

The History of James Radford Millard and His Wife Catherine Richards

by Julie Cannon Markham, a great-great-granddaughter

Chapter 1: A Brief History of Wales

James Radford Millard and his wife Catherine Richards descended from a rich heritage which spanned the course of British history. James was born in the tiny village of Biddisham in Somerset County, England. Catherine was born about forty miles away, on the northern side of Bristol Bay in the coal mining town of Monkash, Glamorgan County, Wales.

The Heritage of James and Catherine

The earliest Britons traded with Europe over sea routes and built masterful stone henges throughout the western half of British Isles, including ancient Wales, which at that time comprised the current Welsh nation plus Somerset, Devon and Cornwall counties of England. Stonehenge, the most famous of these henges, was built on the Salisbury Plains, fifty miles east of what is now Biddisham, but there are many ancient henge sites.



This gold arm bracelet was found in 1898 deep in a spring being bored out for a well. Estimated to have been made before 600 BC, it was likely left by an early Briton making an offering. Today, a person leaving a coin in a fountain is following the same ancient pattern.



Art was just one of the many ways the Celtic tribes in the British Isles and Europe were connected.



Catherine Richards was born in Monkash in 1822. Five years later her husband James Millard was born in Biddisham. Long before the birth of Christ, Celtic tribes from Europe conquered and intermarried with the earlier Britons.

Five hundred years before the rise of the Roman empire, Celtic tribes spread across Europe from the Middle East to the Irish North Sea. While the areas they inhabited were vast, the Celts were connected by their religion, language, traditions and art. As they moved into the British Isles, they conquered and then intermarried with the earlier inhabitants.

In 325 B.C., the ancient Greek writer Pytheas visited the Cornwall and Somerset areas of the British Isles and described the inhabitants, descendants of the early Britons and the later Celts. Their warriors were tall and fair-skinned with blue eyes. They tattooed their skin blue and fought like tigers with long swords. Pytheas called these people the Britanni, likely a corruption of the Celt word Pretani, which means painted or tattooed.

These new Celtic Britons spread to the French peninsula across the English channel, mingling with the Celtic tribes there. Those Celts were known as the Gauls or Gallic tribes, as they were connected to the Celtic tribes from Galatia, which is now Turkey. This movement created the state of Brittany and reinforced a link with the British Isles which would last hundreds of years.

In 55 BC, Julius Caesar and ten thousand soldiers landed on the western coast of the British Isles with the intent to punish the Britons for their assistance to the Celtic Gauls who had rebelled against the Romans. A century later four Roman legions secured southeastern Britain and began building roads for troops to secure the rest of the British Isles, including Wales.

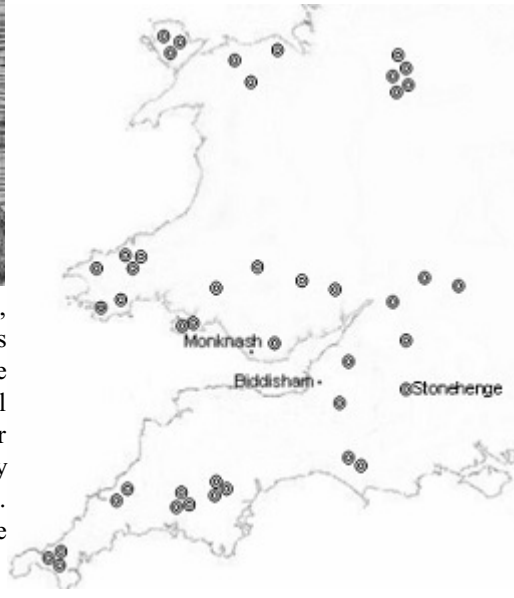
While the Celtic Britons initially fought haphazardly, they united under Queen Boudica, whose army slaughtered thousands of Roman troops and captured the Roman capital of Londinium. The resulting revenge brought by the Romans devastated East Anglia along the channel, leaving it desolate for generations. Attempts by the Romans to conquer the Welsh proved difficult, as these Britons fought from hideouts in the mountains.



In 60AD Queen Boudica rallied the Britons to fight against the invading Romans. While initially successful, ultimately the Romans conquered Great Britain, establishing a civilization which would impact the inhabitants long after their empire fell.



Pytheas, a Greek explorer, visited the British Isles and investigated the mining areas of Cornwall and Somerset, which later made the country appealing to the Romans. He was the first to call the people Britanni.



Ancient stone henges, built by the early Britons, are part of the heritage of James and Catherine Richards Millard.



Numerous ancient henges still stand, including Stonehenge, 50 miles east of Biddisham.

