

History of the Parish of Waltham on the Wolds and Thorpe Arnold



Waltham-on-the-Wolds

The village is situated in the northeast corner of Leicestershire, five miles from Melton Mowbray, eleven miles from Grantham and approximately twenty miles from Leicester, Nottingham, Newark and Stamford. It is positioned on the eastern edge of the Leicestershire Wolds, overlooking the Vale of Belvoir from a height of 168m (560ft), making it the second highest village in the county. Geologically, Waltham stands on a mixture of clay and red marl with underlying strata of Jurassic limestone, which has been quarried locally and used in the building of many of the older houses in the village.

There is little evidence of any settlement in the area earlier than AD 800. However in Arthur Mee's, book, Leicestershire and Rutland, published in 1937, he states under "Waltham-on-the-Wolds", 'Roman pavements and Saxon stone coffins found in its soil testify to its great antiquity.' The Romans left in the 5th century.

The Domesday Book reference to Waltham reveals that the village belonged to Hugh of Grandmesnil who, after the Norman Conquest, was the largest landowner in the county. Hugh allowed a man named Walter to hold a major part of the village and surrounding area. Some say that this arrangement gave Waltham its name - Walt's Ham (Walter's Town). However, earlier records refer to the village as Wautham - so another theory is that the name may have been derived from Weald (woody), Ham (town) and, the Saxon word, Wold (a hill or high place).



THE WALTHAM TIME-LINE

- 1086 Waltham mentioned in the Domesday Book
- C1200 St Mary Magdalene Church built
- C1300 Church rebuilt
- Medieval Era Waltham market & annual fair established under a charter granted by Henry III
- 15th Century The Horseshoes (later the Royal Horseshoes) built and alterations to the Church
- 1541 Parts of the village belonging to the various religious houses at the dissolution of the monasteries were granted by Henry VIII to Thomas Manners, Earl of Rutland
- 18th Century Market ceases to trade but annual fair continues - seventeen alehouses in the village.
- 1766 Parish enclosed
- 1776 Village school founded by George Noble
- 1821 622 inhabitants recorded in the Census
- 1831 Gabriel Edwards Gillett commenced his incumbency of the Waltham living, which lasted for 40 years, during which he built a large rectory (now Waltham Retirement Home) set in 19 acres of landscaped grounds.
- 1833 Church given a chandelier and a new clock-face.
- 1836 Post office opened
- 1838 Agricultural Hall built (subsequently dismantled). New pews for the Church - cost £300.
- 1841 768 inhabitants recorded in the Census
- 1843 Queen Victoria and Prince Albert stopped at the Royal Horseshoes for refreshment while on route from Belvoir Castle to Melton. In the same year, the notorious highwayman Thomas (Gypsy Jack) Britten was arrested by police officers at the annual Waltham horse fair. Wesleyan Chapel built at a cost of £270.
- 1844/45 The present village school built in Elizabethan style, superseding a smaller adjacent building, which has since been converted into a dwelling
- 1861 137 houses and 672 inhabitants in the village.
- 1868 Waltham windmill built on the site of a post mill
- 1871 623 inhabitants recorded in the Census
- 1880s Waltham railway station opened
- 1881 595 inhabitants recorded in the Census
- 1921 Majority of the village sold by the Duke of Rutland to sitting tenants
- 1922 The Duke of Rutland gifted land and a meeting hall to village
- 1939/40 Waltham windmill ceased working
- 1953 Old meeting hall demolished and a new Village Hall erected
- 1961 Waltham Railway station closed
- 1978 Television transmitter erected
- 1981 Pedigree Petfoods establish base in Waltham
- 1991 798 inhabitants recorded in the Census
- 2001 1700 inhabitants in the Waltham Ward recorded in the Census
- 2003 National lottery grant awarded toward the cost of a new village hall - the old village hall and land sold - new hall built adjacent to Waltham playing fields.

• Thorpe Arnold

Situated on the top of a hill close to the town of Melton stands Thorpe Arnold, a small farming village with roots going back to before its first recorded mention in the Domesday Book of 1086. At this time, the village and surrounding lands were in the possession of Hugo de Gentlemaisnell, whose successors were the Earls of Leicester. Thorpe (or Torp) was eventually settled on an Earl of Leicester's steward named Ernauld de Bosco, four further generations of his family took the name Ernauld and this, it is widely believed, is how Thorpe Arnold got its name.



THE THORPE ARNOLD TIME-LINE

- 1086 Thorpe Arnold mentioned in the Domesday Book having 37 workmen
- C1200 The church of St Mary the virgin built - font dated to 1170 and castle or fortified Manor House built on ancient Iron Age site
- 1563 31 households
- 1597 Bells 1 & 2 installed in the church.
- 1670 24 households
- 1685 Bell 3 installed in church
- 1715 Lands sold to the Duke of Rutland
- 1792 Vicarage built
- 1801 33 inhabitants recorded in Census
- 1856 William (Peppermint Billy) Brown was hanged for shooting and stabbing Edward Woodcock (70 yrs), the Thorpe Arnold tollgate keeper, and his grandson James (10 yrs). This was the last public execution at Leicester Prison.
- 1861 Village school built at a cost of £200
- 1875 Church restorations costing £1000
- 1915 Duke of Rutland sold properties including those in Thorpe Arnold
- 1921 133 inhabitants recorded in Census
- 1922 Cricket Club built on present site
- 1923 Village school closed
- 1924 Golf club opened
- 1936 Thorpe Arnold and Waltham-on-the-Wolds form Waltham Parish
- 1958 Vicarage demolished
- 1971 Joins Melton Church Team Ministry.
- 2001 1700 inhabitants in the Waltham Ward recorded in Census

Bescaby (Not part of the Parish but linked by road)

The hamlet of Bescaby lies close to, and can only be reached by public road from, neighbouring Waltham-on-the-Wolds. It was not always so. Bescaby, or Besk Abbey, was formerly an ex-parochial manor, later constituted a civil parish belonging to the Duke of Rutland, and in 1871 had a population of 25 persons, living in 4 houses, on about 1200 acres of land. It was previously the demesne of Croxton Priory, near which stood some extensive buildings, surrounded by a moat. Traces of these buildings are still to be seen near a place called Friars' Walk. William Furnival held the manor in 1382. The chief branch of the river Eye has its source in the locality, near Bescaby Oaks. It is a 'fine spring of hard water which flows in front of Bescaby House, the residence of John Edward Bright'. Bescaby was part of the Melton Mowbray Union, which comprised 56 parishes. The union workhouse, built in 1836 was situated on the east side of Melton Mowbray and was capable of housing 250 inmates. The 1871 census shows 126 paupers in residence.

THE BESCABY TIME-LINE

- 1162 Croxton Abbey founded in 1162
- 1382 Manor held by William Furnival 'with a view of frank pledge, as of Honor of Winton'.
- 1795 The parish comprised only a house and a cottage.
- 1871 25 inhabitants recorded in Census - at the same time 126 paupers were housed in the Melton Mowbray Union workhouse.
- 1885 Bescaby ceased to be a civil parish and was absorbed into Croxton.
- 1926 Croxton Abbey and outbuildings (in Bescaby) excavated.

