

Early Days

It has been estimated that a viable settlement here at Willoughby on the Wolds might have been made about 600 AD, but, in addition to what little is known of the Romans at Vernemetum on the Fosse Way, the earliest documentary evidence available is found in the Domesday Book (1086).

It appears that, pre-1066, the majority of the land here was in the hands of six thegns -- Odincar, Godric, Ernwin, Esbern, Wulfmer and Algar. Also pre-1066, there were 6 sokemen (free men), 10 villeins (feudal tenants) and 28 bordars (cottagers) holding land. This area was in the Danelaw region - mainly Lincs., Notts., Derbys., Leics., and Rutland.

After the Conquest, King William rewarded his own people with large grants of land. In this area there were 4 Norman tenants-in-chief, namely, Roger de Busli, William Peverel, Roger of Poitou and Henry of Ferrers. In the Domesday Book Willoughby is referred to as 'Wilgebi' or 'Willebi'. One theory is that the name derives from numerous willow trees growing by the brook. Peverel's land remained more or less intact in the hands of the Colwick family up to the 14th century. De Busli's land, however, was subjected to many sub-tenancies, hence the origins of the Manor.

The Knights Hospitalers also acquired land through sub-tenures, which became the property of Worksop Priory, until Henry VIII's heavy-handed dissolution of the monasteries. While ownership changed down the years, the land was worked by the villagers continuously. The common pasture and three great open fields - Nether, Upper and Heaning - surrounding the village, formed the Parish. The fields were owned in strips: each was a furrow long (220 yds.) and a chain wide (22 yds) [1 furlong x 1 chain = 1 acre.], and to even out the good and poor land, an owner's strips were widely scattered round the fields.

The grazing on the pasture was common to all. The village was self-sufficient, with the villagers dependent on each other working for and maintaining the communal system of production.

The strip-farming system continued in this village (in contrast to many others) until 1799, when the Inclosure Act of 1793 was put into effect, creating no less than an economic and social revolution, and creating changes to the landscape that remain visible today.