

## FARNSFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER SPRING/SUMMER 2026

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Website: <http://farnsfieldlhs.co.uk>

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### FLHS St Michael's Graveyard Inscription Project

By Gill Sarre

We are making good progress with photographing, inscription recording and researching the many old gravestones in churchyard. Some are easy to read, but others provide quite a challenge. Many are made of sandstone which erodes over time.



Inscription recording during Caring for God's Acre, Love your Burial Week, June 2025



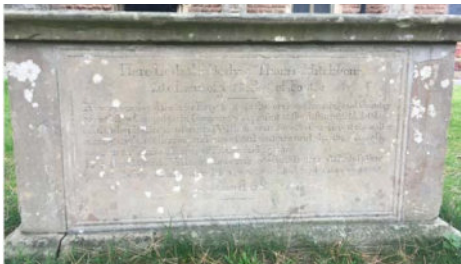
Sunlight makes an enormous difference to legibility! Strong torch light, angled to catch the carved lettering can also help.

Churchyard plans of the oldest sections of the graveyard, drawn up in 1960s, have been very helpful in identifying who is buried in plots with some of the most difficult to read or illegible gravestones. In the lower area of the

graveyard, Polly Illingworth has created a plan for the right hand section based on parish burial plot records. This has provided a really useful framework for the recording task. It has helped to reveal where a gravestone is now missing and some have been rediscovered from underneath banks of ivy or self-seeded holly trees. It is a delicate balance between conserving both the gravestones and the ancient wildlife habitat that graveyards provide. The resources and advice produced by the conservation charity Caring for God's Acre provide excellent guiding principles for this task.

We will be having another inscription recording session in the graveyard during Love your Burial Ground Week this year which runs from 6<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> June. The session is planned for Friday 12<sup>th</sup> June, from 11.00 a.m., weather permitting. The Stories behind the Stones, self-guided graveyard trail packs will also be in the church porch throughout the week so you can read more about some of the people buried here.

The inscriptions themselves can offer a great deal of information about the life of the deceased, as in the case of Thomas Hitchbone below.



Here Lieth the Body of Thomas Hitchbone  
Late Lieu<sup>t</sup> of y<sup>e</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> Reg<sup>t</sup> of Foot

He was employ'd for near Forty Years in the service of  
King and Country  
Serv'd five Campaigns in Germany, was present at the  
distinguished Battles  
of Minden, Fellinghaufen. And Wilhelmstat. & was in  
Garrison in Gibraltar  
during the long. Glorious, and successful defence. made  
by that Fortress,  
against the United Forces of France and Spain.  
He retired to this Village, where respected and beloved  
the last few  
peaceful days of his active life, were terminated  
September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1800  
Aged 68

However most tell us very little and often key pieces of information may have worn away. Research records such as birth, marriage and death records and census information can help to reveal details of those buried here.



*SACRED*  
to the memory of  
JAMES DENMAN  
who  
January ? 1823  
In the ?2 Year of his life

Local newspapers can also provide extraordinary information, as in this report of James Denman's sudden and untimely death.

**SUDDEN DEATH** – *Mr James Denman, butcher, of Farnsfield. Notts, while in the act of settling an account on Monday afternoon last, was struck in an instant with death, and expired in the arms of his wife without a groan or a struggle. He had killed a beast that morning: and not many minutes before the awful visitation, he was standing at the slaughter-house door viewing a pony race. He was in his 52<sup>nd</sup> year and has left a widow and nine children to deplore the loss of a kind parent, an excellent neighbour, and an honest tradesman.*

**17<sup>th</sup> January 1823, Stamford Mercury**

Other inscription sessions can be arranged, so if you would like to get involved in those or in doing some research then do get in touch.

