

Lenham Archaeological Society

The DIG at LENHAM COURT on the front lawn

In Aug . 2010 we started a dig on the front lawn of Lenham Court, down Old Ham Lane in the western part of the parish. The lawn is so uneven that the owners asked us to investigate before the grass is realaid . The northern part of the house is believed to date from the 15th Century if not the 14th C. Foundations may even be older than that . See the listed features by entering [www. Historic Environment Kent](http://www.HistoricEnvironmentKent) and drawing down the parish .

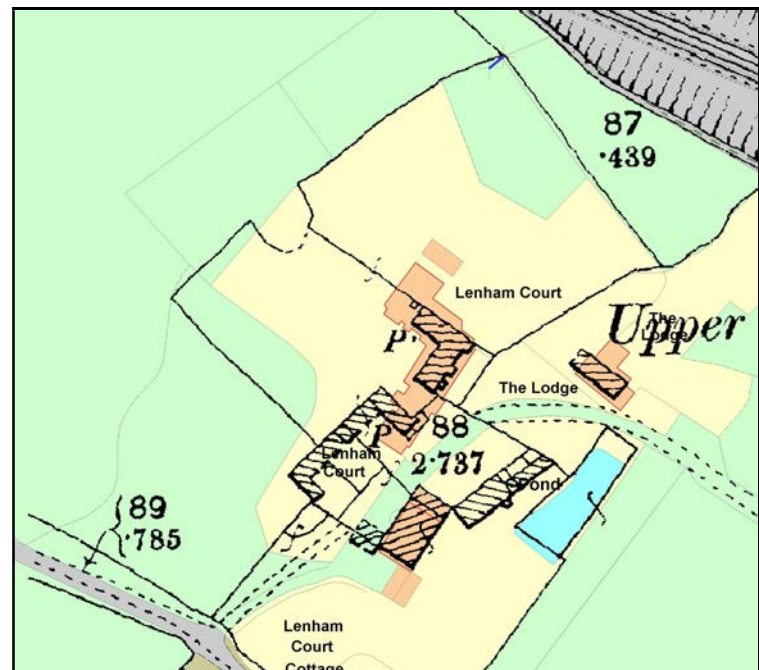
There are several OS maps, the earliest of which is 1797 in which the house and buildings are labelled Upper Ham . Ham is drawn on the 1764 Scaip but is positioned on the Pilgrim's Way ! It is pretty certain that error comes from misinterpretation of an earlier map that was drawn with West at the top of the page instead of North. The 1841 tithe map is drawn in that odd position as if copied from an earlier, but very accurate drawing, that caused the 18thC cartographers to make a mistake with Ham's position. If any one can tell us of this missing pre 1764 map please let us know.

When all the different OS maps of Lenham Court are overlaid there appears a jumble of buildings once standing to the west of the house on the present lawn. All are now gone. The house itself has a very different footprint from the 1841 plan . Buildings to the south have been demolished and the house extended in a slightly different line . Everything south of the present front door can be safely interpreted as 'modern'. As this extension has been so well done it is difficult to discern this dramatic change . Remnants of a wall was visible running at an E→W angle across the lawn as a parch mark in the summer of 2009.

On these overlaid maps (modern in colour and a 1867 in black) the various extensions and demolished buildings can be worked out. The following resistivity plot , done in Sept 2009 shows areas of dense material

