

Fawkham Parish: through the second Elizabethan Era

When Queen Elizabeth II came to the throne in 1952 Fawkham was, in many ways, very similar to today, 2022, at the end of her reign. The parish very much remains a rural one, although the boundaries have changed a little, and large scale development comes ever-closer, with the construction of 15,000 houses at Ebbsfleet underway. The nearly 1000-year-old church of St. Mary remains in the meadow, and is now part of the Baldwin's Green Conservation Area. The annual fete is now held on the meadow, rather than in the grounds of the Village school or the garden of the then Rectory, where it was held in the early 1950s. The Rising Sun Inn is popular, sited beside the village green. Children from the Parish continue to attend Fawkham Primary School, which has new buildings since 1952 (the original flint school building remains). It is still a half-form entry school, with 15 pupils admitted each year, and a total of around 100 pupils from age 4 or 5 to 11, of whom around 30% live in the Parish. The village hall is thriving, with a new building dating from 1989, which was extensively refurbished in 2020.

While much of the land within the Parish remains farmed, some of the old farmsteads are now residential houses, including Scudders, Hill Barn Farm, Churchdown Farm and Green Farm, although most of their lands have been absorbed into other farms, chiefly Gay Dawn Farm at Pennis, and Speedgate Enterprises on Mussenden Lane. Many former farm buildings are now used as premises for a range of businesses, from dog groomers to iron welders, and from catering suppliers to specialist car repairers.

The Parish remains heavily wooded, with 12.7% covered in ancient woodland, which has been in place since at least 1600. In total, 24% of the Parish is woodland. There are four Local Wildlife Sites, which cover nearly 10% of the Parish, found at Horton Wood, Churchdown Wood, Saxten and Cages Wood and a field edge between Churchdown Wood and Dean Bottom. Fawkham also has many old hedgerows which appear on a tithe map of the Parish from 1831 and on the first OS field drawings from 1798.

When the Queen came to the throne in 1952, sugar, butter, cheese, margarine, cooking fat, bacon, meat and tea were all still rationed. Tea rationing ended on 3rd October 1952. Rationing did not completely finish until 1954, with sugar rationing ending in 1953 and meat rationing in 1954. In 2022, we are facing the prospect of electricity being rationed this winter, with potential three hour planned power cuts, due to the disruption of flows of gas from Russia because of the war in Ukraine, following Russia's invasion earlier this year.

Food in 1952 was seasonal (no tomatoes in winter, for example); there were no supermarkets, no frozen food or freezers to store it in and the only takeaway was from the fish and chip shop. 'Meat and two veg' was the staple diet for most families in the 1950s and 1960s. The average family rarely, if ever, ate out. The closest most people came to eating out was in the pub. In 2022, Fawkham residents can have takeaways delivered from local Indian and Chinese restaurants and have recently started to be able to receive deliveries from a limited range of local restaurants via Deliveroo, UberEats and similar services. Longfield currently has two fish and chip shops, two Chinese, two Indian, one Turkish, one kebab, and one pizza takeaways/eat in restaurants, two cafes and a national chain coffee shop (Costa Coffee).

There were three shops at the Green in the 1950s: a grocery store/Post Office in what is now known as Montana House (which later became a Co-op), a greengrocer's shop (which later became the Post Office, and is now a house called The Old Post Office) and a bakery (opposite Montana House). In 2022, there are none. The village survey of 2019 showed that most people in Fawkham shop either at Waitrose in Longfield (where there is also a Co-op), Sainsbury's at Pepperhill or Asda in Swanley.

The population of Fawkham in the 1951 census was 379, and in 2011 it was 578. Much of the growth occurred by 1961, when the population was 529, mostly due to a change in the boundary and the building of further houses at Fawkham Green (see more below).

There are currently around 230 dwellings in the Parish, and planning consent has been granted for a further 52 dwellings: 26 at Salts Farm depot by the railway bridge and 26 in the grounds of Fawkham Manor, which ceased operating as a private hospital in 2019.

