

Early Times up to the 18th Century

Beginnings

The parish of East Farndon, including all its fields, currently covers around 1400 acres (near 600 hectares). It used to be larger but some fields in the north of the parish were transferred to Leicestershire, most recently in 1964. At the northern end, bordering Leicestershire, is the River Welland. On this lower ground evidence has been found of Roman and Saxon settlement. At what point we could say there was a village cannot be certain - perhaps in the late Saxon period.

The ground rises quite steeply to the south, in the direction of Clipston and Great Oxendon. The church is at the top. This makes it seem likely that when a village began to form, it may well have been here, on high ground, and not down near the river. The name Farndon (meaning Hill of Ferns) is Anglo-Saxon, although some nearby placenames are of Danish origin because this part of Northamptonshire was under Danish control for a time around 900. The village probably has its origins in the period 650 to 850 when scattered dwellings were gradually concentrated into more compact settlements and villages became the norm.

As there is no village close by called West Farndon, people often wonder why our village is so called. There is in fact a West Farndon, though it is some 24 miles away and more south than West. It is a small hamlet within the parish of Woodford Halse. The distinctions 'East' and 'West' were being used of the two Farndons by the 17th century and may relate to their situations to east and west of the Roman road Watling Street.

The Domesday Book

Domesday Book of 1086, as is the case with most villages, gives us our first real glimpse of East Farndon. The village is called Ferendone at that time. Four people or institutions are listed as the tenants-in-chief of the land in the parish. The largest landholder is the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk. The others are Robert, Count of Mortain (half-brother of King William), Countess Judith (the King's niece) and a non-Norman, Oslac, who had far more land before the conquest. The Abbey's land is actually held by the Abbot, Baldwin. Robert's land is then let to Humphrey of Wigginton and Judith's to Grimbald. The names of those who held the land before the conquest are given and values before and after the conquest are compared. Values generally had risen a little, showing that the settlement was reasonably prosperous.



This aerial view from 1965 shows the lines of the former ridge and furrow beneath the modern field pattern

Lords of the Manor

The village seems to have formed a complete unit or 'manor', to use the usual term. The first Lord of the Manor known by name was Ralph de Stanlowe, in 1316. The Abbey of St Edmund continued to hold land, presumably from Ralph. Ralph was succeeded in 1318 by the Longvils (their name, as commonly in those times, was spelt in many different ways). This family continued as Lords of the Manor for three hundred years. In about 1611, the Walker family succeeded to the Lordship. Then, through marriage it came to the Cradocks later in the century. By this time St Edmund's Abbey had been dissolved and its land transferred to private individuals. Very little is known of the village in these early times. Did the Lords of the Manor live in the village? If so, where? There is some evidence that they lived in the house now known as East Farndon Hall, or in an earlier house on the site. Over the last two centuries, however, as the title 'Lord of the Manor' had less and less meaning, the Lordship passed to people who lived outside the village. In the early nineteenth century, for example, it passed to the owners of Dingley Hall in the village of Dingley, some five miles away.

Earthworks and the Village's changing position

The village was probably nearer the church, at the top of the hill, in medieval times. There are puzzling earthworks in Hall Close, the field opposite the church on the western side of the main road, running up to the Hall. These have been variously interpreted but the current view is that they mark old roads or tracks, perhaps round the back of the original village and leading to the fields. If so, that would suggest the village houses were in this area, near the church. Perhaps this part of the village was abandoned at some point, as many entire villages were. Hall Close is known to have existed as early as 1712, before the bulk of the parish fields were enclosed, and this perhaps shows that the houses were deserted and the track rendered unnecessary when the owner of the Hall decided to enclose the area for keeping sheep. This was not unusual. He may simply have cleared the villagers off this part of the land. The village then started to develop along the road and down the hill. It has continued to do this and now extends, as a long thin settlement, for about three-quarters of a mile from the church and towards the nearby town of Market Harborough.



This deeply sunken trench or ditch in Hall Close may have been a track separating the dwellings of the medieval settlement (now disappeared) on one side from the open fields on the other

The Open Fields

From around 900 and then for many centuries, East Farndon followed the Open Field system like all other villages in the area. The land of the parish was divided into two or three large fields. Each year, one would be left fallow while the others were ploughed and crops were sown. Land was not held in

blocks but everyone's holdings were split up into small strips spread throughout the fields. In this way, good and bad soil was allotted to everyone. And of course, it would be no use having all your land in one field if that field was going to be left fallow. The ridge and furrow still visible in so many parts of the parish shows how the strips were ploughed. Over time, the ridges got higher and the furrows got lower.

East Farndon had three fields, known as Brakenborrowe Field, Oldemill Field and Debdale Field (the spellings vary in different documents). Debdale means 'deep dale' and refers to the landscape to the east of the main village street where there is a steep-sided valley known today as 'The Gosse' (meaning 'gorse'). The 'old mill' must have stood in the south-west of the parish, west of the Clipston road, not near the later mill which was just north of the Marston road.

