

WESTONING

Introduction

The parish of Westoning is situated in Mid Bedfordshire surrounded by the parishes of Flitwick and Flitton to the north, Pulloxhill to the east, Harlington to the south, and Toddington and Tingrith to the west. Of medium size, 1769 acres, it includes Harlington Woodend, formerly of Harlington detached added in 1888. A pre-Domesday settlement and a thriving village until the end of the last century it now seems rather a "harassed" village with a busy main road running through the centre across the area of the old green as a slip road to the M1. Immediately east of the village the parish is sliced in half by the main London railway line with a train passing every five minutes. The village has become a dormitory town for commuters to Bedford, Luton and London with an increase in population from 792 in 1961 to 1389 in 1976.

It would seem that the boundary follows a somewhat peculiar line with Woodend as an appendage to the west tacked on to Harlington Woodend, yet it is actually Tingrith which cuts a slice out of what would be the natural shape of the parish along the line of the river giving it access to the river and a certain amount of meadow land which it would otherwise lack. With a few exceptions the boundary follows field and woodland boundaries, and natural features such as the river. Along the boundary with Flitwick this has been altered to follow the new canalised line of the stream. Part of the boundary with Flitton follows a watercourse, some sort of culvert, and here occurs the significant field name Rushmead. From the east side of the Greenfield road to the extreme easterly corner of the parish the boundary follows the line of the old hundred boundary between Maulden and Flitt hundreds. At this easterly point occurs one of the 'hiccoughs' where the hundred boundary follows the line of the field boundary, Pains Close, and the parish boundary cuts through it. The other points are at Woodend along the westerly boundary with Tingrith and the boundary with Toddington where Long Jacobs field is cut in half by the boundary, and where the kink at Lond Pollins does not follow the shape of the field.

Geology

Westoning lies on the lower edge of the dip slope of the lower greensand ridge, the dividing line between the gault clay to the south and the lower greensand to the north passing diagonally through the parish on a SW/NE line. The average height above OD is 225-250' rising to over 350' at Upper Samshill. The soils are mixed varying from gleyed brown earth to calcareous and non-calcareous (acid) gleyed soil (See sheet 146 of 1968 Soil Survey). Drainage varies from poor to imperfect especially in the Flit valley where the river gravels are covered with a 1-2m thick layer of peat, a belt which extends down the valley as far as Shefford and which has been worked commercially, to so good on the light, easy-to-work sandy/gravelly drift soils in the centre of the parish (note the name Sandfields) that they require irrigation in the summer. Where the surface drainage is bad it is not surprising to find so many ponds, some spring fed and others apparently dew ponds. Before the last war farming was very mixed with a considerable amount of market gardening and pasture for dairy farming. Now it is predominantly corn with some market gardening, reflecting current farming trends rather than geological dictates. Officially the land is classed mainly as grade 3, good but heavy.

Communications

The railway (opened in 1867) slices through the parish and the M1 borders it though there is no direct access to either although there are stations at nearby Flitwick and Harlington. Historically the main road, then as now was the Ampthill-Toddington road (A5120) running through the centre of the village with turnings off it to Samshill, Greenfield and the manor, the latter is shown continuing on past the manor the Priestleys farm (DMV) on the 1765 map although this road does not appear on later maps. No turnpike roads passed through the village nor are any Roman roads postulated by the Viatores, the nearest being that just east of the parish the 170(b) Limbury to Marston Moretaine road which passed by Portobello Farm. The earliest documented road or way is Church Way or Gobbages way which occurs in the C18. Tythe Barn way is still called that although it is now a service road in a housing estate. Samshill is no longer connected by a through way to Harlington, the road down the hill from Upper Samshill Farm is now an overgrown holloway.

Population

Parish records start in 1560 and continue, apart from a period of disturbance in the mid 17 century, more or less unbroken. There was no apparent increase in death in the years 1656-9 when malaria was rampant or during the plague of 1665-6, yet this is at the period when the records are least complete. The family names which appear regularly spanning the 16th to 19th centuries are Dix, Evans, Odell, King and Vause, with into the late 19th century the Burrs and the Springs. Gravestones from the 17th century still stand for some of these in the churchyard.

