

Lenham Archaeological Society

LENHAM HERITAGE group dig July 2017 ...report .

It is rare to get the chance to dig in the centre of Lenham and due to change of hands of property this became possible in 2017



Google Earth view of the site 2015

© Google Maps

In 2016 Nat West Bank building has been closed and sold to the local Lenham Solicitors Thorneloes.

In 2017 they kindly allowed us to organise a dig in the small garden of the property . Only history we have is that last century it was used as a home for a donkey of an elderly gentleman of the village .

South garden wall (10m) backs onto Church Square. North wall with a gate is 11m length continuous with the churchyard north wall . Separating the garden from the churchyard to the east is a cast iron fence of 13m.

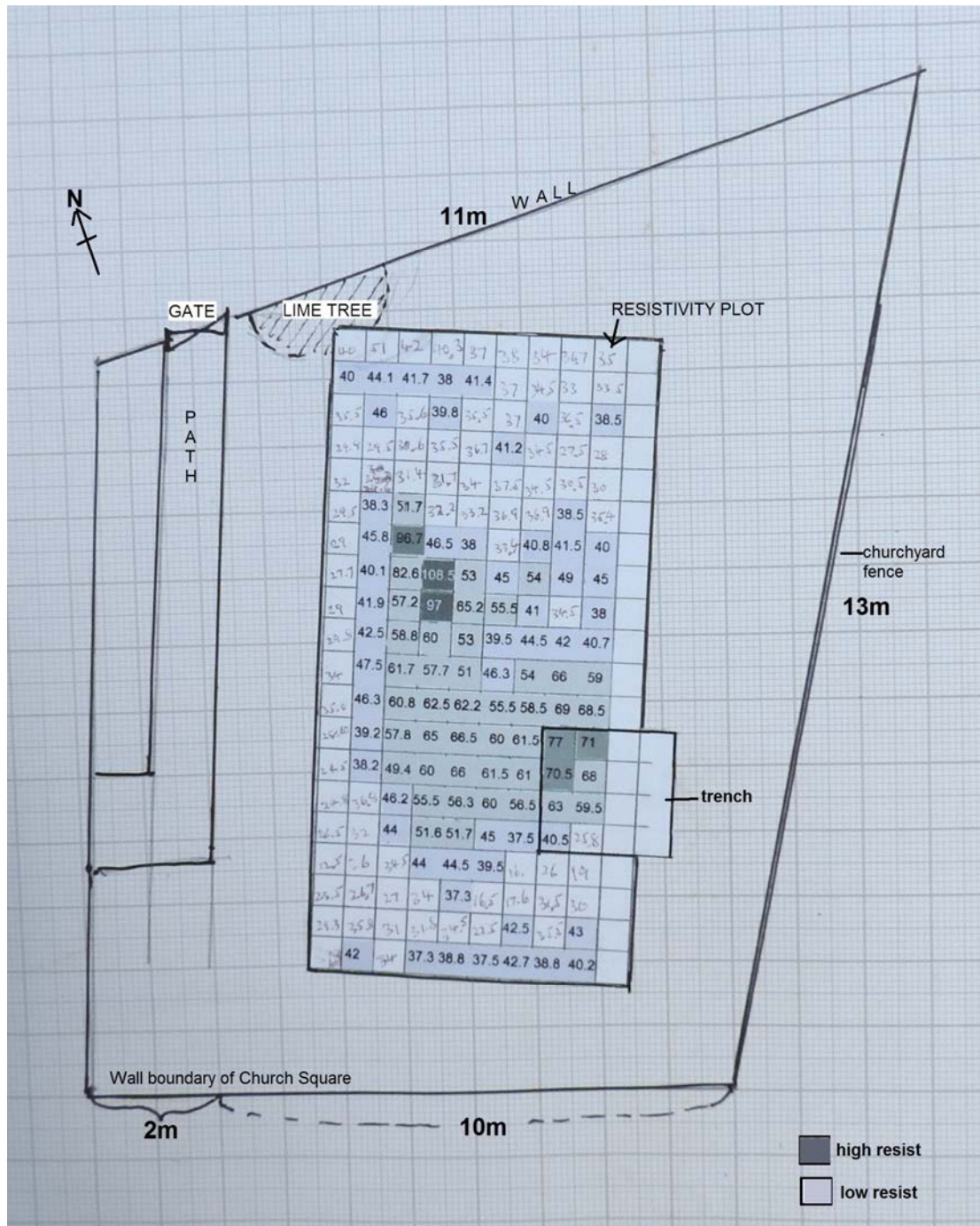
Using the KAS resistivity metre a small plot 10m X 5m was surveyed on 21st June . An area some 4m x4m gave very high readings 45 – 100 ohms as opposed to 20-35 Ohms elsewhere.

The western edge of this area had a straight edge curving round at the southern end. Readings had been taken every 0.5 m to give a more accurate outcome.



View of garden looking south to Church Square

Plan of garden with resist plot and trench marked



The Dig :- started on July3rd .

It was decided to aim for an area of high readings and to ascertain how far it extended towards the churchyard fence.