Let's go back to 1952 - here are some of the events of that year¹:

- The remains of the old Woodman pub, which had been destroyed by a flying bomb in 1944, were finally cleared, to make way for Woodman Villas, temporary council houses built on the Airey system, in turn replaced by the present Woodman Villas cul-de-sac.
- The book, Fawkham: The Story of a Kentish Village, which had been printed in the previous year to mark the Festival of Britain, was selling well.
- Improvements to the bus service were sought - in 1952 the 492 bus ran through Fawkham.
- Complaints were made about the smell from the cooking of pig food off Castle Hill. There were several pig farms in the Parish then.
- Further unsavoury smells came from the emptying of cesspools. All houses then had cesspits; main drainage arrived down Castle Hill in 1970, and was extended along Valley Road in the 1980s, not reaching the Fawkham Green area until 1985.
- In March of that year plans were drawn up for new houses to be built at Small Grains, which it was hoped could be built in six months. The old field title of Small G[r]ains was perpetuated as the name of the new road. The first occupants of Small Grains moved in in January 1953, and all new tenants were visited and welcomed by members of the Parish Council.
- The parish boundary was changed to include the Fairview Cottages, which until then were part of West Kingsdown Parish. This followed a request made by the residents of those cottages during the war "for the sake of convenience".
- Mr Ronald Billings (owner of the Fawkham Manor estate) made an offer of land to Kent County Council to create a path from the school to the green, in response to concerns over the safety of walking along Valley Road, especially with children. It would be hard to imagine walking to school along the road today!
- A survey of the public rights of way was undertaken, as part of a national scheme to document them and create definitive maps. Several paths in Fawkham were deemed to not be public footpaths, and today there are 17 public footpaths within the Parish, covering 5.87 miles or 9.44km.
- The creation of a cricket club was suggested, which received considerable support. Cricket had previously been played on the field in front of the White House, but it does not appear that this new proposal went ahead, and there is no cricket club in 2022.
- It was decided that the post box on Castle Hill had "too small a mouth" and the Parish Council requested for it to be replaced. This happened in 1953, with a new ER II post box installed. Sadly, this was stolen in October 2021 and it was replaced with a modern ER II box without the embossed cast iron royal insignia. (Another small post box was the Victorian one mounted in the boundary wall of Cross House at the bottom of Pennis Lane. This was replaced by a box on a telegraph pole in the Valley Road in the 1960s, but a protest produced an admission from the Post Office that this was a mistake, and a Victorian wall-box, even narrower than the original one, was re-instated in the Cross House wall. This is still there, although the wall itself has been rebuilt on a different alignment.)

¹ Information taken from Fawkham Parish Council Minute Book

Some things were different in 1952:

- Fawkham was part of Dartford Rural District, rather than Sevenoaks.
- Longfield railway station was still called Fawkham Station (it changed in 1961); the attractive Edwardian building was then replaced by the current pre-cast structure in 1971. Although the line had been electrified in 1939 between Victoria and Gillingham, steam trains continued to pass through the station to and from the coast until 1959.
- Manor Lane was called Woodsall Lane, and Gallows Wood was part of Fawkham Road (it only became Gallows Wood when it was truncated by the construction of the M20).
- Steephill (the road past the house of that name) was the “old valley road” as, between the World Wars, the straight section passing the church had been converted from a private track; the main road turned at Baldwin’s Green and followed the route of Steephill.
- Pennis House was still under requisition by the Dartford Rural District Council as temporary flats after the Second World War, and remained so until 1955. It is now one of the 13 Listed buildings in the Parish.
- Parish Council meetings were held at Steephill, already a school but also the home of the then Clerk (and Headteacher), Miss Eileen Bignold.

