



Why Is Elham Here?

Produced by the Elham Historical Society (EHS)– Issue 1

An EHS project to determine from archaeological, geological and archive resources why Elham is here.

Why Is Elham Here? Contents

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Part of a 1769 Dury, Andrews & Herbert Map

Introduction

Elham Historical Society started this venture with a sense of leaping into the dark and uncertain of the routes to be taken. The fundamental purpose was to trace the development of the village and to fix at least some reasons why Elham as a community finished up snuggled into the lee of a hill on the west side of the valley. We hope to show the continuity in the development of Elham from the first temporary dwellings to the thriving community that Elham has become; the routes that have developed, the cultural shifts that have influenced the patterns of growth and the roles played by local and external forces.

The principal challenge has been how to interpret much of the geological evidence about landscape, and how to assess the significance of archaeological finds. There was a huge, but I hope resisted, attraction in making sweeping claims from insufficient evidence and there is no guarantee that what we now consider as valid will not be challenged or invalidated by subsequent knowledge.

We have therefore presented this project in an open form which can be continuously updated as we find more information and some issues become clearer. So users should feel entitled to pass on information and opinions to the Society through the EHS website. The online information and documentation will be updated as new thinking, research and data becomes available, so readers are asked to check the EHS website to ensure they have the latest information.

We hope you enjoy the content

Geology & the Changing Coastline



Note: The maps shown on these pages have been reproduced from recent radar images produced by NASA and are not true representations of how this area would have looked in ancient times.

There were several geological and climatic changes that produced the landscape as we now know it and materially affected the ways in which the valley became populated. So we start with a geological survey, kindly produced by Andrew Coleman, that sets out the base ground, showing how natural forces shaped the landscape that early humans inherited and gradually fashioned to their requirements.

The landscape you see along the Elham Valley has been formed over many millions of years. The chalk hills were once soft sediments deposited at the bottom of the sea around 100 million years ago. After burial these hardened and were pushed up into an elongate dome across southern England and northern France. Erosion by natural drainage of rivers and by water and ice during the glacial and interglacial periods of the last Ice Age created the valleys and hills we see today. A variety of deposits have formed as a result of these geological processes; the ancient chalk hills themselves with embedded flint layers, more recent river sands and gravels in the valley bottom, wetland sits and clays in the valley floodplain, glacial sand, gravel and 'clay with flints' left capping the hill tops by retreating ice sheets, and various weathering deposits, such as brick-earths. All have in some way shaped Man's presence and activities in the valley whether as an early visitor or later settler..

Note: Here is a link to a very interesting presentation by Professor Phil Gibbard on the formation of the English Channel. (<http://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/englishchannelformation/>)

Geological Introduction (by Andrew Coleman)

Geological Structure

Elham is set in a valley on the northern slopes of the North Downs in East Kent, south east England at about 90m above sea level.

South east England is underlain by sedimentary rocks deposited since the beginning of the geological Cretaceous Period about 135 million years ago. They were formed beneath seas, lakes and estuaries and comprise sandstones, limestones, clays and most noticeably Chalk. Since the late Cretaceous Period these rocks have been subject to compression from the south, the same tectonic force which has caused the much more complex deformation and uplift of the rocks forming the Alps.

In south east England, the uplift has been much less pronounced and formed an elongate dome some 135 miles long stretching from Hampshire to north east France and is referred to as the Weald-Artois anticline (but commonly called the Wealden Dome). By about 23 million years ago uplift had raised the Wealden Dome above sea level to form an island.

Once the dome was uplifted, the surface was quickly eroded to expose the older rocks in the core of the dome. These older rocks are mainly sands and sandstones, referred to as the Hastings Group, and being more resistant to erosion they have remained as The High Weald.

More resistant rocks are also found around the perimeter of the eroded dome forming two encircling escarpments which can be envisaged as remnants of the eroded crust of the dome. The inner escarpment is the Lower Greensand Ridge and comprises sands and limestone. The outer escarpment is generally the more prominent of the two and comprises the North and South Downs which are formed from Chalk. The North Downs escarpment originally extended into France near Calais and is referred to as the Weald-Artois ridge.

Between the two escarpments there is a narrow tract of poorly drained land underlain by The Gault clay and sometimes referred to as “Holmesdale”. In East Kent the A20 road follows this vale. The Low Weald is a larger area of poorly drained land between The Lower Greensand ridge and the High Weald and is underlain by the Weald Clay Group. This deposit is not all clay but includes shale and clayey limestone and most significantly is a source of ironstone. It supports dense tree growth particularly Oak.

Drainage history

The rivers draining and eroding the Wealden Dome flowed north and south off the high ground which has now been eroded away leaving only The High Weald in the centre. This drainage pattern, although modified by later events, can still be seen in north Kent today.

Before the North Downs had reached their present height, the head waters of some these rivers were able to erode back through the escarpment, capturing the flow of rivers in the vale beyond. The Great Stour is an example. It now rises south of the escarpment and flows northwards through a gap which it had cut through the Downs at Wye. Uplift continued and consequently The Downs escarpment is now considerably higher than the river. The headwaters of the Nailbourne in the Elham Valley came close to breaching the top of the downs at Postling and Etchinghill, but in this case uplift proceeded faster than headwaters were able erode back, leaving the valley “High and

Dry". Most of the valleys on the north slope of the North Downs are dry for this reason. The important effect of this drainage pattern has been to produce natural route ways aligned north to south through the downs.

History of glaciation

After the end of the Cretaceous Period, the climate began to cool. By about 2.6 million years ago, the beginning of the geological Quaternary Period, ice caps had formed at the poles and by about 500,000 years ago the "Ice Ages" had started when the ice cap advanced far enough south to cover the area of the British Isles. This time also marks the beginning of the archaeological "Palaeolithic" age. Key features of the Ice Ages are rapidly changing temperatures, causing advances and retreats of the polar ice caps, and the effect this has on sea levels. During the maximum ice advances so much water was locked up as ice that sea levels were up to 100 metres lower than at present. During periods when the ice had retreated, sea levels were up to 5 metres higher than present.

The advances and retreats of the ice define "Glacial" and "Interglacial" episodes within the Ice Ages. (The term Ice Age is informal and is often used to describe the most recent glacial advance, which can be confusing). Initially there were four Glacial advances recognised but recent investigations have identified up to twenty smaller fluctuations in temperature, within the larger ones, although not all of them were sufficiently cold to have produced glaciations in southern Britain.

