

History of Eastling

It is generally accepted that the name Eastling derives from the Jutish tribe of "Eslingas" who built a settlement in the area towards the end of the 5th Century.

The village is recorded as "*Eslinges*" in the Domesday Survey of 1086. The entries suggest that Eastling was important and prosperous with two churches and four separate manors noted. The latter were Arnoldton (today, Arnold's Oak), Nordeslinge (North Eastling), Huntingfield and Divan (Divan Court), with Divan being noteworthy for its large number of "slaves" (or, more tactfully, "servants").

In his History and Topographical Survey of Kent (1797), historian Edward Hasted, refers to the village as "*Easling*". Hasted was a native of Eastling, born at Huntingfield in December 1732.

Eastling is four-and-a-half miles south west of Faversham, on the dip slope of the North Downs. Set in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, it is 300 feet (95 metres) above sea level.

One 19th-century record describes the village as having 90 houses with 437 inhabitants. The parish covered 1,912 acres of land, of which 400 acres were woodland and 30 acres hop gardens.

At that time, the village offered a grocer, blacksmith, plumber, glazier and painter, butcher, grocer and baker, harness-maker, shoemaker, a master carpenter and gunsmith - plus the Carpenters Arms "*local*".

Declining demand for most of these services by the second half of the 20th Century, meant none - apart from the pub - has survived.

Today, the area's principal commercial activity is farming with a focus on cereal and vegetable cultivation and sheep rearing. This was not always the case. Fruit growing - with extensive cherry orchards, famed for their Spring blossom - was significant until its demise in the 1960s.

Photographs taken in the early 1900s, show elm trees on the bank opposite the Carpenters Arms pub. Some of more than 60 around the village, they succumbed to Dutch Elm disease in the 1960s.

Eastling Parish features a number of fine listed buildings with several good examples of hall houses. Much of the village itself is in a protected Conservation Area.

Eastling Manor dates, in part, from 1280 and is regarded by many as one of the finest houses in Kent.



Huntingfield, one of the "*Domesday manors*", is a substantial private property on the eastern edge of the parish.

Arnolds, another "*Domesday manor*" was divided and parts sold off in the 18th Century. It lost its right to be a manor and reverted to a farm.

Divan Court, alongside the parish church, dates from 1380-1400.

North Court is said to date from around 1450-1490. Restored and converted to private accommodation in 2003.

The Old Rectory, on the corner of Newnham Lane and Faversham Road, was built in the 1840s (although some authorities have, wrongly, suggested between 1810 and 1814).

An extensive building, it had 25 acres of grounds, including tennis courts and a bowling green.

The house has associations with the Revd. Edward Cage, Rector of Eastling 1796-1835, whose portrait is in the Tate Gallery and who was related by marriage to Jane Austen.

A "*Victorian Wing*" (recorded in an old photograph) was demolished in 1967. A year or two earlier, sale of the grounds - or Glebe Land - led to the development of modern bungalows at Meesons Close.



A walk along The Street, from the Carpenters Arms to the junction with Newnham Lane, is full of interest.

The Carpenters Arms public house is said to date partly from the late 15th Century.



Plantation House (also with late 15th Century origins) was, at one time, a cycle shop.

Orchard House was once the Orchard Stores. The proprietor's daughters looked after the telephone exchange.

Numbers 2,3 and 4 The Street also date from around 1500 and are notable for the tiled front elevations.

The Old Post Office was once the Village Post Office and Stores run by a Mr James Thomas Doughty. He also provided the butcher's shop in the village and, today, his grandson owns the butcher's shop in nearby Doddington.

The front garden of the house called "*The Nook*" is the site of a, now demolished, cottage where it is believed a Mrs Bensted, the village midwife, once lived and was also a saddlers and harness makers shop which later became a shoe cobblers.

The domestic garage adjoining **Laburnum Cottage**, immediately next door to The Nook, is almost certainly the only remaining part of the former shop.

Porch House was built in about 1480 in the shape of a cross and, for many years, was used as a retreat for orders of nuns. Before the Dissolution of the Monasteries, Eastling church was served by priests from Leeds Priory who are thought to have lived in a building on the same site. In the cellar of Porch House are the beginnings of an underground passage, rumoured to lead to the sacristy of the church and walled up around 1913 by the then owner.



Next to Porch House are the white-boarded **Kings Cottages**.

These, in turn, lead to **Forge House**, once the location of the village forge.



Although there has been speculation on the possibility of an earlier church on the site, there is good evidence that the base of the south west tower of the **Church of St Mary** was built in the early 11th Century. Also that the west doorway dates from soon after the Norman Conquest of 1066.



Eastling School celebrated 100 years in its Kettle Hill Road premises in 1981. Before that, the original village school was in Newnham Lane.

