

Malthouse Close / Malthouse Farmhouse

By Henny Shotter

Malthouse Close gets its name from Malthouse Farmhouse in the corner of the High Street and Ham Lane. It is the only remaining building which is associated with one of Lenham's breweries.

Beer was an important part of people's diet. It was safe to drink as it was free of disease-causing bacteria. One London doctor observed that people who drank beer instead of water from a contaminated well in London didn't fall ill with cholera. This observation contributed to the discovery that cholera is transmitted by drinking contaminated water. Drinking beer was healthy and it was nutritious. There must have been many small breweries of which we don't have any record.

We don't know the name of the brewery, which once occupied a prominent place in Lenham village or when it came into existence. It is shown on the Tithe Map¹ of 1839 below.



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The owner of Brew House, the adjoining Brewery House Field and Mill Field was in 1939 Charles Sedgwick. He lived in the High Street near the present Saxon Warrior Pharmacy. One record gives his profession in 1840 as 'carpenter'² but, as the records show very clearly, that at that time, many people at that time did not have a job for life but had changed their occupation frequently.

Charles Sedgwick and his wife Martha lived to a good old age. He died in 1859 at the age of 94, his wife 2 years later in 1861 at the age of 86. (Grave number 182, Lenham Churchyard³) We assume that Edward Sedgwick, a farmer⁴, who lived on Liverton Hill (possibly Bowley Cottage)⁵ was his brother. This brother, Edward Sedgwick, also owned an oasthouse, a hop garden in Platts Heath and Platts Heath Field. It looks like brewing was, at least at some stage, a family business, because in the Lenham Brew House lived another member of the family, a daughter of Charles and Martha, Margaret Martha Sedgwick and her husband Edmond Munk Day, originally from Hythe. He was a brewer and grocer,⁶ but by 1858 he was Postmaster in Lenham⁷. They had married on Christmas Eve in 1821. Their marriage was very fruitful as they ended up with so many children that we gave up counting!⁸ Twenty years after they married in 1841 they had of twin daughters which were baptised Louisa Mary and Fanny Augusta in St. Mary's. Edmund Munk Day and his wife Margaret are buried in the churchyard of St. Mary's church in Lenham.

The inscription on their gravestone (grave number 192)⁹ reads:

To the memory of
EDWARD MUNK DAY
of this parish
DIED DECEMBER 8TH 1863 AGED 63 YEARS

ALSO MARGARET MARTHA wife of the above
DIED SEP^{TR} 21ST 1900 AGED 99 YEARS

² See Pigots Directory 1840, compiled for inline use: <http://www.janetandrichardsgenealogy.co.uk/index.html>

³ Thank you to Colin Moffat for providing the information, soon to be published in Lenham Churchyard Records

⁴ Melvilles, Directory of Kent. Online: <https://pubwiki.co.uk/KentPubs/Lenham/index.shtml>

⁵ His property is shown on the Tithe map as the first building to the right when coming from Platts Heath to Liverton

⁶ See Pigots Directory 1840, compiled for inline use: <http://www.janetandrichardsgenealogy.co.uk/index.html>

⁷ Melvilles 1858 Directory of Kent. Online at: <https://pubwiki.co.uk/KentPubs/Lenham/index.shtml>

⁸ Thank you to Amy Myers for providing family research

⁹ See Lenham Churchyard Records, soon to be published

SARAH ANN Daughter of the above
DIED AUGUST 30TH 1859
AGED 31 YEARS

We don't have records of when the brewery was pulled down to make place for Lenham's primary school and the Headmaster's house, which is still standing and one of Lenham's many listed buildings.

We assume that the brewery was bought by the Chilston Estate and the land gifted to the church for the purpose of a primary school and we hope that further research will confirm this. As we have learned from Laurence Porter, the current owner of Malthouse Farmhouse, the cottage too was part of the Chilston Estate.

Laurence wrote to us:

"We understand that the house was built in around 1825 which would seem to fit in with your general dates. However there must have been a house here before as there is internal brickwork and a well which predate that by more than 100 years.

Most of the rest of the history that we know is more recent. At some stage it became part of the Chilston Estate as it is listed on the auction details when the Estate was broken up/ sold off in ?1947? It was by then a dairy farm run by Isaac (Ikey) Boorman. The farm itself extended to both sides of the railway line but was then gradually sold off for the development of Honeywood Road/ Beacon Road, and then Robins Avenue etc. The final piece of the farmyard (behind the Farmhouse) was sold off around 1980/81 and is where Malthouse Close is today. By that time the Farmhouse was in a state of disrepair- which we believe to be the reason it was not listed between 1979/81 - unlike the cottages opposite (one of which housed the headmaster of Lenham Primary School). "

The brewery in Lenham village shut down around the time when another brewery in Lenham Forstal was growing and eventually turned into a successful business. However, this will be another story.