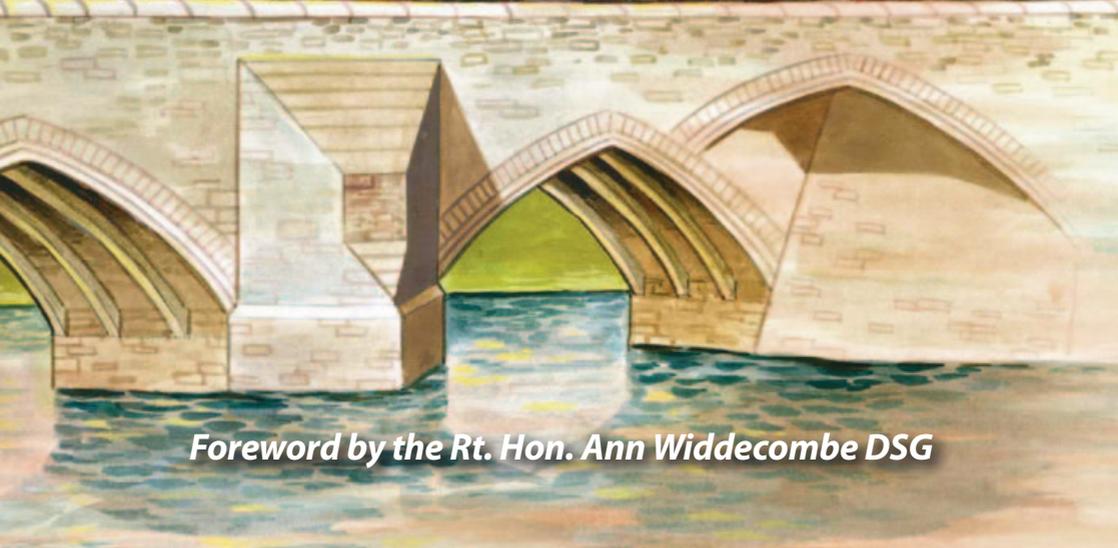




East Farleigh

A brief history



Foreword by the Rt. Hon. Ann Widdecombe DSG



Coppen's Cottage Station Road pulled down 1881

Courtesy Maidstone Museum and Bentlif Art Gallery

East Farleigh

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Foreword



by the Rt. Hon. Ann Widdecombe DSG



Kent is full of pretty, intriguing villages and so the temptation is to admire the scenery and the quainter buildings and then pass on. However many have histories stretching back through the centuries and millennia and East Farleigh's is full of wonderful, exciting tales. This books takes us back to the Roman period and ends with modern times. Good heavens!

Was that bridge, which I associate with canvassing harassed commuters trapped in their cars by the level crossing barriers, really the scene of fierce fighting between the King's troops and Cromwell's New Model army? It causes me much satisfaction that Maidstone and its villages gave the rebels such trouble, holding them up on that small bridge for two hours. Thomas More is well known as the scourge of Henry VIII when the latter wanted to cast off Catherine of Aragon for Anne Boleyn. Less well known is that Pope John Paul II made him the patron saint of politicians for having died on the scaffold rather than betray his principles. He too has a connection with East Farleigh through his daughter's ownership of Gallants Manor.

In this booklet we learn of the history of the village school and of the workhouse and of VE day in the village.

Read on and I guarantee you will never again walk through the village without stopping to ponder on one of its features.

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History



PRE-ROMAN

A history of scattered habitation extending back to Neolithic times is evident through discoveries of Palaeolithic tools such as flint implements and stone axes in Coxheath (once part of East Farleigh). This would put the earliest evidence of human existence in the area at around 9000^{BC}–4000^{BC}. Other discoveries in the vicinity include a late Iron Age fortified camp at Quarry Wood constructed around 40^{BC} near what is now Loose.

ROMAN

The first Roman invasion of England occurred, in 55^{BC}, under Julius Caesar. He named Kent Cantium and wrote in his *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*: 'By far the most civilized (people) are those who inhabit Cantium.' However, the Romans did not establish a permanent domination of the region and it was not until AD43 that the Roman conquest really impacted on the county. After a century of trading between Rome and what we now refer to as England, Emperor Claudius decided to finally take over by taking advantage of internal quarrels between the various tribes then ruling the country. His troops landed at Richborough in Kent and this was the starting point of the new and ultimately successful Roman invasion.

The East Farleigh Roman site

In Roman times, villas and temples were spread along the banks of the Medway. A quarry off Dean Street produced ragstone for London's buildings and walls as well as the shore forts of Reculver and Richborough.

Since 2005 the Maidstone Area Archaeological Group has been investigating a Roman farmstead site in East Farleigh and it has been suggested that this farm provided food for the quarry workers. Following a geophysical survey using a resistivity meter, the foundations of the walls of three rooms and a corridor were unearthed. Pits



Building 5 at the East Farleigh Roman villa site Courtesy Maidstone Area Archaeological Group

below the rooms contained painted wall plaster and tiles from an underfloor heating system.

Several more Roman buildings have been located since 2007, parts of which had been destroyed during the construction of a hop garden for Courage Brewery in 1939. Discoveries have included the remains of a store room, two bread ovens, a cooking fire, a quern stone for grinding corn and a wall rendered, painted and decorated to imitate marble cladding. In what had been a kitchen there were pottery vessels with flint grits for grinding food and spices, many broken cooking pots manufactured locally, and better-quality pots from Hampshire and Oxfordshire. Scattered on the kitchen floor were broken copper bracelets and a ring decorated with snakes ('lucky charms' for good health). A piece of Whitby jet jewellery, part of a greenstone cosmetic-mixing pallet, a bunch of keys, a child's bronze bracelet, a gaming counter and bone pins have also been excavated. A hoard of 153 mid-fourth century copper coins, found dumped on a floor, has been donated to Maidstone Museum.

A 'curse tablet' was also found on the site. Such tablets were used by the Romans to cast spells on people accused of theft and other misdeeds and were usually rolled up to conceal their inscriptions and hidden in places considered to be close to the underworld, such as graves, springs and wells. Inscribed in capital letters on the discovered tablet are the names of 14 people whom experts believe were cast with bad spells. Measuring 6cm (2.3in) by 10cm (3.9in) and 1mm thick, the tablet is extremely fragile.



The Curse Tablet

Courtesy Maidstone Area Archaeological Group
Contact Linda Weeks (Hon. Secretary), 01622 762422 :
email: maag.info@virginmedia.com for more information.

Roman pottery and coins have been discovered in several sites throughout the village and two cremation urns have been found in Gallants Lane.

The Roman Empire came under increasing military pressure from the lands it had conquered and the gradual collapse of the Empire led the Romans to leave Britain around AD400.

SAXON

Little is known about East Farleigh during this time, though the church has its origins in the Saxon period and therefore a settlement must have existed at this time. In 961, East Farleigh manor was given by Queen Ediva, the mother of King Edmund, to Christ Church, Canterbury.

MEDIEVAL

Following the Norman Conquest, the manor was listed in the Domesday Book and was held by Bishop Odo of Bayeaux, who was also Archbishop of Canterbury and William the Conqueror's half-brother. Mention is made of 110 villagers and slaves (but probably only the men of the parish were counted), four mills, six fisheries producing 1,200 eels per year, woodland for 145 pigs and a church. In the Domesday Book the village is called Ferlega – usually translated from Saxon as 'the way of the passage' (over the river) or from Gaelic as a 'clearing in the woods'. By 1300 it is referred to as Fearnlega in the Book of the Church of Rochester and later on a map of 1575 as East Farly.

During this period some of the best-loved and most well-known buildings in East Farleigh were erected. In about 1120, the Normans rebuilt the Saxon church, though the tower was not added until the twelfth century. The medieval bridge is said to be the finest in southern England and, although it is not known exactly when it was built, the earliest-known mention of the bridge dates from 1324. Adelaide Cottages and Gallants Manor date from the fourteenth century, the old vicarage from the seventeenth century and Bridge House has overlooked the bridge also since the seventeenth century. The Horseshoes pub was built in the early seventeenth century and the Walnut Tree in 1528, so the village that we know today was well on the way to being formed by the end of the medieval period.

GEORGIAN, VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN

In 1801 the population of the village was 642; 30 years later it had more than doubled to 1,461 and it reached a peak of 1,668 in 1881. For comparison, today's population is circa 1,500.

The village had always depended on agriculture; however, hop production brought about an increase in the population during this period. The oast houses dotted around the village (some have been demolished) are an indication of the scale of the production. The tithe map of 1841 shows that 25 per cent of the land in the parish was dedicated to hop growing. During the season the population multiplied as pickers, mostly from East London, came to work in the fields. On 12 September 1849 a cholera epidemic broke out in East Farleigh due to the unsanitary living conditions of the workforce. A memorial cross dedicated to 43 'strangers' who died during the outbreak stands in the churchyard. Lessons were not learned, however, and typhoid broke out in 1897 when sewage from the hop pickers' camp leaked into the water supply at Farleigh Springs. Edith Cavell (later a war heroine) was among the nurses that came to the area to care for the sick.

The first workhouse opened in 1771 in the Stockletts/Workhouse Lane area funded jointly by the parishes of East Farleigh, West Farleigh, Loose, Linton, Hunton, Barming and Detling. Those inmates who were able made hop bags on nearby Workhouse Farm. The proceeds from the sale of the sacks helped fund the running costs of the institution, whose main source of income was from the local Poor Rate. The workhouse's inmates were classified as 'poor', 'destitute', 'elderly', 'sick', 'lunatics' or 'imbeciles', 'children', 'deserted women', 'widows' and 'casuals'. Casual paupers were admitted to special wards and had to carry out specified tasks in return for a night's board.

A number of humble tithe cottages were built during the nineteenth century to house farm workers, for example Court Lodge cottages on Lower Road. This reflected the gradual increase in social awareness that arose in this century as landowners and business owners sought to improve the lot of their workers.

THE VILLAGE SCHOOL

In order to provide for the increasing number of school-age children a village school was built in 1846 in Lower Road as a result of public subscription raised by the Reverend Henry Wilberforce. A second floor was added in around 1866. Sixty years later it was deemed unsuitable and a new building was constructed in 1930 on the site of today's school. Made of wood, it



Pupils of East Farleigh School in 1904



Wooden school built in 1930

was intended to be a temporary structure but in fact it lasted 23 years until it was completely destroyed by fire in June 1953. Firemen fought the blaze for five hours on a Sunday morning. Newspapers reported that it was the second big fire in the parish within a week, with a nearby farm garage and a lorry burned beyond repair in the course of the first. Although investigated, no link was ever established. As a result of the school fire, 105 children were given a week's holiday, though the Kent Education Authority at the time said that this would be readjusted later in the year.