Many of the matters being dealt with by the Parish Council in 1952 were the same as in 2022, with problems concerning the roads and lanes, and also local town planning:

- Broken road signs which needed repair or replacement. Fawkham Parish Council (FPC) has, in 2022, requested several signs from Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) as many are missing or badly damaged.
- Complaints made about overgrown hedgerows lining the road sides, and the “inadequate standard of road maintenance”.
- There were complaints of speed and traffic on Valley Road (indeed the very first FPC meeting in 1935 also discussed this matter). There was no speed limit on the road in 1952. In October 2022, an extension of the 30mph speed limit from Speedgate Hill to past the school and village hall was introduced, following years of campaign by FPC.
- It was felt that the danger of turning from Speedgate Hill on to Valley Road would be reduced by installing a mirror, although FPC was told that mirrors were no longer approved. FPC has made the same request in 2022, and will probably receive the same answer! (In 1952, oast houses and an adjoining barn made the turning even more blind than it still is. They were demolished in the 1980s).
- Dartford prepared a town planning document which stated that Hartley and Longfield would increase their population by 200%, although in Fawkham no organised development was planned, except sewerage in about 20 years. A Kent Development Plan was also prepared. These were forerunners of today’s Local Plans, and, in 2022, SDC is working on the second Local Plan for the District, covering development up to 2045. FPC will be working hard to protect the “rural status” of Fawkham, noted in the 1952 plans.
- The Rector, A.C. Ford, had come to the Rectory in 1949, and was to remain in post until his retirement (by then Canon Ford) in 1982. He was the last Rector of the ecclesiastical Parish of Fawkham, which was then amalgamated with the Parish of Hartley, and the Rectory was sold as a private house.

1977

1977 was the Queen's Silver Jubilee year. By this time, Fawkham was part of Sevenoaks District, and the PC proposed moving the northern boundary to the railway line, which happened some years later. The road running under the railway line into the Parish remains named as Fawkham Road; its name changes to Valley Road outside the house called Churchdown Wood, which marks the position of the old parish boundary.

- There were by now speed limits in place along the main lane, and complaints were made about road resurfacing and the condition of some of the footpaths.
- A petition for a public sewer was presented at the Annual Parish Meeting (as noted above, this was still some years away).
- A new surface water drain was to be installed by KCC at the green which, it was hoped, "will greatly improve the situation". Flooding remains a problem today, and in 2022, some additional drainage was installed and plans are being drawn up for further improvements, subject to funding.
- It was agreed that bookings for "discos" (dances with loud music which emerged in the 1970s) at the village hall would not be accepted.
- Complaints were made by residents about noise from Brands Hatch circuit.
- Children at the school wrote a letter to FPC expressing their concerns about the environment (unfortunately there is no copy of the letter to see details of their concerns).
- Granite setts were laid at the probable site of the medieval cross at Pennis Lane, which remain there today, with the area now registered as common land.

To mark the Queen's Silver Jubilee events were held at Small Grains and also at Speedgate Farm, where a party was held in the barn. Boxes to collect donations towards SDC's jubilee fund were placed in the Post Office and the Rising Sun - it's not known how much was collected.



A Parish sign was created to commemorate the Silver Jubilee and the restoration of Baldwin's Green as common land. The sign shows oak leaves and seven acorns, representing our inclusion in Sevenoaks District; the de Faukeham coat of arms, and the white horse of Kent. Also shown are a green line representing the Green Belt and two blue wavy lines representing the water which flows down Valley Road all too frequently.

2002

The Queen's Golden Jubilee was in 2002. In that year:

- The Post Office closed in March, with a temporary Post Office proposed at the village hall on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, although the Minutes show a survey was conducted with very little interest expressed.
- The path which runs from the village hall car park to the school was completed, making it safe for children walk from the car park into the school grounds.
- Concerns continued to be expressed over increasing traffic and speeds along the Valley Road.
- A large building programme of three fully resourced classrooms, a hall with servery and a library was completed at the school, and officially opened by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, with a blessing by the Bishop of Rochester.
- It was proposed that a centre for Battersea Dogs and Cats Home be created in the Parish on the site of former dog kennels. Battersea Brands Hatch, as it became called, is still here in 2022.
- Cables were installed to light the trees on the village green. This time capsule is being buried at the Christmas tree light switching on ceremony in 2022.

