A Short History of Woodford Halse

By

John Williams
This short history was developed for the Woodford Halse Archive Group web site using material available from a number of sources.

This document is © John Williams 2016.

This is Version 5 dated 06/05/2016 which includes minor text changes and adds material on the history of schooling in Woodford.

It is available on-line from the Woodford Halse Village Signpost:-

http://www.woodford-halse-villagesignpost.co.uk/woodford-now-then/history-of-the-village/
## Contents

### Table of Contents

- Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1
- Prehistoric & Roman Times .............................................................................................................. 1
- Saxon Wodeford & the Origin of Village Names .............................................................................. 1
- 1066 & All That .................................................................................................................................. 2
- Medieval Times .................................................................................................................................... 2
- Enclosure, Farms & Manor Houses .................................................................................................... 3
- Church & Chapel .................................................................................................................................. 4
- The Nineteenth Century ..................................................................................................................... 5
- Into The Twentieth Century By Rail .................................................................................................. 6
- A World at War .................................................................................................................................... 8
- Local Living In The Twenties & Thirties ......................................................................................... 9
- Woodford at War ............................................................................................................................... 10
- Post War Development ...................................................................................................................... 10
- The End of the Railway ..................................................................................................................... 11
- Regeneration ....................................................................................................................................... 11
- References .......................................................................................................................................... 13
Introduction

This short history draws heavily on Brenda Courtie's "The Story of Woodford cum Membris" and on Jim Anscomb's "Woodford cum Membris and the Great Central Railway". It covers the most important parts of Woodford Halse's history but much more is known about the village, its history, its buildings and people that is not mentioned here. Some useful sources of information on local history can be found at the end of this book.

To locate buildings I have used modern street names although these may not have been in use at the time of the building's construction.

Prehistoric & Roman Times

Almost nothing has survived from the people that would have lived around Woodford Halse in prehistoric and Roman times. Some Bronze Age flint tools found to the west of West Farndon show that people were here around 3000 years ago but we just don't know whether they lived on these hills or were only passing travellers on the Jurassic Way between the major prehistoric centres in Peterborough and Wiltshire. Certainly nothing has been found to show signs of permanent settlement from that period.

Even the Roman period seems to have left no real trace beyond a few pieces of pottery from the second and third centuries AD found near to West Farndon. However with the major settlement on Borough Hill near Daventry and the Roman town of Lactodorum (Towcester) nearby it is not hard to imagine that there was farming in the area.

Saxon Wodeford & the Origin of Village Names

From about 600AD, Northamptonshire was part of the Saxon kingdom of Mercia and it is from Saxon times that we have the first mention of the settlements that would come to make up Woodford Halse. Collection of the Danegeld (a tax to fund "protection money" paid to deter Danish invasion) in 991AD was arranged through groups of settlements called "Hundreds" and Waredone Hundred (Chipping Warden) included the settlements of "Farendone", "Hintone" and "Wodeford".

These names originated from local features and people. Hintone came from "Higna Tun" (Higna's Farm), Farendone from "Feren Dun" (Fern Hill) and Wodeford presumably from "Wood Ford", a crossing of the River Cherwell.
1066 & All That

Less than 100 years later, Saxon England was over-run by the Normans after their invasion in 1066. In its aftermath the great assessment of the lands of England carried out by William I and recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 provides our first real insight into Woodford, Hinton and Farndon.

Woodford and Hinton were of similar status, both having two hides of land (once thought to have been 120 acres, a "hide" is a measure of value, representing the land that generated £1 income each year) with five ploughs and a mill and both valued at sixty shillings. Even then, Farndon was the least important of the three. It was valued at only five shillings, with a quarter of a hide with only a single plough.

The three manors of Woodford, Hinton and Farndon were held (along with 100 or so others across England) by Hugh de Grentesmaisnil, a French nobleman, one of only 15 individuals named in contemporary accounts as taking part in the invasion alongside William.