Fire site of wooden school burnt down in 1953

WAR YEARS

The war memorial in the churchyard was dedicated in 1920 by The Right Reverend John Reginald Harmer, Bishop of Rochester, who had himself served in the First World War. The memorial shows that 42 local people lost their lives in the Great War 1914-1919 and that 8 died in the Second World War 1939-1945. Some families are shown as losing more than one of their loved ones. In a small rural community such bereavements must have been devastating.

The Parish Council minutes for the First World War years include some interesting items.

- On 10 August 1914 a meeting was called for the purpose of electing special constables to safeguard the parish during the war. Eighty-four parishioners volunteered.

- On 9 May 1919 the Parish Council agreed to build the war memorial.

- Village Peace Celebrations took place on 4 August 1919. The schoolchildren, soldiers, sailors, their wives and old age pensioners were treated to a tea party. They were entertained by the Eccles Brass Band and fun and games included children's races, a Punch and Judy show and a tug of war. One hundred and twenty gifts at an average cost of 6 old pennies each were given to the children.



East Farleigh war memorial

One of the defences against invasion was a number of pill boxes constructed along the banks of the River Medway. They were known as the 'Ironsides Line' and one of these, to the east of Farleigh Lock, still survives.

On 29 October 1940 a German Messerschmitt crashed on Lodge Farm, East Farleigh. It is believed that the pilot was buried in Barming churchyard before being reinterred in a military cemetery in Staffordshire.

Maidstone suffered shelling by German guns located on the French coast. Two of these shells landed on the morning of Tuesday, 13 June 1944 in the orchard of Hermitage Farm in Barming, causing considerable damage.

On the 14th of May 1940 the Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, made a radio broadcast calling for defence volunteers aged between 17 and 65 who were not in military service but who wished to defend their country against invasion to join-up at the local police station. This brought an immediate response from young boys to 70 year olds who hoped to convince the enrolling officer that they were under 65. They were originally known as the Local Defence Volunteers and later the Home Guard.

East Farleigh played its part in the war effort by joining with Barming and Teston to form their own 'Dad's Army'.

In 1939 the Women's Land Army was formed to replace the men who had been conscripted into the services. One such woman was Edna Tree, who worked on a farm in Lower Road. Her pay was £1 8s a week; of this, £1 1s went



East Farleigh 'Dad's Army' 1941 Courtesy Kent Messenger

on rent and insurance the remaining 7s was spent on food – but in spite of this she remembered always being hungry. Edna had attended college and trained as a market gardener, so she would, unlike many, have had a certain amount of knowledge of farming.

The Parish Council Minutes show that on 27 November 1940 the Ministry's scheme for providing watches to combat dangers from attacks by incendiaries was discussed, as was a letter from the Lord Mayor of London asking for books and donations for HM Forces.

In December 1940 Councillors undertook to survey and document the iron railings in the village as requested by the Government, so that if necessary they could be used in the manufacture of armaments.

On 11 July 1944 apologies for absence was received from Councillor Miss A Tapsfield due to injuries received when a plane crashed near her house.

VE Day was celebrated in 1945 by a thanksgiving service in the church and a party for 200 children aged between 3 and 14 years, with extra rations being released for the day by the Food Controller.

The Battle of Maidstone and East Farleigh Bridge ‘Skirmish’



The Second English Civil War (March to August 1648) saw a Royalist rebellion across England and Wales, which began in Kent when the County Committee at Canterbury tried to stop a petition calling for the return of Charles I and the disbandment of the New Model Army.

On 21 May 1648 Royalist forces moved to seize Canterbury, Rochester, Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sandwich. Five days later the Royalists took Dartford and Deptford and the next day the fleet declared for the King. With the prospect of being attacked by sea, the forts at Deal, Walmer and Sandown now surrendered to the Royalists. Dover Castle was also under siege. On 29 May at Burnham Heath the Royalists made the Earl of Norwich their leader. The Earl gathered his army at Maidstone, with some 2,000 men posted in the town itself, another 1,000 sent to cover Aylesford Crossing and 7,000 positioned at Penenden Heath.

Parliament ordered General Fairfax to march his Parliamentarian Army to Kent to deal with the rebellion and by late afternoon of 1 June most of Fairfax’s troops marched across Barming Heath. The army was made up of 7,000 hardened veterans of Cromwell’s New Model Army, who advanced down the road by Barming Rectory and arrived at Farleigh Bridge.



Painting commissioned for the information board sited at the bridge showing The Roundheads crossing East Farleigh Bridge on their way to the Battle of Maidstone

The Royalists were aware that the Parliamentary Army was approaching. Sources state that “at five o’clock that afternoon somebody with a ‘perspective glass’ saw the forces of Fairfax descending a hill on the west side of the Medway”. The Royalists had a small detachment posted at the East Farleigh Bridge. They fought hard to defend their position but the Parliamentarians eventually crossed the bridge, pushing back the Royalists – who nevertheless continued to fight for every foot of ground. It took Fairfax’s Army over two hours before finally arriving on the outskirts of Maidstone.

Fairfax stormed the town that same day and the battle moved into a phase of intense fighting in heavy rain, street by street and inch by inch as each Royalist barricade was ferociously defended. The battle lasted for the rest of the day, with the Royalists retreating towards Gabriel’s Hill, then Week Street before their last position in St Faith’s Churchyard.

Just after midnight, with the thunderstorm still raging, Fairfax finally overcame fierce resistance to take command of the town. It is estimated that 300 Royalists lost their lives that day, while Fairfax lost just 80. Around 1,300 Royalists emerged from inside St Faith’s Chapel to offer their surrender; having acquitted themselves well in a bloody defence against a professional Parliamentary attack, the prisoners were allowed by Fairfax to return to their homes after the surrender.

A variety of evidence found in and around East Farleigh suggests that the clash at the Bridge was considerably more vicious and bloody than what was described at the time as a ‘skirmish’ and an ‘easy victory’. Trenches dug on the Barming side of East Farleigh Bridge have produced many bones of men and horses, as well as a cannon that was displayed outside the Victory pub for many years. Cannonballs were found at the cottage at Farleigh Bridge and in Hermitage Lane, at Bydews Farm, The Old Vicarage and St Helens Lane. This provides evidence that Parliamentary troops may also have tried to cross at Teston, Barming and Aylesford bridges, to outflank and possibly confuse the Royalist forces. Ultimately it was the bridge at East Farleigh that was vital to outflanking the Royalist position at Maidstone and was the key tactical decision that led to the victory of the Parliamentary army at the Battle of Penenden Heath.

The council plans to commission a memorial in Brenchley Gardens to mark the spot where Royalist defenders made their last stand on 1 June 1648, acting as a tribute to all those who lost their lives. The Stone Shop in East Farleigh has been commissioned to create a black granite plaque, which will include an inscription of lines from *The Grasshopper* by Richard Lovelace and an etching of a scene from the battle.

The doublet worn by Fairfax at the battle is on display at Leeds Castle.

Notable Residents and Visitors



MARGARET ROPER (née More) 1505 -1544

Margaret and her husband William Roper were owners of Gallants Manor in East Farleigh.

Margaret was the daughter of Thomas More, the lawyer, scholar, writer, Member of Parliament and chancellor who was executed for high treason in the reign of Henry V111. Thomas affectionately called his daughter 'Meg'. Their personalities and interests were very similar and they had a close bond; both were accomplished poets and although her poetry no longer exists we know of it through Thomas's many letters and writings.

Margaret married William Roper when she was 24 years old. Their marriage seems to have been happy, and popular with their family – William had been living in the More household for some years and Thomas More appeared to view him as a son.

With an astounding education for the time and a vast command of the popular languages of the day, Margaret became a successful translator. Her most famous work was her translation of *A Devout Treatise upon the Paternoster* by Erasmus.

Thomas More initially had a close friendship with Henry VIII and in 1529 Henry made him Lord Chancellor of England. However, problems occurred when the King wished to divorce his wife and marry Anne Boleyn. Sir Thomas was a devout Catholic and when the Church refused to grant Henry an annulment to his marriage it caused a rift between them. When Henry declared himself 'supreme head of the Church in England' – thus establishing the Anglican Church and allowing the end of his marriage – More resigned the chancellorship. Things grew worse for the More family when Sir Thomas was summoned before a parliamentary commission on 13 April 1534 and told that he must swear allegiance to an act of succession placing Anne Boleyn as queen consort of England. More refused on the grounds that the oath had anti-Papal wording and he was imprisoned. Margaret was a frequent visitor to her father in his cell at the Tower of London, as was William. Sir Thomas was charged with high treason on 1 July 1535. His initial sentence was to be hanged, drawn and quartered; however Henry, perhaps because of their



Sir Thomas More, his father, his household and his descendants, by Rowland Lockyer, after Hans Holbein the Younger. Sir Thomas More and Margaret Roper second person and fourth person front row. Courtesy National Portrait Gallery

previous friendship, insisted that he should be beheaded – a quicker, less painful death.

It was documented that after her father was executed and his head placed on a pike on London Bridge as a mark of the king's displeasure, Margaret paid to have the head removed and placed in her care, and that it was buried with her on her own death.

Margaret and William wrote the first biography of Sir Thomas More and it is from this work that most of what we know about him and his family derives.

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

William Wilberforce was born on 24 August 1759. In October 1776 he went to St John's College, Cambridge. In 1780 he stood for election for Hull and forged a lifelong collaboration and friendship with William Pitt the Younger, who became Prime Minister in 1783. In 1784 he left with his mother and sister on a tour of the continent and it was during this period that Wilberforce resolved to lead a strictly religious life and began work with a group of activists whose

aim was to abolish slavery. He worked tirelessly with the group for many years and the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was finally passed in March 1807.

On 30 May 1797 William married Barbara Spooner and they went on to have six children. Robert, born in 1802, became vicar of East Farleigh in 1832 and lived in the village until 1840. In 1854 he joined the Roman Catholic Church and is buried in Rome. In 1843 Henry, born in 1807, also became vicar of East Farleigh. Like his elder brother, he too joined the Roman Catholic Church (in 1850) and made a new career in journalism. John Henry Newman writes that “at East Farleigh he [Henry] built a substantial school house”.



William Wilberforce
Courtesy National Portrait Gallery

William and Barbara often stayed with their son Robert in the Old Rectory in East Farleigh. During one of these visits, William attended a meeting in Maidstone and spoke about the abolition of slavery; this was his last public speech on the subject. After William died in July 1833, Barbara continued to spend time in the village with Henry and his family. She died in 1847 and is buried in East Farleigh churchyard along with other members of the family. William Wilberforce is buried in Westminster Abbey.

ROSA BRETT

Rosa Brett was born in 1829 and by 1850 her family had moved to Kent. She is now listed among the ‘Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood’, other prominent members being Joanna Mary Boyce and Elizabeth Siddal. Though less famous than their male colleagues, including Rosa’s brother John Brett, they were active artists who made a powerful contribution to shaping the Pre-Raphaelite movement.

