

# **SAFFRON WALDEN HISTORICAL JOURNAL**

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## **Wimbish and Thunderley – the development of settlement in a boulder-clay landscape**

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The earliest description of the parish of Wimbish and Thunderley appears in the Essex Domesday Book of 1086 (DB) where they are recorded as two separate settlements: the manors of Wimbish and Thunderley Halls. The name 'Thunderley' means the clearing of the god Thunor or Thor, which dates from the early Saxon pagan period, but the meaning of 'Wimbish' has eluded the etymologists. Although not recorded, it is likely that each manor had its own church, as unusually, each is noted as having a priest.

Over the next two centuries the two manors developed and expanded independently, establishing secondary manors and clearing the extensive remaining areas of waste (rough grazing land) and woodland for farming. By 1300 at the latest, the settlement pattern, the network of roads and lanes and most of today's farms had been established. In 1425 the parishes were merged, leaving Thunderley church redundant and subsequently demolished. The total acreage of the combined parish in 1840 was 4862 acres (7.6 square miles or 19.7 square kilometres).

Wimbish, as we will term the combined parish, lies on an inter-fluve (which includes the source of the Rivers Pant/Blackwater and Chelmer) on the rich, corn-growing soils of the Essex Till, a gently dissected plateau of Chalky Boulder Clay. It is within the north/south stretch of land in west Essex which had a high extent of woodland in 1066 compared to the rest of Essex and to much of south-east England (figure 1). Wimbish also lies within the area with the highest density of moats in Essex and indeed in Britain, since a survey carried out in 1978 for a conference on moated

sites showed that Essex, closely followed by Suffolk, has an unusually high number of these sites.<sup>1</sup>

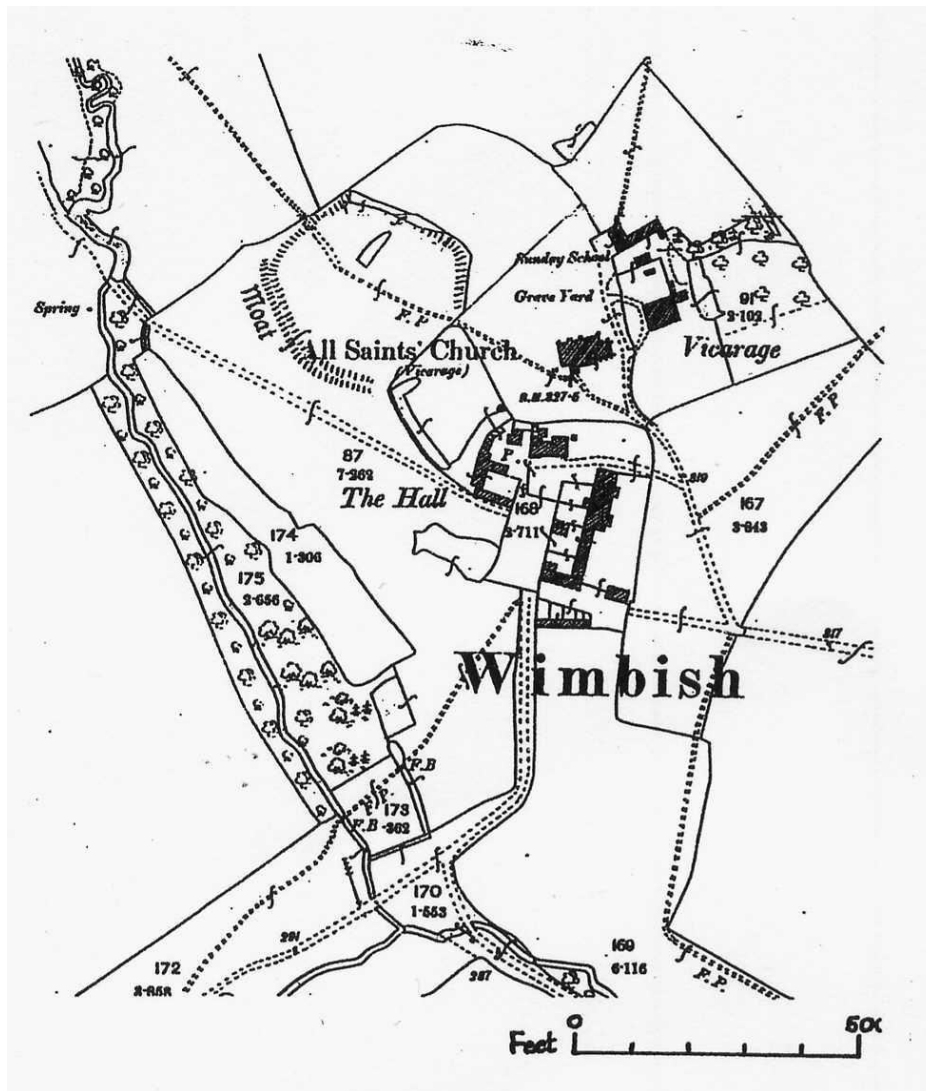
Of particular interest also in this area are the survivals of different types of green and of 'greenside' settlement - the arrangement of *tofts* (also called *crofts* or sometimes *crotes*), where smallholdings and farmsteads directly abutted defined areas of common grazing, the greens which became increasingly important as the waste was cleared for farming. Tofts might lie beside a 'focal' green, for example Ellis Green, or along one side of a 'linear' green as in Cole End and Frogs Green, or on both sides as in Lower Green. These factors make Wimbish a parish particularly worthy of study in seeking an understanding of the diverse and ancient settlement patterns of this region.

The principal source for this study of Wimbish is the Tithe Award with its Map of 1840,<sup>2</sup> while Philip Morant's history of 1768 remains the authoritative account of the manors.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Roman, Saxon and Norman Landscape**

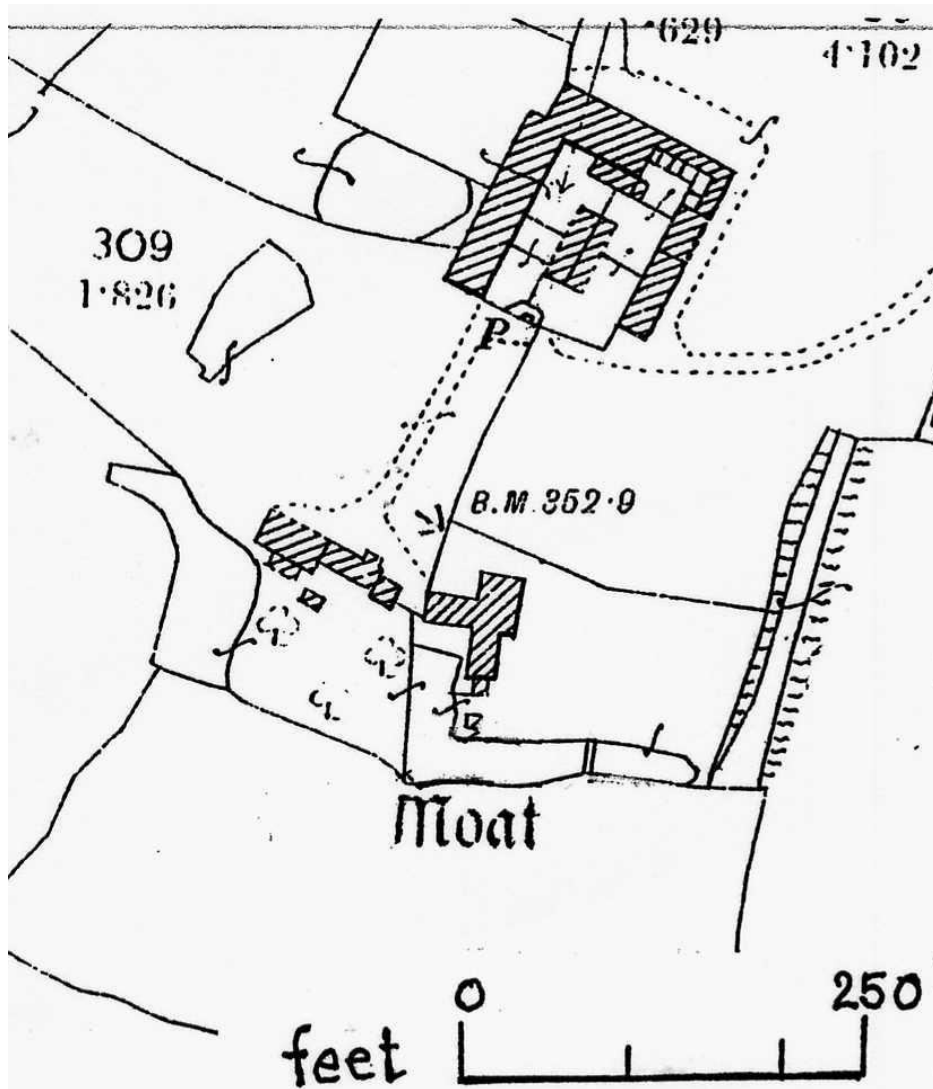
While this study begins with the Domesday Book, it is virtually certain that the area was cleared and farmed in the Roman period, and probably well before. Between 1979 and 1982 Tom Williamson fieldwalked 28 square kilometres to the west of the River Cam and found evidence for extensive clearance and settlement as early as the Iron Age,<sup>4</sup> and now, nearer to hand, we have the discoveries made in the course of fieldwalking by the Heritage Sampfords Project which include the site of a Roman villa, hitherto unknown, close to the site of a primary manor, Little Sampford Hall. At Wimbish, so far little has been found although the parish is bounded to the east by the Roman road from Great Dunmow to Radwinter, and a long Roman boundary lies in the west.

