

Streets in Covington

The basic layout of streets in Covington has remained more or less the same for centuries, unlike the names. In 1801, what is now The Gorse Road was called Spaldwick Road. Long Lane led up from the B645 or Three Shire Lane as it was in 1764, or Turnpike as it was in 1801. The stretch from Bottom Farm to Cross Street was referred to as Low Street in the 1881 Census. From the Cross Street junction northwards was known as Crow's Nest Street in the 18th century and Milton Street in 19th century. The 1901 census refers to Keyston Road as Main Street.

The Village School:

Covington Board School opened in 1876 as a direct result of the 1870 Education Act. The main instigator in its construction on land owned by the Duke of Manchester was the Reverend Watson, Rector of the Parish. However, there is evidence of some sort of education being provided in the village before this time: in 1854 there was a 'small Sunday school'; in 1861, a schoolmistress, Sarah Lines, is recorded in the census, and a 'day school supported by voluntary subscriptions' is recorded in an 1869 Huntingdonshire Directory. The school had places for 40 children but never reached this attendance. Indeed attendance was a constant problem with children being absent for picking wildflowers, stormy weather, fox hunting and 'late dinner' as well as ill health. The school closed in 1921 with the children being bussed to Tilbrook. However, with the arrival of several evacuees, the school reopened for the duration of WW2. Villagers recall the playground being dug up for food production and parties for the children being held by the Americans stationed at Kimbolton Airfield. The old school has now been renovated by the Village and has a new lease of life as The Village Hall.

The Church:

There has been much confusion over the years as to whether this is the Church of All Saints or of St. Margaret but in 1960 it was confirmed that the dedication was to All Saints but St. Margaret's Day was the day of consecration. The advowson is with the Fitzwilliam family but previous patrons include John of Gaunt. The earliest recorded incumbent is Richard de Baiocis who retired in 1293. In 1720 the living was valued at £79 19s 7d and apparently there was some reluctance to attend services - 'They will not come often' reports the Archdeacon in his Visitation. In 1762 a Penance was performed in the Church whereby a woman, covered in a white sheet from shoulder to the floor, stood on a box to publicly confess and acknowledge her offence of incest. In the early 19th century, Petitions were made to the Archdeacon for a band of non-conformists to meet in 'dwelling houses' and, later, a corrugated-iron Methodist chapel was erected.

The People:

Covington has always been a small community based on farming, however the population is now half the 162 it was in 1851. Few families currently resident can trace relatives in the village back more than one hundred years, but one family is recorded as being represented in Covington for more than four hundred years.

Wills show several wealthy tenant farmers from the 17th century onwards but the rest of the population were not so lucky. The main employment was on the land and 19th century Poor Law records regularly show Covington residents being supported either in the village itself or in the workhouse at Thrapston. Accounts dated 1786 detail the income provided by the sale of local wildlife such as hare, quail, rabbits, pheasant and woodcock. Apart from agricultural workers, other occupations in 1881 included 13 lacemakers (aged 12 to 77 years), dressmakers, bricklayer, servants, shepherd, shoemaker and (traction) engine driver. There was also a grocers shop, a public house and a post office. An 18th century map shows evidence of a second Ale House, The Three Pigeons, but this has long since disappeared.

Well kept farm records give a good idea of the crops grown, such as barley, oats, wheat, beans, and the animals kept (sheep, cattle, horses, pigs). One large farm made £70 8s 0d profit from buying and selling sheep and lambs in 1739. Much more recently, the health and well-being of named shire horses can be tracked through the records.

Several individuals stand out: the Rector who was defrocked for taking services while drunk; Major Barnett, who chaired the Parish Meeting before going off to the trenches at Ypres where he perished; Sarah Lines (Lions) who was variously postmistress, schoolmistress and lacemaker; John Simpson, wealthy 18th century landowner who lived at Covington Hall; Rev. R. Watson who was instrumental in setting up Covington Board School and carried out frequent visitations to ensure all was in order.

Sources:

Our knowledge about Covington comes from written documents, maps, photographs, oral reminiscences and archaeology. Many people have been involved in gathering what we know and we continue to investigate and learn.

All historical information in this document is given in good faith. Please see www.covington.org.uk for further details.

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Covington



History Trail

Covington is a small village situated on a fertile south facing ridge at the junction of Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire.

It is thought that the name derives from the Saxon Cova's Farm, although there were definitely Romans here and there is evidence in the landscape of even earlier peoples. In the Domesday Book, Covington is mentioned as Covintune. The Church itself dates from the 12th century but there was a previous structure on this site. In recompense for services rendered during the Conquest, William presented the Manor to Roger d'Ivry from Ivry la Bataille in Normandy. A second Manor is attributable to the Bovetune family and records show a frequent transfer of manorial rights throughout the mediaeval period. The village was enclosed early by the Duke of Manchester in 1764, followed by further enclosure by Act of Parliament in 1803.