During the Glacial periods a Tundra landscape developed in the Kent area with permafrost affecting the soil. There is no evidence that the main ice sheet reached the North Downs but during the greatest advances it came very close, reaching as far as the position of the Thames estuary.

At the onset of each Interglacial, as the temperatures started to rise, water again flowed in the valleys fed by snow melt or melting permafrost each Spring and continued to the Autumn. The volume of water from melting permafrost and snow was considerable, as can be seen each Spring in the lands bordering the Arctic today, and this contributed to forming the remarkably deep and steep sided valleys on the north slopes of the Downs, of which the Elham Valley is a good example.

Species including man were able to migrate to and from continental Europe along the Weald-Artois ridge in response to changing climate. During the first and most significant glacial period (the "Anglian") about 450,000 years ago a lake formed in the area of the North Sea impounded between the Weald-Artois ridge in the south and the ice in the north. The water in the lake was about 30m above sea level and was limited by the height of the ridge.

About 350,000 years ago the ridge was breached in a spectacular fashion resulting in a "megaflood" causing deep scouring which is still visible as sedimentary structures in the bed of the English Channel. Once the Weald-Artois ridge had been breached, a major river flowed along what was to become the English Channel to the Atlantic. This river was larger than any current river in Europe, taking large volumes of water from those rivers of north west Europe which had previously flowed into what we now call the North Sea. The evidence from The Channel sea bed shows it to have flowed in a series of deep gorges.

The breach marked the end of a permanent land migration route between The Continent and Britain as there was no longer a ridge across The Channel which was higher than the interglacial sea levels. In future, crossings would only be possible when sea levels dropped during Glacials, exposing the North Sea bed. Even then, the large river system and gorges would have made crossings on the Calais-Dover route somewhat hazardous, crossings would have been easier on a more northerly Holland-Norfolk route.

About 160,000 years ago during another major ice advance (the “Saalian”), a lake again became impounded behind a wide area of land formed in the southern North Sea. This barrier was breached about 125,000 years ago causing the second megaflood to have been identified from sedimentary structures in The Channel sea bed. During the latest Glacial (the “Devensian”) about 25,000 to 20,000 years ago sea level again dropped re-establishing the large river system and gorges along the route of the English Channel.

The latest retreat of the ice sheet was completed about 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, around the beginning of the Mesolithic. By about 8,000 to 9,000 years ago, the climate was warmer than at present. The sea level had risen sufficiently to flood the area of the southern North Sea, cutting off Britain from the mainland.

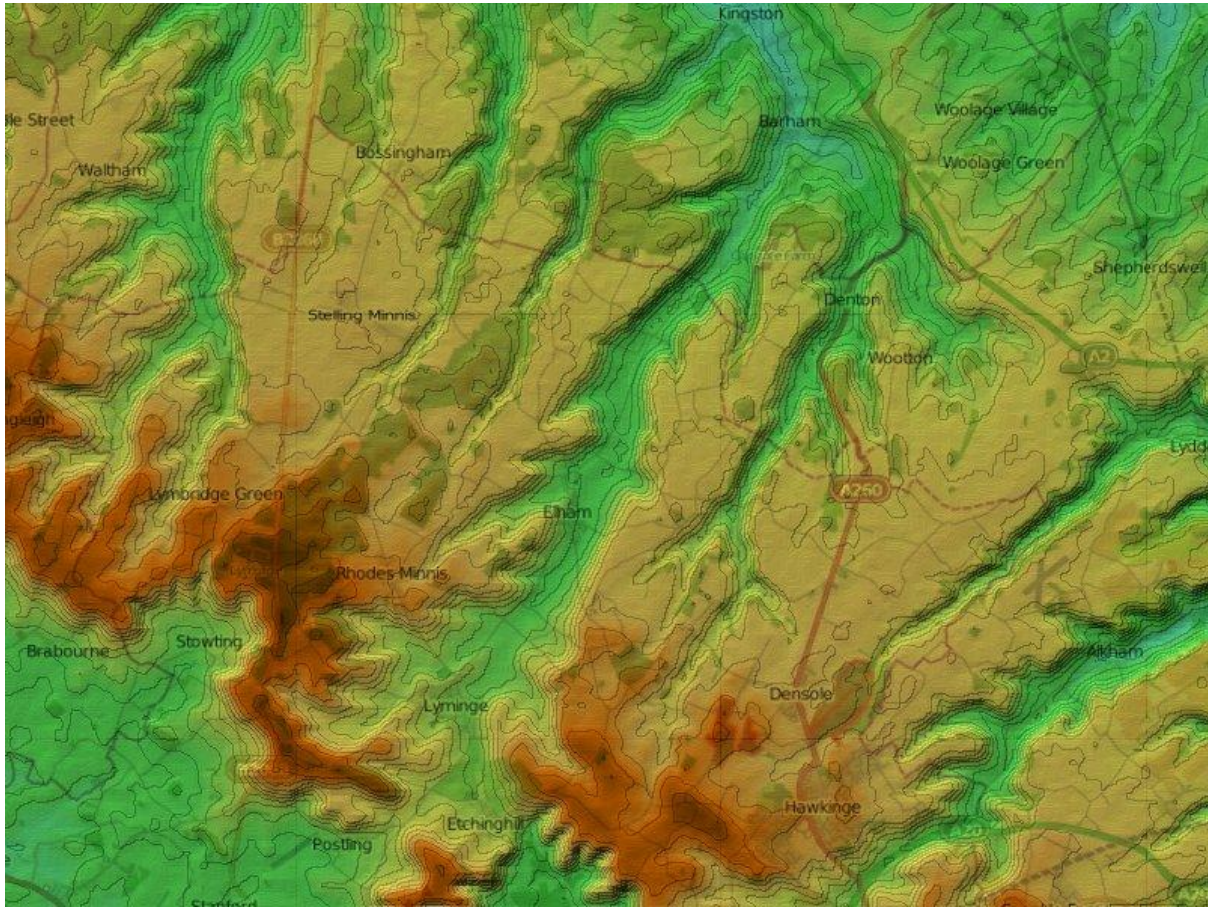
The legacy

The current alignment of valleys in the North Downs originates from the drainage pattern established during the ancient drainage of the Wealden Dome. The Elham Valley is one of those valleys. Whilst the bedrock is Chalk, the surface geology is a result of weathering during the Ice Ages. This has left a deposit on the tops of the high ground between the valleys called “Clay-with-Flints” which is what it says, although it can include isolated deposits of sand. The sides of the valleys are mantled with a solifluxion deposit called “Head”. This is a sandy clay, sometimes suitable for making bricks when it is called “Head Brickearth”. The bottoms of the valleys have thin accumulations of alluvium currently being deposited by the valley streams.

