

The Manor of Lenham

By Henry Shotter

Of all the manors in the parish, the Manor of Lenham is the most important for the development of the village, as it grew around the manor's administrative centre, Court Lodge.

The Lords of the Manor of Lenham¹

804 until 1541 Abbey of St. Augustine in Canterbury²

1541 Dissolution of monasteries under Henry VIII, in the hands of the Crown

Queen Elizabeth I grants it to Lord Cecil

1576 Lord Cecil 'alienates' the manor to Thomas Wilsford from Cranbrook/ Lenham

1622 until poss. 1640 Henry Wilsford from Quendon in Essex

1640 Viscounts Montague

1708/9 ? Lady Elizabeth Hamilton from Hollingbourne buys the manor for son who lives in Chilston Park ³

1709 – 1737 William Hamilton, 2nd son of Elizabeth Hamilton

1737-1798 John Hamilton, High Sheriff of Kent

1798- 1821 Thomas Best , MP for Rochester,

1821- 1833 George Douglas of Baads, Midlothian

1833-1875 James Stoddart Douglas (inheritance left to his wife, adopted daughter of George Douglas)no heirs

¹ The dates are given to my best knowledge

² *'In A.D. 804 the manor of Lenham was given to us by the kings below written, i.e. to God and to the abbot, because this abbot Wernodus, was a kinsman of Kings Ethelwulf and Kenwulf.'* P.32 William Thorne's Chronicle of Saint Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury B. Blackwell, 1934 - St. Augustine's abbey, Canterbury

³ Dates taken from 'Boughton Malherbe' More Journeys through Time' produced by Boughton Malherbe History Society 2104

1833-1875 James Stoddart Douglas (inheritance left to his wife, adopted daughter of George Douglas)no heirs

1875-1911 Aretas Akers, later 1st Viscount Chilston

1826-1948 Aretas, later 2nd Viscount Chilston

Historic Ensemble

On the website of the Northumberland Archives ⁴is an image⁵ which depicts a typical medieval manor. It is almost a blueprint for the main buildings of the Manor of Lenham.



⁴ <https://www.northumberlandarchives.com/2017/04/07/tied-to-the-land-serfs-from-manorial-history/>

⁵ free to use on bing.com

If we transpose⁶ this image onto Lenham, we have the church of St. Mary's with the manor house (Court Lodge) behind. As a monastic manor, Lenham also had two very large tithe barns.

One of the two still survives. It is a Grade I listed building and is used for art exhibitions, Christmas and midsummer fayres and the occasional wedding. Court Lodge is Grade II listed. The date of 1672 is painted above a door. However the listing entry states, '*Ground floor has thick stone walls, possibly Medieval*'.⁷



The Tithe Barn as seen from Court Lodge Meadow

In Lenham, the blacksmith worked directly in front of the church in what today is Forge House⁸, a listed building dating back to the 16th century.

Next to the forge, hidden from view, is the old rectory, which today is divided into three separate houses: Old Meads, Little Meads and Ash House. The Historic England listing dates the earliest parts of this building to the 15th or early 16th century. The vicar's land, the 'glebe', stretched all the way to what is today Tanyard Road.

One of the manor's two watermills, mentioned in the Domesday Book, would have been where, many years later, the mill ponds served the tannery in Tanyard Farm. Tanyard Farmhouse is a grade 2 listed building, and the listing entry dates the house to the 18th/19th century. The mill buildings have given way to a small housing development.

⁶ We don't have primary sources from this period. This interpretation offers merely a plausible suggestion.

⁷ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1086118>

⁸ In the 19th century Forge House was owned by James Troup Hatch who gifted it to the church https://cde37143-ed22-472c-a8f1-abc71483bfe5.filesusr.com/ugd/5cd011_019bac42d43b4c83b0f881be6b8bbbc9.pdf?index=true

The village spread out from Church Square and possibly opened up onto a green space (a 'Green'), with several Hall houses surrounding it. It was on this 'Green' that the market was held.

