

Rutland Local History & Record Society

Registered Charity No. 700273



North Luffenham Village Walk September 2005 (updated 2020)

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INTRODUCTION

The *ham* of *North Luffenham* signifies that the area was probably an Anglo-Saxon settlement, the *ham* meaning dwelling or home. *Luffa* has traditionally come from the name of the Saxon owner of the land. *North* probably refers to its location north of the River Chater. Hence we have '*the home of Luffa to the North*'. There is still an area of land known as Luff's Hill which is just south of Digby Drive.

In 1855 Anglo-Saxon remains were found in a sandpit near the road to Edith Weston. The artefacts included human bones, a spear head, a sword blade, pottery and beads. Some are now in Rutland County Museum and others are in the British Museum. Silica sand from this pit was later used to cast the propellers of the Queen Mary at Deptford.

North Luffenham is an extensive village situated on a south facing slope leading down to the River Chater, spreading out on both sides of the road from Ketton to Lyndon. The church is on the south side of the village.

The original North Luffenham Hall later known as the Old Manor House, which was built *circa* 1635 by Sir Edward Noel, stood to the west of the church on the site now occupied by St Mary & St John Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School. Despite being besieged by parliamentary forces during the Civil War, the Hall survived until 1806 when it was demolished due to decay.

In 1939, John Laing was employed by the Air Ministry to transform a large area of the green hilltop between the village, Edith Weston and Ketton into a bomber airfield. It was to be the home and workplace of many thousands of service personnel over the next 80 years. Initially it was known as an 'austerity airfield', with grass runways, but these were replaced by concrete in 1943/44. Hampden, Manchester, Lancaster and other bombers took off from here to drop their bombs, mines and leaflets over enemy territory, and many pilots received their training here.

Airspeed Horsa and Hamilcar glider pilots also trained at the base for the D-Day and other landings. In the 1951 it became the home of 1 Fighter Wing of the Royal Canadian Air Force as part of Canada's commitment to NATO. It closed as a traditional airfield in 1958 when work started to build launch pads for Thor Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles which were to be based here until 1963.

For the next 34 years the base had a quieter life, being the home of various RAF support services, including the Aerial Erector Flight who built and installed a new frame for the bells in the tower of North Luffenham church.

North Luffenham airfield closed on 31 December 1997 when the British Army moved in, renaming it St George's Barracks. In 2016, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) announced its intention to close St. George's Barracks and redevelop it to provide jobs and housing as part of its Better Defence Estate strategy and to support the Government's housing targets.

This short walk can only provide a very brief introduction to this historic village, which currently has 47 listed buildings, many of which will be seen. These include the church of St John the Baptist. It is normally open and can be explored at the end of the walk.

For those who wish to discover more, the *Victoria County History* is a good starting point as it has the most detailed account of the early history of North Luffenham. A good account of the history of RAF North Luffenham is given in *Airfield Focus No 54* by Bill Harrison.

THE VILLAGE MAP

The map attached to this walk is based on the Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 25 inch to one-mile map of 1904. Consequently, later buildings, extensions and demolitions are not shown. Numbers in the text, [12] for example, refer to locations shown on the map.

Please:

Respect private property.

Use pavements and footpaths where available.

Take great care when walking alongside or crossing roads.

Remember that you are responsible for your own safety.

THE WALK

The walk starts and ends at St John the Baptist Church [1]. From the church, walk up the church drive, passing the entrance North Luffenham Primary School [2] on the left, and turn left into Church Street.

The large barn on the left [3], often mistaken for a tithe barn, is known as Feast Barn or Poor Barn. It was an outbuilding of the Old Manor House, which was demolished in 1806, and used by the lord of the manor to provide feasts for the poor of the village.

Behind Dove Cottage at 4 Church Street is The Dovecote [4], an interesting restoration and conversion of the former 18th century dovecote and stables. It is best seen from Lyndon Road. On the other side of the drive to Home Farm is an outhouse, known locally as 'the dog kennels' [5]. In reality, they are hovel dwelling houses of the early 18th century. The 1913 photograph by George Henton shows that there were then four hovels in the row, but they had been reduced to two by 1916.

