

THE STORY OF

# ELMERS END

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Many have pondered, as they've tarried, or passed through Elmers End, on the origin of its name. Was Elmer a tree? or a person? If Elmer was a person, who was he? Was End his fate? his objective? or his place?

The earliest known documentary evidence of the district is found in four deeds from the reign of Henry III (1216-1272), which refer to the lease of land from Ralph Aylmer and his son Richard, to others. In one of these, Richard Aylmer leased ten acres to William Wodegrove, for an annual rental of 21d; and as the following extract from it shows, the location is precisely defined, and the place in which it lay is described as Westhurst:

"Be it known that I, Richard, son of Ralph Aylmer, have given, conceded, and by this deed confirm to William Wodegrove 10 acres of my land with its **motes**, hedges, and forelands, and everything else pertaining thereto lying in a place which is called Westhurst, in the parish of Beckenham, and extending in length from east by the land of Lord Richard de Rupella, Lord of Beckenham, and extending in length from towards west as far as lands of said William. And in breadth between land of William de Bosco on the south and the way which leads from the house of William Pikenot towards Penge on the north."

Elmers End is situated on the western boundary of the parish of Beckenham; the land leading up to the parish boundary is sloping; and *hurst* means a wooded slope. In this area there were eight adjacent fields with "hurst" in their fieldnames, shown on the Tithe Map of 1838; so the place was aptly named. The lease refers to motes, but there is no mention of the house that the motes were constructed to protect; so it had presumably been abandoned and demolished, at the time the lease was drawn up. The moated site is shown on Thomas Motley's map, 1736 (Fig 1), in which one of the three fields described as La Motes had become a plantation.

This site was excavated in the mid-nineteen seventies by the Archeology Section of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society, and Lilian Thornhill, wrote in *Archeologia Cantiana*, Volume 91, that:

"It would appear that the manor house that the moats were constructed to defend was a fairly substantial house, judging by the building stone found in the moat, and was tiled. The fine ware vessels, one of which was made in France, suggest a family of importance." She concluded that: "all available evidence points to an origin for the manor house in the second half of the thirteenth century.....The pottery ranges from mid thirteenth to early fifteenth century, but the documentary evidence suggests an abandonment sometime in the fourteenth century".

The only documentary evidence Miss Thornhill provided in support of fourteenth century abandonment of the site, was reference to a deed of 1467, which mentions "gardens, and motes", but no house, and relates to the same site. It did not, however, support fourteenth century abandonment; but provided evidence that the site was not occupied by a house in the middle of the fifteenth century. Although this deed is for twenty acres, and the Aylmer/Wodegrove deed is for ten acres; the extract from the Thomas Motley's map 1736 (Fig. 1a.) shows that whilst The La Motes site comprises twenty acres in total, the part of the site which contains the moats is approximately ten acres.

It is clear from the Aylmer/Wodegrove deed that by 1276 - the date of Richard de Rupella's death - the house had been demolished; and the abandoned moated site had been leased by Richard Aylmer to William Wodegrove. It seems likely that the moated house was built, occupied, and then abandoned by the Aylmer family, because of the impossibility of draining the site satisfactorily, at sometime during the turbulent thirteenth century - in the sixties of which rebel forces occupied Beckenham. The family name was sometimes written by medieval scribes as Ailmer, or Eilmer, or Eylmer.



Fig. 1a. The La Motes Site



According to thirteenth and fourteenth century records the Aylmer family were either parties or witnesses to several land charters, and they were members of a number of juries set up for fiscal or judicial purposes, by the Crown. The tax assessment returns for the Hundred of Beckenham for 1329 and 1334 assessed forty eight persons as liable for taxation. Of these only three families: those of Sir Maurice le Brun, Lord of the Manor of Beckenham; Henry de Cliff, Master of the Rolls to Edward II; and Ralph de Langele, freeman, were assessed at a higher rate than the Eylmers. They were a family of substance and would have had the means to build a thirteenth century moated house; and it seems likely that the family gave the place its name. It was the end of the parish where the Aylmer's lived - Aylmer's end of the parish. In 1495, by which time the family appear to have left the parish, a deed refers to a substantial house in the Elmers End area as "Aylmersende", no doubt the residence to which the Aylmers had moved, after their abandonment of the moated house