In the post-Roman period there was a considerable decline in population and a consequent spread of pasture and woodland over the former arable - a trend reversed by the late Saxon period when expansion was well underway by the time of Domesday Book (DB) which recorded the economy in 1066 and 1086. The primary manors were long established by this time. DB describes Wimbish in 1066 as having grazing for 500 pigs - its bizarre method for measuring woodland - a high count, commensurate with the heavy clays of the manor. Thunderley, sited near the break of slope into the valley, has the lower figure of 100 pigs. Woodland clearance was underway in both manors: by 1086 the numbers had reduced respectively to 400 and 80. It seems likely that in 1086 the extensive areas of remaining woodland lay principally to the north of Crowney Wood and to the east of Rowney Wood. Otherwise, land still open and unfarmed lay as rough grazing or waste.



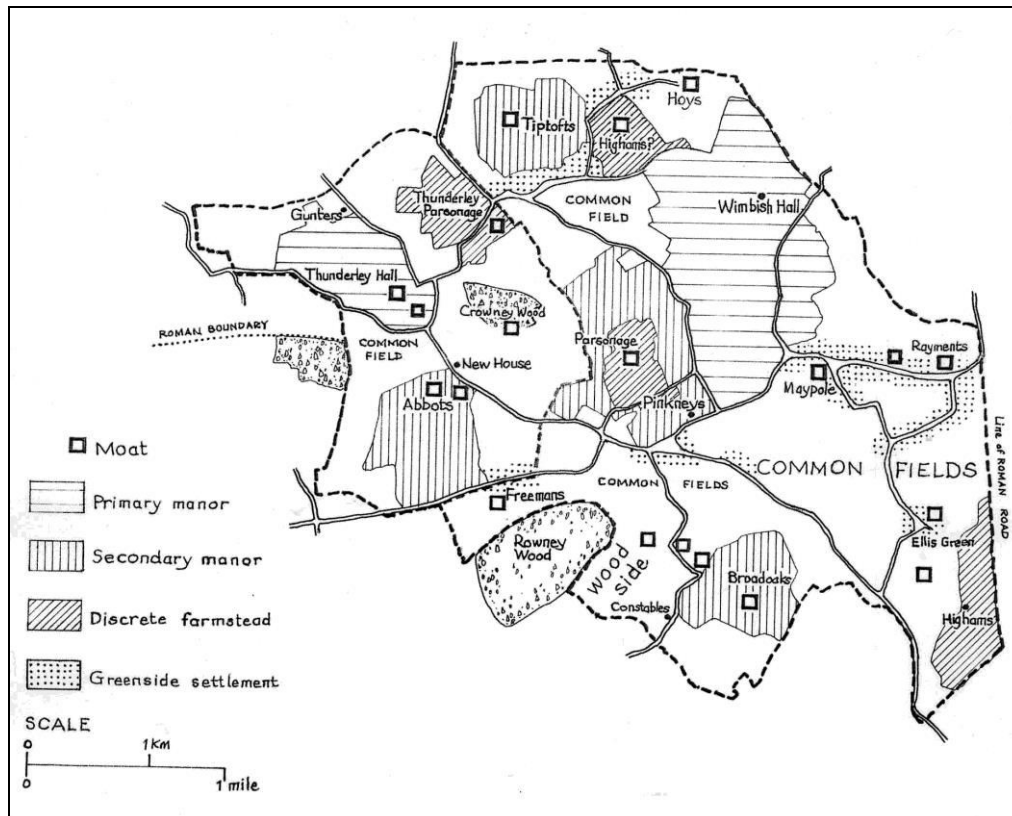
Wimbish Hall. OS 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1897.

Both halls occupy fine sites: Thunderley lies on the shoulder of the broad Cam Valley and Wimbish overlooks the junction of two brooks in their small valleys which combine to form the River Pant. To the north-west of Wimbish Hall is a polygonal earthwork (see map above), about 300 feet across and somewhat eroded by time, described by the Ordnance Survey as a moat. It assuredly is not a moat and seems likely to be a defensive earthwork dating to a time before the Conquest. Along the valley below the hall is a long pond which probably originated as fishponds and a possible mill. If it had been created in the 18th or early 19th century as a landscape feature it would be sited on the course of the brook. However, although supplied by it, it runs parallel to the brook so enabling the ponds to operate independently. This would seem to confirm its medieval origin, although it was later altered in shape to appear a lake with a wooded backcloth – a most attractive feature.



Thunderley Hall. OS 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1897.