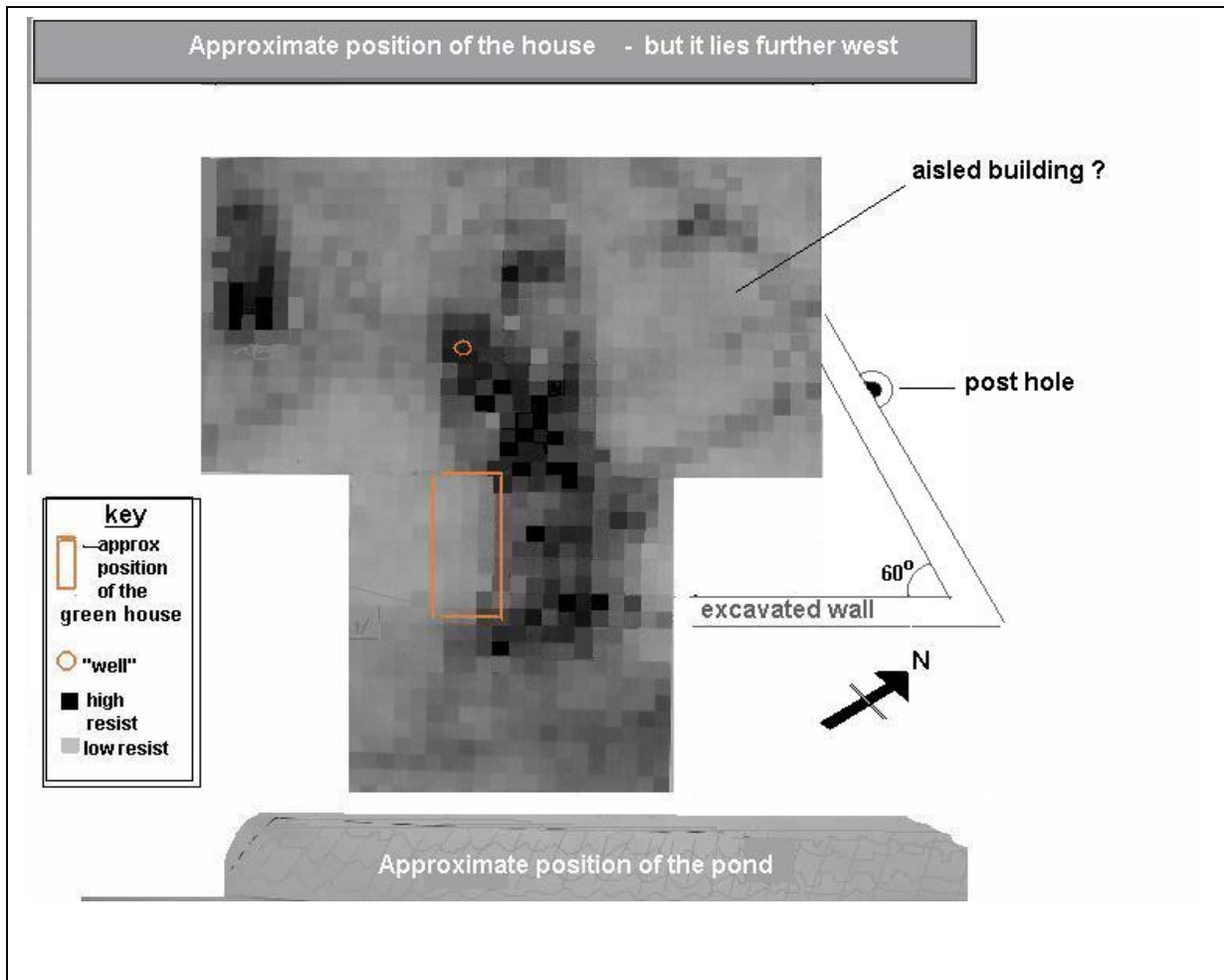


Lenham Court dig 2010, on the front lawn Northern (oldest part of the house is visible)



