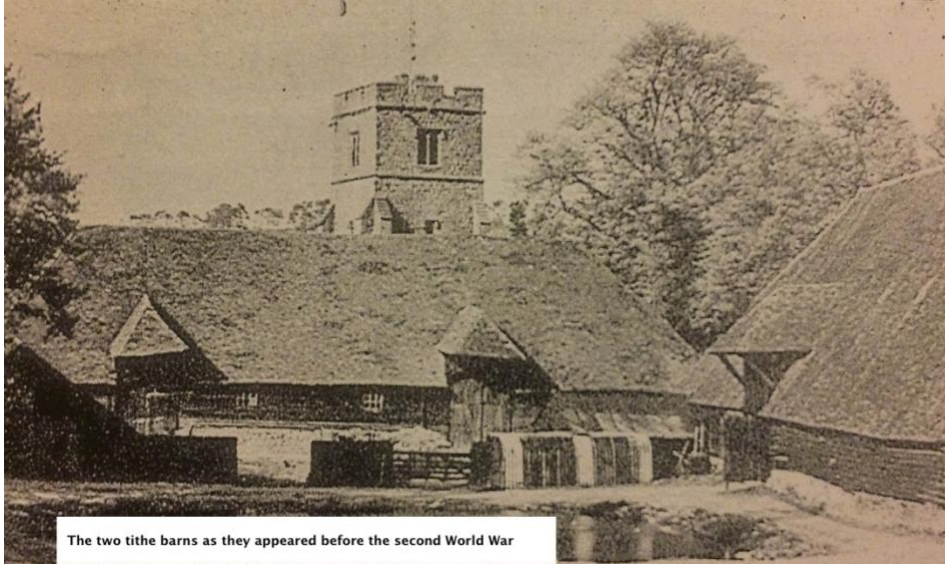


## THE GREAT FIRE OF LENHAM

*by Sue Greenwood*

In May 1964 a newly married couple moved to a cottage in Church Square and started making a garden between the church yard and the old tithe barn. But before the grass had its first cut, on 15 September 1964, some schoolboys are thought to have ‘found a penny and bought a box of matches.’ Apparently, they dropped lighted matches through knot holes in the barn then went to watch the fire engines arrive. The alarm was raised by a café worker who



The two tithe barns as they appeared before the second World War

called her husband, Emie Hare (a fireman at the Lenham station).<sup>1</sup>

The old tithe barn was the same size and next to the existing tithe barn, both owned by John Boyd of New Shelve Farm. It dated back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and was of priceless historic value.

At the time it was used for storing hay and straw, so it caught light immediately, and the fire very quickly took hold, completely destroying the barn. Engines from all nearby stations were called to help – a total of 48 firemen and 6 officers were present all that night and most of the following day.



The crews soon ran out of water and hoses snaked all over the roads as the firemen pumped water from the village pond and from a nearby swimming pool. Water was sprayed over

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<sup>1</sup> see also Amy Myer's article about a fire which prompted the setting up of the fire station in Lenham. [Go to serving the village](#)

surrounding buildings to prevent the spread of the fire, including on the other tithe barn (which still exists), the church and on other homes and businesses.



Trees in the churchyard were burned and local residents evacuated.

The great efforts of the fire crews saved the 13<sup>th</sup> century cottages adjoining the barn and the quick thinking of the Lenham firemen prevented an outcome which could have destroyed the heart of the village.

Flames from the blaze reach a height of 40 feet, the church walls became too hot to touch and various adjoining homes suffered damage, but thanks to the skill of the fire-fighters, the fire was contained.

The newly married couple mentioned at the beginning of this article are Richard and Sue Greenwood who still live in Barnside Cottage, next to the old barn, some 60 years later.