Top soil was quite deep 35cm fairly loose with chalk scraps , a few pieces of modern 20th C pottery , slate , brick tile fragments and a child's tooth . 2 small pieces of skull were also found in this top soil on day 2 together with the following;-

- Charcoal - a few scraps
- 2 small stone balls ...most likely musket balls....plus a gun flint
- Nails mostly hand made , various sizes over 50 in number.
- Glass marble ...from neck of ginger beer bottle.
- Glass fragments, bottles and window glass.

Glazed sherds ... mostly 18th-20th C (& possibly 3 different chamber pots) Italian coin 1919 . king Victor Emanuele III of Italy
 Sections of clay pipes (no bowls to date them)
 3 pieces of imported German stone ware (Belamine jug)
 1 piece of pie-crust yellow/brown glazed slip ware 18th C.
 1 polished thin disc ...tiddlywink ? 19th C



Selection of broken pots all 19th-20th Cplus clay pipes, Italian coin , and glass.

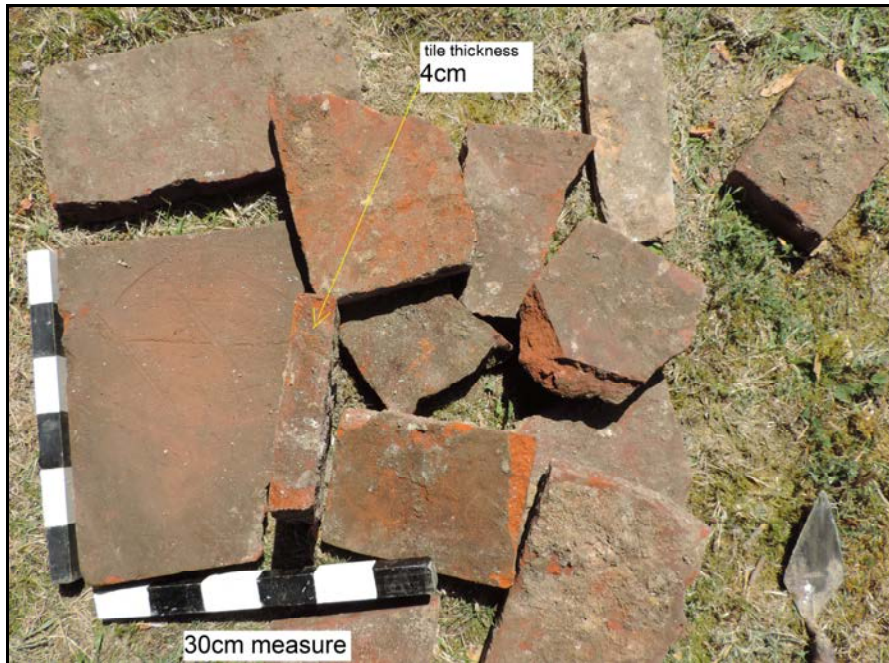
On Day 3 July 5th

Dug down beyond the 35cm level. Large amounts of wall plaster broken pieces of roof tile and brick plus mortar, and all of this was loosely packed with many voids between pieces . |This was obviously the 'dense' layer the rez machine picked up. But because there were many voids through which current cannot pass it registered a high Ohm reading .

July 6th digging 50cm slot around the south and west edges of the trench the builders rubbish continued . Large amounts of brick , some small and narrow like Tudor and large terracotta quarry tile 30cm 15cm in size in broken pieces very loosely packed.

Again this conformed the high resist areas of the survey ,

On July 7th a sondage was dug in the SE corner to attempt to get down below the loose brick rubbish layer ,, Even at a depth of 1.20 m the natural was not reached ,. As at this depth it was extremely unstable, it was decided to call it a day and we filled in. Care was taken to replace the brick tile and rubbish in the greatest depths with top soil added last .



Selection of tiles showing size and thickness

Finds in more detail:-

Strange bits of bone :- these were found on day 1 , very shallow in first 25 cm of top soil .

Only 5m from the Churchyard wall one might suppose they came from older graves when the 19th C ones were dug . Even so, the fact that we found them was recorded with the Maidstone Coroner as is required .

The veining on the inside of the bones can clearly be seen but they are NOT HUMAN



Two small pieces of human skull

One small flat disc made of bone was found , resembled a modern tiddlywink and was most likely a gaming disc of that sort. Tiddlywinks was invented in 1888. Also a piece of Staffordshire pale yellow and brown combed slip ware usually dated as late 18th C was also found . Many pieces of clay pipe stem but no bowls so they cannot

be dated and also two pieces of Oyster shell . These are ubiquitous in Lenham and can date from Neolithic (6000 years ago) to modern 19th C. At one time Lenhamites complained bitterly that they 'were fed too many oysters' by their employers. They were a fairly cheap source of protein and shipped down to Lenham from Whitstable and /or Sussex coast. They can be dated by carbon dating but it is expensive and this dig does not warrant that expenditure .



Finds :- bone tiddlywink Slip ware pottery 18th c and 2 pieces of oyster shell

This Italian coin found was likely dropped between the wars . Dated 1919 Victor Emanuel III was the king of Italy during the time of Mussolini . Perhaps that was the time the house was renovatedwe just do not know for sure .



