



THE EARLY HISTORY OF LINGFIELD VILLAGE

Ancient trackways, hollow lanes, the late Iron Age fort of Dry Hill and the two neighbouring Roman roads (through Godstone and Edenbridge respectively) attest to the fact of considerable economic activity in our locality before the Anglo Saxons arrived on the scene in the mid first millennium AD. The extent of any settlement in this period is not clear but in the fullness of time this might be revealed. For example the building of the fort at Dry Hill would have involved a considerable labour force but here they lived is not known.

Lingfield was first mentioned in the late 9th Century and again a hundred years later when it was described as a Wealden denn of the manor of Sanderstead. Dens were wood pastures in the great Wealden forests of Surrey, Kent and Sussex to which swine and cattle were driven north for the summer from manors on the south coast and south from those on the south bank of the Thames. The annual movement of animals into the Weald was known as 'transhumance' and was an essential feature of early Anglo-Saxon farming practice.

The Anglo-Saxon Period

In the Anglo-Saxon period England, for administrative purposes, was divided into the counties and shires we know today. These were further subdivided into units which in Surrey and elsewhere were known as Hundreds. In East Surrey, from north to south, these were: Kingston and Brixton alongside the Thames; Copthorne and Wallington which included Croydon and Sanderstead; and Reigate and Tandridge. Within each hundred, parish or estate boundaries were established which in the main follow a north/south axis. The early settlers sought to allocate the variable fertile tracts of land which lie in the main on an east/west axis on an equitable basis. The northern estates established wood pastures in the Weald as 'outliers' to their principal holdings. A reciprocal pattern of land holding was established in Kent and Sussex.

The first mention of Lingfield occurs in about 871⁽¹⁾ when King Alfred leased Croydon for life to his namesake, Ealdorman Alfred, with an option of permanent acquisition by his heir. In his will made soon afterwards Alfred bequeathed land in Sanderstead, Selsdon, Farleigh and Lingfield to his heir.

Lingfield is mentioned again in 984⁽²⁾ when King Edgar's queen, Aelfthryth, gifted Sanderstead, its church and its Wealden denn of Lingfield to Hyde Abbey (Winchester). The gift comprised six hides of land (about 600 acres), the advowson

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of the church and a water mill. Hyde Abbey was consecrated in 903 and played an important role in Edgar's church reforms. It was lavishly endowed.

The inclusion of a church and water mill suggests that by the 10th century Lingfield had become a permanent settlement in what would have been one of the earliest clearances of the Wealden forest and not just a summer camp for the Sanderstead herdsman. So far no evidence has been found of Anglo-Saxon buildings in Lingfield. The church was probably built of sandstone as were the nearby churches at Worth and Charlwood but again no Saxon bits have been positively identified.

Anglo-Saxon life centred on timber built halls. A main hall would be used for meetings, feasting and story telling. Other halls would be used as potteries, workshops for bone working, textiles and smithing. Houses were sited randomly around the main buildings and were timber framed with wattle and daub walls. Research elsewhere in England shows that post-holes and rubbish pits provide the best evidence of Anglo-Saxon settlement but these quickly disappear over time.

The mill was probably sited on the Eden Brook where the remains of Neylondes (or new mill) can be seen. The gifted lands might have included the highest part of the area known as the 'High Lands' (possibly a corruption of the word Hyde?) to the north of the church now Centenary Fields (which would have been good for cereals), the land leading to the Eden Brook (Star Field), the footpath being the likely track to the mill, and the area once the glebe within the quadrilateral of the High Street, Vicarage Road and Church Road. All told something in the order of 2 hides. The remaining four could well have been added to the abbey's holdings in Felcourt.

Turning to the question of who built the church in Lingfield it seems likely that Ealdorman Alfred or his heirs did this. It was after all a sign of prestige and wealth to be seen to encourage the new missionary spirit in church building following the ravages of the Viking period.

