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.

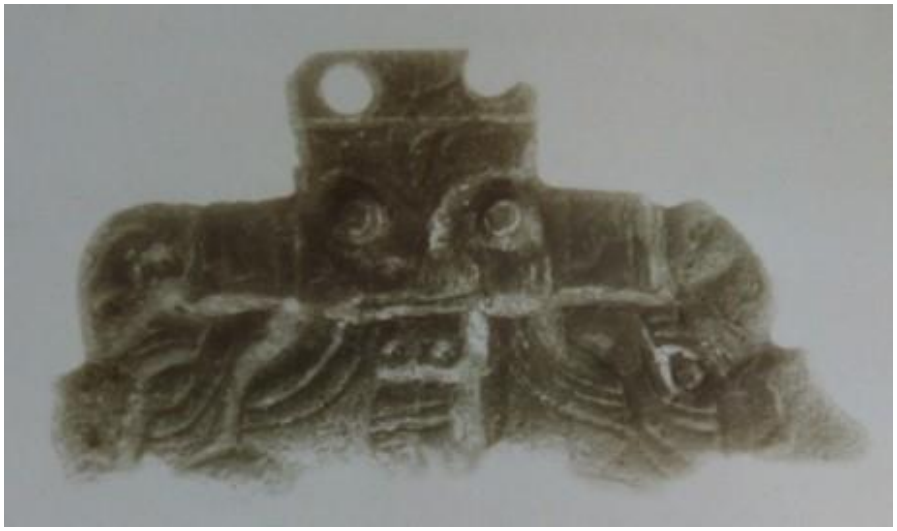
St. Edmundsbury Chronicle 2000.
M Bailey.
C Dyer.

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 and 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"

A recently discovered old source, The Rising in East Anglia 1381: Edgar Powell, pub Cambridge University Press, 1896, has added more detail to this story.

Mentioned in the text are:

John of (de) Cavendish – The Kings Chief Justice

John de Cambridge. Prior of the Abbey of St. Edmundsbury.

Edmund of Lakenheath. Justice and Steward of Lakenheath. The extract says that he was a justice at the eventual trial of the rioters.

The author states that a court of enquiry (Placita Coronae – 'pleas of the Crown') took place at Mildenhall on 27th July 1381. He writes that:

"John de Cavendish himself had the misfortune to fall into the hands of another band of rioters in the neighbourhood of Lakenheath, a parish lying in the fens beyond Mildenhall…… Chief among his pursuers were Stephen Martyn and Richard Rond who, as the *scribe has noted, followed him 'usque ad mortem' (pursued to death). Perhaps thinking of Ely as a refuge he directed his steps for the river (The Little Ouse), hoping that by boat his chance of escape thither would be considerably enhanced, or that, could he even manage to put that barrier between himself and his pursuers he might yet manage to elude them. ……."

*Scribe- the court official who took written records of the proceedings

Further:

"It would seem that news of the approach of the rioters from the south under John Wrarre was brought to the prior, John de Cambridge, sometime during the afternoon of June 13 1381. Knowing, it would seem, that any effective defence of the monastery was out of the question, and feeling that the temper of the townsfolk (of Bury) rendered his position an exceedingly dangerous one, he decided to leave the monastery, and, waiting till nightfall, fled under cover of darkness to the house of certain faithful servant of the monastery at Mildenhall, a town some twelve miles to the north-west where he hoped to be able to remain in hiding till law and order could again be restored…….. the following day, June 14th, in great anxiety and suspense, which we can well imagine became almost insupportable, as late in the day the rioters from Lakenheath were probably pouring through the town on their way to Bury, bearing with them the gory head of his old friend, the justice".

One of the main complaints of the 'rioters' was against the Statute of Labourers of 1361 introduced to ensure the feudal rights of lords of manors, whereby manorial labour by peasants was to be enforced. The peasant work-force had been significantly reduced by the Black Death giving them the possibility of 'selling' their labour. It has been suggested that the King's Justice, John de Cavendish had come to enforce the statute.

"We may suppose that the justice was travelling on his round of duty in the district, but with too weak an escort, and being surprised by a band of rioters was compelled to fly for his life.

The rioting in the district continued with the murder near Mildenhall, of the prior, John de Cambridge. Edmund of Lakenheath was pursued, his considerable property was attacked and in order to escape the insurgents he eventually reached the coast where he took ship only to be captured by a French ship. He eventually was released on payment of a ransom.