

Panel 4 - Bedford Road and Balls Lane

(See map overleaf)

At the crossroads, turn onto the A603 towards Bedford. This road was part of the turnpike from Bedford to St. Neots, established in 1772. The terraced houses on the left date from the early 20th Century. There used to be butcher's and baker's shops where the Post Office (30) now stands. Opposite the post office you may



take the public footpath across the field. However, this is uneven underfoot. There used to be a large tar-painted onion bam in the centre of this field and evidence of its outline can still be seen. The land belonged to Mark Young described as the 'onion king of Bedfordshire', and owner of over 300 acres of land in the parish.

Alternatively, you could continue towards Bedford and turn right into Balls Lane. As you walk towards the village you will pass buildings on your right (31). The first of these was originally the offices of the match manufacturers, Bryant and May, for their poplar plantations until the 1970s. On your left is the Riding School for the Disabled (32) which was established here in 1992. The land was donated by Twigden Homes when the Riding School was moved from The Park, Moggerhanger.

Turn left into Church Road and retrace your steps to the starting point.

Willington Local History Group is a voluntary organisation which arranges a varied programme of talks, visits and activities to increase knowledge and enjoyment of local history.

For more information about these activities, contact the archivist, Sheila Ward on 01234-838535 or Bryan Buckby on 01234-831012

31/03/07

Historic Landscape

The modern village is set within a landscape which holds evidence of at least two thousand years of human occupation. In 1984, evidence of a small pre-historic farmstead by the river was discovered. The farmstead dated from the early Iron-Age, between 500 and 100 BC. During the late Iron-Age and early Roman period, homesteads were scattered throughout the parish between the river and the ridge to the south where Sheerhatch Wood is today.

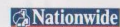
There was another settlement where a Roman road crossed a waterway known as the Deanes Later, the parishes of Willington and Cople divided this settlement.

In the 10th Century Willington was on the frontier between the Danelaw to the north and the English at Bedford. The series of 'moats' by the Danish Camp Visitor Centre (20) may date from this period.

Modern farming and gravel extraction have removed much of the evidence of early human occupation.



This leaflet has been produced by the Willington Local History Group as part of the Willington Heritage Project which is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund with support from the National Trust and Lafarge Aggregates, among others.



The Willington Heritage Trail



We hope that you will enjoy your walk

The trail varies in length from approx. 1.5 to 2.5 miles depending on the route chosen.



The Dovecote and Stables (1) & (2)

These two fine Tudor buildings, now owned by the National Trust, are the remains of a large collection of Tudor manor buildings.

They were built partly as status symbols and they still have the ability to impress us today.

If you would like to see inside these buildings, please contact Mrs. J. Endersby, the volunteer warden, to arrange a visit (01234 838278).

St Lawrence Church (5)

Today's airy and peaceful church building is due mainly to the influence of two families: the Gostwicks in the 16th and 17th Centuries and the Russells (the Dukes of Bedford) in the 19th Century.

The medieval church was substantially altered or rebuilt by Sir John Gostwick in about 1540. His tomb can be seen at

the entrance to the Gostwick chapel at the north-east of the church. There are two splendid memorials to later Gostwicks.

The church was described as a 'beautiful specimen' in 1847 and in 1877 the Duke of Bedford paid for a major restoration which cost £2500. At this time the altar rails and the splendid Minton encaustic-tile pavement were put in. The east window was filled with stained glass depicting the Ascension in 1885.



Welcome to Willington

The Dukes of Bedford in the 19th Century

In addition to paying for the restoration of Willington Church, the Dukes of Bedford built cottages for their workers, the village school and houses for the teachers.

They also repaired the dovecote and stables following a local campaign to save them from the original demolition plan.



Willington in the 19th Century (1851 Census)

Willington was an agricultural community in an estate village of 282 people with a lace-making cottage industry.

The 56 households were numbered but the street names were not recorded.

There were 6 farmers who employed almost all the men and boys. There was a game-keeper, a mill, a mid-wife, 2 shops, a wheelwright, a seamstress, a blacksmith, 2 shoe makers, 27 lace-makers, a manufacturer of straw products and a parish clerk.

There was no school or public house. 10 people, mostly elderly, received parish relief. 25 heads of households and 38 wives were born outside the parish. Many were from nearby Bedfordshire parishes but others came from as far as Birmingham, Dorset, London, Kent and even from the Mediterranean.



Willington Peace Memorial Hall (9)

The village raised funds for a village hall both before and after the First World War and finally, in 1922, the foundation stone was laid. The original plans did not include a kitchen. However, this was put right before the hall opened in 1923.

During the Second World War the hall was a rest centre for evacuees and a base for training in First Aid for women and Home Guard for men.

The hall was the focus of activities for a Fighting Forces Fund which, in 1945, was shared out to Willington men who had served in the Armed Forces. After the war the Willington Variety Players used the hall for their shows, given to packed houses, to raise money to restore the church.

