



Chapter 1

A hand drawn and coloured map, depicting the parish and manor of Langham in 1624¹, is just one item to be found within the numerous boxes of estate papers deposited in the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Record Office by the Rt Hon the Earl of Gainsborough from 1987-91.

The map was one of the first items reviewed by the Langham History Group and, even at first glance, was obviously a document which could help us to determine, not only who lived in the village in 1624, but also where they lived, where they farmed, and their land holdings. We have managed to extract a great deal of information from the clues left for us by our very skilled seventeenth century cartographer and surveyor, although there are still things we are yet to fully understand.

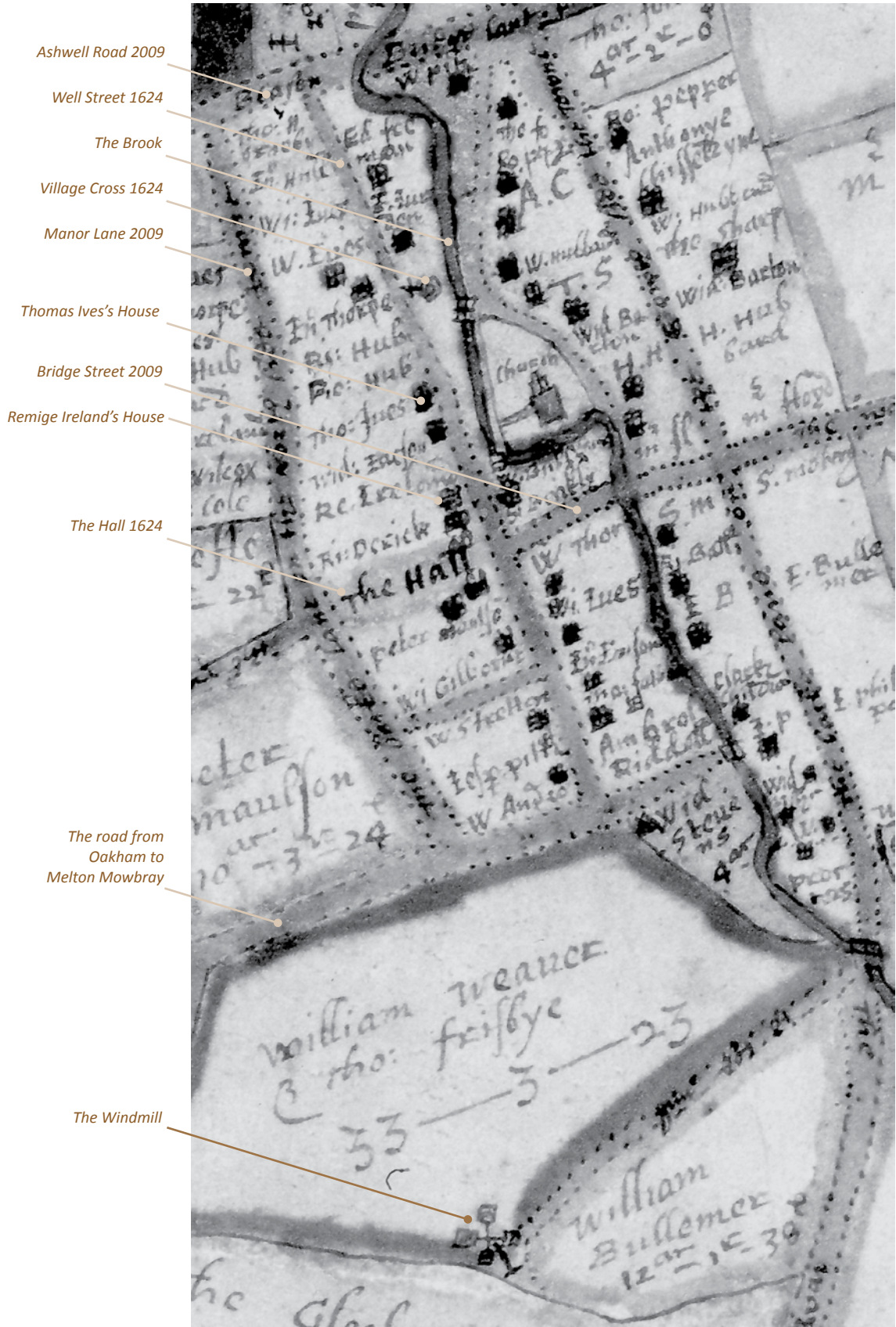
Viewing the map much magnified, it is possible to see some of our surveyor's setting out lines which show his care, and the accuracy for which he strove. Comparing the 1624 map with a current digital map of the parish, our surveyor's accuracy, nearly four hundred years ago, using few aids, is nothing short of remarkable. The map's orientation is east-west, rather than the modern north-south, and it has a scale of 48 perch [792 feet] to the inch or roughly 6½ inches to the mile.

