

Farming in Lenham: a Look Back

Prepared by Andrew Barr
Robert Boyd-Howell
and
Henny Shotter

The Landscape



A natural landscape,
shaped by farming
and by historic
landownership

View from the downs towards the East of Lenham

The Natural Landscape



The South Downs: here to demonstrate the typology of a Downs Landscape.

The natural landscape around Lenham is

- to the North, an open landscape the North Downs, with fertile soil on the slope and thin soil at the top. The chalk underneath is the most important aquifer in Kent.
- The fertile soil expands to the spring line of the Stour and the Len, which was wooded in the past.
- To the south, the land is mainly sandy heath.

A landscape shaped by farming

Characterised by:

- Large fields. The soil in Lenham at the foot of the Downs is excellent. Large swathes of it are classed as Grade 2 agricultural land. It is slightly alkaline and therefore suited to fruit farming, livestock farming and growing of cereals. The large fields have served these purposes well through the ages.
- This contrasts with the acid soils in the Weald which are not that suitable for growing cereals, but ideal for livestock rearing. The small enclosed fields in the Weald served that purpose well but in Lenham small enclosures would have limited the opportunities.



Harvest on East Lenham Farm

- Historic Landownership



The Tithe Barn at Court Lodge

- Farming in Lenham is ancient. Excavations at Tanyard Farm North uncovered settlements dating back to before Roman Times. A footpath in the field is likely to go back over 2000 years. There are soil formations on the slopes of the Downs which are possibly lynchets , historic plough lines which form some terracing.
- The large farms in Lenham date back to medieval manors, and most of their land has been in farming use for centuries.
- The manors of Lenham , East Lenham and Shelve Marley (for a short time) were originally ecclesiastical manors , but they were not abbeys, or priories like Leeds and Boxley .
- They were not subject to ‘Gavelkind’.
- After the Dissolution of the Monasteries these manors were

leased ‘in lots’ mostly to absentee landlords. It seems that many of the small farms and landholdings in the area are a result of the manors being removed from the control of the archbishop and St. Augustine’s Priory and land became available to buy. On the other hand, East Lenham Farm today occupies the same area it did in 1600.

Owning land, a privilege

- The pattern of settlements in small farmsteads scattered all over the countryside are very typical for Kent and have their origins in gavelkind: the splitting up of estates among all male heirs into ever smaller units.
- Consequences: Manors got smaller, less economical to run
- Opportunities arose for non-landowners to buy land, which brought a change in status and rights.

There were also small landowners in Lenham right up to the 20th century. Some 'fledgling owners' named their meadow or their field after themselves. There is, for example, the Hampshire Meadow. The Hampshires lived just opposite the Hampshire Meadow in 1839. John Hampshire was a farm labourer. At the time of the Tithe Awards, the field was no longer owned by the Hampshire family. There is also the "Lower Winder Meadow'. The Winders were tenants at Shelve in the 17th century. In the Tithe Award Schedule of 1839 they are named as owners.

Times of hardship for farm labourers

Wars: Britain had been at war with France since 1750, followed by the American War of Independence, the war against Spain and the Napoleonic War. Farmworkers went to war, and when they returned, there was no job for them to come back to.

The Agricultural Revolution introduced new technologies (e.g. threshing machine) with the consequence that fewer workers were needed.



Noteworthy is the inscription on these tokens (from Hothfield) with which farm labourers were paid: No pains, no gains.

