A concise history of Willingale.

It is unknown when the area now known as Willingale was first inhabited. A Bronze Age axe has been found in a field as well as a Roman vase, Roman coins and a Roman cinerary urn. Roman bricks have been used in the construction of the church suggesting some occupancy in the area during roman times. It is thought that the Saxons used the river Roding as a route out of London leading to them settling in the area and the older church is built in the Saxon style. The Norman immigration to the area is recorded in the Doomsday¹ book, confirming that Willingale was a thriving and growing farming community of 36 households with three manorial properties.

The Normans are probably responsible for the name Willingale, either the origin is from Pillen (woollen) and hall, a celebration of wool Morant² alternatively the name may come from the home of the Willa’s people. The village has four entries in the doomsday book under the names Willingehalam, Willinghehala, Ulinghehalam. At a later stage the two parishes were differentiated by the addition of Doe and Spain. Willingale Spain after the manorial family D’España, mentioned in the doomsday book and Willingale Doe after the D’Ou manorial family.

Willingale comprised two parishes with two churches, however these were built in one churchyard separated by the Essex Way. Willingale is the only example in Essex.³ The commonly told legend is of two sisters who argued over a church seat, they went to their father about building separate churches. He supposedly replied ‘if you are willing gel do’ and as there was much argument over these sisters, it became ‘willing gel’s pain’. A version of this explanation is recorded by Coller⁴ when he described leaning on the churchyard gate in 1821 being told the story of two sisters by a ‘grey haired parishioner’. However, another explanation given by Father Marsden⁵ in his churches booklet is that the Village was expanding due to the woollen industry and the existing church was too small so rather than demolish the village was split into two parishes. However, the location of these two churches has baffled historians with no evidence available of the real reason.

¹Little doomsday book downloaded from http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ entries E31/1/1/309 35r ; E31/1/1/421 46v; E31/1/1/828; E 31/1/1/642 73r
²Morant Philip. (1768) The History and Antiquities of the County of Essex [vol. 1] London
³There are eight other examples; Bury St Edunds, Trimly, Swaffham, Gt Melton, Reepham, Snoring, Evesham and Coventry.
⁵Rev. Father Marsden, G (1960) Willingale two Churches. Locally printed, Willingale
For many centuries the church and the rectors were significant influences on the village no more so than in the 17th century when Willingale seems to have attracted a number of interesting residents.

**Bartholomew Kello and Esther Inglis** the Rector and his wife at St Andrew’s from 1607-1614, Esther Inglis was a notable Calligrapher and her husband her business partner with connections in many royal courts and possibly a spy for James 1 of Scotland.

**Thomas Wynnyffe** was the rector of St Christopher’s 1608-1642 he was a tutor and preacher at Oxford and a chaplain to Prince Henry, Prince Charles and King James 1 and on leaving Willingale became Bishop of Lincoln6.

**John Josselyn** was not a rector but a local resident who travelled to New England 1638 and 1663 writing two books which are still available today7 8. He is mentioned in Longfellow’s poem ‘John Endicott’.

**Dr Thomas Fuller** was rector of St Christopher’s 1670-1710 he was a fellow of Chris College Cambridge and is mentioned as a friend in Samuel Pepys diary9.

In 1691 **Dr Clopton Havers** published his ‘Osteologia Nova’ and the Haversian system regarding the vessels in the bone which carry the blood supply was named after him. He died in Willingale in 1702 having married Dorcas Fuller Daughter of the rector Thomas Fuller. 10

The memorials with the churches also reveal some other interesting names; Sir John Salter who was Lord Mayor of London in 1740, a print can be seen on the National Portrait Gallery webpages11, Sir Thomas Torrell, Knight, Sheriff of Essex and Hertfordshire in 1428, Robert Wiseman who personally commissioned a large Monument to be erected after his death in 1641 and showed little humility in the words he chose to describe himself,12 John Markham apothecary and a member of the governing committee of the Royal Bethlehem (Bedlam) hospital who married a daughter of the Brockett family in 1752.

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7 Josselyn, John (1667), *New Englands Rarities Discovered*, reprinted Applewood Books 1986
8 Josselyn, John (1675), *Two Voyages to New England*, Widdows
The second of two clans of the Brockett family who resided in the village, the first lived in the village from 1586 for about 91 years and in 1688 when they returned for over 200 years when in 1907 the last Mrs Brocket died.

Willingale alongside the rest of England was affected quite dramatically with the Two World Wars. During the First World War 21 young men were lost. The village lost four men in the Second World War but was also impacted greatly as it was the location for the Chipping Ongar airfield across the boundary with neighbouring parish of Fyfield. The 387th bombardment group of the USAAF were stationed here flying 204 missions and losing 10 aircraft. In the village, they used St Andrews as their parish church and held dances in the village hall, gave sweets to local children and stockings to the women.

In the 1970’s, the village was considered as a site for the third London airport, which was vehemently protested. Willingale was strongly affected by rural decline with closure of many businesses in the 1980’s, the shop, the Bell pub, the school. The final pub, the Top House, closed in 2001 and the village post office service was withdrawn in 2008. However, as can be seen from the village web pages the village is thriving; the Village Hall is regularly booked, the Sports and Social Club busy and the annual Village Fayre to name but a few of the community activities.