

# Watton-at-Stone



Village Guide

# Village Guide: Foreword



Welcome to the Jubilee edition of the village guide. The purpose of the guide is to introduce and update the village's history, buildings, facilities and (new to the guide) to include more information on the churches and offer the opportunity to clubs, organizations and societies within the parish to tell everyone about what they do. This we feel should make the guide relevant everyone.

A lot has happened since the guide's creation in 1988 with new housing, facilities and people, and it can be said that Watton-at-Stone is a thriving village and we hope the guide will reflect this.

Of course, the material derived from memory or historical sources is going to be open to interpretation, and it is not intended that the guide be seen as an absolute authority on the village; the guide has been produced in good faith according to the authors' account.

We hope the new format is easier to read and makes the guide a must-have coffee-table ornament for all to enjoy. and that you will find it interesting and informative. If you have any new information you feel should be in it, please pass this on to either a member of the Conservation Society or the Parish Council so that it will not be lost, and we can consider it for future editions of the guide.

The Conservation society would like to thank all the contributors and advertisers whose efforts and support made this Village Guide possible.

*Peter Knight, Chairman Watton-at-Stone Conservation Society, 2002*

# Introduction

Watton-at-Stone has a population of around 2200 and an area of 3499 acres about half way between Hertford and Stevenage.

The village is 24 miles due north of Charing Cross as the crow flies and, by road; the southern end of the village is 26.75 miles from Shoreditch Church (despite the enthusiastic highway authority who painted the wrong distance on the milestone opposite Rivershill in the mid-1970s).

The parish lies on the dip slope of the Chilterns, about 12 miles from the escarpment of the Dunstable and Royston Downs, at the north edge of the London basin, and, despite the overlying alluvial deposits, chalk is still visible in a number of places in the parish.

Watton is about 5 miles from the Great North Road, A1(M), at Welwyn, and the Cambridge Road, A10, at Ware, and approximately 15 miles from the M11 at Bishop's Stortford.

The name Watton is first recorded in an 11th century publication of 10th century Anglo-Saxon Wills as Wattun, and in the Domesday Book as both Wodtune and Watone. A number of other spellings appear over the years until the greater reliance on written records which followed the mechanisation of printing methods in the 16th century finally settled it in its present form, which was confirmed by The Local Government Act, 1894 under '*The Parish of Watton-at-Stone (Naming) Order, 1895*'.

Not all the authorities are agreed on the derivation of the name; one such belief is that it came from the Anglo-Saxon 'wad tun': wad or wat from the Old English Wád meaning woad, and tun or ton meaning small farming settlement. Alternatively, 'wad/wat' might derive from wade (Old English Waden meaning a fording place), or from the Old English Waétan meaning wet or watery. Indeed, there was a proliferation of springs in the area, one of them reputedly with healing properties, and at one time Watton was as popular as some of the now more famous spas. Unfortunately, this spring seems to have dried up.

The 'Stone' appeared for the first time in about 1300 (Watton atte Stone, 1311) and is presumed to refer to a prehistoric or Roman mark stone, a lump of Hertfordshire puddingstone, at the Waggon & Horses.



The River Beane was originally the Benefician ('fician' possibly being an equivalent of the Welsh 'bychan', meaning 'small'), but lost the latter part of its name in the 15th or 16th century.

## Natural Habitats

The gentle valleys and folds of the parish as we know it today were given their final form by the ice sheets and melt waters of the last ice age. The underlying rock is chalk, which can be seen within the parish with its accompanying flints on the higher ground and in the disused quarries near Watkins Hall Farm and Bardolph's Farm. Elsewhere, the clay, sand and other alluvial deposits are clearly visible, and gravel has been taken in commercial quantities from Frogmore Hall to the north and, more recently, in massive quantities from land to the east of Stapleford and Waterford to the south.

The River Beane rises near Rushden on the Royston Downs at the north-east end of the Chilterns, the escarpment that forms the watershed between the Ouse and the Thames river basins. It runs through the parish from north-west to south-east and has been artificially widened into a lake in Woodhall Park. To the south, it joins the rivers Ash, Lea, Mimram and Rib in Hertford and flows on, as the River Lea, through Ware to join the Thames near the East India Dock in London.

It is likely that the fields to the west of the village were enclosed by the end of the 15th century, while those on the east remained open, common fields until the 19th century. As a result, the parish offers a wide range of natural habitats:

- open arable land, particularly to the west of the village, where hedges and trees have been removed wholesale and those which remain are tamed by mechanical hedge cutters
- the lush grasses of pasture land
- the small, uncultivated areas which are some of the most interesting habitats (although some, such as the railway cuttings, have had to survive special hazards like the annual burning)
- woodlands, young and old, deciduous and coniferous, managed and unmanaged
- the allotments and gardens within the village envelope
- the river banks and marshes
- the river itself, and
- the ponds and moats near Watton Green, Watkins Hall Farm and Bardolph's Farm.

A large variety of flora and fauna can be seen within the village itself and a detailed study of the natural resources of the parish would reveal a wealth of material.

There are hedgerows of hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel and elder with brambles and crab apples, some of considerable age. The oldest hedgerow in the parish and, indeed, one of the oldest in Hertfordshire, runs from Toes Wood to Broom Hall Farm and may, in fact, have stood unchanged since the original, natural cover was first cleared and tamed.

Of the many standard trees around the village, the elms have been sadly depleted by the ravages of the 'Dutch elm disease' epidemic. Within the residential areas of the village, there is a wide selection of the decorative flowering and fruiting trees.

There are several attractive areas of woodland, some more carefully managed than others. Moorymead Spring has, for example, been coppiced for centuries although it has now not been cropped for some considerable time and only voluntary efforts will give it a chance of survival.

Two areas of common land, the Lammas and Watton Green, are in the ownership of the Parish Council, and Management Plans have been created to ensure the continued survival of these natural habitats.

# Transport

## Roads

The Roman road from St Albans (via Welwyn and Puckeridge) to Colchester ran through the parish and the present road between Watton and Datchworth still follows the old route for part of the distance. It is interesting to speculate where this road crossed the River Beane, since no signs of the road were discovered despite a thorough archaeological survey when the bypass was being constructed.

It has been suggested by John Michell that the Romans themselves followed the routes of earlier tracks, which may, in turn, have followed ancient ley lines. This particular route could then be linked to a ley line marked further to the east by an ancient mound near Little Hadham!

The 18th and 19th centuries were the era of the toll road, or turnpike, when new roads were constructed for the first time since the Roman occupation. Watton was a station on the toll roads from Ware and Hertford to the Welwyn turnpike at Broadwater. Administered by the Watton Turnpike Trust, which was established in May 1757, it originally had tollgates across both the Broadwater and Walkern roads near 'the stone' at the north of the village; two more gates were subsequently built at the south east corner of Woodhall Park across the Ware road and across the parish road from Sacombe to Hertford.

In addition, a side gate across the Whempstead road to the north of Woodhall Park existed from 1757 to 1758, but this made no money for the Trust since the toll collector was allowed to keep the toll money as his wages.

The Ware road was diverted away from Woodhall Park in 1841–1843 at the request of the Smith family, but the routes otherwise remained basically unchanged until the Trust was dissolved on 1 November 1875 and the roads were adopted.

The route of Watton's by-pass was subject to much discussion and argument within the village, and a compromise solution was finally agreed. With minor additional variations, three basic routes were offered to the village by the County Council, and a vote was taken. The first route ran behind and through Blackditch Wood, to the east of the village, the second ran between Blackditch Wood and Beane Road/Lammas Road, and the third followed the railway along the west side of the village.

From the point of view of causing least additional disturbance, the third route was natural, but this involved two railway bridges and would have taken the by-pass very close to the church and through the Conservation Area at the southern end. The first would have been largely invisible from the village, but it would have had a significant effect on Blackditch Wood, and the County Council pointed out that it would be much more expensive than the second route.



The second route received the largest number of votes after the County Council had undertaken to carry out landscaping and planting in order to minimise its visual and audible impact on the village. This route was adopted and work started on its construction in mid-1983. It was opened on 10 December 1984.

