

Subject: Boundary between Over and Willingham

From: Linda Poulter [mailto:overparishclerk@hotmail.co.uk]
Sent: 26 February 2016 09:12
To: Francis Andrew <Andrew.Francis@scambs.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Boundary between Over and Willingham

Andrew

Our main thoughts on this issue are:

1. It's a historic boundary.

In the Victoria History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely Vol IX:

The "**Over**" entry states on p339:

"In the eastern side only the northern part of the Willingham boundary was defined by 1575, more than 1000 a. of fens being intercommoned by the two parishes until partition in c.1618. The south east boundary partly follows tracks called c.1600 the mere way and the baulk or procession way".

"In 1575 the north part of the parish comprised meres and fens, which were mostly flooded in winter. One cause was the fluctuating extent of the meres, until the early 17th century indifferently named Over mere and Willingham mere. After the parish boundary was fixed the area permanently under water was in Willingham."

The "**Willingham**" entry states on p398:

"The greater part of the western boundary was determined c.1618 when fen pastures intercommoned by Willingham and Over were partitioned by a ditch 12ft wide."

Over Parish Council has recognised the significance of the date of 1618, which is 398 years ago. It has already commissioned work to assess the appetite within the village for a celebration of the impending 400th Anniversary of the boundary's determination and to suggest what form such a celebration might take. It would appear that the c.1600 mereway is reflected in the name "Over Mereway" which lies on the current parish boundary, presumably following the line of the old mereway. This is the precise part of the boundary that Willingham is seeking to move.

2. Villages within their parishes

Villages don't have to be situated in the geometric centre of the parish - indeed both Willingham and Over villages lie to the western side of their parish boundaries.

The Victoria History says that in the Middle Ages Over was significantly larger than Willingham - in 1377 the poll tax was paid by 378 people in Over and 287 in Willingham. By the 1560s Over was the largest village in Cambridgeshire outside the Isle of Ely. Willingham overtook Over in the 1700s and has continued to grow at a faster rate.

In the 1500s Willingham's houses only reached as far south as what is now the Over Road, and there was little development beyond the western edge of the High Street. In recent times Willingham has extended its western development right up to the Over boundary, but that doesn't give any weight to its desire to enclose some of Over's green space within its western borders. The village could have expanded towards the east and remained more central within its own parish boundary, but that is not what happened.

Residents sometimes don't like their existing street names, but they usually get short shrift from the District Council if they want them changed. Although street names have sometimes changed over the years, most have historic significance and such capricious change is rightly resisted. Apparently some businesses on the Highgate estate don't like the fact that it lies within Over's historic boundary and would prefer it to lie within Willingham, but the reason

offered - that Over Parish Council has not paid them sufficient attention over the years - is hardly likely to enlist our support!

It's hard to escape the fact that this is just the hand that history has dealt them, and they should come to terms with that and make the best of it. It would be justifiable for Over Parish Council to point out that Highgate businesses have made little attempt to develop their links with Over, preferring to brood upon the fact that they are located closer to Willingham village than to Over village. Sadly or gladly, that's just the way it is!

During our investigations into the history of this issue we did note that the boundary was created in 1618 and we are looking at ways of marking the 400th anniversary of this within the village. At this point in time we are not looking to instigate a petition but this is something we may re-visit at a later stage.

Kind regards

Linda