Victor Emanuel III C 2 with barley ear . date 1919

Another interesting find were two slate stylus used to draw on slates:-



Obviously 2 different stylus ...as they are of different thickness.

A worked flint at first glance looks Bronze age but its size and squareness indicates it is from a flintlock firearm , most likely a Brown Bessie Musket circa 17th C . but if the stone shot is from the same gun then it is earlier , 16th C



Worked Gun Flint and corresponding musket ball

One almost identical was found in 2002 on the Community Centre site and the lead gripper that held it in the breach was also found.

Last items to be mentionedin the garden are 2 dressed ragstones that have grooves as if they were part of a doorway :-



Ragstones lying in the gardenmeasure is 30cm .

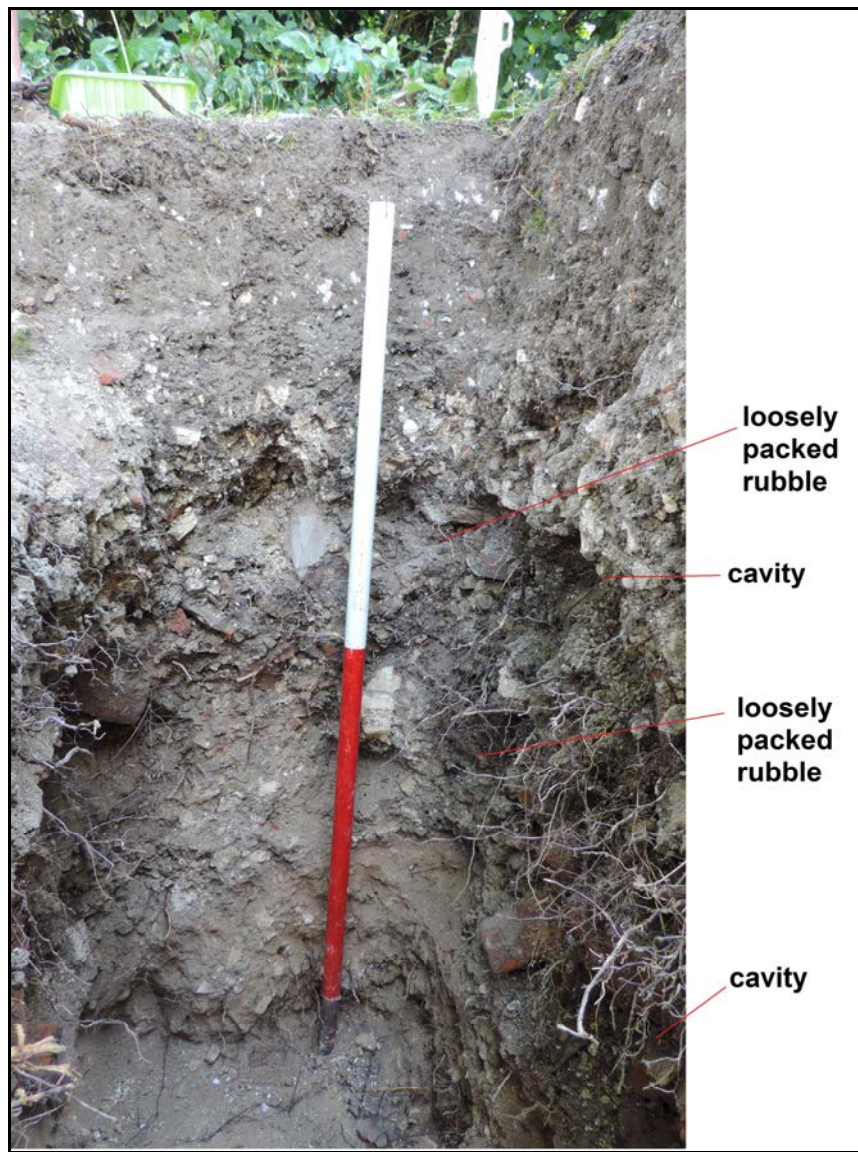
Conclusion

Although no proof of an older building was found in this garden , the builders rubble indicated renovations were made to the “Nat. West Bank” building around 1930. It looked as if an old kitchen with terracotta tiled floor and a hearth was removed. The small sized bricks found and the possible 400 year old beams inside the house *might* indicate it is Tudor . It is yet another house in Lenham village that has not had thorough inspection inside as to its age . Anything prior 1717 should be listed but invariably is not.

But the presence of the 2 dressed ragstones under the ivy suggests that a medieval building *might* have been present in the vicinity.

It may be as well to revisit the site and drop another trench 1m or so closer to the south wall of the garden to ascertain if anything else is there.

Another test pit might be dropped in the NE corner (hopefully not over the pet cat burial of last century.) The exact position of Roman roads through Lenham have never actually been proven and could quite well run in front of the present church .
Reason why we closed up and never reached natural :-



This sondage showed how unstable the ground was . Dryness of the fill compounded the problem . Another trench later in the year after more rain might be better .

L. Feakes 1.8.2017.