## The Railway

The first plans for a railway line through Watton were made in 1890 as part of a Hitchin–Enfield line and, although this plan was never implemented, the proposed route for the section between Hertford and Stevenage was incorporated into the Enfield–Stevenage link that received parliamentary approval in 1898. This line, the first extension to the London suburban system for over 20 years, was then estimated to cost £1.25M.

Work actually started in 1906, on the Enfield–Cuffley section, and the first train ran to Cuffley on 4 April 1910. Two years later, in August 1912, Robert McAlpine & Sons were awarded the contract for the line between Cuffley and Stevenage and a single-track line was opened on 4 March 1918. Duallying of the track was completed on 23 December 1920.

The first passenger train ran through Watton on 6 February 1920 after being diverted from the main line as a result of an accident at Welwyn. The first scheduled passenger service of four trains on each weekday, stopping if required at the Watton and Stapleford halts, started on 2 June 1924.

Fifteen years later, on 11 September 1939 immediately following the outbreak of war, Stapleford and Watton stations were closed and no more passenger trains were scheduled through Watton until 5 March 1962.

British Railways considered reopening the station in March 1967, but it was not until 1981 that any action was taken, and the 06.23 train from Watton to Moorgate on 17 May 1982 was the first train to use Watton station for almost 43 years.

The costs of reopening the station totalled £120 000, but only about £30 000 of this was paid by British Rail! Local authority funds provided £80 000 and the village contributed £8000, £4000 by way of a donation from Parish Council funds and £4000 raised by an appeal to the village and neighbouring parishes.

The official opening of Watton station took place on Tuesday 15 June 1982 with the arrival of the “Watton Venture”, and was attended by Sir Peter Parker, Chairman of the British Rail Board, and representatives of local government.

The Station and line is well used by villagers who commute each day, and shoppers and school children travelling to Hertford and Stevenage.



Problems have been caused as a result of accidents on the main line at Hatfield and Potters Bar, as the Hertford Loop is used as the diversion for the long distance GNER trains resulting in the cancellation of local WAGN services to the village.

# History of Watton

## Archaeology

Evidence for man's presence in the parish dates back to the Palaeolithic hand axes which have been found, both within the village itself and at the Frogmore gravel pit, and there are traces of a Mesolithic (middle Stone Age) site near the roundabout at the northern end of the by-pass.

Close by, there is a supposed tumulus near the gate to Frogmore Hall and there are signs of 'ring ditches', which could be Neolithic or Bronze Age, to the north of the village. A late Bronze Age occupation site (the only one so far identified in mid- Hertfordshire) has been excavated in a field to the north of the village called Great Humphreys, and has produced a bronze chisel, a bronze pin and some pottery.

The Belgic Iron Age is represented by finds of pottery to the east of the village and, near the burial site of an Iron Age 'princess' in the Great Humphreys area, by one of Watton's most exciting finds, the bronze 'Aston' mirror. This was found in what is technically the parish of Aston (due to the tortuous route of the parish boundary in this area), but it is close enough to the village to be relevant to its history.

The mirror was found by John Wallace of Broom Hall Farm during a stroll across one of his fields, and it is to his eternal credit that he recognised it for what it is. The mirror is now on display in the British Museum and has been extensively written up in the *Antiquaries Journal* (1982, volume LXII part I). It was found near what is probably a native homestead of the early Roman period. A large pre-roman boundary ditch at Great Humphreys, subsequently filled in by the Romans in the late-4th century (probably by the dumping of rubbish rather than as a deliberate policy), has yielded a Roman Cavalry Spur and some infant burials. Between these two sites is a Roman burial ground from which 27 burials have been extracted.

Roman sites are known in the grounds of Glebe House and in the north west corner of Woodhall Park, where Roman pottery was unearthed in large quantities in 1953 during the excavation of the outfall sewer. There is also a large site in the field to the east of Watton House which has yielded over 700 coins dating the site to the 4th century, an enamel brooch, a flint-built corn drier (possibly used for malting barley) and fragments of quernstone imported from the Rhineland. It is also thought that the old north-south route through Watton predates the Romans, and the rather sketchy structural evidence here suggests that this may have been a market place near the crossroads of the two routes, rather than a settlement in its own right.

A field near Broom Hall, known as Danesfield, may have been named after a local skirmish with the Norsemen, thought to have taken place in AD 911, and a further argument for the presence of Danes in Watton links Crowborough's name with the raven emblem of the Norsemen, and the same manor's position on high ground with the similar location of a Norse camp at Hexham on the Chilterns in NW Herts. A more mundane explanation might be that it is a corruption of Denesfield, named after the Denes, or chalk pits, along its boundary.

It is near here that Watton's buried treasure remains hidden, having refused to reveal its location either to expert survey or to metal detectors. A large collection of ancient arms and armour, possibly Belgic, was unearthed in the mid-19th century when labourers were

digging a drain. They removed only what was necessary to complete the drain and left the rest of what would now be an archaeologically priceless hoard!

A large quantity of pottery and a mortar (now in the British Museum) have been found in Well Wood, and it is thought that this could have been the site of a fortified settlement, possibly Watton manor itself. Chapel Wood is bounded by a (probably medieval) triangular earthwork, doubled along the west side, which extends into Well Wood at the northern end; the earthworks in Well Wood are roughly circular and rather less clearly defined.

Until the late-1970s, when Mr. Tony Rook decided to investigate the buried site in the middle of Chapel Wood, the wood's name was a puzzle (despite the clue offered by the nearby field, called Chapel Field on the Tithe Map) and there appeared to be some inconsistencies in the history of Watton's chapel. On excavation, Chapel Wood turned out to be the location of a medieval chapel and hermitage, dating from the late-12th century and yielded a fragment of possibly the earliest example of stained-glass window in Europe.

## Manors of Watton

Parts of Watton, including its chief manor (Watton manor), were held by King Edgar, who ruled England from 959 to 975. He subsequently made Watton manor over to the Abbey of Westminster and, despite the later fragmentation of this land; it is recorded in the Domesday Book that the Abbot himself still held one of the five hides making up this land.

The Domesday Book also implies Saxon occupation of the parish, but the only local evidence of Saxon occupation is a 9th century strap end which was found near Bardolph's Farm.

By the year 1200, Watton manor had been inherited by Henry Fitz Ailwin, the first Lord Mayor of London. He was also, at one time, a joint-trustee (with the Archbishop of Canterbury) of Richard I's ransom. Shortly after Fitz Ailwin's death in 1212, Watton manor passed to the Bardolf family, which was to hold it for most of the next 300 years (with Crowborough manor from 1329 to 1562). In 1576, it joined Woodhall manor under the Boteler family and this link with Woodhall remained until the last century. For a short period following Paul Benfield's bankruptcy in 1801, it was held by Edward, Lord Ellenborough, but it was sold in 1813 to Samuel Smith, who had already bought Woodhall manor.

Watton's other three manors were Crowborough, Watkins Hall (or Watton Hall) and Woodhall. Only the last of these still exists today as an estate although the names of all the old manors have been preserved in Watkins Hall Farm, Bardolph's Farm, Woodhall House and a private house near the church, named Crowbury in 1898 in honour of the old manor.

Watton Hall appears to be a relatively late addition to the Watton manors, appearing in the records for the first time in 1540. It is thought to have been located in Well Wood despite an old beam at Watkins Hall Farm, which bears the inscription:

Watton	alias	Watkins
Hall	I.M.	Hall 1636

The county histories mention Crowborough for the first time in 1266 and, in 1278, both Crowborough and Woodhall were held by the manor of Benington. In 1329, the manor was conveyed to Thomas, Lord Bardolf of Watton manor for an annuity of 66/8 (a payment of £3.33 per annum!) and Crowborough manor remained in the Bardolf family for over 200 years. In 1562, Sir John Boteler of Woodhall manor bought Crowborough and it then remained with the Boteler family for at least another 150 years.

Crowborough Hall, which stood by Watton Green, was held by the Botelers until 1702 when Philip Boteler, who was lord of Woodhall manor and patron of the church, exchanged the house and some land for the rectory which had, until then, stood on the east of the river; thereby saving the rector some wet winter walks across the river to the church. The manor itself remained, as one might imagine, with the Boteler family.

