

## **If walls could talk..... A Youth at Court Lodge<sup>1</sup>**

*by Henny Shotter*

Entering an older house, you might wish that the walls could talk. Then, perhaps, one day someone rings the doorbell, out of the blue, and says: 'Excuse me please, I grew up in this house.' Then the visitor starts to share his memories, and the listener is enriched by a glimpse into a time which wasn't his.

Lenham Heritage Society was contacted a while ago by members of the Todd Family, who once farmed at Court Lodge, this most historic place with the ancient Tithe Barn in the middle of Lenham, following the death of Alan Francis Todd MBE<sup>2</sup>. He grew up on Court Lodge like his uncle, Sir Herbert Todd, who recalled his youth at Court Lodge Farm with much nostalgia in his memoirs. Herbert was born in 1893 and lived in Court Lodge from the age of two or three.



*Court Lodge Farm in the 1940ties<sup>3</sup>*

Court Lodge was then a farm of ca 300 acres and was owned by the "Lord of the Manor", Aretas Akers Douglas, Lord Chilston, who lived at Chilston Park, but in those days the tenant also had to pay a tithe to the vicar, though it was eventually abolished. Herbert's father, John Brown Renwick Todd, was a tenant farmer who had come from Scotland to Kent, like so many farmers around 1900, when farms in England were suffering from a shortage of experienced farmers<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The article is based on the unpublished memoirs of Sir Herbert Todd, which were gratefully received from the Todd family.

<sup>2</sup> He was a past Master of The Worshipful Company of Fruiterers; a past Chairman of The National Fruit Show; and past Chairman of East Malling Trust for Horticultural Research.

<sup>3</sup> all photos courtesy of the Todd Family

<sup>4</sup> see our article [The Scots in Lenham](#)



*A cart in the Tithe Barn Lenham*

Three ploughmen, a carter, a shepherd and three herdsmen for the cattle worked on the farm. The head ploughman drew eighteen shillings a week and paid 2/6d per week for his tied cottage. The head dairyman earned £1 per week and also lived in a tied cottage. The others received wages of between 8/- for a boy in the cowsheds and 16/- for the second ploughman. The ploughs were pulled by horses, and a pony trap provided the means of transport. If a car was

spotted in the village, it caused a sensation. The children had a dog cart and, as they grew older, a round tub trap and a pony.

There was also old George Kemsley, who had a dairy. Young Herbert admired him very much because George, who possibly never had the chance to get an education, had an astonishing memory and natural intelligence. He could tell what crops had grown well or not so well in any field over many years.

One of the children's past times was catching and killing vermin, such as rats of course, but also sparrows, which raided the corn fields, and bullfinches, which stripped the trees of their



*In the 1940ties the children of Court Lodge, Alan and his sister played more civilised games. Here with their Uncle Harold Ellis ( Dog and Bear)*

fruit buds. The children had their weekly meetings of the "Rat and Sparrow Club", and a prize went to the most prolific hunter.

The tenant farmers were allowed to shoot rabbits and hares, but no game birds or deer, which was a privilege of the squire who had the warren. His gamekeepers reared the pheasants for the yearly shoot and young Herbert stood with the gun at his side and watched, longing to be old enough to join in. His father and mother, however, were occasionally invited to the deer hunt and there she rode, a typical Scottish farmer's wife, side-saddle.

As a Scottish family, the Todds had attended the Kirk of Scotland for worship and, in Lenham, they went at first to the Congregational Chapel, which stood where is today in Tolhurst Way. However, after a while the family started going to the Church of St. Mary in Lenham. There they had their very own box pew, which came as a privilege to the tenant of Court Lodge.

The squire, Akers Douglas, was driven to church in a two-horse brougham and sat with his family in an elevated position in the chancel area, well above the rest.

Herbert received his first schooling in the chapel but then he and his sister Elizabeth went to the village school, which was run by 'Old Thunder Bottom', the headmaster Mr. Underwood. Later, he went to Brunswick School in Maidstone.

The family was not wealthy enough to allow him to go to university, so he took a correspondence course and studied from home in the comfortable office of Court Lodge. He worked from 9 am to 4pm, only having a break for lunch. The school holidays were a welcome change when he could enjoy the haymaking, harvesting, and some ploughing matches.

Herbert Todd looked back at this time with mixed feelings, because the farm made, like many farms at the time, just enough money to maintain the family. His father was very worried about this and took to drink. He eventually became an alcoholic. After a very difficult time for the family, he was sent away to a home and came back 'cured'. He lived out his time at Court Lodge and his coffin was carried on top of one of the waggons. It was led by the head ploughman, followed by many farmers from the area.