

Village Life from the Eighteenth Century to the Present

Employment in the Wool Trade

A list of 'able-bodied men' who were liable to serve in the Northamptonshire Militia, was compiled in 1777. There were 36 names, which may not seem many, but there were several exemptions which reduced the numbers. What makes the list very informative is that the occupation of the men is given. They are as follows:

Servant 10
Farmer 6
Weaver 6
Comber 4
Labourer 2
Baker 2
Shoemaker 2
Blacksmith 1
Miller 1
Tailor 1
Shepherd 1

The occupations 'weaver' and 'comber' make up 10 out of the 36. At that time a cloth market was held in Harborough and these men would have been working on the wool and cloth at home, with the products going to the market. Women were probably involved as well, as spinners. John Nichols, in his History of Leicestershire, published in the late 18th century, reported, *"In the present day, a considerable manufactory of tammies, shalloons, plain and figured lastings, &c. employs a great number of poor families in this town and neighbourhood. Several hundred pieces of tammies, shalloons, &c. and a large quantity of yarns and jerseys are brought weekly to the market."*

Tammies, shalloons and lastings were types of worsted. Nichols's account may be out of date, because it was reported of Kibworth in 1795, *"There was formerly a tammy manufacture, which is now nearly laid aside"*.

What happened to employment in the village when the local cloth industry declined? It seems that for a time the population declined as well, presumably because some people moved to find work. The numbers receiving help from the village's Overseers of the Poor were considerable. The proportion of village men working in agriculture increased over the next few decades, as few alternatives existed locally. Censuses begin in 1801; in that year the population was 279 but by the next census in 1811 it had fallen to 251.

New Jobs for Old

The population remained at a similar level over the next few decades, including in the census of 1841. This was the first one which listed everyone and recorded occupations. Of all those who have an occupation, 50% are either agricultural labourers or graziers (the employers of the labourers). The word 'farmer' is not used, showing that virtually the whole

parish was given over to pasture. Of the 74 people with occupations, 12 were servants at the larger houses. Other occupations were shoemaker, baker, grocer, tailor and publican; showing that villagers could buy essentials without leaving the village.

The population figures in 1851 and 1861 were 238 and 242. The proportion in agriculture remained around 50%. New occupations in 1861 were butcher, groom, coachsmith and three bricklayers.

Census totals in 1871 and 1881 were 222 and 223 respectively. In 1881 new occupations were two painters and two builders, as well as three laundresses - they most likely worked at the laundry in the outbuildings of the house now called Bleasdale.

1891 saw a short-term rise in the population to 244. This census records a brewer (James Dulley of Harborough brewers Eady & Dulley, who lived in the Hall), as well as a printer and a staymaker (corset maker). These three would have commuted into Harborough to work, with the staymaker employed at R. & W.H. Symington. This marks the beginning of a growing trend for villagers to work away from the village, usually in Harborough. The advent of bicycles made this much more feasible.



This is an advertisement for the Liberty Bodice, made in Market Harborough by R. & W.H. Symington. The model is Freda Cox, daughter of F.G. Cox, chairman and managing director of the company, who lived in East Farndon

1901 marked the biggest change so far in the census information. The population declined to 204 (100 years earlier it had been 279). Perhaps work in the town encouraged people to move there. There are several new occupations: shop worker, factory worker, bank accountant, railway carter – a world we can recognise as more like our own. The proportion in agriculture has declined from 50% to 31.5%.

The last census currently available is 1911. It shows that the same trend continued. The population was down to 193. There are now 52 different occupations listed, in contrast to 1841, when there were only 18. There are four cycle and motor workers and an electrical engineer. Also recorded are two company directors (the Coxes of R. & W.H. Symington) and a company secretary (G.W. Wilson of the same company, who lodged with the Coxes at the recently built Orchards). By now the proportion working in agriculture was down to 22.5%, less than half of the figure of 1841 but still a considerable number.

Thatch gives way to Tiles and Slates

Over the 20th century there was a considerable change in the appearance of the village. In medieval times the majority of houses would have been thatched, with cob or mud walls. Only a very small number would have been stone. Presumably the Manor House (now The Hall) would have been the first stone house. Then in the seventeenth century two substantial houses were built, those known today as 'The Manor' and 'Home Farm'. Gradually as the use of brick increased in the eighteenth century, more houses of some status were built. This must reflect increasing prosperity among some sections of the population. Some of these larger houses were still being roofed with thatch.



A fire at one of the village's thatched cottages in the 1920s. All thatched houses have since been demolished or re-roofed in other materials. The Bell Inn, on the right, was one of two pubs, both of which have since been closed and turned into private houses.