The map accurately identifies the surrounding parish boundaries of Barleythorpe, Ashwell, Whissondyne [Whissendine] and Couldeouton [Cold Overton] and displays a symbol ☼ where each boundary intersects Langham parish [see over the W in Whisson in the map detail above]. This may indicate that, in the seventeenth century, boundary junctions had clear physical markings for all to see. Bridges, windmills and other features are marked clearly but the map does not identify woodland or individual trees in field boundaries, something that a larger and later map of 1760² shows in some detail, proving how valuable a resource timber was. In a 16 year lease between Edward, Lord Noel and William Edgson, the elder, of Langham, dated 20th April 1610, William, as part of the agreement, has to plant 6 sets of ash or elm and 10 sets of willow. A lease between George Coles and Sir Andrew Noel, dated 1st May 1606, requires George to provide two days of carting wood, and also attendance on Sir Andrew with good sword and dagger in the King's Service.

At the top of the 1624 map is written *A trew plot of the manour of Langham in the countye of Rutland pcell [parcel] of the possession of the Right Honourable noble Edward Lord Noel. Barron of Ridlington made the 24th October 1624.* Edward, Lord Noel's name displayed so prominently may provide a clue as to why such an accurate, detailed and, no doubt, expensive map was commissioned. It was twenty-four years since the Noel family's acquisition of Langham. Other chapters in this book provide information on how land usage was changing, allowing landowners to increase their financial returns. It may be that this map was confirmation as to how changes were progressing.



Setting-out lines clearly shown on the 1624 Map
 ROLLR DE3214/503 11/78 - Detail
 Reproduced by kind permission of Lady Campden



1624 Map - Detail ROLLR DE3214/503 11/78 ~ Reproduced by kind permission of Lady Campden

Anthony Wright, in his chapter on the roads and tracks, states that the map identifies each roadway and whence it leads. Roads at this time were often gated and all gate locations are shown on the map. There were two gates on the road to Melton Mowbray, just one field apart.

Comparing each road in 1624 with those of today, most, as you would expect, follow a very similar route. Well Street, however, appears to be further to the north than today and, in the section close to the parish church, is situated on the north side of the brook, the opposite of today.

Just to the south of Well Street, and east of the churchyard, there is a cross symbol on the map, which we thought might have been the location of a medieval hermitage or small chapel dedicated to St. Helyn. As our researches progressed, however, we became inclined to believe that this was the original location of an eleventh century village cross, the remaining parts of which, were recently discovered in the churchyard. This cross is not recorded in any documents so far researched. The illustration right shows (i) the cross symbol [top left] with two concentric circles; (ii) the brook to its right [south]; (iii) a bridge from Well Street to Church Street; (iv) a bridge from Well Street to the bottom left corner of the churchyard and the 2009 location of Well Street.



*Detail of 1624 Map
ROLLR DE3214/503 11/78*



The stone foundation of the mediaeval manor in Orchard Road

Not only does the map provide us with significant clues as to how much of the village's 2,900 acres was common land, land already enclosed, the Lord's own enclosed land and land still being strip farmed. It also provides a detailed layout of the housing and, with one notable exception, tells us who lived where. The location of the Hall [presumably a mediaeval hall] is shown, but not the name of its occupant.

When we first saw the position of the Hall, we questioned the ability and accuracy of our map maker. We should have known better. He was, after all, there at the time! The Hall is sited on land now occupied by the houses and gardens of Orchard Road, a 1960s development. Local people who remember the land prior to its development describe a rather bumpy field of grass and orchard.

Our suspicion is that the bumps were the covered remains of our medieval Hall, demolished sometime after 1624 and before the drawing of the 1760 estate map which refers to *The former site of...* Further research has uncovered what may be part of this Hall's foundation, on the eastern edge of Orchard Road gardens. Had development taken place more recently, there would probably have been an archaeological survey before the contractor was allowed to destroy what could have been important evidence of Langham's past.