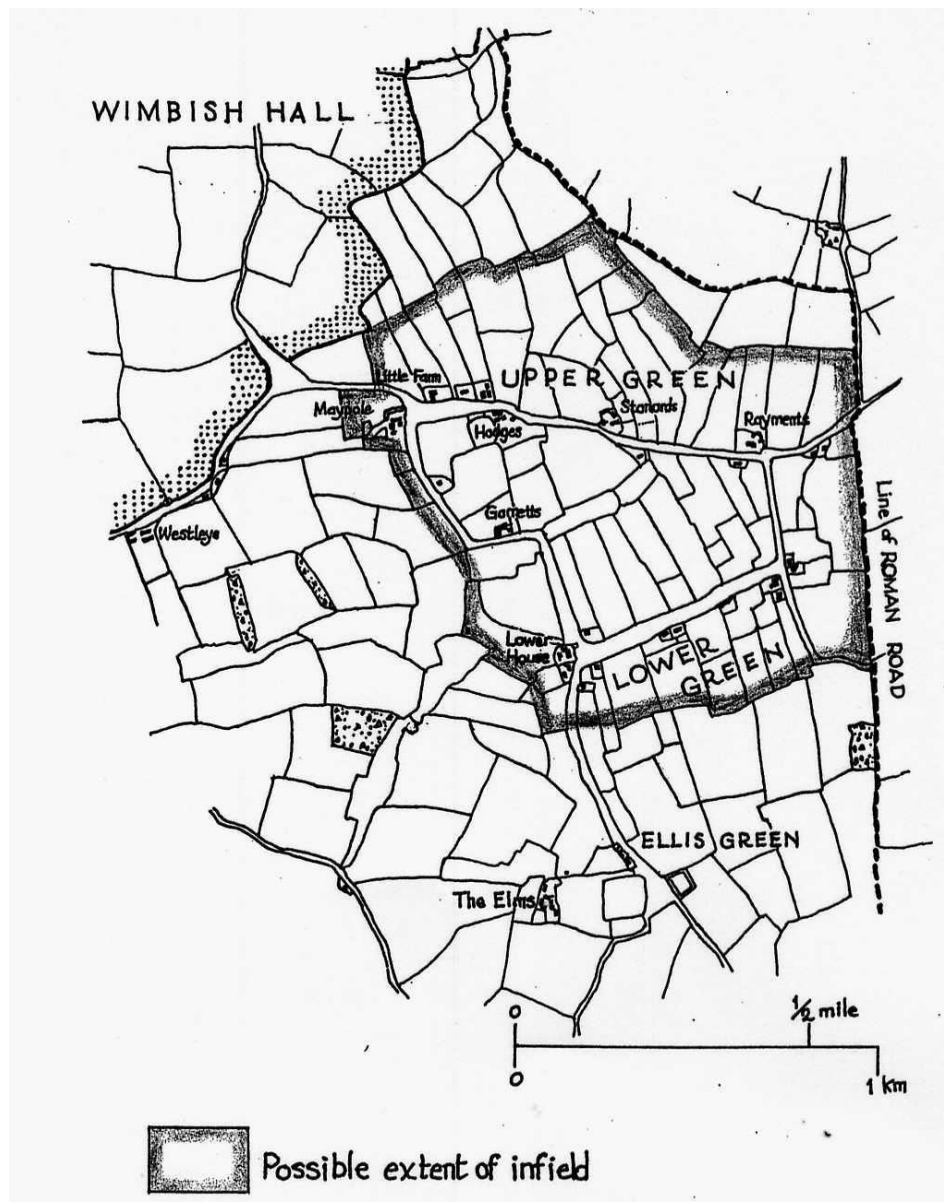
Thunderley Hall (map above) is partially moated, but this seems to be a later modification of an ancient site where the sloping topography precludes a moated enclosure. The eastern arm is a deep ditch which is likely to be a surviving length of a defensive enclosure with the northern side filled in when the complex of farm buildings was first established on this part of the site. The ditch along the southern and part of the western sides was broadened to form a fishpond, possibly in the Middle Ages or alternatively when it came into the hands of the Wiseman family: first Robert, who died in 1624, then his son Richard who was clearly wealthy, being created a baronet in 1628. Moats and fishponds were still features which suggested age and status, and even more so were deer parks. Field name evidence (Upper Park, Lower Park) reveals that a small park of some 26 acres lay between Thunderley Hall and the main road to the east. A small moat lies in the north-west corner of Park Wood (now Smithfield Bottom), which I suggest was a feature, deliberately archaic, forming the setting for a pavilion or banqueting room. An earlier homestead moat would be most unlikely on demesne land so close to the hall.



**Settlement and land use circa 1300.**

The demesnes, or home farms, of Wimbish and Thunderley Halls in 1066 and 1086 were probably much as shown on the above map. Common fields comprising the arable strips of the tenants – the long selions which minimised the number of turns of the ox-teams drawing the heavy ploughs – were likely to have been established by this time in the area to the south-east of the Wimbish Hall demesne and to the south of Thunderley Hall demesne.

The Wimbish field, based on Upper and Lower Greens, shows clear signs of original planning in the alignments and straight boundaries of the narrow fields depicted on the Tithe Map, although these had been modified by later amalgamations of strips. Immediately to the west many of the boundaries are slightly bowed, characteristic of furlongs ('bundles' of selions or strips) directly enclosed from the waste in a phased and gradual rather than planned expansion. This may reflect an *infield/outfield* system in which the planned infield (see map below) was heavily manured and kept in permanent cultivation while the outfield was generally left fallow and grazed, but ploughed and cropped once every few years - probably a part at a time. The system survived into the 19th century in Ireland as *rundale*.



**Possible infield. Figure 6: Based on Tithe Map, 1840.**

The Thunderley field lay between the demesne and Abbots and was called Mill Field and comprised some 74 acres. It is located on the Tithe Map by field names, Further - Middle - and Home - all indicating a later division of a single field, and a 'z' kink characteristic of the division of a selion into two. Mill Field, and other areas of common fields in Wimbish/Thunderley, appear gradual rather than planned.

### **EXPANSION FROM 1086 TO 1315**

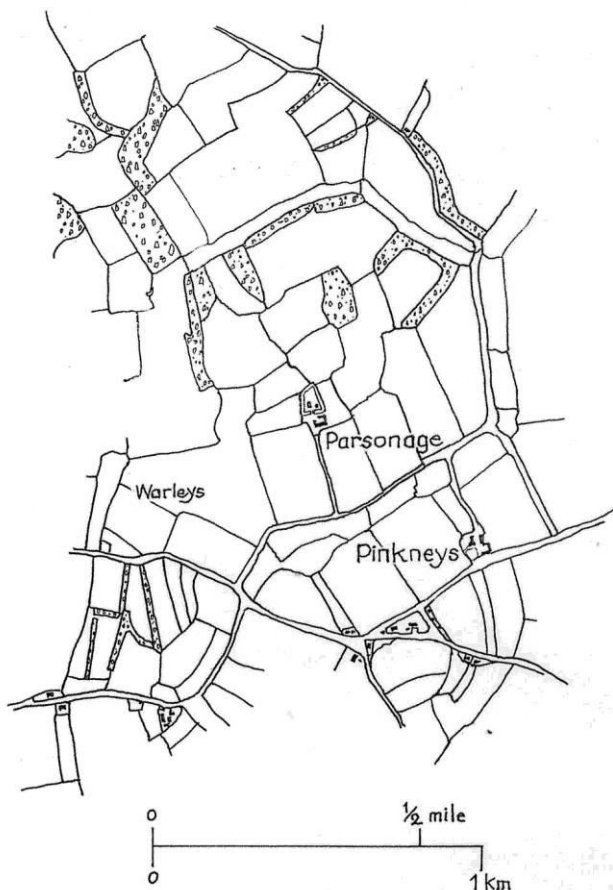
This great period of medieval expansion established the landscape of much of Essex in the form it was to preserve through later changes in farming practice and patterns of settlement. As the population increased, woodland and waste was cleared and the arable extended to the parish boundaries. The loss of waste with its rough grazing required the

preservation of minimum areas for common grazing and so led to the establishment and definition of greens, with their bordering farms and tofts. Beside lay the common fields where the toft-holders and farmers held arable strips, with the management (crop rotations and fallows) likely to have been decided by agreement at this local level.

In midland England from the 10th to 12th centuries (including Cambridgeshire) settlement was consolidating into compact villages with planned common fields while older scattered farm sites were abandoned. This was not the case in Essex (nor neighbouring Suffolk and Kent), and it may be that some earlier scattered sites survived or were relocated in the hamlets, focussed on greens as described above.

## Secondary manors

Sub-infeudation, the establishment of secondary manors as under-tenancies was a feature of the 12th and 13th centuries. As clearance progressed magnates rewarded loyalty and service with new fiefs and, particularly in well-wooded country, knights and gentry were carving out new manors by buying parcels of land or enclosing and ploughing the waste. These small manors tended to have a low proportion of tenant land and lacked servile tenants and labour services.<sup>5</sup>



There was also a financial advantage for the primary manor. Land was held in return for military service or, increasingly after 1100 for payments in lieu. The creation of new manors within their holdings enabled lords to pass these obligations down to their under-tenants. Edward I recognized a tax fiddle and in 1290 the statute *Quia Emptores* made the practice illegal.

**Pinkneys Manor, Warleys and Parsonage Farm. The shaded outline denotes the estate boundaries, while the solid shading picks out the Parsonage Farm lands. Based on the Tithe Map, 1840.**

Secondary manors in Wimbish are Pinkneys, Tiptofts and Broadoaks, and in Thunderley, Abbots and the elusive

Dales/Caldecot. These are considered in turn. Pinkneys has no moat, being established probably before moats became fashionable and one was never added at a later date as appears the case (partially) with Thunderley Hall. It included an estate called Warleys, its origin unknown but its name bracketed with Pinkneys at later dates. At some time its holder carved out Parsonage Farm from the demesne, a compact glebe endowment for Wimbish parish, together with two parcels of land in the adjacent common fields in which Pinkneys had holdings - features surviving to be recorded on the Tithe Map of 1840 (see map above). Endowing a glebe at that time was an act of piety similar to granting land to a religious house or establishing a chantry, but of rather more value to the immediate community.