Beyond the hovels is Home Farm [6] which should be viewed from Church Street. It is a late 17th century dwelling with a Collyweston slate roof. Note the massive central chimney stack which has four linked flues, and the wavy roof line.

Continue to the end of Church Street and turn left into Lyndon Road. The c1800 cottage at [7] is one of three former post offices in the village. This was the last, closing in 2003. Up to 1918 it was the village bakehouse. A

Plymouth Brethren Meeting House [8] was located behind this property. It was last used in 1931 when the minister was a Mr Palmer.



The former dovecote and stables in Church Street, seen from the east. (McCann, J and P, Dovecotes of Rutland, Figure 22)



George Henton's 1913 photograph of the 'dog kennel' hovels in Church Street. (Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland)

On the south-west corner of the junction between Lyndon Road and Glebe Road is a late 17th century cottage [9] said to have once been a convent. It was converted into 3 cottages at the beginning of the C19, but two of the cottages were demolished after the Second World War.



The post office and shop, a former bakery, in Lyndon Road circa 1925. (Jack Hart Collection)

At the beginning of the war, excavations for an air-raid shelter revealed human skeletons two feet below the surface. Analysis by the British Museum indicated that they were all victims of the Black Death.

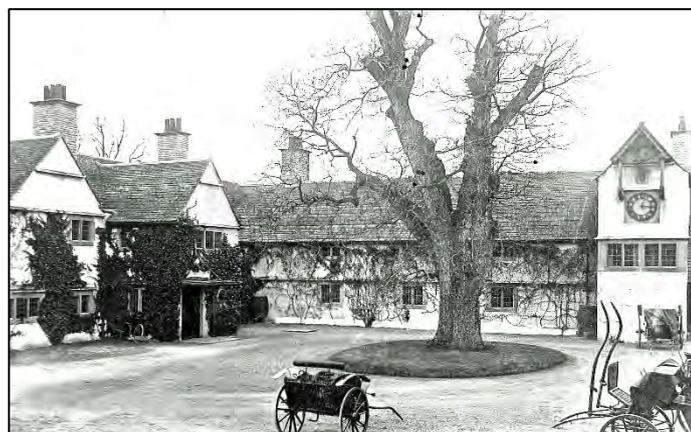
Continuing along Lyndon Road, which used to be known as Clay Lane, the next property of interest on the left is Bede House Farm [10], a late 17th century dwelling. The Stamford Bede House, as it was formerly known, was built for the Diocese of Lincoln to accommodate visiting bishops and clergy.

The next house on this side of the road is The Retreat [11], an early Grade II listed dwelling. It is considered to be home of Vincent Wing, a mathematician, astrologer and surveyor, who was baptised in North Luffenham on 11 April 1619. In 1660 he carried out a detailed survey of the open fields of the parish. He was also the author of almanacks, selling more than 50,000 copies.

Manor Farm [12] on the north side of Lyndon Road was built in 1640 by the Barker family. Note the sundial in the gable of the two storey porch. Its motto, which is difficult to read, is 'omnia fet aetas'. This is translated as 'time bears everything away'. Just beyond the 17th century Manor Farm barns [13] and set well back from the road are the Victorian Manor Farm Cottages [14] now converted into one dwelling.

Opposite the barns, on the south side of the road, is the Malt House [15], now known as Luffenham Court. It was once owned by Rudkin Morris a property owner and brewer on whose lands the Anglo-Saxon artefacts were found in 1855. He was High Sheriff of Rutland in 1858 and he died in 1874. Stone from his disused malt kiln is said to have been used to build the Wesleyan Chapel in Chapel Lane.

Return to the junction and turn right into Glebe Road Walk round to The Pastures [16], an interesting Arts and Crafts house designed by C F A Voysey for Miss Gertrude Conant and built by Bowman of Stamford in 1901. Whilst this is private property, some of the south elevation can be seen over the garden wall.



The Pastures courtyard in 1920. Above the clock dial designed by Voysey is a 16th century bell cast by Robert Newcombe of Leicester. It was originally in the tower of Little Bowden Church, near Market Harborough. (Jack Hart Collection)

The house is built on three sides of a quadrangle which originally had a mature walnut tree at its centre. The south-facing wing has two reception rooms, the west wing has

service rooms, and the single-storeyed north wing is made up of manservant's quarters, stables and a coach house.