We have glimpses of 17th and 18th century Covington: The Old Hall is inscribed with the date 1659 and several other buildings, such as the Red Cow and Varneys, date to this period. Hearth Tax records survive, as does a Composite Register dating back to 1804. Wills and probate documents help give some idea of property.

The 19th century brought significant changes to the village. A new rectory was built in 1837. From 1866, thanks to the coming of the railway the Rector was able to purchase his ale from Burton, on Trent, and ten years later, the school opened. The history of 20th century Covington is dominated by a diminishing population, changes in farming practices, and WW2. The last person to be remembered carrying pails of milk on a yoke was strafed with bullets from an unknown plane as he walked back to his farm. Could an iron trouser buttons found near a hedge have belonged to someone manning the nearby searchlight?

Have an enjoyable walk back in time!

TO START THE TRAIL, turn left from the Village Hall car park...

COVINGTON TRAIL MAP



- The Village Hall:** built and opened as Covington Board School in 1876. The school closed in 1920 but was reopened for the duration of WW2 when the village received a number of evacuee children.
- All Saints Church:** only the nave remains of the original 12th century church but there is evidence of an earlier structure - see information sheet inside. The earliest recorded incumbent is Richard (de Baiocis) who retired in 1293.
- The Manor:** the present private residence dates from 1735 and is on an ancient moated site.
- Church Lane:** brick Victorian cottages contemporary with the Village Hall. There were originally 4 cottages with a central alleyway.
- Dukes Cottages:** built by the Duke of Manchester who enclosed large areas of the village in 1764.
- Fairy's Lodge Farm:** named after a prominent 19th century family holding one of the manorial estates and well represented in Village documents and the churchyard! An isolation hospital (now demolished) was built 1km NW of the farm after the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918.
- Letter box:** a variety of buildings have hosted Covington Post Office over the past 140 years, as can be seen from letter box 'shadows' in the brickwork.
- Pond:** one of the village pumps was sited here until the early 20th century when the water quality was deemed so bad that a water diviner was appointed to locate an alternative supply.
- The Red Cow:** this was originally an ale house (no spirits were allowed because there was no ladies toilet until the mid 1950s) but closed as a pub in 1989. The men of the village retired here to sit on the benches after working on the allotments.
- Varneys:** dating back to the 17th century, this was formerly a shepherd's house. It was withdrawn from a sale in 1940 for £39.
- Rookery Farm:** originally a farmhouse dating from 1690 but more recent activities have included a fruit farm, the breeding of show rabbits and a collection point for unwanted (but very useful) material from local American airbases.

- 12. 16 and 18 Keyston Road:** these houses replace semidetached thatched cottages, which in 1871 housed the post office and the school mistress.
- 13. Three 19th century agricultural workers' cottages.**
- 14. The Old Rectory:** built by Fitzwilliam (patron of the Church living) in 1837 for The Reverend Alphonsius Binns. A later Rector, The Reverend Watson, was instrumental in setting up the school in 1876.
- 15. Cloney Pond:** this pond (used for watering horses) is thought to have been part of the moat of the mediaeval manor house, the site of which lies just to the north.
- 16. Railway Line (disused):** The Kettering, Thrapston and Huntingdon Railway opened in 1866 with the nearest station being Kimbolton. The line (now Midland Railway) was in use for passengers and goods until 1963.
- 17. Yesterfield:** site of the original rectory and an apple orchard. Rector Sam Taylor (1698) was given leave to live elsewhere as the rectory was too small and 'ruinous'!
- 18. The Old Hall:** dates back to 17th century with Victorian additions. It was the home of John Simpson, a prominent local squire (d.1799). In the early 20th century, traction engines from here were used throughout the local area.
- 19. Ferndale:** originally of lath and plaster construction and dating back to 15th century with later brick extensions. The scene of an incident with a gun resulting in the death of one Mr. 'Beau' Bloodworth (reputedly a fox-keeper for the local hunt).
- 20. The cutting:** Covington Home Guard practised throwing handgrenades into the turrets of invading German tanks by sitting in the doddle trees above the cutting and throwing stones into the back of a pickup.
- 21. Bottom Farm:** dates from 1808 although it appears on an earlier enclosure map. South of Bottom Farm is the site of **The Three Pigeons**, an 18th century alehouse shown on a map dated 1764.
- 22. Chapel:** there was a strong non-conformist element in 19th century Covington with permission being given for meetings to be held in residents' houses prior to the construction of a red corrugated iron Methodist chapel.
- 23. Between the drive up to The Manor and Cross Street,** there were **four cottages** which were demolished in the early 1960s. 19th century census data shows that occupants of these cottages included agricultural labourers and lacemakers.