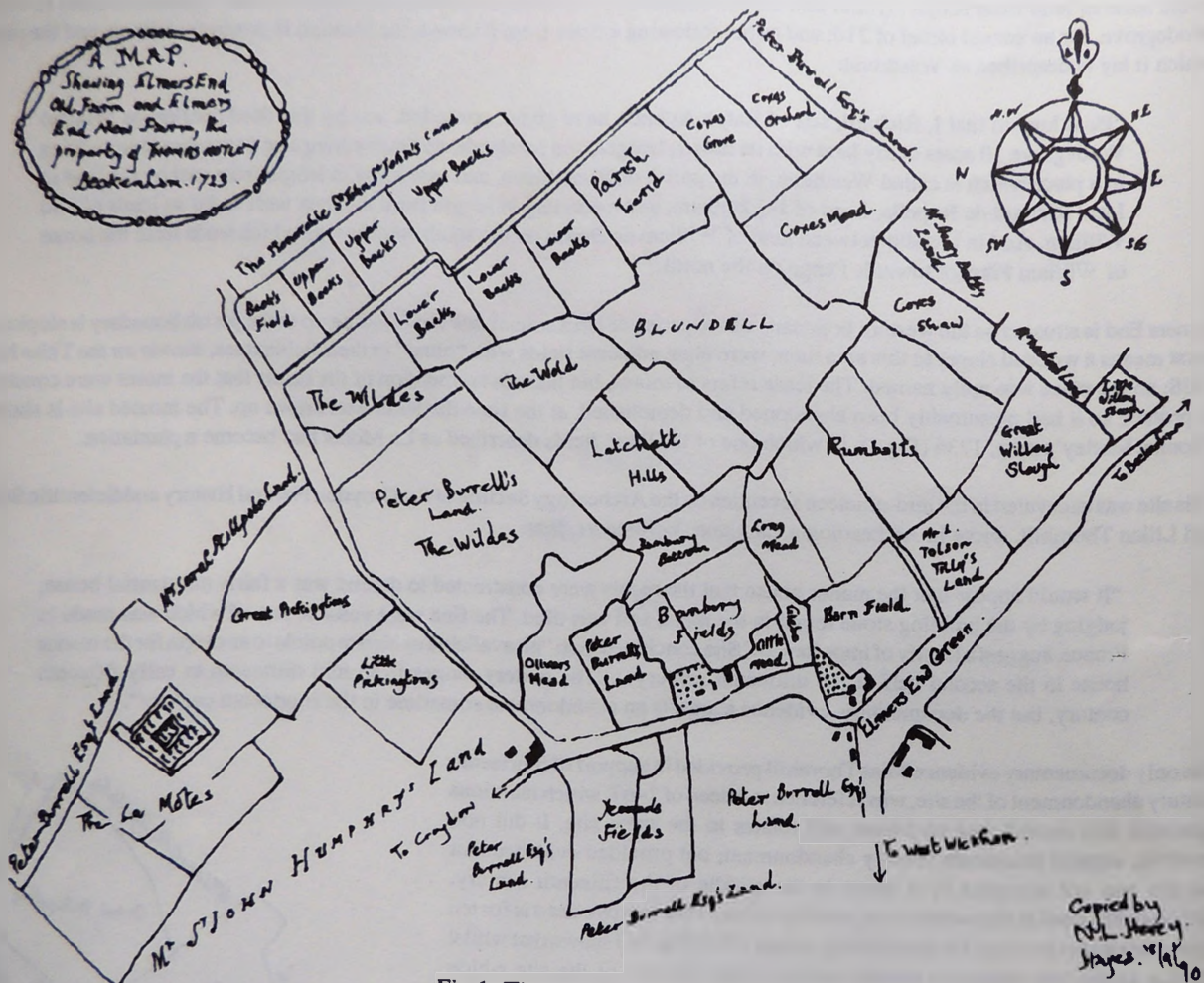


Fig.1. Thomas Motley's Map - 1723.