Census Data:

1671	1801	1811	1821	1831	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1931	1961	1971
302	401	497	634	627	732	782	784	725	657	525	501	601	792	1122

that for 1671 is estimated.

Godber attributes increases in population in the early 19th century to improved hygiene, inoculation against smallpox and a general drop in the infant mortality rate. The decline in the second half of the 19th century was due to the migration of the poor to the towns such as Luton and Bedford or further afield to the industrial north and even as emigrants to Canada and Australia.

History and Archaeology

The history of the parish extends back into the Anglo-Saxon period yet there is archaeological evidence for much earlier activity in the area. As is common on the gravel terraces of the river valleys a scatter of prehistoric ('mesolithic') flint tools has been found during fieldwalking but as yet no settlement site. An air photograph of the fields just southwest of Granford bridge shows rectangular and rectilinear cropmarks (PRN 3251), possibly of prehistoric or romano-british date. Weston is itself an Anglo-Saxon placename meaning west farm and the area is surrounded by other such names including Toddington, Harlington, Tingrith (= meeting place) and Worthy End. As there was already a manor at the time of the conquest the village is likely to have

Development of the Landscape

Domesday Book provides the first clues to the nature of the early landscape and land-use. The manor was assessed at 5 hides with land for 14 ploughs. At the value of 120 acres per ploughland (E. Campbell, 1962), this would give an area of 1680 acres, allowing for the area of Harlington detached, this is very close to the actual 1769 acres. We are told that two ploughs are in the demesne and that 5 more are in the possession of 16 villeins and 3 bordars, and that 5 more could be employed. This hint at underexploitation of the resources is common and may indicate an incomplete recovery after the disruptive years following the conquest when much land was wasted and went out of cultivation. There was also meadow for seven plough teams and pasture for the stock of the village as well as woodland for 400 swine yielding besides 3 shillings. This part of Bedfordshire away from the Chilterns is not primarily sheep country yet particularly in the later medieval period wool was a very valuable commodity, this is reflected in the survey of 1535 of the property of Dunstable Priory in that sheep grazing land in the village was valued at 2s per acre and arable at 1s per acre. Domesday woodland need not imply dense woods and quite often refers to fairly open woods on poor often marshy ground without much undergrowth. Taking Fowler's estimate of a pig requiring $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres of woodland per year the parish would seem to be about $\frac{1}{3}$ woodland (600 acres), compared with a mere 82 acres (excluding spinneys) at the time of the enclosure (CRO:AMA63/63). No extensive woodland is currently extant, there is small conifer plantation by the river to the west of the manor and the wooded parkland of the manor is the subject of a tree preservation order. No mills are recorded in Domesday Book yet from placename and other references there must have been several later on.

It has been postulated that there were perhaps only seasonal mills operating in the winter when the streams were in flood. A bond of 1553 (CRO:CRT100/31) was for the payment of a miller so presumably there must have been a mill in the vicinity. An extant of the manor at the time of the purchase by the Inges mentions a water mill (Chan. Inq.p.m.Edw.I no. 40), and later references mention 2 mills in 1332 and one worth nothing in 1372. The terrier of 1552 refers to a milldam in Puchoke mead which was still apparently there in 1828 (CRO:ST145). This also refers to two windmills, one in East Rye field (= Windmill field) which appears to be the field next to Innings, and a second in Middle Field where Windmill Hill = Pennyhill furlong. This distinction is continued in later documents, e.g. in 1720, (CRO:WE277). Although Middle field is difficult to locate, there is a field just north of the site of Lower Samshill farm which is called Mill field and which is just by Middle field. A survey of 1542 also mentions a barn north of the church, late a horsemill. There are no mentions of a manorial dovehouse yet there was presumably one at Lower Samshill by the site of the farm (Dovehouse close) and one at Harlington Woodend as well as various others in documents unspecified. The manorial rabbit warren seems to have been in Washers Wood in Toddington (Fac. 1/E 315-317) as a survey of 1542 noted that it was rented out for £4, per annum and "12 equal rabbits".