## The Angry Letter Sent by the People of ASHILL Norfolk to the Gentlemen of the Parish 1816

By Philip Marsh



Illustration of villagers meeting to discuss enclosures  
<https://islesproject.wordpress.com/>

My book **Lieutenant Joshua Gregory – His Life in Context**, has in section 9, *Changing Fortunes*, a description of the causes and effect of the economic downturn which followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars and its effect on Britain, Europe and the Gregory family in particular during the time they were living in Farnsfield. The letter which follows highlights another factor influencing the situation at the time, namely the effects that the various Enclosure Acts, which were introduced from roughly the middle of the 18th century and continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were having on communities.

Although an important step in the campaign to improve agricultural practices and therefore increase food production, Enclosure had its downside, particularly for the poor. The Feudal system consisted of three large open fields divided into strips which were awarded to individuals, the number awarded being based on their historic rights. Enclosure involved dividing the land into fields of various sizes, which required fence and hedge boundaries to be established, and awarding them to individuals again using their historic entitlement.

The anonymous letter shows the effect the enclosure system was having on the poorer inhabitants of Ashill, a parish near Watton, Norfolk, in 1816. Farnsfield had been enclosed in 1777/8 – Ashill, was subject to the Enclosure of its medieval fields in the year 1786.

The experience of ordinary people was probably shared by both villages at the time. Although they had been awarded land equivalent to their holding under the three field system, they were unable to erect fencing and plant the hedges around their land, as required under the terms of the Enclosure Acts, due to the costs involved. They were therefore obliged to sell their land so became dependent on the new owners for their future employment.

Thus poorer people were forced to remain bound to a wealthy landowner in exactly the same way as they had been under the Feudal System of the medieval era. They also lost their rights to pasture on the common land and could no longer drive their pigs into the woods in autumn to forage for acorns and beech nuts.

**This letter sets out their grievances in their own words. I quote from the reference at the National Archives at Kew:**

The period from 1815 – 1820 was a time of general political and social unrest. With Napoleon's defeat in 1815, around 400,000 men from the armed services were thrown onto a saturated labour market. This caused great economic and social stresses evident in mass under- and unemployment and a continued rise in poor rate expenditure.

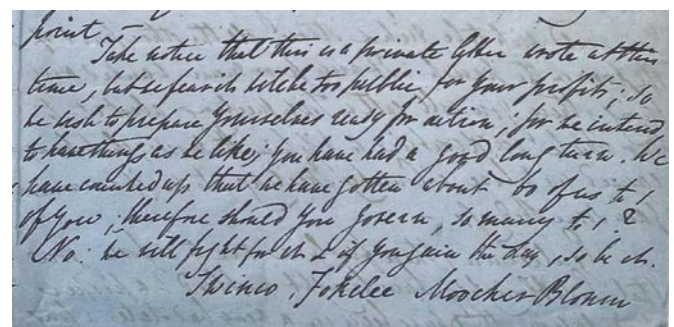
In grain producing areas like East Anglia, farmers found that grain prices slumped while rents did not. They turned to cutting wages and laying workers off. In April and May 1816, rising unemployment and grain (thus bread) prices caused a series of disturbances often known as the 'Bread or Blood' riots.

After earlier riots across East Anglia, disturbances broke out at Littleport and Ely in Cambridgeshire, with the poor demanding money and destroying property. Local Magistrates responded by ordering further poor relief and promising to fix a minimum wage. At the same time, however, they called in local yeomanry cavalry and troops. This anonymous letter reveals the economic hardship faced by poorer parts of society. They show collective reasoning about why living standards were falling and what they themselves might do about it. A copy of the letter was sent by Rev. Bartholomew Edwards, Ashill near Watton, Norfolk, to the Home Secretary on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1816.

In his covering letter, Edwards explained that the threatening letter had been found at the entrance gate to his house. He deemed it a 'confirmation of the Spirit which prevails in this Neighbourhood'. The original was kept in the hope that the author might be identified from their handwriting.

National Archive Catalogue and Reference:  
H042/150

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C1905769>



Note: Curiously, what could be three signatures at the bottom of the letter are not shown or commented on in the transcript. They appear to read: Twinco, Fokelee and Mocher Blonin

Are these the nicknames of the perpetrators?