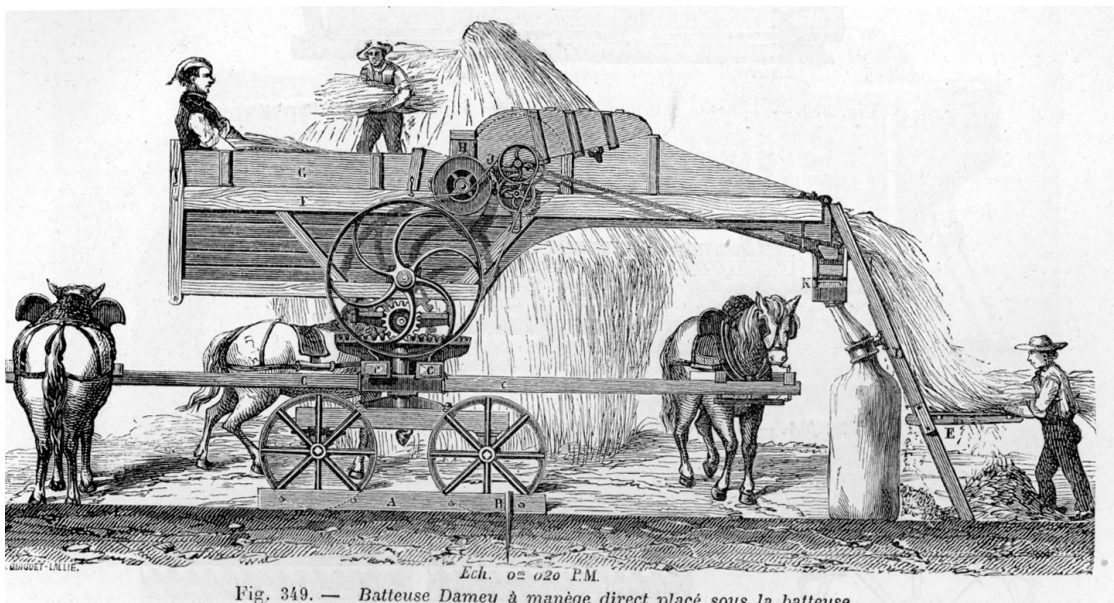
The enclosure of land between 1760 and 1820 led to the impoverishment of the landless labourer by creating legal property rights to land previously held in common. In Kent, however, land had been enclosed before the act and its consequences were not felt as much as in other parts of the country

Corn Laws 1815



Against the backdrop of a strained post-war economy, Tory Prime Minister Lord Liverpool passed the Corn Laws in 1815. These laws placed tariffs on cereal grain imported from other countries, such as wheat and maize, in favour of domestic agriculture. Tenant farmers, in particular, were keen to improve productivity, whereas many of the traditional landowners seemed to have been comfortable as long as they received their rent.

However, farm labourers were increasingly replaced by machinery, one example being the horse-powered threshing machine. (The picture below shows a French model from 1881¹)



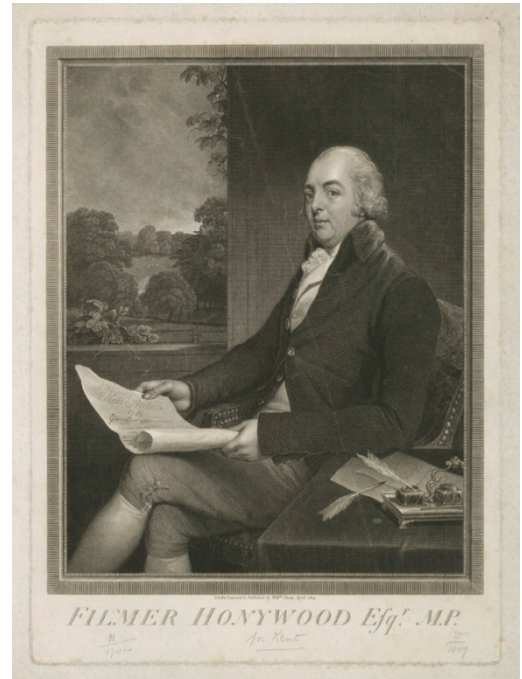
¹ Image thanks to Wikipedia

Notable Lenham Landowners

Filmer Honywood

He was elected MP for Kent in 1780 and held the seat until 1796. He was re-elected MP for Kent in 1802 and held the seat until 1806. He stood up in parliament and argued for better poor relief. He opposed Britain engaging in yet another war, when the country had already been fighting the French for decades. If his advice had been heeded, perhaps the events of 1830 would have never unfolded.