The present Manor, erected in 1665, is located 300m to the east of Orchard Road and was probably a replacement for the medieval Hall. It is certainly a well designed and constructed stone building with some fine detailing, the stonework between the first floor bay windows and the second floor central pair of dormer windows being particularly elegant. The roof of Collyweston stone is capped with a number of stone acorns on the ridge line. [Were the original builders attempting to ward off lightning?] This feature has also been adopted on other buildings within the village.



*Langham - The Manor
Detail of the stonework between the 1st floor
bay and 2nd floor dormer windows*



Langham - The Manor circa 1930, the acorns on the ridge line can be clearly seen

The mid to latter part of the seventeenth century looks to have been a period when new building and major renovation work was taking place in the village. Langham Old Hall, also built in the 1660s, was a relatively modest dwelling, more a large farm house. Its subsequent development transformed it into a much grander property.

Until quite recently we were led to believe that Langham had no buildings other than the church, the Manor and the Old Hall which predated the eighteenth century. Our research has indicated that more seventeenth century houses remain, some of which possibly contain fragments, or more substantial parts, of property from much earlier dates. Yew Tree Farm, the Grange and Briggins Cottage are a few examples of property that contain elements of 17th century construction.

The map's detailed lay-out of the village core helps to identify property, associated land and householders. We continue to speculate whether the houses shown on the map make up the total village accommodation, or if there was more in the form of poor cottages or hovels. The map shows 42 dwellings, inhabited in the main, by those families holding agricultural land in the parish.

The Licence of Alienation³ granted by Elizabeth I to Gregory Cromwell in 1600, transferring the Manor of Langham to Sir Andrew Noel, mentions 50 messuages [a plot of land with dwelling house and outbuildings], 50 cottages, 40 tofts [an enclosure for a homestead], 2 mills, 2 dovecotes, 100 gardens, 100 orchards, 1,400 acres of land, 500 acres of meadow, 1,300 acres of pasture, two acres of furze and heath and 20 acres of woodland. Drawn up just twenty years earlier than the map, there are a number of contradictions between the two documents. The parish of Langham is approximately 2,900 acres, and the 1624 map confirms that but the 1600 land transfer gives a figure of 3,420 acres. This discrepancy increases if we add additional sales of land that took place in small parcels over the next 23 years. 500 acres of land is not something easily mislaid, so either the documentation is incorrect, or it includes land outside the parish of Langham.

This raises doubt as to the number of dwellings; are the figures correct, or are we looking at property outside the parish? Discounting the 40 tofts, which are most likely to be plots of land without a dwelling, then Langham in 1600 looks to have at least 100 dwellings. Certainly 100 dwellings is a more likely figure than the 42 shown on the 1624 map as, forty years later, the 1665 Hearth Tax return for Langham records 116 dwellings, and 11 years further on the Compton Census of 1676 records that Langham has 500 conformists and 4 nonconformists; a total of 504 persons. The Compton Census may be flawed, with the recorder possibly wishing to inflate the numbers attending church, but a population of roughly 500 is unlikely to be housed by just 42 houses.

It is possible that the 1624 map shows only the superior housing and, if this is the case, we might want to consider the possibility that these houses accommodated larger numbers of people than the widely used 17th century estimation figure of 4.25 persons per household. If, however, we accept a figure of 100 houses and a population of roughly 500, then this would create an average per household very close to 4.25.

A statute, introduced by Elizabeth I in 1588-89, stated that all new housing must have at least four acres of land and that no house should accommodate more than one family [with various exclusions and limitations]. The 1624 map does not appear to show dwellings with four acres linked closely to them and we have no way of telling if the houses were in multiple occupancy, though a few Langham wills show cases where there were other than immediate family living in the house, usually skilled or apprentice employees.

Leases and other documents show people holding property, farming or working in the parish, but living elsewhere. William Wilcox and Mr Gibson leased land but lived in Ashwell. Conversely, there were others who lived in the village and worked in neighbouring parishes. It may be reasonable to assume that these two groups roughly balance each other out.

What do we know of these 42 houses shown on the 1624 map? The medieval Hall is the only property for which no occupier is named, but the Noels' Steward or Bailiff was the most likely occupant. As for the rest, we know where houses were, and who lived in them but not how they were constructed or their size and until three years ago that is where the story might have ended.