A new rectory was built at about this time on the land to the west of the church and this was, in turn, rebuilt in the mid-19th century. In 1898, this rectory was sold to Mrs Abel Smith, who named it Crowbury in honour of the old manor house, which used to stand nearby, and a new rectory (now Glebe House) was built. The present rectory was built in 1970, when the rector moved from Glebe House.

Like Crowborough, Woodhall was originally part of the manor of Benington and, even today, the eastern part of Woodhall Park lies in Sacombe parish. The earliest recorded rector was Gilbert de Tywe, who was appointed, in 1221, by Sir John de Tywe, the holder of Woodhall manor.

Woodhall subsequently passed by marriage to Eudo de Peletot whose grandson, Sir Philip de Peletot, died in 1361 and is commemorated in the church by a brass memorial, which, although much restored, is one of the earliest in the county. Philip's son died without children so the manor passed to his daughter Katharine, who was married to Ralph Boteler. On Ralph's death, the manor passed to his son Philip (and Katharine married Edmund Bardolf of Watton manor).



Woodhall manor remained in the Boteler family for 40 years but, on 12 October 1771, Woodhall house, then a brick-built 'noble, quadrangular building which had a gateway with round towers', was burned to the ground and, in 1777, John Palmer Boteler sold the estate.

The Botelers had been landowners (also of Hatfield and Tewin), High Sheriffs and Knights of the Shire, and one of the county's most influential families. During the Civil War, they remained active Royalists and Sir John Boteler was imprisoned at Peterhouse for his beliefs. He was also patron of the church and the rector at that time, William Ingoldsby, was also imprisoned (in the Fleet prison) for printing an anti-parliament book. A Mr. Wells was appointed rector in his place but, shortly afterwards, Ingoldsby was released after he had humbled himself, petitioned parliament and promised not to do it again!

The 5000 acres of the Woodhall estate was bought in 1777 by Sir Thomas Rumbold for £85 000 (including timber); Rumbold had previously been Governor of Bombay and had amassed a considerable fortune. It is clear that he was not considered to be as socially acceptable as the Botelers since his fortune had been earned (and some queried his methods) rather than inherited. In any event, he employed the architect Thomas Leverton to build the present Woodhall House (to which the porch and north and south wings were added some 20 years later by Paul Benfield) a short distance from the site of the old house.

An 1824 description of the mansion says that it occupied 'one of the finest situations in the county; it is a large and beautiful modern structure, fitted out with great taste and elegance, and standing on an eminence in a noble park that is finely diversified by hill and dale, and watered by several small streams which flow into the River Beane'.

It may have been a spring at the head of one of these streams or an old spring near the mill, which was mentioned in Clutterbuck's 1815 history of Hertfordshire with those at Chipping Barnet and Northaw as one of the county's principal mineral springs. The Watton spring had been discovered in about 1689, when springs and spas were highly fashionable, and was claimed 'to create an appetite to provoke urine, to expel gravel from the kidneys and bladder, to sweeten the blood' and to treat intestinal disorders, scurvy, 'green sickness and most ill habits of the body'. Nowadays, of course, we have to make do with indigestion tablets.

Nathaniel Salmon commented in 1728 on the magnificence of Woodhall's timber, and records that one of these trees had been sold at the end of the 17th century for £43 (a considerable sum in those days). It had taken 18 horses to pull it away after it had been cut, and it was used for the 'cutwater' or stem of the Royal Sovereign.

On Rumbold's death in 1791, Woodhall was sold to Paul Benfield, sometime MP for Shaffesbury, who had retired from the East India Company with a very dubious reputation. Benfield held Woodhall for only 10 years before it was sold for the benefit of the Exchequer; he was subsequently bankrupted and fled to Paris where he died in poverty in 1810.

Woodhall was then bought by Samuel Smith, a well-respected banker and, by 1815, a Member of Parliament. Smith's family hold the estate to this day (and much land elsewhere in Hertfordshire), although the mansion is now occupied by Heath Mount Preparatory School and the senior representative of the family lives in a very attractive conversion of the old stables.

Within Woodhall House is one of the few original 18th century print rooms to have survived. It is unusual in that the engravings are cut out and stuck on the walls of the room itself in an elaborate scheme.

The Smith family (now Abel Smith) has taken and continues to take an active interest in village affairs: Abel Smith MP, in 1851, paid for the restoration of the church and Lady Susan Smith erected the almshouses in 1867 for the benefit of the poor widows and widowers who were supported by Abel Smith.



## Architecture

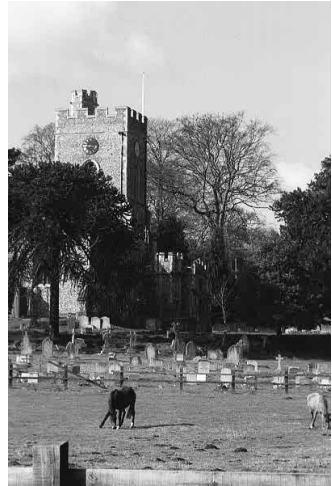
### Churches

Certainly since the 13th century, and possibly much longer, there has been a church in Watton. The existence of a church in 1086 is recorded in the Domesday Book, but the present register commences in 1560. Originally the church of St Mary (like a large proportion of other Hertfordshire churches), the dedication to St Andrew was added in the early-19th century. The present building is 16th century flint rubble with stone dressings; the north chapel was added in about 1570.

The church was restored in 1851 at a cost of about £7000. During the Civil War, the Roundheads held their Royalist prisoners in the church.

The church contains a number of interesting Boteler memorials, including an interesting monument dated 1712 to Philip Boteler and his sister (an unusual relationship for a memorial) Elizabeth Neville, who died 30 years later.

It was originally in the chancel, but has been moved to an arch in the south aisle. The late Mr. Gordon Moody compared this monument with a similar, complete monument (to another unusual relationship for a memorial: a man and his mother) at Wing in Buckinghamshire. The latter memorial has a complete surround with fluted columns, urns, draperies etc and it is thought that the Watton memorial may originally have been similar.



It has a number of other interesting memorial slabs and tablets: an incised alabaster slab in the north chapel and a 13th century slab in the churchyard; there is a large ironbound chest of the late-16th or early-17th century in the chapel. A peal of eight bells was transferred in 1978 from a redundant church in North London after the previous ring had been worn out!

The latest major changes to the church were carried out in 1998 and involved construction of a toilet and kitchen facility in the base of the tower. In 1999 to commemorate the Millennium, floodlighting was installed using a Lottery grant from the Church Floodlighting Trust.

The church is well worth a visit and a short guide, giving more detail, can be bought in the church.

It is now thought that Watton had two chapels and that Chapel Wood is the site of the first one, which was founded in about 1200 by Henry Fitz Ailwin.

This chapel lasted for some 200 years and was finally replaced by the larger foundation at Whempstead; a licence to celebrate mass at a chapel to the honour of the Virgin issued in 1390 by John Dysford, rector of Watton, probably marks the foundation of the new chapel.

The Whempstead chapel was still standing, although in a ruined state in Edward VI's reign and, in the early-19th century, enough remained to house three families. The remains then visible showed the chantry and secular buildings to have covered a considerable area.

The Methodist chapel in the High Street was built in 1891 on the site of a butcher's shop. It was later extended to include schoolrooms and two vestries. A history of the Methodist Chapel was produced in 1991 to mark the centenary of the building of the Wesley Centenary Church in Watton.



## Watton Village

The old village was probably on the higher ground by Watton Green, close to the church, and the moat still to be seen by Watton Green marks the site of the old Crowborough manor house. Indeed, even as late as the 1950s, four cottages were still occupied adjacent to the Green. In the 12th or 13th century, with the decreasing importance of the cross-country Roman road and the increasing importance of the old north-south route between the market town of Hertford and the Great North Road coaching stop of Stevenage, the inns and houses of the village migrated downhill and established the village along the new highway.

Of the other buildings in the village, one of the most impressive must be Watton Place. The house is probably Tudor and is thought to have originally been L-shaped. It retains some fine twisted brick chimney stacks, restored in 1991 when the building was converted for use as a medical centre—the Watton Place Clinic.