in the thirteenth century. From the fifteenth century it became fashionable for London merchants to buy land in Beckenham, and a deed of 1467 between Stephen and John Fabian, citizens and drapers of London, of the one part; and Richard atte Charte of Beckenham, of the other, refers to the sale of the moated site: "twenty acres of land with gardens and *motes*" which are granted to the Fabians. The Thomas Motley map of 1736 (Fig 1) shows that the moated site and the two fields called La Motes that adjoin it measure twenty acres, to the nearest acre. London merchants, brewers, and vintners continued to buy property in the area in the sixteenth century; and in 1501, 1502, and 1504 John Style, a citizen of London and a mercer, with others, bought houses and land in Beckenham, some of which was situated at Elmers End. In 1510 he bought the Langley Estate, which included holdings at Elmers End, of about 100 acres. A property referred to in a deed of 1512 is described as "being situated at a place called Elmers End"; in 1610 a house was built at Elmers End



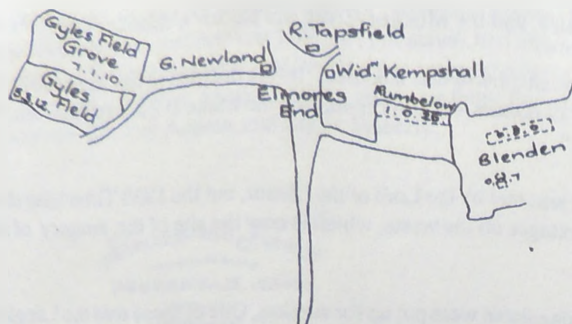


Fig.2. Part of Beckenham Manor - 1623

called Elmer Lodge, full details of which are given below, in the section dealing with the Sale of the Gwydir Estate, in 1820. George Hodge, in 1623, leased a house, garden, and orchard, at Elmers End, to Richard Tapsfield, which is shown on the Estate map of Beckenham Manor in 1623, a section of which is shown in (Fig 2).

An eighteenth century estate map, of the lands of Thomas Motley of 1736 (Fig 1), referred to above shows Elmers End Old Farm, 60 acres, and Elmers End New Farm, 80 acres, the homestead of which is shown in (Fig.3). The tenant of the former was Nicholas Hodge, and of the latter, Daniel Hodge. Old Farm had three fields named La Motes one of which contains a double rectangular concentric moat, which at one time defended a residence which

is referred to in a thirteenth century deed referred to above. It is shown as a tree plantation. The site was bought in 1860 by the Croydon Board of Health, and the moated part was levelled. A sewage farm was constructed, and fell into disuse in the nineteen sixties

Mapmakers described the place in a variety of ways: Rocque's Map of the Environs of London (1747) names the hamlet as Elms End. Andrews and Drury (1763) names two hamlets, Aylmous End and Aylmous End Green; and a map of 1778 in Hasted's Topography of Kent names the hamlets as Elmous End, and Upper Elmous End Green. The first ordnance survey map (1801) names the hamlets as Lower Elm End and Upper Elm End. Upper Elmers End was the district around the present public house called the Rising Sun.



Fig. 3. The Homestead, New Farm, Elmers End.



In 1775 the housing of the poor exercised the minds of the Vestry, and the Minutes record the Rector's statement that:

"there was a great need for small houses for industrious shepherds and labourers. It was decided to ask the Lord of the Manor, John Cator, [who was not present] to build 12 houses, 4 at Elmorend, 4 on the waste at Elmorend Green, and 4 on waste lying at the side of the road to Penge."

There is no evidence in the Vestry minutes of whether this need was met by the Lord of the Manor, but the 1838 Tithe Map shows cottages at Elmers End, on land owned by John Cator, but no cottages on the waste, which is now the site of the surgery of a medical group practice.