Medieval Times

By 1202, Farndon had already become known as West Farndon. (There were originally more houses to the east of the present hamlet but these were abandoned, perhaps in the 14th century and are now known only through archaeological excavation. The "West" was added to refer to the current part of the hamlet presumably to distinguish from the eastern properties and remained when the eastern part of the hamlet was abandoned. In records of the time, William of Farndon admits before the local Justice that the church at Woodford has rights to eight acres of land at West Farndon.

By 1200, the first stone parish church had also been built – parts of the current building date back to the 1100’s. It was the fact that the three settlements all shared one priest, one burial ground and one church (at Woodford) that gave rise to the name of the parish as Woodford-cum-Membris meaning "Woodford and its members" (the settlements of Hinton and West Farndon).

Although the three settlements were joined together in the single parish, at some time in the 12th or 13th centuries Woodford and Farndon became separated from Hinton. In 1329 Lady Matilda de Holand became Lady of the Manor of Halse. Halse, near Brackley, was a major Saxon manor. When Matilda became Lady of the Manor, Halse also included the dependent manors of Brackley, Syresham, Farthingoe, Astrop, Woodford and Farndon. The word Halse was added to Woodford in the 19th century, to distinguish the village from the other Northamptonshire Woodford, near Thrapston.

Woodford and Farndon have at various times been owned by the Earls of Stafford, Shrewsbury and Ellesmere and the Duke of Bridgewater. Hinton passed through the hands of the Catesby family of Althorp (one of whom famously took part in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605), the Drydens and the Knightleys of Fawsley.
Given that Woodford and Hinton were of similar size, why was the parish church in Woodford rather than Hinton? The belief is that the church was built on the site of an earlier burial ground located on higher, well-drained, land. Certainly Hinton was always prone to flooding. In records from 1202 of a dispute about grassland at Hinton, jurors sent to view the site couldn't do so because of floods.

There is still something to be seen in the fields around the parish from the medieval period. In this time farming was carried out using the open field system, with strips of land of an acre or half an acre each farmed by an individual farmer. The three villages were surrounded by these open fields and the long lines of ridges and furrows that can still be seen in fields around Woodford Halse are evidence of this.

Apart from that, the only visible remains of the medieval period are in the church. The main door dates from the 13th century and the chancel and pews from the 15th. Most of what can be seen of the church today dates from its restoration in 1878, though.

In 1469 a great battle involving perhaps 20,000 men, part of the Wars of the Roses, took place at Edgcote. It is hard to imagine that Woodford Halse was not touched in some way by the event but there is nothing to tell us if it was.

## Enclosure, Farms & Manor Houses

In the 17th and 18th Centuries, many open fields across England were enclosed by land owners. Enclosures began in Northamptonshire in 1727, reaching Hinton in 1753, Woodford in 1759 and West Farndon in 1761. At the same time as fields were enclosed, public roads were identified to make it easier to travel between villages where the fields had been enclosed. These public roads are the basis of the network of lanes in and around Woodford Halse today. The word "lane" is a memory of the the enclosure of the open fields; it means "hedged on either side".

Around the middle of the 17th century many of the old houses of Woodford Halse – probably originally built with cob walls (made of earth, cow dung, straw and lime) on a shallow foundation of stones and with thatched roofs - would have been rebuilt in stone. It is still possible to see what may be the original foundations for cob as shallow plinths at the foot of some of Woodford's old stone buildings.

By the end of the 17th Century, Woodford was made up of a number of houses along what is now School Street, High Street, Quinton Lane and Parsons Street. Between the Church and High Street was an area of glebe land belonging to the church.

Hinton too was a cluster of stone houses around Pool Street and Hinton Road while West Farndon would have been larger than it is today, with houses clustered around where the farms are now.

