

Lenham's Shops

by Amy Myers

Pedlars, bartering with goods for goods, hop tokens and markets were some of the forerunners of village shops for the necessities of daily living, but very little is known of the history of village shops themselves until about the late 18th century. Catalogues in specialist fields had existed since at least the 15th century, and a few shops are known to have been operating in the 13th century, although as the centuries passed retailers were often distrusted as middlemen out for their own profit. It isn't until the 19th century that there's evidence of the shopping scene in Lenham through directories such as Kelly's and Pigot's, although the village had been plentifully supplied with pubs since medieval times. First things first!

Lenham's market has been an asset since medieval times. In the 13th century it received a charter from King John and probably began two centuries earlier authorised by Edward the Confessor. The market has had a chequered career, however. For many years it fell into disuse and when revived in 1757 it suffered another period of disuse when the coming of the railway led to its decline again. Instead Lenham had two fairs a year for the sale of horses and cattle. The market's chequered career continued but in 2000 it was once again revived and is thriving, taking place on the second Sunday of each month.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century shops in some form must have made their appearance in Lenham as elsewhere, and by 1821 the Lurcock family entered the scene. It



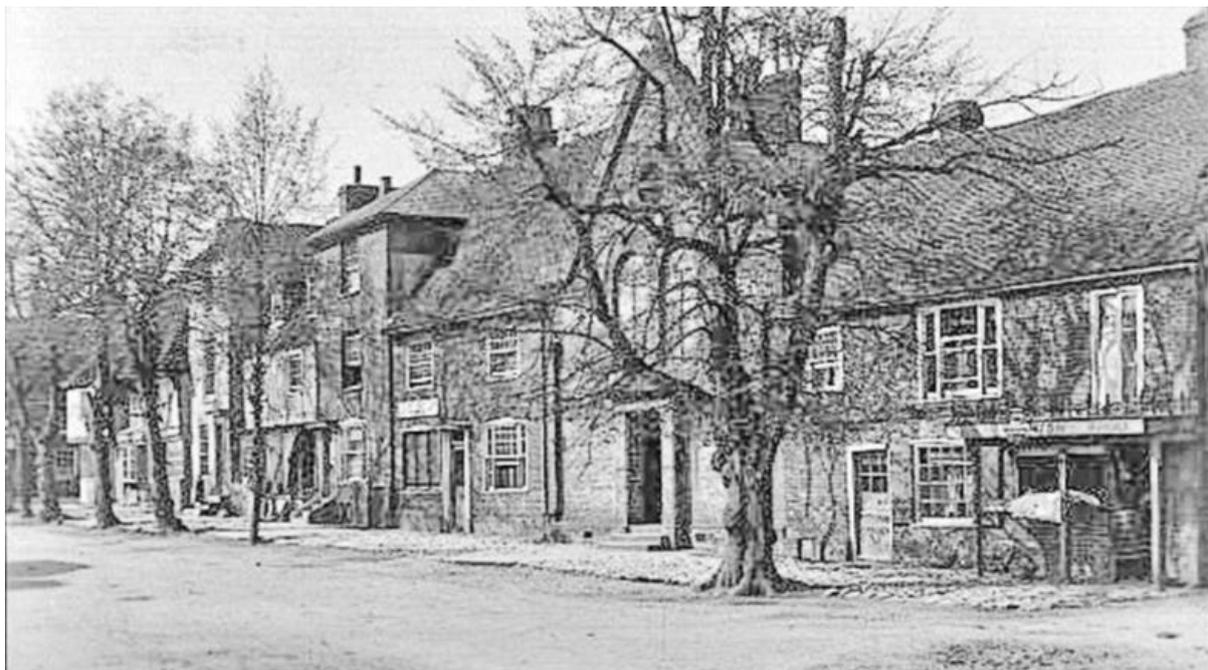
Looking towards Lurcock's Grocery Store from the Limes

opened the grocery store that remained an integral part of Lenham life for 150 years (see below). By 1847 a William Lurcock was trading as a glover, later in the century Thomas Lurcock ran a drapery shop and the grocery continued to flourish in Lurcock hands. Certainly by the end of the century the Lenham shopping trade was booming. Kelly's directory for 1895 records amongst others Ellen Palmer as another local draper, William Bayley who was running his general store at Lenham Heath (which he was still doing 40 years later), Frederick Ashby was Lenham's baker, Gurney Bourne its butcher, John Else was selling shoes, John Fairhall was the saddler, John Turk made watches, James Wakefield sold newspapers, Walter Record ran a grocery business, Wiffen Brothers were wheelwrights, Frederick Day was sub-postmaster, Ernest and William Town were blacksmiths.

