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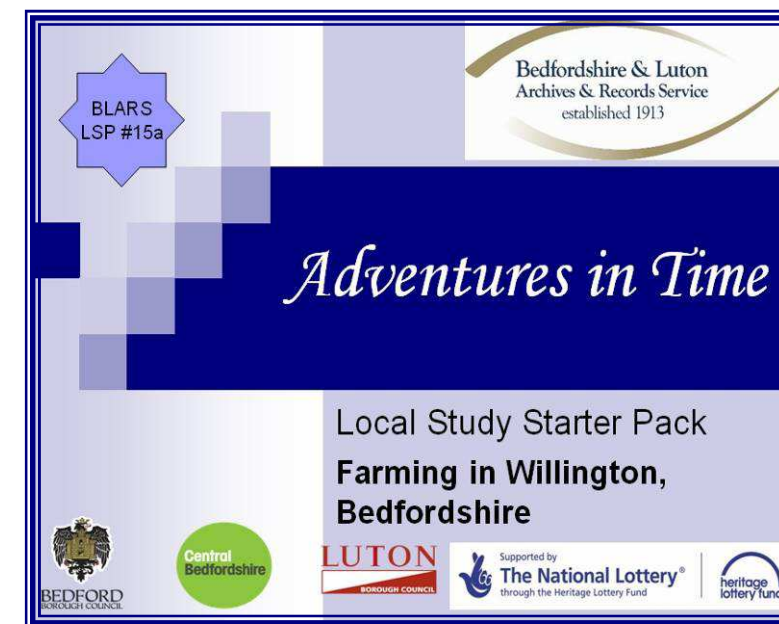
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## Farming in Willington

LSP#15a Teacher's Booklet

Supplement to LSP #15



- 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.

SECOND EDITION (Plan, Particulars & Conditions of Sale)

## WILLINGTON & COPLE

Near SANDY, Bedfordshire.

3 miles from Sandy (G.N.R. Main Line), 3 1/2 miles from Bedford (M.R. Main Line), each one hour's journey from London, adjacent to a Proposed New Passenger and Goods Railway Station about to be erected at Willington (L. & N.W. Ry., Blotchley & Cambridge Branch) and 2 miles from Cardington Station (M.R., Bedford & Hitchin Branch).

**IMPORTANT TO LAND OWNERS, SPORTING GENTLEMEN  
MARKET GARDENERS & OTHERS.**

Particulars and Conditions of Sale with Plan  
OF  
HIGHLY DESIRABLE FREEHOLD  
*Agricultural, Market Gardening*  
AND  
*Sporting Estates*

Comprising a large portion of the Picturesque Parish of Willington,  
and a portion of the Parish of Cople,  
EMBRACING AN AREA OF

# 1370A. OR. 16P.

And consisting of Parts of Willington Road Farm, Willington Croots Farm, Willington Hill Farm, Willington Mill Farm, and Moxhill Farm; Cople, with 3 capital Farm Houses and sets of Farm Premises and including a large number of Lots fronting Main Roads, adapted and well situated for the growth of Vegetable Crops, for which the Sandy District is so famous.

Also a Large Finely Timbered Wood "Sheerhatch" (176 Acres) and another Prime Wood "Conduit Grove" (20 Acres), which

**FOX & VERGETTE** in conjunction with **G. C. WALKER**  
(OF PETERBOROUGH) (OF BEDFORD)

Have received instructions to Offer for SALE BY AUCTION,  
At the "RED LION" HOTEL, SANDY,  
ON  
Friday, 19th September, 1902  
AT 4 O'CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON, PRECISELY.

PARTICULARS AND CONDITIONS OF SALE WITH PLAN may be had from Messrs. KNIGHT, FRANK & RUTLEY, Land Agents and Auctioneers, 9 Conduit Street, London, W.; from Messrs. FOX & VERGETTE, Auctioneers, Peterborough; from Mr. G. C. WALKER, Auctioneer, Bedford; or from

**Mr. H. B. HARTLEY,**  
SOLICITOR.

Peterborough, August 18th, 1902.

J. W. SARGEANT, ELECTRICAL PRINTING WORKS, PETERBOROUGH.

PARTICULARS.

In Willington.

LOT 1  
(Green on Plan.)

A VERY VALUABLE  
GARDEN FARM  
KNOWN AS  
"WILLINGTON MILL FARM,"

In the occupation of Mr. J. Barr, situated on the North side of the Bedford and St. Neots Road, bounded on the North by the River Ouse, and the Willington Parish Boundary; on the East by Property of the Trustees of the late E. H. F. Dawkins, Esq. (Moggerhanger Estate), on the greater part of the West by Lot 2, and intersected by the London and North Western Railway (Bedford and Cambridge Branch), comprising—

A compact brick and flat-tiled FARM HOUSE, containing Entrance Hall, Dining and Drawing Rooms, 4 Bedrooms, Dairy, Cellar, Kitchen, Pantry, Brew-house, with Garden and Yard.

