over on horseback to collect it.

All the land you can see outside the walls is part of our open fields and we all work on the lord`s strips for 3 days a week and the rest of the time on our own. I am proud to be villein but sometimes wish I could leave the manor and earn some money.

I am not paid a wage but have some extra allowances such as firewood and grazing for my pigs in the wood.

I never had much schooling, just enough to write my name and add up. William, the clerk, is paid 8 pence a year to write down the Manor`s accounts.

9. LUCY CHAT AND TORPEL VILLAGE in 1300

My name is Lucy Chat and I am a widow living in Torpel village which is just a cluster of about 20 thatched wooden houses at the side of the road. My family and I are all villeins and we have to pay rent for our strips in the open fields. My son looks after our ox and works on the lord`s land while I make a little money from selling vegetables at



the village market. I also brew ale and my neighbours always know when to come to the door with a jug because I hang a pot on a post.

I have to pay a tax of 9 pence a year which goes to the king to pay for all his wars. I shouldn't grumble because John, my next door neighbour, pays over 3 shillings a year. He is a freeman and doesn't have to work on the lord's land.

What with keeping the fire alight and the leek and oat pottage cooking in the pot, baking our bread in the lord's oven, making our cloth and warm clothes for the winter, I never stop working.

10. PIERS (PETER) GAVESTON, WHO WAS THE FAVOURITE OF EDWARD 11 AND WAS GIVEN TORPEL MANOR BY THE KING IN 1309

My wife and I renewed the right of Torpel to hold a market and fair and I even sent some members of my household on a fact-finding visit to ask if villeins are allowed to own land on this manor. It was made very clear to them at the manor court that the old medieval traditions of labour services and declarations of loyalty to their lord have not been relaxed at all.

I know that, as a Frenchman, I am unpopular and that I have enemies who are jealous of my friendship with the king.

[In fact he was murdered by the Earls of Lancaster, Arundel and Warwick in 1312]



Point 5 is next to the kissing gate on the Torpel Way looking towards Ashton

11. ROYAL CONNECTIONS

For over 300 years Torpel manor was passed down through a succession of royal owners, including King Henry V111 and Queen Elizabeth 1. They benefited from its rents but never lived there.

12. SIR THOMAS TROLLOPE BOUGHT TORPEL MANOR in 1687

I live at Casewick near Uffington and have found ways of making more profit from Torpel land. I give my tenants a copy of their rental agreement which has to be renewed every year so I can get rid of any lazy tenants and raise rents if need be.

The old deer park boundary still exists but all its land has been divided into little fields or closes, separated by hedges, to allow tenants to keep animals or grow crops. Torpel Field was never ploughed.

12. SIR JOHN TROLLOPE LED THE DEMAND FOR ENCLOSURE OF THE OPEN FIELDS in Ufford in 1799

I was the biggest landowner and could see the advantages of enclosing all the open fields and common grazing land in the village



which had survived for over 1000 years. There had to be a special Act of Parliament because not everyone agreed with me.

Farmers, still copyhold tenants of mine, were pleased to have new farm houses surrounded by their fields. I am sorry that the poorest people, such as John Clare`s family after enclosure in Helpston, were not given any land and had nowhere to graze their animals. They just became farm labourers or moved into the towns.

Point 6 - On the way back to the cabin.

13. JOHN CLARE`S TERRIFYING ENCOUNTER WITH A GHOST ABOUT 1809

"The worst fright I ever met with was on a harvest night when I worked at Bassets of Ashton. We was always late ere we gave over work....and ere we finished our suppers it was nigh midnight by the time I started home which was but the distance of a short mile. But I had a terror haunting spot to cross called Baron parks in which there was several ruins of roman camps and saxon castles. The tales were numberless of ghosts and goblins that were seen there. I fancied I saw something stand wavering in the path but my hopes put it off as a shadow. On coming nearer I found that it was something but whether it was of flesh and blood was a question... my astonished terrors magnified it into a horrible figure. It appeared to have ears of vast length and the hair seemed to hang about it.

I trembled and almost wished the ground would open to hide me. I would have spoke but I could not and on attempting to pass it I gave



it the road and ran off as best as I could. On stopping at the stile to look where it was, my increased terror found it close to my heels...I took to my heels and when I got home I felt nearly fit to die."

Next day I found that it was nothing but a foal that had lost its mother.

14. NOT GHOSTS BUT STILL ALIVE AND WELL

THE FARMER WHO FOUND THE KEY ON THE MOUND about 2000

The key has been dated to the 14th Century

LANGDYKE TRUST WHICH BOUGHT TORPEL FIELD in 2009

It had been used for grazing horses and was in a very bad state, full of nettles and thistles and the old stables were rotten. Underneath there were rat and rabbit holes so it all had to be knocked down. In 2013, thanks to a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, the new cabin was erected, there has been archaeology and history research and the field is being managed to improve its biodiversity.