From the Domesday Book, we know that the manor at that time had 8 acres of meadow, woods for 40 hogs and 18 carucates of arable land. A carucate is not a measure which is defined by its size but by how much work was required to cultivate it. If the land was stony, ploughing was difficult. The same is true for heavy clay soils. Lighter soils, however, take less time. Lenham has stony, heavy and light soils. Therefore, a carucate was somewhere between 60 and 180 modern acres. The Lenham Manor farmed between 1.080 and 3.240 acres. The average size of an English farm today is 363 acres.⁹

There were two mills, as mentioned before, possibly at Tanyard and Royton/ 'Chapel Mill' in Lenham Heath¹⁰.

From the Domesday Book we also know that there were 40 villeins, 7 borderers and 1 serf living and working on the manor.

Over the years more land was added to the manor through the patronage of various English kings and, of course, more people were needed to work the land.

Many of the hamlets and farmsteads around Lenham were once part of the manor. They sprang up outside the village as the manor (and also East Lenham Manor) covered such a large area of land, making it possible for labourers to live close to the fields they worked on and over the times a complicated net of leases and sub-leases will have developed.

⁹ Defra Statistics: Agricultural Facts, England Regional Profiles February 2020
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/866807/regionalstatistics_overview_20feb20.pdf

¹⁰ Royton Manor was originally part of the Manor of Lenham: see article on Royton Manor

Absent Lords

For the non-historian historian, it is perhaps surprising to learn that for about 900 years the Manor of Lenham, which had its manorial administrative seat at Court Lodge, was in the hands of various Lords of the Manor who never resided in Lenham!

In economic terms that meant that a large share of the profits of this manor went somewhere else instead of being invested or spent in the local area. As a monastic manor, the manor collected a tithe for the monastery, it paid for the livelihood of a knight and his family (possibly more than one) and it had to pay money for the upkeep of bridges, for example to the Rochester Bridges Trust.

We therefore have to assume that in the early years of its history Lenham was an impoverished place.

Even in societies which don't have a 'benign' economic system, wealth trickles through societal layers. Margaret Thatcher illustrated this well with the example of a pyramid of champagne flutes. When you start filling from the top, the champagne will eventually overflow and fill the other flutes. Considering that, in Lenham's case, this overflow from the top was just a 'trickle', it is surprising that it eventually developed into a prosperous village or, technically speaking, a prosperous town.

The fact that Lenham had a marketplace since at least the 12th century¹¹ might be the explanation for Lenham becoming wealthy.¹² The weekly market attracted traders and customers and led to permanent shops being opened around the square. A town also offered opportunities to serfs who had escaped their manor. If they managed to live in a town without being recaptured for more than 12 months, they could become free citizens of this town.



¹¹ It is likely that Lenham's market existed at the time of the Domesday Book <https://kentarchaeology.org.uk/node/12481>

¹² Which is documented in the Kent Hearth Tax assessment, Lady Day 1664 An online version can be found here http://gams.uni-graz.at/o:htx.Kent-head_292

The Manor under the Abbey of St. Augustine

804 ‘Soile and Signority’ of the Manor of Lenham were given by Cenulf of Mercia and Cudred of Kent to the abbey of St Augustine’s in Canterbury .

until

1541 the ‘Dissolution’, when the manor reverted to the crown.

We don’t have any records from this period. It is possible there are some in an archive somewhere; or else they were destroyed after the decline of the abbey or during the Peasants’ Revolt.

The monks of St. Augustine were Benedictines. Their motto was: ‘Ora et labora’ (Pray and work). Most monks came from wealthy families and we don’t know how much of their work was physical. In any case being a serf or villein in a monastic manor wasn’t a guarantee for better living conditions. Although charity is one of the underlying principles of Christianity, inequality was the accepted ‘god-given’ social order. The serfs’ lives are largely unrecorded. There are, however, some documents relating to Lindisfarne and other monastic manors on the website of the Northumberland archives.¹³

Was it hardship or injustice which incited two ‘persons unknown’ to set fire to Lenham church in 1297? We don’t know, but what we can be certain of is that the resulting need to rebuild the church must have been an additional financial burden on the people of Lenham. Even if the serfs’ and villeins’ lives were hard beyond our imagination, they, too, benefitted from some sort of ‘order’ and security. They had a roof over their heads, a place where they could stay and some basic food such as bread and fruit.