Another question arises in this context which is how the church functioned? In 974 the Minster Church of Godstone⁽³⁾ was founded specifically to serve the communities in the Tandridge and Lingfield area. Minster churches provided secular priests to provide pastoral care in the community. (Secular priests worked in the community whereas priests and monks in monasteries lived in seclusion.) The other minster churches in East Surrey were in Southwark, Bermondsey and Croydon. But what if anything was the relationship between the Minster Church of Godstone and Hyde Abbey which held the advowson? The Minster was endowed with 10 hides⁽⁴⁾ - a substantial figure far greater than might be required to maintain a village parish church - so it could have supported a large cadre of clergy.

The Domesday Survey 1086

Lingfield, its church and mill are not mentioned specifically in the Domesday survey. The purpose of the survey was to discover how much cultivated land there was in King William's new domain, what it was worth, and who held it, rightfully or wrongly⁽⁵⁾.

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Because Lingfield was a Wealden outlier of Sanderstead, the value of the land would have been included in the Sanderstead entry, viz:

In the WALLINGTON Hundred

The Abbey of St Peter's of Winchester holds SANDERSTEAD.

Before 1066 it answered for 18 hides, now for 5 hides.

Land for 10 ploughs. In lordship 1;

21 villagers and 1 cottager with 8 ploughs. 4 slaves.

Woodland at 30 pigs.

Value before 1066, 100s; later £7; now £12; however, it pays £15.

Note that neither the church in Lingfield nor Sanderstead is mentioned, presumably because they were maintained by the abbey and produced no separate rental income. The Lingfield mill too is not mentioned presumably because it had fallen into disrepair. The mill in later years was known as the 'new mill'.

Post Conquest Development

In the years following the Domesday survey the area south of Tandridge was cleared of forest. New manors were created. Crowhurst was one of the earliest and a new church, St George's, was built. This dates from the late 12th century. Other manors include Chellows, Buer, Puttenham, Prinkham later known as Sterborough, Billeshurst to the east of the Eden Brook and carved out of Prinkham, Blockfield, and Felcourt to the south, all of which had moated, fortified houses.

In this period the first substantial buildings, open-hall houses or Wealdens, were being constructed in Lingfield. These are evidence of a growing better-off peasant class, the so called yeoman farmer, a form of lesser gentry. Whether these buildings replaced the timber framed wattle-and-daub Anglo-Saxon buildings is a matter for conjecture but interestingly the seven which are extant in Lingfield today are sited in a haphazard fashion. The earliest are: the Old House which is behind the Thatched Cottage on the Godstone Road, and Bricklands Farm and its barn on the Newchapel Road and are said to be 14th century.

The De Cobhams of Sterborough

The de Cobhams moved into the area in the thirteenth century when Reginald de Cobham married Joan of Hever who was endowed with manor of Prinkham. When his elder brothers predeceased him he inherited their estates. His family can be traced back to Henry de Cobham (died 1230) of Cobham near Rochester. He became one of the largest landowners in Kent. Reginald, Henry's great-grandson, because of his wealth and his family's position was able to effect his son's (also Reginald) introduction to the court of the young King Edward III. Reginald had a glittering military career, playing a leading role in the early years of the Hundred Years' War. He was summoned to parliament in 1347 and thus was entitled to style himself 'Lord Cobham of Sterborough'. He was permitted by Edward to crenellate his manor house at Sterborough which he later remodelled as a substantial moated castle comparable to Bodiam Castle. He was elected to the Order of the Garter in c1352.

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When Reginald died of the plague in 1361 it was decided to seek the permission of the Bishop of Winchester to rebuild the old Saxon church in Lingfield as his last resting place. Whether this was because he was the then jewel in the de Cobham crown and his family wanted him to have his own mausoleum or whether the senior branch of the family were reluctant to have a plague victim buried in their church in Cobham is not known. But the rebuilding of the old church was achieved relatively quickly because the bishop gave permission in 1369 for 'the newly rebuilt chancel' to be reconstructed following an act of sacrilege.

In the next century the church was enlarged by Reginald's grandson, also Reginald. He purchased the advowson of the church from the bishop who also approved the foundation of a chantry college. Provision was made for a master (custos), five chaplains, four clerks and thirteen poor persons. The foundation was well endowed with the church and the glebe, Neulande Mill, the manor of Haxted with its mill, Byllies Park, Jordans Land, various tenements and plots of land around Lingfield, four manors in Kent and the Green Dragon Inn in Southwark.