On the death of Lord Gwydir (formerly Peter Burrell) in 1820, his estates were put up for auction. One of these was the Langley Estate, part of which was five freehold plots, at Elmers End., which comprised 102 acres. These are shown on the Sale Catalogue Plan, Lots 11, & 48-52, from which it can be seen that most of Elmers End was part of the Langley Estate. One of the properties offered for sale was Elmer Loder (Fig.4.), described in the sale Catalogue as:

"A commodious and very substantial brick dwelling house with coach house, stabling for three horses, harness room, brew house, garden, shrubbery, paddock, and meadow land, suitable for a genteel family".

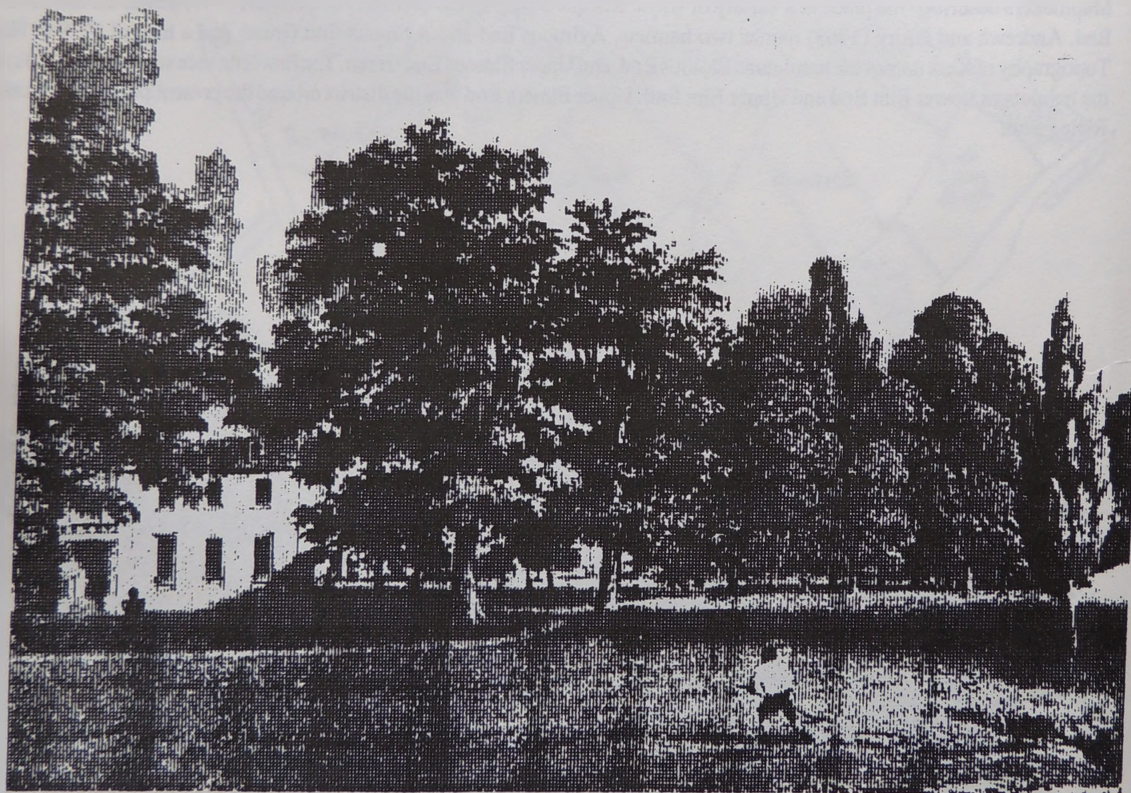


Fig. 4. ElmerLodge - 1838

Built in 1610, it was at one time the residence of Hugh Raymond who had bought the Langley Estate for £6,500 in 1732. He was an Essex merchant, and a director of the East India Company, and the South Sea Company. When the "South Sea Bubble" burst in 1720, his estate was valued at £64,375, of which he was allowed to keep £30,000; the rest, was his contribution to make good the shareholders' losses. The house was bought at the auction by Edward Richard Adams, gentleman, who resided there until his death in 1856, shortly after which his son Edward Adams demolished it, and replaced it by the present Elmer Lodge, now a public house.