Heating, lighting and other amenities at the hall have been improved over the years, and it is still in much demand as a venue for village clubs and events.

The Crown Public House (21)

The Crown in Station Road opened in March 1905. The licence was transferred from the Crown, at Kempston, which had just been demolished. The pub was built by Newland & Nash of Bedford, who were bought by Wells & Winch, the Biggleswade brewers, in 1922 who in turn became Greene King in 1961.

The first licensee stayed for 35 years until 1940. The pub still serves home-cooked food and has a garden to the rear.

The walk described in this leaflet assumes that you begin in the car park by the National Trust Dovecot and Stables. The description begins with Panel 1 overleaf.

Panel 1
Start at Church End (originally Manor Road)

The Dovecote (1) and the two-storey Stables (2) opposite are the remains of a Tudor farmstead built by John Gostwick, lord of the manor in the mid-16th Century (See overleaf for more detail about these buildings). Willington Manor to the west is a private family home. The house was built at the same time as the dovecote and stables and later much altered. The Victorian farm buildings (3), built by the Duke of Bedford, have been converted into attractive homes. There was a medieval manor site near here with a moat and drawbridge, mud walls, three gates and many domestic buildings.

To the south of the car park are semi-detached red brick cottages (4) (Nos. 70 and 72) built for the Duke of Bedford in 1890. (See the ducal coronet and date stone on the end of No. 70.) The original vicarage is believed to have been hereabouts.



4

The church of St. Lawrence (5) stands to your right, rebuilt and extended by John Gostwick at the same time as he built his manor. Written evidence for this church dates back to 1166 (See overleaf for more detail about the church).

The house (6) on the corner to your left as you turn into Church Road was originally a single-storey building housing the Sunday School. The building became the village school from 1858 to 1867.



6



12

Turn left into Church Road

As you walk away from the church you will pass a series of cottages (7) built for his estate workers by the Duke of Bedford in the mid-19th Century. One block of 6 has been demolished. Many houses in the village had their own well but these cottages had shared wash-houses behind the cottages and used pumps for water which were on the opposite side of the road. No. 42 was the village post office. In the 18th Century, the field on the right, where there are now bungalows, was known as 'Oat-land' and was later used for animal grazing, allotments and gravel extraction. Walk along Church Road, past the junction with Balls Lane. No. 39 (8) was originally four cottages dating from the 16th Century. This part of Church Road, to the Methodist Chapel, used to be called Vicarage Road. Walk past the village hall (9). (A brief note on the hall is given elsewhere in this leaflet.) On the right, No. 33 (10) and No. 31 date from the 17th Century, as does No. 32, known as the Old Vicarage (11), on the left. This former farmhouse was built on glebe land and became the vicarage when the old one was demolished in 1834. Further along, at No. 28 (12), is a house which was built as a



8



10

dovecote and has since been greatly extended. On your right is Beauchamp Place, the site of a small holding belonging to the Golder family from about 1914.



11

Almost opposite is Jeakins Drive (13) which was known in medieval times as 'Smallewaye'. This drive, although not a public right of way today, was used by the lord's tenants to get to the meadows and hayfields by the river. Today the Drive is named after Old Jake (Mr. Jeakins) who occupied land here where he grew blackberries and kept hens and bees. He made sheds and boats, using as his office an octagonal summer-house which one of his customers had failed to collect.



14

The village school (14) was designed, in a restrained Gothic style, by Henry Clutton, a Victorian architect who designed many buildings for the Dukes of Bedford. When it was built, the school was considered to be very advanced for its time. The ducal crown and date can be seen on the gable at the front. The houses next door to the school were also built in 1867.



16

The south side of Church Road has some picturesque thatched cottages, many dating from the 17th Century. Look out for the cat on the roof of No. 7 (15). See also No. 5 Rose cottage and No. 3 Penwrights Cottage (16), named after its 19th Century occupants.



17

The Methodist Chapel (17) stands at the junction of Chapel Lane, Station Road and Church Road. The original wooden building was moved to this site on rollers from further along Station Road in the 1850s. The brick building we see now is said to encase the old wooden building.

Panel 3 - At this point you can walk an extra loop via Chapel Lane. (see Panel 2) or you can continue along Station Road.

The width of Station Road suggests that the verges were used for grazing animals in medieval times. In the Second World War a battery of searchlights was located to the west of Station Rd. On the right Croots farmhouse (22) and on the left No. 45 Clumbercotes (23) date from the 17th Century.

No. 36 (24) was a shop before 1900. The development at Grange Way has been built to blend with the older farm buildings of Grange Farm. The former mill (25) is now two homes, and a barn has been incorporated into a terrace of houses.



24

Willington crossroads (26) is unusual as five roads meet here. Grange farmhouse (27) stands at the crossroads. The building is in two distinct parts, one grander than the other. A timber 'privy' stands in the garden facing Station Road.

