

# Lenham Archaeological Society

## *The Mystery of Lenham Court and how it must be the West Lenham Manor House of The Abbot of St Augustines.*



When I first came to live in Lenham I understood from Tim Tatton- Brown (then Director of Canterbury Archaeological Trust) that Lenham Court was the Manor house of the Abbot of St Augustines and I had no reason to believe he was wrong .

Since then modern historians in Lenham say 'there is no evidence that it was so'.

But according to available literature it most certainly looks like it to me. I will explain my deductions .

Edward Hasted wrote:-

*"This manor remained part of the possessions of the monastery till its final dissolution in the 30<sup>th</sup> Year of Henry VIII .....when it was surrendered into the Kings hands. The Manor of Lenham remained in the crown till Queen Elizabeth granted it to William Cecil , Lord of Burleigh ....he alienated it to Thomas Wilford ....and it was conveyed to Anthony Brown , Viscount Montague. "*

Now, for a house of the correct date, size and importance , Lenham Court is the **only one now standing** that it could be .

Court Lodge was not built until 1672 and from its name it suggests that it was once the Lodge gate of the Abbots land . That would fit with possibility that the Abbot's land extended northwards to the present E→.W section of Ham lane and had an eastern limit of the Headcorn road ( or more likely the limiting line of Court Lodge drive N→S .( An old Roman road ? ) The Lodge then stood out on a corner of the Abbots Land . His land did not extend north to Church Square for that would have been part of Lenham given to the Archbishop by Queen Ediva in 961.

Under the ownership of the Viscount, Lenham Court manor house became divorced from its advowson and was leased, then sold on separately. This is difficult to prove because so many of the Cowdray Park records of the Montagues were lost in their disastrous fire of 17<sup>th</sup> . Century.

However a snippet that survives in Battle Abbey records:-

**FRANCIS VISCOUNT MONTAGU, Deed to Sir Brockett Spencer, Bart., of Offley, Hertfordshire, and others, to indemnify divers Barns, Buildings, and pieces of Land situate in Lenham, in Kent, parcel of the Demesnes of the Manor of Lenham, from a Fee Farm Rent of Seven Pounds to the King for the Manor of Lenham. June, 1667.**

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Was this referring to the Lenham Court House ?

Another entry refers to a possible earlier lease from Henry Wilford in the Wilford records ;\_

HENRY WILFORD, of Quendon, Lease for Twenty-one Years to  
Robert Halsnod, of his Messuage, &c. at Lenham, with all the  
Outbuildings, &c. thereunto belonging ;

April 18, 1630

**More convincing than either of these is the record in the Wotton Survey of 1560 !  
For in that there is a description of a messuage (house and buildings ):-**

"The house had a hall with a fireplace and chimney at the northern end with a buttery and kitchen behind that . Over the buttery are three more rooms .  
At the south end of the hall is a parlour with a chimney , another buttery and a small room .  
Above this area is a fair sized room with a chimney.  
On the west side of the house (behind and attached to it ?) is a little milk house and on the east side of the main house is a bakery with a room above it. Near the bakery is a fair sized barn and stable. All buildings in 1560 were tiled. Behind the house (west side ) was a garden  
There was also an orchard and a court land ."

This would appear to be an accurate description of Lenham Court but the name of this house is Mayes Tenement and it is said to be standing "to the west of Liffleton Street ". We tend to believe that Liffleton (Liberton or Littleton Street) is near Liverton Hill. But that was probably not the case . One can follow Littleton Street northwards to Pleasant Farm , there it bears NW in a deep cut, crossing the lost stream of the Len and up what is now Ham lane . Then it goes straight past the gate of Lenham Court on its way to Grant's Cottages and the present A20.

There are other important pointers . Several fields around Lenham Court had a strange RC Covenant that precluded any buildings except of a chapel or church . These covenants remained till late last century when they were rescinded on request to RC Southwark. There is a field and wood named "Chapel" as if one is missing .

There are about six large fishponds around the vicinity of the house . Monopoly of fish and fishing was very lucrative for the monks no one (except they ) were allowed to fish . The western pond or lake has a rectangular shadow beside it that *could* be a mill . William Thorne writing in 14<sup>th</sup> Century says the monks had two mills , Abbots Mill and Slakke mill . Slakke mill could have been near the present Sand way where the River Len flowed out from a lake (slack ) beside the present White Horse Pub. That road junction was known as Spital Crouch Which suggests a hospital ?

When LAS dug on the lawn a wall with a post hole was discovered on the north side. Could that have been the edge of the "court ".

The 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount was enobled by Queen Mary and the Montague s remained quietly Catholic throughout the Elizabethan period .

Perhaps the name 'Mayes' remained as their tribute to the Catholic Queen Mary. It would all make sense .

I would only hope archaeologists of the future will eventually investigate some of these enigmas in west Lenham .

Adaptation of the 1841 Tithe map