The farmhouses within the parish represent a number of different architectural periods and Broom Hall dates from the late-16th century, retaining some attractive brickwork. A schedule of listed buildings within the parish is given at the end of this booklet, although the county is presently being resurveyed and it is likely that a significant number of further buildings will be added to the list.

The High Street also has a number of interesting smaller cottages, some dating from the 15th and early 16th centuries and there is an old Victorian lock-up, now bricked in, opposite the George & Dragon.

Although old photographs of the village show a number of establishments selling ales, there are now only three public houses in the village: The Bull, the George and Dragon and the Waggon and Horses, but little is known of their past history.

### The Bull

The Bull has had a chequered history as manorial copyhold property in the 18th century, sharing the ups and downs of Woodhall manor. In more recent times, it was severely damaged by fire during the night of 13 February 1990. During its restoration, the various developments of the building have been identified, the earliest portions dating back to about 1400.

### The George and Dragon

The George and Dragon is the youngest of the public houses in the village. The earliest known reference is in 1619 when it was licensed to Thomas Dison, having previously been held by Richard Hindle Little. It is known about this 16th century building, which is an amalgamation of several smaller cottages, Owned in 1812 by Edmund Ind of Romford, several licensees can be traced until the building appeared in Piggots Directory of 1839, with the named licensee George Lawrence. Records are scarce past that time, but the

building has served the locals well, being a focal watering hole, incorporating a butchers shop where the small dining room is now located, and with the rear of the building serving as a coal merchants for a number of years. In more recent times, the George and Dragon has become known more widely, building a reputation for quality food for which it has won many awards and accolades.

## **The Waggon and Horses**

The Waggon and Horses is a 16th century building, and a conveyance of 1732 says this was formally the Red Lion. The sign of the Waggon and Horses is not mentioned until 1760.

## **The Gate**

The Gate was a beer house at Whempstead in 1756. This 16th century building closed in about 1960 and is now a private dwelling. The name possibly derived from the turnpike toll gate.

## **The White Horse**

The 1832 Hertfordshire Directory reports one George Rose as keeping the White Horse at Watton, but by 1890 no further reference is made.

## **Modern Developments**

Like many other Hertfordshire villages, the greater part of the village now dates from the 20th century although it retains a number of fine (and much under-estimated) examples of 18th and 19th century architecture, from the almshouses, the Grey House, Watton House, Watton Cottage, Glebe House, Crowbury and The Chestnuts to the smaller cottages in High Street and the red brick terrace opposite the Pump.

The Walkern Road Bridge over the River Beane is an interesting industrial monument to the 19th century, being constructed of the large Caleb Hitch bricks, although it is now much repaired.

The 20th century saw the building of the estates, Beane Road (1946), Glebe Close (1948), Rectory Lane (1948), Hockerill (1956), Lammas Road and part of High Street (1960), Great Innings (1964, 1977 and 2000), Rivershill (1966 and 1986) and Hazeldell (1970), as well as some individual houses and bungalows.

In 1985, the site of the old school was redeveloped by renovating the old school buildings and adding additional houses in the orchard and playground (Old School Orchard).

The local planning authority (East Hertfordshire District Council) is now, properly, restricting additional building to 'the village envelope'. Applications for normal domestic extensions to houses within this area are normally granted, but applications outside the area are controlled very strictly. For example, a 1981 application to demolish Watton House and replace it with a small housing estate was refused (although some development has since been approved), as was a 1983 application to convert a private garage on Hockerill to business use, even though the latter was within the envelope and no significant structural changes were necessary.

However, 1986 saw a spate of planning applications: for 28 dwellings in the builder's yard to the north end of the village, now built as Motts Close, 14 dwellings on the site of

Beaside Service Station, now The Beaneside, and 38 dwellings behind the Bull as an extension to Rivershill.

Conversion of the former Holden du Cros factory and barn into a number of dwellings (known as Newmans Court, after a former land owner) was completed in 1994.

In 1993, 4 dwellings (Aylotts Court) were built behind the porch cottages in the High Street, and an outline planning application was approved for 70 dwellings on land adjacent to the railway station, part of which had been used as an oil storage depot. Some 76 Dwellings were eventually built as Moorymead Close together with a parking area for the station.

In 1998, the old bakery behind the grocery shop in the High Street was developed to provide an enlarged shopping area and three flats. To gain access, the narrow passageway from the High Street was widened by demolishing part of the grocery shop. In 2002, the grocery store was converted for use as the village Post Office and the former site lower down the High Street reverted to a private dwelling.



In December 1999, work started on the final phase of the Great Innings development. During 2001, 12 houses on the Watton Service Station site in the High Street were completed and named Long Meadow.

There are now some 970 homes in the village, 140 of which were built between 1991 and 2001. Sites for 107 new homes have been identified for the future.

The pump, which is reported still to have worked in the 1930s was modernised in about 1895 when the present shelter was erected *'in affectionate remembrance of Lt General Philip Smith CB, Grenadier Guards, third son of Abel Smith, born January 1837, died November 1894. He joined the Grenadier Guards in 1855, served in the Egyptian campaign 1882 and at the battle of Tel El Kabir and lastly held command of the home district, 1889 to 1892.'*

The pump itself is bronze and is thought to be a conversion of an old cannon

Watton's Conservation Area extends from Watton Green and along the High Street, including some land to each side. Its effect is to give all the trees and buildings within the area certain basic protection and both the Watton-at-Stone Conservation Society and the Parish Council have a map of its exact boundaries and keep a weather eye on its management.



# Life in the Village

## Modern Living

With the building of the housing estates in the past 50 years, life in Watton has changed more than it did in the previous 1000 years. Few of the people living within the village now work in the village since, with the exception of some small industrial units in Mill Lane, there are few opportunities for employment (the Holden du Cros salmon packing factory in the High Street closed in 1988 and was converted to housing in 1994). Watton is now, therefore, 'commuterland' and its people travel to Stevenage, Hoddesdon, Hertford and other areas of employment (including central London at a 2002 cost of £2140 per annum!).

There are a number of shops in the village, but sadly the number seems to be decreasing despite the extra houses being built. However, in 1997, part of the grocery store in the High Street was opened as a separate hot food shop selling Oriental and Beijing cuisine. The garage in the High Street closed in October 1999 and the site cleared for housing development.

The village boasts a wide selection of facilities, including the clubs and societies listed separately at the end of this booklet; all of them welcome new members (and what better way is there for newcomers to the village to meet people?). Many of these report their activities in the excellent Parish News which is distributed free each month to all houses in the village; they can alternatively be contacted through neighbours or the local shops, or through the Clerk to the Parish Council, whose name is given on the notice board on the High Street, almost opposite the George & Dragon.

Each year there is a highly successful Church Fête on Late Spring Bank Holiday Monday, but the Horticultural Society's Flower Show and Fête on the August Bank Holiday Monday has now ceased after 52 years of declining enthusiasm. A similar fate overtook the Community Association, which did much to raise funds for village causes and held a very successful Silver Jubilee event in 1987. A film record of this event, together with one of the earlier Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 has been included on a video produced to mark the Centenary of the Parish Council. Various smaller events are organised by the school, the Scout and Guide group and local societies.

The recreation ground is used for outdoor sports and nearby there is an indoor sports hall and a floodlit multi-purpose play area for tennis, 5-a-side football and netball; there are children's play areas on the recreation ground and in Great Innings.

Outside the village, there are swimming pools at Ware (open air), Hertford and Stevenage (indoor), with squash, badminton, bowls, and a ten-pin bowling alley also at Stevenage. Water sports are catered for at Stevenage (Fairlands), Welwyn Garden City (Stanborough) and at the Lee Valley complex. There are theatres nearby at Stevenage, Hatfield and Harlow and cinemas at Stevenage, Hatfield, Harlow, Broxbourne and Waltham Cross, and the Stevenage Leisure Park, opened in the mid 1990s, provides plenty of nightlife.

For the more practical, there are builders' yards and DIY shops at Hertford, Welwyn Garden City, Knebworth and Stevenage; and for the green fingered, there is Watton Nursery and larger garden centres at Bragbury End (Stevenage) and Great Amwell (Ware).

The mobile library calls every two weeks.

