

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HARBURY

Harbury stands on a ridge of lias limestone covered by clay which was deposited when the last ice age retreated.

Highways

Ridges were used by early man as highways because they were sparsely wooded and drier than the lowlands. One prehistoric route was Lear Street, which ran from Wappenbury to Wormleighton through Harbury, following the line of the present day Church Terrace and Ivy Lane. Bronze Age cooking pits, discovered at Sharmer Farm, to the north-west of the village, have been carbon-dated at 1400 BC, providing the earliest evidence of human presence in Harbury.

The unusual combination of a hill-top location and a good water supply made the area attractive to the later Iron Age people who sought good defensive sites. The name Harbury is a relatively recent contraction of Herberbury meaning Hereburgh's byrig – the camp or fortified settlement of the people of Hereburgh.

The Romans

The Roman occupation left little mark on Harbury itself, although the neighbouring parish of Chesterton is rich in Roman associations. The Fosse Way, a Roman military road, built round 72 AD at the frontier of Romanised Britain, forms the western boundary of today's parish. It was used as a route to the interior by successive waves of invaders from the east, and centuries later its upkeep was to prove a burden for the inhabitants of Harbury.

The Saxons

The Saxons came from the north and east, probably following the Fosse Way, and settled here. They cleared the forest and carved out communal fields. Farming was on the 'three field system', one field for wheat, one for barley, and one field fallow. The crops were rotated each year to allow the land to recover its fertility. Animals were pastured on the fallow field and on the commons. The large 'open fields' were ploughed by the village as a whole, for a plough would need a team of eight oxen to draw it. The system of ploughing produced an undulating effect known as 'ridge and furrow' and over the years this became more pronounced, which was useful, enabling individual holdings to be identified and providing a simple drainage system. It is still possible to see some remnants of ridge and furrow in the fields surrounding Harbury today.

The Normans

The Norman Conquest brought social and political changes and especially changes in the system of land tenure, for William I rewarded his followers with grants of land in Britain.

Much of the land was owned by absentee landlords and changed hands with great regularity. Interested parties between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries included the Earls of Warwick and Leicester, the monasteries of Coventry, Nuneaton and Kenilworth, and the Knights Templar, who gave their name to Temple End. Harbury is listed in the Domesday book as 'Edburberie' and is described as being 'laid waste by the King's men'.

Agriculture

But although the landlords changed, the methods of farming stayed essentially the same until the late 18th century. In 1740 the village is called 'Hungry Harbury' because the land is 'poor and unproductive'. The majority of Harbury inhabitants were employed in agriculture until the start of the century. Flour was produced at the windmill which dates back to 1779, though the present structure was built in the early 1800s. It ceased production at the outbreak of the second world war.

The Railway

In 1847 the eminent civil engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel commenced building the Oxford to Birmingham branch of the Great Western Railway and the line was opened in 1852.

It necessitated creating a cutting half a mile long and 110 feet deep and was the deepest one in the world at that time. The removal of soil and rock was done with pick and shovel, by the navvies, aided by somewhat crude blasting with black powder. The local inns in the village multiplied and would have done a great trade at this time as the navvies capacity for ale was immense.

In January 2015 the cutting made the national news when a major landslide caused the closure of the Chiltern Line for 6 weeks – 350,000 tons of unstable rock and earth had to be removed and the embankment stabilised.

The Quarry

The railway provided access for Harbury Quarry which had been quarrying the blue lias limestone for cement since 1820. In 1927 and 1928 the skeletons of an ichthyosaur and a plesiosaur were found which are now in the Natural History Museum.

Education

One of the earliest stone buildings in the village was the school, founded in 1611 by Thomas Wagstaffe, it provided education for local children until it closed in 1967, when a new one was built in the centre of the village.

Harbury Heritage Centre

The Heritage Centre is home to a vast collection of historical documents and photographs relating to the village and surrounding area.

Visitors are most welcome (see our website for opening times)



Harbury Heritage Centre, Harbury School, Mill Street, Harbury CV33 9HR
www.harburyheritage.org.uk email: harburyheritage.org.uk



HARBURY HERITAGE CENTRE VILLAGE GUIDE



VILLAGE GUIDE



1 Harbury Windmill in 1930 complete with its sails



1 Harbury Windmill today



2 One of Harbury's oldest houses



3 The Manor House



4 The interior of the Heritage Centre



7 All Saints Church in 1820



7 All Saints Church today



5 Chapel Street and the windmill in 1910



6 Ivy Lane in 1910

10 Aerial photo of the cutting landscape in 2015

10 The cutting before the landslip

9 One of Harbury's last thatched cottages



8 A photo of Wagstaffe School on the day it closed in 1967



8 Wagstaffe School building today

Harbury WW1 Blue Plaque Trail:

Established by the community in 2017, the trail commemorates the men of Harbury who lost their lives during WW1

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|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Edmund Astell | 7 Albert Marlow | 13 Gabriel Overton |
| 2 Harry Gardner | Fred Padbury | 14 Reuben Barfoot |
| 3 Brian Osbourne | 8 Raymond John Brooks | 15 William Lancaster |
| 4 Clement Gascoigne | 9 Albert Victor Wyatt | 16 Malcolm Gordon Bland |
| 5 Frederick Owen Young | 10 Frederick Charles Field | Robert Lamplough Mann |
| 6 Reginald John Beardsworth | 11 Ernest Ivins | Bernard Turner |
| | 12 Ernest Edward Gurden | 17 James Thomas Walker |