At the time of the enclosure in 1842 over half the parish was already enclosed, particularly Samshill, the area around the manor and at Woodend, (clustering around the manors), with the area of open fields centering on the village. Some of the furlong boundaries appear on the 1797 map. It is interesting that few of the field boundaries created at the enclosure which were generally very small and slightly illogical, still survive in modern field boundaries. In other parts of the country this is apparently quite common (Russell 1974) but not in Bedfordshire. Some of the land is now owned

grown up before then. In 1066 it was in the possession of Earl Harold and after his death it was seized by William I on his march north, along with the rest of his estate at Hitchin. Thus in the Domesday Book it was surveyed as part of Hertfordshire, although for all other purposes since it has been part of Bedfordshire.

The manor remained royal demesne until 1173 (Pipe roll 11-19 Henry II), when it was worth £15 yearly after which it seems to have passed through various families, including the Tregoz family, until it was purchased by Sir William Inge in 1297-1308, (a chief justice of the Kings Bench) and Weston became Westoning. He obtained grants for an annual fair and a weekly market in 1303 and it is likely that at this time he completely rebuilt the church, the advowson of which was held by the nuns at Elstow. The church was added to several times in the middle ages and much refurbished by the Victorians, yet although earlier romanesque carvings and a pillar base do remain, we have no other clues as to nature of the earlier church. The site of the moated manor still remains, (see notes and plan in file), it is circular with a flat top with an inner and an outer fosse, although the outer one does not go all the way around and appears to run into some fish ponds. The inner fosse is about 3m deep and the top about 13m wide. The 1842 Tithe map still buildings extant on the top and a bridge crossing the inner fosse on the west side. At present the moat is damp rather than full of water. It is quite possible that if it was constructed by the Inge family it may well be on the site of an earlier manor, (another Goltho?!). The manor is now a large red brick mansion built in the 1840's although earlier manorial barns survive in the courtyard.

In 1371 the manor passed to the Zouch family who in 1542 exchanged it with the crown for an estate in Derbyshire and it was annexed into the Honour of Ampt Hill. The "Honour" was formed out of estates of priories and abbeys after the dissolution and both Dunstable priory and Woburn Abbey had held land in Westoning. In 1553 it was granted to the Curzon family and during the civil war it was in Royalist hands, and from the second half of the 18th century until the first world war it belonged to the Everitts and then the Coventry-Campions.

Although only one manor is recorded in Domesday, a second manor, Aynells manor developed in the early medieval period. A deed of 1173-81 (CRO:CRF 110/39) records a grant of land from the Abbot of Winchcombe to John Gayton. In the mid 14th century it passed to the Aynell family, the earliest reference being in a grant of 1428 (CRO:W1/332) when the lands of the manor are cited, and later in the 15th century it passed to Gonville and Caius College Cambridge, referred to as Kayes Collidge and Gunwell Hall. In the next reference, a terrier of the manor of 1552, the lands of Aynells are listed separately, from those of the manor of Westoning (AD332). It is of course not certain that the site of the actual manor is in the parish at all, but either the medieval moated site at Upper Samshill or the site of a farm just east of the now derelict remains of College Farm would seem possible and that at Upper Samshill, then called Middle Samshill, the more likely candidate. The fields owned by Gonville and Caius at the enclosure and the identifiable ones on the terrier of 1552 cluster around these two points, perhaps one is the manor and one the manorial farm. At one stage a third manor existed in the south west of the parish at Woodend called Youngs manor. As a field name Yonges occurs in the terrier of 1552 as well and possibly the same one in a survey of 1542 (CRO:FAD1/E 315/317) as "Yonges next the kings highway". Its later history is that of the Wentworth estate in Toddington, of which it was a part, being sold up in 1801. The extensive earthworks of this moated site are still viable and the moat is still full of water but the whole area is very overgrown.

by the County Council noticeably that of the former open fields, as for example in the Innings and the Sand field as also down by the road to Toddington, interestingly the former Westoning Town land at the Linces was allotments until recently. Many of the boundaries of these fields are rich in different species of plants and ripe for assessment by "Hoopers hedgerow analysis".