These three fields, each of perhaps 400 acres, would have had no hedges within them. Today's countryside, with its patchwork of smaller fields, few more than 40 acres and many much less, all divided by hedges, presents a completely different picture. The change was brought about by enclosure.

The Civil War

It was in the days of the open fields, with few obstacles such as hedges, that in June 1645 the armies of Royalists and Parliamentarians were manoeuvring their forces, before clashing in the Battle of Naseby on the 14th of that month. This was the only moment in Farndon's history when it saw events of national importance taking place on its soil.

On 5th and 6th June the Royalist army was based in Market Harborough and surrounding villages. This caused great distress in all the communities involved, including Farndon. The army was ruthless in demanding food and horses and frequently plundered other household goods. The villages complained in vain, as some surviving documents prove. 'Wee of east Farndon had our houses plundered and pillaged by the Kinges army..'; a complaint echoed in similar terms by Great Oxendon, Sibbertoft and many more. The Parliamentarians, commanded by Sir Thomas Fairfax, attempted to enforce greater discipline and respect for local communities, but with so many troops, often scattered in different locations, it was not always possible. Guilsborough, for example, suffered from having their headquarters there.

The Royalist army moved to Daventry, but on discovering that their opponents were not far away, moved back to Harborough. Their aim at the time was probably to go north to Newark, one of their strongest bases. The King's Council of War was held during the night of 13th-14th June at the King's Head in Harborough. The army commander, Prince Rupert, advocated the move north, but the King's advisers, who seem to have had more influence than Rupert, advised the King to stay and do battle – advice the King accepted, with disastrous consequences.

On the morning of the 14th the Royalist forces marched out of Harborough and their other bases in the area and came together. They 'had not march'd a Mile out of Town, having taken a hill whereon a Chapell stood' according to Sir Henry Slingsby, who was with the cavalry. This 'Chapell' is most likely to have been Farndon church. Prayers were said here, probably near the church. A little further towards Clipston is an excellent viewpoint, now the very informative 'Rupert's View' which can be visited. When it was established that Fairfax's army was not many miles off, the King's forces moved south, past Clipston and to their eventual defeat in the fields of Naseby. The King's fortunes never recovered from this disaster, though at this time few would have expected it would end in 1649 with his execution.

Fairfax's army pursued the Royalists and the large number of musket balls which have been turned up in the area, north of Naseby, near Sibbertoft and near Clipston show that fierce fighting continued. There were skirmishes around Marston Trussell; in the 19th century a mass grave was discovered, though whether it contained bodies from the battle is not proven beyond doubt, though widely believed locally. 'Bloodyman's Ford' is a local name for what is now a bridge over the Welland in Welland Park in Harborough; its name may well reflect an encounter here when the Parliamentarians caught up with the Royalist forces in their retreat from Naseby.

The Enclosure of the Open Fields

There was a general and unstoppable movement towards the enclosure of the open fields all over the country at different times. In the East Midlands, enclosure in most parishes took place in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Each parish enclosure required a separate Act of Parliament, requested by a number of leading citizens of the parish. Enclosure favoured the raising of cattle and sheep, in small fields with hedges or fences round. The Act for East Farndon was passed in 1780. A small group of men were chosen as Commissioners and they organised and supervised the allotment of blocks of land to those who were entitled. So instead of having twenty acres of land split up into numerous strips scattered throughout the parish, you would have a single block or perhaps two blocks. There was more pasture now. So although formerly most land had been arable, by the 1920s a local directory could report that 'the parish is entirely pasture'. That situation has changed again and the need to 'dig for victory' meant that more land was ploughed in the second world war and the trend has continued. However, much 'ridge and furrow', the evidence of the ploughing of the open fields, is still visible. Land showing ridge and furrow has remained pasture ever since 1781.

The village must have been quite prosperous at some periods. The land which still shows the lines of ridge and furrow is unusually steep in some places. This implies that there was such a need for land that more difficult areas had to be taken into cultivation. According to Bridges' 'History of Northamptonshire', published in 1791 but with information gathered around 1720, there were 60 houses and the population was 267. This figure is higher than the population figures recorded in any of the censuses until 2011, when it was 307.



The field boundaries on either side of the road to Marston Trussell show the straight lines characteristic of allotments of land made under an Enclosure Act. This view dates from the 1960s.

There is no surviving map from the Enclosure, showing exactly who was allotted which land. However, from the details given in the Act, it is possible to reconstruct a map which gives a reasonable approximation to the allotment made. If this reconstructed map is compared with a map of today's field pattern, it is clear that the present landscape has its origins in the Enclosure of 1781.



The field in the lower centre in this aerial view from the 1960s is known as Dairy Close. Up to the enclosure of 1781 it was part of Debdale Field in the former Open Field system. In 1781 it formed part of the land allotted to Rev. Richard Farrer in the Enclosure Act. He owned Farrer Farm and rented it out to a village farmer.



Snow reveals the 'ridge and furrow' remaining from the open fields of the period before 1781