The warm climate encouraged a diverse flora and fauna. Wherever the Chalk was covered by Clay-with-Flints, Head, or Alluvium it was able to support the growth of trees. So it was only at the very tops of the Downs, where the clays were thin or absent that significant tree growth was not established. But even those trees which were able to grow on the Downs were probably not as large, nor the forests as dense, as those in the Low Weald where the damp soil promoted lush vegetation growth and the formation of nutrient rich soils.

To early settlers, The Low Weald is likely to have been The Wild Wood with plenty of game but also predators both animal and human. It was a source of timber, notably Oak, and also ironstone which made it a resource rich area if a somewhat hazardous place to establish permanent settlements. The Downs afforded more attractive sites for settlements being easier to clear and to defend. The natural north-south routes, formed by the ancient valleys in the Downs, provided easy access between the two types of landscape.

Ice Ages, Land Bridges and Sea Level Changes



We had long discussions about the drainage of the Elham Valley. There is little doubt that the valley has been much wetter than it is now because the landscape and climates have changed so much.

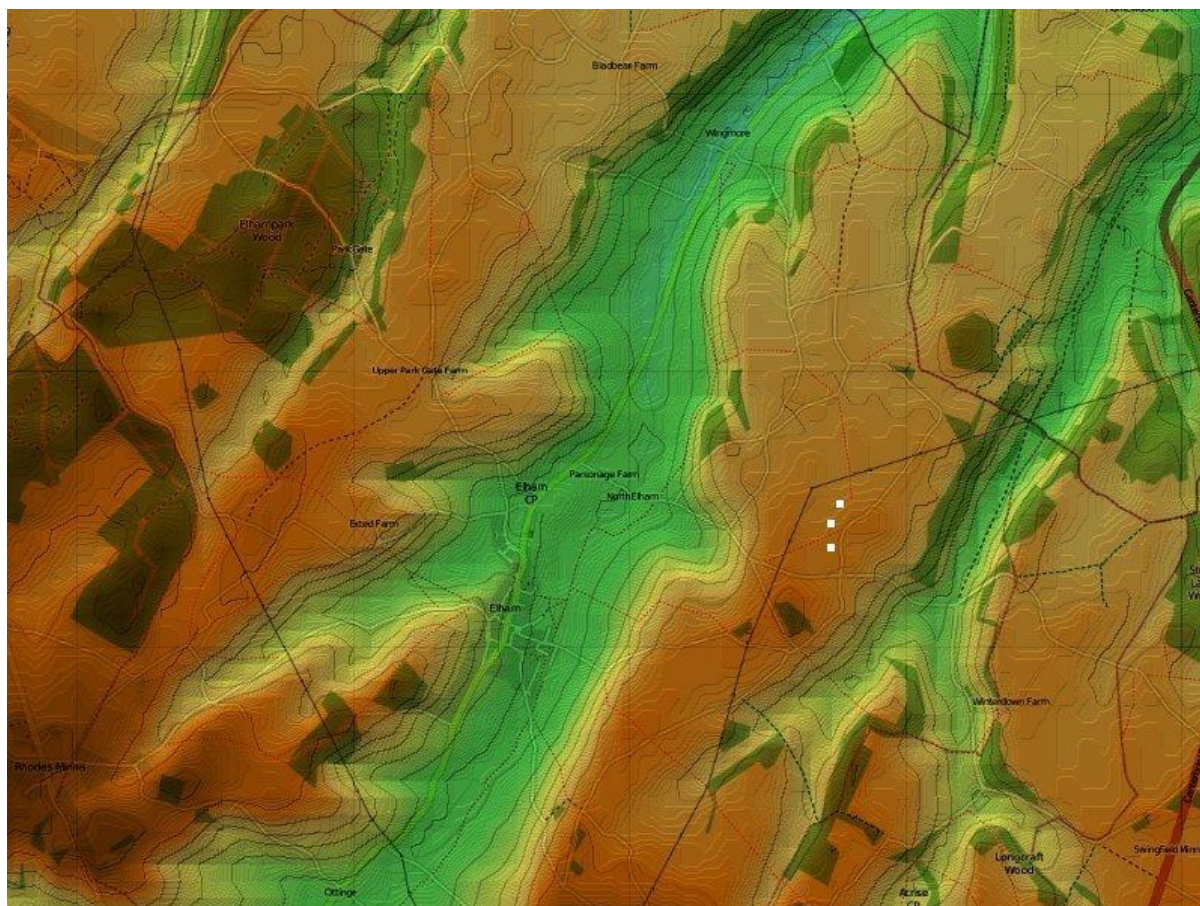
A key contribution to this debate was provided by Anne Beecham, relating aspects of human intrusion into the geological features.

For much of the period of early human evolution, which began in Africa 3 to 4 million years ago, Britain and Continental Europe were part of one landmass and not separated by the English Channel – Kent did not exist as we know it today. The first glaciation of the last 'Ice Age' began around 450,000 years ago in the Lower Palaeolithic in Britain, several more glaciations followed, separated by warmer interglacial periods. Sea level fluctuated dramatically - it was much lower than today (possibly by as much as 100m) during the cold glacial periods when water was locked up in ice, but rose higher during the warmer, sub-tropical, inter-glacial periods when ice sheets retreated as melt-water was released. When water levels were higher the land joining Britain and Northern Europe became marshy and, at times, flooded by large river channels and, eventually, by the sea. The last flooding around 8000 years ago formed the English Channel as we know it today.

An example of the effect of sea level rise on the coastline of Kent is shown in this map where the Romney Marsh is submerged and Thanet is truly an island.

Several times during the 'Ice Age' Kent was at the edge of the habitable world and most probably remained unoccupied during the intense cold glacial periods. During these times continental Europe

provided a refuge for early humans of the **Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age)** period, who then repopulated Kent and other parts of southern Britain when the warmer interglacial climate and land connection allowed, each time bringing with them new tool technologies and cultural changes



Palaeolithic (500,000BC to 8,300BC)

Palaeolithic Visitors to Elham – Neanderthals and other hunter gatherers.

