

THAKEHAM PARISH PLAN

3. Thakeham – A Brief History & Description

Thakeham – which means ‘thatched homestead’ is an ancient village, dating back beyond the Domesday Book into Saxon times. Many artefacts including a crock of gold, which have been unearthed by accident, illustrate this fact. You have only to walk down the ancient ‘holloways’ and byways to get a feel for the antiquity of the surroundings.

A short walk to the east from the sports field on Storrington Road leads to Strawberry Lane, which is part of an old drover’s road that is believed to have connected Shoreham to Horsham. This old track predates the church and may have been the main Anglo-Saxon or possibly a Bronze Age route through our parish into the Weald. Many of the old houses in the area have dark cellars and unexplained recesses that could tell a few tales!

Following this ancient track north, you will come to ‘The Street’, the main thoroughfare in the heart of the village, passing the church of St. Mary’s. The church, originally called St Peter and St Paul’s is of Saxon origin and once enjoyed the Royal patronage of King John (of Magna Carta fame). Progressing up The Street, there are a number of properties whose function has changed with the years. Two forges came and went and they are now private homes. The Old Post Office was once a School for Young Ladies. The Street is now part of a conservation area and contains many fine buildings that are both pleasing to the eye and represent a cross section of village life. These include the White Lion Pub which dates from the 15th Century and the village school which dates from 1875.

Walking down the Storrington Road will take you through the deep cuttings and local legend has it that these were apparently carved out by French prisoners during the Napoleonic wars.

On the green, just before Abingworth Hall pond is a stone from where William Penn, who lived for a while in the village, is reputed to have preached. He was a Quaker who was the founder member of the meetings at The Blue Idol, Oldhouse Lane, (where he worshipped) and as the founder of Pennsylvania, later gave his name to that colony in America.

May Day was previously celebrated at Abingworth Hall with the village children dancing around the maypole. This tradition continues today with children from Thakeham First School who dance around the maypole on Village Day held on Chesswood Sports Field in June each year. The notorious Oswald Mosley – founder of the fascist movement in the UK - lived at Abingworth Hall pre-World War II. These days, Abingworth Hall is a hotel hosting groups of walkers interested in exploring the rural surrounds of the South Downs and Weald.

Other famous people connected with Thakeham include the poet Shelley who visited and stayed in Thakeham and the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens who designed Little Thakeham (now a private house again after a period as a hotel).

In 1841 the population of Thakeham was 494 and it was described as an ‘out of the way parish with no resident gentlemen’. More recently, in the 20th Century, houses were built in the Southern part of the Parish, including Crescent Rise and the Davis Estate. Following a parish boundary review in 2000, part of Heath Common formerly in Thakeham moved into the Parish of Washington. Today, Thakeham has a population of around 1,793 living in 723 houses.

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Community spirit has always prevailed in Thakeham but it was made eminently stronger during the Silver Jubilee in 1977 and again during the Millennium celebrations of 2000. Annual Village Day is held in June each year and the Annual Parish Walk takes place on May Day, meeting at the Village Hall usually around 10am (details on the parish website and notice boards). The May Day Walk is very popular with all age groups and around 100 walkers turn out each year. It is an excellent way to learn more about the footpaths and bridleways across the parish. Throughout the year many other traditional community events are held for example, Christmas dinner, Spring lunch/tea, Thakeham Burns Night etc. If you can get up early enough on May Day you can join the local Morris Men greet the sunrise on top of the Downs. Other village events from dances, quiz nights and barbecues utilise local facilities such as the Village Hall which is used by community interest groups and the Parish Council. The adjacent Sports Ground – used and known as Thakeham’s traditional “Village Green” is in regular weekly use for youth football and supports over 200 young players from local schools who make up a number of teams of different ages.

The parish map confirms that the boundaries of our parish extend from north of the A272 near Coneyhurst to the south to just beyond Rydon School. The main road through the parish, the B2139, is very narrow in places as a result of the deep cuttings mentioned earlier – this serves to preserve the rural feel of the area but drivers must take care on the twisting roads and lanes generally in the area.

The A24 and A272 provide the main road links into the area and the majority of people in the community use cars to commute to work. The nearest rail links are at Pulborough and Billingshurst with direct links to London.

The sections that follow capture the responses and relevant issues that were fed back from the completed questionnaires. We have also identified the actions that are required to address the issues raised together with the parties who will work towards resolution.