## Memorial and Meditation Garden

The Memorial and Meditation Garden lies alongside the Methodist Church in the High Street. It was laid down in 2001 with funds donated by local people and organisations to provide a place of quiet where we may remember those who have passed on, and to escape from the bustle of modern life. It is open to all to share and enjoy. A beautiful mosaic, designed and made by local artist Helen Durrant, representing the Tree of Life, has recently been added on the wall at the end of the garden.



## Millennium Celebrations

### Watton Wall Hanging

The Bayeux Tapestry inspired Muriel Allen to commemorate 2000 years of Watton's history in a wall hanging. Twenty-three cross-stitch panels were designed by Michael Allen and worked on by twenty volunteers from the village. The finished panel was unveiled by the Chairman of the Parish Council in October 1999 and now hangs in the Community Hall.

The Chairman of the Parish Council in October 1999 and now hangs in the Community Hall.

### May Day 2000

Part of Watton High Street was closed for the day and the area adopted a carnival atmosphere with stalls and sideshows and a truck-pulling competition. In the nearby Methodist Church Hall Alan Rattue's collection of old photographs and postcards of the village drew much attention and helped make the day a great success. The funds raised are being used to provide a wooden seat near the old people's bungalows in Great Innings and a decorative village sign near the War Memorial.

### Year 2000 Canister

A canister made of marine stainless steel by members of the University of Hertfordshire was buried under the floor of the Parish Church during a special service on 31 December 2000.

This time capsule contained memorabilia, photographs and maps of the village past and present, commemorative booklets about the village, the Village Directory and the Electoral Roll for the year 2000 and the Register of pupils attending Watton School.

## Early Social History

Indications of what life was like in the village can be gained from the 'official' records such as the parish registers of births, marriages and burials and from the County Court records. In 1248, John de Tywe was accused of obstructing a roadway by digging a ditch across it and, over 400 years later, in 1653, Philip Collop was accused of obstructing a roadway by depositing timber on it.

However, the Court records tend to give a rather one-sided view of life at the time since, by definition, they only deal with those who did wrong (or rather more accurately, those who were caught). We know, for example, that common hobbies in Watton—indeed, in Hertfordshire generally—were poaching (including sparrowhawks, trout and ducks), unauthorised trading and producing illegitimate children. In 1701, for example, James Nicholls was publicly whipped at Hertford market place for stealing six of Philip Boteler's trout, value 10d. One legitimate birth worthy of note is that of Edward Penefather, son of Ralph and Marion, who was delivered at 'The Bull' in February 1608 as Marion passed by from market.



In the 17th century, there was a national shortage of small change and the more enterprising traders took advantage of the authority granted by Government to introduce trade tokens, which they gave and accepted as change. One Watton trade token was discovered in 1964, bearing the name Katharine Allen on one side and in Watton 1668 KA on the other. She was a widow and a woollen draper and the token is particularly interesting since she had, four years earlier, been accused of trading without having served an apprenticeship. It is not known if she ever did, but it is tempting to guess that she was still unapprenticed when she issued the token.

During the times of religious and social change of the 17th century, the Courts heard some interesting cases. In 1653, for example, John Greenaway, described as an alehouse keeper, was charged with harbouring thieves and wicked persons in his house and (even worse) of allowing them 'to drink and tittle there and play cards on the Sabbath Day'. By 1661, one assumes that John Greenaway had died since an Elizabeth Greenaway, widow, was accused with Charles Turner, innkeeper, and Judith Foster, also a widow, of refusing to receive travellers in their lodging houses even though the constable had required them to do so (there is, unfortunately, no description of the travellers they had turned away). William Mills was twice indicted for not attending church, the first time in 1678 with John Blundell and a Mr Plumer, the second time in 1686, with Thomas Fallowfield and Robert Pluckrose. (Robert Pluckrose later, in 1694, had a turkey worth 10d stolen by James Ellis who, like James Nicholls in 1701, was publicly whipped for the theft.)

Also in 1686, a Mr Crabb appealed against the removal of his licence to keep an alehouse, on the grounds that false evidence was given. The charge had been of keeping a disorderly alehouse by serving beer, ale or other liquor between the time of the sermon bell and the time of leaving church! The Court was told that Crabb had been an old servant of the Boteler family and was of good reputation and credit; and the licence was (conditionally) reinstated.

By 14 July 1707, the religious climate had eased enough to allow the Quakers a meeting house in Watton although, on 29 May 1717, there was a religious or political demonstration of some description by 'a great multitude' coming to Watton 'in a riotous manner with green boughs on their hats and horns on their heads and with flags'.

There were, however, further charges of keeping disorderly alehouses in 1727 (against John Irons, Robert Ratford and John Chapman) and, in 1733, against William Hammond.

This last charge seems to have been connected with two other charges before the Court at the same time: Thomas Gardiner was charged with 'being very drunk' and a mealman was accused of assaulting William's wife, Martha Hammond, 'with an intent to ravish'.

Other more rural offences include, in 1680, the enclosing of an area of common land in Hayden's Field, Benington by George and Edward Campkin of Watton, the digging of clay from the common highway to Walkern in 1660 by Watton villagers and the failure, in late 1746, of William Cox of Bardolph's Farm to report that his cattle had distemper.

It is also clear from these records, even though the reasons may have changed, opinions of politicians were little higher then than they are now. In 1678, Ralph Coulson, a smith, was charged with speaking 'scandalous words' of Sir John Gore MP JP to one John Lawrence. What he actually said was 'You have chose a fine member for ye parliament house, have you not'. John Lawrence asked whom he meant and then answered 'I did not help choose him, he had noe occasion for my voyce but why doe you say these words of Sir John Gore'. To which Ralph Coulson is supposed to have replied 'Sir John Gore is a Papist and reputed to be one'. Slander indeed!

Watton also had its social iconoclasts: in 1779, a complaint was made by William Lloyd, a clerk, of Aston, that William Upfold, a yeoman, had insulted him, his family and servants by using rude and indecent language and gestures and that he had threatened Lloyd with violence.

A colourful family called Mumford lived in Watton and kept the Courts well exercised between 1825 and 1843. In 1825, Edward was bound over to keep the peace; in 1838, William was fined for poaching; in 1839, Abraham was bound over to keep the peace towards Joseph; in 1840, Abraham was fined for poaching and, in 1841, William had to provide surety for keeping the peace towards James! The family's last appearance in the Court records seems to have had a sobering effect (or possibly they moved to try their luck elsewhere) since, in 1843, William was transported for 7 years for stealing three ducks and two drakes, value seven shillings, from Abel Smith.

In the census of 1881, the population of Watton parish was 811 living in 188 dwellings. The eldest inhabitant was 85, the youngest 3 months.

### **Watton Tragedy**

In 1833, James Sheppard was fined five shillings 'for breaking glass' and his luck ran out finally later in the same year when he was shot by Robert Piercy, the village constable.

This incident is described in some detail in the *Hertford & Ware Patriot*, an anti-Tory and anti-police newspaper of the time. Under the heading 'Watton Tragedy', the paper describes what happened on the night of Saturday 7th December 1833 (and, in reading this, it must be remembered that the Watton lock-up was opposite the George & Dragon).



The report refers to the sounds of two men quarrelling violently and loudly outside the George from about 10 pm. The row continued, sometimes louder sometimes quieter, until about midnight when it came to a head and villagers, brought to their windows

by the noise, saw the two men struggling together. A shot rang out and Sheppard fell. The surgeon, Mr William Taylor, was woken and Sheppard was carried into the George, where he died at 5.00 am the next morning.

An inquest was held at the George & Dragon on 9 December 1833 and witnesses (including a Miss Sarah Watts, who lived in a cottage opposite and claimed to have seen everything!) testified to Sheppard's drunkenness and, with less certainty, to the constable's forbearance. In the course of the inquest, however, Piercy was accused of megalomania, drunkenness and abusing his authority (as one of Robert Peel's 'new' police force) and Sheppard's case was taken by William Cobbett, a great authority of the day and a champion of the agricultural workingman. He succeeded in getting a verdict of manslaughter, but the sentence is not known. Angry villagers chased Piercy out of Watton and he does not subsequently appear in Watton's history.