The first early human visitors to the Elham area may well have been *Homo heidelbergensis*, who probably first colonised Britain around 500,000 years ago in the Lower Palaeolithic. (Recent evidence suggests an even earlier human species, *Homo antecessor* (Pioneer Man) was living in parts of Norfolk around 800,000 to 900,000 years ago). Early visitors to southern Britain would have walked here across the land connection with Northern Europe at times when sea level was lower than today. These people were hunter-gatherers and accomplished scavengers, moving from place to place making no permanent settlement, but following migrating herds of animals in search of food. The then shallow river valley cutting through the Downs, formed a natural route-way for migration of animals and people, as well as a ready supply of water and sheltered places to make camp. There was also an abundant supply of a valuable raw material - flint from the chalk, river gravels and glacial deposits - to make tools for hunting and butchering animals. (More in 'The Early Human Story')

Through the Middle Palaeozoic between 200,000 and 35,000 years ago, *Homo heidelbergensis* gradually evolved into *Homo neanderthalensis* (Neanderthal Man). Neanderthals were also hunter gatherers and 'masters' of basic hand axe technology; there is evidence they lived in family groups, cared for the old and sick, buried their dead, spoke a rudimentary language, and in the later period may possibly have mastered the use of fire. Neanderthals were strong and stocky and much better adapted to living in the harsh glacial tundra covering southern Britain than *Homo sapiens* (i.e. 'modern humans'), who were evolving in the warm savannah of east and central Africa at this time. Neanderthals probably had a high ratio of body fat and some thick hair to help keep them warm; they may have also used skins from butchered animals, but evidence for this is not clear.

No Neanderthal skeletal remains have been found in the Elham Valley so far, but a large number of flint tools (hand axes, including Acheulian hand axes, picks, including Thames picks, and scrapers), have been found on the hills around Elham. Although some are not precisely dated many are characteristic of the simpler, basic tools of the Palaeolithic and may well have been made by Neanderthals (or their predecessors), as have been found in other parts of Kent. Their hunter-gatherer-scavenger life style meant Neanderthals would not have made permanent settlements in the Elham area, but would have moved through the valley and hills in search of food: edible plants, berries, nuts, as well as tracking herds of game for meat and skins.

Homo sapiens did not migrate into Europe until around 43,000 years ago in the Upper Palaeolithic and the first remains in southern Britain date from around 35,000 years ago. *Homo sapiens* brought with them a range of more sophisticated stone, bone and wood tools, as well as new hunting weapons such as bows and arrows. Within a few thousand years of 'our' arrival in Europe our Neanderthal cousins were extinct. Whether we were the direct cause of this or not is still much debated.

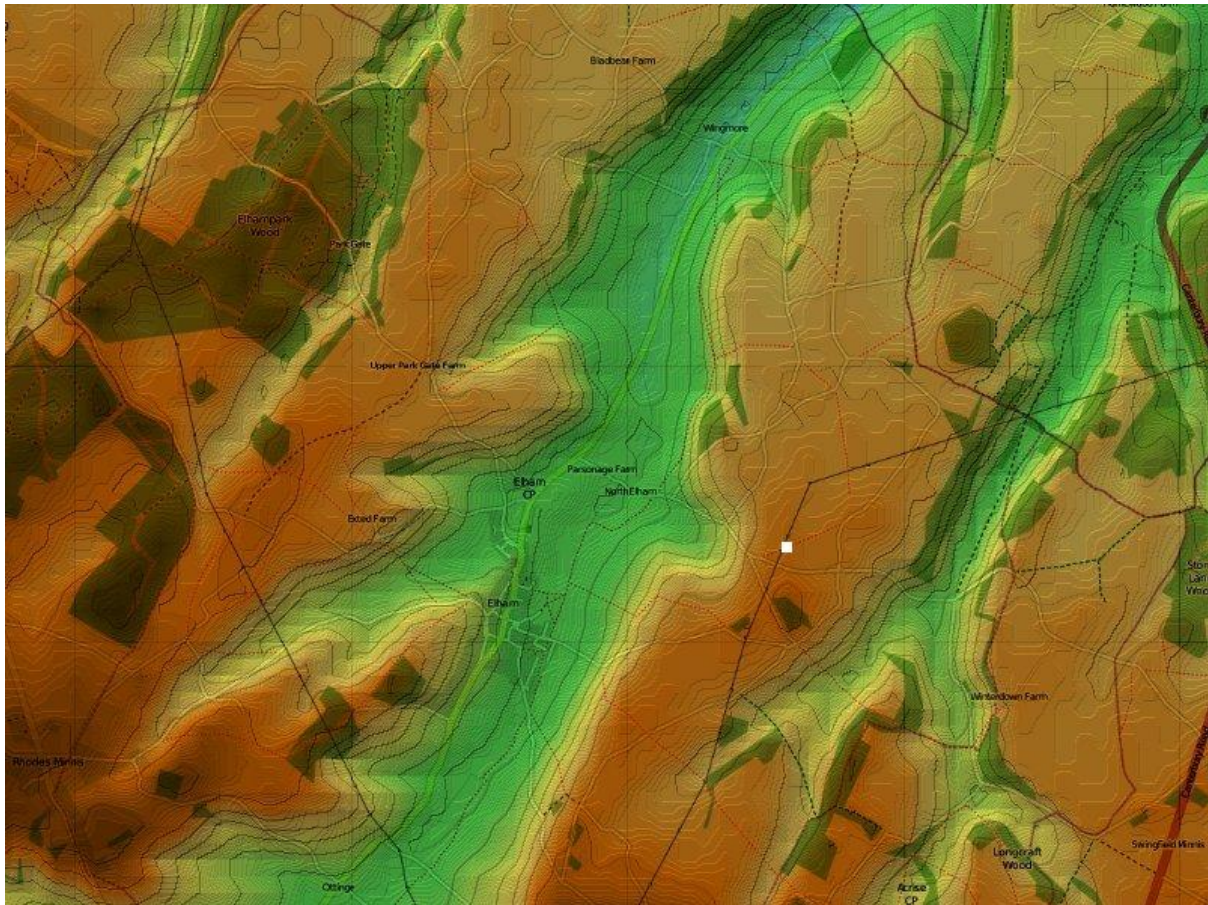
Artefacts found as indicated by the white squares on the above map:



Acheulian Hand Axe

Axe

Thames Pick



Mesolithic (8,300BC to 3,500BC)

Mesolithic Visitors to Elham – *Homo sapiens* take over

The **Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age)** in Britain, beginning at the end of the last glacial period of the 'Ice Age' around 10,000 years ago, was still dominated by **hunter gatherer** communities, but now exclusively made up of anatomically modern humans, ***Homo sapiens*** ('Thinking Man' or 'Wise Man'). New tool types for use as blades and tips in arrows, saw-edged blades and axes begin to appear, although early Mesolithic finds are relatively rare in Kent. Two Mesolithic flint working sites have been identified on the hills above Elham (indicated by the white squares on the above map); tools include saw-edged blades and a flint fabricator. From around 9000 years ago worked-flint tools show particular characteristics which suggest the development of regional styles (e.g. 'Horsham' points which are found only in south eastern England).