Eastling villagers got an attractive new **Village Hall** in September 1998. Previously residents had used a modified military hut originally from the former Throwley airfield.



The Harris Estate: Once the seat of the Harris family, these substantial land and property holdings are, today, administered by The Harris Trust.

In the early part of the 20th Century, the land around the village belonged to the then Lord Harris, who lived at Belmont House in the neighbouring parish of Throwley.

His son inherited the title, as the Sixth Baron, in 1984, choosing to live at Huntingfield. Generally known locally as "*The Captain*", he died in 1995.

Today, the remaining substantial land and property holdings are administered by The Harris Trust, operating through Belnor Farms Limited. Belmont House and its grounds are regularly open to the public in summer months.

For more information on present-day activities on the Estate, see this extract from the Eastling Parish Appraisal 2001.

Market and Fair: One 13th Century occupant of North Eastling, Sir Fulco de Peyforer, knighted by Edward I, obtained a grant for the village to hold a weekly market and an annual toy and pedlary fair. His family's Coat of Arms (Argent with Six Fleurs de Lys Azure) can be seen in the cloisters of Canterbury Cathedral.

Squirrel hunting: A one-time annual event called squirrel hunting, held on November 30 (St Andrew's Day), seems to have been an excuse for bad behaviour! Edward Hasted took a dim view of the proceedings in Eastling and its neighbouring parishes. He regarded them as an excuse for labourers to "*form a lawless rabble*" armed with "*guns, poles, clubs and other such weapons*" and spend the day pretending to hunt squirrels, but in reality killing other wildlife, breaking down hedges and, in the evening, heading for the pub.

Friendly Society: The Eastling Friendly Society, formed in 1812 "*for the benefit of working men in the village*", became the model for other communities. The Society's Jubilee Day at Eastling in July 1861 was a major local event. Over time, the various Societies merged to form the United Men of Kent Friendly Society.

The following article was published in 1977 as part of Eastling's Silver Jubilee Celebration souvenir brochure.

The Eastling Jubilee of 1861

The village's great day in history came on 11th July 1861 when the Eastling Friendly Society celebrated its own Jubilee. It was an event, recorded in the newspaper of the day "*which for years will furnish pleasing reminiscences to the inhabitants of the retired and peaceful village of Eastling.*"

It is hard to imagine that our "*retired and peaceful village*" was once the instigator of a movement that was to spread throughout the county, but such was the success of the Eastling Friendly Society. It was founded in 1812 and organised for the mutual benefit of the working men of the village. The concept grew to other villages and within 24 years the Society had become the "*United Men of Kent Friendly Society.*" Under its Secretary, James Drewry, the Society decided to celebrate its Jubilee in the village of its founding.

The entire village took part and representatives attended from all over the county. Banners were stretched across the street, with jollifications and events taking place in the meadow provided for the occasion by Mr Leese. As with 1977 there was a church service at St Mary, but on that occasion the procession to the church was led by Holland's band, where the service was preached by the Rector, the Revd. G. B. Reynardson.

After the service members and their friends repaired to a spacious booth provided by Mr Shilling of the Carpenter's Arms.

One would like to believe the "*retired and peaceful*" bit - but alas history records otherwise.

Celebrations for the Jubilee which were well in hand by the March of 1861, were suddenly forgotten by the gruesome proclamation "*Read All About It. Murder in Eastling.*"

It was a tragic case. An infant was found to have been murdered by her mother, who herself died from natural causes a short while later.

For all the Friendly Society's ideals about mutual benefit of the working man, the working man of this and other villages led a harsh "*existence*". He was bound to his employer, tied to his service and forced to obey his commands. Breach of service carried severe penalties. It was George Gillham who was a servant in husbandry to the same Benjamin Leese who provided the meadow for the Jubilee, and he was charged before the Magistrates of misconduct in his master's service. He had, it transpired, refused to obey his master's orders. For this he was sentenced to 14 days hard labour at St Augustine's and to the loss of his wages.

Gillham's punishment was slight in comparison with another who dared to abscond from his master's service. He was caught, of course, and for him the Jubilee day was spent engaged in the middle of a two months sentence with hard labour.

William Hills, an Eastling grocer, didn't much enjoy Jubilee year, either. He was prosecuted for having a set of scales which weighed 6 drams against the purchaser; for having an unstamped half gallon measure and for further scales which were not in order. But he was in good company, for there were around 60 similar prosecutions in the Faversham and Sittingbourne area, many involving prominent traders.

Today, Eastling is a haven of peace - something much appreciated by its residents. The church, the school and the pub - together with a small number of local social groups - provide for some of the needs of the village. But, as with so many other rural communities, many services are in neighbouring towns and journeys by car or the local bus and taxi services have become an everyday necessity.