We were very fortunate to be allowed access to a house in Well Street which, in 2006, was undergoing major restoration work. It was believed to be an early 18th century property but on closer examination we found that things were very different. The owners of the property were very willing for us to gather information, and Nick Hill of English Heritage, who has been compiling details of old properties in Rutland for a number of years, was keen to take on the role of detective and building specialist.

The Heritage Lottery Fund, at very short notice, allowed the use of some of our grant funding to employ the services of Robert Howard, a specialist in dendrochronology, to help with dating structural timber in the house. What a surprise we, and the owners, received when the results came in.

This summary from Nick Hill's report explains what was found:

This house originally had a full timber-frame with close studding, a very rare example in the heart of this stone building area. Parts of two main timber-framed internal walls and two external posts survive, together with the first floor structures of two rooms. No other examples of such a timber-framed building, later encased in stone, are known to the author in the surrounding stone-belt area of Rutland, Leicestershire or Northamptonshire.

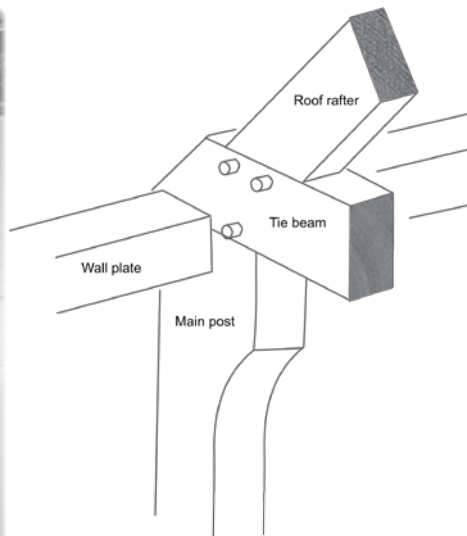
The original house, tree-ring dated to 1468, had a main front range which contained in the centre a single[?] bay open hall. The east bay, with a cross passage, probably contained service rooms on the ground floor and a chamber above. At the west end there was a two bay cross wing with parlour on the ground floor and solar above. This would be an impressive, large and early house for the area, indicating that it was probably built as an important house by a family of considerable local status.

The open hall had a first floor inserted in 1540. The timber-framed house was largely rebuilt in stone in 1681, the stone building following the original building very closely in layout. By this stage, the building had declined in status, and was rebuilt as a good-sized but ordinary farmhouse. – NH.

So here in the village core we have a dwelling that started life in the 15th century. It was constructed with a timber frame of locally grown green oak, with the external framework probably in-filled with oak lath and plaster, and the internal framing with reed and plaster. The main hall was retrofitted with a first floor in 1540, and the exterior walls were clad in stone during the last quarter of the 17th century. This continuous development over 525 years highlights how a building, and its use, can develop over time. Although the timber frame is no longer providing structural support, much of it remains in place. This property was re-roofed in 1959, with little regard for the preservation of the existing structure. The History Group has been delighted with the present owners' more sympathetic approach to restoration work, which should preserve this old dwelling for future generations to enjoy. We still do not know who commissioned the original building, but in 1624 it looks to have been occupied by Remige Ireland.



Well Street circa 1930s - 15th century house in the foreground - Photo - LVHG Archive



The photograph, far left, shows the top of a main timber support post and tie beam. It was when the author saw this construction in the Well Street house, that he was convinced that the property was built considerably earlier than 18th century. The drawing, next left, shows how the joint would have looked during the initial construction phase in 1486.

Photograph and drawing by Mike Frisby.

There are several other houses in the village that, given time and permission to investigate more fully, may prove to have been constructed in the seventeenth century, or even earlier. This will require considerable detective work, and free access when major renovations are taking place. Care needs to be taken, however, as it can be quite difficult to separate more recent extensions and alterations from earlier work, as we can be misled by the re-use of old material. The photograph on the opposite page, shows part of the exterior wall of the north chancel of Langham Church, and illustrates how material from an earlier date is incorporated into repair, or extension work. In this case, pieces of window mullions, removed during earlier rebuild, have been used to repair the wall, many centuries ago.

There is no doubt that both the 1624 map, when and if we can fully understand all its symbols and colour codes, and our as yet unexplored village properties will have more to add to our story.



Well Street 15th century house - A main roof truss with timber and reed partitioning - Photo Mike Frisby



Example of repair work using recycled stone window mullions - Langham Church north chancel exterior wall - Photo Mike Frisby

References:

¹ ROLLR DE3214/11/78 ~ ² ROLLR DE3214/M59 ~ ³ ROLLR DE3214/182/2