In 1862 Rosa came to East Farleigh, where she painted *Old House at Farleigh*.



The Old House at Farleigh by Rosa Brett 1862

This was the old thirteenth/fourteenth century manor house located where Court Lodge Cottages stand today. In its long history it was owned by many families including the Amhurst family, who are commemorated by several monuments in the Church. Although the manor house was demolished in 1874, the building was purchased by Maidstone Corporation and part of it was saved and re-erected in Maidstone as a wing of the Maidstone museum.

EDITH CAVELL

Edith Cavell was born in 1865 to the Rev Frederick Cavell and his wife Louisa. She was the eldest of four children and was taught to always share with the less fortunate, despite the fact that her family was not wealthy.

After a period as a governess she trained as a nurse at the London Hospital. In 1897, when a typhoid epidemic broke out in the areas around Maidstone including East Farleigh, she was sent to help nurse those that had contracted the disease. The source of the outbreak was the East Farleigh springs, which had become polluted. Due to her and the other nurses' efforts the outbreak claimed fewer lives than might have been the case and she received the Maidstone Medal for her work.

In 1907, Cavell was recruited to be matron of a newly established nursing school in Brussels and by 1911 she was a training nurse for three hospitals, 24 schools and 13 kindergartens in Belgium.

In November 1914, during the German occupation of Brussels, Cavell began sheltering British soldiers and helping them out of occupied Belgium and into neutral Holland. She was arrested on 3 August 1915 and charged with harbouring allied soldiers. In her trial she was prosecuted for aiding British and French soldiers, in addition to young Belgian men, to cross the border and enter Britain. She was sentenced to death.

The night before her execution, she told the Reverend Stirling Gahan, the Anglican chaplain who had been allowed to see her and to give her Holy Communion: *"Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone."* These words are inscribed on her statue in St Martin's Place, near Trafalgar Square in London. After the war her body was taken back to Britain for a memorial service at Westminster Abbey and then transferred to Norwich, the place of her birth, for burial.



Edith Cavell

Courtesy National Portrait Gallery

DONALD MAXWELL

A Riddle of Kent, by Donald Maxwell

I know of a valley enchanted,
A valley of crystalline streams,
A valley of Kent in a mountain,
I call it the Valley of Dreams.

I sing of an emerald Eden,
Gold-barred by the morning's beams,
But I tell you nought of the road I sought,
To come to the Valley of Dreams.

I fear the men of the moment,
I fear their hurrying schemes,
I fear the rush of the motor,
Destroying my Valley of Dreams.

So I give you the clue of the waters,
To follow the light that gleams,
Who readeth the riddle of Langley,
Discovers the Valley of Dreams.



Donald Maxwell

Donald Maxwell was born in Clapham in 1877 and he died in 1936. His father, Dr Frederick Charles Maxwell, was headmaster of Manor House School in Clapham and his mother Lucilla (née Stanley) was a talented artist and related to Rudyard Kipling and Stanley Baldwin.

Maxwell was a writer and illustrator and he also served as an official Admiralty artist during the First World War. He lived in the Medway Valley for 27 years and painted and wrote about the area throughout his life, inspiring his generation to explore the Kentish landscape.

In 1907 he married Fanny Eveline Marie Morgan (died 1954). In 1930 he and his family bought East Farleigh House in Lower Road and, although he had moved away from the village prior to his death, he is buried in East Farleigh churchyard overlooking the Medway Valley he loved so much.

He trained in London at the Clapham School of Art, the Slade School of Fine Art, and the Royal College of Art. He was soon writing and illustrating extensively for magazines and in 1909 he became a regular correspondent for the Daily Graphic and the weekly illustrated paper The Graphic. In later life he wrote weekly illustrated articles for the Church Times. His interest in history and architecture led to the publication of two volumes about churches, which he wrote and illustrated.

Maxwell's 30 or more self-illustrated books were about voyages in Europe, Mesopotamia, Palestine, India and about the sights of southern England. His books *The Enchanted Road* and *Unknown Kent* include drawings and notes on East Farleigh and other nearby villages. He also illustrated books by other authors, including Rudyard Kipling.

Several of his topographical paintings were bought by the Southern Railway and were displayed as prints in railway carriages. These and his books, paintings and drawings are now collectors' items.

MRS MACONOCHIE

Someone of great importance to the village, past and present, is Beatrice Margret Maconochie. For such a great supporter and benefactor of East Farleigh there is little of record to be found concerning her generous gifts and deeds.

Born in 1858, she was the only daughter of James Johnson Ellis, who owned 350 acres of hop farms in and around East Farleigh, making him the largest hop farmer in Kent and one of the biggest in the country. His land and fortune was left to his only son Herbert Ellis who, before dying in 1892 at the early age of 37 from lung disease, donated £7,000 (over £750,000 in today's money) to East Farleigh church for its restoration. On his own passing the estate was left to his sister.



Beatrice Maconochie

In 1885, at the age of 27, Beatrice (known as Margaret) married Captain Robert Blair Maconochie of the Royal Navy at East Farleigh church. They lived at the original Priory Estate off Lower Road. Robert died in 1897, aged 47.

Margaret became a very committed member of the community. Her activities included being Chairman of the East Farleigh Conservative Association and People's Warden of East Farleigh Church and she was a great supporter of East Farleigh's Gardeners Club, with the annual show being held in the grounds of the Priory.

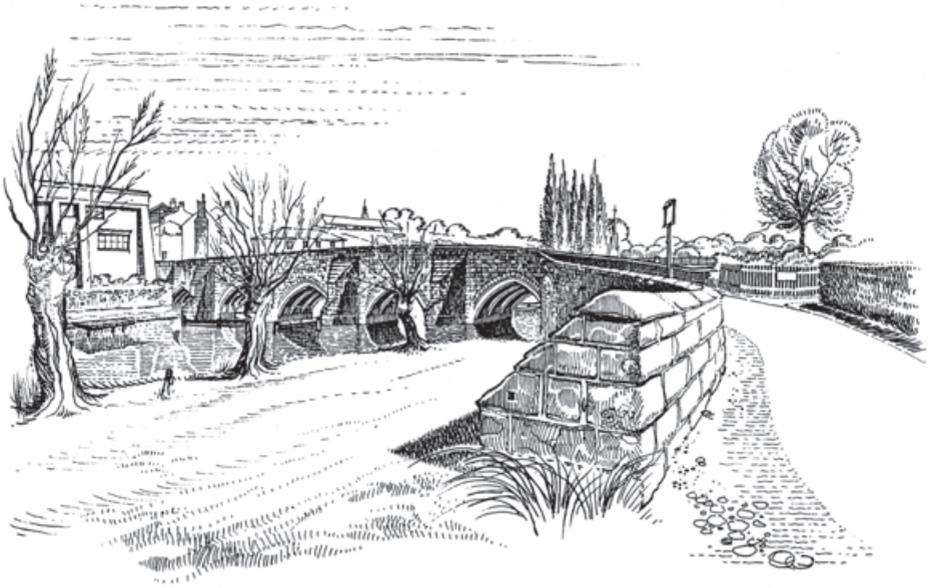
She donated the land for the recreation ground to the village, this gift being listed in the Parish Council minutes of 3 November 1920. Another example of her generosity was the offer to host the King George V Silver Jubilee celebrations in the grounds of the Priory. Children of up to 15 years and adults of 65 years and over were given a tea and activities included sporting events, a Punch and Judy show, pony rides, a band and a bonfire and fireworks. Her donations also included a village bathing place – on the condition that the users did not swear.

When she died in 1936 her estate was worth £127,000. In her will she left £1,200 to the East Farleigh Churchwardens' Trust for the maintenance of the

choir, organ and graveyard. Other bequests included to The British Home for Incurables, Mrs Weston's Sailors Rest in Portsmouth, The Home for Lost Dogs and The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

It was noted in the Parish Council minutes of 21 October 1918 that Mrs Maconochie agreed to the village hiring one acre of Court Lodge Farm for use as allotments. From the sale of her estate in 1936, Mr John Bunyan Leaver, who was then Chairman of the Parish Council, personally purchased 3.5 acres of land in Vicarage Lane in order to provide permanent allotments for the village and generously donated this land to East Farleigh. The allotments were to be administered by the Parish Council and the proceeds of the rents, after paying certain expenses, should form a Christmas charity of 5 hundredweight of coal to be given to deserving families of not less than five years' residence in East Farleigh.

East Farleigh Bridge



East Farleigh Bridge Phil Clark

English Heritage says the East Farleigh bridge is an outstanding example of medieval enterprise and architecture and cites it as a national monument with Grade I listed status. Accolades by historians and travel writers are numerous; the author E. Jervosie, for instance, describes it in *The Ancient Bridges of Southern England* (1930) as “certainly the finest bridge in Southern England and a perfect example of medieval design and craftsmanship”.

Although there is no historical record of its construction, the first known reference to it is in 1324 when an official enquiry was held into who was responsible for its upkeep. In 1530, Henry VIII’s government appointed Justices of the Peace to enforce repairs to bridges and, where no one was found to be responsible, the county paid for repairs. The need for repair to the East Farleigh bridge is by no means a recent concern: in 1721 Her Majesty’s Justice of the Peace Western Division for the county of Kent said that the bridge was “so much in need of repair that it was dangerous to pass over”.

The building material used is roughly coursed ragstone, which was plentiful in stone quarries in East Farleigh and the surrounding countryside. Its impressive stone arches were originally four, with an additional blind (filled) arch being added some time after the initial construction to help angle the bridge into what is now Station Road. Certainly this was the case as far back as 1797 as Edward Hasted mentions “an old gothic stone bridge of five arches” in his 12-volume *History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*. He also noted that the tide flowed as high as the bridge prior to the locks being built in the 1700s to promote navigation.

Perhaps the bridge is most famous for its part in the English Civil War (1642–51). (See also *The Battle of Maidstone and East Farleigh Bridge ‘Skirmish’*, pp 14).

Buildings and Monuments



There are 37 listed buildings and monuments in East Farleigh. East Farleigh Bridge is listed as Grade I and the others are Grade II.

Of the Grade II listed there are 15 that are not houses. These comprise the Ancient Parish Church of East Farleigh and 9 monuments in the churchyard, the Old School Hall, the mounting block and drinking trough on the centre junction at the top of Station Road, and both The Horseshoes public house and what was formally the White Lion public house and listed in 1951 but now residential.