There are no records on how the college functioned, but the Cobham chantry college founded in 1364 by the senior branch of the family is well documented. The Cobham college consisted of a master, four chaplains, two clerks and four choristers and was provided with a refectory, a buttery, lodgings for the fellows, a kitchen, bake-house, brewery and stables. The Lingfield college would probably have been equally provided for and would have provided a stimulus to the local economy. Several buildings around church date from the foundation of the college.

Dissolution of the Monasteries

The college was surrendered to King Henry VIII in 1544, as part of the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Heads of religious establishments were invited by the authorities to accept the inevitable and to surrender their foundations. The priests in these cases were pensioned off. Those who resisted the king lost not only their foundations but often their heads. In 1544 the Lingfield College foundation was valued at £75 p.a. 'clear' and nearly £80 in the 'whole'. Henry closed the college and gave the church and most of its lands to Sir John Carwarden who held the manor of Bletchingly.

The effect of the dissolution on the Lingfield's economy is not known but presumably the supply of produce and goods from the manors with which the college was endowed would have continued but would have been creamed off by the new owners.

Lingfield in 1600

The Lingfield library has a copy of a map of circa 1607 of the manor of Billeshurst held by Lord Howard of Effingham. The objective was to detail the fields with names and acreages. Buildings extant at that time are sketched in the Old Town, Plaistow Street and part of Dormansland east of the High Street.

In the Old Town the church and eleven buildings are shown including the college which was still standing although in disrepair. Intriguingly, some buildings are sketched with chimneys whereas others look like farm buildings. The Guest House, Barn Cottage, Church Cottage, the Old Town House, Pollards and Church Gate Cottage are readily identifiable. There are two buildings on a plot in Saxby's Lane

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entitled 'William Saxbye' one of which has a chimney and one in Church Road near the junction of what is now Town Hill. New Place is shown as a complex with two buildings on an adjacent plot. Further east Neylondes Mill is shown.

In Plaistow Street the cross and ten buildings are shown plus the parish barn and what looks like the parish pound for impounding stray animals. Rose Cottages, Billeshurst Cottages, Bricklands and Magnus Deo are readily identifiable. To the south a dwelling is shown by Jack's Bridge.

Lingfield in 1720

The library has an estate map of Magnus Deo farm which sadly is deficient of buildings although Magnus Deo itself is shown along with the Greyhound PH, the village forge, the Cross and the pound and what looks like Bricklands.

Lingfield in the 19th Century

Lingfield is mentioned in Manning and Bray (1809) which describes the village as consisting of "about ten houses" in Plaistow Street. No mention is made of the houses in the Old Town apart from a description of the former college buildings which by then had been replaced by an early eighteenth century building.

