

TIMELINE

The First Britons (500,000BC – 2,200BC)

The first evidence of humans living in Britain dates to around 500,000 years ago in the old stone age (palaeolithic) period. Tools have been found in Bubbenthal from around this date. By the upper paleolithic, around 40,000 BC, modern humans emerged, though from then until around 10,000 BC ice coverage made the country largely uninhabitable, though cave paintings at caves in Cresswell Crags in Derbyshire date to around 10,000 BC.

In the middle mesolithic stone age (10,000 – 4,500BC) hunter-gatherers followed the retreat of the glaciers. They are distinguished from the upper palaeolithic by their technology (small flint-barbed harpoons and arrows) and rituals. They had temporary camps although there is increasing evidence that some of these may have been fixed seasonal settlements within tribal territories. Many larger prey animals could not adapt to warmer temperatures, and hunters changed the way they hunted. Weapons changed, with arrow-head shapes including barbs, which caused more damage to the animals they hit.

During the new stone age (neolithic 4,500 – 2,200 BC), hunter-gathering slowly gave way to a period of plant and animal domestication. How much this was natural evolution and how much due to incomers from other parts of Europe is not clear. Permanent communities with farming were created in newly cleared areas of forest and communal monument building and burials occurred with long barrows, causewayed camps and cursuses. Evidence of religious worship still exists – locally the Rollright Stones are an example of an ancient stone circle. Cattle and pigs were the first animals to be farmed, simple pottery was made and polished axe heads produced.

Bronze Age (2,200BC – 800BC)

Man learned to manipulate metal (copper then the copper/tin amalgam of bronze) to make tools and weapons. Agriculture was the way of life for the small population of Britain and religious beliefs and practices were very important. At the start of this period a new style of culture known as 'beaker' swept across the country – an example of this style of pottery has been found at Warmington.

Goods, such as the tin needed to make bronze, was traded from mines in the south west of England and gold was worked, as evidenced through grave goods. People were buried singly, in a change from the communal practice of the Stone Age. Cremation started to replace burial practices by the late Bronze Age, whilst an increasingly wet climate changed

settlement patterns. As people moved from hill tops to valleys, even more of the tree cover of Britain was cleared.

Iron Age (800BC – 43AD)

The Iron Age followed, and is said to end with the Roman invasion. Iron working technology gradually replaced bronze, though the general adoption of iron was not widespread until after 500-400 BC.

Throughout the first millennium BC, strong regional groupings emerged, reflected in styles of pottery, metal objects and settlement types. In some areas, 'tribal' states and kingdoms developed by the end of the first century BC; whether this was due to foreign invasions or to natural development is unclear.

However, archaeology shows the trading and exchange contacts between Britain and mainland Europe, developed in the Bronze Age, continued throughout the Iron Age.

Technological innovation increased, with major advances including the potter's wheel, the lathe (used for woodworking) and rotary quern for grinding grain. The population of Britain is estimated to have grown to over one million, with new crops, including improved varieties of barley and wheat, and increased farming of peas, beans, flax and other crops. Farming techniques improved and new iron-tipped ploughshares meant heavier soils with a higher clay content could be cultivated.

The best known and most visible remains of the Iron Age are hill forts. Nearly 3,000 examples are known from across the British Isles, from small enclosures of less than one hectare, to massive, multi-ditched sites. Nadbury Camp is just a mile from the Warmington excavation; the significance of a very large ditch is being investigated this season. The function and form of these monuments varied greatly over time. The earliest examples date from the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age (900-600 BC) and show little evidence of permanent settlement. Instead, early sites often appear to have been used for seasonal gatherings, perhaps for trade, exchange and religious activities, with a further function as a storage centre for the broader community. Many forts played a part in the attempts to defend against Roman invasion.

The Romans (43AD – 410AD)

The Romans invaded a land rich in natural resources (wood, metals and minerals) and fertile with productive, well-established agriculture. The progressive Romanisation of society was a slow process taking many generations and most apparent in the south and midlands. It was also determined by proximity to military settlements and towns or tribal centres.