The invading Roman army struggled to find food for their numerous soldiers, but ultimately the Romans built a network of forts within a day's march of each other, linked by several thousand miles of paved roads, many of which lasted for centuries. These roads eventually facilitated the movements of thousands of troops which controlled Rome's newest province.

The Jewish historian Josephus believed the Galatians and the related Celtic tribes throughout Europe were descendants of Gomer, the grandson of Noah. (Much later, a few British scholars would claim the Celts were descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel.) Missionaries traveling with the advance of the Roman Empire preached Christianity to the Galatians under Paul, and then across Europe to the Britons in the far western reaches of the

Empire. An ancient tradition holds that Joseph of Arimathea traveled with eleven companions to the British Isles as one of these missionaries, teaching in Glastonbury, just twelve miles north of Biddisham. The British chief of Glastonbury welcomed the missionaries and Joseph thrust his staff into the ground where it took root and flourished. Generations of Glastonbury residents revered cuttings from plants grown from the roots of Joseph's staff, and even the faithful in Europe procured cuttings. Joseph and his fellow missionaries are reputed to have remained in Glastonbury, building a wattled house of worship, the first Christian chapel in England.

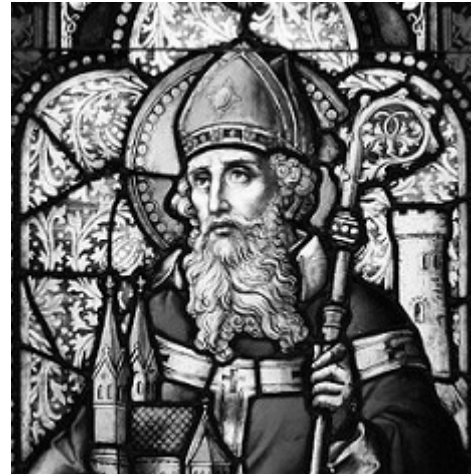
Another missionary who preached in Somerset was Patrick. While thought to be Irish, Patrick was actually the son of a Roman settler in Somerset. As a child, Patrick was captured and sold into slavery in Ireland. There he learned of Christianity and returned to his homeland to preach.

The Britons adapted to the Romans, eventually learning to appreciate the improvements in their own pastoral culture with the Romans' literacy and education, their fine villas, baths, hospitals and a life based around towns instead of farms. However, their British culture was not completely usurped. Many place names and particularly names of rivers remain today as they were in pre-Roman days.

Nonetheless, the Romans brought new industries and taught the Britons improved methods of building pottery-kilns, remnants of which can be found at Shepton Mallet just twenty miles from Biddisham. They procured lead from the numerous mines in Somerset County, one being Axbridge, an ancient site built near a bridge over the River Axe, very near Biddisham. Lead from the nearby Mendip mine has been found in Italy, demonstrating the centralized rule of the Romans which used resources from all over the empire. The River Axe flows west to Bristol Bay where the Romans built a thriving port, trading British goods to ports in Europe.

Roman officers, rewarded with land in the British Isles, settled on large estates. Their families intermingled with the tribal population, in all respects changing the face of the Britons. Latin became the language of the day. Even the farmers prospered as they worked to meet the demands of the increasing population which grew during four hundred years of peace. Roman gods came into play, and the last day of the week was changed and called after Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture.

The British utilized the wide and straight Roman roads for commerce and trade. One such road was the two-hundred-and-fifty-mile long Fosse Way which the Romans built from northeastern England through ancient Somerset County, building this thoroughfare from the remnants of ancient British paths which are still in evidence. Mile markers came from the Romans, who used that measure for distance, and even two thousand years later the mile is still in use throughout many nations today. However, by the fourth century the Roman Empire was dying, and in the British Isles this empire was supplanted by new invaders, the Anglo-Saxons.



St. Patrick lived in the 5th century, the son of a Roman settler. He was kidnaped by traders and sold as a slave in Ireland, where he embraced Christianity and returned to his family where he preached the gospel.



James Millard's grandmother Sarah Dunscomb was from Congresbury, named after St. Congars, an early missionary to England. This vicarage, ten miles from Biddisham, was built in the middle ages.

For several hundred years the Welsh-Britons staged numerous raids against the Anglo-Saxon armies. In the eighth century, the Anglo-Saxon King Offa used slaves to build an enormous earthen dyke from the River Dee, near Liverpool in the north, to the River Wye, one hundred and fifty miles south, connecting with an earlier dyke which reached the River Severn.² This dyke, sixty-five feet wide in some places, became a barrier to keep the Britons in Wales from encroaching on the territory belonging to the Anglo-Saxon kings. As a result, the Welsh retained their Celtic culture, customs and language and became a totally separate people from their English neighbors. Today, genetic science indicates the Welsh are descended from the ancient Britons and Celts and have a very different genetic heritage than the general population of England, who are descended from the Anglo-Saxons.

