

Troubled Times. 1349 -1381AD.

1349 -The Black Death.

The village was an early victim of the plague known as the Black Death. It's thought that up to a third of the village died and that the plague was transported by boats along the river Ouse from Kings Lynn, then an important port. The plague continued east and south to affect much of East Anglia.

The Ordnance Survey map of 1854 shows 'The Old Churchyard' somewhere near the track at the top of Broom Road near the Warren. There is no record of a church having been there and it has been suggested that this might have been the site of a burial of plague victims. Contagion was greatly feared so the dead were buried rapidly and as far away from habitation as possible.

The number of deaths on top of bad weather and poor harvests must have made life very hard and impoverished villagers would have had great difficulty in meeting the Abbey's demands. Despite all difficulties the quotas of produce and rents from the village still had to be met and Lakenheath was now a major provider of the Abbey's needs.

The Black Death had created a labour shortage so some lords reduced rents in order to attract new labourers but the Prior of Ely was unwilling to do this and a few villagers left for other manors. The labour shortage became such a problem nationally that it became a criminal offence to refuse to do manorial work. The Statute of Labourers became law and specially appointed Justices enforced it.

When justices arrived at Lakenheath to enforce the law the vicar SIMON de SUTTON (or possibly SIMON WRIGTE) sided with the villagers against the interests of the Abbey and was later removed from his position.

Sir John Cavendish, a local lord, was one of the justices. He reappears later.

Local ill-feeling towards Ely Abbey and the Justices gradually grew.

St. Edmundsbury Chronicle 2000.

M Bailey.

C Dyer.

More information about 'The Old Churchyard' has come to light. We are grateful to Ron Morley for his help.

It now seems very likely that 'The Old Churchyard' was in fact an early Saxon burial ground, possibly from a similar date to those discovered on the airbase hospital in the first excavations there which took place in the late 1950's. Since then more Saxon burial sites have been found there. (Circa AD 600). The site of the 'Old Churchyard' is close to the site of the Roman Era farmstead shown on early OS maps.

**Christianity was tolerated alongside traditional pagan beliefs in King Raedwald's reign in the early 7th C. Raedwald was then the most important king in the East of England*

**Wikipedia. Org.*

"..... I read your very interesting article in the latest Lakenheath Times where I see you mention 'The Old Churchyard' and where it was believed to be situated. I had an old map of Lakenheath years ago that placed it halfway down Sandy Drove. It was called the Old Churchyard due to the fact during the Victorian period a number of Saxon skeletons were dug up there. The unusual thing was that a number of the cruciform brooches found on the skeletons had been cast in three separate pieces then bolted (riveted) together to make the complete brooch. These were a unique type at the time.

*It was in the 50's while *'field walking' there that I picked up from the field's surface one of these brooch wings which I asked **Lady Briscoe about. She gave me information about the brooches. I later excavated some Saxon*** 'dating' floors in the same area suggesting the people buried in The Old Churchyard had lived in the area the wing came from. This seemed very likely as it was said they placed their cemeteries near enough by where they lived so they could keep an eye on the burial area to make sure no-one interfered with the dead but far enough away that the living weren't disturbed by the dead spirits."*

The wing has been displayed in Moyes's Hall museum for many years now."

Roman Ron Morley.



The wing shows a mythical beast's head facing, with two peacocks heads(?) beneath.

*Field walking: An archaeological examination of the surface of a field/land by eye and touch.

** Lady Grace Briscoe: See Time line 5 at 1930. "Read About Sir Charlton and Lady Grace Briscoe."

***Dating floors: The carefully identified ground layers of an excavation which enable accurate dating of the 'floor'.

1379. Fire in the Village.

A major fire heavily damaged the village with many cottages and permanent market stalls destroyed as well as the manorial buildings. Arson was suspected.

After the fire the prior ordered the villagers to rebuild cottages and manor buildings, perhaps at their own expense. To the villagers the manor hall and steward's barn represented the power of the abbey and were probably a focus for their anger. The prior's steward, Edmund de Lakenheath would have administered justice at the manorial court and enforced all feudal obligations. Later his property was ransacked. These large buildings, and those built after the fire, were sited at the south end of the churchyard where no. 63, the modern house, and library are now.

The Statute of Labourers was being enforced and the local constables (the bailiffs), JOHN CARTER and JOHN MAYHEW, sided with their neighbours and refused to act against them.

*M Bailey
C Dyer*

1381- The Peasants Revolt.

“When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman”

From a sermon by John Ball in 1381

Riots in Bury St. Edmunds had increased following years of discontent and Kings Justices had been despatched to restore order and collect unpaid taxes.

The justices, John of Cambridge, Prior of St. Edmundsbury Abbey and Sir John Cavendish, Chief Justice, were assisted by none other than Edmund of Lakenheath, the Steward of Lakenheath, who also leased land from Ely Abbey here.

Some say that the justices were fleeing from Bury to escape the peasants’ anger, others that they were coming here to arrest tax dodgers. Whichever is correct they were chased towards the River Ouse by Lakenheath villagers where KATHERINE GAMEN prevented their escape by pushing her boat away from the bank. Sir John Cavendish was captured and beheaded, traditionally by Matthew the Miller and John of Cambridge was captured and killed, probably on Mildenhall Heath. Edmund, having fled to the coast boarded a ship and was captured by pirates and held to ransom.

MARGARET WRIGTE, an ‘ale-wife’ or seller of beer, was part of the uprising. She had been fined by the manorial court for selling poor quality beer. Was she holding a grudge against the Steward?

C Dyer.

BBC Magazine no. 18373149 “Women at Arms”