Expanding road networks and trade routes made a big impact, often felt most in the arrival of Roman-style pots, brooches and coins, the growth of markets for produce and the imposition of new taxes. Most Roman Britons lived in the countryside, so the normal daily round for most people was farming, planting and ploughing, storing and processing crops, managing woodlands, tending flocks and herds, butchering, maybe tanning, spinning, weaving, basket making, perhaps potting or smelting and smithing. The archaeology in Warmington indicates this was the type of society that existed in this area.

The late Roman population was very mixed ethnically and, when the Roman military umbrella was withdrawn in response to attacks at home, many 'foreigners' were settled and appear to have stayed behind. Within a generation or two the Roman institutions, government and economy had disappeared and the towns and villas falling into ruin.

Medieval (early)

Anglo-Saxon (c450AD – 1066AD)

With the end of Roman occupation, a process of infiltration from the south up to the north (excluding Wales, Cornwall and Scotland) by Germanic tribes overcame native opposition and established the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Sussex and Wessex. Many ideas introduced at this time lived on into the modern era, in language, laws, customs and even currency. These kings gradually converted to Christianity throughout the 7th century (Mercia was the last pagan stronghold) which moved from the Celtic model adopted from Ireland and Northumberland to the Roman Catholic. This part of Warwickshire was on the border of Mercia and the Hwicce and may have been in either tribal area. Mercia would become one of the most powerful Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms, extending its territory beyond its original heartland.

From the 9th century onwards, the kingdoms were all facing the threat of Viking invasion, which became rule in the north and east of England (Danelaw) and throughout the country from 1013 until 1042 when Anglo-Saxon rule was restored. The last king Harold Godwinson successfully fought off invasion from the Vikings in the north only to die on the battlefield of Hastings at the hands of the Norman Duke William very shortly after.

Medieval (late) (1066AD – 1485AD)

William I (The Conqueror) had invaded an England that was a powerful, centralised state with a strong military and successful economy; his conquest led to the defeat and replacement of the Anglo-Saxon elite with Norman and French nobles and their supporters.

William the Conqueror and his successors took over the existing state system, harshly repressing local revolts and controlling the population through a network of castles. One of the greatest contemporary sources of information was created 20 years after conquest – the Domesday Book. Carried out for taxation and information purposes, the survey also shows how those communities that opposed Norman rule were laid waste, especially in the north (the Harrying of the North).

The new rulers introduced a feudal approach to governing England, eradicating the practice of slavery but creating a much wider body of unfree labourers called serfs. The position of women in society changed as laws regarding land and lordship shifted. England's population more than doubled during the 12th and 13th centuries, fuelling an expansion of the towns and trade. Marginal land was cleared and brought into production to feed the expanding population, helped by warmer temperatures across Northern Europe.

A new wave of monasteries and friaries were established, while ecclesiastical reforms led to tensions between successive kings and archbishops. Despite developments in England's governance and legal system, infighting between the Anglo-Norman elite resulted in multiple civil wars and the loss of Normandy. Wales would gradually come under complete control of the English monarch through there would still be outbreaks of rebellion.

Climate change in the early decades of the 14th century is thought to have caused catastrophic crop failure in England (the Great Famine) leaving a weakened population vulnerable to waves of plague (the Black Death), which killed around half of England's population, threw the economy into chaos and society into unrest. The old feudal system proved less viable as there was not the manpower to sustain it and nearly 1,500 villages were deserted by their inhabitants, or depopulated by their overlords, as landowners looked at ways, such as sheep farming, to make their land more profitable.

English kings in the 14th and 15th centuries laid claim to the French throne, resulting in the Hundred Years' War. At times England enjoyed huge military success, with the economy buoyed by profits from the international wool and cloth trade, but by 1450 the country was in crisis, facing military failure in France and an ongoing recession. Social unrest escalated to civil conflict with the Wars of the Roses fought between rival factions in the English nobility. The final victor was Henry VII, the Lancastrian who defeated the last Yorkist monarch Richard III at the Battle of

Bosworth. This event is often held to mark the end of medieval or middle ages.

