

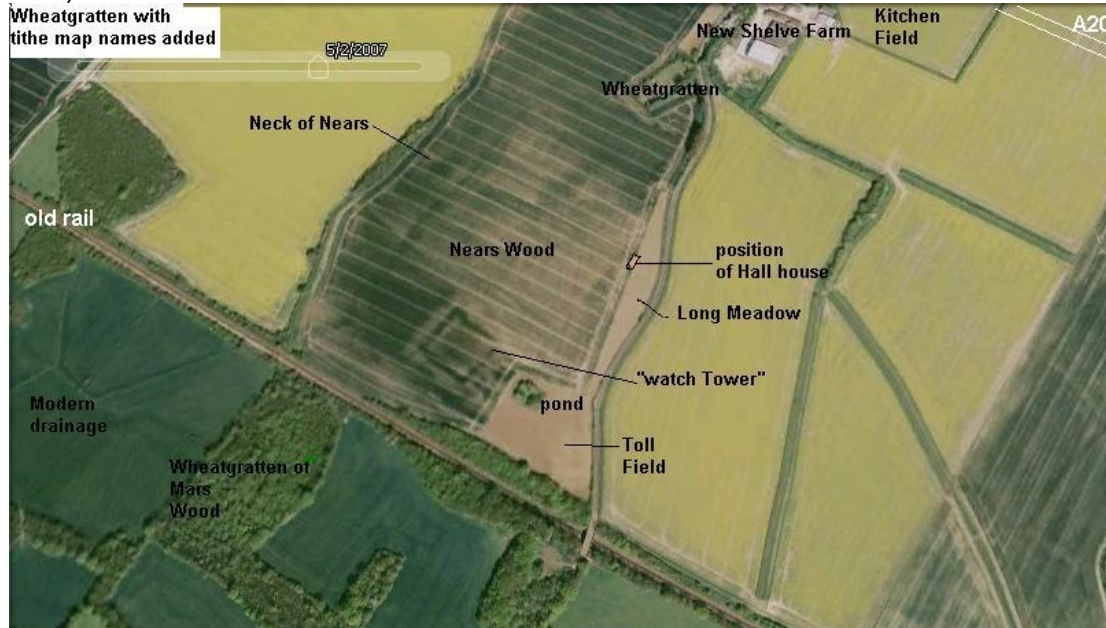
Lenham Archaeological Society

Site 8 Wheatgratten Farm and possible Roman features .

A crop mark invariably shows on all aerials and on Google Earth . Using GE it is now possible to accurately measure both the size of the structure and width of the ditches. The 1841 tithe map names the field Toll Field and even as late as 1908 the ditches on the north corners were still filled with water .

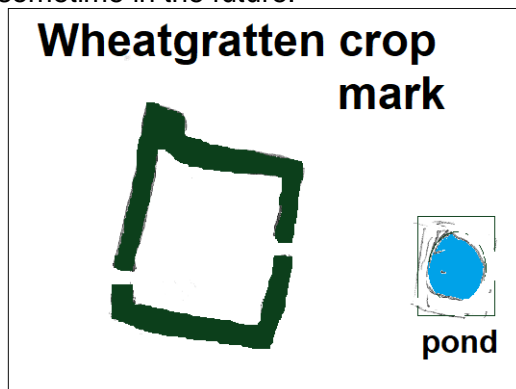
This might suggest it was once a hall house standing in a moated site . But the only house marked on the 1841 map (not on the 1908) is close to the Forstal road at TQ9142.5100.

Fig 1 . Google photo of Wheatgratten , Lenham (New Shelve post code = **ME17 2DS**)



Scale :- |-----| 100 metres N at top of page © Google Maps

The "Watch Tower" square is 74 m X 63m and could be a garrison for 100 soldiers . Is the overall size of the original "camp" much larger? Does the strange square of Mars wood (also known as Wheatgratten Wood) across the railway line , form the southern end of the original site ? All questions that may need investigating sometime in the future.



Figs 2 . Wheatgratten square -- 2007diagram

Finds to date

Despite a thorough metal detection relatively few finds have occurred. These were drawn and featured in our first Lenham Archaeology Journal in 2006.:-

Fig 3,

Snaffle bit, Iron Age, copper alloy
Date possibly 1st C. End rings linking to the rein rings are broken off.
Design of the metal working suggests it is Celtic.
Finder: Derek Butcher



Large iron hand made nail
Date difficult to determine.
Could be Medieval, could be Roman.
Finder: Jean Bayford

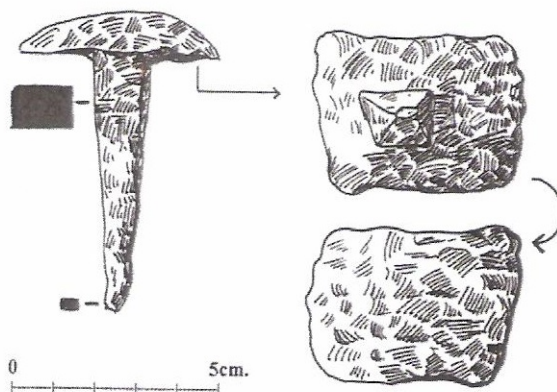


fig 4.

Also found were several sherds of a Saxon shelly ware pot . This might indicate some Saxon habitation but the overall features strongly favour a Roman original occupation.

