Contact us for further information on local history, access to primary sources, visits to the archives and other resources for schools:

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• Includes:
  • Explanation of Images
  • Background information
Farms for Sale

These images have been taken from a sale catalogue (Ref: X65/66) dated 19 September 1902.
Copies of the catalogue and plan can be obtained from the Archives Learning Officer.
Willington Iron Age Farmstead

A feature which belonged entirely to the Iron Age was a farmstead excavated in the 1980s. The site contained two enclosures and appears to have been constructed as a single entity. The smaller enclosure showed evidence of heavier occupation. It was thought that the larger enclosure was to keep livestock, while the smaller would be for domestic buildings. This would link in with the trackway that funnelled in near the entrance to the large enclosure as it could aid the driving of animals. Bedfordshire County Council published an information sheet, the first in the series Discovering Our Past about the site in April 1986 [CRT130Willington14]. The sheet reads as follows.

An Early Iron Age Farmstead at Willington

Discovery
In 1984 archaeologists working near Willington uncovered traces of a small prehistoric farmstead down by the river. It had existed over 20 centuries ago, during the early part of the Iron Age, between 500 and 100 BC. The site was first found from the air, and we have photographs showing markings in the growing crops. These are caused by the greater depth of fertile soil over the filled pits and ditches of the farm, cut into valley gravels. We had to find out all that we could about the farm through modern archaeology, because those gravels were to be quarried away for building modern houses and roads, taking all the remains with it.

The Farmstead
The farm consisted of two enclosures. Cattle were penned within the larger one, and the family used the smaller as its living area. Around both were hedges which had ditches outside them. The archaeologists found over 100 postholes within the enclosures, representing the remains of wooden buildings and fences. Careful study of these remains can tell us much about the people who lived here, and how they organised their lives. The buildings in the smaller living enclosure were replaced at least twice. The digging of the ditch probably created an earth bank on its outside edge. Many fragments of pottery tell us that the farm was occupied in the early iron Age. It was the home of a peasant family living altogether in a large round thatched house. They threw their rubbish and food remains into the ditches. The bones dug out of these ditches tell us they kept mainly cattle and horses, and also a few sheep, all smaller than modern breeds. Their animals were kept in the larger enclosure mainly during the winter months, and taken to more distant pastures during the crop growing season. These Iron Age people would have grown vegetables and cereal for bread. We have found loom weights, and this tells us they spun their thread, wove their own cloth and made up their own clothes.

Farming in Willington—The War Years

The following extracts regarding Farming in Willington during WW2 have been copied from The War History of a Bedfordshire Village, Written and Published by Willington Women’s Institute in 1946. (a copy can be found in 130wil in the Archives searchroom)
Farming in Willington

**Image 9:**
Extract from ordnance survey map (1:25000) showing location of Osier beds. Background picture courtesy of wiki common—Women and children stripping osier.

An Osier bed is where historically willows were planted and coppiced to produce withies which were used for basket making, fish-traps, and other purposes. Willow rods (cuttings) would be planted, which root easily in moist ground, and the growth of the willow withies would be cut every one or two years.

Cutting usually took place when the leaves had fallen, about November time. After being cut, the osiers were tied into bundles until April time when peeling started. Peeling and drying of the osiers was generally done by women for about six or seven weeks, finishing in time for haymaking.

**Image 10:**
Water colour of Willington Mill by T Wray

In the Domesday Book of 1086 Willington is recorded as having a mill. This building formed part of the Manor of Willington into the 20th century. This meant that from 1779 to 1902 it was owned by the Dukes of Bedford, the Russell family.

Further information regarding mills at Willington can be found on the BLARS Community Archives pages.

**Willington Iron Age Farmstead**

**Iron Age Farmers in the Ouse Valley**
The Willington farmstead is like many others which existed close to the river all along the Ouse valley, sited on easily draining gravel near to water and on fertile land. They were established between 500 and 100 BC, and often continued through the Roman period. The local inhabitants lived in single and grouped farmsteads, before the development of the villages and towns that we know today.

Archaeologists have excavated similar sites at Odell, Bromham and Newnham; others are known from crop markings recorded on aerial photographs. The pottery shards found at Willington show this farmstead was not occupied after 100 BC, but the land was still being farmed during the late Iron Age and right up to the end of the Roman period.

Closer to Willington farmsteads was the buried ditch of a flattened Bronze Age barrow, dating back to about 1500 BC. It is further evidence that the Ouse valley has been more or less continuously cultivated for the last 4,000 Years.
**Image 1:**
Tithe Apportionment map

WILLINGTON: Plan of the parish of Willington in the County of Bedford [P]. Surveyor: M Reynolds. 12" to one mile.

Shows part of the village. Note that the map is east-west rather than north-south.

Ref: MAT51/1 Date: 1840

**Image 2:**
Ordnance Survey 6 inch map which has been annotated to show field names.

This image shows the northern part of the parish.

Ref: ord survey 6” map Date: 1902

**Image 3:**
County Development and Structure Plan

Willington Village - land use coloured but no key

Ordnance Survey 1:2500

Ref: PLD10/195 Date: 1961

**Image 4:**
Aerial photographs of the River Ouse

a) Little Barford
b) below Tempford
c) Tempford bridge
d) Roxton lock
e) above Roxton lock
f) Willington lock
g) Great Barford and Old Mills
h) Goldington
i) below Castle Mills
j) Castle Mill

Ref: X635/21f Date: 1947, 1952

**Image 5:**
Photograph of Willington farm workers at haytime.
Letter from Mrs Gurney 29.1.96 identified Wm. Devonshire (front, left) and Jas. Hen. (front right)

Ref: Z50/142/333 Date: c1900

**Image 6:**
Copy of article in Bedford Mercury.
Willington men potato harvesting.

Ref: X758/1/12/49 Date: 1954

**Image 7:**
Extract from publication ‘Willington The War History of a Bedfordshire Village’. Written and produced by Willington Women’s Institute

Farming—p14 to 18

Copies of the full text on farming are included in this booklet.

Ref: 130wil Date: 1946

**Image 8:**
Photograph of a Saunderson tractor from the Saunderson Tractor and Implement company Ltd; Elstow works.

Although there is no evidence at BLARS of Saunderson tractors being used in Willington, it is likely that farm machinery might have been purchased from this local company.

Further information regarding the Saunders Company can be obtained from BLARS.

Ref: Z50/43/59 Date: 1914-1918