Early Modern 1485AD – 1720AD

Henry VII gave his name to the House of Tudor. His rule was largely peaceful. A shrewd and ruthless man, he was also fiercely acquisitive, building his personal wealth to bolster his position on the throne and less reliant on his nobles creating a system of absolute monarchy. On his death he was succeeded by Henry VIII, whose passionate desire for a male heir combined with a desire for greater wealth and power saw him deny the authority of Rome, confiscate all monastic property and declare himself the head of the new Church of England. Henry would go on to marry six times, fathering two daughters and a son – all of whom would rule, and all die childless.

England entered a period of religious instability – his son Edward VI, a staunch Protestant, attempted to move the whole country to his view; then Mary, a devout Roman Catholic, persecuted Protestants and had many burned for heresy. Her sister Elizabeth attempted a compromise; Anglicanism – separate from Rome, with English not Latin and in many ways similar to the modern Church of England. Though Catholics could still be prosecuted for following their faith, only those plotting against the Crown faced the maximum weight of the law for treason. Elizabeth was also averse to wasting money on war, and created an environment of peace and stability that allowed an unprecedented flowering in this country of music, art and literature of whom Shakespeare is the most famous exponent.

Dying unwed and childless, the crown passed to Mary Queen of Scots' son, unifying the three countries for the first time. James I, the Stuart king, left Scotland to rule in England and never returned. He, and his son Charles I, both followed the path of absolute monarchy as shown through their belief in the Divine Right of Kings. When Charles took this to the extreme of refusing to accept Government authority, Civil War broke out. This massively divisive and bloody war had its earliest confrontation just by the church gates in Warmington, with the first battle two miles away in Edgehill.

As absolute monarchy had reduced the power of the traditional aristocracy, the power of the commercial classes had risen. The rise of trade and the central importance of money to the operation of the government gave this new class great power, best demonstrated in the conflict between parliament and the monarch which led to the execution of Charles in 1649 and the commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell.

The Commonwealth saw a ferocious Protestantism, dispensing with anything seen as a barrier between the individual's personal relationship with God – images and statues in churches were covered or destroyed, side chapels and screens removed and personal morality strictly enforced. This puritanical mantra proved deeply unpopular and when Cromwell died Charles I's son (also Charles) was asked to return. Again the arts would flourish before Charles died without a legitimate heir. Succeeded by his brother James II, the last Stuart king, his inability to read the public mood brought the country back towards civil war. His first wife, and daughters, were Protestant, but his second wife was Catholic and foreign. When she gave birth to a son and it was known that James was, at the least, moving towards Catholicism, a bloodless coup took place which swept him from the throne and placed his daughter on the throne in its first and only joint monarchy.

William and Mary could not produce a living heir, her younger sister Anne also died without a surviving child in 1720 and a prince of Hanover was invited to take the crown.

House of Hanover 1720AD – 1837AD

For the first time since the Anglo-Saxon invasion England had a German royal family (George I, II, III, IV and William IV). And despite attempts by the Stuart descendants (James II's son and grandson) there would never be another monarch forced from the throne. These uprisings (the Jacobite rebellions) continued to damage the relationship between the Church of England and Rome, and led to great suffering among those who had supported the Stuart cause, especially in Scotland. However as the political situation stabilised, the country saw a period of immense social change in Britain, with the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of rival political parties like the Whigs and Tories. In rural areas the Agricultural Revolution saw huge changes in both the ownership and use of land, the growth of towns and cities and the beginnings of an integrated transportation system of roads and canals.