Many of the humbler cottages survived through to the twentieth century and there are photographs which show them. They look quaint but of course lacked what came to be considered essential facilities. So by the middle of the century they had all been demolished. The larger houses which had been thatched were re-roofed in tiles or slate. So today East Farndon has no thatched houses and is largely a brick-built village.



This pair of thatched cottages, one with its entrance at the rear, were on Main Street. They were demolished in 1950.



This pair of thatched cottages, one with its entrance at the rear, were at the southern junction of Main Street and Back Lane. They were demolished in 1950.

One reason for the replacement of thatch with tiles or slates was the risk of fire. There have been three examples of fires occurring in the thatched roofs of village houses. One is shown here in the cottages that were near the Bell Inn. Another was at the Bakehouse (now The Old Bakehouse) in 1906 and the third at Orchard Cottage in 1947.



The Bakehouse after the fire in 1906. It is surprising that the house was rebuilt and still stands today.

Local Administration in the 19th century and beyond

In the early 19th century village affairs were in the hands of the Vestry, a group which was made up of those who paid rates. Only property owners or tenants would pay the rates and the amount they paid depended on the value of their property. There was a rate to raise money to support the poor and another to keep the roads in a reasonable state. There might be further demands if the church needed repairs. The Vestry was normally chaired by the Rector or a Curate, so church and the village administration were all one.

From amongst their number the Vestry chose two men (they were always men in those times) to be Overseers of the Poor, who would be responsible for keeping accounts of the money they gave to the poor of the village and for organising work 'on the round' (going for a time to work for different farmers) for those who had no work otherwise. They made payments to those in need or ill. There was no country-wide system of Social Security. It was all in the hands of the parish Overseers.

The Vestry also chose two Overseers (or Surveyors) of the Highway to organise the purchase or excavation of material (gravel, stone) for the road and to employ and pay men for the work.

There was also a Constable to keep an eye open for possible law-breaking, especially important before the County Police Force was formed around the middle of the century.

The Account Books of the Overseers from the early part of the 19th century have survived (in Northamptonshire Record Office) and provide a fascinating insight into village life of the time.

There was no County Council and the only authority above the parish Vestry was the Quarter Sessions, held at Kettering. The Overseers had to take their accounts there for approval at the end of each year. Publicans' licences were granted at the Quarter Sessions.

County Councils came into existence in 1889. In 1894 parishes were asked to choose between having a Parish Council or a Parish Meeting, which would have more limited powers and generally just have one meeting a year. East Farndon opted for the Parish Meeting and the first meeting was in March 1895. The change to a Parish Council was made in 1977. The separation of the church and the civil administration was an important part of the 1894 establishment of Parish Councils and meetings. Church administration was eventually taken over by the Parochial Church Council in 1920.

Major Denis Cowen was a dominant figure in Farndon after World War 2. He was Chairman of the Village Meeting from 1950 to 1974 and Chairman of the Charity Trustees from 1951 to 1985. He died in 1986. His photograph appears below. The first Chair of the newly-formed Parish Council in 1977 was 'Joe' West (also below).



Denis Cowen



'Joe' West

The school was established as a church school around 1840, run by the Vestry with the Rector as one of a board of six. In 1902 control passed to the Local Authority, with a board of 4. The school closed in 1966. The photograph below shows the last group of pupils at the school when it closed.



Social Life up to World War I

From at least the 18th century till the second half of the 20th there were two pubs in the village, the Bell and the Three Horseshoes. In the days when the village was quite self-contained and there were no other places of entertainment, they played a vital role in the community. For instance, in 1880, "The Head of the Market Harborough Volunteers was engaged by Mr G. Russell, of the Three Horseshoes Inn, for both evenings and played for dancing". This was the 'feast', the predecessor of today's fete, which took place on two weekday evenings.

Sometimes one of the better-off residents would provide a meal for villagers on a special occasion, such as the one given by Mr Richard West in August 1874 when his daughter Frances was married. Similarly in June 1888 Mr Underwood of Little Oxendon marked a family wedding by giving a dinner for 170 people. This was served by Mr Russell "in a shed in the school yard" There was dancing to the Lubenham Brass Band.

The Rector arranged an annual treat for the village children, when there would be tea and games on the Rectory lawns. There would also be occasional evening entertainments in the schoolroom, with songs from village residents.

When James Nance was Rector (1895-1905), he formed an extraordinarily successful Church of England Temperance Society (CETS) branch in the village. He arranged meetings which included various entertainments, thereby persuading unlikely numbers of village people to pledge to abstain from drink. The children's Band of Hope had 27 members joining at a meeting in January 1896. In 1897 there were celebrations for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, with a dinner for 130 adults, then games for the children and a supper for all including children. Every child received a jubilee mug or cup and saucer.