Also at the cross roads are two 17th Century houses: the Timbers (28), which was formerly the White Hart Inn, and the Old Forge (29), which was once a cycle shop. The village pound for stray animals was also near here.

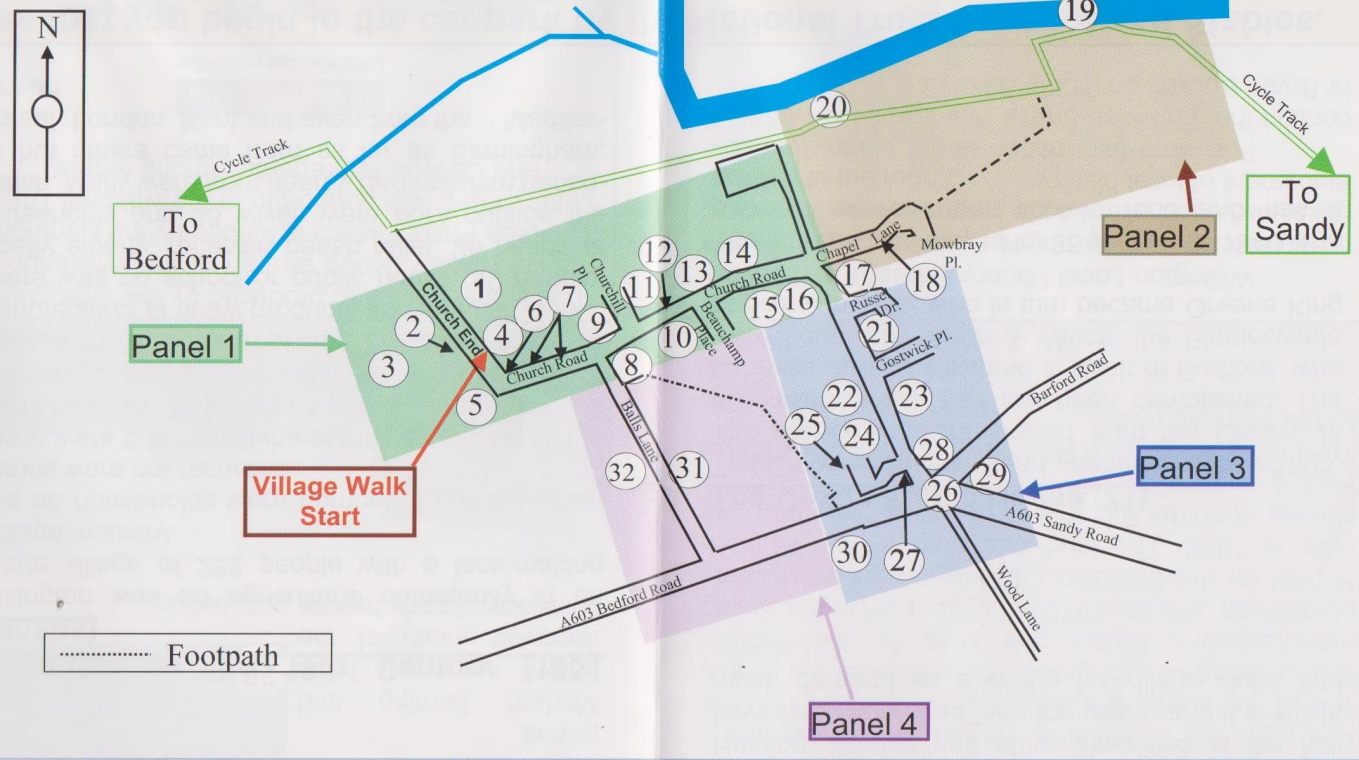
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Panel 2 - Circular loop from the Methodist Chapel.

Start by walking along Chapel Lane

The names of the houses on the left refer to the ancient 'moats' lying between them and the river: Moat House and Danish Camp. Further along on your right is Mill Lane Cottage (18), thought to be the oldest cottage in the village. Follow the footpath at the end of Chapel Lane passed the old sewage works. Turn right onto the cycle-way (part of the national cycle network which follows the line of the old Bedford to Sandy railway) to get to Willington Lock (19) close to which is the site of a water mill.

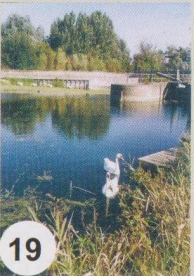


18

Return via the cycle track to the Danish Camp Visitor Centre (20) on the right with sight of waterfowl on the 'moats' to the left. The remains of the station platform can be seen further along to the south of the path.

Turn left on to the footpath which runs alongside the driveway to the Danish Camp car park. On the right is the old Station Yard with the remains of the weighbridge still visible.

Rejoin the main walk by the Old Station House, opposite the Methodist Church.



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From this point, you may either retrace your steps to the starting point or continue along Station Road as described in Panel 3.