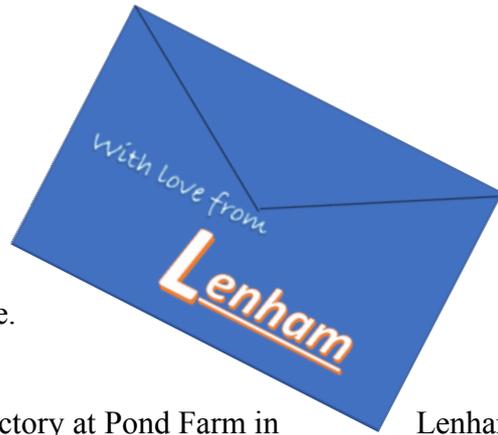


## *Lenham Storage*<sup>1</sup>

The blue and red lorries which carry the name of Lenham in their white logo all over the country are a familiar sight on our roads. For people living in Lenham or those who have connections to Lenham, encountering the lorries somewhere on the roads is almost like receiving a greeting card from the village.



### Early beginnings

In 1946, Reginald Tolhurst bought Milnes Basket factory at Pond Farm in Lenham and from this base, developed a company that was to become one of the leading privately-owned storage and distribution firms in the South East of England. Tolhurst<sup>2</sup> had started his own one man band transport business, transporting bricks, baskets and fruit to London, the day he achieved his driving licence at the tender age of 17. His first Maxwell lorry was bought shortly after for the primary sum of £ 25 and growth followed quickly with increasing rolling stock, employees and contracts. The early thirties had seen a turning point when the local began to use wastepaper instead of importing wood pulp.

### A recycling pioneer

Tolhurst seized the opportunity and organized a waste paper collection service which expanded to cover the whole of the south east area. In an increasingly competitive market, the standard of service he offered to his customers maintained his connections and won business time and time again, allowing him to be in the favourable position of being able to purchase the 15,000 sq. feet of storage space at pond Farm.

In 1947 the company became a private limited company and in 1949 when the company was running a fleet of twenty nine vehicles with services nation-wide it was nationalized.

Lenham Storage Co Ltd was undergoing a period of incredible expansion in the 1950's by which time the company had outgrown its premises necessitating the purchase of further land from Pond Farm for New warehouses. Then in the 1960's it won large contracts with Kimberley Clark and Spillers. As a result of this large increase in business, Lenham Storage's building programme took on a new life of its own with two new warehouses being built every two years. In addition, an improved transport fleet was required and in response the company introduced larger lorries, each 40 foot long and with a 20 ton carrying capacity.

### Freight Flow

Despite Great Britain being vetoed for EEC membership in 1967 for the second time by Charles de Gaulle, Lenham Storage with its optimism and determination opened the continental side to its business in 1968 with groupage loads being taken to France, Germany, Holland, Austria and Italy. The decision was well founded but it was not until the next decade that the international side of business would really come of age.

The 1970's and 80's brought with them the chance to enjoy reaping the rewards of its own success. In 1972, a few months before Great Britain was accepted in the EEC, the company's freight flow division came into operation. Built to receive Folkestone and Dover cargo movements as a busy channel port, Freight flow was the only Inland Port in Kent and was

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<sup>1</sup> The article and photo are taken with permission of Lenham Parish Council from a publication by Lenham Parish Council in its 1996' Lenham Village Appraisal' with minor changes and additions by Henny Shotter

<sup>2</sup> See also our article on Tolhurst Place under the tab 'Place Names'

ideally located off the A20. Concern however was expressed over the possibility of large lorries passing through the village and of the risk of drivers ( particularly foreign ones) missing the company site altogether. Lenham Storage took it upon themselves to pay for the erection of 'Freight Flow' road signs.

#### Site constraints

Site expansion was mapping out nicely with the Bacon Factory being purchased in 1974 to complete the ownership of all the properties within the company's boundaries and a new main office being built the following year. However, as the site grew, its proximity to the housing estate which had sprung up in the 60s meant that landscaping and shield construction were required only to be extended in the 1980s in response to the construction of the Cherry Estate.



The Lenham Storage site is highly visible from the Kent Downs AONB which limits the company's further physical expansion in Lenham. Lenham Storage today has sites in Andover, Aylesford and Sittingbourne but still has its head office in Lenham and is a very much valued local employer.

#### A new century with new challenges

The new century brought many new challenges for the company which is now run in the third generation of the family. Operation Stack was introduced in 1988 and caused severe interruption of vehicle movements in the years ever since. In 2005 alone<sup>3</sup> Operation Stack was implemented 18 times. In 2015 there were 30 miles of road blocked with stationary cars between Hollingbourne (junction 8) and Cheriton ( junction 12) between 24 June and 4 July. Traffic in Kent came basically to a near halt.

Britain leaving the EU will also bring new challenges to the company which in the last decades has operated in a market without national borders. However, the company is very well equipped to face these challenges with its position as a specialist in ambient food storage and distribution, its openness to change and a dedicated staff of 650 permanent employees.

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<sup>3</sup> See Wikipedia entry on Operation Stack

