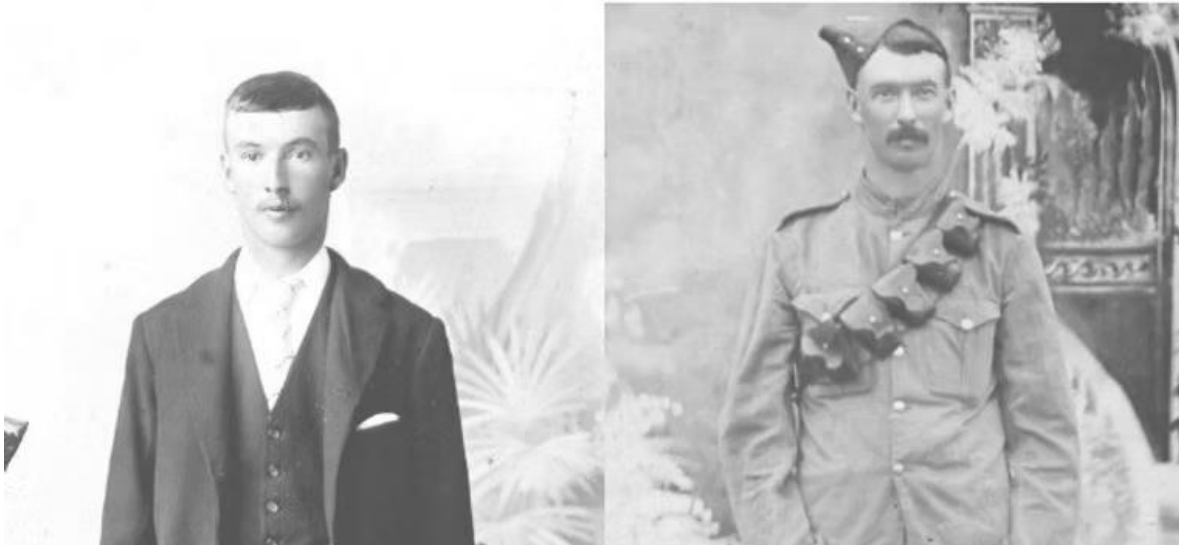


A Lenham Childhoodⁱ



Edward John Stedman (1881-1964)

was a 4 day old baby without a name during the 1881 census. He was the youngest of at least 9 children of Henry Stedman and Sarah Ann Elizabeth Smith and maybe they were just too exhausted to come up with a name!

Edward remained in Lenham with his parents and siblings after the majority of the extended Stedman family had left for a life following the Mormon faith in Salt Lake City.ⁱⁱ He obviously had some military experience which still needs to be discovered. He married Annie Chatfield Smith in Lenham in 1904, and they raised a family in the village during the early parts of the 20th century. He worked on the farm of Court Lodge at the same time when Herbert Todd, the farmer's son grew up there.ⁱⁱⁱ Although life was tough for most, the

Stedmans were at the other end of the social spectrum. Some of their children died in infancy or whilst still young. , Their eldest son, another Edward John, was Karen's

^{iv}grandfather. Another of their children, their

youngest daughter Doreen, wrote some memoirs which give us an insight in life in Lenham at that time:



"I was born on September 12th 1927, the last of 12 children. We lived in a two-up, two down cottage known as The Gardens, High Street, Lenham.

I don't know much about my grandparents, except that one of my granddads was a drover and during his visits to Ireland to collect animals, he met and fell in love with a vicar's daughter. She obviously felt the same way and followed him to England, which resulted in her parents disowning her. (I have been unable to find any evidence of this exact story,

though there is an Irish link on Doreen's mum's side - Annie Smith -but more on this later).



Doreen's mum..
a pretty young woman

My sister told me that my grandmother on my mum's side, used to live with my Aunt Rose at Warren Street, at the top of Lenham Hill. She used to sit in the best front room, very straight backed, dressed in a long black skirt with a white high-necked blouse, with her grey hair done up in a bun. It was our Sunday afternoon duty to go round to see her. My older brothers and sisters were really quite scared of her, as she was so prim and proper.

One of my grandad's brothers emigrated to Salt Lake City in the 1880s to become a member of the Mormon Church. The church paid all their expenses to settle families in Utah, and the years seem to have been kind to them.

My mother had a small fruit plantation at the Warren, Sandway. My very first memories are being put down to sleep, with a bottle (not of beer) under the Morello Cherry trees; of lovely summer days and watching mum pick the fruit.

We attended the local village school and my brother Dennis and I would go straight to the fruit plantation after school to help mum load the fruit onto a trolley. We would have to pull the trolley about a mile and a half to the local train station, to enable it to be in London for the early morning market the next day. We would hurry home from there so we could hear 'Dick Barton Special Agent' series on the radio, also 'the Ovaltines', a children's programme.

Our holidays as children were spent hop-picking. It was fun, although we were not allowed to run riot like some of the children did. Nor were we allowed to mix with the Londoners working there. This working holiday allowed mum to get us clothed well for the winter, and Dennis and I felt that we were doing our bit towards that.

Although we were poor, I had a good childhood, a lovely Christian mother and a dad I could twist around my little finger. You see I was a mercenary little soul even then!

On November 5th each year all the dads would make torches from paraffin soaked rags, stuffed in golden syrup tins nailed onto strong sticks. Everyone would go in procession to the cross on the hill overlooking the village, where there would be a bonfire and fireworks. This was always a lovely evening that we enjoyed.

I can remember going with my sister Bertha to see Gladys, another sister who married a Romany gypsy. He was a lovely man, very good to her all her life. When we went it was winter and all the families lived in lovely wooden caravans, which were beautifully painted. The caravans were in a large circle, and all the cooking was done on a large fire in the middle.

When I was 11, we moved to Faversham Road. The house had 4 bedrooms, and I was able to choose, so I chose the one that was over next doors living room. I could hear their radio when I had to go to bed, which was always at 9 o'clock until I left home and started working.

We were living then on the wrong side of the A20, the main road from London to the coast. By the wrong side I mean the side away from the village and it was hell to cross on summer weekends with all the traffic. In fact, my dad's 2 sisters lived in a little cottage just across the road from us, and they along with us, used to spend many Sunday evenings sitting on the bench seat that they had built just watching the traffic returning to London. We weren't the only ones to do this; many villagers came up from the village to do the same. You will probably think we were stupid, but we found pleasure in simple things and were happy.

When war broke out in 1939 we were scared of what was to come. We sometimes saw the pilots parachuting out when their planes were shot down. The police and the army used to hurry to get to them before the Londoners did. When they bombed Detling Aerodrome, we

could see all the stuff flying up in the air. They were exciting times to us kids, not frightening, and there was a lovely chumminess between people that is sadly missing now.

^{i i} We are grateful to Karen Palin who allowed us to publish this article from her website
<https://www.genesgenie.org/stedman-family-lenham-1>

ⁱⁱ See our article in 'People and Stories': *James Turner and the Mormons at Woodside Green.*

ⁱⁱⁱ See our article in 'People and Stories': *If walls could speak. Sir Herbert Todd 'A Youth at Court Lodge*

^{iv} see note 1