Large scale extraction does not seem to have much affected Westoning, as gault clay is now considered unsuitable for bricks, yet we have early references to the presence of sand and clay as well as gravel pits in the area. Sandpitt furlong appears as a name in 1450, claypitte furlong in 1542 and gravellpitt furlong in 1651. Churchwardens accounts of Harlington record the sale of two loads of clay from Westoning to Harlington in 1687. (BHRS 8.p.106). There was a gravel pit at the corner of Innings and the Moors (corroborated by the farmer.) A clay pit marked on the OS 25" map of 1882 as the old clay pitt and it has now been filled in and returned to agricultural use, (PRN 2918). At the turn of the century a brickworks flourished briefly, 1894 - 1903, owned by the future owners of London Brick Company.

Land ownership seems to have varied widely and was probably typical. At various times land was owned by baronets from London and Oxfordshire, gentlemen and shopkeepers from Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire; and London Brewer (in 1428), the Drapers company, Gonville and Caius college, Christ's college, Oakingham Hospital Berkshire, and the Lucasian professor of Mathematics at Cambridge.

Development of Settlement

The basic pattern of settlement seems to be that of a nucleated village surrounded by outlying hamlets. 'End' is a common way of denoting outlying districts in a parish, particularly in the 13th century (EENS1926), thus the settlement at Woodend may well be quite early. Harlington Woodend is now a farm and a couple of houses but earlier maps and documentary references indicate several other cottages centred on the green, which is now a field, although the pond is still there. In the 18th Century this was the home of Sir James Astry and possibly the farmhouse now occupies the site of his house. An adjoining close is called Dove House Close but there is no visible evidence of one now. Youngs manor forms the nucleus of Westoning Woodend and back in the 17th century we have evidence of cottages straddling the lane there (e.g. CRO:TB75 1644), then as now, Woodend farmhouse is of mid 19th century date but the farm buildings appear older and may well correspond to some on the 1765 Jeffery map, perhaps the manorial farm, and were certainly there by 1827 (CRO:SP464). The group of houses on the Flitwick road although modern is on the site of some earlier cottages and a farmstead in Rawley's close shown on the map of 1839. The farm is called Westoning Moors farm and is a county council smallholding. Clayhill is a later 19th century farm planted in the open fields and named after Clay field in which it stands. Settlement at Samshill has been complex, the earliest mention being in 1542, (Fac. 1 SC6. Hen.8). The moated site (PRN 3418) possibly that of Aynells was formerly referred to as Middle Samshill and the other farm at the top of the hill as Upper Samshill and at the bottom of Bankey Hill down towards Harlington Grange there used to be another small farmstead. The farm and cottages which once centred on the green at Lower Samshill have disappeared as has the farm at the north end of Dovehouse Close although the earthworks are still detachable. The relationship of this to College farm is unclear, as College farm does not appear on the earlier maps and perhaps is a 19th century replacement

of the other farmstead. It was here in 1660 that Bunyan was arrested for preaching, apparently by the large oak tree that still stands.

Field names do not provide much of a clue to settlement, they reflect rather the names of their owners, the state of the ground, or what was grown in the fields... e.g. Turners pasture, Paynes Home Close and Madges Croft; sand field, rush mead, spring close, old cow house close, barn close; corn close, whetefield, middle oat close. Among the more potentially revealing are Potter's close, although there are no other references to a potter, and monks field which first appears on the terrier of 1552 and perhaps reflects ownership previously by Dunstable Priory or Woburn Abbey, and Gallows furlong by the Toddington Road although again there are no other references to a gallows.