Looking at East Farleigh road by road, below are just a few of the interesting buildings, monuments and houses. (For more information about the listed buildings in the village, go to www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk)

Station Road

Here we find our only Grade I site – the **medieval bridge** built in the fourteenth century and in constant use ever since. Overlooking the bridge is the seventeenth century timber-framed **Bridge House** (Grade II). On the opposite side of the road in what is now the boatyard are some **hoppers' huts**; these were very basic buildings in which hop-picking families would stay during the picking season. At the top of the hill is **The Bull** public house which was demolished in 1899 and the present building erected.

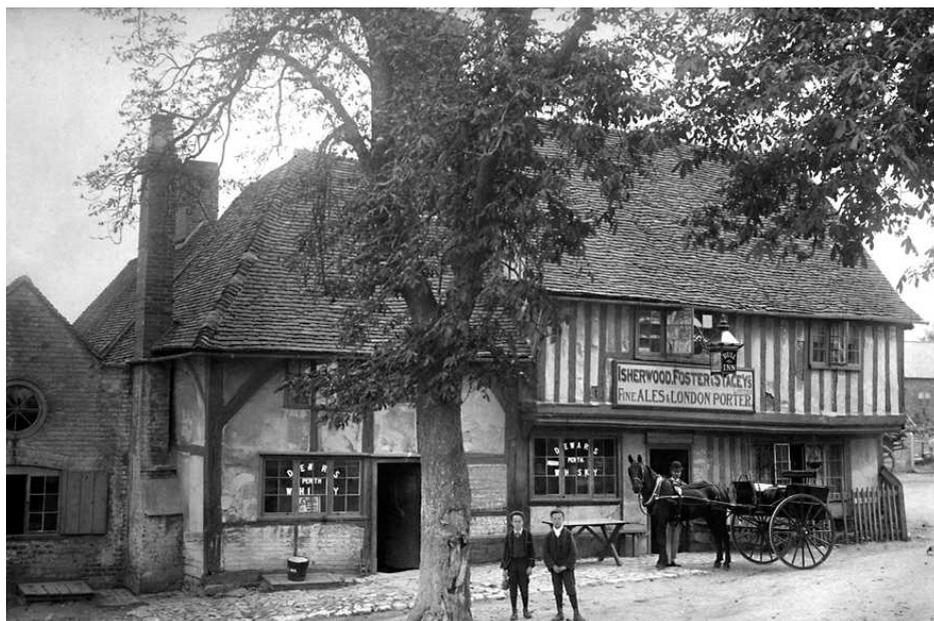
On the triangle of the road junction are to be found the **drinking trough**, inscribed "H.M. George V June 1911, Erected in commonwealth by voluntary subscription God Save the King" and a **mounting block**, both Grade II listed.

Lower Road

One of the main and most loved sites in East Farleigh is **The Ancient Parish Church of East Farleigh**. There was probably a church on the site before 961 as Queen Edina, mother of King



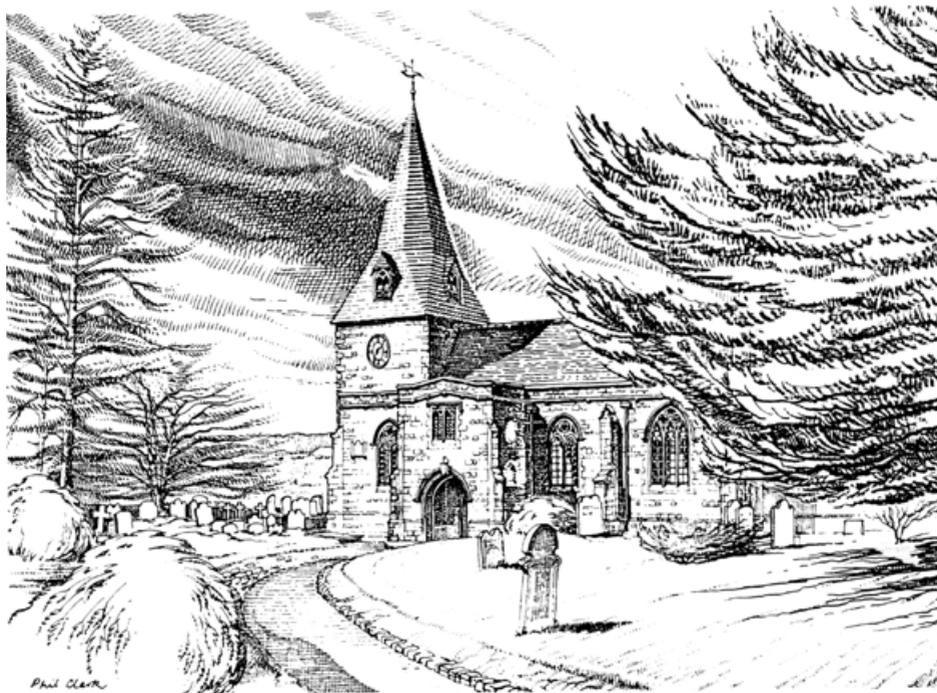
The drinking trough and mounting block



The old Bull public house Courtesy Maidstone Museum & Bentlif Art Gallery

Edmund, mentions in a grant the “stipulation of repair to bridges and buildings”. It is assumed that this included a church. The Domesday Book of 1086 states “the Archbishop holds Farleigh where there are a church, three mills, 6 eel fisheries, 12 acres of pastures and woods for one hundred and fifteen hogs”. The church is Saxon in origin but nothing of the original remains except some tufa stonework on the outside of the north-west corner. The present building has some Norman work over the west door and further building work was undertaken in the eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A major restoration was carried out in 1891, funded by the Ellis family who were local hop farmers. At this time the lych gate was erected and stained glass was installed in the east windows.

Inside are many interesting monuments. Set in the floor of the vestry chancel entrance is the tomb of John Amhurst, who was High Sheriff of Kent in 1699 and died in 1711. Other members of the Amhurst family, who lived in Court Lodge, are also buried here. Also on the north wall is the fourteenth century altar tomb of a member of the Colpepper family. On the south wall is the tomb of Lady Margaret Pympe, who died in 1337. John Pympe paid for the refurbishment of the Lady Chapel in 1411; he fought at Agincourt in 1415 and provided 6,000 cannon balls for the battle from the quarries he owned in East Farleigh. On the wall is a record of the vicars of East Farleigh dating back



Above: The Ancient Parish Church of East Farleigh Phil Clark

Opposite page: The stained glass window John Vigar

to 1279; among the names listed are those of the two Wilberforce brothers who were sons of William Wilberforce, the anti-slave campaigner (see also Notable Residents, p XX). One of the most unusual stained glass windows in the church is a window to remember Stephen Walter who, at 20, died in action on 31st July 1917. This window is believed to be the first to show a soldier dressed in a khaki uniform, and is also unique in that it features a Red Cross ambulance from World War I

In the churchyard is the simple wooden cross in memory of 43 strangers who died of cholera in 1849. There are also memorials to members of the Wilberforce family, the grave of Donald Maxell, the artist and writer who died in 1936, and the war memorial to the dead of the First and Second World Wars.

Old School Hall is a Grade II listed building next to the church. It was built in 1846 in the Victorian Gothic style with ragstone walls and arched mullion windows. It was erected as a result of public subscription raised by the Reverend Henry Wilberforce. A second floor was added in 1866. The school bell still hangs from a cote on the eastern face of the building. **School House** (Grade II) adjoining the hall was built as accommodation for the headmaster.



On the wall alongside Little Adelaide Cottages in Lower Road is a plaque commemorating the site of the national school 1820–1846, which preceded the Victorian school.

Court Lodge Cottages were built in the nineteenth century as tithe cottages for the farm workers. **Court Farm Oast** and the **barn**, make up this group of farm buildings (all now private houses).

Where Court Lodge Cottages now stand originally stood Court Lodge. This medieval house was a famous landmark; however, it fell into disrepair and was mostly demolished in 1874, though one wing was saved and incorporated into Maidstone Museum where it can still be seen. The ragstone wall seen in the photo still fronts some of the cottages.



Old school hall



Court Lodge pulled down 1874
Courtesy Maidstone Museum & Bentlif Art Gallery



Court Lodge Cottages

There were once three identical oasts in East Farleigh, built in the 1870s: Court Lodge Farm Oast was demolished after a fire in 1955; Coombe Bank Oast was demolished in 1874 although one kiln remains standing; and Churchfield Oast (now called **Court Lodge Farm Oasts**), which is the only remaining complete example. This was converted into houses in 1982. The oasts were last used to dry hops in 1977.



Court Lodge Farm Oasts

East Farleigh House is a mid-eighteenth century Grade II listed house and has a keystone dated 1766. It was for some years the home of the writer and artist Donald Maxell, who is buried in East Farleigh churchyard.



East Farleigh House Penny Spearman

The Old Vicarage, a late-seventeenth century house with some eighteenth century additions, is Grade II listed. When it was occupied by Robert Wilberforce during his time as vicar of East Farleigh church (1832–40) it was the vicarage for the parish. It is now a private house.

Arnage/The Covers was once the home of butterfly expert Captain Edward Bagwell Purefoy. He and other experts conducted experiments on the lives of these insects. He not only determined the life history of the Large Blue butterfly but also established the only colony of the Large Copper in the British Isles. Later on this house became the Post Office and the switchboard is still in situ.



St Helens Penny Spearman

St Helens is a Grade II listed house dating to the late sixteenth/early seventeenth century. The present owner's grandfather, Peter Dening-Smitherman, left detailed memoirs and in one section describes the death of

his own grandfather, who was struck by a train at East Farleigh station – an event that caused a change in law that allowed his grandmother to receive compensation for his loss. The tragedy also instigated the first level crossing gates and footbridge to be installed.



The Limes Penny Spearman

The Limes a Grade II listed house was built in the seventeenth century that was the location of an old village butchery with its own abattoir.

Gallants Lane

Gallants Manor was built in the fourteenth century. There have been many illustrious owners of this fine old manor including the Colpeppers: the tomb of Thomas Colpepper (1307–51) can be found in the church; Sir John Colpepper was High Sheriff of Kent in 1365, 1366, 1369 and 1382. The latter is believed to have funded the building of the chancel of East Farleigh Church and the medieval bridge.

Humphrey de Stafford, Duke of Buckingham acquired the manor in 1447. He was the great-grandson of Edward III and a military commander in the Hundred Years' War and the Wars of the Roses. When he died in 1460 his son Henry inherited the manor; he was one of the primary suspects in the disappearance of the princes in the tower. He fell out with Richard III and was beheaded in 1483 having been involved in a rebellion against the crown. Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, fared little better when in 1521 he lost his properties and his head when he was convicted of treason by Henry VIII. Sir Henry Isley bought Gallants manor in 1521; he was involved in the Wyatt rebellion against Queen Mary and was executed in 1554.