As sea level began to rise and the current English Channel formed around 8000 years ago, there is an increase in the quantity of flint tool finds from this period in Kent. These tools also show fewer similarities with flint tools made on the Continent, suggesting perhaps an increase in Mesolithic population and/or gathering together of communities as the land area reduced and less contact with communities on the Continent. There was far more woodland in Kent than today - more than half the county was tree-covered in 'pre-historic' post-'Ice Age' times compared with less than 15% today). There is evidence that the widespread clearance of woodlands that has shaped today's

landscape had already begun in the Mesolithic, before arrival of the first farmers and the first agricultural settlements in the Neolithic. Wood and wood products were possibly becoming more important in the life of early humans - for creating tools, weapons, temporary shelters and boats (e.g. a wooden paddle found at Swanscombe) and perhaps tree clearance was also used in an attempt to herd or entrap animals? It is hard to say whether these practices went on in the Elham Valley, as no wooden artefacts from the Mesolithic have been found here, but it is likely that the deforestation of Elham's wooded slopes began at this time.

Neolithic (3,500BC to 2,150BC)

The coming of agriculture to Britain around 6000 years ago (4000BC) in the Neolithic(New Stone Age) is seen as a major turning point in human development, but farming was slow to arrive in Britain, (having developed much earlier in the Middle East at least 10,000 years ago) and even then was not adopted quickly or exclusively. New practices of domestication of animals and growing of cereal crops (barley and wheat) continued alongside hunting animals and gathering wild plants for much of the Neolithic. Woodland clearance that had begun in the Mesolithic was continued by Neolithic people, perhaps to provide more ground to cultivate or graze animals. The coming of farming may have marked the beginnings of establishing 'traditional rights' to using particular parts of the landscape for regular cultivation. But there is little evidence of permanent Neolithic settlements in Elham or, indeed, in Kent.

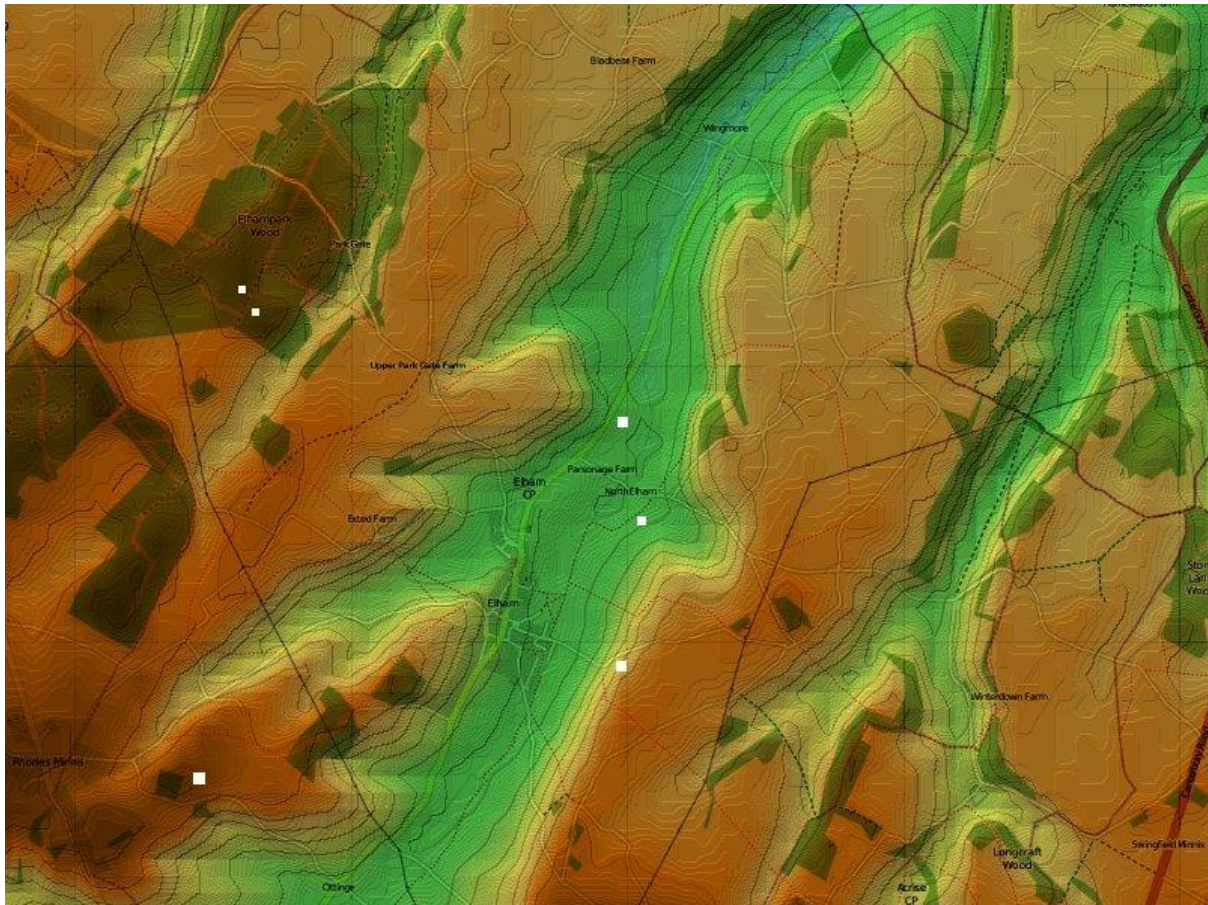
Neolithic visitors to Elham would have probably remained in small social groups in a comparatively equal status society, retaining a mobile pattern of temporary settlements, perhaps tied to certain places for seasonal grazing or harvesting of crops, but continuing with the old ways of hunter gatherer foraging. A substantial Neolithic flint working site containing 'hundreds of flint flakes, scrapers, axes, spearheads, borers and large rough celts, and some flint pot-boilers' was found between Elham and Acrise, possibly an established fabrication site which may have been visited more than once to make tools for hunting and other activities. A Neolithic polished flint axe was also found in the same area.

The first clear practice of 'honouring the ancestors' occurs in Neolithic times as impressive long barrows and causewayed enclosures. These monuments to the dead were used over many years and had complex ritualistic purposes, frequently occupying prime hillside sites that overlooked important route-ways and territories. Although the hills above Elham would seem an ideal site for such monuments, none have been found as yet and there is no clear evidence that permanent Neolithic communities ever lived in here.