Modern map with 1867 overlay





Resistivity of the Lawn

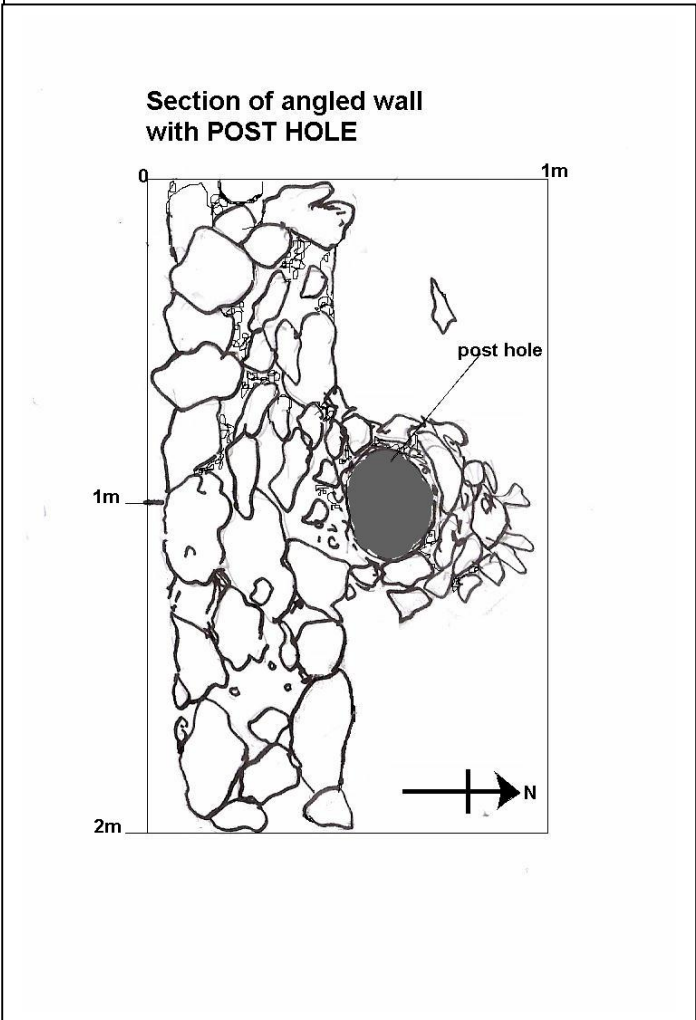
Because the readings were taken every 0.5m the detail is quite clear. But the dense areas it showed did not fit well with the 1867 map! Or with the later 1901map. The density of the stone wall was picked up by the rez and the second, vaguer, wall 4m towards the pond might indicate the footprint of the long building on the 1867 map.

However, as excavation will continue this spring (2011) the confusing overlay of the different buildings may become more apparent.

What is curious is the "aisled" building that appears to be present although investigation of that has only revealed a hard packed flint base as yet. It would appear that the "aisled" building is set correctly against the odd line of the "garden wall"correctly meaning that it is at right angles to it.

These type of building could be of any date from Iron Age through Saxon to Medieval times and/or it could just be a late barn of 17th C date. Which is most likely what it is! From charcoal found in post holes carbon dating could give us a date at which these posts were burnt.

From the upstairs window it was clear that there was a parch mark running east west across the lawn from the porch to the pond. This was proven to be a ragstone wall, later by excavation



Excavations :-

The first trench opened in Aug 2010 was one across the area of high resist area at the pond end of it. This eastern edge proved to be a substantial ragstone wall with large blocks set in deep clay. There did not appear to be any mortar on the lower levels. It was surmised that the pond could have extended at one time right up to this wall like a moat. Later with heavy rain in late Sept this theory was made even more plausible :-



Moat that appeared after we dug !

Looking North along the trench.

As stated before trenches were opened across the parch mark the ran east from the house towards the pond. This proved to be another 60cm wide ragstone wall that joined at a 60 degree angle with the first wall.



Northern end of the rag-stone wall

Showing the 60 degree angle as it travelled west towards the house

This strange angle confused at first until it was noted that the angle of the building on the 1867 map fits that configuration. At the southern 'end' of the first wall brick buildings had been constructed using it as a foundation. It is uncertain if the one of these brick structures represented the building on the 19thC map. It looked more like a sunken greenhouse and west of it was this strange 19th-20th structure:-



Measure =30cm . **Brick structure =60cm**
"drains sloping down into it and a lower one draining out"

The most likely explanation for this is that it is a drainage sump for water off the roof of the greenhouse.

Another feature that was discovered and fits with the small square to the SE of the 19thC building on the map is an outhouse:-



Old fashioned early 19thC latrine

It was difficult to find many datable small finds at all. The only piece of distinctive pottery (bar flower pot) was this small piece of 17th-18th C glazed slip ware :-



Also, under the stone wall wedged in the clay beneath it was a broken piece of a Neolithic polished flint axe. Proof that centuries ago it was once discarded in a pond ?



Broken Neolithic axe