There were a few larger houses. Some were the house of farmers – Jaffe House, Vicarage Cottage, Top Farm, Tews Farm and Pool Farm all date from the late 17th Century. There was certainly one manor house. Hinton Manor – at the junction of Phipps Road and Hinton Road- was begun in 1695
and was intended for the use of the Lord of the Manor although it was never finished as intended. Woodford Manor, a grand building on School Street dating from the 17th Century was never occupied by a Lord of the Manor since Woodford and Farndon were still part of the Manor of Halse. Perhaps a steward responsible for the village was housed in the house that preceded it. Before Woodford became part of the manor of Halse it would have had its own manor house but so far it has not been identified. Equally, Manor Farm in Farndon may have housed a steward for that part of Halse.

Woodford's farming was a mixture of animal rearing and crop growing. Farmers would often butcher their own animals but for grinding corn they would rely on one of the mills in the parish. In 1786 there were at least two mills nearby; records show a Thomas Jessop took out insurance policies on his mills at "Farnton" (later known as Woodford Mill at the foot of Barnett's Hill on the road between Hinton and Eydon) and at Burnt Mill (actually in Eydon parish). These were both water mills. There were also windmills, probably wooden built post mills. One was at Woodfordhill on the road towards Canons Ashby and the other on the Farndon Road from Hinton just before where the railway bridge is now.

**Church & Chapel**

From the reign of Henry the Eighth onwards, St Mary's church weathered the changes from Catholic to Protestant back to Catholic and finally to Protestant again. Its fortunes evidently waxed and waned – records talk of broken stained glass, missing and loose seats in the chancel, the need for a bell and parts of the church needing paving. In 1706 the churchwardens repaired the roof and in 1749 they were repairing the church bells.

In the 18th Century other places of worship also began to appear in Woodford Halse.

First came a community of Moravians, protestant Christian evangelists that trace their origins to persecuted protestants in Bohemia and Moravia. In 1788 William Hunt licensed the property now known as School House as a Moravian preaching place. The congregation grew so that only 21 years later, they were able to build a chapel and minister's house in Parsons Street. A new chapel was built after the community's 100th anniversary and opened in 1906. This building and the minister's house ("The Manse") next door still stands.

In the early 19th Century, Methodism reached Woodford. In 1808 a Methodist preaching place somewhere in the village was registered and in 1813 a second. In 1820 a building at Farndon Mill was registered as a preaching place. Other Methodist preaching places are known in Hinton and by 1879 the first purpose built chapel (together with a stable and coach house to accommodate the visiting preacher's transport) had been built near the junction of Phipps Road and Hinton Road. A new chapel – the one still in use today – was built alongside it and opened in 1902.

In 1917 the Roman Catholic Church of St Joseph opened its doors. Built beside what is now the Social Club on the site of three cottages, the church ceased to be used in 2008 and is now a private house. Today, Catholics from the village worship either in Aston Le Walls or in Daventry.
The Nineteenth Century

In 1801, according to the census, Woodford-cum-Membris had a population of 629. By 1831 it had risen to 827 but from then fell back until in 1891 it had fallen to 527.

The population changes reflect the rise and fall of English agriculture during the 19th Century with competition from imported goods. In 1851 of the 480 inhabitants of working age many were not employed outside the home but there were 170 farm labourers and farmer’s boys. At this time there were 16 farms totalling almost 2400 acres. Other occupations, reflecting the needs of a rural community, included four blacksmiths, a wheelwright, four carpenters and two sawyers. There were two stone masons, a stone breaker and two lime burners. By 1881, only 12 farms were recorded and the acreage being farmed had fallen by 17%.

