

TALL STORY?

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The village of Hale is in the south of [old] Lancashire about two miles away from the southern outskirts of Liverpool not far from the River Mersey. Hale is a quintessential English village known for its quiet nature, cottages and countryside, but most of all for its most famous inhabitant, John Middleton, more commonly known as "The Childe Of Hale". His height reached a staggering 9 feet 3 inches before his 20th birthday. It is not clear if John Middleton ever married, as there is no reference to this in the church marriage register, which dates back to 1572. The Middleton's cottage still stands today, it has recently been re-thatched due to years of neglect. In the gable end, you can see the windows that the Childe used when sleeping, hanging a foot out each window in order to lie the full length of the cottage asleep. Because of his 'formidable appearance' Middleton was employed as a bodyguard by a local landlord called Gilbert Ireland. In 1617, on his way back from Scotland, King James I (James VI of Scotland) stopped to knight Gilbert Ireland, and in doing so heard of his gigantic

protector. Both master and servant were invited to visit the royal court, and a fine outfit of purple, red and gold was specially made for Middleton. In London, John beat the king's champion wrestler, and in doing so broke the man's thumb. Embarrassed by the defeat and displeased with the amount of money many of his subjects had lost in betting on the match, James sent the Childe home with the substantial amount of £20 for his troubles. Unfortunately, jealous of his wealth, and taking advantage of his apparently slow wits, Middleton's companions mugged him on the journey back to Hale. John Middleton returned to the village penniless and remained there until he died on August 23rd 1623. His grave lies on the south side of St Mary's church surrounded by iron railings. Childes grave reveals the inscription:

HERE LYETH THE BODIE OF
JOHN MIDDLETON
THE CHILDE
NINE FEET THREE
BORNE 1578 DYEDE 1623

It is recorded that the Childe and his master visited Brasenose College, Oxford (Ireland was himself a graduate and senior member of the college), where Middleton had his portrait painted. The fact that there are only three portraits of Middleton in existence, and that two remain at the college, shows he was there, and Brasenose rowing club's



first eight still wear the "Childe of Hale colours" of purple, yellow and red in honour of their visitor. Further evidence can be found in the Diary of Samuel Pepys, who wrote about seeing the painted outline of the Childe's hand (which remains to this day) at the college in 1668. In 1768 the schoolmaster and Parish clerk, Mr Bushell, removed John Middleton's remains from his grave. They were then taken to Hale Hall for measuring and preservation. It was discovered during this examination that his thighbones equalled the length from hip to foot of the average man. His hands were also measured and found to be 17 inches from the carpus to the end of the middle finger and 8½ inches across the palm. His remains were re-interred into St Mary's churchyard where they are now today.