In 1836 an estate plan for the joint owners, Reverend Stewart Foster and Reverend John B. Collisson (Fig 5), showed that the two farms had been merged into one holding (174 acres), and although the two substantial homesteads are shown, there are no names of any tenants. It seems probable that the plan was prepared prior to sale of the property, as two years later the Tithe Survey Survey shows the owner as Ambrose Austin, and the tenant as Peter Pagett. Other landowners are shown as: John Cator, Richard Shute, Mrs Humphrys, Richard Adams, and Major Maberly.

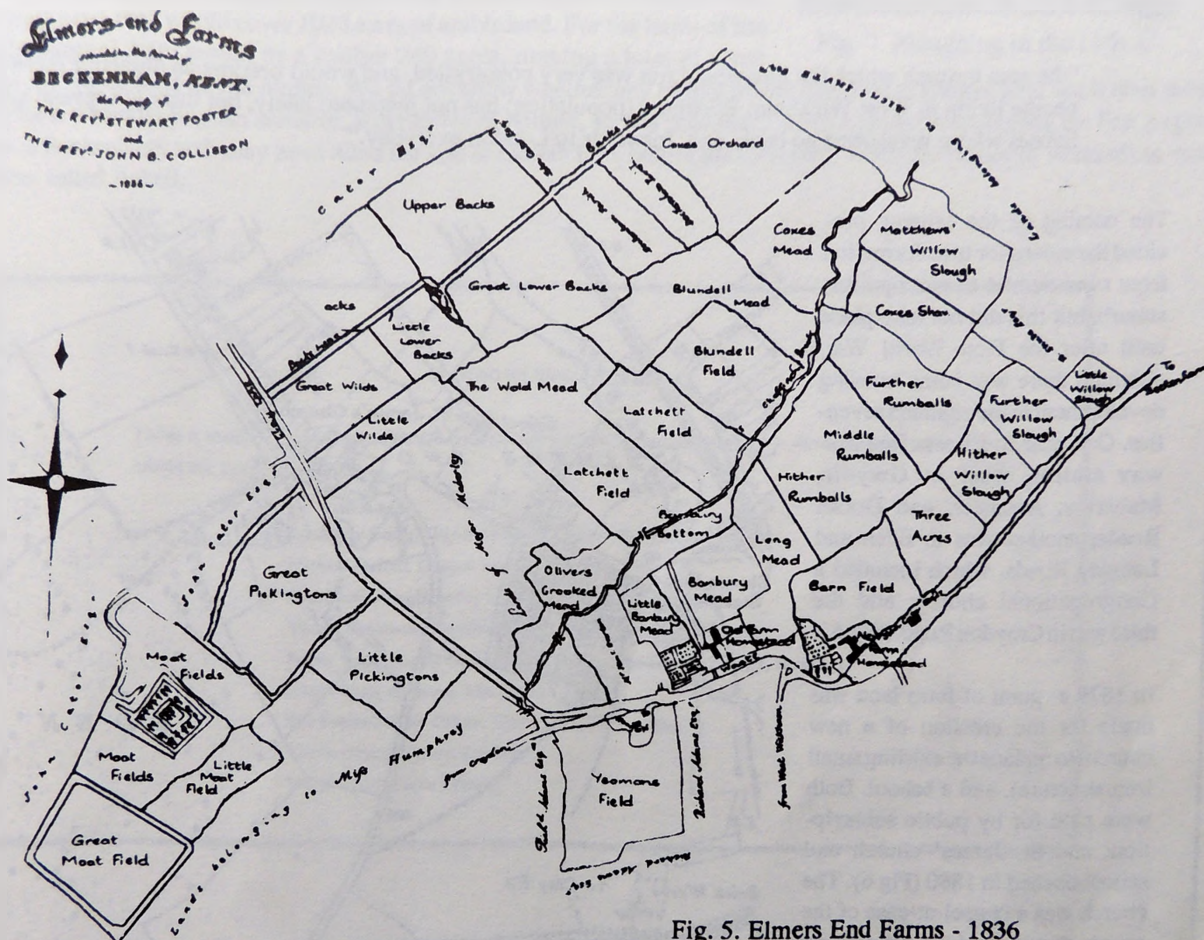


Fig. 5. Elmers End Farms - 1836

All the owners and tenants of land at Elmers End, at the time of the Tithe Survey of 1838 , are shown in the following extract :