Other sources throw a slightly different slant on the incident. The constable had been hired from the newly formed Metropolitan Police at the request of local landowners and was armed with a pistol rather than the more usual cutlass. That evening, while patrolling the streets, he was accosted by a drunken Sheppard who threatened the policeman with a bludgeon. Sheppard had no love for authority having recently served six months for assaulting the local squire. During the melee, a shot rang out and Sheppard fell with a ball through the head. At the inquest, a verdict of "Justifiable Homicide" was recorded, and Piercy was shortly transferred back to pounding the Westminster beat.

In more recent times, a second tragedy occurred during the Second World War when a stray bomb hit a row of cottages (now demolished) in Workhouse Yard off Mill Lane, killing two of the residents. Another bomb (V2) landed behind the Methodist Church breaking most of the stained-glass windows and causing damage to the roof structure, which is now reinforced with metal straps. Minor damage was also caused when a bomb fell in the gardens of Watkins Hall Cottages.



Other significant events in the village fall under the headings of fire, flood and tempest.

In the early part of the century, the only thatched cottages in the village, at the north end, were destroyed by fire. In 1967, the mill, in Mill Lane, was destroyed by fire. This was a four-story brick building with a slate roof (probably built in the 1800s) that had been used for a number of years as a chicken factory. The mill had two later additions to its structure, one on either side. These buildings still remain and have been joined together to form the present light industrial units.

On the night of 13/14 February 1990, most of the upper story of The Bull was destroyed by fire. It reopened in March 1993 having been restored to its original external appearance.

Serious flooding occurred in 1968 when heavy rain caused the River Beane to burst its banks damaging the newly constructed Scout Hut. Debris floating down the river jammed

under the Ware Road Bridge causing a back up of water to flood properties in Rivershill, some to a depth of 3-4 feet.

In the winter of 1923/24 gale-force wind caused untold damage, in particular removing the line of elm trees along Church Walk, one tree demolishing the bier house by the church gates. This was subsequently rebuilt by voluntary labour. The hurricane of October 1987 caused little structural damage, but a few trees were lost.

## **Schools**

Watton's first free school was founded in 1662 when Maurice Thompson of Lee in Kent and Sir William Thompson of London gave land and houses to a trust for the benefit of 20 children of the poor of Watton.

The parish now has two schools: the Watton-at-Stone JMI School, situated within in the village, and Heath Mount School, which occupies Woodhall House. Heath Mount, a preparatory day and boarding school, was founded in about 1790 in Hampstead and moved to Watton in 1933.

### **Heath Mount School**

Heath Mount Preparatory School, establish over 150 years ago, is located at Woodhall Park, a beautiful Georgian mansion in 40 acres of private parkland. The mansion's vast cellar areas have been imaginatively converted to house up-to-date technology, art and science, and computer laboratories and a flourishing year-8 centre. The school also has its own purpose-built Pre-Prep, Sports and Dance Hall and heated swimming pool. Weekly and half-weekly boarding places are available as well as day places. Children may choose to board for 1–4 nights weekly, signing up for activity evenings run by specialists. The ethos of the school is to offer children a challenge in a happy stress-free environment.

### **Watton-at-Stone Primary and Nursery School**

The present village school was opened in 1963 on a large site at the end of Rectory Lane. The earlier school buildings, dating from 1816, remained in use as the infants school until 17 May 1980 when the site was sold for redevelopment as Old School Orchard.

Watton-at-Stone Primary and Nursery School is a County Primary co-educational school.

The village has grown substantially over the past 10–15 years, which has led to an increase in numbers. There are also some children from neighbouring villages and from Stevenage. Even though there are now approximately 250 children on the roll, the school prides itself on retaining a “family” atmosphere where all members of the school community are valued and their talents and contributions appreciated.

The school building was built in the late 1960s and has subsequently been extended on two occasions. Two mobile classrooms are also in use. The school enjoys an attractive environment with views across open fields. Outside, there are extensive grounds including a large playing field, playgrounds, a garden pond and a conservation field.

The school is very well equipped, thanks mainly to the efforts of a very active Friends Association.

The school aims to be an integral part of the village community and has established links with the two village churches, other local schools and the local community in general.

A preschool playgroup occupies a building adjacent to the old school site.

## Parish Council

Watton-at-Stone's right to form a Parish Council was granted under the Local Government Act, 1894. Subsequently, the Parish Council's first meeting was held in the Parish Room (now restored as cottages in School Lane, opposite the Community Hall) on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> January 1895, and Mr Abel Henry Smith was elected as its chairman.

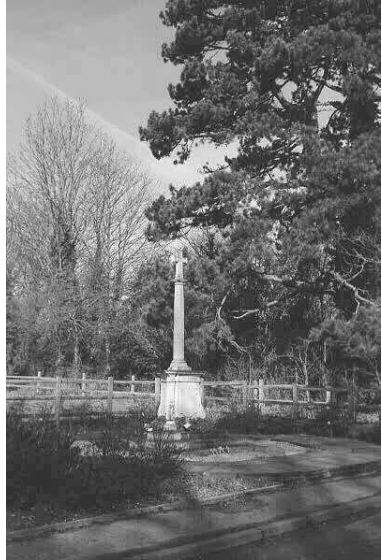
At that time, the main responsibilities of the Parish Council were to see to the collection of tins in the village and to maintain the oil lamps used for street lighting. It was also the duty of the Parish Council to appoint overseers for the collection of rates in the village

The upkeep of the War Memorial was invested in the Parish Council in 1935.

The Parish Room was used bi-monthly as a Magistrates Court, and later used as a Clubroom with a snooker table.

To mark its centenary, the Parish Council ran a competition to design a village motif. This was won by Mr Phil Berry of Hazeldell, and his design was adopted as the village logo and has been used by the Parish Council and many other local organisations ever since.

The Council also produced a booklet containing a brief history of the village together with many old photographs. The *Peep into the Past* video was also produced at this time and it contains footage of the mill fire (1967), the floods of 1968, the Queen's Silver Jubilee (1977) and the Community Association Silver Jubilee Fete (1987) – copies are still available. In addition to an exhibition of photographs and memorabilia, the Parish



Councillors of the day became thespians and acted in a short play written by Bob Ansell, their Chairman. Although the "performance" was a "memorable" one, it came as no surprise that not one of the councillors decided to give up their day job!

As a result of the increase in the population of the parish, Watton-at-Stone has a large Parish Council comprising 10 elected members plus the Clerk. As the size of the council has increased, so has the range of its responsibilities and activities.

The council owns and manages significant areas of land and planted areas within the parish including the Sports Field, Watton Green and the Lammass.

All Parish Council meetings are held in the Community Hall. Main Parish Council meetings are held on a monthly basis, with the exception of August (during which no main meeting is scheduled). The agenda for each meeting is posted on the two notice boards in the High Street and the one in Whempstead.

All Parish Council meetings are open to the public.

## Watton Green

Watton Green is an area of common land, which can be reached via Perrywood Lane.

Historical evidence suggests that village greens and commons such as Watton Green may once have been used for archery practice, jousting and maypole dancing, as well as carnivals and fairs.

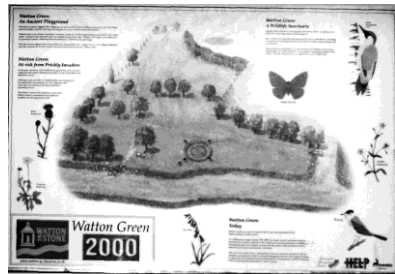
Watton Green is an ancient unenclosed 'common'. Under the medieval agricultural system these were 'waste lands' owned by the Manorial Lord and not suitable for growing crops. Villagers had 'rights' to use this land for grazing livestock, collecting firewood (firebote) or tethering pigs.

The site and adjacent surviving earthworks of moated houses suggest that early village settlement may have centred on Watton Green; over half a mile from the centre of the present village.

As a Millennium project during 1999/2000, the Parish Council undertook extensive groundwork to reclaim land lost to continuous scrub-encroachment. In addition, a management plan was adopted to ensure that the quality of the grassland could be improved and future encroachment controlled.

Watton Green is a registered County Wildlife Site and is a mosaic of ecologically important habitats that is rich in wildflowers, and provides a breeding and feeding ground for many species of birds, small mammals and invertebrates. The grassland is particularly valuable because such habitats are becoming increasingly rare in Hertfordshire due to modern agricultural practices and arable cropping.