We have a few snapshots of life in Woodford at this time. Richard Walter, for example was curate at St Mary’s from 1823 to 1846, but the tithes of the parish were being paid to Reverend Shirley in Derbyshire, Walter only apparently receiving a pittance for his work. Richard Walter was only installed as vicar following the appointment of his predecessor as Bishop of Sodor & Man and as a result of the intervention of Major General Sir William Napier, who wrote to the then Lord Chancellor pleading Walter’s cause. Napier’s letter mentions that Walter had been wounded as a lieutenant at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, a curious connection for a village like Woodford almost as far as it is possible to be from the sea in England. Richard Walter and his wife, Mary Ann, together had 10 children between 1822 and 1833 managing on what Napier calls "a very small stipend". Richard Walter died at the age of 66 in 1851 only 5 years after being appointed.

An insight into the concerns of the wealthier folk of Woodford comes from the story of Caroline Hunt a local landowner who owned several farms and lived at Ivy Cottage / Woodford House (in Parsons Street). When (at the age of 71) she purchased Rectory Farm in 1882 she became "lay-rector" of Woodford, a role she shared with the Hinton lay-rector George Hitchcock of Hinton House. In November 1882, the Churchwardens complained about her to the Bishop of Peterborough, claiming that she had sent labourers to the church to remove pews. The Bishop ruled that the lay-rector could not do this, only being responsible for keeping the chancel in repair. The vicar, H.H. Minchin, evidently not expecting Miss Hunt to comply, took legal advice and then arranged for this to be published in the Northampton Herald. Miss Hunt and the Reverend Minchin chose to conduct their debate on the matter through the newspapers in spite of living almost opposite one another (he lived in what is now "The Old Vicarage"). From her letter to the Herald it seems she was only too aware of her rights as lay-rector but had overlooked the fact that her rights came with responsibilities.

Disputes around the village were not only related to the Church. In 1860, Edward Hughes the miller at Farndon Mill, was involved in a dispute with one of his largest customers Henry Messenger the farmer at Farndon Manor. The disagreement centred on £50 (about £2500 today) for work done and goods sold. It developed into a court case before Daventry magistrate and the Northampton Herald reported on "the angry spirit in which the discussion was approached". It was not apparently the first time that the men had brought a case to court.
The 1800's also saw the arrival of formal education for children. In 1851 a survey showed 250 children in Woodford were getting no education. This encouraged local landowner Sir Henry Dryden (of Canons Ashby) to sponsor the building of a school. Other local landowners seem to have had little interest in the project and Sir Henry's own resources were taxed by the project which suffered delays before finally opening in 1867. Sir Henry, an architect, designed the building himself. The original building now makes up the Dryden Hall, part of the Village Centre. Nearby "School House" was given by Dryden as accommodation for the schoolmaster's house. By 1879 the school master could report 114 children enrolled with a third of children having a better than 90% attendance record. It was only in 1891, though, that the school-pence contribution was abolished by the Government and children could attend school free of charge.

The church was still very much at the centre of village life. The Reverend Henry Herbert Minchin was vicar of St Mary's for 17 years. He campaigned to restore the church, leading a committee that raised £3,000 (£130,000 today) over five years. The restoration took place in 1878, rebuilding much of the church in its original style and retaining many of the original features. Minchin was an enthusiastic builder having already constructed what is now the Old Vicarage in 1868 using a mortgage on the glebe land and, after swapping a piece of land with Henry Dryden for the Vicarage Cottage, restoring that building with a second mortgage on the glebe. A plaque on Vicarage Cottage reading "HHM Rebuilt 1877" probably exaggerates the amount of work done as original internal features remain. The cottage was used by Minchin to accommodate divinity students that he tutored for university entrance.

In 1894, Woodford had four shops, two inns, a bakery and a smithy listed in the local Kelly's Directory mainly on High Street and Parsons Street. In 1891 there had been 597 residents in the parish. Ten years later that figure had more than doubled.

Into The Twentieth Century By Rail

The key to the transformation that took place in Woodford Halse at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is in the three words "Great Central Railway".

Whereas much of the country's railway network was already in place (the boom time in railway building had been between 1830 and 1850) the competition between the railway companies of the day that owned both rolling stock and the rails it ran on meant that new routes were identified wherever a business opportunity presented itself. Even so, the route that ran through Woodford became the last main line to be built in England until the advent of HS1 which opened just over 100 years later in 2003.

The Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company (later to be renamed the Great Central Railway) were keen to establish an extension of their lines to run from Nottingham through Aylesbury and on to London. In 1890 some of Woodford's landowners received letters from the MS&LR that the company was applying to Parliament for approval of the route, allowing for purchase of the land for it.

The original route proposed through the parish would have taken the railway past the bottom of
Scrivens Hill but a revised route proposed in 1891 was the one adopted with bill receiving Royal Assent in Parliament in 1893. Contracts were awarded in September 1894.

Work had certainly begun by May 1895 when the Parish Council was complaining to the developers that their men were creating a nuisance and danger by sleeping in barns and outhouses. The influx of workers was considerable. In 1898 when the construction work was finally completed, there were about 500 men working on the railway almost as many as the local population.

The large number of workers and the time they were in the village was the result of the scale of works being carried out. Not only was there the construction of the line but also the station, locomotive sheds for almost 50 engines, a wagon repair shed and sidings to take 1000 wagons. Woodford was to become a major railway centre with a junction to another nearby railway line (the line from Stratford across to Towcester and eventually to London St Pancras) which resulted in the great triangle of railway cuttings that can still be seen to south of the village around Dairy Farm.

Although the presence of railway construction workers ("navvies") initially caused problems, there were measures taken to help them. A Miss Adeline Pym started a reading room specifically for navvies who according to the Northampton Mercury of 17th July 1895 felt it was "the greatest boon and pleasure to them." In August 1895 the Navvy Missionary Society opened a Mission Hut, an event attended by over 100 navvies with their wives and children. Miss Pym also rented Banksia House on School Street and converted it to a home for navvies.

While the railway was being constructed the navvies were mainly housed in a camp of temporary huts in the Flax Farland field on the Eydon Road and Dairy Farm became a lodging house for some of the navvies and their supervisor ("ganger").

More comfortable accommodation was available in two hotels that opened with the railway. The White Hart (later the Sir Winston, on the site of the present Winston Close flats) was a business hotel while the Hinton Gorse (now the Social Club) was intended to cater for those coming from London, with their horses, to hunt with the Grafton or the Bicester & Warden Hunt.

Permanent accommodation was needed for those that were to work in the yard and at the station more. In 1898, developers began the red brick buildings that line Sidney Road, Percy Road, Castle Road, Cherwell Terrace, Church Road and Station Road. Sidney Road and Percy Road are named for the sons on the developers, the Melcombe brothers. The development of 240 properties cost between £2000 and £2500 and included a parade of shops in Station Road – competition for the old village shops in Parsons Street and High Street.

The population growth (and also changing legislation) also increased the need for local education. Sir Henry Dryden had opened a school in the village (in what is now the Dryden Hall) in 1867. This was too small for the children of the larger village so, in 1903, a new building (the current Library) funded by the villagers was opened to accommodate a further 198 pupils. The new building was used for older pupils, while the original school continued as an infants school.

Woodford Station started small but was expanded until it finally had three platforms (one for the Stratford-on-Avon and Midland Junction Railway), a refreshment room and a bookstall but it was
the locomotive works, wagon works and train crewing that provided most of the jobs. At the peak of its expansion the railway employed some 550 men in Woodford, handling as many as a million wagons in any one year and 30 passenger trains stopping or starting at the station every day. Some idea of the distribution of labour can be gained from figures relating to 1956 when 184 staff were employed in the Operating Department (station staff, guards, shunters, signalman), 60 in the Carriage & Wagon Department, 200 in the Locomotive Department and around 160 in the Permanent Way Department responsible for keeping the track in order, ballasting and so on.