The name Kitchen Field applied to the field beside New Shelve farm might also indicate some Roman finds in the distant past, Medieval people often named fields such if Roman pots were found .

If Lenham had a garrison one might expect a military arena . The sink hole on the Downs foothills above New Shelve is an interesting possibility . Looked at it closely on Google it is right size and shape and is worth investigation later should Wheatgratten prove to be Roman. Roman snails are common on the Pilgrim's Way and Samian ware has been found in Birch Wood less than 2 Km NNE. Presence of Roman finds (pottery , key brooches and other items) is proven by LAS 400m south near a substantial Iron Age enclosure on Chapel Farm .

Although this "camp" is a possibility the presence of water drains on the left of the Google picture might suggest that the ditches across what used to be Nears Wood, date from the 19thC . However, it is also possible also that the drainage system was 'plugged in ' to an existing much older ditched system the truth will not be certain without investigations !

Initial excavation :-

Prime aim would be to investigate the "watch tower" and determine who had built it and why . This could be solved (hopefully) by throwing a trench across the ditch and part of the internal space. We know that the site stands on the gault clay and excavation would need to entail a mechanical digger .

If it proves to be a Roman fortlet then further investigation at a later date would be interesting, to determine if the site extended further .

It is possible that Julius Caesar came along the foothills of the Downs . Did Plautius follow his tracks in AD 43 ? It would be nice to prove both possibilities !

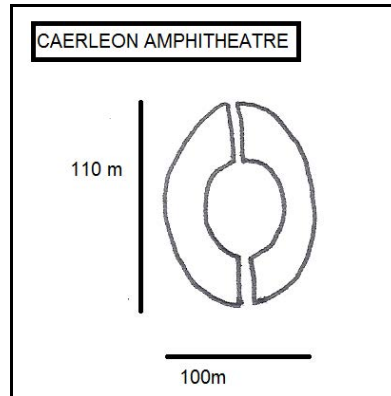
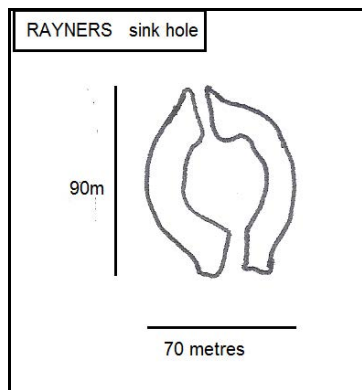
Additional Feature in the field North of the A20

(Article as written for Lenham Focus Magazine)

Lenham Focus Feb 2016 -- Amphitheatre on Lenham Downs ?

Rain is probably on everyone's mind this winter season . And sink holes often grab people's attention. Often they owe their appearance to past underground excavations, partly filled in dene holes may suddenly open up with all the wet weather . Two did last year on the Downs above Lenham . The Boyds have a similar 'hole' that keeps needing earth to refill it on the field just to the east of Rayners Hill road (appropriately named) .

I have noticed this year it seems to have sunk a little more...but nothing really to worry about and I do not think it is a forgotten dene hole ! Last century there was a small sewer plant serving the long gone hospital but that was further north close to the Pilgrims Way in the next field . Google Earth is an invaluable information site to source /research these kind of things . If you click on the clock on the tool bar you can go back to a 1946 aerial of Kent . It is not visible on that one but does not mean it was not there . On the 2003 aerial is the clearest picture of all and there is a whitish area surrounding it as if the chalk is affecting the soil . I have made a drawing of what I can see there and the central 'hole' is 30metres wide and some 50meters long . If you compare this sketch with the drawing of Caerleon Roman amphitheatre near Newport, in Wales you will probably be surprised by the similarity !



Caerleon (for 6000 people) is just slightly larger as you can see by the scale and is a little more regularbut then Rayner's has been ploughed for many years , There is another Roman Amphitheatre that one can walk across and actually view (almost the exact same size again) at the Roman Town of Silchester, 5 miles due north of Basingstoke . The city still has most of its walls visible but there is not a lot else to see except plenty of grazing cows !

Makes a pleasant summer walk if you are ever that way ! It is free to visit but belongs to English Heritage and is dug every year by Reading University . It is where they found a wingless Roman eagle, lost from a Legion's standard and Rosemary Sutcliffe wrote the exciting story "The Eagle of the Ninth". Well worth a read for teenagers or anyone for that matter.

NO! we have no plans to dig down and see what is there on the Rayner's field !

There would few finds to retrieve any way ! Small finds would be deep down (and covered by piles of infill) and not that numerous at all. What is likely to be there (if at all) would be the remains of chalk block seating arranged around in tiers for the spectators !

What an amphitheatre (in that position) would indicate is that there was a Roman station or town of reasonable size somewhere in the vicinity . Lenham? Lenham Heath ? Charing ? The theatre was always outside the town . There are hints at all 3 places , Charing has a large Roman villa/Farm and things were found in all the sand pits .

Somewhere there is something major to be found by people of the futureso keep your eyes peeled young archaeologists of the future . You may have a chance to become an Indiana Jones !

There is a missing town in our area called Durolevum . Some say it was at Ospringe . has to be about 13miles from Rochester . A road along the top pf the downs would fit .

But what if it was badly written or rememberedwas it Duolenum i.e. a twin town ?