Watton Green is a very peaceful part of the village and is worth a visit at any time of the year.



## The Lammas

The area known as the Lammas is at the northern end of the village lying alongside the River Beane between Mill Lane and Walkem Road. It covers a range of habitats including a traditional hay meadow, wooded bank and blackthorn thickets. The area was an important site for the commoners of the village. They would have grazed animals and been allowed to take a hay crop at certain times of the year. The wooded bank may have been a source of timber and fuel where berries could be collected.

In 1995, the Parish Council became concerned over the deteriorating state of the Lammas and sought advice from the Countryside Management Service on the creation of a management plan for the area. In 1996, a 10-year plan was adopted as part of the Government's Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Under this scheme, the hay meadow is cut regularly, the blackthorn thickets have been thinned out and some 300 new trees have been planted to rejuvenate the woodland area.

Footpaths in the area have also been improved and benches provided for those who wish to linger to enjoy the peace and tranquility.

## Watton-at-Stone Community Hall

The Community Hall was constructed in 1997 to replace the old Pavilion that had stood on the site for many years, and to provide the village with a range of new facilities.

The Community Hall has charitable status and is managed by a board of four trustees, each of whom are members of the Parish Council. In addition, the trustees are responsible for the management of the adjacent children's play area, floodlit Multi-Purpose Play Area (which accommodates the tennis courts) and the sports field.

In addition to the general management and maintenance of the Community Hall, the objectives of the Board of Trustees include the provision and promotion of:

- sporting and recreational facilities within the building itself
- facilities to support the sporting and recreational activities on the sports field and Multi-Purpose Play Area
- an information centre to allow the public to access a wide range of material published by local authorities and various other organisations
- meeting-room facilities



To help to achieve these objectives, the Community Hall comprises external public toilets, 'home and visitors' changing-rooms and showers, a sports hall, a pavilion and kitchen, and a small meeting-room (which is also used by the Parish Council and the Board of Trustees for their meetings). Internal toilets are provided in the sports area of the building and within the pavilion. The information centre is located in the main entrance to the building and is provided free of charge.

Parts of the Community Hall are hired by various clubs, organisations and individuals on a regular and ad hoc basis.

Anyone interested in having a look round the Community Hall, or getting more information on the facilities available, etc., should contact the Clerk to the Parish Council.

## Memories

Memories abound from the older residents of the village of life before television and the ubiquitous private car. Thanks to the children of Watton School, some of these memories have been collected, and extracts are recorded here. Even so, time has moved on and some of these recollections now require further expansion.

*The old school [now Old School Orchard] used to have a bell on top that rang in the morning, and we buried some papers in tins for people of the future, but I believe these have been dug up again now.*

*I remember as a very small child seeing the soldiers in the memorial hall, they used it for recreation. I also remember tanks in the High Street.*

*We had a marvelous celebration for the Queen's Coronation. We had a parade through the village and were all in fancy dress—the rain didn't seem to spoil things too much. We had a party and were given a mug and a tin of toffees at our Sunday School.*





*There used to be quite a lot of shops in Watton. The Post office [now a private dwelling opposite Rivershill] was a butchers, Watton Bakery [Summans/Post Office] was owned by Wilsons—they sold everything, but not bread—the Bakery was owned by the Bonnetts [next to the Almshouses opposite the telephone kiosk/postbox], Miss Bonnett also taught at the School. The other grocers was owned by Inman's [next to Bull, by the telephone kiosk/postbox, now a private dwelling]. This was the Post Office and also stocked clothes, ribbons, cottons, elastic and all other things. Mr Milton had a shoe menders and a barbers where P&P have their office [opposite George and Dragon, now The Counting House]. He also mended the bell ropes and led the bell ringers. The greengrocers was a saddler.*

*The school was opposite the cricket meadow, with two playgrounds and vegetable and flower gardens, which we all worked on. Mr Furlong was the art teacher then. We were not always good when we did potato printing; one boy printed all up the sleeve of my white blouse for which he received the cane.*

*When the cookery hut was built [now the Play School], boys and girls were taught cooking and how to do housework and ironing.*



*Watton was so different in those days, it had so many shops and things. Blacksmiths: Mr Stubbington; Butchers: Mr Stewart; Wilson Shop: Mr Wilson; Westminster Bank (in Bull Yard); Post Office and Shop: Mr Inman who delivered groceries to people on a large bike with a basket on the front; Bake House: Mr Bonnett; Shoe-Menders: Mr Milton; Bike shop: Mr Stubbs; Sweet Shop: Mr Dudley; Cafe and Newsagent: Mr Natrass, where dancing classes were held in the cafe hall [now the Firs] on Tuesdays; Hairdressers; Dairy; Off Licence; three pubs and a garage.*

*We all used to meet there [the mill] in the evening and talk, and sometimes I'm afraid we used to play knock-down-ginger especially on dark evenings until the local policeman caught you.*

*Wilson's shop was, once visited, never forgotten, with everything to sell from an elephant to a pin. They had a money-gadget that ran all across the shop which took your money from the counter to the desk and then back with your change. The ceiling was hung with long strings of milk-cans, enamel mugs, lamp pieces, all sorts of items.*

Other sources point to a thriving laundry in a hut near to the Pump.

## Village Organisations

Angling Society	Methodist Church
Badminton Club	Mother and Toddler Group
Carpet Bowls Club	Neighbourhood Watch
Christians in Watton	Parish Council
Conservation Society	Parochial Church Council
Conservative Association	Photographic Society
Craft Club	Playgroup
Evergreen Club	St Andrew's and St Mary's Church
Flower Club	Scout and Guide Group
Friends of Watton School (Club)	Sports and Social Club (including Tennis)
Labour Party	Women's Institute
Memorial Hall Management Committee	Youth Club

Most of these organisations depend entirely on voluntary helpers and the contact addresses or telephone numbers are included in a village directory produced annually by the Parish Council but entries can change quite frequently.

Most of them are, however, mentioned from time to time in the Parish Magazine but, if no contact point is given and neighbours are unable to help, addresses can be obtained either through the Clerk to the Parish Council (whose address is given on the Parish Council notice board on the High Street, near the telephone kiosk), or through the Rector. The Sports and Social Club have a notice board on the sports field, by the Community Hall.

### Watton Angling Society

Watton Angling Society has been in existence for over 20 years and was originally set up as a village club for the benefit of past and present Watton-at-Stone residents. Membership has always been restricted in numbers (65) because of the limitations of the waters we can fish. Over the past few years, village members have been difficult to find and we have extended membership to other local communities in order to keep the club financially viable. We do have a wait, but village members will usually take preference.

The aim of the club is to provide mixed angling in comfortable conditions and pleasant surroundings. We take great care to consider the environment and do what we can to encourage wildlife into the sanctuary of our waters. We are continually on the lookout for more water that we can develop for our use and for the benefit of the environment. Over the years, we have built up a considerable expertise in the water management and this is reflected in the quality of the Club's waters.

### Watton-at-Stone Carpet Bowls Club

The Watton-at-Stone Carpet Bowls Club was founded in April 1986 with a carpet hired from the Association. The Club went from strength to strength and now owns two complete sets of mats and bowls. In its best years the Club met on Tuesday evenings and Wednesday afternoons, and played in the Herts Evening League for several years until new rules required an increase in the team size from eight to twelve.

The club now plays on Wednesday afternoons only because of lack of members, but anyone wishing to start up an evening meeting would receive our full support and use of all equipment.

The Club would welcome new members from the village; simply turn up at 2.30 pm on Wednesday afternoons.

## **Watton Conservation Society**

The Conservation Society has been in existence for over 30 years.

Our role is to act as a pressure group for the whole parish on various issues concerning the environment. This includes commenting on planning applications (as and when required) and undertaking various projects and campaigns. One of our most recent projects was the marking and opening up of a 'Millennium Walk' within the parish.

We are not anti-development or excessively "green", although we have been known to plant a few trees in our time. Our voice is used to help to steer the parish forward in a sustainable way so that we can all continue to enjoy the amenity of our rural environment.

We update our Village Guide at regular intervals so that it can best present an easy-to-read record of the village's past, and what is currently on offer (and we are pleased that you are reading this one!).

