



# Milton Keynes Celebrates!

## 'A Curious Celebration!'

The Fenny Poppers of St Martin's



*'On every St Martin's Day, November 11th, volleys of gunpowder explosions from the churchyard disturb the quiet of Fenny Stratford...'*

*'This is part of a curious celebration which has taken place every year for over two centuries to commemorate Dr Thomas Willis (1621 – 1675), the famous anatomist-physician and Professor of Natural Philosophy at Oxford.'*

William Cone, Professor of Neurosurgery, The Montreal Neurological Institute, Canadian Medical Association Journal, 1969

Local 18th century benefactor, Browne Willis, celebrated his famous grandfather, Dr Thomas Willis – a resident of St. Martin's Lane, St. Martin-in-the-Fields London who died on St. Martin's Day – not only by building a new church, but by firing off miniature canons!

Every November 11th, at 12 noon, 2pm and 4pm, six tankard-shaped cannons, each weighing 9 kilos (20lbs) – the Fenny Poppers – are plugged with gunpowder and well-rammed newspaper, and fired.

In 1856, one of the poppers burst - a fragment was blown onto the roof of the Bull and Butcher which burned down! Afterwards, all six Poppers were re-cast by the Eagle Foundry, Northampton.

**DISCOVER**  
MILTON KEYNES