**Tiptofts Manor, seen from across the moat.**

Tiptofts (see photo above) is renowned for its magnificent hall, an exceptional building sited within its grand moated enclosure, all indicative of high status and it seems likely to date from the early 14th century. Its probable builder was Sir John de Wanton, Sheriff of Essex and Hertfordshire in 1331, while the name Tiptofts appears to be that of the manor's first owner - the manorial estate dating much earlier than de Wanton's time. Its probable original demesne, before later peripheral accretions, is shown in the earlier map, although there is uncertainty over when Tiptofts obtained the Highams block of land which we will consider later.

In Thunderley, the compact manor of Abbots was held by Walden Abbey. There is the problem of the vanished manor of Dales or Caldecot, recorded by Morant (1768) who describes it as purchased by Dr. Bromfield, of



Bromfield's pills, who gave it to the poor of St. Andrew's, Holborn. The Tithe Map, however, shows Thunderley Hall as the property of the Trustees of the Broomfield Charity (as it remains today), so there is an element of confusion and the location of Dales, and indeed of its charity, remains a mystery. A second glebe endowment, Thunderley Parsonage Farm, was established to the north-west of Thunderley Hall – a similar endowment to Parsonage Farm, Wimbish, referred to above and clearly well before the merger of the parishes.

The manor of Broadoaks lay in the southern part of Thunderley parish. Its origin and medieval ownership are unknown, with the earliest reference dating from the reign of Henry VIII, whereafter it enjoyed a sudden burst of evident wealth and splendour which we will consider later.

The settlement map earlier in this article shows (with an element of conjecture) the different areas of land tenure in 1300 which gave rise to distinctly different field systems, which are clearly shown as surviving on the Tithe Map and can still be traced in the field patterns of today. They are as follows:

- First, there are the demesnes – the later home farms – of the primary and secondary manors described above. These were under the exclusive control of their owners, and in the 13th century were farmed in hand, although later often leased out.
- Secondly, there were the tenants' holdings of selions (strips) in the common-fields, themselves mostly focussed around the tenants' tofts in greenside settlements.
- Thirdly, there are 'discrete' compact farms: the two glebe (Parsonage) farms, Highams on the parish boundary to the south-east and 'Highams' between Tiftofts and Hoys. Lastly there is 'woodside' settlement, land directly enclosed from woodland or waste.

Much of the extensive wooded area of 1086 had been reclaimed for farming by 1300, with the remaining woodland now preserved as a valuable resource, embanked and hedged and managed intensively as standards with coppice under the control of a woodward. Crowney Wood lay within Thunderley, and Peverels and Rowney in Debden abutting the parish boundary.

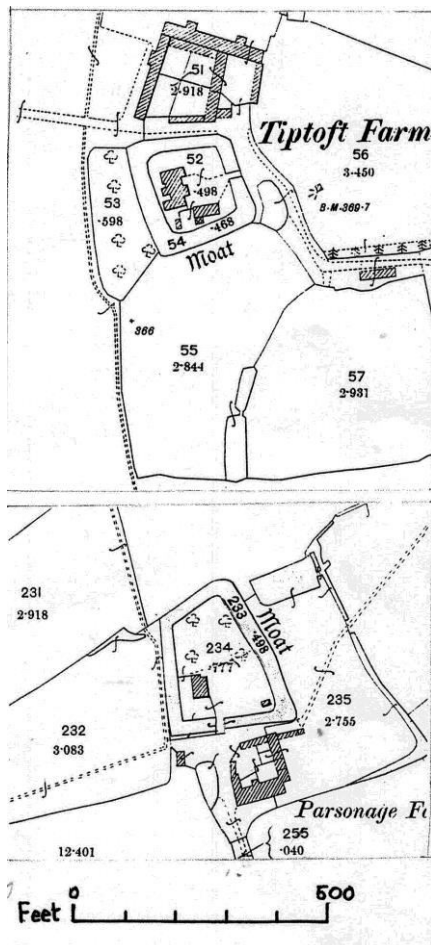
Wimbish and Thunderley in 1300 were separate parishes, and I would suggest that the boundary between them lay along Elder Street, and at a point halfway between Freeman's and Burnt House Farms it turned northwards skirting a common field which lay to the west. It then crossed the Walden/Thaxted road and followed the western boundary of Warleys and Pinkneys northwards, passing between Harrison's and Cole End Farms (as shown on the Tithe Map, 1840) and then followed the road to the north-east of Thunderley Parsonage Farm to Swards End.

The acreages of the manors and glebe farms shown in the Tithe Award of 1840 are as follows, and I would suggest that they differ little from those of 1300, with the possible exception of Tiptofts:

Wimbish Hall	562 acres
Thunderley Hall	159
Pinkneys	256
Tiptofts	316
Abbotts	275
Broadoaks	258
Parsonage (Wimbish)	78
Thunderley Parsonage	94

### Homestead moats

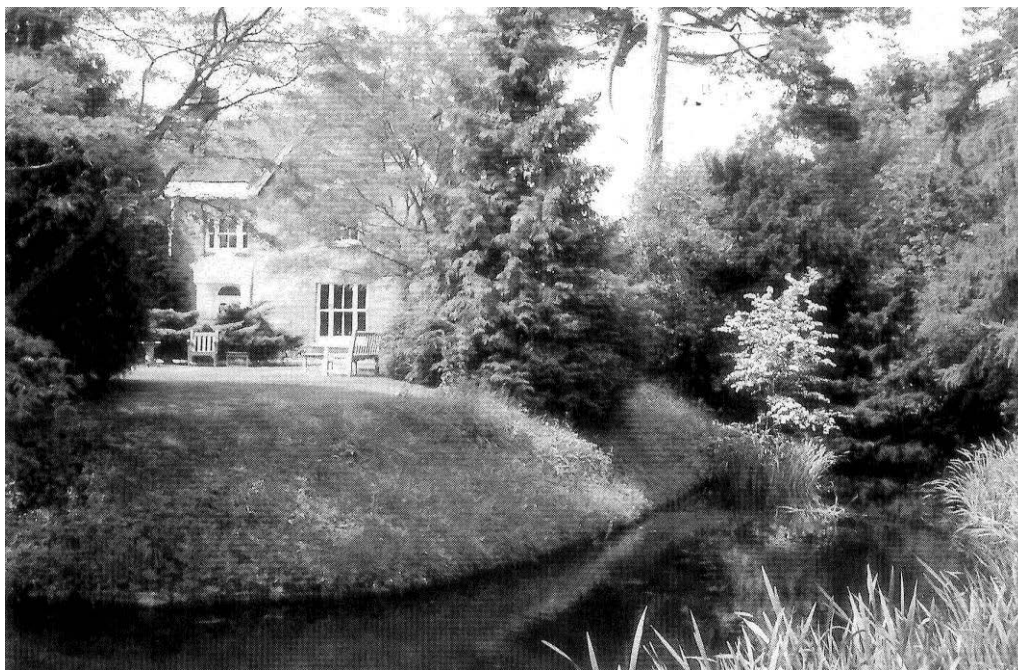
The first recorded homestead moat in Essex is King John's new manorial centre at Writtle which is dated to 1209.<sup>7</sup> A more recent excavation of a farmstead and, interestingly for this early date a windmill, is a site on Boreham airfield, which was moated and appeared from ceramic evidence to date from the 12th century.<sup>8</sup> The main period of moat-building is later



and generally thought to concentrate in the later 13th and early 14th centuries. Moats had several functions – as fishponds, water supply and protection against marauders, but most importantly they appear to have been status symbols. While the holders of manors might ponder whether to enhance their existing centres with a moat, I would suggest that they would certainly give priority to homestead moats for their endowment farms such as the two Parsonages. Successful neighbouring tenant farmers were now building farmsteads embellished with fishponds and moats, and it would just not do for the glebe to be outshone in status or quality.

