

The Story of the Dragon of Moston



Well, if you were to go looking for Moston, you'd find it betwixt Sandbach and Middlewich. It is only a little place now with a few folk living there, and when you hear this you'll see why that may be. Now, the people of Moston were a happy and jolly lot who made most of their living from the fine apple trees in their orchard. They bore the largest and juiciest apples in all of Cheshire, and in truth the rest of the county were more than a little jealous of this. The apples of Moston were bigger than even your head. And a fine head it is you have sir. The people of the village didn't know why it was that their apples grew so large, but I do, and I'll tell you.

The apples grew in an orchard which was beside a boggy marsh, full of dark, dank swamp water. The trees reached out their roots through the soil and into that marsh and drew the water up along the roots, rising through the trunk, along the branches and caused those apples to swell.

The people of Moston looked forward to those days at the end of summer with autumn beginning to make itself felt in the air, the days when the apples would be ripening and ready for the harvest and they eagerly awaited the day to go picking, dreaming of the juice trickling down chins, or the warm smell of the apples baking. And now the day was here! Each of the Moston folk headed out to whichever tree in the orchard which was their own, carrying baskets and buckets ready to be filled. There was laughter and singing as the apples were gathered in. And then someone shouted out, "Look, up there!" And the crowd looked up through the leaves to see something flying high in the sky. It was higher than any bird they knew, it didn't move like a bird and wasn't shaped like anything they'd seen before. The excitement grew until it turned to horror when the people of Moston realised it was a dragon flying above them.

This dragon had flown out from Wales, you could tell because it was red, and was looking for a new home. Now, you may have heard that dragons like to live in caves. Well, that is true, but it's not their first choice. Or perhaps you've heard that dragons like to live in burial mounds of an ancient king surrounded by treasure? Well, that's true as well, but still not their preference. Where dragons like to live, if they can really find it, is in a slimy, smelly swamp. And the boggy marsh

beside the orchard at Moston was the perfect place. The dragon circled around for a while, then settled down in the middle of the swamp beside the orchard.

The people of Moston weren't fools. They knew that if they ventured close to the dragon they would likely be eaten. But then they looked at the trees, and saw their finest apples beside the marsh. So one brave chap came up with a plan. He would make his way to the apple trees, keeping his eye on the dragon all the while and should the dragon make the slightest move, he would be off! He walked through the trees and set down his basket beside the apple tree closest to the boggy field, making sure to keep his eyes fixed on the dragon. He took one apple from the tree, then another, but then the next apples were higher, he looked up to the branches for a moment and then... The dragon was upon him. It opened its mouth and breathed upon the brave fellow. Not fire as you might think, but the foulest, stinkiest breath you'd probably rather not imagine. The poor chap was overcome and fell to the ground. The dragon pulled him by the feet into the swamp where he lay asleep until the evening, when he awoke. Just in time for dragon supper time and being eaten in one gulp!

This happened again, and again. And again. Until half of the people of Moston had been eaten by the dragon. As you'd imagine, those that were left went from being a happy and jolly bunch to being a sad and miserable lot. Then one day, the local lord of the manor, Sir Thomas Venables was making his way around all of his lands to inspect them and came to the village of Moston. "What's happened here?" said Sir Thomas, "Has there been a war? For there are less of you than before, and you look miserable, and your fine trees have been left to wither." The people of Moston explained how the dragon had come and, one by one, taken many of the folk from the village. And what was worse, just this morning a young boy had been taken by the dragon, his poor mother had already lost her husband and was grieving for her son now sleeping in the swamp awaiting his fate at the dragon's supper time.

Well, Sir Thomas, being a bold and brave knight, swore he would slay the dragon and save the boy. Thinking to catch the dragon whilst it slept, he quickly put on his finest armour, took up his sword and dashed off through the orchard toward the marsh. But the clanking and clattering of his armour awoke the dragon which began to make its way towards the knight.

Sir Thomas fled. But you must not think him a coward. No, Sir Thomas had a plan. In the days before he was a knight in his armour, he had been an archer, and being from Cheshire that made him one of the famed and feared Cheshire Archers, the finest bowmen in the land, better even than Robin Hood himself. In fact, because of their skills with the bow, people round here say "Robin Hood? More like Robin No-Good!" Sir Thomas made his way back to the orchard where he could just see the dragon in the marsh, snoring once more, and with the young boy asleep next to him. Sir Thomas drew back his bowstring, then let loose his arrow which whistled through the air and found its target - right in the dragon's eye!

The dragon roared and flew at Sir Thomas before he could ready another arrow. But the arrow in its eye had so wounded and winded the dragon that it could not muster up its foul breath. Sir Thomas did not waste a moment and struck the beast over the head a dozen times. Just to be sure he cut off the head. With the young boy under

one arm and a dragon's head under the other, Sir Thomas returned to the village of Moston.

The people of the village were thrilled. They insisted that this brave deed should be remembered for ever more, and that the Venables family should change their coat of arms to depict a dragon, with an arrow in its eye, about to eat a boy. And so that is just what was done. They even carved the scene in oak and set it on show in the church of St Michael and All Angels in Middlewich, where you can still see it today.

And that is the tale of the Dragon of Moston, the last dragon to be seen in England, so folks say, and here it was in our own fair county of Cheshire.