

1. Parish: Woolpit

Meaning: a. Wolf-pit for trapping wolves
b. Pit dug for burial of wolves
c. Site of capture of last wolf in East Anglia

2. Hundred: Thedwastre

Deanery: Thedwastre (–1972), Lavenham (1972–)

Union: Stow

RDC/UDC: Thedwastre RD (1894–1974), Mid Suffolk DC (1974–)

Other administrative details:

Thingoe and Thedwastre Petty Sessional Division
Stowmarket County Court District

3. Area: 1,881 acres (1912)

4. Soils:

Mixed: a. Deep well-drained sand and coarse loams. Some coarse and fine loams with slowly permeable subsoils, slight seasonal waterlogging. Risk of wind erosion.
b. Fine loam over clay with slowly permeable subsoils. seasonal waterlogging, associated with similar but wetter soils. Some calcareous/non-calcareous slowly permeable clay soils.
c. Some brickearth.

5. Types of farming:

1500–1640	Thirsk:	Sheep-corn region where sheep are main fertilizing agent, bred for fattening. Barley main cash crop. Also has similarities with wood-pasture region with pasture, meadow, dairying and some pig keeping.
1818	Marshall:	Wide variations of crop and management techniques including summer fallow in preparation for corn and rotation of turnip, barley, clover, wheat on lighter lands.
1937	Main crops:	Wheat, barley, turnips.
1969	Trist:	More intensive cereal growing and sugar beet.

6. Enclosure:

1851 456 acres on Woolpit Heath enclosed under General Acts of 1848.

7. Settlement:

1981 Main Bury St Edmunds–Ipswich road follows line of northern boundary before curling south and east across parish.
Large relatively compact development around central church.
Secondary development at a. Woolpit Green, b. Heath Road, c. Broadgrass Green, d. Borley Green.

Inhabited houses: 1674 – 58, 1801 – 108, 1851 – 228, 1871 – 229, 1901 – 213, 1951 – 249, 1981 – 518

8. Communications:

Roads: For many centuries Woolpit stood on main road to Ipswich. Roads to Tostock, Beyton, Drinkstone, Rattlesden, Elmswell, Harleston, Stowmarket and Finborough and Ixworth converge at this point.
1844 Carriers to Bury St Edmunds on Wednesday and Saturday
To Ipswich on Monday and Thursday
1891 Carriers to Bury St Edmunds on Wednesday and Saturday
To Stowmarket on Thursday

Rail: 1891 1½ miles from Elmswell Station. Cambridge–Ipswich line, opened 1846, became unmanned halt 1967.
No date: narrow gauge tramway said to have run from Woolpit to Elmswell station.

9. Population:

1086 – 61 recorded
1327 – 16 taxpayers paid £1 10s. 6d.
1524 – 59 taxpayers paid £8 5s. 10d.
1603 – 240 adults
1674 – 107 households
1676 – 247 adults
1801 – 625 inhabitants
1831 – 880 inhabitants
1851 – 1,071 inhabitants
1871 – 995 inhabitants
1901 – 863 inhabitants
1931 – 755 inhabitants
1951 – 805 inhabitants
1971 – 1,316 inhabitants
1981 – 1,471 inhabitants

10. Benefice: Rectory

- 1254 Portion to Abbey of St Edmund £13 6s. 8d.
Portion to the vicar £2. £15 6s. 8d.
- 1291 Portion to the vicar £6 13s. 4d.
Portion to Infirmarer of St Edmunds £6
Portion to Hostiliar of the same £1 6s. 8d.
Portion to Pitanciar of the same £6 £20.
- 1535 Valued £6 18s. 9d.

Advowson vested in Abbot of St Edmunds by gift of Ulfketel. Church appropriated 12th cent. on death of parson to use of sick monks.