Gallants Manor Penny Spearman

William Roper, the son-in-law of Sir Thomas More, was High Sheriff of Kent 1554–5. Sir Thomas was Lord Chancellor of England but fell from favour when he opposed Henry VIII during the King's divorce and marriage to Anne Boleyn and his break with the Catholic Church. Sir Thomas was executed in 1535. Willam Roper died in 1578. His son inherited the manor and in total the Ropers owned the house and estate for over 150 years. (See also Notable Residents, Margaret Roper, p XX.)

In recent years the history of the manor has been more peaceful and in 1947 it was purchased by Cecil Bartlett, father of the present owner.

Dean Street

Frith Hall was built in 1855, in a typical Victorian style, by local builder Thomas Reeves. Its construction was commissioned by Gabriel Kennard (born 1811), an East Farleigh gentleman who hailed from a very large and well-established local farming family.

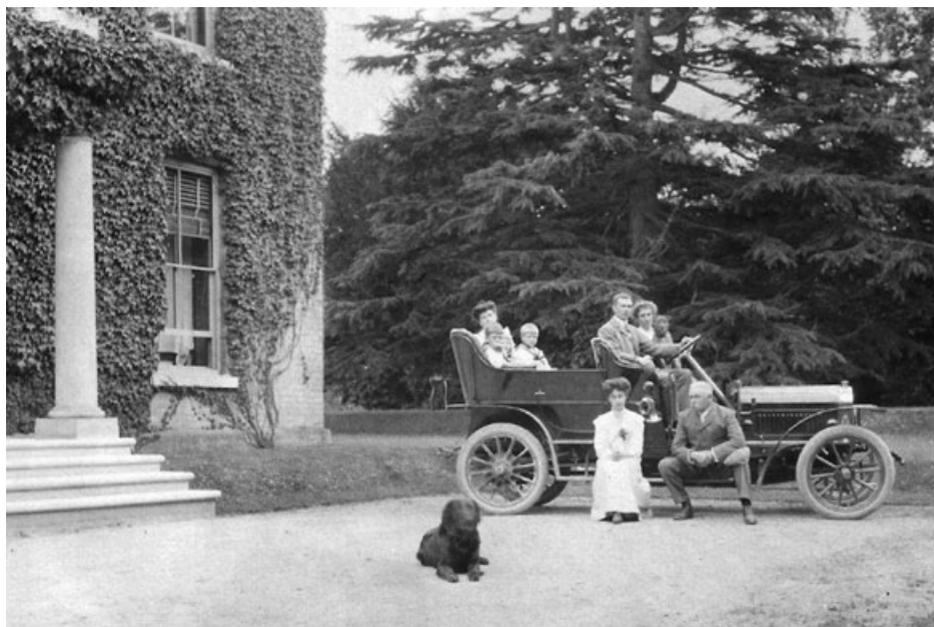


Frith Hall Penny Spearman

Gabriel, Sarah and their nine children lived in their new home with the help of two domestic servants and a cook. The formal part of the house was adorned with deep skirting boards, ornate ceiling coving, a wide staircase and bell pulls to call for assistance: the remainder of the house, where the servants and young children lived, was much less elaborate and plain in design. There was an extremely large, walled kitchen garden and outbuildings (a ragstone barn and a thatched stable block with coach house) from an earlier period.

The Kennards were hard-working, successful and renowned hop and fruit growers. They were the focus of an article in the *London Graphic* in 1874 reporting on the work of the farm and the hoppers, who arrived annually *en masse* from London.

On Gabriel's death the house and farm were occupied for a while by three of his unmarried sons, Arthur, Walter and Howard. Their bachelor life there ended



A family reunion at Frith Hall (circa 1922)

however, when Arthur married Nettie Gramshaw in 1883; they had four children who all grew up at Frith Hall.

The estate passed to Gabriel Christopher Kennard in 1915 (his signature is still on a door in the cellar recording his inheritance at that time). It is his father who died on the way home from Ceylon in 1873 and who is commemorated in the church. It is unlikely that Gabriel Christopher actually lived at Frith Hall very much, since his business interests and home were mainly in Argentina; other family members probably ran the farm in his absence.

The final member of the family to own the house was Keith Kennard. He took possession of the property in 1933 and lived there until his death in 1977, thus ending a 122-year period of ownership by the same family. Keith is still remembered by some villagers today.

The Horseshoes was built in the seventeenth century and is still operating as a pub/restaurant today. During the 2nd World War a V1 doodlebug exploded in the garden causing extensive damage to the pub.



Forge Lane

At the corner of Forge Lane and Dean Street is **Rivendell House**, which was formerly the William Wilberforce pub. The name was changed from the New Inn when bought by the brewers Whitbread.

The Walnut Tree dates back to 1528. Its website states that the pub is said to be haunted by genial ghosts of hop pickers who were regulars in the heyday of Kentish hop farming.



The Walnut Tree Penny Spearman

Workhouse Lane

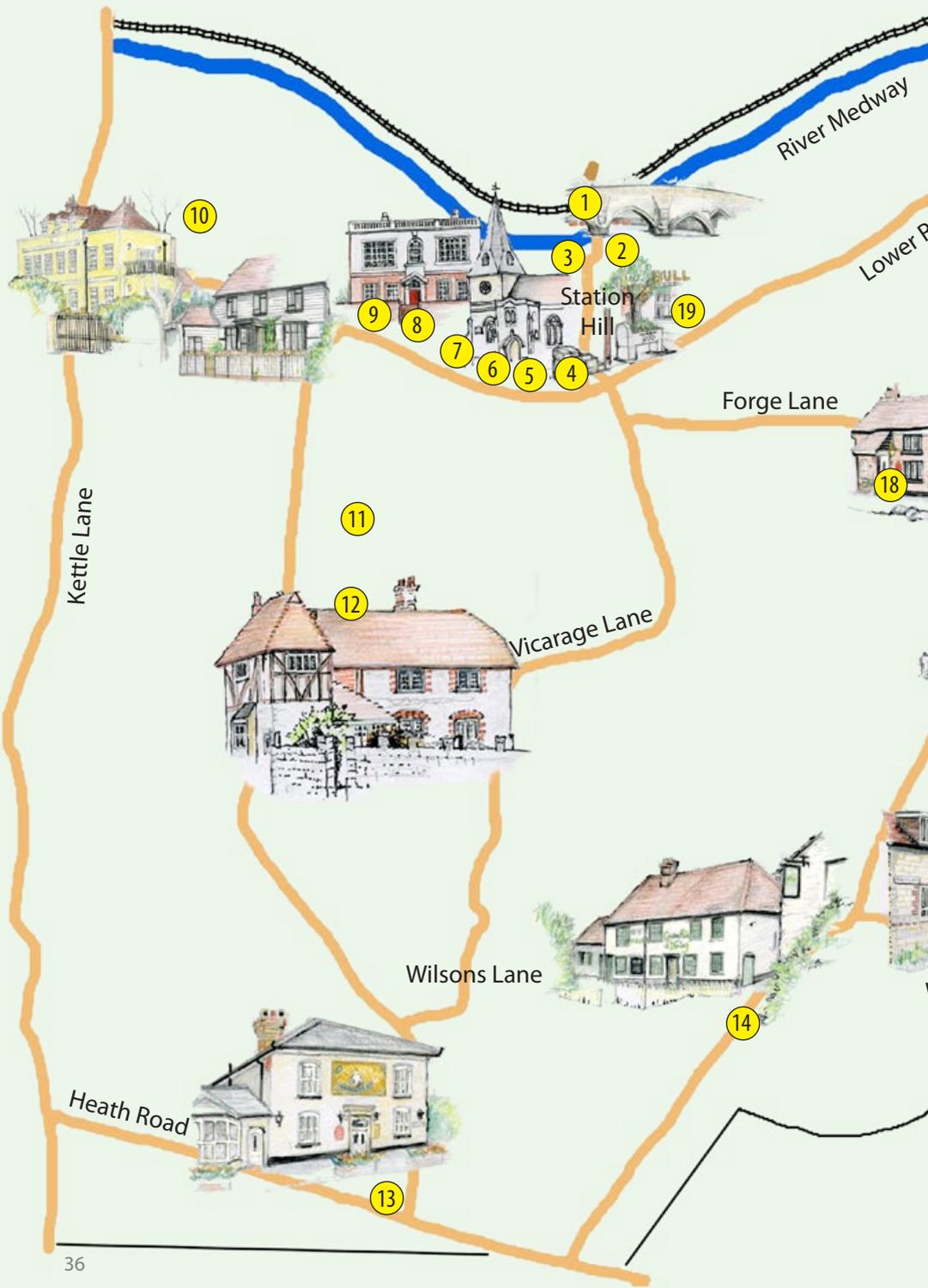
The **almshouses** came into being when Sir John Franklyn of Pympe Court left £100 to build six almshouses when he died in 1609. These were completed in 1611 on what was then common land in Quarry Lane, now known as Workhouse Lane.

When the houses were first built they did not have their own water supply, but for the sum of 2 pennies per annum they were allowed to use the well at the rear of a nearby house owned by James Clark. Unfortunately, this right was taken away when in 1622 the house and land changed ownership and it was not until 15 years later that the right to use the well was returned to the residents. Finally in 1935 a standpipe was provided at the rear of the almshouses, which provided a more convenient, if less picturesque, water supply. In 1950 a mains water supply was connected.



Almshouses Penny Spearman

Various changes have been made to the almshouses since they were built: Gabriel Kennard donated funds for the building of a 'wash room' to the rear of each house in 1870; and in the early 1900s three double porches were added to the buildings.



River Medway

Lower P

Station Hill

Forge Lane

Kettle Lane

Vicarage Lane

Wilsons Lane

Heath Road

East Farleigh Parish Map Buildings of Interest



- 1 East Farleigh Bridge
- 2 Bridge House
- 3 Hoppers' Huts
- 4 Mounting Block and Horse Trough
- 5 Church
- 6 Old School Hall
- 7 (Site of) Court Lodge
- 8 East Farleigh House
- 9 The Limes
- 10 St Helen's
- 11 Cokehurst
- 12 Gallants manor
- 13 The Victoria
- 14 The Horseshoes
- 15 Franklin Cottages
- 16 Frith Hall
- 17 Rivendell/The Wilberforce
- 18 The Walnut Tree
- 19 The Bull

Memories of East Farleigh



Wally Adams has spent a lifetime living, working and playing an important part in the community of East Farleigh. His family moved to the village over a hundred years ago and Wally's recollections paint a vivid picture of how the village has changed over time.

The early years

"My family's first home in East Farleigh was Green's Row in Gallants Lane. They then moved to a farm cottage in Forge Lane. My father, William, was employed as a 'land walker' (farm foreman) for fruit and hop farms in the village. He also rented various areas of land, including a plot at the corner of Lower Road and Dean Street where he grew an assortment of crops such as potatoes. Later he bought a five-acre lot that included what is now Hazeldene, a barn and seven cottages fronting Forge Lane – for this he paid £1,100 in cash!