However, for the farm labourers, the situation became even worse.



Filmer Honywood



Sir Edward Knatchbull, 8th Bart

The poor of the parish were entitled to poor relief (outrelief), but as more and more people were entitled to support, some landowners were concerned about abuse. One of these was Sir Edward Knatchbull, the 8th baronet, who, among many other manors, also owned the Manor of East Lenham.

He sponsored the Poor Relief Act of 1722-3, an Act for the Amendment of the Laws relating to the Settlement, Employment, and Relief of the Poor. This act is sometimes called Knatchbull's Act. It established the principle that the workhouse should be a place where the 'idle' are set to work.

1830, Swing Riots in Lenham

The swing riots, named after an imaginary Captain Swing, began in Kent but occurred all over the country and in the end led to a change in parliament. The Whigs, more progressive and more liberal than the Tories came to power.

Swing Riots also took place in Lenham.

Threshing machine destroyed

One William Chapman, (possibly the malster and brewer) was heard to talk derogatively about the rioters, with the consequence that some of his farm machinery (threshing machine) was destroyed. 12th of October 1830.

Wage Riot

Tithe Riot 26th of October directed at the 10th Earl of Winchelsea and Earl of Nottingham, who had his seat in Eastwell.

Arson

Robbery in Warren Street 28th of October, directed at Cefus Clifford (Blue House Farm).



EARL OF WINCHELSEA

1838: Owners and Tenants in Lenham

Old Shelve

Owned by Mary Winder
farmed by William Howland

New Shelve

Owned by Ann Kenrick
Farmed by Clark Maylam

Cobham

Owned by Mrs Mary Dering & Mrs Frances Ann Kenrick
Farmed by John Fell

East Lenham

Owned by Rt Hon Sir Edward Knatchbull
Farmed by William and James Powell Down Court

Owned by Rev Philip James Honeywood
Farmed by William & James Powell

Court Lodge

Owned by James Stoddart Douglas Esq
Farmed by John Hughes

West and some south of Lenham

Owner (Dickley Wood area) William Baldwin Esq. (Harrietsham, Stedehill)
Farmed by William Vinson

Owner: Lord Cornwallis (Boughton Malherbe), Land in Lenham (Marley) was formerly owned by the Wottons since dissolution of monasteries, and is mentioned in the Wotton survey (1557 and 1560)

Farmed by several: Boorman, Reeves, William Russel (House and Barn Marley) , Record (Platts Heath Area) , Pye (Liverton Area, Upper Runham (753 on Tithe Map)) , William Hope (Lower Runham 712 on Tithe Map)

The Chilston Estate

James Stoddart Douglas and later his successor, Viscount Chilston, were the largest landowners in Lenham. They owned land from one end of the parish in Lenham Heath as far up as Warren Street on the Downs, and from Old Shelve up to the border with Harrietsham.

Over the next few years, Viscount Chilston bought even more land e.g. East Lenham and New Shelve/ Cobham



Wisdom and Truth

1846: Repeal of Corn Laws ends protection of English market (since 1815)

1856 end of the Crimean War. 1865 end of the American Civil War. Result :in cheap imports from these countries

From 1870, serious decline in domestic agriculture

Depression

The price of wheat in Britain halved in the thirty years from 1865-95, which might have benefitted consumers but, in the end, led to even more unemployment in the agricultural sector.

WW1 gave a few years respite but, once the 1920 Agricultural Act was repealed early in 1921, the great Agricultural Depression of the 1870s returned. Nobody wanted to invest in farming or work in the sector because there was no money in it.

Aretas Akers-Douglas, Lord Chilston, gives some insight into the problems in his notebook.

Farm buildings became rather dilapidated and, at some stage, his land agent advised him to pull down the second tithe barn because it was in such a bad state of repair .