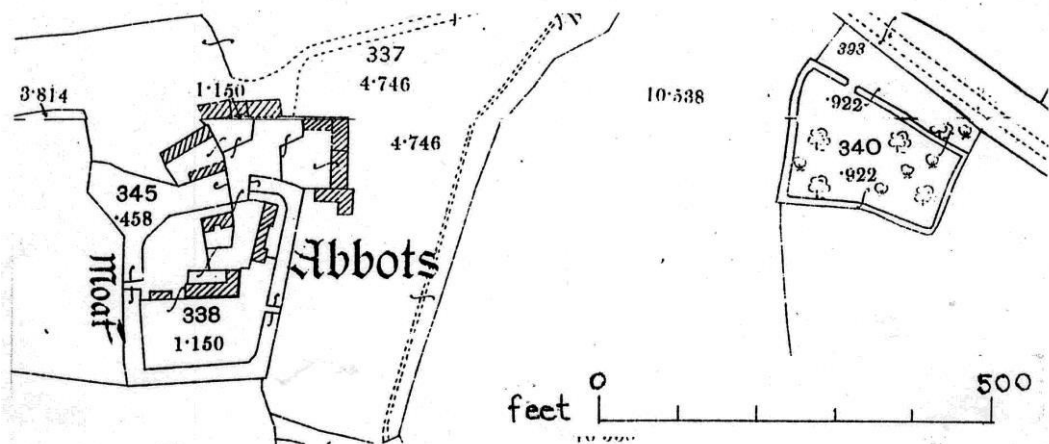
**Tiptofts and Parsonage Farm. OS 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1897.**

High status moats, such as Tiptofts and Parsonage Farm (see maps left & photo below) were constructed in a single operation, were broad and deep, and formed a complete enclosure.



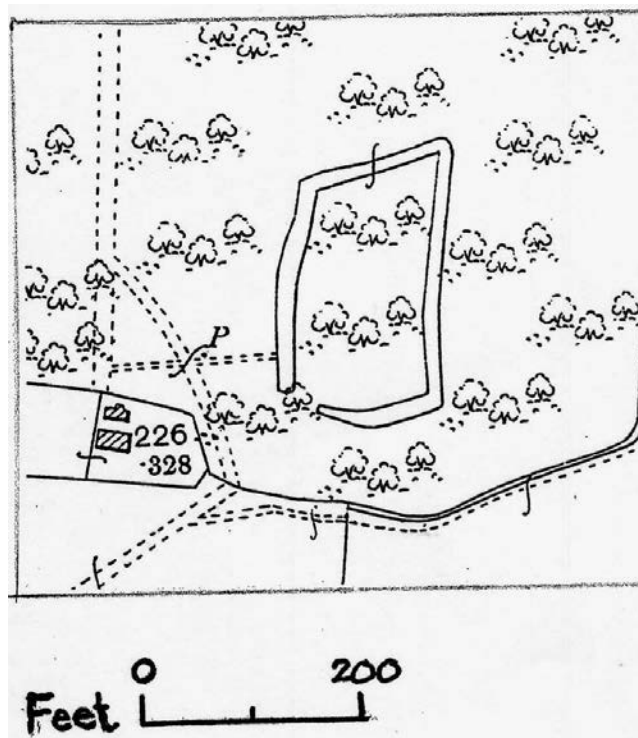
**The moat at Tiptofts.**

The Tithe Map shows Abbots (see map below), Parsonage Farm Thunderley, and the deserted site at Ellis Green as having similar moats. Successful peasant farmers were keen to follow suit. Archaeology has shown that they emulated manorial planning in their homes and farm buildings, and similarly, many sought to embellish their steadings with moats and that other medieval status symbol, the fishpond. Few, however had the resources to construct a moat in one operation or on the scale of those listed above. This led to a particular type of moat which I will term *incremental*, constructed by necessity in stages and consequently leaving gaps between the phases of work. Examples are three sites on or near Pepples Lane: Pepples (or Pimples) Farm, Conyers (Cowyards or Cowards) Farm and Wiggles, abandoned, but its earthworks survive under woodland. The Tithe Map also shows three ponds on land between Wiggles and Rowney Wood, which clearly bounded a long forgotten farmstead. Rowney Wood has spread over the site and I was delighted to find two of the ponds in very good order.



Abbots and deserted site. OS 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1897.

Further examples of incremental moats (from the Tithe and early OS) are Stonards, Rayments and Hoys; while Maypole, High Garrett and Lower House had fine displays of water.



A moated site in Crowney Wood. OS 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1897.

Another type of peasant moat might be termed 'narrow'. Examples, now gone, are a moat to the east of Abbots beside the main road, and a moat lying in Crowney Wood (see map above), which probably originally lay just outside the wood. In 1840 Crowney Wood formed part of New House Farm which was owned by Richard Wolfe. Several fields in the east part of the farm had tumbled down to secondary woodland, and Crowney Wood may have expanded. Wolfe kept this part of the farm in hand and clearly favoured his game birds. The field pattern over much of New House Farm

has the character of direct enclosure from woodland, and the moat is likely to be a relic of a farmstead like those in a similar landscape around Pebbles Lane.

### **Farmers and smallholders**

This leads on to the process of engrossment, the consolidation of holdings. In the case of common fields it became far more convenient to have one's strips gathered together contiguously rather than scattered in the fields. This could be achieved by agreement through exchange or purchase, which was much more easily arranged within the small communities of north Essex than in the complex nucleated villages with huge common-fields of neighbouring Cambridgeshire. Distinct farms of varying size were emerging out of the common fields, and this process is clearly recorded (having survived until very much later) in Wimbish Upper and Lower Greens on the Tithe Award and Map of 1840. Dating is assisted by documentary evidence of persons or families whose names survived in those of farms.

In the area to the south-east of Rowney Wood are field patterns I have labelled 'woodside' - perhaps better described as piecemeal enclosure, land directly reclaimed field by field from woodland by peasant families, and somewhat haphazard in character compared to land consolidated in the former common fields. Many of the field boundaries between New House Farm and Crowney Wood have a similar character, and direct enclosure by families from the waste is characteristic of land in the Sampfords, lying between Great Sampford and the parish boundary with Thaxted.

Professor Dyer has described the process: 'Peasants expended great efforts to assart from woodland or scrub, because as well as cutting down trees, roots had to be dug out of the ground, and the land enclosed against animals. Often peasants could tackle an acre or two at most at a time. When they had brought the land into production, their lords required them to pay a rent - usually a few pence in cash'.<sup>9</sup>

References in documents which have survived such as the Lay Subsidy of Essex of 1327 (a taxation measure) which lists the names of heads of households, were gathered together by P.H. Reaney in his *The Place-names of Essex* (1935). These give likely dates for when the farms which bear their names were *already* established, and Reaney's dates (where occurring) are given beside those of farms mentioned below.

The year 1327 was one in which people were recovering from disasters such as famines resulting from successive failed harvests and the great sheep murrain which had swept flocks. The Great Pestilence (Black Death) was to follow with its recurrences - the times of expansion were over. Farms likely to have been established by this time on moat or place-name

evidence, other than the manors and parsonages already considered, are listed below, with their acreages as recorded on the Tithe Award.

**Cole End**, 158, John Colle 1327

**Constables**, 15, John Constable 1381. A 'woodside' holding near Broadoaks, tiny by later standards, but well able to support a family at the time

**Freemans**, 124, moated, John Freman 1382

**Gunters**, 84, Roger and Ralph le Gaunter (glover); probably tradesmen in Walden, 1387

**Hawes**, Roger Hawys 1380. Possibly an earlier name for Hoys, 77, moated,

**Highams**, 121, John de Heygham 1311

**Maypole**, 115, moated

**Rayments**, 31, moated

**Stonards**, 76, Andrew Stonhard 1327

The siting of the following in relation to their engrossed holdings in the common-fields suggests that they also existed pre Black Death, although they lack place-name evidence or surviving moats.