In the later medieval period this security was no longer provided, and destitute people were lucky to find a place in the workhouse.

High taxation and poverty following the Black Death which arrived on English shores in 1348 led to a radicalisation of the poor. One such radical was the non-conformist preacher John Ball (in the picture below), who was imprisoned in Maidstone. Shortly after the Peasants’ Revolt¹⁴ began in March 1381, he was freed by the rebels.

¹³ <https://www.northumberlandarchives.com/manorial-documents-register-project/>

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peasants%27_Revolt



In a sermon in Blackheath, he preached the following:

*'When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman? From the beginning all men by nature were created alike, and our bondage or servitude came from the unjust oppression of naughty men. For if God would have had any bondmen from the beginning, He would have appointed who should be bond, and who free. And therefore I exhort you to consider that now the time is come, appointed to us by God, in which ye may (if ye will) cast off the yoke of bondage, and recover liberty.'*¹⁵

It is not surprising to learn that John Ball was hanged, drawn and quartered in 1381.

In Lenham there are few reminders of the manor's monastic origins. Some people say that the choir stalls in Lenham church date from this era. In Church Square there are traces of a

¹⁵ http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/voices/voices_reading_revolt.shtml

monastic building which form the end wall of 4, Church Square. The legacy of the original manor, however, is the layout of the centre of old Lenham.

The Manor of Lenham after the dissolution

William Cecil, 1st Baron Burghley was chief adviser to Queen Elizabeth I and twice held the office of Secretary of State and Lord Treasurer. He was a very wealthy man and owned many small manors. He was also a very good note-keeper and, if Edward Hasted (thus far, our only source) is right and William Cecil held the Manor of Lenham, some documents will eventually emerge from the National Archives in the course of digitisation. More information would be very helpful in clearing up some remaining questions.



William Cecil, 1st Baron Burghley,
National Portrait gallery 2184

Julia Hickey, in her write-up of a talk given to Lenham Heritage Society,¹⁶ observes that Hasted's account of the handing over of the manor from Cecil to Thomas Wilsford¹⁷ is relevant. The word which describes the transaction 'he alienated the manor...' expresses de facto that 'vassalage' had ended. This means that the Lord of the Manor did not have to provide for knights anymore, nor did he have any other 'vassals' such as villeins and serfs.

Thanks to the internet and digitisation, lease agreements are now available online¹⁸ which relate to the time when Thomas Wilsford, then his grandson Henry Wilsford of Quendon in Essex and then the Montagues owned the manor. From these documents we learn that the rectory and the parsonage were still part of the manor in 1602.:

¹⁶ See: <https://thehistoryjar.com/2020/11/29/lenham-a-medieval-monastic-manor/>

¹⁷ The family name is sometimes spelled as 'Wilford or Wilforde'

¹⁸ **Descriptive Catalogue of the Original Charters, Royal Grants, and Donations ...**

By Sir Thomas Phillipps, Sir Goldfrey Vassall Webster (5th bart.)

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=u0J-Elkcs64C&pg=PA220&dq=Lenham&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwidosK-icflAhVPSxUIHYyyBg8Q6AEIPiAD#v=onepage&q=Lenham&f=false>

also available as Kindle Book

'Indenture between Thomas Wilsford, Esquire of Lenham, co Kent; Thomas Barham, Esq., of Teston, co. Kent and Francis Pordage, Gent. of Dunstan in the West, London; being a Deed of Revocation, and New Appointments to Uses of the Manor of Lenham, the Rectory and Parsonage,&c. May 23, 1602.'

