

## Lenham Court

*By Henny Shotter*

Lenham Court is an impressive, Grade II building on Ham Lane. This building is included in this section of manors as there are a few residents in Lenham who think that this building was once an important manor. Their main reason is that the building is a 'grand building' and that nearby there is a field called 'Chapel Field'.

Historic England describes the building as possibly a Wealden Hall House with two bays on either side of the hall, having its origins in the C15 and late 16<sup>th</sup> century. There are modern additions from the early 18<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century which have doubled the size of the original building.

There are several other Wealden Hall Houses in Lenham.

The research into this house did not come up with any documents earlier than the 19<sup>th</sup> century held by the Kent Archives which in itself is no argument against the 'manor theory' as records could be held outside of Kent, as it was the case with Court Lodge, the Manor of Lenham.

It is more concerning that the name 'Lenham Court' doesn't appear on any early map whereas all other manors (except Shelborough) do. The house is shown on early maps as part of a settlement called 'Upper Ham'.

Lenham Archaeological Society carried out an investigation of the site. Their report is available in the village<sup>1</sup>. Unlike their investigation into East Lenham Manor, the dig didn't find conclusive evidence of a manor.

Historic England writes in its listing entry: 'Said to have been owned by Elder and Younger Pitt. Owned by Pitt family until late C20.' Unfortunately, we have so far also been unable to confirm this. The Tithe Awards<sup>2</sup> from 1839 show 'House and Premises' of Upper Ham in the ownership of William Baldwin Esq. The occupant was William Vinson.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Discovering Ancient Lenham' The Lenham Archaeological Society 2011, Volume 1 Edition 3

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/tithes/lenham>

However, the house was indeed occupied by Major William Pitt <sup>3</sup>in the 1960ties.

He had inherited a share of the Turkey (paper) Mill in Maidstone through the line of his wife's grandmother<sup>4</sup>. The Paper Mill produced special paper for banknotes. Whilst living at Lenham Court he was sole director. Major Pitt was well liked in the village and is described as a proper country gentleman. He was the first chairman of the Working Men's Club and also the first chairman of the Cricket Club. On East Lenham Farm he is remembered for calling in every year, just a week before Christmas with a bottle of Sherry and saying: "I have come to wish you the compliments of the season, Andrew!" and with that the two men retreated and opened the bottle.

Major Pitt is fondly remembered for his generosity by some men who were in those days young lads. It could be that he gave a young lad from the village 5 shillings for Christmas, but he also knew how to make the young lads work. The story goes that on one occasion the scouts called in and asked if a bob-a-job was going. There was a job: Cleaning the two old Rolls Royce. It took the boys the whole day to get the cars shining again. In the end, they were paid....1 Shilling!

Today Lenham's playing field is named after William Pitt who sold the field to the Parish council for 634 pounds.

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<sup>3</sup> Major William Pitt is mentioned in a newspaper report about his father's funeral. The family has connection to Wales and to the Pitt Estate in Kensington.

[https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results/1950-01-01/1999-12-31?basicsearch="thomas pitt"&phrasesearch=thomas pitt&retrievecountrycounts=false](https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results/1950-01-01/1999-12-31?basicsearch=)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.turkeymill.co.uk/useful-information/history/>