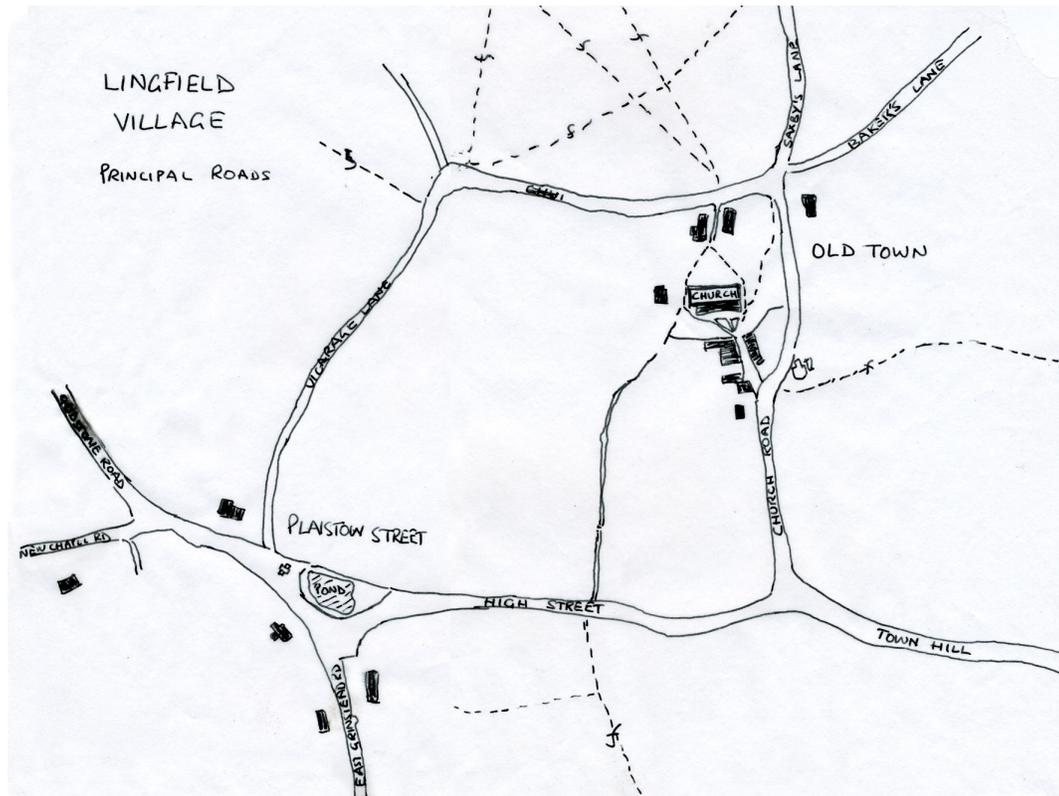
An analysis of the 1851 census shows that there were ten households in The Old Town including College Farm, with 94 persons including 31 children. There was a grocer's shop, a butcher, a shoemaker and the Star Inn. In Plaistow Street and Drivers there were thirty four households, with 181 persons including 89 children. There were three grocers' shops, one of which was also a draper's, a forge and the Greyhound PH.

There were small groups of dwellings in the surrounding area, for example at Jack's Bridge (4), in the middle of Saxby's Lane (6), in what is now Station Road (8) and in Lingfield Common Road and Coldharbour (20) but these were not part of the nuclear settlement of Plaistow Street and the Old Town.

The first authentic modern map of the village is the first Ordnance Survey map drawn up in 1869 and 1870. This shows how little Lingfield had grown since the 1607 map. There is a deal of in-filling in Plaistow Street but there is open farmland beyond Wallis' on the Godstone Road as now, and beyond Bricklands on the New Chapel Road, and similarly beyond what is now Drivers Mead on the East Grinstead Road. On the north side of the High Street is the Baptist Chapel, a single large dwelling and the school and the school house, then Sunnyside, another building, and a large building on the corner of Church Road. The south side of the High Street is open farmland. Open farmland is shown on both sides of Town Hill. There were two or three buildings in Church Road before the churchyard. Apart from Church Cottage there are no houses in Baker's Lane.

The nearest dwellings in Saxby's Lane are some distance from Old Town. Similarly there are no houses in Vicarage Lane, formerly Barn Lane, until the junction with Plaistow Street.

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However all this changed with the bankruptcy of the Maunder family, the principal landowner in Lingfield in the 1870s, the arrival of the London, Brighton & South Coast Railway in 1884 and the opening of the race course six years later.

The rate of development in the latter part of the century is reflected in the census figures: in 1881, 791 workers in various occupations were recorded as living in Lingfield and Dormansland. By 1901 the figure had risen to 1366, a 58% increase.

As a footnote it is worth recording that Lingfield parish was divided in 1885 after the new church in Dormansland had been dedicated. Land to the east of the LBSCR then became the parish of Dormansland.

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Notes:

1. P H Sawyer Anglo-Saxon charters: an annotated list and bibliography. (London, 1968), numbers S1508 and S1511.
2. London, British Library, Department of MSS, Cotton Vesp D ix, f32.
- 3 & 4. Sawyer S1511.
5. Domesday Survey of Surrey, Phillimore & Co Ltd, Chichester.

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Sources and Further reading:

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