Name of Farm	Owner	Tenant	Acres
New Farm	Ambrose Austin	Peter Pagett	165
New Farm	Beckenham Parish	Peter Pagett	5
New Farm	John Blake	Peter Pagett	5
Elmer End	Edward R. Adams	Edward R. Adams	83
Elmer End	Rev. Harcourt	Edward R. Adams	46
Powell's Farm	Mrs Humphrys	Mr Powell	31



Elmer End farm was managed by a bailiff, and there was a smallholding of 17 acres owned by Major Maberly, and tenanted by Thomas Holfield. At Lower Elmers End there were five houses with gardens (including three farmhouses), and seventeen cottages. At Upper Elmers End there was one farm, and nineteen houses with gardens. The Census of 1841 shows the population of Lower Elmers End as 107, accommodated in 20 dwellings; and the population of Upper Elmers End as 105, accommodated in 20 dwellings.

The New Beckenham to Addiscombe Railway which opened on 1st April, 1864, included a station at Elmers End (Fig. 6), and the scheme was under discussion in 1862, Mr Edward Evans, Elmers Lodge, Elmers End gave the evidence to the House of Commons that:

"the area through which the line would run was very countryfied, and would become an attractive outlet for people living in West Wickham. Wickham (population) has not increased lately, but there are several good houses whose gentlemen go back and forwards to London everyday."

The coming of the railway provided the means for transformation from rural hamlet to metropolitan suburb, but this did not take place until after the First World War, although there was some housing development in the eighteen seventies. One near to Elmers End railway station was: in Gwydir, Maberley, Ancaster, and Dorset Roads; another was in Eden and Langley Roads, which included a Congregational church; and the third was in Croydon Road. (Fig.6.).

In 1879 a grant of farm land was made for the erection of a new church (to replace the existing small iron structure), and a school. Both were paid for by public subscription; and St. James' church and school opened in 1880 (Fig 6). The church was a chapel-at-ease of the parish church; and the school was behind the church, set among fields through which flowed the Chaffinch Brook, and in which stood a stately line of elms. It closed in May, 1930, when the children transferred to the new Marian Vian schools, which had been built by the Beckenham Council to provide for the rapid growth of population that had taken place because of housing development.

Elmers End was for centuries a hamlet in the western part of Beckenham parish, in the diocese of Rochester (sometimes Canterbury), and the County of Kent. It was located on



Fig. 6. Ordnance Survey Map - 1898

the road from Beckenham to Croydon, and at the junction of the road from West Wickham, all of these settlements are mentioned in ninth and tenth century Anglo-Saxon charters, and the Domesday Survey of 1086. The Domesday Book, 1086, records a manor in Beckenham with a demesne, with two plough teams, and 4 slaves; 22 villagers and 8 smallholders, with eight and a half plough teams. Apart from the Lord of the Manor's demesne there would be 30 settlements. Normally a "villager's holding" was land cultivated by two oxen, a variable area, but usually between 30 - 35 acres. Assuming that eight and a half plough teams each comprised eight oxen, there would be 68 oxen in total, and at 15 acres per head, they would cover 1020 acres of arable land. For the lands of the Home Farm [demesne] there would be a further 240 acres, making a total of some 1260 acres of cultivable land in the manor. We do not know whether any of that arable land was at Elmers End, but it does seem possible. Aylmer is a Middle English surname, a derivative of Ailmar, so it is possible that the Aylmers were among the first Anglo-Saxon settlers in Beckenham, and may have tilled the soil at Elmers End, before the Conquest, when the Manor of Beckenham was held by a Saxon called Ascell.



Fig. 7. Ploughing in the 11th. C

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