By 1922, trade had increased. There were six grocers in the parish of Lenham, two butchers, two drapers, two saddlers, one chimney sweep, two hairdressers, one tobacconist, two coal merchants, two garages, two bakers, two newsagents, one carpenter, one watch repairer, one clockmaker, two greengrocers, three banks and one café. By 1930 the latter had increased to five owing to the increased traffic from charabancs using Lenham as a stopping point on their way to and from the seaside. Lenham also possessed many other traders including wheelwrights, blacksmiths, an agricultural machinery dealer, a motor and aero engineer dealer (an agent for Morris Motors and BSA motor cycles), a motor engineer selling wireless sets and components in the Square, a poultry food dealer selling dog and puppy cakes, a corn merchant, dressmakers, and four invaluable carriers, who both took goods to neighbouring towns and brought back items at residents' request.

The standard way of summoning the carrier was to leave a card in one's front window whether one had goods to be taken or collected. The most well known of the carriers was Tom Gilbert, who lived in Church Square. He kept what one resident affectionately remembered as his 'ramshackle cart and one horse' in what is now called Bank Yard off Maidstone Road. Tom had taken up this role after nearly dying at the Battle of the Somme and as a carrier was always ready to oblige, even choosing ladies' dresses for their approval.

Lenham Square shops have changed hands and occupations several times over the hundred years, although to look at now the Square still looks familiar from its appearance in 1922. At the far end of the Limes, is now Scizzor & Co Barbers, but in 1922 it was still a butcher's shop with a slaughterhouse at its rear. It was owned by Henry Burton, who probably took over the business from the splendidly named Gurney Bourne. The slaughterhouse closed before the Second World War (which ended the practice of keeping the meat fresh overnight in the lime trees outside the shop). Henry Burton had left the shop by



The former butcher's shop in Lenham

1930, but it remained a butcher's shop until the Sweeney Todd Barbershop set up business there in 2017.

The shop next to the butcher's, now Lenham Clocks, was for some years earlier a greengrocer's and next to that stands the former village hall which closed when the Community Centre in Groom Way opened and which is now converted into a private dwelling place.

Before the outbreak of the Second World War there was a saddler working in the Limes, despite the growing motor trade. Alfred Palmer, who had been working there in 1915



had by 1922 been followed by Percy Day. This was a handy location because horses could be tethered to the lime trees.

On the corner of the Limes and what is now called Faversham Road, a magnificent Wealden Hall building houses the Heart of Kent charity shop, Immyblingy's gift shop and an antique business above. For many years it had been a greengrocery, run by James Hughes at the beginning of the 20th century, followed by Hilda Hughes, and then Fred Parks, who had been gardener to Swadelands Manor. In Tudor times, however, the upper storey at least had been a school. The present Cornerhouse Café on the ground floor was preceded by restaurants and at one time was part of a hotel. Round the corner in the Faversham Road where the Co-Op now stands used to be the Lenham Ironmongers, burnt down in an arson attack in 2010.



In the Bow Window where there is a Cafe today, was once a delightful hardware shop

On the south-facing side of the Square is the Bow Window Café and next to it the Fig Tree, once the home of Lurcocks, established in 1821 as a grocer, apothecary and purveyor of horse medicines. As the years passed in the expert hands of the Lurcock family, it remained central to Lenham's shopping world (although the apothecary and horse medicines disappeared from its range). In the efficient hands of Edwin Lurcock for many years, it was finally sold to Tony and Carol Robinson in 1971 who eventually retired 32 years later. Not long afterwards the Fig Tree Spa replaced it.

Next to the Fig Tree Spa stands the imposing Stanfield house, once the village doctor's home and surgery and during the First World War Kent VAD Detachment 134, Lenham. It is now the home of R B Plant Construction Ltd, and next to it is the Dog and Bear inn which has reigned over the Square for many centuries. Next to it is the Lenham Village Store, long established as a grocery and general store. Before the Second World War it was run by W. R. Boorman 'grocer and provision merchant'. He not only ran the grocery but offered teas as well advertising 'teas, butters and bacon'. He also rendered another service to his customers, alas now a service of the past: 'Families waited on Daily for Orders'.

The Saxon Warrior Pharmacy on the corner of Maidstone Road and the High Street was once the domain of H. Honess & Sons,



Today the pharmacy, but once a 'Hardware, China and Glass' retailer. On the left Bradford, the drapers.

who also ran either together or separately two businesses, 'Groceries and Provisions' in the part of the present pharmacy that faces the High Street and 'Hardware, China, and Glass etc' in the area facing Maidstone Road which carried the name Lenham and District Stores. Fred and Charlie Honess (probably the sons) took over the business from John Cloke sometime between 1915 and 1922, and Fred and Charlie remained there until about 1938. Charlie Honess was one of a great many Lenham men who joined the Civil Defence groups during the Second World War.