Finally, the Conservation Society is always happy to welcome new members. So don't be shy, why not come to one of our monthly meetings and have your say on environmental issues that interest or concern you?

## **Watton Conservative Association**

Watton is now part of the North East Herts constituency and the present MP is Oliver Heald. Watton has an active branch who organize social events

## **Craft Club**

The Craft Club normally meets on the last Tuesday of the month in the Methodist Church Hall at 8.00pm. It is open to all, and is a club for anyone interested in hobbies and crafts. Usually one of the members demonstrates a particular skill and then all join in, but occasionally an outside expert is invited in.

## **Watton-at-Stone Flower Club**

In 2002, the Watton-at-Stone Flower Club celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. It was formed in 1978 with 140 at the inaugural meeting, several of whom are still regular members.

It has a varied programme, mainly flower arrangers who visit to demonstrate their skills, do-it-yourself workshops, speakers on varying subjects connected with flowers and plants and, once a year, an outing to such places as Hampton Court, Capel Manor or the RHS Garden at Hyde Hall.

Meetings are held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the Month (except August and December) in the Memorial Hall at 7.45 pm. Refreshments and a sales table of floral mechanics (oasis, ribbons, baskets etc) is available at every meeting and, twice a year, a plant stall and a bring-and-buy stall are held.

## **Lunch/Friendship Club**

The Lunch/Friendship Club was founded in July 1992 by members of the Methodist Church to supply food and companionship for those who would otherwise be eating on their own. It

draws both its helpers and its members from all sections of the village, not just the Methodist Church.

Members pay for their meals, the food for which is provided by volunteers, and the surplus funds are ploughed back.

The Club meets on alternate Thursdays, except for August, in the Methodist Church Hall and is open to all, although it is often operating at close to capacity.

## **Watton-at-Stone Photographers**

Watton-at-Stone Photographers are a friendly bunch who meet on alternate Mondays in the George and Dragon at 9.00 pm. Slide and print competitions on various subjects are held frequently interspersed with a number of social events. Occasional workshops are held on lighting and printing techniques, and studio lights are available for portrait work. Even if you only take photos for the family album, do come along and have an enjoyable evening – that's what most of us do.

## **Watton-at-Stone Sports and Social Club**

The earliest record of a Watton cricket match was reported in the Hertford, Cambridge and Isle of Ely Mercury, dated August 8 1829 with a win for Watton in a two innings game 'with three wickets to go down, against eleven from the Tewin Club'. The first photograph of a Watton Football team is dated 1907 and includes current village family names such as Allison, Aldridge, Monk and Spinks.

This is all good evidence that sport has been a feature of village life for many years, but it is a little disappointing that there is no great archive of information recording the history of these sporting activities and, with the exception of an interesting private photographic collection, only fragments and faded memories exist.

In the 1850's the cricket club was known as the Watton & Bennington Cricket Club and for many years played at Woodhall House where the Head Butler was a regular player. The pitch at the Meadow, which was dug out by hand and levelled, has been used since 1910 and this season the club has returned to Woodhall Park for some 2nd XI home fixtures.

Meanwhile football has been played at 'Sheepwalks' (off Perrywood Lane), Mill Lane (known as the Rifle Range) and now also at the Meadow. The Meadow had its famous ridge (formed to create the cricket table) carefully smoothed out about 8 years ago and soon after, in 1995/6, the new Pavilion and Community Hall was constructed, partly using lottery funding, to replace the old dilapidated timber structure.

Records do reveal that a referee was once thrown into the moat at Sheepwalks and that the exuberant Watton Goalkeeper once pulled the crossbar down, breaking an upright during a game which was only prevented from being abandoned by an official ten minute break while he rushed home to obtain a tool kit and odd pieces of wood.

The current Sports & Social Club was formed in the late fifties when the cricket club was short of funds and needed the support of the football club to continue and the football club were looking for a new pitch. Many social events were organised in the sixties and seventies and the Annual Dinner and Dance, now defunct, was a popular event. The Club expanded further when the Tennis Club was formed in the late seventies despite being unique in its league by not having its own courts. The private courts at Crowbury and Heath Mount School were used before the Multi Purpose Play Area (MPPA) was constructed in

1984 enabling the Tennis Section to develop further. Despite some ups and downs it is now flourishing and active in a local league.

The MPPA has been a valuable asset to local sports clubs and is owned and managed on behalf of the village by the Parish Council, who is also responsible for the Meadow and the adjacent Pavilion and Community Hall.

Numbers and support have fluctuated regularly over the years for all the clubs but the Cricket Club now runs two Saturday league teams and one friendly Sunday team against local village and touring sides. The Watton-at-Stone Football Club also run two Saturday teams in the McMullen Hertford and District League and the Waggon and Horses run a Sunday pub team. The Public Houses play and have always played a very important part in the sporting life of the village, with The Bull currently sponsoring the Football Club and The George and Dragon supporting the Cricket teams.

Following a questionnaire in the village organised by the Sports & Social Club some twelve years ago, some new activities were promoted. Youth Football has been very successful with teams now established in competitive leagues in all age groups from under 10 to under 14, a friendly league for under 9's and a strong Development Squad for the 5-7 year olds. There are some 150 boys and girls actively participating regularly under the guidance of trained coaches. The Badminton Club has also been running for about twelve years and has maintained a small core of regular players, while the Netball team currently out of action will no doubt reform if more support is found. There is now also a very popular Youth Tennis Section with an established coaching programme for all age groups involving over 100 youngsters.

Finally, within the last year a further expansion of the club has taken place with new activities operating on a regular basis. These include Aerobics, Kick Boxing, Circuit Training, Cycling and Rambling, and with the introduction of a Monthly Newsletter distributed with the Parish News the activities of these and all the main clubs are recorded and publicised regularly throughout the whole village.

The Sports & Social Club aims to promote sport within the village and to provide the framework to support and encourage any new clubs. It is currently preparing a Business Plan and Detailed Design for new football pitches and other facilities on land alongside Mill Lane, which, strangely enough, is almost where it all began.

## **Memorial Hall**

The then Parish Hall was built in 1911 by the late Col. Abel Henry Smith to seat 250 persons. The present hall was built in the 1930s to seat 150 people. Following renovations in the 1940s with money collected in the village, the hall became known as Watton Memorial Hall and includes a modern kitchen, invalid Toilet facilities and parking for 25 cars.

## **Watton-at-Stone Scout and Guide Group**

Scouting has been present in the village for a long time; it was started by Captain Boobyer in 1911 and has been going on and off since then. Guiding first appeared in the village in 1939. Eventually a dedicated headquarters (a prefabricated building) was officially opened on 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1969 by Tim Abel Smith.

There have been a large number of leaders in the village running various sections over the years, the longest serving of whom was Harry Camp, the local baker. His 25 years of

service is still recognized by the awarding of the “Harry Camp” cup to a Scout and to a Guide each year for best effort.

Currently there are Rainbow Guides, Brownie Guides and Guides all well supported, as well as a Beaver Scout colony, Cub Scout pack and a Scout troop engaged in a range of activities under a recently launched new programme. Recently, the Scouts have been particularly successful in winning the Scout British Legion Camping Competition cup consecutively from 1999-2001.

The group continues to look for new leaders and helpers in all sections to deliver the excellent outdoor experiences appreciated by the young people in the village.

## Listed Buildings

### Grade

St Andrew's and St Mary's Church	2 109 High Street
2 Heath Mount School (Woodhall House)	2 111 High Street
2 Abel Smith House	2 The Bull/115 High Street
3 Bardolph's Farm and farm buildings	2 117 High Street
2 Broomhall Farm	3 123 High Street
3 Perrywood Farm and outbuildings	3 34 High Street
2 Watton Place	3 42/44/46 High Street
3 Waggon & Horses	2 George & Dragon
3 69/71 High Street	3 124 High Street
3 87/89 High Street	3 128/130/132 High Street
2 91 High Street	3 The Cottage, High Street
2 93/95 High Street	3 Tudor Cottage, Whempstead
2 99 High Street	3 The Old Gate Inn, Whempstead
3 101 High Street	2 Watkins Hall
2 Telephone Kiosk, High Street	