I had wanted to be a jockey or a carpenter when I grew up but I had to leave school at the age of 14. I started work the next day tending the potato fields. My work included ploughing with our sturdy farm horses. In fact I was helping out many years before then when I was still a young boy. My weekend job at the age of 10 was helping to deliver milk. I drove the firm's van when I was 12, even though at the time it wasn't legal to drive until you were 17. Everyone in the village knew everybody else, doors were not locked and when I delivered the milk I would put it in a bowl of water to keep it cool. I might even let the cat out or put the oven on if it helped someone out.

There was no mains water in those days. Each cottage had its own well, varying in depth of up to 80 feet. It was hard work but I had a happy childhood, growing up with a gang in Forge Lane. Often we would meet outside the Walnut Tree pub and play football or cricket in the road.

I married my wife Jean in 1953 when I was 23 and we built our house, Hazeldean. We kept some livestock such as poultry, rabbits and pigs and later started a nursery growing mainly shrubs. This eventually expanded and we opened a farm shop selling fruit, vegetables, eggs and other similar products. This lasted until 1970



Wally Adams

when the Tesco supermarket opened in Tovil, which caused a steady decline in our business until we had to close. We decided to move into perennial flower growing, specialising in violas. This proved to be very successful: we exhibited at many Kent shows and 10 Chelsea Flower Shows, winning 6 gold medals."

People and places

"The village used to have its own policeman. I remember our local bobby Fred Harris, who knew everyone and generally took a pragmatic approach to keeping order such as turning a blind eye to my underage driving. The police station was in Lower Road towards Tovil.

Then there was Reggie Weeks, who was the village 'roadman'. He was employed by the Parish Council to keep the village looking clean and tidy by sweeping the roads and cutting grass verges. He had lost an arm in the First World War, which led to his nick name of One-arm Weeks. Despite his handicap he did a sterling job.

Len Aitken and Len Harding were East Farleigh's AA men, who were often sighted driving in their motorbike and sidecar to help people.

Every bend and hill was named in those days. The hill at the Dean Street end of Workhouse Lane towards Maidstone was Nettle Hill and towards the Horseshoes pub it was called Shoe Hill. A travelling fair used to pitch nearby every year. I also remember a party for school children each year held at the Priory in Lower Road. At the time the house was owned by Mrs Maconochie, who was a generous benefactor to the village.

The allotments off Vicarage Lane have always been very important to me. I was a trustee for 28 years of the John Bunyan Leaver Charity, which receives rent and uses the money to give small donations to individuals experiencing difficulties and to help maintain the site in good condition."

Farms and businesses

"The village was a hive of farming activity, mainly producing hops and Bramley apples. The fruit was packed into bags and put into bushels and pecks. The taller trees required ladders with up to 45 staves [steps]. Some of the fruit was sent to the London markets from East Farleigh railway station. Hops were grown in Dane Park, on Bill York's site above Lower Road and at the bottom of Gallants Lane as well as in other fields in the village. I remember the trainloads of East End Londoners coming to pick hops and treating it as a holiday. We all joined in with the fun. On Friday and Saturday nights the roads outside the Horseshoe and Bull pubs were totally blocked with hop-picking revelers. Once picked, the hops were dried in the local oasts – some now converted to houses. Coal or coke was the fuel originally used to dry the hops and sulphur was added to kill the insects.



Farleigh Forge before it became Farleigh Forge Garage

The hops were packed into 8 foot hessian bins. A measurer came with a bushel measure and once checked they were tipped into bushel sacks called pokes.

There were five dairy businesses distributing milk to the village at one time. As well as ours there was Linden Farm, Manklow, Primrose and Len Goodale.

A forward-thinking family called the Edmonds ran a farm opposite Forge Lane. They fitted standpipes to tanks of chemicals to connect spray equipment to

them. Previously there was a horse drawn tank and a man walking beside it with a spray line. Mr Edmonds was also the first in the village to use tractors.

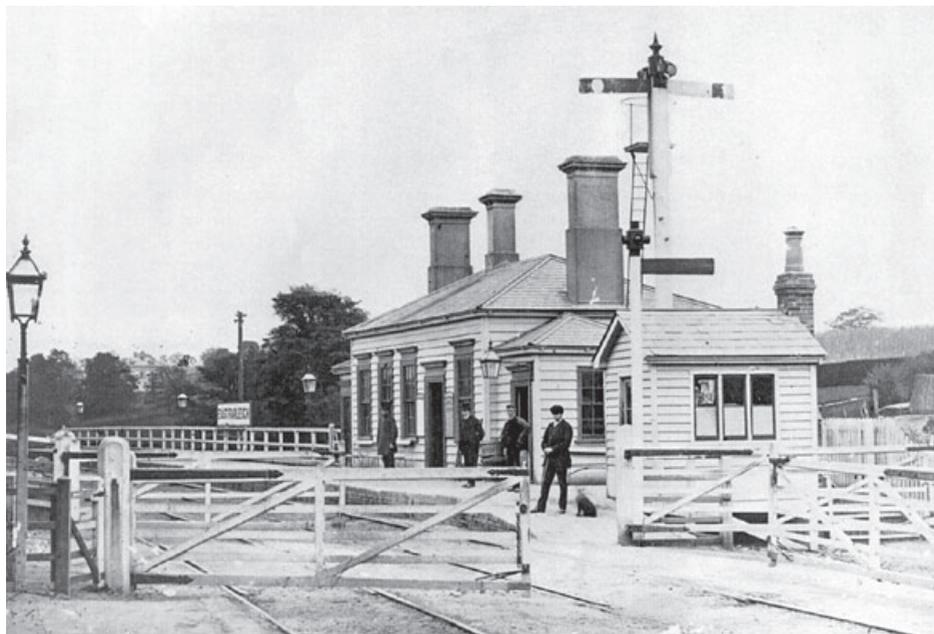
Many shops and businesses thrived in the village. Gus Chambers was the village butcher, based at the bottom of Gallants Lane. Here he slaughtered the animals and prepared them for market. As the name suggests, Farleigh Forge Garage used to be the blacksmith's. Mr Jopson ran the place and charged £1 to shoe a horse. In the winter a snow screw was fixed to the shoes to stop the horses slipping on the icy roads. The horses helped with road surfacing work. They pulled a tank from which tar was sprayed, on top of which was sprayed grit. A steamroller completed the job. The men tied sacks around their own and their horses legs to protect them from the boiling tar. Until recent times the shop at the top of Station Hill was a post office and grocery store. The village undertaker, Tom Miller, lived the white house by the bridge."

Changing times

Wally was born in 1930. In historical terms this is a very short period of time and yet the changes he has seen in village life have been dramatic. Wally talks about a village policeman, a butcher slaughtering local meat to sell to local people, a blacksmith, various shops and businesses and even an undertaker. All of these are no more and what was largely a self-contained community now relies totally on transport to provide for the daily needs of the residents.

Not so long ago, most of East Farleigh's population would have worked in the farms and businesses located in or near the village, whereas now commuting is the order of the day.

East Farleigh Railway Station



Old photo of East Farleigh Station

East Farleigh's station is positioned on the north bank of the River Medway (so is actually located in Barming) on the Medway Valley Line linking Strood and the Medway Towns with Maidstone West and onward to Paddock Wood/Tonbridge through to London St Pancras International and Charing Cross stations.

Trains typically run a half-hourly service between Strood and Maidstone, with one train per hour carrying on through to Paddock Wood. Since the December 2009 timetable change, trains continue on to Tonbridge rather than terminate at Paddock Wood.

The section from Maidstone West to Tonbridge passes through some of Kent's most picturesque countryside along the narrower sections of the River Medway, including, of course, East Farleigh.

The Medway Valley Line was built in two stages by the South Eastern

Railway (SER). The first stage opened on 25 September 1844 and was a branch off the SER's first main line that crossed Kent between the coast ports of Dover and Folkestone and the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway's (LBSCR) main line at Redhill. The junction was at Paddock Wood and followed the Medway Valley down to Maidstone, which had been by-passed by the new main line.

Twelve years later, on 18 June 1856, the extension of the line further down the Medway Valley was opened to join the North Kent Line at Strood (which had opened in 1847). The extension was built by the railway contractor Edward Betts, who lived locally at Preston Hall in Aylesford.

The line from Strood to Maidstone West was electrified by the Southern Railway, opening on 2 July 1939. The rest of the line from Paddock Wood to Maidstone West was electrified under Stage 2 of Kent Coast electrification by British Rail's 1955 Modernisation Plan, opening to traffic on 18 June 1962.

During 2005, the Medway Valley Line's signalling systems were upgraded, replacing the traditional semaphore signals with colour light signals. A Permit to Travel (PERTIS) ticket machine was installed at the entrance to the southbound platform in 2007, and in 2008 a large area of unmade land on the north side of the station was turned into a surfaced car park with free parking for more than 30 vehicles.

The line now serves the following stations from East Farleigh:

From the northbound platform: Maidstone West, Maidstone Barracks, Aylesford, New Hythe, Snodland, Halling, Cuxton and Strood.

From the southbound platform: Watlington, Yalding, Beltring, Paddock Wood and Tonbridge. Two stations either side of East Farleigh – at Tovil and Teston Crossing Halt – were closed in 1943 and 1959 respectively.

Since 2005/6, the number of annual journeys on the Medway Valley Line has increased by 52 per cent and broke the one million barrier in the 12 months to 31 March 2013 – the first time this has been achieved since the line opened. The event was celebrated by Kent Community Rail Partnership and photographed for the local press at East Farleigh Station

On the southbound platform is a signal box that still controls the level crossing at East Farleigh, despite plans to demolish it and replace the level crossing gates when the line was modernised in 1990. British Rail said that the box would no longer be of any use but, aided no doubt by former borough councilor Alan Holden and colleague Cllr Peter Randell seeking listed building status for them, both continue to be used to this day. At the time of writing, however, there are new plans to replace the level crossing's existing manually operated wooden gates with automatic barriers.

The councilors also asked for listed building status for the ticket office and station building, which closed in 1989 and were disused for many years, despite being in good condition. The building is currently used by Network Rail staff for storage purposes and discussions have continued for many years as to the best use of this attractive wooden structure. Suggestions have included use as an East Farleigh teashop and as a working model for the Kent Museum of Rural Life.

The Medway Valley Line has held several steam locomotive events over the years and on occasion has even seen visits of the Belmond British Pullman and Northern Belle (sister train to the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express) for one-day journeys from London down to the south coast – a wonderful experience that has been enjoyed by several East Farleigh residents over the years.