The BUILDINGS, which are brick and slated, comprise—Cart Horse Stable for Five, Horse Yard with open shelter, Loose Box, Cow Yard with shelter and Cow House for Four, good Barn, Pig Styes and Poul House.

AND VERY PRODUCTIVE  
Arable, Pasture and Meadow Lands,  
the whole containing by Ordnance Survey

2 R 30 57a. 3r. 1p.

VIZ.:

	Ordnance No.	A.	R.	P.
House and Premises	...	86	0	2 11
House Close	...	85	5	1 27
Thirty-Four Acres	...	84	34	0 8
Roadway	...	87	0	3 14
Riverside	...	76	2	1 16
Oster Holt	...	78	1	0 35
Footpath Piece	...	81	0	1 12
The Nine Acres	...	83	9	0 10
North side of River	...	77	0	2 6
Island Piece	...	82	2	1 22

In Willington.

LOT 23.  
(Pink on Plan.)

A VALUABLE SMALL HOLDING  
COMPRISING  
Two Fields (One Pasture and One Arable)

adjacent to Hill Farm House situated on the North-east side of and fronting Hill Farm Road, South-east of Lot 14 and bounded on the South-east by Lot 21.

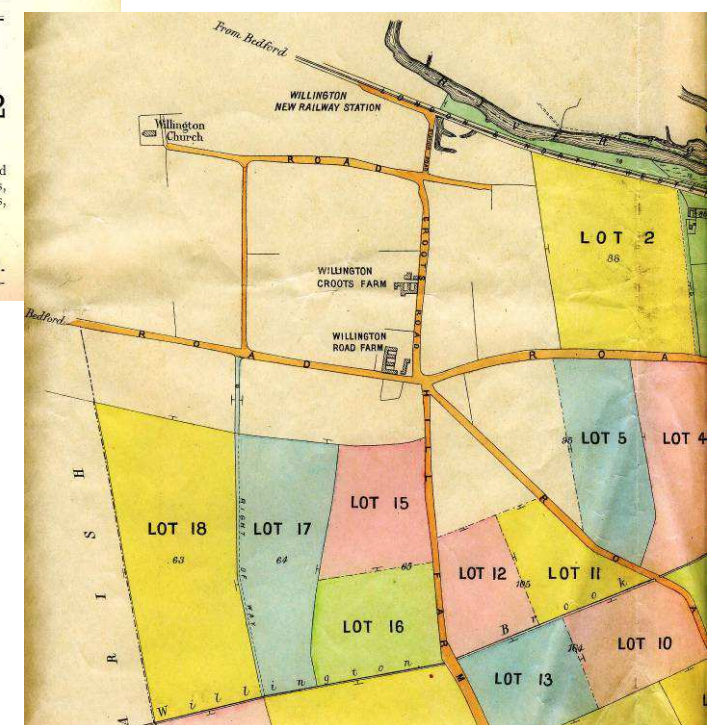
Together with Two Brick and Flat Tiled COTTAGES with Gardens in the respective occupations of Barr and Dawson.

The whole containing by Ordnance Survey  
22a. 2r. 25p.

VIZ.—

	Ordnance No.	A.	R.	P.
Cottages	...	107	0	2 32
Ten Acres	...	108	10	1 36
Gravel Pit Field	...	109	11	1 37

Tenant of Land—Mr. T. Greig.





Farming in Willington—The War Years

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All this called for extra labour, at a time when some of the younger men were being called to the forces. The Women's Land Army began to appear in the village. The first girl to be employed here under the scheme began in November, 1939. Though the girls were regarded at first as a joke by local farmers, they were later gladly accepted; and by the end of the war about 50 were employed in Willington. No one will pretend that on the average they were equal to the men; but there is no doubt whatever that they helped materially to fill the gap. Most farmers can tell of one or more girls who showed quite exceptional aptitude.

Later on when the Government was calling for still larger acreages of such crops as potatoes and sugar-beet which need a high labour force, Italian prisoners were brought to help. These were good when they first arrived, but they fell out of favour with farmers owing to their somewhat lazy habits. It was only in the last winter that there were German prisoners. They earned themselves a good name for hard work.

One source of help in these difficult times was a band of ladies, none of them young, who for several summers volunteered to come out from Bedford every afternoon (having done their housework and their queuing in the morning). They worked with a will in the fields until 6.30 p.m. They could not of course do heavy work, but for trimming tomato-plants and picking beans and peas they were invaluable, and their spirit was an encouragement to those who saw them. School children from the Bedford schools were a useful adjunct. The girls usually found more favour than the boys. The fact that their headmistress used to come out from Bedford and sit and watch them may have had some bearing on this!

