

Warren Street

by Henny Shotter



To the north of Lenham village lies the hamlet of Warren Street. At the corner where Rayners Hill and Warren Street meet is one of the two houses in Lenham which bears the name of 'The Warren'. The other house with that name is on Headcorn Road on the left side before you enter Sandway.

The name of 'The Warren' derives from the Anglo-Norman French 'warrene', the medieval Latin 'warrenna' (used in the Magna Carta) or in middle English 'wareine'. It describes a piece of land for breeding game. Places called 'The Warren' were places in which pheasants, partridges, conies (rabbits) and hares were reared for the table. (more information on 'Warrens' can be found here: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/thetford-warren-lodge/>)



Robert Filmer ca.1630

However the animals which were mostly kept were rabbits, introduced by the Normans into Britain in the 11th and 12th century.

Nobody at the time had even an idea that rabbits would 'breed like rabbits' and get everywhere. They were kept in fenced-in areas. There were many predators (wolves and raptors) which hunted them....and then there were the poachers. Poached rabbits provided many meals on a poor family's table. The fur was supposedly worth as much as a workman's daily earnings.

The people who looked after the animals in the Warren were called the Warreners. They were employed by the landowner.

Currently the earliest reference to 'The Warren' in Warren Street is found in old map from 1730 which shows the 'Warren' in Warren Street' in the ownership of Baronet Filmer of Sutton Valence.

The Filmer family (under Robert Filmer) , which later acquired the Filmer baronetcy, moved from Otterden to East Sutton in the reign of Elizabeth I. Robert Filmer left his land in Otterden and Wychling to his two brothers, one a clergy man and one a grocer in his will. So, it is astonishing to still find ‘The Warren’ in Warren Street in the census of 1839 as being owned by Sir Edmund Filmer 6th Baronet (1727–1834). The house was then occupied by a Mary Gilbert.



Map of 1730 produced for Sir Edward Filmer by Alexander Bottle (Kent CC Archives)

The house was eventually acquired by the Health Authority and was let to Mr. Chamberlain and his family. Mr. Chamberlain was the senior consultant of Lenham Chest Hospital and very popular in the village. After the final closure of the hospital the house was eventually sold to a private owner.

The house on Headcorn Road which bears

the name ‘The Warren’ possibly relates to a Warren in the ownership of Chilstone Park. We hopefully will learn about the background of this house in the future.

There is of course the famous London Tube Station and a woodland in Ashford which share at least part of the name: they all have some history in common.