

Lakenheath Manor Hall Estate: 16th-20th century.

[Please click here for Information about Feudal Lakenheath 1042-1547.](#)

By the 15th century the Lacy family, originally villeins of Lakenheath, had taken advantage of the opportunities presented by the aftermath of the Black Death and had prospered. In the early 16th century John Lacy built his house on land leased from the Manor on what is now Hall Drive. When John died, Simeon Steward obtained his house and land.

This was the beginning of what ultimately became the Lakenheath Hall Estate.

A new social class

The late 14th/early 15th century had seen the emergence in the village of 'yeomen farmers' whose status in the village rose by virtue of their prosperity and their employment of labourers and ultimately, servants. They were able to take on more copyhold tenancies and when the opportunity arose, were able to purchase land outright. The disposable wealth of the yeoman farmer and copyhold tenant, often through sheep farming, began to encourage specialist trades and shop keepers and by the middle of the 15th century there was a 'merchant' in the village whose house and workshops were directly opposite St Mary's Church.

By the 16th century *Simeon Styward, steward of the manors of Undley and Lakenheath and brother of the prior and later the dean of Ely Abbey, had become exceptionally wealthy (an advantageous marriage also helped!). One of his descendants was able to considerably enlarge the grounds around the original medieval hall on what became Hall Drive. After the execution of Charles I in 1649, Parliament abolished the Dean and Chapter of Ely and the value of Lakenheath manor was radically reassessed. The manor was 're-leased' to the Styward family, but at a very much increased rent which included the vast Lakenheath Warren.

[Click here for 'Lakenheath in Tudor Times'.](#)

After the drainage of the fens in the 1630's Ely Abbey had been allocated large areas of land on the newly drained fens and it continued to sell or let on copyhold leases some of its original manorial land around the village, presumably to sitting tenants or those wishing to increase their holdings. As the traditional role of lord of the manor became less important so the influence on village life of the future Lakenheath Hall Estate tenants grew.

The Styward/Stewart family continued to own or tenant the estate with its surrounding land until Robert Eagle of Wangford acquired the copyhold lease of the original medieval hall and land towards the end of the 18th century.

In the 18th century a new house, Northlawn Cottage, was built on a site to the north of the old hall by Robert Eagle who became prominent in local and county affairs, becoming a justice of the peace. The estate remained copyhold land for some years and eventually became known as the Lakenheath Hall Estate, remaining with the Eagle family until 1861-2. We think that at some time in the mid 19th century the copyhold lease was purchased outright by William Eagle and inherited on his death by his son William Graham Eagle. Broadly speaking, it was this estate which was purchased first by Sir William Dunn in 1885 who renamed the house 'The Retreat', and then by Sir Charlton Briscoe in 1930, who changed the name to Lakenheath Hall.

NOTE: In 1872 Prince Duleep Sign acquired vestiges of the Manor of Lakenheath which included the Warren and its mineral rights. The Lakenheath Hall Estate was by then independent of the medieval manor.

Houses of the Estate.

16th century -Lacy's House. 17th-18th century - Northlawn Cottage also known as The Cottage and Lakenheath Cottage. 19th C- The Retreat. 20th C- Lakenheath Hall.

All except Lacy's House share the same site.

Residents of Lakenheath Hall Estate. Some dates are estimated based on best available evidence.

Before 1529. **John Lacy.** Yeoman farmer, built a house here (No 7 on the panel map). This house was more or less continuously occupied until about 1790.

The Styward family, later the Stewart or Stuart family.

1533. On the death of John Lacy, **Simeon Styward.** d 1568, steward of Lakenheath Manor, acquired the Lacy house and copyhold land. The Styward family established the medieval Lacy house as the principal house in Lakenheath and were able to lease more manor land as well as purchasing land elsewhere in the area. Although the dominant family in the village they were not lords of the manor. **William Styward** grandson of Simeon inherited the estate. The family surname was changed to Stewart (or Stuart) in the 17th century.

Sir Nicholas Stewart Bt. MP (b 1664 d 1730), descendant of Simeon, had his main home at Hartley Mauditt, Hampshire. He employed *Thomas Kitchener as his land steward. The last Stewarts to live in the original medieval hall here were **Sir Simeon Stewart** who died in 1780 and **Miss Mary Stewart** who died in 1781.

*Thomas Kitchener, ancestor of Lord Kitchener of Khartoum- Minister of War in WWI.

1782- 1830. * **Robert Eagle of Wangford** became copyhold lease holder of the estate and was able to purchase more land. He probably lived for some years in the original medieval hall until he built a new house, and called it **Northlawn Cottage.** He was the commanding officer of the Lakenheath and Wangford Volunteers formed circa 1794 to guard against the risk of invasion by Napoleonic France.