- 1831 1 curate. Stipend £100 p.a. Glebe house. Gross income £350 p.a.
Valued £350 1835
Yearly tithe rental of £450 18s. 6d. 1855 1 Rectory house.
30 acres glebe 1874.
- 1912 35 acres glebe. Valued £252 + residence.
- 1918 Valued £270 1918.

Patrons: Abbots of St Edmunds (c.1055–1539), Sir Richard Southwell (1554), See of Norwich (1556–1678), Charles Wood (1718–1752), Samuel Hunt (1752–1757), George Mandeville (1757–1781), Rev. Thomas Cobbold (1781–1831), Rev. J.S. Cobbold (1831–1837), B.W. Page and J.C. Cobbold (1837)

11. Church St Mary

(Chancel, clerestoried nave, aisles, embattled W tower and spire) (Renowned for its 15th cent. carved and decorated double hammer beam roof).

- 1086 1 church + 15 acres in alms
Two building periods 1300–1375 and 1375–1550
- 14th cent. S. aisle and chancel
- 1444–1462 Legacies for the church
- 1473/4 Will bequeaths £20 for 5 images for the porch
- 1643 Visited by Puritanical Vandals (William Dowsing) on 29th February. 80 superstitious pictures and 3 crosses destroyed.
- 1702 Part of tower and 66ft. spire blown down in gale. Rebuilt with smaller pinnacle 1708
- 1844 Double hammer beam roof of nave restored.
- 1852 Tower almost entirely demolished by lightning strike (original was timber and lead) – rebuilt 1854
- 1854 Timber vault to tower built

Note: The angels on the roof mostly date from 1875 although some are original.

The south aisle contained chapel to Our Lady of Woolpit (supposed to have held image of great repute)

Seats: 120 appropriated, 280 free (1873)

12. Nonconformity etc:

1593	9 persons absent from church for 1 year
1611	2 persons fail to receive communion
1643	John Watson, rector, ejected by Suffolk Committee for Scandalous Ministers
1676	4 papists, 3 nonconformists
1817–1850	8 houses set aside for worship
No date	Plymouth Brethren chapel (formerly used by Primitive Methodists). Primitive Methodists chapel built 1861 and meeting room for Plymouth Brethren.

13. Manorial:

Woolpit/Cold Hall

1066/1086	Manor of 3 carucates (an outlier) belonging to Abbot of St Edmund (Lordship vested in Abbot by gift of Earl Ulfketel). Extent/customs for lands of monastery 1357 in MSS in British Museum.
1541	John, Lord Russell owns Due to differences in grants of this period it is suggested (though not confirmed) that there were 2 manors in Woolpit prior to 16 th cent.
1546	Linked to Stowmarket (Sir Thomas Darcy has grant of Woolpit Manor)
1584	Suggested date of unification of the manors
1610	Linked to Winston (Sir Robert Gardiner confirmed in ownership, died without issue)
1619	Gardiner Webbe (his nephew) owns
1740s	Linked to Blythford, Bromeswell, Hollesley, Ufford, Sogenhoe, Loudham and Drinkston (disputed) (Sir Henry Wood)
1764	Linked to Buxhall (Joshua Grigsby)
1892	John Reginald Hargreaves owns

14. Markets/Fairs:

13th cent.	Grant for market and fair
	Fair in use and much frequented 1481/2
	Fair held on Sept. 16th (for horses, scotch cattle and toys) 1759
	Fairs held on August 12th, Sept. 16th and 19th 1792
	Fair held on August 12th, Sept. 16th for horses and Sept. 19th for cattle and toys 1805

1878/88	Fairs abolished. Drunkenness and disorderly behaviour and the railways given as contributory causes for the abolitions.
1912	Horse and cattle fair held annual on 16th Sept. Flower show held in 2nd week in July.
1877	Woolpit Street Market revived
1978	Woolpit Fairs Week revived in May/June.