Voysey wanted to build the whole house in local stone, but Miss Conant insisted that he built it in the style of his other houses. The house exhibits many Voysey features, particularly the plain roughcast walls, buttresses at the angles, steep grey slated roof with gables, and small low leaded windows with stone mullions.

Voysey also designed the garden but the flagged paths, pergolas, sundial, and most of the yew hedges of the original design have gone.



The Pastures and garden from the south west in 1920. (Jack Hart Collection)

Walk back along Glebe Road towards Lyndon Road. On the right is a line of Ancaster estate houses [17] with characteristic tall Ancaster chimneys. Each pair of houses had a well, and a pigsty at the bottom of the garden, as shown on the map.

Walk back to the junction with Lyndon Road turn right and then continue walk to the end of Lyndon Road and into Pinfold Lane. The Grade II listed Fox and Hounds public house [18] was a 17th century coaching inn. Note the coursed rubble stone walls with quoins and stone dressings and the Collyweston slate roof with moulded stone end stacks.



The Fox and Hounds in 1910. (Jack Hart Collection)

The Old Forge on the corner of Church Street [19] was the location of a former village smithy. The last blacksmith to work from here was a Mr Fox in 1900. Mr Day from Edith Weston was the next blacksmith, working at his forge [20] behind the Fox and Hounds for three days a week until the 1930s. He was kept particularly busy shoeing the many horses used by Rose's woodyard further along Pinfold Lane [21], and the village farms. The former woodyard is now a small housing estate named Rosewood Close. Next to the Old Forge, just inside Church Street, is

a cottage [22] owned by North Luffenham Town Estate, an old village charity.

Continue to walk down Church Street and note the two stone gate piers, [23] and [24], approximately 50m apart on the north side. They are associated with the former avenue to the Old Manor House, demolished in 1806. Their pairs were probably lost in road widening. Between the piers is an entrance to The Oval [25], a large recreation ground reserved for cricket matches and other village activities. This piece of land was acquired for the village in exchange for Glebe land by The Rev William Hardyman from Sir Gilbert Heathcote in 1808.

Further along from the second stone pier is the former reading room [26], identified by the three small carved stone faces set into the gable. Traditionally, these are from the old Guild Chapel which, before it was demolished, was located to the south-east of the church.

Turn left into Old School Close. On the left are two small cottages – Old School Cottage and Cook's Cottage. On the Right is Sycamore Cottage [27], the original village post office. Ahead is the old village school [28]. It is now a private dwelling, but you may go up to it to see the plaque on the west wall. It was built in 1858 and endowed by the Town Estate charity. It closed in 1969 when the new St Mary and St John Church of England Primary School was opened.

Continue eastwards along Church Street to the former Horse and Panniers public house [29] which has now been converted to two private dwellings. Across the street you will see the mid-19th century village pump [30], which is Grade II listed, partly surrounded by the stone garden wall of the 17th century Stone Cottage [31].

Walk into Chapel Lane. On the east side is Dewey's Barn [32], now converted into three cottages. A little further down this road, on the same side, is the Wesleyan Chapel [33], built in 1895. Before this, meetings were held in a house on the opposite side of the road, on the south side of the Horse and Panniers. This area was then known as Chapel Yard. The chapel is now a private dwelling and the chapel altar table, which was donated by the RAF, is now in the church.

Walk down to the end of Chapel Lane, to its junction with Digby Drive, to see the 17th century round-arched gateway entrance to North Luffenham Hall [34].

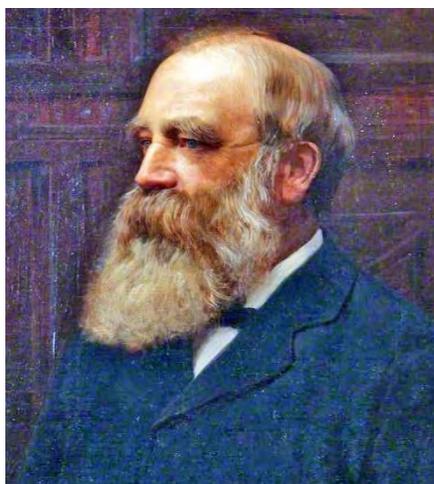


The gateway entrance to the grounds of North Luffenham Hall and Sundial Cottage in Digby Drive in 1910. (Jack Hart Collection)

The small arch to the left is the start of a public footpath to South Luffenham. Down here, but not part of this walk, is a water garden designed by Russell Page in the late 1920s.