[* Click here to read about 'The Lakenheath and Wangford Volunteers.'](#)

1830-1854. **William Eagle.** (Barrister). Defended his father in a major tithe dispute with the local vicar. He 'owns the greater part of the soil' in the area surrounding the village'. It's probable that by now the Eagle family had purchased outright the Lakenheath Estate. He was a notable collector of antiquities and medieval art. 1854 1861. **William Graham Eagle.** Grandson of Robert. (Barrister and radical politician). A prolific writer on legal subjects. The house was known as '**The Cottage**'. The original medieval hall was in ruins by now. During their time here the Eagle family had purchased large amounts of land which they retained until around 1891.

1861/62 Advert in the Norfolk Chronicle 13th July 1862 gives sale details of the estate which is known as the Lakenheath Estate. The cutting refers to the house as 'The Cottage'.

SUFFOLK.—A gentlemanly Sporting
Cottage Residence, with capital Breeding Preserves and Shooting over near 1400 acres, at Lakenheath, near Ely. Milde-hall and Brandon.—Messrs LEITCHFIELD, SON, and CHEFFINS are instructed to LET, on an agreement for LEASE, or from year to year, **THE COTTAGE**, adjoining the town of Lakenheath, two miles from the railway station, about three hours' ride from town, and within a drive of Bury, Ely, and Cambridge. This very desirable residence stands on a pleasant lawn, surrounded by luxuriant shrubberies and extensive grounds and plantations, which entirely enclose the house from the road, and through which are two carriage-drives. The Cottage contains five bed-rooms, two large parlours, entrance hall, kitchen, capital cellars, and ample domestic apartments, with game larder, detached stabling and coach-house, and two or three enclosed paddocks. This estate has always afforded first-rate pheasant and partridge shooting, with snipes and wild duck. There is also good rabbit shooting, with capital fishing in the Brandon River; and there are several packs of hounds in the neighbourhood. A very favourable opportunity is here offered to any gentleman who is seeking a residence which shall possess all the qualifications of a sporting retreat, and be, at the same time, quiet and inexpensive. The preserves around the cottage and grounds are admirably adapted for rearing and keeping a first-rate head of game at a moderate cost; two years of neglect have reduced the stock very low, but if the work of renewal be begun at once the success of two seasons of judicious management will be most satisfactory, as the experience of the past has proved.—For terms and cards to view apply at the Land, Timber, Auction, and Estate Offices of Messrs LEITCHFIELD, SON, and CHEFFINS, 62, Moorgate-street, London, E.C.

1864 The 'Hall' ie. the estate, being well known for its shooting, was leased to **Mr. C Farrow** of Diss.

1872 Lakenheath Manor. Remnants of the medieval manor land and the Warren were purchased by **Prince Duleep Singh**. This explains how land in the village ultimately came to be owned by Elveden Estates. (Lord Iveagh).

1885-1912. Northlawn Cottage and the Lakenheath Hall Estate, were purchased by **Mr., later Sir William Dunn, MP JP FRGS, 1st Baronet of Lakenheath**, greatly enlarged and renamed 'The Retreat'. He was MP for Paisley in Scotland and benefactor to several universities including both Oxford and Cambridge. He was also a Director of the Royal Exchange Assurance Company. He died without heirs.

1914-1917 **Mr. Robert Bilsland JP**. Chair of Lakenheath Parish Council. Former tenant of Churchgate Farm. He purchased Lakenheath Hall Estate and hosted the reception at the Hall following the unveiling of the memorial to Lord Kitchener in St. Mary's Church in 1915.

1918-1930 **Mr. Walter Salmon**. Donor of the site of Lakenheath Peace Memorial Hall.

1930-1960 **Sir Charlton and Lady Grace Briscoe**. Both eminent physicians before retiring to Lakenheath. Lady Briscoe later, a well-known amateur archaeologist, discovered the site of the original medieval hall on Hall Drive. They were prominent in the improving of housing in the village and they arranged the lease of the land on which the British Legion hut was built at a peppercorn rent.

1960-2000 **Mr Henry Hunter Smith.**

2000 The estate was split into The Hiss farm and the Hall and grounds. The Hall was left empty until it was sold in 2004 to a newly formed company who converted it into apartments and began to develop the site. Following strenuous local objections and planning difficulties the hall and grounds were sold.

2020 John Stapleton. The development of high-quality houses occupying the grounds was begun.

***1892 Between 1892-1909 the Lord(s) of the Manor were the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.**

Trustees were J Howard, Elveden Estate, and the National Provident Life Insurance Society.

* There remain a number confusing details concerning the relationship between the still partially existent medieval Manor of Lakenheath (Dean and Chapter of Ely Abbey) and Lakenheath Hall Estate where copyhold land was probably sold by the Abbey to the Lakenheath Hall Estate. Another is the intriguing interest in, and possibly the brief ownership of the Manor of Lakenheath, by *John Julius Angerstein. More information can be found through the link below.

[*Click here for the notes on Dumpling Bridge Lane and the 1861 Estate map.](#)