Hop Farming



Hop workers at Farleigh hop farm

Hops are not native to Britain, but there is evidence dating back to the tenth century from seeds found in a boat at Graveney that Kent was an early importer of the hop plant. The Tudors encouraged hop growing and by the mid-sixteenth century licences were being granted to export hops from Kent to other parts of Europe. A hundred years later, a third of national hop acreage lay in Kent. In 1725 Daniel Defoe described East Kent as the 'mother of all hop grounds'.

By the nineteenth century hops were a huge business in Kent. In 1825, James Ellis, the greatest hop grower in England, had 500 acres of hops under cultivation around the Barming/East Farleigh area. From his humble beginnings he became very wealthy and at his death just the hop poles that he owned were said to be worth £70,000. He employed 4,000 people in one month at picking time.

Charles Whitehead of East Farleigh, a noted hop grower and writer about

hop farming, poignantly conveyed the tremendous upheaval and disruption to the normally quiet villages at picking time. He described it as “an extraordinary time in which everything is upset, when every man, woman and child goes to the hop grounds, when swarms of immigrants flock to every farm”.

The arrival of these strangers, including Londoners, Irish people and gypsies, made an enormous impact on village life. They arrived up to 10 days before picking was due to start in order to get the best chance of employment. During that time they slept rough in the countryside or in the wards of the workhouses. Whitehead described them as “having filthy and disorderly habits, destroying fences and robbing orchards and turnip fields”.

On the other side of the coin, the living conditions that the farmers provided for these casual labourers was indescribably bad. In 1849, at the height of the annual migration, a party of several hundred came to work for John Ellis at Court Lodge Farm in East Farleigh. The sheds, barns and hop pickers’ lodgings were overcrowded and ill-ventilated hovels and the water drawn from the wells became contaminated by the soakings of cow yards and human waste. The workers were also half starved and the food sold to them of poor quality. A cholera outbreak resulted.

Dr Plomley of the Maidstone Union at Coxheath took charge of the situation in East Farleigh. He reported visiting the hop pickers, where he found 62 persons suffering from the disease, and by the next morning 12 were dead. The Rev Henry Wilberforce, vicar of East Farleigh, opened the village national school as a hospital. On 4 October the vicar made the following entry in the parish register: “These 43 entered strangers were all hop pickers for James Ellis Esq. and died of epidemic cholera.” A wooden cross in the churchyard commemorates these deaths.

A description of hop picking in East Farleigh in 1845 was printed in a 1968 edition of *Kent Life*. It states that Mr Ellis’s farm of 145 acres gathered around 98 tons of hops annually and that he employed nearly a thousand people. It describes the commencement of the hop-picking season as one of rustic excitement, where the hop pickers gathered at East Farleigh Bridge to hear the customary declaration of the laws and penalties of their occupation. Ellis (surrounded by his family and friends) made the proclamation, the workers were told the price for their labour, and the rewards for care and tidiness and penalties for neglect such as breakage of poles, theft and so on were



Hop Pickers memorial in the churchyard Phil Clark

declared. Consent was made by acclamations and the business ended with a village celebration. The article concluded by saying that Ellis claimed that his method of doing business brought contentment both to him and to his workers.

The concept of hop picking holidays began in Victorian times with mainly women and children 'hopping down to Kent' to stay in the hoppers' huts from September for six weeks. Hop pickers continued to visit farms in East Farleigh and the surrounding area into



Hop picker families meeting at horse trough, date unknown Courtesy Maidstone Museum & Bentlif Art Gallery

the early 1960s, when machines started to replace manual labour. Londoners still talk of childhood summer holidays spent picking hops, remembering them as some of the happiest times of their lives.

Stories abound from those who lived in the village when hop picking was at its most prolific. Here are three extracts from a collection of memories documented by Mollie Richford, who lived in East Farleigh for over 50 years.

"At the end of hop-picking a scrimmage would take place to pull the last pole, and it was a favourite pastime to put the fattest women available in the bin and watch her struggle to get out." (*Anna Tapsfield*)

"The specials (trains) came in during the night. In London the families were packed into non-corridor compartments together with clothes, baskets and slop pails. The latter were emptied out of the windows." (*Hilda Lewis, née Hayzelden*)

"During hop picking a screen was erected by the church wall and words of hymns projected onto it. There were times when a hymn was being sung on one side of the road while a spirited version of *Knees Up Mother Brown* was taking place on the other side. Miss Ley played the harmonium in the lych gate." (*Arthur Tuff*)

The decline in hop production in Britain was precipitous: of the 46,600 acres of hops that flourished in Kent in the 1870s, only 1,000 now survive. Machines replaced the hop pickers and apples replaced English hops because cheaper hops from the United States, New Zealand and Germany were attractive to the big breweries.

Village Flora and Fauna



Though still a rural village, much of the East Farleigh natural environment has changed, in common with the rest of the country, as a result of modern agricultural practices and, to an extent, increased housing. A small amount of ancient woodland remains in Hamlet Wood, along with pockets of recently planted mixed woodland and previously coppiced sweet chestnut elsewhere. A few overgrown orchards and patches of abandoned scrub also provide valuable additional habitat for some of the plants and animals still to be found here.

Historical records are scarce, but churchwardens' accounts dating back to 1667 show bounties (introduced by law as early as 1532) paid for the destruction of 'pest' species that would now enjoy legal protection were they still found here. Polecats and 'hodghogs' were worth four pence (2p) each, while foxes and 'grays' (badgers) fetched a shilling (5p), presumably augmenting meagre household budgets. Sparrows were later added to the list and provided income for landowners and small boys alike: in 1781 "W^m Larkin and his son John at the Cortlodg" were paid "one and fourpence ha'penny" (7p) for 66 sparrows, while in 1783 Henry Weeks received five shillings (25p) for 12 dozen. Kennard, Hartridge, Springate, Mercer and other current village names were frequent recipients. In the 1800s and early 1900s, the slaughter of village wildlife continued courtesy of the Hunton & District Rat and Sparrow Club, which met monthly at the White House pub, and broadened the scope to include other species. In 1917, for example, money was paid out for "1192 Sparrows, 657 Rats, 33 Bullfinches, 134 Moles, 879 Blackbirds, 1301 Queen Wasps, 1854 Butterflies, 13 Stoats and 9 Jays".

Agricultural changes since the 1960s – removal of hedgerows and widespread chemical use in particular – brought about (and are continuing) the steep decline of once common plants and animals. Hopefully, an awareness of this loss is beginning to emerge that will help stem, and even reverse, some of them.

Although polecats vanished long ago, hedgehogs can still be found, albeit in decreasing numbers, and foxes and rabbits are still commonly seen. Several badger setts remain and most small mammals, with the exception of dormice, continue to populate hedgerows and the 'wilder' parts of gardens

and farmland. Two alien species, grey squirrels and little owls, have become established, the former a significant commercial and environmental pest. Although historical records of bats, reptiles, amphibians and insects are scarce or non-existent, records held by the Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre and current sightings indicate that some, such as grass snakes, frogs and pipistrelle bats, can still be found where the habitat is suitable.

Marked changes, though, are evident in bird populations. Once-plentiful farmland birds like skylarks and linnets are now scarce, while corn buntings and yellowhammers have disappeared completely. Turtle doves are also fast disappearing but we have gained collared doves (from Asia) and buzzards and sparrow hawks are now re-establishing themselves; and kingfishers, once on the churchwardens' pest list, are frequently seen along the river. Many species, though, are suffering the same fate as sparrows – though they are no longer persecuted, their populations are being decimated indirectly by human activity. Wood pigeons, however, are increasing because of it!



Birds of prey, like this Little Owl chick, are now caught in the village and ringed for scientific study and conservation Ray Morris



Juvenile sparrow hawk. No longer persecuted are regular visitors to village gardens Ray Morris

Field boundaries

During the years in which Watson and Crick were figuring out the shape of DNA, at a more mundane level, E. Pollard and M.D. Hooper of Nature Conservancy were purposefully striding up and down the rural hedgerows of southern England. They concluded that the number of woody species present in a 30-pace length of hedge more or less equalled the number of centuries that the hedge had existed. In doing their count



Typical unmanaged village hedgerow Ray Morris

the ubiquitous ivy and bramble were ignored and the two species of elm, hawthorn, English oak and suckering prunus (blackthorn or damson) were each regarded as one. However the different species of wild rose were scored separately.

Seeking ancient hedgerows in East Farleigh it was logical to turn to age-old sections of the parish boundary. In Kettle Lane, south of the access to Kettle Farm, nowhere did the 30-pace count fall below 5 and in some places reached 9. Northward along the same boundary down St Helens Lane, only a short length opposite Riverdale bungalow achieves this standard (7). There is much elm in the St Helens Lane hedge, and an extensive section of damson. It is food for thought that the cultivated Farleigh Prolific damson, introduced about 1820, was a wild seedling found in the parish by James Crittenden. Omitting garden plantings, the woody hedgerow species on the western parish boundary north of Farleigh Green include ash, dogrose, dogwood, elder, elm, field maple, field rose, hawthorn, hazel, holly, oak, Prunus, spindle, sycamore and wild cherry.

In the local hedges, field maple and hazel frequently accompany commonplace hawthorn: dogwood holly and spindle are a little more precious. Kent has a relatively high proportion of ancient woodland and one might



Blackthorn (or sloe) which is the blossom in the hedge Ray Morris

deduce that many species-rich hedges are relic wood margins. Such is the case at the eastern end of Workhouse Lane, where the edge of Hamlet Wood scores 6 and intact sections of hedge opposite houses immediately to the west also average 6. On this south side of the road woodland existed until the mid-nineteenth century. Such woodland-derived hedgerows might be expected to retain elements of its ground flora, and wood anemone persists here.

Within the parish it seems that any field hedge that consistently scores 5 or more along its entire length may have a long history. You could check your own, assuming that your pace is 0.9 metre (if not, compensate

accordingly). With increasing awareness of the need to promote diversity for wildlife, modern amenity plantings of mixed hedges are admirable but may mightily confuse future landscape historians.

Boundary plantings that are conspicuously uncomplicated are windbreaks. They are always single lines of a single species at close and regular spacing, designed to uniformly reduce windspeed, not stop it. Several different tree species may be encountered in East Farleigh. They include birch, hybrid black poplar, grey alder, Italian alder, Lombardy poplar and white willow. Birch is unquestionably native and white willow was introduced many centuries ago, but the other trees are twentieth century intruders that exert a considerable landscape impact. At least theirs is a protective role in current land management, unlike other rural eye-catching interlopers, the gardenesque daffodils from Spain and Portugal.

Wall building has always been much more expensive than hedge planting and is proportionately more scarce. The ragstone walls of the parish do make their own botanical contribution, providing a toehold for such plants as the introduced ivy-leaved toadflax and yellow corydalis, also the native ferns maidenhair spleenwort, intermediate polypody and wall-rue.