The first house on the north side of Digby Drive is Sundial Cottage [35] which is dated 1647 and which was restored in 1894, as confirmed two tablets: one inscribed 'Aedificat 1647: Renovat 1894', and the other inscribed 'Labora et ora 1894'. It also has a sundial on the front elevation, but this is often obscured by foliage.

On the right, a little further along Digby Drive, is Stonecroft [36]. It is a 17th century Grade II listed property, but the datestone of 1626 may be a 20th century addition as it is not shown on early photographs of the house. An extension to the rear is by C F A Voysey. Note the single storey garden room with a Collyweston slate roof and a stone mullion window near the drive entrance.



Stonecroft was the home and surgery of Dr William Newman (1833-1903). He was instrumental in the design of Stamford Hospital and his books about surgical techniques are still used today. His patron was the Earl of Ancaster. (Stamford & Rutland Hospital)

Return to the entrance to the church drive via Chapel Lane and Church Street, noticing on the left the gazebo and garden wall adjacent to the north entrance to North Luffenham Hall [37]. This was built by the Harrington family in 1538.

Walk down to the church of St John the Baptist, passing the entrance to the former Rectory [38] on the left. In the long wall which runs down the west side of the drive [39], which was built in 1725, notice the 'dole hole', a loaf shaped piercing of the wall about halfway down towards the church, used for giving alms to the poor.

Follow the wall to the south part of the churchyard and look over the low wall to the west. Here you will see the ha-ha [40] which was at the front of the original North Luffenham Hall. The Hall, then known as Old Manor House, was purchased by Sir Gilbert Heathcote in 1764 but it later fell into disuse and John Wing was paid to demolish it in 1806. The old stone and lead was sold to three Stamford tradesmen for £500.

In the churchyard to the south of the church is an area set aside for the graves of men who died in accidents whilst serving in home and Commonwealth air forces [41]. It is immaculately maintained by the Parochial Church Council in association with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and is well worth visiting.

Whilst in the churchyard, look for the headstone of Elsie and Guy Fenwick, who lived at North Luffenham Hall before World War II. It is near the north-east corner of the churchyard and is inscribed as follows:

Elsie Fenwick
1874-1938
Medaille de la Reine Elizabeth of Belgium
1914-1918 La Panne
Guy Fenwick MBE JP
1867-1937
Royal Bucks Hussars 1914-1918
4th Grand National on Wynot 1895
No truer friends or greater sportsmen



St John the Baptist's Church in 1797 by John Feilding. (Rutland County Museum)

The church of St John the Baptist [1] is normally open for visitors. It has many interesting features to see, including:

- The tower west window to the memory of Edward Arthur Irons MA, a former rector of the parish; a name familiar to local historians in Rutland for his 'notes'.
- The sedilia, referred to by Pevsner as 'the finest piece of display in the church'.
- The brass plaque on the back wall of the sedilia to the memory of Archdeacon Robert Johnson, the founder of schools and hospitals in Oakham and Uppingham. He was rector of North Luffenham from 1574 until his death in 1625. He was buried on 24 July 1725, but his place of burial is not recorded.
- The C14 stained glass in the chancel north windows. These were reconstructed in 1870 from the remains of windows which were damaged following the siege of the original North Luffenham Hall in 1642-43.
- The RAF window in the south aisle, and the RAF and RCAF flags.
- The large wooden model of the church in the south aisle, made by E F Spencer in 1976.
- The painted decoration round a south aisle arch.
- The monument to Susanna, Henry Noel's first wife which was defaced by parliamentary forces during the Civil War, losing the nose and the fingers of both hands.

Acknowledgements

Elizabeth Bryan, David Carlin, Mr and Mrs Conant, Tim Hawkins, Sheila Sleath and Janet Whittaker.

Robert Ovens

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Based on the Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 25" to 1 mile map of 1904

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