The injustice brought about by some aspects of the Enclosure Acts was the cause of much ill feeling and comment at the time as shown in one version of a poem which seems to have originated in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and appeared in The Tickler Magazine in 1821.

*The law locks up the man or woman  
Who steals the goose from off the common  
But leaves the greater villain loose  
Who steals the common off the goose*

*The law demands that we atone  
When we take things we do not own  
But leaves the lords and ladies fine  
Who take things that are yours or mine*

*The poor and wretched don't escape  
If they conspire the law to break  
This must be so, but they endure  
Those who conspire to make the law*

*The law locks up the man or woman  
Who steals the goose from off the common  
And geese will still a common lack  
Till they go and steal it back*

Anonymous

## Transcript of the letter

To the Gentlemen of the parish of Ashill, Norfolk. This is to inform you that you have by this time brought us under the heaviest burden & into the hardest yoke we ever knowed; it is hard for us to bear; you have oftentimes blinded us saying the fault was all in the Place – men of Parliament; but now you have opened our eyes, we know they have a great power, but they have nothing to do with the regulation of this Parish.

You do as you like, you rob the poor of their Commons right, plough the grass up that God send to grow, that a poor man may not feed a Cow, Pig, horse, nor Ass; lay muck and stones on the Road to prevent the grass growing. If a poor man is out of work, & wants a day or two's work you will give him s6 per week, & then a little man that does not employ a labourer at all, must help to pay for your work doing, which will bring them chargeable to the Parish. There is 5 or 6 of you have gotten all the whole of the Land in this parish in your own hands & you would wish to be rich & starve all the other part of the poor of the parish: if any poor man wanted anything, there you will call a Town meeting about it, to hear which could contrive to hiss him the most, which have caused us to have a County Meeting to see if we cannot gain some Redress –

Gentlemen, these few lines are to inform you that God Almighty have brought our blood to a proper circulation, that have been in a very bad state a long time & now without an alteration of the aforesaid, we mean to circulate your blood with the leave of God. And we do not intend to give you but a very short time to consider about it, as we have gotten one or two of the head on our side. There was 2 cows & an ass feeding on the road last Saturday & there was 2 farmers went to the keepers & said they would pound them, if they did not drive them away; one of them candidly went home, got a plough and horses & ploughed the grass up that (growd) on the road.

We deem the Miller to be full as big a rogue as you farmers for if the wheat rise s1 per coomb\*, he will then raise 2d per stone: So we shall drive the whole.....& knock down the Mill, set fire to all beggarlys.....houses & stacks as we go along; we shall begin in the Night.

And the first man that refuse to join the Combination shall suffer death in a moment, or the first person that is caught saying anything

against the same, shall suffer death. We have had private ambushers round us for some time, and by this time you will find it is coming to a point –

Take notice that this is a private letter wrote at this time, but we fear it will be too public for your profits, so we wish to prepare yourselves ready for action; for we intend to have things as we like, you have had a good long turn. We have counted up that we have gotten about 60 of us to 1 of you. Therefore, should you govern so many to 1? No: We will fight for it, and if you gain the day, so be it.

*\*a coomb is an old unit of volume used for measuring grain, especially in Suffolk and Norfolk. In wheat it is equivalent to 18 stone (Wikipedia)*

## FLHS Exhibition at the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary School Summer Fair, Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June, 12.00 – 5.00pm

It is twenty years since Farnsfield Church School and Walter D'Ayncourt School merged to form St Michael's Church of England Primary School in a brand new building on Branston Avenue. To celebrate the occasion, the school is holding a special 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary summer fair on 13<sup>th</sup> June on the school field.

FLHS will have an exhibition stand showing the history of education in Farnsfield and, in particular, the two schools below with lots of photos!

Hope to see you on this special occasion in the village.