The impact of the railway was not only felt in local employment, though. The railway made it much easier for Woodford folk to travel. The 1910 Bradshaw’s Guide shows 5 trains a day to Banbury for example, with the last train back at 10:30 in the evening. Before the railway arrived in Woodford, the disputatious Caroline Hunt describes leaving Woodford at two o’clock by horse and trap to catch the train from Banbury – travelling first class of course - and arriving in London at 7:30 that evening. In 1910, the 5:27 from Woodford and Hinton would have got you to London by 6:43. (Now you would do rather less well – you would need to catch the 16:40 bus from Woodford to connect with the 5:47 train from Banbury in order to get you to London at the same time).

What can be seen of the railway today? The original entrance to the station is still visible under the bridge that crosses the road between Woodford and Hinton and, on the left side of the road just past the bridge, is the red brick house that was the Station Master’s. The embankment between Station Road and the Co-op Store was the site of the goods-yard and the road from Station Gardens up to Mainline Timber follows the old line of the station approach road. The road from Woodford to Eydon crosses two bridges over railway cuttings and by walking through the Pocket Park it is possible to follow a little of the route of the line. At the far end of the Pocket Park a bridleway crosses a rickety bridge over the cutting. Of the engine sheds, carriage and wagon works, nothing remains except the name of the Great Central Trading Estate that occupies their site.

**A World at War**

In 1913 a group of dignitaries gathered on Sharman’s Hill near Charwelton. The German Kaiser, Sir John French, Winston Churchill and others watched military exercises involving the use of the railway. A year later they would be commanding the forces bent on each other’s destruction.

Woodford saw the impact of the Great War but perhaps to a lesser extent than other places. Because of the importance of the railway to the movement of equipment, horses, and troops, many men stayed in their jobs on the railway. Even so, 24 local men gave their lives in the conflict, their names recorded on the war memorial erected in the church yard two years after the end of the war.

The place of some of those that went to fight was taken by women. They served as locomotive cleaners at the railway works and helped on the farms. Women also worked in the Dent’s Glove Factory which opened in 1916.

The village doctor was also the medical officer for the Home for Wounded Soldiers at Eydon.
Local Living In The Twenties & Thirties

As the population grew in the twentieth century, more people meant more opportunities for trade and the railway brought goods as well as jobs.

More people meant more children and greater needs for schooling. In 1914 a new, “Council School” opened in the High Street. The two schools operated alongside one another (a result of disagreement about the religious education curriculum between the Church School on School Street and the Council School) until 1947.

Woodford’s range of shops expanded dramatically. From four shops, a bakery a smithy and two inns in 1894, by 1936 Woodford offered over a dozen stores, a petrol station, a building contractor, undertaker and plumber, and four drinking establishments (the Hinton Gorse Hotel - now the Social Club – the Three Fleurs De Lys, the Hare and Hounds and the White Hart). Altogether 35 businesses were listed in the Kelly’s directory for that year. The parade of shops along Station Road, built as part of the Melcombe brothers’ development, largely took over from shops in High Street, School Street and Parsons Street although shops there continued until the railway closed.

To get some idea of just how varied a village shopping centre Woodford Halse had, imagine a walk from the Station to the Church in the 1930’s. You emerge from the station stairway under the bridge and head along Station Road. On the right is the White Hart Hotel and on the left a butchers and then a fish and chip shop. On the first part of the site still occupied by a pharmacy today is a chemist and next to that is Billy Bright, the grocer’s. Crossing Cherwell Terrace there is a barber’s, then W.H. Adams "High Class Bakers and Patisserie". To your right, you see the ex-Serviceman’s Hall (the current Memorial Hall replaced it) but continuing along the row of shops there is a butchers, a hardware and haberdashers, a shoe menders, a sweet shop, the carriers, Barclays Bank, another butchers and finally, on the corner of Percy Road, Miss Hemming’s Ladies Boutique. By King’s Corner is the large Co-operative store (now Faulkners Footwear) with its grocers, butchers and drapers. Continuing across Percy Road you pass another barbers, a general store, a newsagents, a "high class grocer" and, in what is now the Woodford Dynasty Restaurant, a glove factory. You could turn right up Parsons Street to the Doctor’s surgery in Jaffe House but you continue along Church Street. On your right are four new, semi-detached houses with bay windows, very much in the 1930’s style with the brick arches over their front doors. On the left hand side of the road you see the local Electricity Board shop on one corner of Castle Road, and on the other side, the Post Office. Finally, for those of a pious mind there is a left turn into the churchyard and St Mary’s church while, for those in search of more secular pleasures, a right turn takes you into the newly opened Savoy Cinema. Just ahead of you is the Village Primary School. In the few hundred yards from the Station as you have climbed the hill, almost every need has been catered for.