Christian missionaries from Ireland and the continent returned to preach to the Anglo-Saxon English and to the former Britons in the southwest part of the Island. Place names near the birthplace of James Millard reflect the early influence of St. Congar and St. Bridget in Congresbury and Badgworth. Hundreds of chapels in southwest England are named after early missionaries, some of whom crossed the River Severn into Wales. The Welsh again embraced their Old Testament heritage through Gomer, this being a strain of doctrine which persisted for centuries.

Heroes rose from the ashes of the Romans, such as the British King Arthur, who fought the new conquerors attacking from the western shores of Europe.¹ The Germanic Anglo-Saxons slaughtered the Britons across their island and drove the survivors to Wales. The Anglo-Saxons settled eastern England and severed Wales in half at the River Severn, adding the southern area of Cornwall, Devon and Somerset to its English kingdom of Wessex.



The Anglo-Saxons cut the ancient kingdom of Wales in half at the River Severn, adding Cornwall, Devon and Somerset counties to their Wessex kingdom. The remainder of Wales was never conquered and the Mercian King Offa built an earthen dyke 176 miles long to curb attacks from the Welsh.

The Saxons built a strong presence in ancient Somerset and ultimately created a formidable center in Axbridge on the ruins of the Romans. Anglo-Saxon influence persists throughout many parts of the world even today, with five days of the week being named after their gods. Sunday and Monday were named after the pagan worship of the sun and moon. Tuesday was called after Tiwes, a god of combat. Other gods were Wodnes, Thor and Frig.



For thousands of years the British lived in sturdy cob houses built of plaster comprised of clay, straw and manure. The roof was thatched.

The suffix of ham on the name Biddisham indicates the town was built and named by Anglo-Saxon settlers. Another Saxon center was thirty miles east in Bath, a favorite health resort with hot springs known for their healing powers. Artifacts dating from the earliest Britons to the Romans and Saxons indicate this site was well-known throughout history. Bath is about thirty miles from the ancient site of Stonehenge.



The Biddisham chapel was built at the time of the Anglo-Saxons. Although the tower leans, it has stood for over a thousand years and is still used, seating about eighty people. James Millard was christened here in 1827.

In the eighth century, Danish Vikings invaded not only the British Isles but coastal cities in Normandy and Brittany along the channel. Their foothold in France grew to be well-defended and thousands of Vikings became



The Biddisham chapel was built near a Celtic pillar which marked the place of worship for the pagan Saxons. The pillar still stands and was originally topped with a Celtic cross. Pillars such as these are still very common.

established traders, although they continually looked to England for land and goods. In 1066 William of Normandy, of Viking descent, conquered the armies of Harold II, the last Anglo-Saxon king. William brought the French language to his royal court, although the local people still spoke English with remnants of Latin.

For generations the residents of Biddisham assembled around a Celtic pillar for prayer. At the time of the Normans, they built a small chapel near the pillar, both of which still stand today. The chapel has the original baptismal font. Although the chapel is of stone, their homes were built around a wooden framework with woven walls of willows. The walls were then covered with cob, a plaster made of sandy clay, straw and often manure for strength. The roof was thatched. This

was a very sturdy method of construction and was used into the second millennium AD.

Two hundred years after William, his descendant Edward I subdued Wales in battle, bringing it into the British Empire. Edward promised the Welsh a prince born in Wales who spoke no English. Soon after this vow, Edward's first son was born in a Welsh castle in 1284 and was named the new Prince of Wales. To this day, the heir apparent to the British throne carries the title of the Prince of Wales. Axbridge was prominent enough during Edward's reign to send members to Parliament and was known to be a major center for cloth manufacturing.

In 1348, the Black Death spread throughout the British Isles after decimating the European continent. At least half the inhabitants died. Subsequent epidemics continued to raze the population. A severe labor shortage resulted, and farmers in Wales and Somerset County turned to raising sheep, which required fewer workers. The wool industry grew throughout England and became a major export to surrounding nations.

Endnotes for Chapter 1:

1. Wales claims Arthur as a son, but historical evidence from monasteries and dated evidence at castle ruins near Cadbury, ten miles from Biddisham, suggests this as the place of Camelot. History, not movies, paints a Celtic Arthur as a defender of Christianity against the Saxon pagans.

2. Today the dyke is a national trail.