To celebrate the jubilee, Fawkham Primary held a jubilee concert on the 16th of July, and an event for residents was held on the village green with food supplied by the Rising Sun.

2012

2012 saw the Diamond Jubilee, marking 60 years of the Queen's reign. In that year:

- A 30 mph speed zone was sought by the school and, although that was not possible, flashing lights and road markings were installed.
- A dog waste bin was placed in the church car park.
- Miss Bridges became the headteacher at Fawkham Primary and remains as head in 2022.
- London hosted the 2012 Olympics, and Paralympic events were held at Brands Hatch.

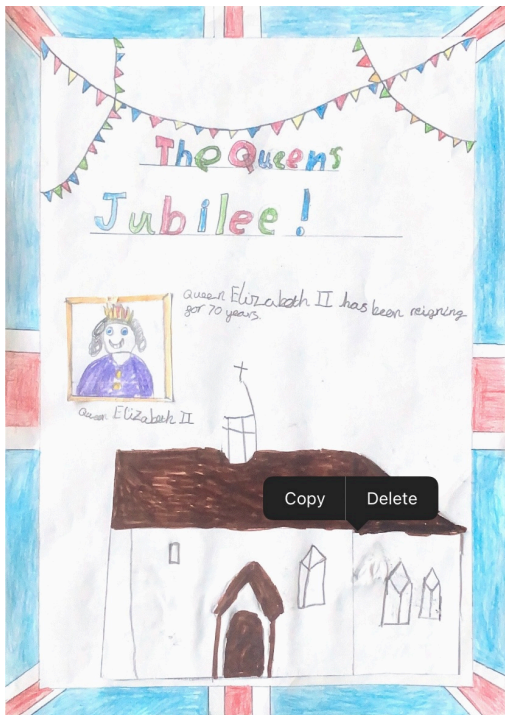
2022

Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee was in 2022. During this year, the Parish Council continued to tackle issues which were also seen in 1952: speeds along Valley Road, with the 30mph speed limit at last extended to the school; damaged road signs; road surface issues; surface water flooding issues - and sewage flooding from the mains system. SDC's Local Plan is being consulted upon, although the development sites proposed for Fawkham will not be known until 2023.

The Parish is also creating its first Neighbourhood Plan to set out the community's vision for Fawkham and put in place policies to help shape the area. A Vision for Fawkham was created at a workshop for residents in July 2022: *Our vision is for Fawkham Parish to retain and enhance the*

distinctive rural character of the landscape (particularly its woodland, biodiversity and views), the separate, small scale scattered hamlet of Fawkham and the historic Baldwins Green Conservation Area and its setting whilst meeting the limited local housing need, sustaining the local economy and retaining and enhancing the social fabric.

To celebrate the Platinum Jubilee, the Parish Council, helped by a committee of residents, held a picnic on the Small Grains grass area. A fancy dress competition was held for children, with a royalty theme, and for adults with a 1950s theme. A themed cake and best dressed house competitions were also held. Children were presented with a medal, a bookmark and sweets as mementos, and one of each can be found in the time capsule. A celebration was also held at Fawkham School in July, when the PTA, Friends of Fawkham, presented the children with a medal.



A competition was held to design the invitations



A Jubilee Conga



Rose Cottage, home of the Cherry family, and winner of the best dressed house



A rare visit from the ice cream van



A Platinum Jubilee G & T served on a Silver Jubilee tray!



Small Grains and Fawkham Green Road were closed for the party



The winners of the children's fancy dress competition



The cake competition winners, and the prizes



The two Parish signs, created to mark the Silver Jubilee, were decorated with bunting



Red, white and blue flowers by the Parish entrance sign (installed in 2019 by the M20 bridge, with a second one by the railway bridge) and the war memorial (which was Listed in 2020)

Laura Evans
Chair, Fawkham Parish Council
November 2022

With thanks to Christopher Proudfoot for additional information