Economy and Society

In the middle ages Westoning was part of Manshead Hundred for administrative purposes, now it is part of Mid Bedfordshire District. At one time in the 19th century the parish was split in two, the main area being in the Ampthill Union and Westoning and Harlington Woodends being in the Woburn Union. The church, has been responsible for a good deal of the administration of the parish and of the poor, in particular of the workhouse and other charities. The 1830's particularly after the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834 were in a time of great social unrest and in Westoning a relieving officer was mobbed. (R3/3869). Nonconformist religions were very strong in Bedfordshire and may account for some of the renewed interest in their social responsibilities by the upper classes who tended to promote schools and the better running of workhouses and hospitals. The school now the village hall was founded in the 1940's although the parish registers record a schoolmaster called Pearles in 1735. After charity self help was also encouraged and in Westoning the Amicable and Brotherly society was formed in 1826 (CRO:HA33). About 40 members met at the Chequers Pub once a month and in return for paying a regular amount they received money if ill and funeral expenses if necessary.

Churchwardens accounts contain two interesting items, one an agreement for employing children in 1794 and the other a contract for a mole-catcher in 1806. Crimes in Westoning seem to have been rather tame compared to other villages, no rapes, murders or incest, merely sheep and sheet stealing. Yet in the early 13th century a brawl between a certain Ailward the village beadle and Fulke a humble cottager led to a miracle apparently worked by St. Thomas of Canterbury, (Beds.Life No. 3). In 1646 the vicar, a Mr. Rawlings, caused a scandal by marrying a Miss Vincent without any banns or her father's permission.

Although non-conformism was strong in the area in the 17th century the chapels were not built until the 19th century. A deed of 1814, (CRO:WE1737-9) records the conversion of a barn sold for £62 into the Baptist chapel and the Methodist chapel is of similar date, although the date on the outside is 1833. An ecclesiastical census of 1851 records that the numbers attending the parish church on a Sunday were 265, at the Baptist chapel, 410 and at the Methodist chapel, 102. A note at the bottom records that these churches drew their worshippers from surrounding parishes where there were no nonconformist chapels.

In the middle ages Westoning must have been a flourishing village with it's weekly market and it's annual 3 day fair, and until the end of the 19th

century it boasted a wide selection of craftsmen and trades including a blacksmith, wheelwright, coal merchant, shoemaker, and in 1877 a tailor who doubled as the postman. The 18th century parish records include all the usual trades and a millwright, chairmender, ropemaker, collar maker, and a hog driver, but by the 19th century most of the specialised trades had moved to the towns. The two oldest pubs are the Bell and the Chequers while the Nags Head was opened in the second half of the last century. Although there is now only a bakery and general store and a garage, the shop in the village during the late 18th century seemed to do very well with orders from Greenfield, Harlington, Flitwick and Toddington and for glass from the Woburn estate and Ampthill church, (account books 1785-99, X 168/2-9, 84-92). Present industries are confined to a Milk Marketing Board depot at Lower Samshill and a factory producing chloride for batteries in the extreme south east of the parish by Harlington Grange.

Threats

The only real threat is that the village would be totally engulfed in new housing, it would seem to have reached the limits in expanding to three times it's original size. Traffic is the other hazard, a danger emphasised last year by the oil tanker episode and a campaign group for a by-pass is active. Deep ploughing is the other potential hazard.

C.J. Harding,
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September 1977

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References in the CRO are prefaced CRO others are in the PRO unless otherwise stated.

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Local Contacts

Difficult to make. Most farmers seemed to be busy out harvesting although those spoken to were friendly and helpful. The Vicar was not in when I called either perhaps out with his parishioners or on holiday!

BEDFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARISH SURVEY PROGRAMME

This essay was produced as part of the archaeological parish survey programme, carried out by the Conservation Section of the County Planning Department. A major source of evidence was material in the County Record Office. Copyright over this essay is retained by Bedfordshire County Council.

Further information on specific items may be available in the Bedfordshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) which can be consulted by appointment in the Planning Department.