**Lower House**, 123

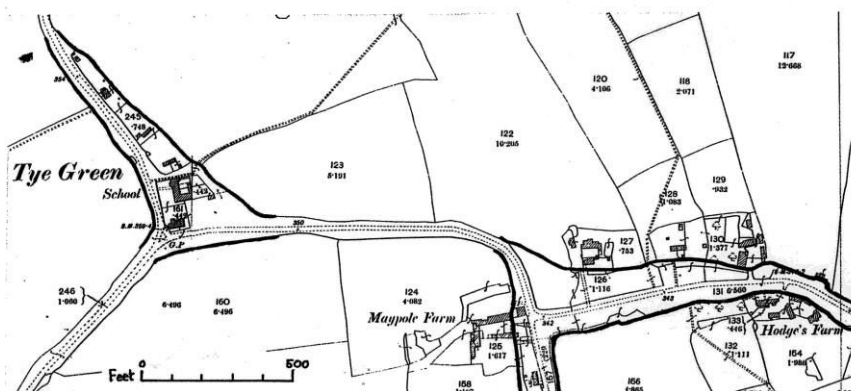
**Hodges**, 87

**Westleys**, 36

Howlett End is likely to be linked to Robert Hulot (1270), Frog's Green to Roger Frog (1380), and Ellis Green to John Elys (1327).

## Greens and greenside settlement

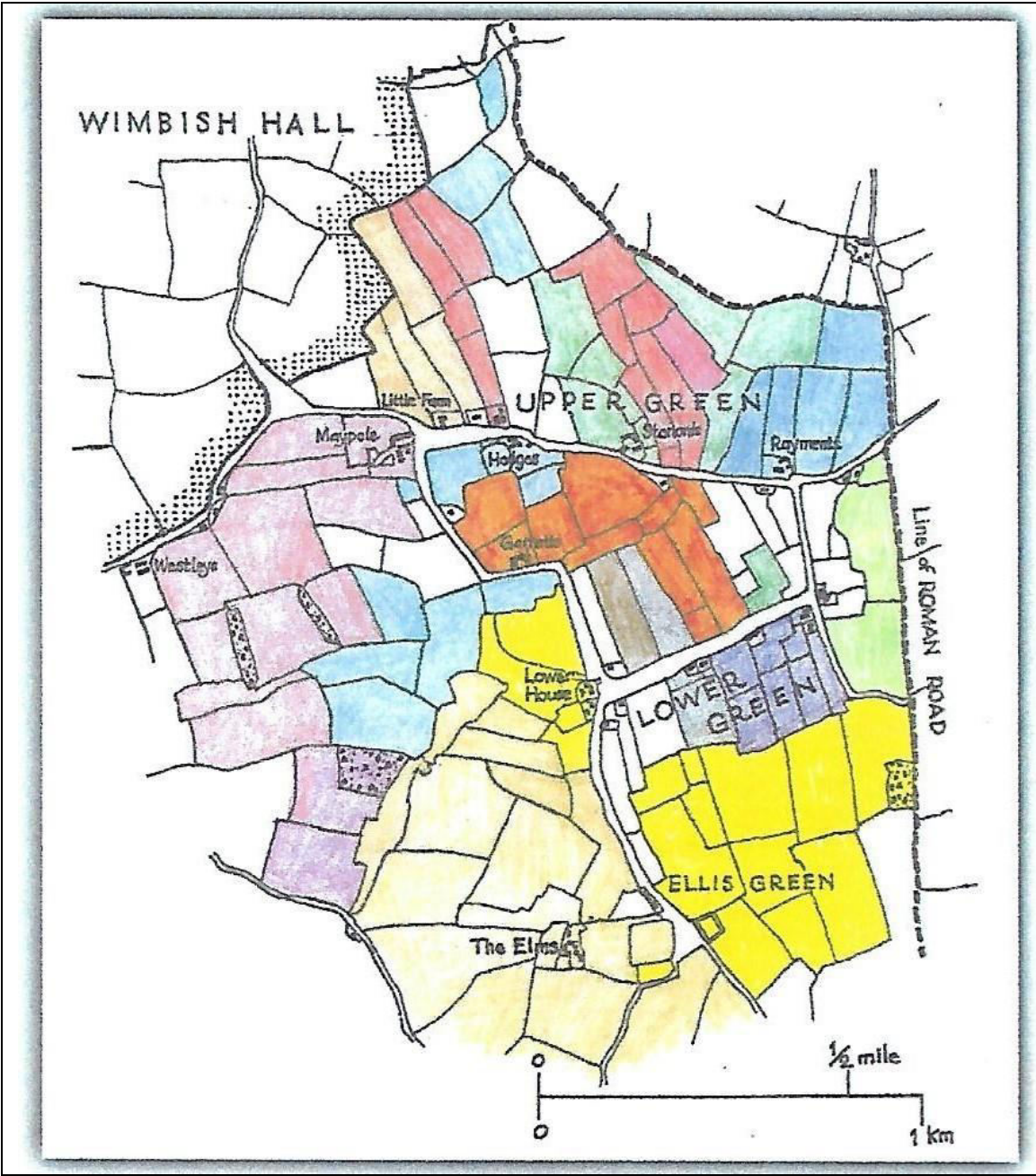
Early 'primary' greens lay beside the complex of primary manor and church, such as we can still see at Wimbish Hall, and provided an area for assembly, local markets and fairs. The many secondary greens (often - *ends*) appear to date from the 12th and 13th centuries when their boundaries were established to safeguard an area of common pasture, essential for the sustenance of the peasants' milch cows, goats and geese, as the former rough grazing on the waste was converted to arable or enclosed for deer parks. Beside the green would be set the farmsteads and tofts of the smallholders. The ground was often wet and might be drained into peripheral linear ponds.



Tye and Upper Greens. OS 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1897.



We have noted earlier a planned common field to the south-east of Wimbish Hall which was later expanded to cover the surrounding waste. This required the creation of the 'focal' greens, Tye and Upper, and a linear green, Lower (see map above). The farmers were amalgamating their strips and setting up their steadings on their land, for example, Stonards, Little, Rayments and Garrets, while others were similarly consolidating their holdings in the wider former outfield, Maypole, Hodges and Lower House (see map below).

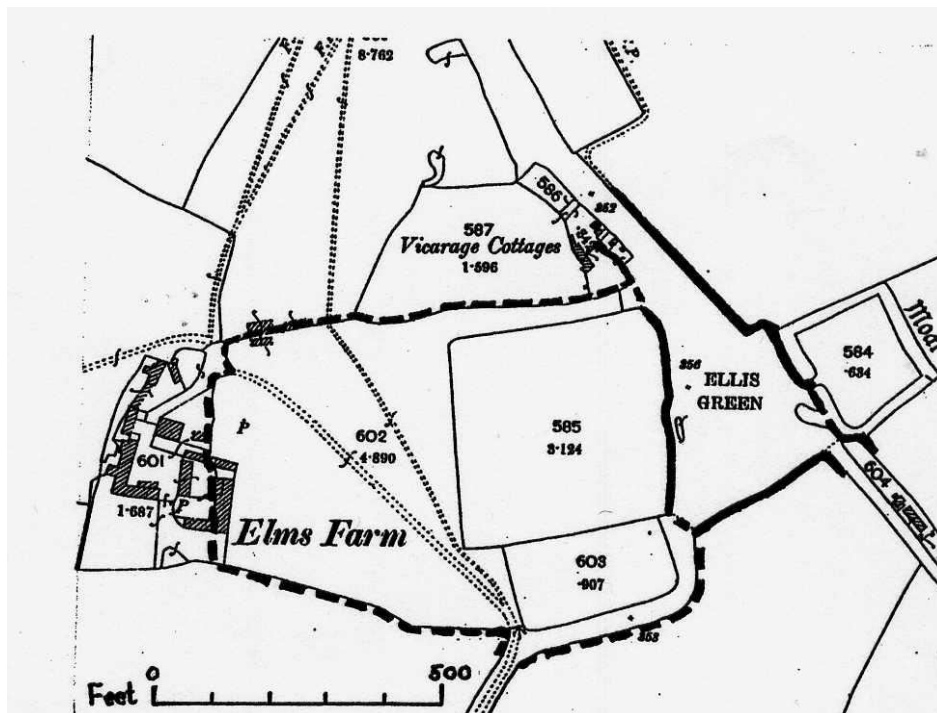


Farms around Wimbish Upper and Lower Greens. Based on Tithe Map 1840.