Church School, Main Street



Walter D'Ayncourt School

## A Walk Down Main Street in 1966

By Judith Milnes

This year I shall have lived in Farnsfield for 60 years. David and I bought Long Acre in September 1966 just before we were married. We paid £4450 for it when the average house price was £3568. Average pay in those days was £1,220 p.a. for a man and a mere £630 p.a. for a woman. The average weekly income for a household was £24.2s.3d, state pension £5 p.w., petrol 5/3d a gallon and milk 5d a pint. When we came to the village the bottom part of the Ridgeway was being built but not the estate higher up than Ridgeway Close.

The Plough is possibly the least changed building on Main Street, although inside it had separate rooms. The Wheatsheaf may still have been a public house. It had a plaque outside indicating cyclists were welcome.



Who remembers Arthur Musson's cobbler's shop on the corner of Quaker Lane and Main Street? He was there for years,

busy until leather soled shoes and little metal or rubber heels on women's shoes gave way to synthetic soles and heels and trainers.

In 1966 there were three butchers in the village, one where Scissors is now, Riley's where Hamiltons is, which was Mick Marshall's for a good number of years. A third was Annabel's on Mansfield Road where Bramley and White is.

Before The Pot Yard was built in the 1980s by George Rhodes, there was a garage run by Les Widdowson, with petrol pumps by the road and sheds for repairing cars. It is called The Pot Yard as the village pottery had been there at one time and we regularly dug up bits of broken terracotta with a black glazed lining.

The Post Office on the corner was a busy shop with living accommodation at the rear and beyond that a room where the mail was sorted by our postmen and postwomen. There was even an afternoon delivery. Just imagine!



*Garage and Post Office 1960s*

Atherley's was a tiny shop where Paul's grandmother served. They have expanded it over the years, both the shop and the bakery at the rear. Paul joined his father, Bill, when he left school, as James has done. The house is reputedly the oldest house in the village.

On the other side of our house was David Hutchings the Chemists. In 1966 the village was small enough that he could manage with just two assistants. Perhaps the residents did not run to the doctor's so often as we had just one doctor, Dr. McRobbie who had a small surgery at his house on Station Lane. Recently Annabel Hutchings and I were recalling the dark brown cough medicine her father used to make.



*New Inn*

At about the time we moved here the New Inn (and its skittle alley) on the corner of Tippings Lane was being demolished to make way for a new pub to be called the Warwick Arms, named after the brewery. That had various landlords over the years with different ideas to bring in clientele but now, of course, it is our spanking new Co-op. How we missed it in the weeks it was closed, but sixty

years ago we had other choices for groceries, greengroceries and newspapers. The Co-op had previously been where The Rustic Crust is now. Mr Parkin, the manager, walked to work from Edingley. No self-service in those days, nor in any of the other shops. That building stood empty for some years, becoming an eyesore on Main Street until the owners of the Rustic Crust put in a planning application to have a pizzeria there. They were just about ready to open when Covid struck and all their hard work had to be put on hold. How good it looks now with the hanging baskets and the little courtyard at the side.

The low building to the left of them was called the Bus Stop because that is where the bus to Mansfield stopped. After Swallows bought the business that was there and traded from what is now Le Petit Vert it became at one time a hairdresser's but many will remember when Charlie Buchan had a Pot Shop there. He would go to Staffordshire and buy china and pottery to sell cheaply in the shop.

Eaton Close was built on what was land for Redfern's coaches. It adjoined George Rhodes' builder's yard. He lived in the house down the drive at the side of Le Petit Vert and there was a



sign advertising him as a builder and Funeral Director. That building has been a general store and newsagents run by Jean Swallow and her mother when we first lived here and we have seen a variety of owners until Simon gave it up a few years ago.

*Swallow's General Store & the village road sweeper. He used to store his cart and brooms in the lock-up.*

Gone are the days when you couldn't get a cup of tea or coffee in the village. You just had it when you got home, or you called in for a pint at one of the pubs. The Red Lion had a place on the right hand side where you could fill up a jug and take it away.