Thomas Wilsford of Hartridge, Cranbrook came from a distinguished family of soldiers. Articles in the Oxford National Biography are dedicated to two family members. One being his uncle Thomas Wilsford, the other his father, James Wilsford.¹⁹

Thomas Wilsford's oldest son James/John Wilsford of Cranbrook had married Anne Newman, of Quendon in Essex and set up home there at Newman Hall. He died in 1620 before his father.

Hasted writes in his article²⁰ about Cranbrook that during the rule of Henry VIII and Edward VI, the then Lord of the Hartridge Manor, another Thomas Wilsford had all his land disengavelled. This meant that in the family the whole estate passed from the father to oldest son.

As a consequence of the death of Thomas, the 'natural' James' oldest son, we find Henry in the Manor of Lenham on various leases. Whether this was following Thomas Wilsford's will can only be guessed. Thomas wanted to provide for his daughters too. His will which is in the National Archives²¹. It is as follows:



in 1621 after the death of the son, James Wilsford, the succession was to Henry and indeed he was in charge of the arrangements in 1630 making various arrangements. This affected the stipulation in the will which can only be guessed. Thomas Wilsford wanted to provide for his granddaughters too. His will which is in the National Archives stipulates the following:

I will give and dispose all the tythes profittes and Comodities which shalbe due to my said Rectory of Leneham for the first three years after my decease to Mary Wilsford one of the daughters of my sonne James Wilsford deceased to be paid to her or her assignes within six monethes next after those three yeare shalbe expired And that he will give and dispose all the tithes profittes and Comodities due to my said Rectory of Leneham for the next three years to Elizabeth Wilsford an other of the said daughters of the said James Wilsford deceased to be

¹⁹

²⁰ Edward Hasted, 'Parishes: Cranbrooke', in *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 7* (Canterbury, 1798), pp. 90-113. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-kent/vol7/pp90-113> [accessed 21 June 2021].

²¹ We are grateful to Dr. Sheila Sweetinburgh for the transcript of National Archive Reference Prob/11/140/66

payd to her or her assignes within six monethes next after those three years shalbe expired And that hee will giue and dispose all the tithes profittes due to my said Rectory of Lenham for the nexte three years to Dorothe Wilsford an other of the daughters of the said James Wilsford deceased to be paid to her or her assignes within six monethes next after those three shalbe expired And that he will giue and dispose all the tythes profittes and Comodityes which shalbe due to the said Rectory of Lenham for the nexte three years to Joyce Wilsford an other of the daughters of the sayd James Wilsford deceased to be paid to her or his assignes within six monethes next after those three years shalbe expired And that he will giue and dispose all the tythes profittes and Comodities which shalbe due to the said Rectory of Lenham for the next three years to Martha Wilsford an other of the daughters of the same James Wilsford deceased to be paid to her or her assignes within sixe monethes next after those three years shalbe expired And lastly that he will giue and dispose all the tithes profittes and Comodities which shalbe due to the said Rectory of Lenham for the next and last three years to Mildred Wilsford the younger daughter of the said James Wilsford deceased to be paid to her or hers assignes within three monethes next after those three years shalbe expired'

He had six granddaughters; Mary, Elizabeth, Dorothe, Joyce, Martha and Mildred. If each of them received the tithes for 3 years, the male heir Henry would have received the tithes 18 years after the death of his grandfather in ca. 1640.

In 1630, Henry Wilsford owned the market house, the stalls and standings and market rights: *'Henry Wilforde, of Quendon, Esq., Lease for Twenty-one Years to Thomas Bartlett of Lenham, of the Market-House, with all the Stalls, Standing, Penthouses, &c, thereunto belonging with the benefit of the Faires and Markets, the profit and benefit of the Pound and Poundage, with ten parcels of Meadow, Pasture, and Arable Land; namely Windmill-Bank, the Workhouse Close, with meadow adjoining, Pasture Fields lying near Lenden Cross, and Little Blackman's lying in Harrietsham Lane; the Court Lodge Close, &c in the Town of Lenham. April 7, 1630.'*

