

Eynsham

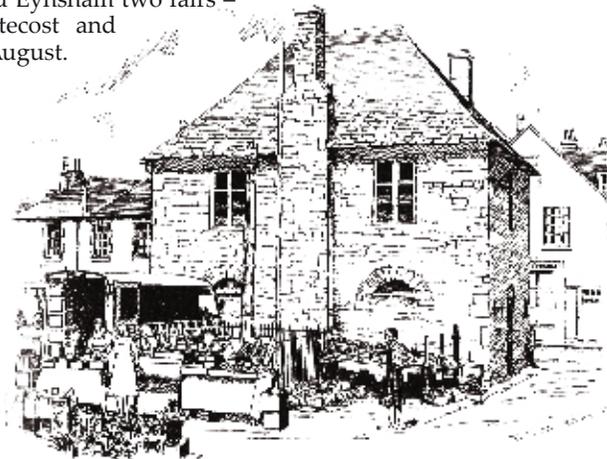
Eynsham's first inhabitants probably chose to settle here because of its position on the gravel terrace above the River Thames at a point where it was relatively easy to ford. A Bronze Age enclosure ditch, over 3,000 years old, was found under the site of the abbey. During the Roman period the land may have been occupied as a number of Roman coins, tile and pottery have been found in the area. The first documented reference to Eynsham was in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 571. Several Saxon buildings - known as sunken floored buildings or SFBs - have been found in excavations in and around Eynsham. They were small buildings consisting of a shallow pit with a post at each end that supported a thatched roof. As they were quite small it is thought that they may have been used as workshops or weaving sheds rather than houses.

The abbey

Eynsham Abbey was, in its time, one of the most important abbeys in the country. Founded in 1005 by Aethelmar, Earl of Cornwall, Eynsham Abbey was part of the Benedictine order. The first abbot was the famous scholar Aelfric, perhaps best known for his ability to take difficult Latin texts and make them understandable to the less well educated monks. Soon after the foundation of Eynsham Abbey Aelfric wrote his 'Letter to the Monks of Eynsham' in which he instructed the monks on how they should live from day to day. The abbey became wealthy, owning land throughout Oxfordshire and beyond.

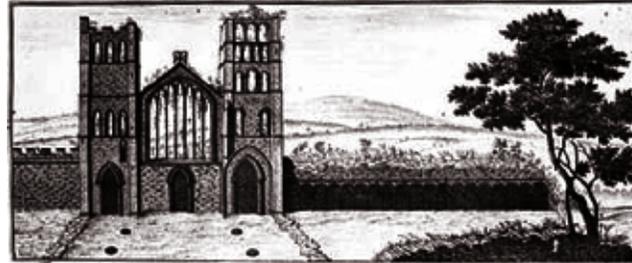
Market trading

Eynsham became a market town with a regular Sunday market controlled by the abbot. The first licence was granted in about 1150 by King Stephen. Later, Henry II also allowed Eynsham two fairs - at Pentecost and on 15 August.



The new lands

In the 1200s Abbot Adam attempted to increase the abbey's wealth through property development. He created the abbey fishponds to the south of the abbey and a new borough called Terra Nova, or New Land, to the north. Adam hoped to move the market here and attract rich merchants to Eynsham. Sadly, whatever his merits as an abbot, he was no good as a businessman: he plunged the abbey into debt and was eventually deposed by the bishop. But his legacy lives on: the road is still called Newland Street and has survived to be one of Eynsham's most picturesque streets.



The end of the abbey

With the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, the abbey was handed over to the king in December 1538 and the magnificent buildings gradually fell into decay. The abbey buildings were used as a quarry and the stones were taken to build many of the houses in the village. By 1657, only the ruined west end was still standing. Carved fragments of stone from the abbey can still be seen in many of the buildings in the village.

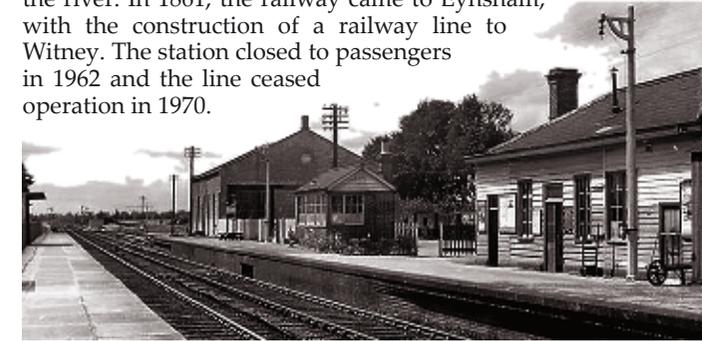


Eynsham wharf

The Thames provided Eynsham with a trade route from the earliest times - there was a wharf as early as 1302. From the middle ages, through to the mid-19th century Eynsham wharf was an important connection to Oxford and London, sending and receiving goods such as coal, corn, salt and stone. Much of the stone used to build the Oxford colleges was shipped through Eynsham.

Tolls and trains

The crossing of the river Thames at Swinford was sometimes hazardous - some Welsh sheriffs drowned there in 1636 and John Wesley nearly drowned in 1764. Because of this the Earl of Abingdon built Swinford toll bridge which was opened in 1769. The Earl and his successors were granted the tolls tax-free, for ever. The toll is still collected today - 5 pence from every car that crosses the river. In 1861, the railway came to Eynsham, with the construction of a railway line to Witney. The station closed to passengers in 1962 and the line ceased operation in 1970.



Eynsham now

Today Eynsham is a thriving community, with over 4,500 residents and around 2,000 people working here each day. Since the end of the 1940s the village has expanded rapidly with new housing and conversions, secondary and junior schools and, more recently, new facilities such as the Village Hall, Scout Hall and Sports Centre.

Eynsham has never lost its strong sense of community. It is not a museum piece, but a living, vibrant village. Eynsham remains what it has always been: a traditional Oxfordshire village - rooted in history, yet looking to the future; proud of its past and flourishing in the present.