Artefacts found as indicated by the white squares on the above map:



Polished Neolithic flint axe



Bronze Age (2,150 to 800BC)

Bronze Age settlers in Elham – land, power and status

The Bronze Age saw the spread of farming and land occupation in Kent. Growth of communities along the Thames valley, estuary and north and east Kent coast allowed blocks of land to be farmed that had direct access to trade with the Continent as well as inland and coastal Britain. The Bronze Age boat find in Dover makes it clear that the channel was no longer a barrier to movement at this time. Those who produced farming surpluses were able to trade for high status objects, particularly bronze metalwork used for ornaments and weapons. By the Late Bronze Age metal objects were being manufactured in Britain as well as being used here. The proliferation of prestigious weapons, ostentatious goods and practice of depositing valuable items in water courses used as route-ways suggest that a social elite ‘class’ had developed by the Late Bronze Age.

Agriculture transformed the landscape in the Bronze Age, creating a new formal layout of ditch and bank boundaries, field systems, stock enclosures, drove-ways and waterholes. A highly organised system of mixed farming with a strong emphasis on stock rearing developed. Several high status enclosures were built where farming was concentrated along the north and east Kent coast. Also on the River Stour (now Canterbury) and overlooking the Medway Valley. These higher status communities occupied prime spots in order to control trade goods to and from the Continent, and also to and from farmsteads further inland and along the southern and eastern coasts. Elham may

well have been one of these 'lower status' inland farmsteads. 'A ring-ditch of probable Bronze Age with possible internal features' was identified in North Elham at the foot of the Downs – a farmstead accessible to a ready water supply and, importantly, with good communications through the valley to Canterbury and the north east coast of Kent.

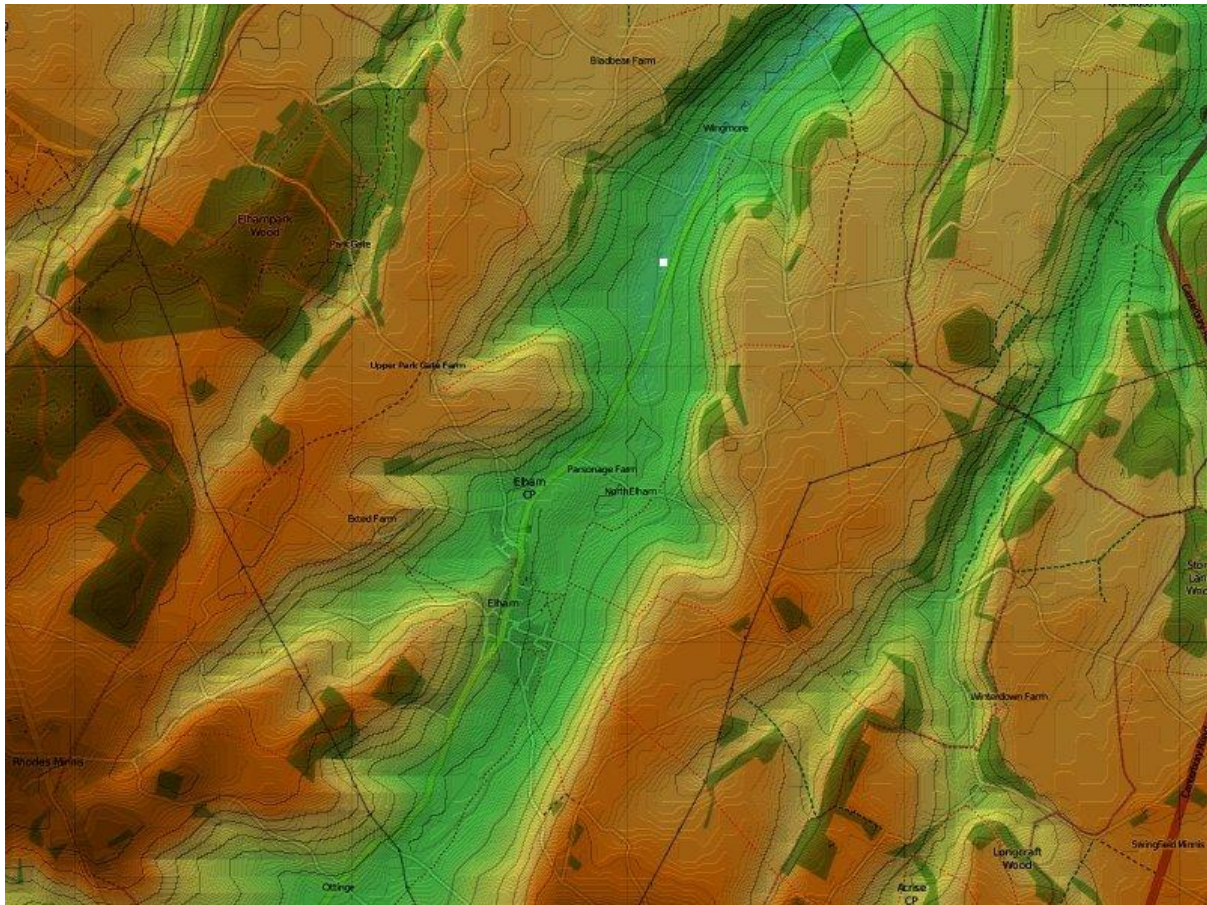
From around 5000 years ago (3000BC) in the Late Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age the round barrow, appeared reflecting a change in funerary practice to individual burials. Round barrows feature throughout the Bronze Age and often contain a crouched burial, sometimes with grave goods, including high status objects. Bronze Age round barrows were commonly, but not exclusively, placed on the tops of hills and many of the unexcavated round barrows on the hills above the Elham Valley are likely to contain Bronze Age burials.

Artefacts and evidence found as indicated by the white squares on the above map:

The white square shown at Ottinge is the location for this barrow



The other squares indicate the location sites of a now levelled ring ditch and barrow at North Elham and a barrow just above the chalk pit in Elham.



Iron Age (800BC - AD43)

Iron Age settlers in Elham

Towards the end of the Bronze Age, there is evidence of social breakdown between communities and collapse of cross Channel trade and communication, coinciding with wider European disruption, possibly associated with a cooling climate and wetter summers which affected agricultural production and trade. The highly regulated agricultural landscapes and many of the ring-works associated with the Bronze Age social elite went out of use from about 3000 years ago (1000 BC).