*If Judith has stirred your memories of Farnsfield in days gone by, we'd love to hear from you!*

### **Thomas Wombwell (Wombell) and his sons William, Frederick, Albert and Robert Wombwell**

Thomas was born 1850 and baptised on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1851 at St Giles Church, Edingley. He was the son of William and Mary Ann(e) Wombell (nee Marshall). In the 1851 census William is a servant to Reverend J. D. Becher and living close to the Edingley Mill with Mary Ann, their daughter Emily and baby Thomas. Emily was baptised in Farnsfield on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1848 so presumably the family were living there at the time. The family moved back to Farnsfield and in 1861 William, Mary Ann and their five sons were living on Principal Street (Main Street). Thomas was a pupil at Farnsfield School.

Thomas found work as a farm servant but in 1868, at the age of 18, he went to London and enlisted with the Grenadier Foot Guards. On his attestation paper there is a hand written note, obviously added at a later date: *"Gave notice of his desire to continue in the service beyond 21 years therefore consenting to the application to him of Part II Army Act 1881"*



Thomas was promoted a number of times; to Corporal on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1872, to Serjeant on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1874, to Colour Serjeant 12<sup>th</sup> February 1877 and to Quartermaster Serjeant on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1880.

Thomas married Ellen Roberts and they lived at the Chelsea

Barracks. By 1881, they had moved to the Wellington Barracks, London, the home of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Grenadier Guards with their four young sons, William (b.1874), Frederick (b.1876), Albert (b. 1878) and Robert (b. 1880) and a live-in nursemaid/domestic servant. They later had three daughters, Mabel (b. 1882), Maud (b. 1884) and Ellen (b. 1886).

Thomas was awarded the Queen's Egypt Medal after service at Tel-el-Kebir. From 4<sup>th</sup> March 1891 he also served as a Yeoman Warder. He was discharged on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1891 and took on the job of coffee bar manager at the barracks. He died 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1895 in London.

William, Frederick, Albert and Robert Wombwell all followed in their father's footsteps and had military careers.

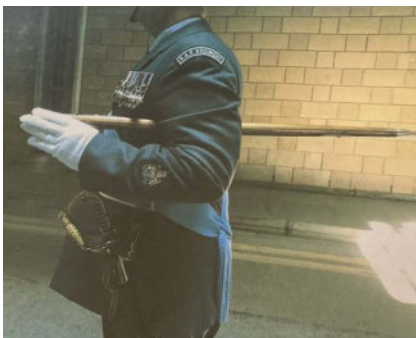


Standing L to R: Robert, Frederick, Albert.  
William seated

William Henry Thomas Wombwell served as a Warrant Officer, Class 1 and a Colour Sergeant in the Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort's Own); a driver in the Royal Field Artillery, Acting Lance Corporal in the Army Ordnance Corps and was also Sergeant Major in the King's African Rifles.



Flight Lieutenant Albert Wombwell had a very distinguished career. He served as the principal Drill Instructor at RAF Uxbridge from 1920 to 1926. Known as 'Stiffy', he trained, amongst others, T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia). He was awarded the OBE in 1926.



The tradition of parading 'Stiffy's stick' is still held in his honour on the first and last day of the mounts at the London Palaces.

Albert retired to Clacton where he ran the Marine Hotel with his wife Helen. They apparently always ate oysters for breakfast!



Albert's funeral in Clacton in 1936

In the 1901 census, Robert and Frederick were both living at the barracks at Caterham, Corporals in the Grenadier Guards.



Robert pictured here in 1909 when was a Sergeant Drummer in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Grenadier Guards

In 1941 Robert became principal door keeper to the House of Lords. He was clearly an imposing figure, after all those years in the military.