The system of establishing farming-camps where town-dwellers could spend their holidays working on neighbouring farms sounded well. One such camp was at Blunham. After one or two trials most farmers were not anxious to apply again unless their labour position was very bad. The holiday-makers were very young and undisciplined and had come for a holiday. Most

of the work was harder and less exciting than they had been led to expect by gay posters. Some older men among them were useful; one farmer in the village had a gang of them for some weeks one summer and was satisfied with them. Perhaps at least these farming camps helped some townfolk to realise that earning one's living from the land is hard and skilled work; and certainly they only increased the good opinion which local farmers held of their own old stalwarts.

One striking change in local agriculture was a great increase in all forms of machinery. Tractors before the war were, if not a rarity, at least not used by the majority of smaller growers. By the end of the war every market-gardener with upwards of 5-10 acres had his own tractor; and this was true of all other machinery which could help to get the work done with fewer hands.

Another change was in distribution. Before the war nearly all the market-garden produce of the village was collected in lorries and delivered straight to the consuming town, London, or Midland towns such as Northampton and Leicester. With petrol rationing growers had to return to the railway; and Willington station, which for some years had had little traffic in the goods department, had to receive a much larger volume. Our local porters and portress (Miss J. Spavins) rose valiantly to the occasion.

Livestock was never prominent in the agricultural economy of Willington, though a fair sprinkling of cattle could be found, particularly in the river meadows and on the heavier hill land up towards Sheerhatch Wood. No milking cattle have been kept to any extent in the village for some years; and therefore Willington could not do much to help in the drive for more milk.

A fair number of beef cattle were fattened annually, and this number probably did not differ appreciably from that of pre-war days in spite of the grassland that had been ploughed up. There are no sheep. Pigs were not kept on a large scale before the war, and the drastic cuts in feeding-stuffs reduced what there were to meagre proportions. Poultry are kept only for domestic purposes and not on a commercial scale.