The population increased significantly again in the Iron Age (700BC to 43AD). Iron Age settlements (enclosed and unenclosed), ranging from single round houses of wattle, daub and thatch to large villages, were concentrated in the east Kent coastal area, at important river crossings and along river valleys – such as the Elham Valley, where communication was easiest. A network of well used paths and track-ways, like the North Downs Way, connected inland settlements. Iron Age people in Elham would have still been mainly occupied with agriculture, but other larger scale industries were also developing in Kent – iron stone ‘smelting’, local pottery making salt panning and quern-stone production of Lower Greensand. The white square on the above map shows the location of a smelting site at Worlds Wonder.

Trade with the Continent resumed and extended south to the Mediterranean with imports of wine from Italy. A wide variety of iron implements and weapons were introduced into Britain during this

A further change in funerary practice saw the move from crouched inhumations in the early Iron Age to laying out of the body in supine position by about 200 BC. From around 100BC, however, cremation became the common form of burial with ashes placed in a pot and grave goods sometimes accompanying the burial. Two Late Iron Age/Romano British cremations burials were found side by side on the hills above Elham.

[illegible]

“What did the Romans ever do forElham?”

There's little doubt that they were all around us, living in Folkestone, Lympne, Lyminge, Canterbury, Dover and Reculver and many centurions' feet must have marched close by, up Stone Street, from port to city. However, no footprint has yet been found in Elham and precious few artefacts that

can be attributed to their occupation. However, people living here must have had their lives profoundly changed by the arrival and settling of peoples whose origins were not only the Imperial City and the Mediterranean area, but who would have come from all over the Roman Empire which, at this time, extended as far as Syria.

Of the few items found near Elham are:

A second century silver coin of Faustina (141 AD+) and a large copper coin of Trajan (98-117AD) were discovered beneath the floor of Elham Church during restoration work in 1870s.

A second century silver coin of Hadrian (117 – 138 AD) was dug up in the Vicarage Garden during 19th century.

Two late Iron Age/Romano-British cremation burials found side by side whilst digging a post-hole north of Wick Farm in 1966.

A Roman Sestertius coin in a field off Vicarage Lane.

A Roman marble found between Dreal's Farm and Wick Farm.

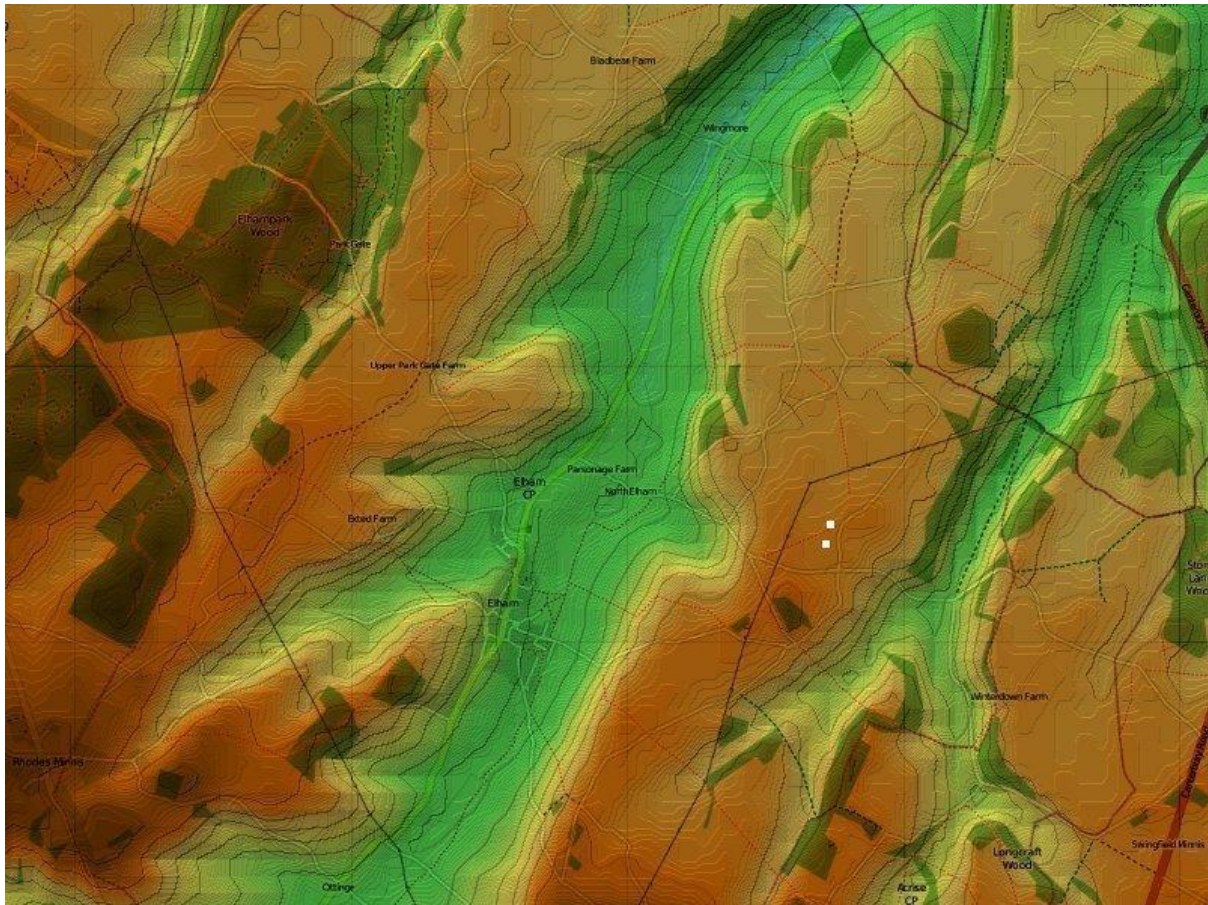


A Roman pot rim found in a field near Standard Hill Farmstead

A Roman baby's feeding bottle (pottery – spout broken) found at Hog Green – currently held in the Beaney Museum.



Until we can establish that the Romans were here, we must assume they did 'nothing much' for Elham!



Anglo Saxon (410AD - 1066AD)

This period, historically is known as the Dark Ages. Aspects of this are true for the development of Elham, but there are sufficient clues for patterns to be traced, though there is a real need for archaeology to confirm what the historical texts and place names suggest. So, while there are few artefacts that reveal a living past, there are other ways of interpreting what was happening in Elham in Anglo Saxon times.