When he left, a report appeared in the Nottingham Evening Post on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1945

#### Peers' Doorkeeper

*A familiar figure left Westminster when Parliament adjourned for the Easter recess. He is Mr. Robert Wombwell, principal doorkeeper to the House of Lords since 1941. Many peers and officials shook hands with him when the House rose.*

*No one visiting the Lords could possibly doubt that Mr. Wombwell had served in the Guards. His straight back and military carriage were unmistakable. They hear him shout, "House up" down the Royal Gallery, and hurry to the entrance to bow to the Mace was a fine thing.*

*One of his proudest possessions is his discharge certificate from the Army. It records: "One of the finest N.C.O.s that have ever served in the Regiment."*

**The photographs and most of the information has come from the family records of Tony Bak who is a descendent of Thomas Wombwell of Farnfield. We are very grateful for his generosity in sharing his fascinating family history.**

## Local History Organisations, Resources and Events

- **Nottinghamshire Local History Association (NLHA)**

<https://nlha.org.uk/>

Formed in 1953 to bring together people and organisations interested in all aspects of local history in the county. FLHS is a member organisation. NLHA produces a bi-annual publication 'The Nottinghamshire Historian', promotes the meetings of affiliated local history groups and a useful list of local history speakers. It also runs 2 day-schools a year offering a variety of local history talks.

- **Nottinghamshire Family History Society (NFHS)**

<https://nottsflhs.org>

Meetings are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month at the Nottinghamshire Archives. Most are also available to watch online via Zoom. NFHS has a members' research room at the Galleries of Justice in Nottingham. Membership costs £13 a year individual or £16 joint and includes a quarterly newsletter.

- **British Association for Local History (BALH)**

<https://www.balh.org.uk/>

BALH offers both individual and society memberships. FLHS is a society member and this includes insurance cover for our meetings & copies of the 2 publications: The Local Historian and Local History News. You will find a wide range of interesting 10-minute talks on their website that are free and well worth dipping into <https://www.balh.org.uk/ten-minute-talks>

- **Mansfield Library: Hands on Heritage Day, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2026, 10.00 – 2.00**

<https://www.inspireculture.org.uk/whats-on/events/hands-on-heritage-day-2026/>

This is a great showcase for Nottinghamshire Local History. Sadly, FLHS will not be participating this year, but if you're in the area drop in and see all the local history stands and join in the activities.

### **Farnsfield Local History Society** <http://farnsfieldlhs.co.uk>

Meetings held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month in the lower hall at the Village Centre starting at 7.30pm. Visitors are welcome, we ask for a £3 donation on the door. Tea, coffee & biscuits included after the talk.

**Committee:** James Pinder, Chair, Caroline Jenkins, Treasurer, Gill Sarre, Secretary. Lesley Healy, Vice-Chair, Peter Stimson, Graham Foster, Jackie Campbell, Lynn Thompson

#### **Future meetings:**

10<sup>th</sup> June 2026: ***Bits and Bobs***. Items from Granny's attic – can you guess what they are? Bob & Dell Neill

8<sup>th</sup> July 2026: ***Summer Social***

9<sup>th</sup> September: ***Mashed potato sandwiches and bottle top tinsel***. Rose Buckner's post-war world of home-making by Ann Featherstone

14<sup>th</sup> October: ***Lace, slums and the occasional riot!*** The making of Victorian Nottingham By Chris Weir

11<sup>th</sup> November: ***History of Farnsfield*** by Gill Sarre

#### **FLHS Publications**

Available online, at our meetings and in Farnsfield Library:

- **A History of Farnsfield** by Mary Rigg £5.00
- **Memories of Farnsfield** compiled by John Bradbury & Patrick Stevens from the Farnsfield Millennium Oral History Project £3.00
- **Farnsfield to Rainworth, Journey of a Lifetime, Sir Augustus Charles Gregory** by Philip H. Marsh £7.50
- **The Wesleyan Methodist Chapels & School 1799-2012** by Philip H. Marsh £7.50
- **Lieutenant Joshua Gregory – His Life in Context** by Philip H Marsh £9.00

Contact us on: <https://farnsfieldlhs.co.uk/contact-us>