The tenant farmers were remiss in paying their rent and neglected the land and the



buildings. New tenant farmers were hard to get. Once again, the land agent advised Lord Chilston to do what was being done all over the country: to advertise in Scotland for tenant farmers.

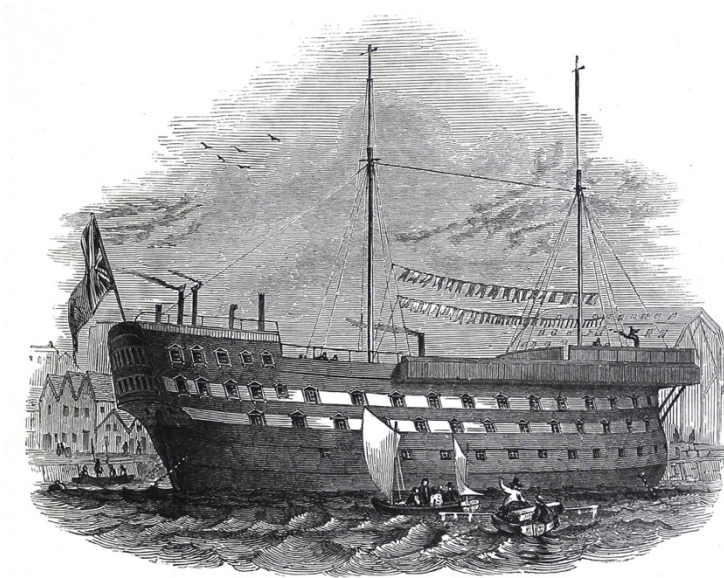
They came in numbers and brought with them their skills, especially in livestock rearing.



One of the two Tithe Barns in Court Lodge

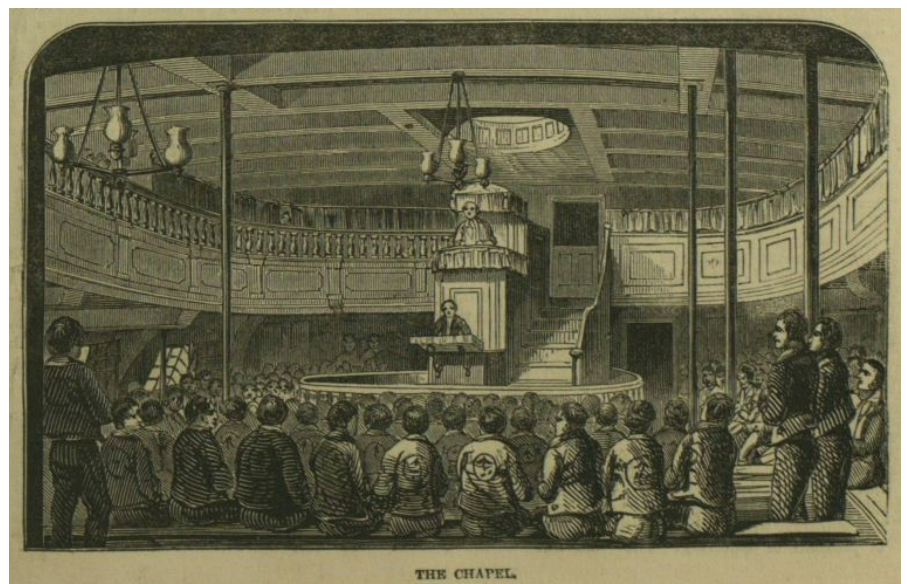
RURAL CRIME

Some people, inevitably, turned to crime. In October 1839 James Ford², aged 30, who was a butcher in Lenham, stole a sheep belonging to Mr. Buss. He was sentenced to be deported for 15 years to Australia on the “The Warrior”.



The Warrior³

The ship had a chapel but we don't know whether James Ford arrived in Australia a 'reformed' man. Many convicts found a new way of life in a country with opportunities to make a good living, opportunities which they didn't have in England.



² National Archives Document No HO 18/10/69

³ Both images courtesy of wikipedia