First, the decline of the Roman Empire is well-documented. We know that Kent was raided and settled by Saxon and Jutish tribes that left their marks in various ways throughout Kent, but particularly at Lyminge which was a royal centre for a couple of centuries. It was in this time that Elham acquired its name, variously Aelham, Alham and Eleham. We know from the trackways that Elham gradually became a kind of centre subordinate to Lyminge as the royal centre. It is probable that many of the cross-valley tracks that eventually became lanes, originate from these times, and the fact that so many intersect in Elham, suggests that Elham became a farming hamlet of some stability, with herds, flocks and crops that needed to be protected by some kind of defensive pound in case of raids.

We know also that the fields and place names are strongly Germanic and by the time of the Conquest, Elham was substantial enough to have its own church; this was probably on the site of the present one which dates from the late C12th. William I granted the estate to his half-brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, who is recorded in Domesday as holding 'land for 24 ploughs, 41 villagers with 8 smallholders, 8 slaves, 2 mills at 6s; meadow, 28 acres; woodland, 100 pigs.'

This is in marked contrast to Lyminge at the time. There, although in the process of decline as the centre of Saxon power shifted to Wessex, were Royal halls, ecclesiastical buildings and a religious cult attached to the water of Ethelberga's well. All this is documented and supported by archaeology. There is, at present, nothing like this for Elham. To that extent, the Dark Age rings true for Elham's Anglo Saxon past. All we have are a few scattered finds, a network of paths and lanes, and some beautifully sounding field and place-names. However, it takes stable communities to shape lane patterns over the years and the persistence of place and field names betoken a transferred pattern of continuous existence. Community life was stirring in Elham even though its details have, at present, to be inferred. Eventually Elham grew as Lyminge diminished but it took the Norman Conquest to provide the impetus, when new brooms, dependent on personality, swept with greater vigour at Elham than they did in Lyminge which had got used to the process of decline!

Whatever the lack of buried evidence, it is clear that the transformation of society that took place during the 5th to 6th centuries in lowland Britain was seismic. The introduction of the foundations of the English language itself was one of the most profound events of the period, and most of the place names in and around Elham originated in the Anglo-Saxon period. It is also probable that a good many of the existing farmsteads, hamlets and other villages, as well as a proportion of boundaries and routeways within the Elham area were established during the 5th to 11th centuries. In that regard, the Anglo-Saxon period is crucial to any study of the overall development of the shaping of Elham.

Artefacts and evidence found as indicated by the white squares on the above map:



6th Century Brooch



10th Century Pin

Medieval (AD1066 - AD1500)

Despite the lack of written, or indeed archaeological, evidence, it is clear that Elham was already a substantial settlement at the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. Both Domesday Book and the Domesday Monachorum (the ecclesiastical survey undertaken by the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury) confirm this.

Lyminge had been the most important community in the valley through most of the Anglo-Saxon age, both in the pre-Christian era as a royal centre, and subsequently as a monastic site. After the remaining monks had fled to Canterbury during Viking raids, and the remains of St Ethelburga had been translated to St Gregory's in Canterbury by Archbishop Lanfranc, Lyminge's importance was drastically reduced.

The Manor of Lyminge, held by the Archbishop, remained pre-eminent in Lyminge, although many other manors had land within the parish. A similar situation existed at Elham, but it would appear

that the influence of Elham Manor was less predominant, and an entrepreneurial spirit gave Elham an advantage, which culminated with the granting of the Market Charter in 1251.

It was just thirteen years later that Walter of Merton visited Elham. He bought a very small estate, which consisted of the same forty acres which were sold to the Palmer family in 1957. More importantly, he acquired the advowson of the church. This gave the College, which he had founded at Morden in Surrey, but was about to move to Oxford, the right to present priests to the living and to collect the Tithes of the parish.



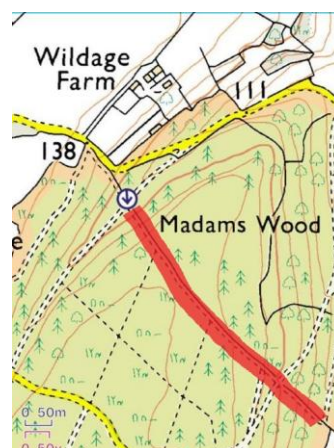
Parsonage Farm

This income made North Elham and its tithe barn an important hub of the parish. The stewards who the college appointed proved to be men of enterprise, and their Elham estate provided them with income out of all proportion to its small size. In the early fourteenth century, the steward travelled regularly to the market towns of the Cotswolds, particularly Winchcombe, where he bought horses to be brought back to Kent by Elham lads for sale in the prospering market.

Apart from the widowed Countess of Eu in the early thirteenth century, all the Lords of Elham Manor appear to have been non-resident. In the fourteenth century Juliana de Leybourne lived at another of her manors at Preston next Wingham, but her husband, William de Clinton, established a deer park in Elham in the 1340s.



The raise mount showing the Deer Park boundary



The boundary marked in red

At her death in 1367, Juliana left her extensive estates to religious causes, and Elham Manor became part of the endowment of St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster. It may well be that the stewards of Elham Manor were as entrepreneurial as Merton's at North Elham, but the records are lacking. At the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1540s, Elham Manor came back into lay hands, but none of the owners lived here.

Exactly why or when Elham's market started to go into decline has to be the subject of much more research, but the parish registers show a drop in population in the seventeenth century. The market struggled on, but appears to have ceased trading by the 1760s

Conclusions

We have arrived at a point in our considerations where Elham is a stable community and its future history is accessibly well-documented. There are shifts ahead as social systems buckle and change, but Elham as a community has fixed itself in its own space.

The first point in its stability was when hunter gatherers gave way to homesteaders and farming began. The basic requirements were shelter from prevailing winds, access to water for animals and people, and an amenable soil capable of sustaining continuous cycles of crops. So, in the lee of a hill, close to the Nailbourne, and at a flood-free point in a fertile valley bottom, Elham began.

Later, paths and routes opened up connections and the Nailbourne valley provided a link between communities. Trades developed, invasions brought changes in social organisations, and patterns of patronage led to further shaping of the village but essentially by the end of the late Middle Ages, and the granting of its Market Charter, Elham's existence was confirmed.

There are still exciting chapters of its history to be examined, and much of what we have presented may well be modified by the advice of those who visit the EHS web-site (ehs.elham.co.uk). There is also some fascinating conjecture as to how the village will develop in the future. We hope that it will keep its distinctive character and be neither atrophied into barren gentility nor subsumed, like so many London villages, into some monotonous megalopolis. But that is for the future to decide!



Derek Boughton in Merton College Archives (2013)

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