At a CETS meeting in April 1899, "Mr Cox produced a gramophone, which was a surprise and gave pleasure to all". There was no village hall in those times, so indoor events were usually held in the schoolroom and outdoor events in the Rectory grounds.

In July 1902 the coronation of Edward VII was celebrated, with a dinner for 150 people in a tent in the school yard, plus sports events and a supper. This is the earliest social event of which a photograph exists (below).



On Boxing Day in 1903 a Social Evening was held in the schoolroom and "tea and coffee and various good things, including tobacco, were handed round." How times have changed.

The school treat provided by the Rector, Cyril Burges, in January 1909 included tea and "a highly amusing cinematograph entertainment." Everyone over 16 had a dinner in the schoolroom in June 1911 to mark the coronation of George V. There were concerts in the schoolroom in 1913 and 1914, when village people performed, including the Misses Belton on the piano.

Social Life from 1914

In December 1914 there was a 'patriotic entertainment' including "special new coloured lantern slides". Among those attending were a number of Belgian refugees who had been accommodated in the village. There were several fund-raising events during the war for the troops, including the 'Parish Feast' in June 1916, when heavy rain brought proceedings to an early finish.

A cricket club was started in 1920, with matches against neighbouring villages. There were events to raise funds for the War Memorial, such as a fancy dress dance at East Farndon Hall, thanks to the residents there at that time, Mr & Mrs Hart. The Feast continued each

year and in 1922 Miss Paterson arranged a cricket match between the village team and a team of ladies. The Feast was still held on a Monday evening.

Social events were given a boost in 1924 when the village hall, a wooden structure, was opened with a whist drive and dance. The building was in continuous use until it was replaced with the present brick hall in 1994.

In the 1920s Market Harborough Polo Club had its ground in East Farndon, by the Marston Road, roughly opposite The Grange. This photo was taken on a match day at the ground.



There were distinguished visitors to the polo ground; Major Wernher of Thorpe Lubenham, his wife Lady Zia, her father Grand Duke Michael of Russia and ex-King George of Greece (later to be re-instated as King). The Club closed down in 1928.

Whist drives and dances were a staple entertainment in the 20s, usually to raise funds for a good cause. A 'Women's Sewing Party' met regularly during the winter months and arranged trips out during the summer. The local paper featured this advertisement for the Feast in 1927, by when it had apparently changed to Sunday evening.



An Entertainment Committee was very active in the 1930s. An event in February 1930 featured conjuring tricks by Miss Bluett. From that year plays began to be performed, including "The Jacobite", as shown in the photo below.



In February 1931 an evening's entertainment included "Mr J. Clifford and his troupe of pierrots." (Below)



The Farndon branch of the Women's Institute was formed in 1933. In the same year the Fete was held this time on a Thursday evening. The boys and girls of the Children's Home in the village (now 'The Limes') benefited from parties arranged by ladies of the village. Jumble or 'Rummage' sales were also held for the first time in this decade.

There were celebrations for the Silver Jubilee of George V and the Coronation of George VI in 1935 and 1937 respectively.

The programme for the 1935 celebration (below) shows how much preparation had gone into the occasion. F.G. Cox (and his family) feature prominently. The Cox family lived at The Orchards (now Orchard House); he was the chairman and managing director of R. & W.H. Symington, the corset manufacturers in Harborough.

PROGRAMME.

- TIME.
- 10.0 a.m.—Children Assemble in School Playground.
- 10.15 Unfurling the Flag at the School,
by Mr. F. G. Cox.
- 10.30 Church Thanksgiving Service.
- 2.0 p.m.—Cricket Match—Married Men v. Bachelors.
In Mr. Belton's field by kind permission.
- 2.0 to 3.30. Children's Sports.
In field kindly lent by Mr. Ward.
- 4.0 Children's Tea.
Distribution of Jubilee Mugs by Mrs. F. G. Cox.
- 4.0 to 5.30. Adults' Sports (Mr. Ward's field).
- 5.30 Adults' High Tea.
- 5.45 Children Assemble in the Marquee adjoining the
Village Hall for prize-giving.
- 6.0 Presentation of Prizes to Children,
by Mrs. D. Hignett.
- 6.15 Tug o' Wars.
1. Ladies over 18.
2. Men over 18.
- 6.30 to 7.30. Adults Sports continued.
- 7.30 Competition— "Sticking the Pig,"
in the Village Hall.
- 8.0 Broadcast of King's Speech.
Radio kindly lent by Mr. Mayes.
- THE NATIONAL ANTHEM.
- 8.15 Presentation of Prizes to Adults,
by Mrs. F. G. Cox.
- 8.30 Community Singing—Accompanist, Mr. Wheeler.
- 9.0 to 9.30 Games and Cinema.
- 9.30 Fancy Dress Parade.
Judges: Mrs. J. A. Hart, Mrs. E. Cox, and
Mrs. John Hart, Junr.
- 9.45 to 10.30. Dancing and Whist.