15. Real property:

1844	£2,667 rental value
1891	£3,394 rateable value
1912	£2,869 rateable value

16. Land ownership:

1844/1891	Land sub-divided
1912	Duncan Parker and T.E. Robinson principal owners

17. Resident gentry:

1680	3 gents.
1810	Joshua Grigsby, High Sheriff of Suffolk
1844	Rev. E. Clayton MA, Rev. L.F. Page MA
1891	D. Parker
1912	Rev. E.M. Bartlett, O.R.M. Wood, MB, CM, LRCP, LFS & PG

18. Occupations:

1500–1549	1 husbandman, 1 smith
1550–1599	1 clothier, 6 yeomen, 5 husbandmen, 2 bladesmiths, 1 cordwainer, 1 wheelwright, 2 tanners, 1 labourer, 1 rector, 1 parchment maker.
1600–1649	1 clothworker, 3 clothiers, 11 yeomen, 3 husbandmen, 3 tailors, 1 cordwainer, 1 butcher, 1 brickmaker, 1 wheelwright, 1 potter, 2 inn holders, 2 clerks, 1 glover, 1 beer brewer
1650–1699	1 clothworker, 1 clothier, 2 wool combers, 1 linen weaver, 9 yeomen, 1 husbandman, 1 draper, 1 cook, 2 cordwainers, 1 miller, 1 butcher, 2 spinsters, 1 potter, 1 glover, 2 grocers, 1 labourer, 2 woollen drapers.
1831	92 in agriculture, 75 in retail trades, 10 professionals, 12 labourers, 31 in domestic service, 19 others.
1844	Large brick and tile manufacturer, Woolpit Brick Co. liquidated 1905. Last brickfields closed 1950s. Solicitor, land surveyor, land agent, hairdresser, watchmaker, grocer/draper, postmaster, cabinet maker, surgeon, saddler, farrier, cooper, 3 publicans, 1 beerhousekeeper, 4 teachers, 3 bakers, 2 blacksmiths, 6 boot/shoemakers, 2 bricklayers, 4 brick/tile makers, 3

butchers, 3 carpenters, 2 millers, 9 farmers, 3 painters/
plumbers/glaziers, 3 tailors, 2 wheelwrights.
1912 Sub-postmistress, fire brigade, schoolmaster/2
mistresses, police officer, carrier, 2 boot/shoemakers, 3
butchers, 10 farmers, 2 carpenters, poor rate collector, 4
publicans, 2 millers, thatcher, greengrocer, relieving
officer, hotelier, 3 beer retailers, painter/plumber,
blacksmith, grocer, sheriff's officer, builder/carpenter/
blacksmith, brickmaker, chimney sweep, harness maker,
market gardener, tailor, medical officer, manager of
Woolpit Brick Co., brick, tile and drain pipe makers.
1983 Hofels Pure Foods Ltd. based at Woolpit.

19. Education:

1818 Thursday evening school (70 attend), 1 Writing school (4
boarders, 50 day boys and 16 girls attend), 1 Sunday
school (70 attend)
1 Dames school (15 attend)
1833 6 daily schools (115 attend, 46 assisted places)
1 Sunday school with lending library attached (100
attend)
National school established 1836
Infants school established 1837
1844 4 Academies listed
Board formed 1877. Average attendance at school
1891 150
Public Elementary school built 1895, average
attendance 1912 130

20. Poor relief:

1776	£192 18s. 0d.
1803	£500 3s. 11d.
1818	£1,213 6s.
1830	£631 12s.
1832	£637 16s.
1834	£546 11s.

21. Charities:

Poor's Land:

1811 15 acres 2R 6P let at £38 p.a., rents laid out in bread to
12 poor widows
3 pieces of land in Rattlesden let at £10
Residue after amount for bread, distributed at Christmas
among the poor 1840

Church Lands:

1828 6 acres 2R 37P including land in Woolpit and Hunston let at £14 p.a. used for church repairs

Beales Charity:

1728 by will of Francis Beales: 2 tenements let at £5. 10s. p.a. Rents distributed in bread to 52 poor persons, 12 of them to have a 1d. loaf every Sunday

Gardener's Almshouses:

In Elmswell: 3 poor widows have places (must be 60 years old), each given pension of 16d per week (paid monthly), 1 load of good firewood on Feast of All Saints and 1 gown, ready made, of coarse blue cloth or stuff. Bequest of £16 p.a. to cover this.