We also learn that land in Lenham Heath was still part of the manorial estate: *'Henry Wilforde, of Quendon, Esq., Lease for Twenty-one Years to John Brockwell of Lenham, of Five Parcels of Land, estimated at Sixty-eight Acres, known by the name of Ten Acres, the Fayrefield, Windmill-Hill, the Eight Acres, and the Long Downes, in the Parish of Lenham. April 13, 1630.'*

And finally, he still conducted his business from Court Lodge as he stipulates *'the Rent to be paid in or at the auintient Mansion House belonging to the above demised Land, called and known by the name of the Court Lodge of Lenham, April 13, 1630.'*

Many of the field names mentioned in these documents had been changed by the time properties and fields in Lenham were listed for the Tithe Awards²², so it is not easy to identify them.



Francis Browne, 3rd Viscount Montague

The source of these documents is unexpected as they were found in Battle Abbey. The link here is the Montague family, who were Lords of the Manor of Battle Abbey and at some later stage also of the Manor of Lenham. Documents held in the Cowdray Collection confirm the important role of Court Lodge: *'Francis, Viscount Montague, Lease for twenty-one years to Edward Wakeley, of Lenham of the capital Messuage or Manor House of Lenham, called the Court Lodge, with the Farm-House and several parcels of Land, Meadows, &c., pertaining to the same,*

*estimated at three hundred acres; and the Closes called the Vicarage Croft, Bearefield, Brickhillfield, Hawfield, Churchill, Cattesbraines, Workhouse Close, Cock's Downe, Apsley's Penketham, otherwise Hutchknoldens, Pelleys, &c. at the yearly Rent of 150/. Dec. 2, 1678.*²³

This quote opens up the possibility that what we know today as Court Lodge was actually the farm and that there was another building nearby. We don't, however, have any evidence for that. If there was another building, then it was in the vicinity as, on the Tithe Award Map of 1839, two ponds to the south of Court Lodge are called 'Manor Pond'. However, it is also possible that the Farmhouse mentioned is, for example, Home Farm in Sandway.²⁴

The Montagues were Roman Catholic and suffered greatly in the Civil War and under the Commonwealth. As a consequence, they had to surrender Battle Abbey and other estates,

²² <https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/tithes/lenham>

²³ The Cowdray Archive ca 1200-1992at West Sussex Record Office, Cowdray Miss

²⁴ Home Farms are always part of a large estate. Until we have more evidence all discussions of this topic remain speculative.

among them Lenham Manor. The Battle Abbey papers relating to Lenham eventually found came into the hands of the Webster family. The original documents are held in the United States²⁵ but some of them were published in the book mentioned above. From the dates of these papers, it can be concluded that Lenham Manor was owned by the Montagues after 1635 (maybe 1640 if Thomas Wilsford's will was carried out) and was bought by the 3rd Viscount Francis Montague. He died in 1682, bequeathing the manor of Lenham to his second son Henry, who in 1708 inherited the title and the entire family estate. Henry must have disposed of the manor of Lenham immediately, as it was purchased by Lady Elizabeth Hamilton before her death in 1709. The Montague family lives today on the Cowdray Estate in West Sussex.

When Lady Hamilton bought the Manor of Lenham for her son who lived at Chilston Park, it was the first time that the manor was owned by a local family. It remained part of the Chilston Estate until it was eventually sold to local farmers in the 19th century.²⁶

The Kent Archives hold documents relating to the ownership of Chilston Park under George Best and the personal notebook of the 1st Viscount Chilston, which give us a good insight into the running of the estate during an agricultural depression and the impact of a caring 'Lord of the Manor', deeply concerned about the wellbeing of the land entrusted to him. This, however, will be the subject of a separate entry on our website.

²⁵ Huntingdon Library, San Marino California in the United States as part of the Webster Collection

²⁶ See our article 'The Scots in Lenham' https://cde37143-ed22-472c-a8f1-abc71483bfe5.filesusr.com/ugd/5cd011_3f9b4e4581e542b0b52948d5d0b5fb70.pdf?index=true