Light Refreshments will be served during the evening.

ADULTS HIGH TEA

5.30 p.m.

MENU.

ROAST BEEF

HAM

PRESSED BEEF

SALAD

PICKLES, Etc.

PASTRIES

CHEESE and BISCUITS

BEER

LEMONADE

GINGER BEER

Toast to Their Majesties The King and Queen

Proposed by Mr. F. G. Cox.

The events planned to mark coronation of George VI suffered from bad weather and had to be cut short. In November the copper beech tree which still stands on the triangular green near the church was planted to commemorate the coronation.

During the Second World War events were inevitably fewer, but many were held, usually to raise money to assist the war effort in some way. Some years the fete did not take place but had restarted by 1945, after VE day. 'Whist drive and dance' was still the most frequent entertainment. Sometimes the music was played by a German band from the Prisoner of War camp in Harborough, roughly where Roy Hubbard's garage is today.

In the autumn of 1948 a village football team was formed, sustaining a series of heavy defeats at first. A 1950s team is shown in this photograph.



May Day was celebrated from 1949 and the next few years with the choosing of a girl to be the May Queen, who would lead other children round the village. The photograph shows the time Cynthia Whiterow was Queen.



The village cricket team started up again in 1948. It seems these post-war years were the only ones when Farndon could boast a cricket and a football team. Whist drives continued and the W.I. held regular meetings.

In January 1953 the local paper reported, somewhat illogically, that “for the first time in their history, the Sick and Dividing Club have held an annual dinner”. Known as ‘the Sick and Div’ the club met every fortnight and members paid around a shilling each time. If anyone was ill they could draw money out. If any money was left at the end of the year it would be

divided between the members. The club went back to a time before the First World War; one member, A.G. Reeves, had been in the club since 1911.

June 1953 brought Queen Elizabeth's coronation. The village, like the whole country, celebrated and the programme of events is shown below.

P R O G R A M M E		S P O R T S	
		C H I L D R E N	
11.0 a.m.	Service in Parish Church.	Under 6 years :	25 yards. Balloon.
2.30 p.m.	Children's Sports in Messrs. West Bros. Field.	6—11 years :	50 yards. Obstacle. Sack.
4.15 p.m.	Presentation of Coronation Mugs to Children in Village Hall.	11—15 years :	100 yards. Obstacle. Three Legged. Wheelbarrow. Sack. Relay.
4.15 p.m.	Children's Tea Party in Village Hall.	18 years and under :	Obstacle. Three Legged. Sack. Pick-a-back. Potato. Egg and Spoon. Relay.
5.30 p.m.	Children's Fancy Dress Parade and Competition.	A D U L T S	
6.15 p.m.	Adult Sports in Messrs. West Bros. Field.	Open Handicap. 100 yards. Tug of War for Men. Tug of War for Women.	
8.0 p.m.	Adult Play in Village Hall.	Events may be added or withdrawn according to the support forthcoming.	
9.0 p.m.	Buffet Supper in Village Hall. Toast to Her Majesty The Queen. Dancing and Games.	Prizes to the value of over £15 will be awarded in cash.	
Competition for the best Decorated House in the Village.			

Since that time, during the Queen's reign, the village has continued to hold the annual fete, W.I. meetings, occasional talks, jumble sales and latterly an annual barbecue and regular coffee mornings. There was a cricket team for a short time in the 1980s but otherwise no sports teams.

In the years round 1980 there was a revival of revues and other entertainments when villagers performed. The most ambitious, perhaps, was a performance of the musical "Grease". Some of these events are shown in the photos below.



There was a branch of Age Concern in the village for over 25 years. There were regular meetings to provide a social environment for older residents who might spend much of their time alone. The photo below shows the volunteers who ran the branch.



The Bell Inn (the interior is shown below) and the Three Horseshoes had contributed to social life but by the 1970s they had both shut, as in so many villages, in a trend that continues today.



The photo shows George Dimbleby, the publican, and his wife Annie. George was the landlord from 1953 to 1966.

Some more recent special occasions include: the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977, when there was a tea-party for the children in the village hall (below) -



The Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012:



And the centenary of the 1918 armistice, with a ceremony at the War Memorial and a display in the village hall about those who served in the war:



There is now a village barbecue each year and, of course the Fete, once known as the 'Feast'. Below are some scenes from past fetes.





2020 was an unusual year, as few events took place because of the Covid pandemic. 2021 began in the same way but everyone is hoping for brighter times ahead.

Alan Langley
February 2021