**Droveway between Ellis and Lower Greens.**

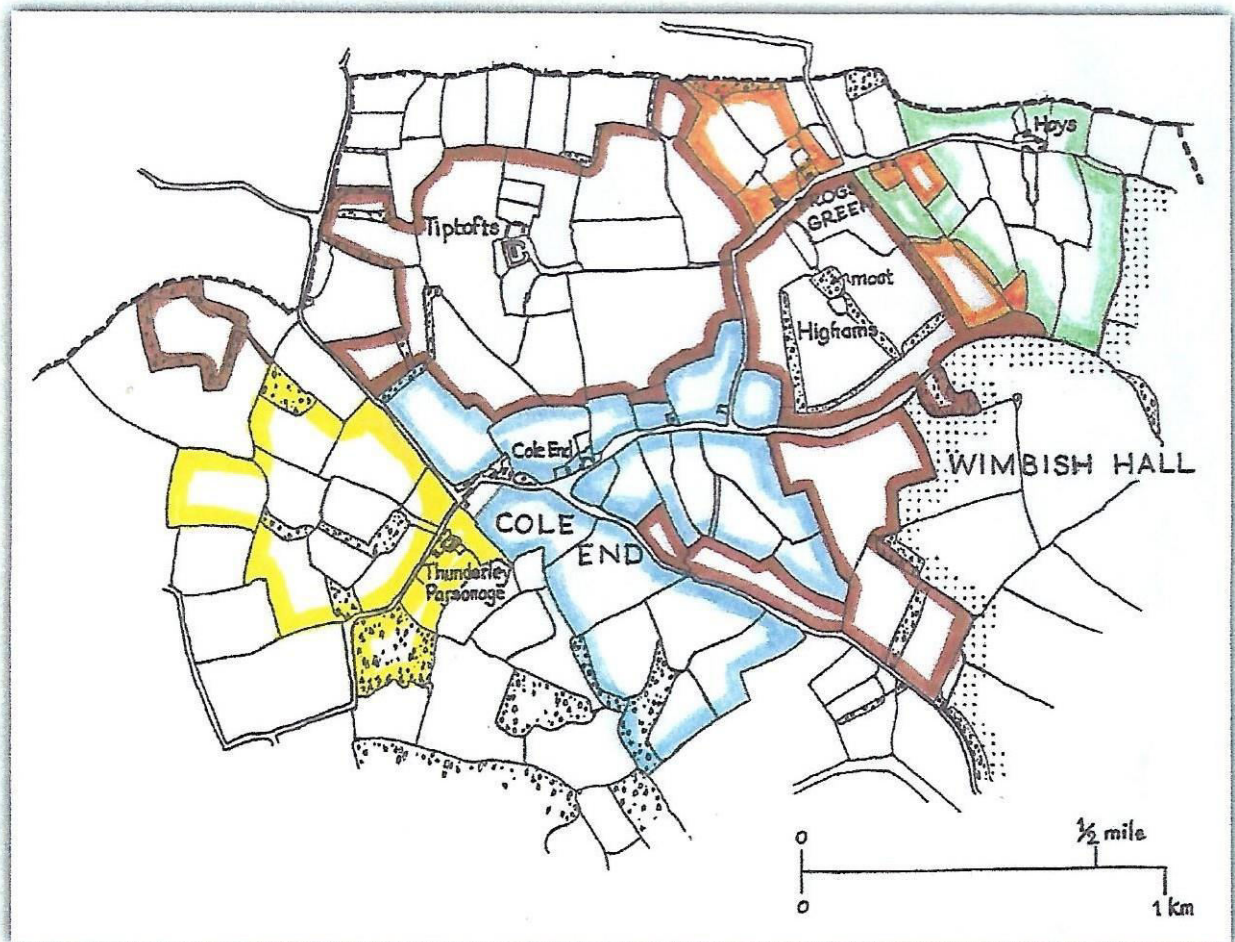
To the south, Lower Green was linked by a broad droveway to Ellis Green (see photo above). Ellis Green is what archaeologists term a deserted medieval settlement, a type of site that followed the reduction in population levels in the centuries following the Black Death. In other parts of England, including Cambridgeshire, large numbers of deserted medieval villages have been found, the nearest to Essex being at Castle Camps. There are no deserted villages in Essex but there are a very large number of deserted or shrunken medieval hamlets, often focussed on greens.



**Ellis Green. OS 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1897.**



The map above shows Ellis Green with its likely original boundary, but there is a possibility that it could have been very much bigger, extending to the boundary shown by the dotted line. A deserted moat lying against the eastern side of the green may be the original site of Elms Farm, or alternatively, it may be a former greenside farm, later deserted and absorbed into Lower House Farm. Nearly half of Elms Farm (total acreage 256 in 1840) lies to the south of the lane from Causeway End to Ellis Green, and the field pattern of this block, and that of Highams, suggests that this was an area of discrete holdings, rather than farms formed from the engrossment of strips. This possibility is supported by the Tithe Map which shows a huge moated enclosure near its centre among wisps of secondary woodland, but moat and woods had gone by the time of the First Edition OS six inch map. It seems likely that this site is a 'lost' farm of some status. Today a slight hollow in the field marks one arm of the moat.



**Farms around Cole End and Frogs Green. Based on the Tithe Map, 1840.**

The map above shows the farming and settlement pattern in the north of the parish as recorded on the Tithe Map: Tiptofts manor, Thunderley Parsonage, and Cole End and Hoys Farms. The field pattern suggests that

a common field may have lain to the south-east of Cole End in which Tiptofts had strips.



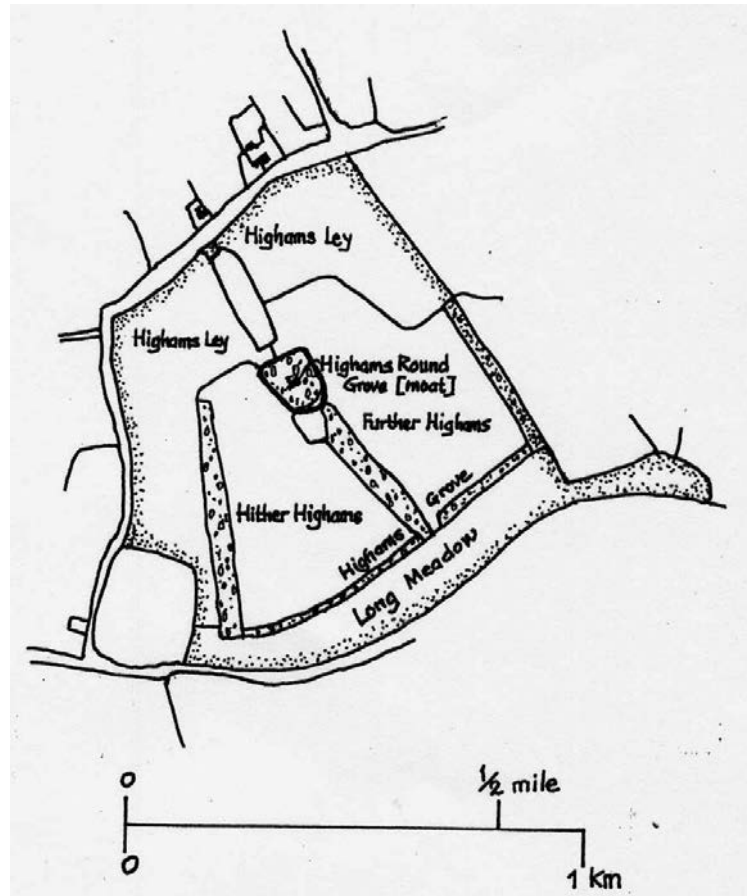
**Ancient pollard oaks on the boundaries of former tofts.**

A wide droveway or linear green stretches eastwards from Cole End with former toft sites bounding it to the north with impressive pollard oaks (as photo above), then turns northwards to Frog Green, another deserted or shrunken medieval settlement, where a cottage and former farm are the only survivors of what must have been a bustling community 600 years ago (see left photo below). The right-hand photo below shows the site of Frog Green in the middle distance seen from a footpath from Swards End.



