

Beacon Road

by Henny Shotter¹

You'd search in vain for a beacon in this area as the road is named after a Lenham benefactor and his family². In 1863, George Beacon from Gravesend set up the Beacon charity for the Lenham poor.

The Beacon family has a long history in Kent, which started when a fiery reformist priest Thomas Becon³ (1513-1567) left his home county of Norfolk.

Thomas was more radical than Henry VIII, who seems to have been more radical



in his pursuit of women than of faith. Therefore, it is not that surprising that in 1540-1541 Thomas Becon was prosecuted in London for heretical preaching. It was after this incident that he moved to Kent, where he published eight works under the pseudonym of Theodore Basile. This got him in trouble again and he could save himself only by distancing himself under oath from his own writing. The reign of Edward I gave him a short reprieve. When England turned catholic again under Queen Mary, Becon's spiritual leader, Hugh Latimer, was burnt at the stake.

¹ I am indebted to Kent Archaeological Society which publishes their older Cantiana articles on the web. My article is based on information given in: Thomas Becon, Canon of Canterbury by H.B. Thomas, O.B.E., Archaeologia Cantiana Vol 69, 1955

² There are two graves of this family in Lenham churchyard. Grave 43 and grave 90

³ The name is spelled ,Becon 'at the time

Thomas Becon realised that it would be wise to leave his home country if he wished to escape a similar fate. With his wife, he went into exile to Germany, where some of his children were born.

He returned to England in the reign of Elizabeth I and became a canon at Canterbury cathedral. What a career change!

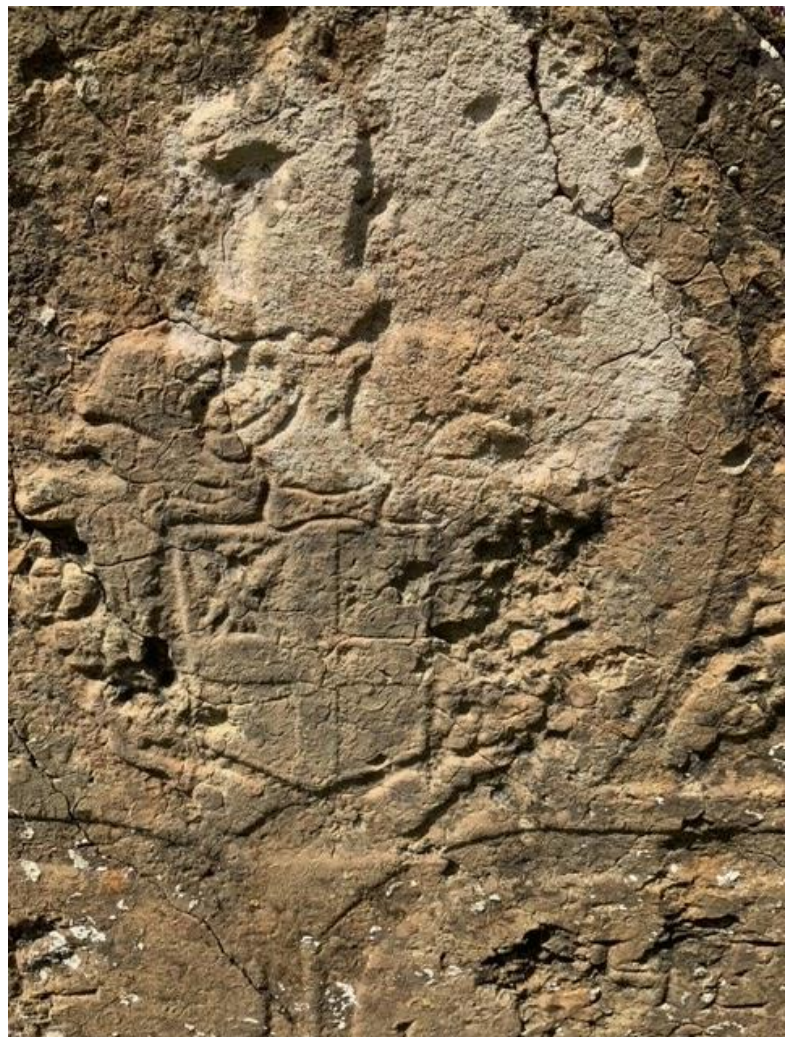
After a tumultuous life, he died in Canterbury in 1667.

He had three children, Rachel, Theodore and Basil. Rachel married, Theodore became a doctor and Basil a priest. The Beacon Family had a heraldic shield, the exact form of which is unknown.

In Lenham churchyard are interred Bassell Beacon and his wife Elizabeth⁴. Bassell died in 1739 at the age of 72 and his wife passed away in 1756. Their headstone in Lenham churchyard may, however, reveal the form of the lost family shield.

Bassell Beacon was a cordwainer, a skilled craftsman who made shoes, the cobbler in contrast was restricted to repairing shoes.

At the time when Bassell



Beacon practised his trade, one of the best leathers for shoemaking came from horses. Since horses drew all the carriages and ploughs, there were plenty of horses about. The coat of arms on this gravestone shows a shield divided into segments by

⁴ Grave no 43, row 10 see graveyard survey

the St. George's cross. In the top left-hand segment of the shield there are two crossed swords. The shield is topped by a rearing horse (not captured in this photograph). We very much hope to find a photographer able to further enhance the image of the coat of arms and solve the mystery.

As for Beacon Road, it is not after all so wrong to think of a shining light, in this case provided by a family who was a shining light for Lenham's poor.