

Hubbards Hill

By Henny Shotter

Hubbards Hill is a country lane leading up the North Downs from the east side of Lenham village via the Old Ashford Road.

The name dates back to a family named Hubbard¹ who farmed at Great Pivington Farm in the 19th century. There may also be a family connection to Hubbards Farm in Lenham Heath.

A document² held by the Kent Archive refers to ‘Land at Sprotton Street held of the manor of East Lenham’ (1468), and on a map of 1769³ this lane is called ‘Sprattin Street’. A look on the East Lenham estate map⁴ shows the land adjoining the lane. Some of it is woodland, which could provide a clue to the meaning of ‘Sprotton/Sprattin’. A village in Northamptonshire is called ‘Spratton’. This name is derived from the old English word ‘sprēot’, meaning a pole, spar or spear; and the word ‘tūn’, also old English, which means a farmstead or enclosure. From their research academics concluded: ‘Spratton’ denotes *a place where poles were made or obtained*.⁵ We just wonder whether our Lenham ‘Sprotton/Sprattin Street’ has the same



origins. Up to this day, ash grows widely on the Kent Downs and is processed locally. Its wood has been used for tool handles and furniture. Ash is not that weather resistant and Hazel and Sweet Chestnut are grown for making hurdles, fencing and poles. It is not known when Sweet Chestnut was introduced into England but in the late 15th century, the first hop gardens⁶ sprung up in the Maidstone area and they all needed wooden poles...whatever timber they were made of!

The other interesting observation is that the lane was then called “street”, in the same way as the road to which it leads is to this day called “street” (Warren Street) and the road leading off Warren Street is called ‘Payden Street’. Ancient roads which are called ‘street’ normally have Roman origins.

Before the road, which today is the A20, was built, Hubbards Hill continued as the road which leads to East Lenham, once a moated manor (see our article on Lenham Manors) and today a farm.

We have contacted the Institute for Name Studies at the University of Nottingham for their comments.

¹ The Tithe Awards, 1839 name John Gillebrand Hubbard jnr. as the tenant of ‘Pivington Homestead’ <https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/tithes/lenham>

² Document Reference: U 120/T106

³ Andrews and Drury's Map of 1769

⁴ https://www.heritagelenham.co.uk/_files/ugd/5cd011_57a3641ac66742a6b0009aa862566c32.pdf

⁵ <http://kepn.nottingham.ac.uk/map/place/Northamptonshire/Spratton>, See also A.D. Mills ‘A Dictionary of English Place Names’ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199609086.001.0001/acref-9780199609086-e-12208>

⁶ According to the British hop growers association, ‘The cultivation of hops was probably introduced from Flanders to England in the Maidstone area of Kent at the end of the 15th century.’ <http://www.britishhops.org.uk/hops/history/>