**Left: Linear green looking eastwards from Cole End. Right: The former hamlet of Frogs Green approached from Swards End.**

A similar large moated enclosure has been brought to my attention by Peter Wells, revealed by an aerial photograph of Highams (no known connection with Highams Farm) - the large field lying to the south-east of Frog's Green. The Tithe Map shows it broken down into six closes and five groves - a post-1400 landscape - with Highams Round Grove corresponding to the enclosure (see map below).



**'Highams' - a former farm and moated site. OS 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1897.**

Ian Haig, the owner, made a transcript of a map of Tiptofts of 1746 in Brasenose College which shows this as the *Hoppet*, which brought back memories to him of Marks Hall, White Roding, where the site of a long deserted moated farmstead was known as the Hoppet. A hoppet is a piece of enclosed marshland or wetland - a fair description of a lost moated enclosure. It seems clear that this is the site of another 'lost' farm (a second Highams), at some stage abandoned and absorbed into the Tiptofts home farm. Inspection of the ploughsoil revealed a scatter of medieval pot sherds.

### **The landscape since 1400**

Recurrences of now endemic plague (the Black Death) occurred later in the 14th century, and where evidence survives, as from the parishes of



Writtle and Great Waltham, it suggests that the population of Essex in 1400 was reduced to half, or even less, than that of a century before. This high mortality advanced the trend to severalty. Leases on vacant tofts were taken up by their neighbours - Frog's Green is typical, a sparse settlement on what once would have been a busy hamlet. This was clearly a general trend, as can be seen in progress on many of the estate maps which began to be produced from the late 16th century onwards.

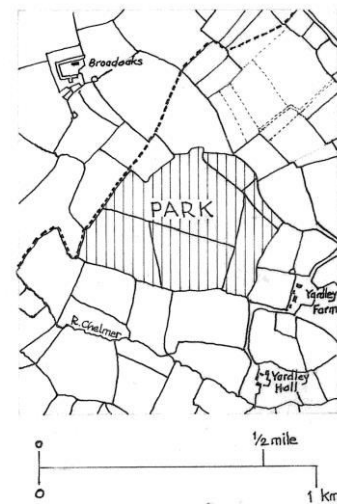
These changes were relatively minor, and there was no need for major reorganisation at a later date such as occurred in the Midlands, and nearer to home, in Essex parishes lying to the north-west of Wimbish near the Cambridgeshire border where large common fields required acts of parliament to enclose, mostly in the early years of the 19th century. As we have seen much of the Wimbish common fields had been engrossed and enclosed by the later Middle Ages, and the remainder is likely to have swiftly followed - a process that could be achieved by agreement between neighbours for their mutual benefit

Standards of living for farmers rose. In the 13th century a virgate of 30 acres gave a family a good living and would require the labour of two full-time workers. In the 15th we find a new stratification; a prosperous farmer, now a yeoman, would have 80 acres or more, there was a middle category of husbandmen, and at the bottom the labourers who might hold a few acres but had to work for wages.<sup>10</sup> From the late 14th century the rise of the cloth industry brought increased prosperity to north Essex with wives and daughters employed in a cottage industry of spinning and preparing warps. Peasants rebuilt their farmhouses in growing numbers after 1380, increasingly with two-storey crosswings. Many of the Wimbish farmhouses are listed as 17th century, but parts of their structures may well be earlier.

We noted earlier that the likely builder of Tiptofts was Sir John de Wanton. His descendant Elizabeth married Sir John Mordaunt and at her death, Morant relates, she held Tiptofts, Highams, Pinkneys and Warleys, and much else in the area. Highams, in this case, would seem likely to be the former moated farmstead we have considered lying to the east of Tiptofts, rather than Highams Farm which lies south-east on the parish boundary with Thaxted. Warleys seems to have been a small estate at some time absorbed into Pinkneys. Mordaunt died in 1543, bequeathing his late wife's lands in Wimbish to Brasenose College, Oxford.

Tiptofts is an early 14th century timber-framed building of national historic and architectural interest. Tudor brickwork makes its appearance in a grand rebuilding of Broadoaks, the work of Thomas Wiseman. His father John, who lived in Felsted had acquired the manor from the Mordaunt family in 1555. According to Morant he was a man of means, for in addition to property in Felsted he owned a number of manors: Ashwell Hall in Finchingfield, Great Brockholds in Radwinter, Tendrings and

Wieldbarns in Debden, and Yardley Hall in Thaxted, which adjoined Broadoaks to the south. Thus Thomas, who inherited the estate on John's death in 1558, was a wealthy man who had a choice of sites on which to build his seat, and with its prominent position and fine prospects, his choice fell upon Broadoaks (see photo below).



**Left: Broadoaks Manor. Right: Broadoaks Park. Based on ERO maps: Broadoaks T/M 516/1 1728, and Thaxted. Tithe Map D/CT 348 1844.**

It would seem that the mansion was originally E-shaped in plan and the present house, impressive as it is, is one arm of the original building. It is likely that the moat dates from this time as moats were again in fashion as status symbols. Horham Hall, Thaxted, had been rebuilt in brick with a new moat earlier in the century, and with a similarly prominent site, Wiseman may have sought to rival if not excel it.

Horham also had that other status symbol, a deer park, and inevitably Wiseman followed its example. An estate map of 1728 of Broadoaks,<sup>11</sup> and field names on the Thaxted Tithe Map have located it, lying on land belonging to Yardley Hall.<sup>12</sup> It covered just over 60 acres and its complete boundary has survived in the field pattern (see map above). It is a site with fine views, particularly over the nascent Chelmer valley to the west, and it is likely that a banqueting pavilion would have been built to observe these prospects. It is possible that the site was already wooded, or partly so when John Wiseman acquired it.

At the other end of the social scale the later 18th century saw the arrival of purprestures, the establishment of smallholdings on highway land (then manorial waste) with the consent of the manor, but incurring payment of rent and contractual responsibility for highway maintenance. Good examples lie on the south side of the main road at Howlett End, and there are many other cases in the parish, reflecting the rise of population again to pre Black Death levels and beyond.

## The present landscape

From 1950 onwards, when the long years of farming depression had ended, the Agriculture Acts brought government support and investment, and the process resumed of engrossment into larger farming units together with rapid technological change. Looking back I think it fair to say that in the face of many pressures to do otherwise, Wimbish farmers maintained a balance between the productive and the non-productive elements of the landscape, in what came later to be seen as the concept of stewardship, and it shows today in enlarged fields that are matched by venerable hedgerows, exceptional grass roads or green lanes, and 'lost' greens. Frequently one sees planting and maintenance in sympathy with the historic character of the area and in Wimbish we can explore and discover the subtle ancient landscape of the Essex Till at its best. As a hardened observer of the Essex scene I think that 'magical' may not be an inappropriate adjective for some parts of the Wimbish landscape.

## Further research

Much in this paper is speculative and will remain so, being based on existing sources, and it is unlikely (although far from impossible) that new documentary or cartographical evidence will appear. An extension of our knowledge of the past would seem to lie in archaeology, particularly in field-walking where an experienced eye can spot and roughly date lost settlement sites, so bringing to life the focal points of earlier landscapes. Many mysteries remain: where was the manor of Dales/Caldecot? And how would the landscape around Ellis Green have looked in 1300?

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**Note: This was the last article written by the late John Hunter, the noted landscape historian from Thaxted. He was author of *The Essex Landscape: a study of its form and history* (1999) and *Field Systems in Essex* (2003). All photographs and most maps were the work of the author.**

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