LIVERTON
an historic hamlet in the Parish of Lenham

by Henny Shotter

In 1469 a John Baker from Liverton, in those days called Lefferton, wrote his will.[1] In this will he made sure that his wife, Isabella could stay in their marital home, in one upstairs room to one side of the hall and that she had use of the hall and front door for her coming and goings and as well as the use of the kitchen. He had three sons, the youngest being under the age of 20 at the time when he wrote his will. He also had two underage daughters, Elizabeth and Johanna. His oldest son was inherited the estate in Liverton. However ,there were two fields set aside to produce income for the daughters. Another son inherited land in Frinsted and the youngest inherited land in the heath.
He also left money for the upkeep of the road between Lenham and Liverton. He wanted to be buried in Lenham churchyard and candles to be lit at the 'altar' of St. Nicholas, St. Catherine, Mary and the Holy Cross at St. Mary's in Lenham.

What do we learn from this will?
Beside the fact that he was a man who provided for his family (including his daughters and his wife), we learn that he lived in a hall house on Liverton Street. His sons also wrote wills in later years from which we can conclude that they stayed in the area and developed the farm. As John Baker left money for the upkeep of the road to Lenham, we know that the road was important to him, possibly to bring his produce to the market in Lenham and from there perhaps further afield to the port of Faversham. He also gave us some insight into the pre-Reformation church in Lenham, which will be the subject to another article.

Liverton Hill
Still today, life in Liverton is dominated by the road which leads through it. The buildings, old and new, are mainly located near the road and the map doesn't show any named side roads. There is no 'centre' to the settlement and the two former pubs are closed. The latest pub to close was "The Plough", which was converted into a private house in 1980.[2] It had been lost to local knowledge that at the other end of Liverton, there was also a pub, called "The George". The earliest document which we could find relating to "The George" is an indenture from 1670[3], which makes it obvious that the pub was named after St. George, the patron saint of the English. The document refers to an earlier bargain and sale from 1663, in which a John Brockhill, who we know was governor of the Honywood Alms houses in Lenham, was one lessor. The other one was a Francis Lury of the City of London, a druggist who entered the contract in 1670 with Robert Callant, a Maidstone Apothecary. [4]
It seems that the brewing of beer was important in Liverton as we find here also a "malthouse" (not a listed building) and in proximity two oast houses, both listed and deemed to be 19th century. However, as the two public houses were earlier, we can safely assume that they made their beer and, being close to Maidstone where hops growing in England started off, they will have used hops which they grew : "By the 17th century ale (i.e.: un-hopped beer) was no longer popular and beer was the established drink and by 1655 hop cultivation grew rapidly in fourteen counties."[5]

[1] see: Kent Archives, Canterbury Probate Records (1396-1858) PRC/17/1/329b
[2] see the article by Richard Thomas in The Plough on the Lenham Heritage website.
[3] Kent Archives U1292 T 41-42 Liverton Street Indenture 18.2.1670 and in the 20th year of Charles II.
[4] In this context our article "Beer the Healthy Choice"
[5] see History of British hops on the website of the British Hops Association.

The building style of "The George" and "The Plough" are quite different. In the listing

details[6] "The George" is identified as "early 18th century with 19th century facade', whereas the 'Plough" is described as ' C15 or early C16. timber-framed with painted brick front elevation. '. The listing of 'The George" doesn't mention that the house was once a public house, perhaps a coaching inn, which still today boasts a beer chute and that possibly a much older building is hidden underneath the facade. The Kent Archive holds a bundle of Title Deeds for the George starting in 1649[7] and going through to 1890[8]. The earliest document mentioning "The Plough" are title deeds from 1717[9].

Also, on Liverton Hill, near the George is 'Greenacres' the building form of which suggests that it was once used for storage with the higher part of the building possibly accommodating a hoist.

Hall Houses
The will of 1469 prompted the search for Hall Houses on Liverton Hill. We don't know whether there were more, but there are two remaining.

[6] see: https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/england/lenham-maidstone-kent#google_vignette
[7] see: 'The George in Lisserton Street Lenham' U55/T255 · 1649-1777 · Kent History and Library Centre
[8] see: Title Deeds for the George in Liverton Street, Lenham U82/T236 · 1838-1890 ·
[9] see: Titel Deeds for 'The Plough' in Liverton Street, Lenham U82/T234 · 1717-1777 · Kent History and Library Centre

One is <u>Churchill Cottage</u>
which is situated at one end of the hamlet

The timber structure of the building is largely hidden underneath the modern facade; however, the listing identifies the original building as a 16th century hall house with an open hall and two bays.

Timber Structure

Jettied corner with missing dragon beam

The other building, identified as a hall house on Liverton Hill is <u>Mansion Farmhouse</u> which was the centre of fruit farming on Liverton Hill at least in recent history. The farm was once part of the Chilston Estate [10].

Sale details[11] from 1912 show the extent of the farm compromising a barn, an oast house and several other outbuildings. In 1987 the barn, the oast and a building plot on which had been three derelict cottages were given planning permission for conversion to domestic use.

Of course, we cannot be certain that John Baker lived in Mansion Farmhouse, but it was the most likely existing building and therefore became subject to a visit by the Historic Buildings Group of Kent Archaeological Society which wrote a detailed report about the building and its interesting features.

Unusually for a profane building of this period, the frame of the entrance door is decorated with a foliate head which also is known as a 'Green Man'.

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[10] see: U673/E1: Schedule of lands on the Chilston estate (1893
[11] see: U55/SP/844 · 11 Jul 1912 · Kent History and Library Centre

In close proximity to Liverton Hill is the conservation area of Elmstone Hole which boasts a spectacular setting to another hall house <u>Elmstone Hole Farm</u>.

The building was excluded from the search for John Baker's hall house as it is not situated in Liverton and is not directly on the road to Lenham. There is also known a family in Lenham by the name of Elmstone. Family names are often derived from place names. For example, the family name 'Lenham' goes back to Roger de Lenham who resided in East Lenham. Although there are no other places named Lenham, but several others called 'Elmstone' , it is fairly safe to assume that Erasmus Elmstone (died 1631) is connected to Elmstone Hole Farm. Erasmus is, together with other major landowners of his time, buried in front of the altar in St. Mary's church Lenham. It is of additional interest that he was churchwarden in 1622 when the Honywood Charity was set up. His signature is on the same document as that of John Brockhill, Governor of the charity, whom we know from the title deeds of the 'George' just round the corner.

Elmstone Hole Farm , however, provides another mystery: the wall and the remains of a seemingly tall building with a round arched entrance on one side.

A mystery still to explore