

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WILLERSEY

Lying as it does at the foot of the Northern edge of the Cotswolds, and adjoining the Vale of Evesham, the Village has absorbed much of the Vale's characteristics but is, nevertheless, very much a Cotswold village.

Opinions differ as to origins of the name Willersey. The most widely held view is that it comes from the Old English, "willers seagoon" (saltboilers' pits) or 'Willers ieg' (the island of the salt-boiler).

In 709AD a Charter by the Kings of Mercia gave Willersey to the Abbey of Evesham. Willersey continued in the Abbey's possession, through the Domesday Book, until the Abbey was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1539. Lords of the Manor followed including Sir Francis Winnington, Mr Bertram Ingles (who bought the Lordship from the Winnington estate in 1955), and now Willersey Parish Council who purchased it in 1994. Under the Enclosures Act in 1767, the Village Greens, the Pond and Willersey Quarry were vested in the Lordship and consequently they are now owned by the Parish Council as Lord of the Manor (the Greens were registered under the Common's Registration Act of 1965).

The Main occupations of the residents have been farming and market gardening, particularly since the 1914-18 War. In 1919 there were fourteen persons with their many employees fully engaged in commercial market gardening, and nine farmers. Today there are fewer farms and the market gardens have tended to merge to form larger units, or else the land has been used for housing development. In recent years, a light industrial estate has been developed and the Village still has its School, two public houses, an excellent shop and a garage.

In the first detailed Census of 1801, the Village population was 273. In 1931 this had risen to 485 and in 2011 Census it was over 800. In 2013 it was estimated at 820.

The Parish Church is dedicated to St. Peter, though religious activity on the site has been traced to the 8th Century. The first recorded resident Incumbent was Robert de Gloucester in 1281. The Priest in Charge is now the Reverend Craig Bishop, whose Parishes include Honeybourne, Peabworth, Dorsington, Aston-sub-Edge, Saintbury and Weston-sub-Edge. 3

For many years there has been a very active Methodist group within the Village. In its early days, meetings and services were held at licensed Meeting Houses in Broadway Road, and the present Methodist Church was converted from cottages in the 1930s. The present Preacher is the Reverend Christine Kettlety.

Willersey Parish Council held its first meeting in December 1894; the year parish councils were first formed. It has nine Councillors and a Parish Clerk.

The Village School was built in 1844 by the Earl of Harrowby to accommodate 52 children. Enlarged in 1896 and 1913 for 100 children, it was an Endowed School which was taken over by the County Education Authority in 1902, and is now a Church of England Controlled County Primary School with approximately 50 pupils.

The first Village Hall was built on land acquired in 1923. Further land was bought in 1946, and the present Village Hall was built in 1968 at a cost of £9,000 and opened in May of that year. The Hall is registered under the Charity Commissioners, the Custodian Trustee being the Parish Council. It is administered by a Management Committee consisting of members from all the Village organisations.

The Recreation Ground was opened in 1934. It is owned by Willersey Parish Council having been bought from Cotswold District Council with funds bequeathed by the late Miss Nancy Hewins.

The War Memorial stands at the entrance to St. Peter's. It was designed by F. L. Griggs of Chipping Campden and was erected in 1920 by Jewson and Berkeley of South Cerney. The panels bear the names of the fallen in both the 1914-18 and 1939-45 World Wars.

Adjoining the Churchyard of St. Peter's is the Burial Ground. Gifted in 1963 under the Will of Edward Gibbon, it is administered by the Parish Council. In 2004 an extension, also gifted by the Gibbons family, was added and is now in use.

The attractive centre of the Village is greatly enhanced by the wide village greens, the pool and the Jubilee Seat. The 'resident' Aylesbury ducks for so long a feature of the Village Pond, now appear to have gone but the many visiting mallards and other species are a great attraction. The Pond has been drained and cleaned out by volunteers in recent years – in 1954 one hundred and twenty tons of mud and debris were removed! The Village Greens and Pond are owned and administered by the Parish Council, the grass being mown on a regular basis by a band of volunteers and owners of adjoining properties. In 1999 the Pond was refurbished as a Village Millennium Project.

Where the Jubilee Seat and horse-chestnut tree now stand was the site of the old Village Smithy. Blacksmiths and farriers of the Sawyer and Willis families worked there from before 1800 until it was demolished in 1921 when it was bought by the Parish Council. The present tree is the third to be planted. The original seat was erected in 1935 to commemorate the Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary. It was replaced in 1981 by a new seat to commemorate the marriage of HRH Prince of Wales and Lady Diana Spencer. This was replaced in 2012 to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

The Village is a member of the Gloucestershire Branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), and has been a winner of the Bledisloe Cup, sponsored by that body, on many occasions. Despite the many problems created by modern industrialism and ever increasing road traffic, the Parish Council, with the help of many of the Village Organisations and individual residents, strives to retain the rural character of the Village. Some developments may no longer be resisted but it is felt that we now have just about the right balance of residential and business sectors and of private and local-authority housing within our Village.

Thanks to all those who are always ready and willing to assist in any project aimed at keeping the Village 'alive' and attractive, and to preserve the many treasures we have inherited, we not only have an attractive Village but also a well-kept one.

May everyone – longstanding residents and new residents alike – continue the good work.

Maurice Andrews