Rural trees, woods and grasslands

Those who are familiar with the vegetation of the North Downs must feel mild disappointment with the parish. There is no trace here of naturally occurring beech, crab apple, wayfaring tree or buckthorn and the rare examples of hornbeam, whitebeam and yew can all be ascribed to human agency.

In ancient times, after the climate had warmed following the last glaciation and humans had not so mightily asserted themselves, the parish was part of a boundless broadleaved forest. There would have been glades maintained in an open state by grazing and browsing animals and an occasional temporary opening where a long-dead standing tree was brought to earth by decay and storm, continuing to rot where it lay.

Central to the forest character would have been long-lived oak, of which there are two native species equally at home in the area. Pedunculate oak favours deeper, heavy soils: it provides the broadly arching branches sought by shipbuilders of the past. Seedlings of the species do not thrive in the shade of their parents so it is a tree characteristic of more open areas and hedgerows to which the acorns are transported by jays and squirrels. Sessile oak tends to grow a tall, straight trunk and prefers lighter, well-drained soils. The saplings are more shade-tolerant and it is more typical of ancient woodland. Sparse individuals survive in Hamlet Wood. The names of these two English oaks refer to whether their acorns are borne on thin stalks (pedunculate) or directly on the supporting twig (sessile). Perversely, their leaves have the opposite features: the tapering leaf base of sessile oak narrows to a distinct stalk while the leaf of pedunculate oak has ear-like lobes at its almost stalkless base. To add more confusion, the two species can hybridise and a walk along Workhouse Lane can yield both sorts of leaf on the same boundary tree.

In late medieval England much woodland was managed in a 'coppice with standards' system, providing a compromise between two different needs. The standards were intact single-stemmed trees (mainly oak but perhaps ash, wych elm and wild cherry) left to grow for at least 30 years and in many cases well beyond 100 to provide structural timber. The woody species among them were cut down to near ground level at regular intervals of 7–20 years, depending on species and local needs. This underwood provided brushwood, general fuel, a source of charcoal, hurdles, wattle, fencing posts and all the other requisites for a hand-to-mouth existence. Livestock were excluded from such woodlands as their browsing on the coppice regrowth would kill it. The practice of stooling might on the face of it look like vandalism but it provided immense relief to the

herbaceous plants of the woodland floor by restoring daylight, and incidentally prolonged the useful lives of the cut-down trees. For example, single-stemmed ash rarely exceeds 150 years before succumbing to a combination of decay and gales. Coppiced ash could theoretically endure for over a thousand years as an ever-widening ring of independent stools derived from a core that had rotted long ago. Examples exceeding 3 metres in diameter are well known, but not in this parish.

The native coppice in East Farleigh comprises ash, field maple, hazel, the occasional goat willow (sallow) and oak itself. Collectively they are outnumbered by sweet chestnut, a tree from south-east Europe, timbers of which are known in various Roman buildings in southern England. Perhaps it was brought in for its edible seed. Certainly it has been in Kent long enough to be regarded as traditional.

Over the last few centuries local woodland has been strongly linked to the culture of hops. These were first grown commercially in the early sixteenth century, as a result of which there would be an increasing demand for hop poles, fuel to heat and dry out the harvest and for oak staves from which coopers could assemble beer barrels. In the years previous to the mid-1870s, hops were trained directly up the poles, of which about 10,000 were needed per hectare. On harvesting the bines would be severed at perhaps half a metre above ground level and the poles uprooted to get at the cones (fruit). Over this period the durability of a pole when sunk into the earth was not a prime consideration. Failures could be easily replaced at the end of each growing season and the defective poles used to supplement the wood or charcoal burned in the oast. Ash was valued as highly as sweet chestnut for its almost matching growth.

When, during the mid-1870s, a method of culture was introduced by which the hop was trained up coir (coconut) string suspended on horizontal wires supported by a smaller number of permanent poles, their durability assumed a greater importance. Sweet chestnut would be the exclusive choice in new plantings or gapping up existing coppice, as it had a reputation for outlasting oak in contact with soil. Creosote dipping, started in the 1860s, further prolonged the life of hop poles.

National production of hops reached its peak just before 1880, and today there is no demand in the parish for hop poles. However, there is still a more-limited need for spile and wire fencing, posts and fuel to make charcoal (the wood spits in an open fire). In the south-west corner of the parish there remains a managed woodland of pure chestnut coppice. Due to a quirk of boundary making, the timber-length stems that fringe the road opposite Quarry Farm, West Farleigh, are in that parish.

The slump in demand for underwood in general has given rise to much-

neglected coppice. There are several belts of this stored coppice, many fringed on only one side by a species-rich hedge, also clusters in field corners. In each, sweet chestnut is the dominant species.

Are these the relics of once more extensive coppice woodlands, or do they represent a spate of new plantings over 150 years ago on land that had been cultivated for many generations previously? The people who grew hops were general farmers affluent enough to assemble the gear (poles, oast house, storage barn) and growers of more dependable crops than the drought and disease-prone labour-demanding hop that might yield huge profit... or little, if any. These farmers could turn their hands to anything. The appeal might have been to plant a useful woody species harvestable in their own lifetime, an unlikely prospect with oak. Agriculture and forestry were not as divorced then as they became in the twentieth century.

To resolve these alternative possibilities, the girth of several chestnut stools in each belt or cluster might be measured. If similar, they could represent a new planting: if markedly different, relict woodland. However, who is to say that newly introduced saplings would all grow at the same rate? Some might have been suppressed under a long-gone standard tree close by.

Another route would be to see how many herbaceous species typical of ancient woodland occurred under the coppice. Unfortunately, tall chestnut casts dense shade and its persistent leaf litter acidifies the soil. Generally little more than bramble, ivy and an occasional nettle patch survive at ground level. Old estate plans predating the ordnance survey would be needed to add evidence to this approach.

Over the last 200 years, the demand for oak has diminished to a steady level. More houses have been built of brick, and the needs of shipbuilders a few miles downstream decreased from the 1850s when warship construction turned increasingly to iron. This drop in local demand may account for the scarcity of timber oak in the remaining stock of ancient woodland. Such trees could always be coppiced to provide bark for use in tanneries.

Today is an age of steel, concrete and plastic where timber needs are largely satisfied by plantation softwoods, or alien fast-growing conifers. Indigenous hardwoods have become minor players. However, the parish has a strong tradition of fruit growing, which satisfies culinary needs and also a deep-seated human desire for colour. From blossom to harvest time, the landscape has decorators at work: for the remainder of the year most people probably see it as boring. Suppose, then, that a small plot of land became available for traditional use and to perpetuate culture of an edible product on the brink of disappearance: what might the choice be? Hazel, or cherry on a modern dwarfing stock?

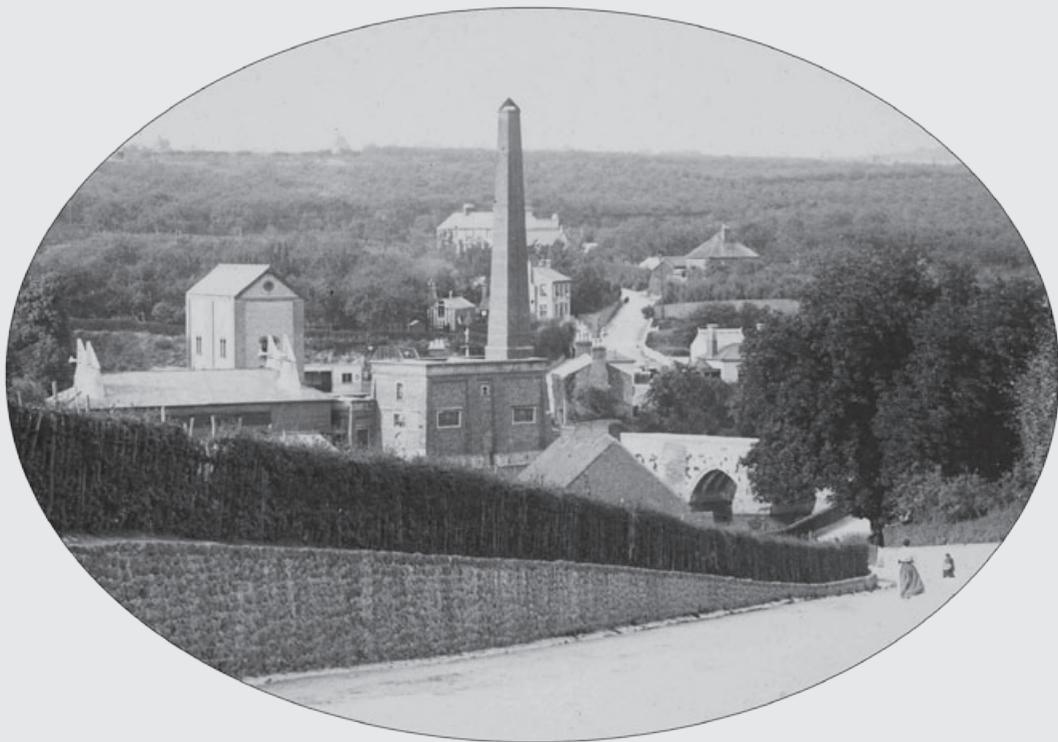


Native bluebell Ray Morris

In England, wild hazelnuts have been gathered and stored by people since Neolithic times. Roman troops fed on them and by the sixteenth century a larger nut, the filbert, was imported from south-eastern Europe. In the eighteenth century several hundred acres were grown in the Maidstone district. By the nineteenth century an improved variety, mistakenly named the Kentish Cob, was developed and a small plot remains near the parish boundary with Coxheath. Cultivated cherry also goes back to Roman times, though the fruit may have been our native wild cherry. Hybrids with this species have given rise to the modern fruit, springing from attractive blossom to provide a colourful but perishable feast about the middle of summer. How can the dull, storable filbert compete?

Change is inevitable, whether driven by environmental factors, economic pressures or fashion. What is the future of our native bluebells – iconic at present – with their rather one-sided, gently nodding heads? Horticulturalists long since imported a more vigorous upright species, the flowers arranged all around the central stalk with an option of pink flowers, not just white or blue. This Spanish bluebell can produce fertile hybrids with our own and patches lurk in Hamlet Wood awaiting a change in fashion.

To end with grasslands, soil fertility in the parish is high and the likelihood of any old pasture or meadow persisting without improvement is very small. Should any remain, they are more likely to turn up in the garden of a nineteenth century house than out in a field. Does anyone's lawn contain three or more of the following plants: agrimony, bird's foot trefoil, knapweed, St John's wort (three possible species) and yarrow? Before you squirt them with ethnic cleanser (selective herbicide), please do let us know.



View down Station Hill with Obelisk (actually the chimney) in place on what was the Pumping Station Courtesy of Maidstone Museum and Bentrif Art Gallery