John Cloke had together with Walter Record (who from at least 1895 to 1915 ran a grocery in the High Street) published a series of postcards featuring village scenes. The Pharmacy derives its name from the grave of two men and a woman thought to be sixth century Saxons. The ‘Warriors’ stems from the military regalia found with them. The grave had been found by workmen digging on behalf of the new owner of the building, the historian and archaeologist Robert Goodsall.

Facing the present Pharmacy across the High Street at roughly the same time as Honess & Sons were in business was Bradford’s Drapers (who also sold boots and clothing). They too had been established about 1922 – probably taking over from John Crump who had been a Lenham draper in 1915.



After the fire at Bradford’s Drapery Store, View from the church tower

It was Percy Bradford who suffered so badly when fire broke out in February 1935 in a neighbouring shop which rapidly spread. Later a small shop nearby in the High Street became a popular haunt in Lenham when E. and H. Pilbeam ran their tobacconist, confectionery, stationery and toy business there. Visiting Mrs Pilbeam’s sweetshop was a treat right up until it closed in 1980.

Until 1912 the present post office was an alehouse called The Hussar but its licence was revoked and the premises sold at auction to the sub postmaster John Hughes whose descendants ran it until the 1980s. It was his daughter Esme who had been on duty at the telephone switchboard on the night of the 1935 fire and managed to summon the fire brigade. Lenham fire station did not then exist, but this fire provided the impetus for Lenham to have its own brigade. In 1914 it had been John Hughes's wife Mabel who took the morse telegraph that the war had begun.

The present baker's shop near to the entrance to Church Square was for many years a draper's shop. At the outbreak of the First World War it was run by W.F. Hill, probably William Hill, who in the census of 1911 was 32 and living in Ashford. However he was single and of serviceable age and with the coming of conscription in 1916 he would have been called up. He served in the 12th Manchester Regiment, but was killed in 1918. At the war's end the shop was bought by Ambrose Manktelow and it seems to have remained in Manktelow hands at least until 1938. However, in 1928 a bakery was advertising as the Town Bakery, the Square, under the name of T. J Mount & Sons, 'Bakers, Confectioners and Pastrycooks' although it's a mystery as to where they operated. In the 1980s, the former drapers became Woods Cycles, but in 1983 it became a bakery, our Home Bake of today, bought by the father of the current owner Lynn Skippon.

Church Square itself has never, it seems, had shops in it. The rear of the post office building opening on to a pathway leading into Church Square extended until the late 1980s further along the pathway. That part of it was once the Hussar taproom and it is now a separate private residence. The nearest Church Square came to commerce was in the 1920s and 1930s when Ma Browne had a teashop there; it also had as residents the carrier Tom Gilbert and the village chimney sweep, John Uden.

St Mary's House, at the entrance to the Square, was once church property and is now Thorneloe & Co, Solicitors. Before them, it had seen a wide range of businesses from Charles Merritt's butcher's shop (about 1915), a barber's shop, Colbrans, and then a teashop run by the aptly named Mr and Mrs Tart who had replaced Mr Merritt. After them later in the 20th century came the National Westminster Bank.

In Lenham Square itself is Chequers, for many years a hotel and pub until it lost its licence in 1915 on the grounds that Lenham had more licensed premises than it needed. Now it is the Chequers Fish Bar and in the spacious area at its rear the Square Fish Café. Earlier the rear of the building had been in use as an antique shop and in earlier days still it had been a garage. Following the latter, Mrs Sanguinetti ran her tearoom at the front of the building,

while her son, E.Gwynne Sanguinetti, founder and first certified engineer of the Kent Gliding Club, occupied the rear of the building with gliders under construction or repair.

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**TRANSACTION COMPLETE—ONLY WHEN
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Sandway, Platts Heath, Lenham Heath, all had their own general stores: amongst them were the grocers John Hill at Sandway operating about 1915, and from 1922 William Bellingham and William Elliott took his place, Liverton Hill had a confectioner and tobacconist, Thomas Turk had a business in Platts Heath. There was a 'handy Shop' in Warren Street which offered 'all sorts' and was

very 'handy' for people living up the hill 2 miles away from the nearest shop in Lenham village

The building on the north end of Warren Street started life off as a forge, then became a Ayliffe's handy shop and eventually a post office. It is a private residence today.



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Bayley....the much loved general store and post office in Lenham Heath



All in all, Lenham was a busy place
and still is.

Calendar cover by Bayley, from 1902

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