From the start of the 19th century, the English population expanded dramatically and large numbers started to move into towns or emigrate abroad. The British Empire also started to expand, except for the loss of the North American colonies, with increasing international trade. This and the industrial revolution led to some extremely rich people, some of whom had come from quite ordinary backgrounds. As the population grew, especially in urban areas, social reform started to follow towards the end of this period. Some of the most offensive examples of social inequality like slavery, and worst extremes of child

labour were outlawed and the criminal justice system started to be reformed.

Many people had felt let down by the Church of England and there was a major growth in 'non-conformist' groups such as the Quakers, Methodists and Baptists. Newspapers and leaflets were making political issues more widely debated, and alongside the setting up of hospitals, Sunday schools and orphanages, was a growing discontent with the gap between rich and poor, unemployment through mechanisation and what was seen as the immoral behaviour of the royal and aristocratic families. Revolution in France combined with the poor mental health of George III and the self-indulgent, expensive lifestyle of his son the Prince Regent, meant public opinion of the monarchy was low, church attendance falling and calls for change were growing. The period did, however, leave a rich legacy of literature, music, art and most visibly, architecture.

The Victorian Age (1837-1901)

Still the longest ruling monarch, Victoria succeeded her uncle William IV when she was only 18. It was a long period of stability, increased prosperity and growing national self-confidence. The first of the electoral reform acts which slightly extended the vote was passed in 1832 – the later 1867 act took this far further. Despite a massive exodus from the British Isles through emigration (15 million) the population of England grew from 16.8m in 1851 to 30.5m in 1901.

The marriage of Victoria and Albert, a devoted couple who demonstrated high standards of moral behaviour and extreme fecundity created an aspirational lifestyle which seemed to be within the reach of ordinary people. Religious tolerance increased, and for the first time since the 16th century new Roman Catholic churches were built. Attendance at parish churches also increased as Victoria and Albert led by example – a strong work ethic with family and church at the centre. This also led to a major programme of church restoration and building.

But while there was much that was positive in the changes – universal education, abolition of child labour, public health programmes and electoral reform – the increased mechanisation and industrialisation which saw the arrival of the railways, also brought increased pollution, more urban slum living and the expansion of Empire. The public mood was largely confident with a common belief in progress – though as the Victorian period advanced this feeling darkened a little. The death of Albert coupled with Victoria's mourning and social withdrawal led to a gradual reduction in the monarchy's popularity.

A backlash of romantic feeling against the industrial revolution led to concerns about the loss of the natural habitat and its beauties. With the creation of institutions such as the workhouse, small communities had less responsibility for the unfortunates with larger impersonal organisations taking on that role. The legacy of the Victorians is all around us – in photographs, our transport systems, buildings and social structures.

Modern Times

The twentieth century saw a number of 'firsts' – two world wars, air and space travel, a king's abdication, motor vehicles and motorways, widespread electronic communication, the nuclear age, computers – the list seems endless. But how did it change this part of south Warwickshire?

Always a community with farming at its core, self-sufficient in many ways through its landowners and workers and its smiths, bakers and other tradespeople, the pace of change in the twentieth century accelerated enormously in these traditional communities. The wars took a heavy toll on the number of young working men. Here as elsewhere women would not be able to marry, there would be less people to work the land and a community had to adjust to the crippling losses. As the business world changed, there was less room for the small business and farm. Trades disappeared, shops closed and as the numbers of young families in rural communities decreased, schools, churches and pubs closed.

Improved transport and communication meant that this part of the country appealed to people who would commute to work elsewhere and as property prices increased and social housing decreased, families who had lived locally for generations moved elsewhere.

But as so many of the last elements of what makes a village a community seem to be slipping away there is a mood for a fight-back. As people realise what has been lost so they are starting to recreate many of the things that have gone. Never have allotments been so popular, volunteers are ever more willing to give their time to initiatives such as community shops and fundraising activities.

Those who live in rural communities are consciously embracing the idea that the only way to make village life work is to take part in it – that looking at a village as just a pretty place to live undermines those things which make living there worth it.

We hope you have enjoyed your whistle-stop tour!