## 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.

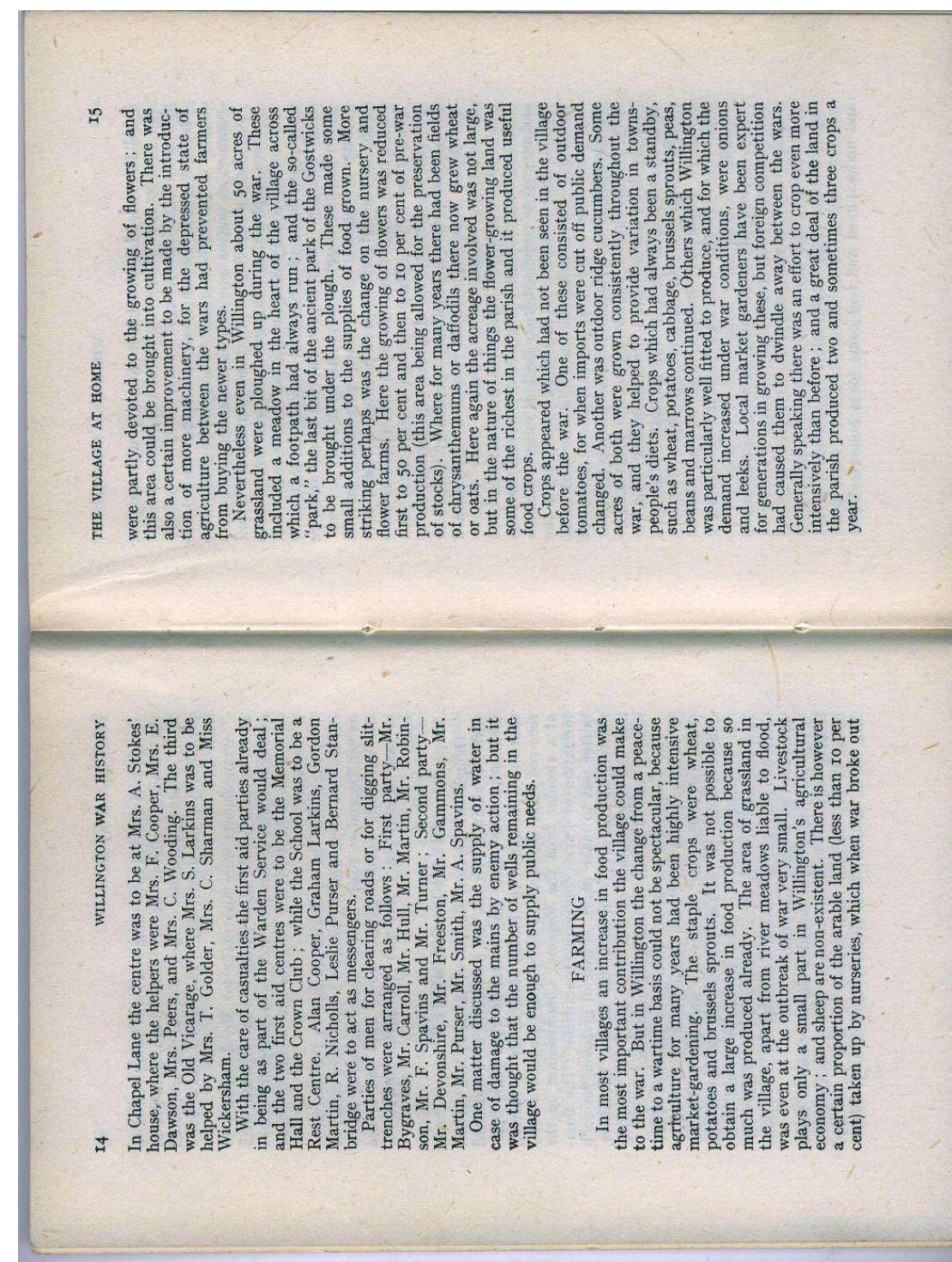
#### The Farmstead

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)







**Image 9:**

Extract from Ordnance Survey map (1:25000) showing location of Osier beds. Background picture courtesy of Wiki Commons—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.

Ref: ord survey map  
Date: c1937-1961  
1800s

## 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.



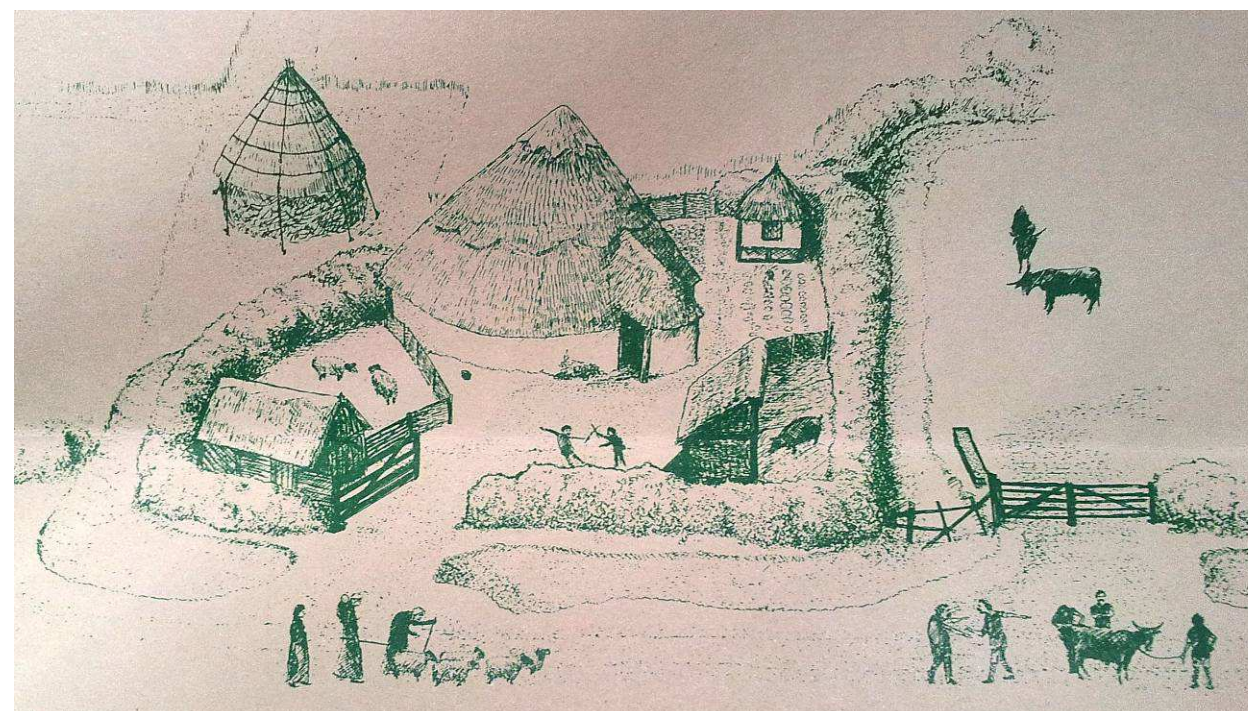
**Image 10:**

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.

Ref: Z44/2  
Date: 1848







**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 Tempsford
- c) Tempsford 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)

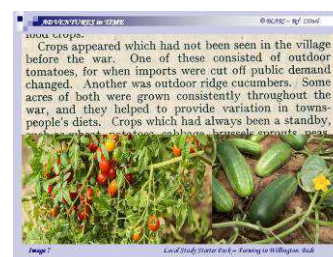
Ref: Z50/142/333  
Date: c1900



**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 not 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