At the same time housing was being expanded in the village. The 1920's and 1930's saw housing ribbon development on the Farndon Road, the north side of Byfield Road, the new houses on Church Street and new cottages built on High Street.
Woodford at War

Between 1941 and 1946 the skies around Woodford were busy with aircraft from the airfield at Chipping Warden. This airfield had three concrete runways (now used for storing cars) and was host to a number of training units. Some 3000 RAF and WAAF personnel were based here during the war and the airfield’s base hospital is now used as Chipping Warden School. (hence the plane in the school’s logo).

Operational Training Units (OTU’s) prepared crew to fly in particular aircraft. Generally OTU training did not involve missions over enemy territory although in some cases OTU crews carried out leaflet dropping missions. The heavy cost of this training is highlighted in the toll of aircraft and crews lost at Chipping Warden. 32 Wellington bombers were destroyed and 74 crew killed in accidents at Chipping Warden between 1941 and 1946.

In January 1945 an Airspeed Oxford aircraft was abandoned and crashed near Woodford Halse when its engines iced up.

The surprising thing is that Woodford’s railway yard – with its capacity of over 3000 wagons – was never damaged by bombing. Although attacked on one occasion in September 1940, the bombs fell between Cherry Tree Farm and the top of Roundhill Road. A week later another single bomb fell near Dairy Farm.

Woodford’s farms lost men to the armed forces but, in their place, members of the Women’s Land Army arrived to help make sure that farms continued to produce the food so desperately needed to keep the country going. The wage for “Land Girls” as they were known, was £1.12 a week after deductions for lodgings and food for a maximum working week of 50 hours in the summer and 48 hours in the winter – five and a half days working with Saturday afternoon and Sunday off. Members of the WLA posted more than 20 miles from home received a free rail warrant for a visit home every six months. By the end of the war over 80,000 members of the Women’s Land Army would be contributing to the war effort across the UK and while almost none of them had any knowledge of farming at the start they proved an invaluable work force and some remained at the end of the war marrying farmers sons or railwaymen, as they did in Woodford Halse.

The only trace of the 1939-45 war remaining in Woodford today are the reinforced concrete walls and roof of the air raid shelter for the old village school.

Of the men from Woodford that left to serve in the armed forces, eight never returned. Their names are commemorated on the War Memorial beside Saint Mary’s Church.

Post War Development

With the end of the war things began to return to normal and the village saw a considerable expansion in housing. First a small number of pre-fabricated houses (developed in response to the housing shortage resulting from enemy bombing during the war) were built, followed by the estate of council housing called Townsend.
With the raising of the school leaving age to 15 in the 1944 Education Act, the two Woodford schools were reorganised so that the Church School became the local primary school and the Council School was developed as the local Secondary Modern school. Further expansion followed.

Woodford United Football Club was started in 1946 (there had been a club before the war, Woodford Central) and continues today, playing in Division One of the Southern Counties League.

In the 1960’s private housing development followed on Membris Way, Central Avenue, Fay Close and Dryden Close.

For those working on the railway there were also developments. The old Hinton Gorse Hotel was acquired in 1953 for use as a railwaymen’s club (it later became the Woodford Halse Social Club).