22. Other institutions:

Guilds of Our Lady and Trinity 15/16th cent.
Village Institute housed in 14th century building, restored 1920. Presented to parish as War Memorial. Contains reading, billiard, concert and bath rooms.
1803 3 Friendly Societies (61 members)
1844 3 poor women in Gardiner's Almshouses
1891 Fire Engine listed
Police officer and Sheriff's officer listed
Woolpit Health Centre built 1973. Improvement scheme completed 1987.
Woolpit Village Hall opened 1980

23. Recreation:

1600–1649 2 inn holders listed
1844 The Crown, The Plough and The Swan public houses. The origins of the Swan date from 1625. 1 beerhouse.
1891 The Plough Inn, The Swan Inn, The Crown Inn and The Bull public houses. 3 beerhouses.
1912 The Bull, The Ship, The Plough and The Swan public houses. 3 beer retailers.
Crown Commercial Hotel and coaching house
Woolpit Horticultural Show
Football team c.1921
Woolpit Rifle Club opens new range 1984

24. Personal:

25. Other information:

Bygones Museum, situated in centre of village opened 1985, organised by Woolpit History Investigation Group.

Swan Inn: part dates 1826, rest has 16th cent. core with plaster date in dormer gable of 1759. Grade II listed.

Parish contains numerous listed buildings.

Post Mill: 18th cent. Grade II listed.

Fire Brigade: Fire station building believed to have stood in Rattlesden Road 1961. Engine bought 1844 by parishes of Woolpit, Drinkstone, Norton, Shelland, Tostock and Wetherden under control of the Woolpit & District Brigade. Engine appears to have been sold c.1941. Financial records cover the period 1899–1939. Regulations state 'Anyone requiring the Engine be requested to send a summons in writing, if possible'.

Legend of the Green Children: First related in 12th cent. Two green children are said to have emerged from the vicinity of some ditches or pits. They were cared for by the Lord of the Manor. The boy died but the girl lost her green colour after a time, married and moved away. Many books and plays have been written on the subject.

Shrine of Virgin Mary: Popular place of medieval pilgrimage. Well established by 14th cent. Resident of Creeting bequeathed string of 180 beads with silver paternosters, 3 gold rings and silver cross and heart to be hung round the statue 1505. Site of chapel remains unknown.

Article on Masons' Marks in Woolpit Church by F. Johnson in parish folder.
Lady's Well: said to have been endowed with medicinal virtues. Situated in meadow called Palgraves and is a perpetual spring. Although used by pilgrims it was not itself a place of pilgrimage and any suggestion that a chapel was sited by the well is unsubstantiated.

Hill House: Former schoolhouse. 15th cent. core, contains crown post and indications of original open hall.

Extracts from Medieval wills relating to church bequests in parish folder.
Village Pump: cover erected by villagers to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

Village sign erected 1977.

'Mural Inscriptions in a house at Woolpit', by Leslie Dow. PSIA Vol. XXIX p.213.

Former Crown Hotel: private house. Well found under living room floor 1982.

Map of Woolpit Brickworks: surveyed 1883/84 in parish folder.

Photocopy of Will of Henry Farrow, brickmaker of Woolpit 1658 in parish folder.

'Wolves, Wells and Woolpit', by E. Lunnon, East Anglian Magazine May 1980 (this article contains inaccuracies)

Article (with photographs) 'Woolpit' in 'A View into the Village', by E. Sandon 1969.

Parish suggested as possible site of Roman station Sitomagus (other such sites are at Haughley and Thetford).

'Woolpit Church'. PSIA Vol. II, p.190

Neolithic axe from Woolpit. PSIA vol. XXIX, p.216.