The End of the Railway

The arrival of the railway had been a momentous event for the village but in 1962 there was news that was to prove every bit as significant for village life with rumours that the railway was to close.

In the late 1950’s British Railways had decided that each part of their network should pay its way and that "unprofitable" lines should close. Finally, in February 1963 the first changes affecting Woodford Halse were announced with the closure of all the stations between Rugby and Aylesbury except Woodford and Brackley. This was quickly followed two months later by the withdrawal of passenger services between Woodford and Banbury (they were replaced with 4 times a day bus service). By February 1965, the decision to withdraw freight trains had been made and in May the Banbury Guardian reported that 350 staff were to be made redundant as the marshalling yards and locomotive works closed. The wagon shops closed in August and the last passenger train ran to Marylebone on the 3rd September 1966.

A few of those that lost their jobs at Woodford Halse chose to stay with the railway, transferring to Banbury or other depots. Most found other employment in factories in Daventry, Banbury or Rugby.

Regeneration

In the wake of the railway closure, Northants County Council acquired the old site of the wagon shops and locomotive works to construct a new industrial estate providing jobs for the village to replace some of those lost with the end of the railway. The project was not without its problems – the old embankment had to be stripped away removing hundreds of tons of spoil while demolishing the railway bridge across the Byfield Road took three weeks instead of the three days anticipated. The Beaver Centre and then the Great Central Trading Estate opened on this land and continue to provide important local sources of employment.

The land alongside was bought by the Parish Council from British Railways to provide a sports field
for the village, eventually transferring to the Sports & Recreation Association (SARA) and finally becoming the home of the football club, the bowls club and many other village sports.

There was also debate about the use of the old marshalling yard embankment and the station site. Eventually the bank was planted with woodland and the station area became the home of Main Line Timber.

The 1970's onwards saw further housing development with mainly smaller developments after the large Byfield Estate.

Other aspects of the village took a backward turn. The village's secondary school in High Street closed in 1970 (the primary school moved to its current location, and it's buildings on School Street became used as the Library and the Village Centre). By 1971 two of the village’s three pubs had closed. None of the shops in Parsons Street or High Street survived the closing of the railway, although the tiny corrugated iron roofed shed that once was a cobblers can still be seen at the corner of South Street and High Street. The village no longer had its own doctor’s surgery (although today, the Byfield practice still opens a surgery in the Memorial Hall daily). Eventually, St Mary’s Church no longer had a full time vicar. Now the church is part of the benefice of Aston le Walls, Byfield, Boddington, Eydon and Woodford cum Membris.

Even so, the village continues to develop. In the 1980's parts of the railway cuttings that formed the triangular junction to the south of the village were used to create a nature reserve – the Pocket Park. In 1991 the old Serviceman's Memorial Hall was demolished and replaced by the new building that serves the village today. In 1994 a convenience store (now the Co-op) opened on the Hinton side of the village to serve the new estates. In spite of many comings and goings, Woodford still boasts a collection of shops that is the envy of many villages.

Today, Woodford Halse has over 3500 inhabitants and while the village has extended far beyond its old centre, it still reflects its past in street names, buildings and local traditions.
References

Books

The main books (available in the local library) consulted in the writing of this history were:-

**The Story of Woodford Cum Membris**: B. Courtie : Courtie Books : 1996


**Woodford cum Membris 2007**: Y. Roberts *et al.*

Internet

A number of internet based sources were consulted in the writing of this history. The most important of these were:-

**English Heritage : Inventory of Historical Monuments for Woodford**


**A Vision of Britain: Census Data 1851 – 1951**

http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10287108/census

**Details of listed buildings in Woodford**

http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/england/northamptonshire/woodford+cum+membris

**The Midland Aircraft Recovery Group**

http://www.aviationarchaeology.org.uk/marg/index.htm

**The Woodford Halse Archive Group**

http://www.woodfordhalsearchive.org/