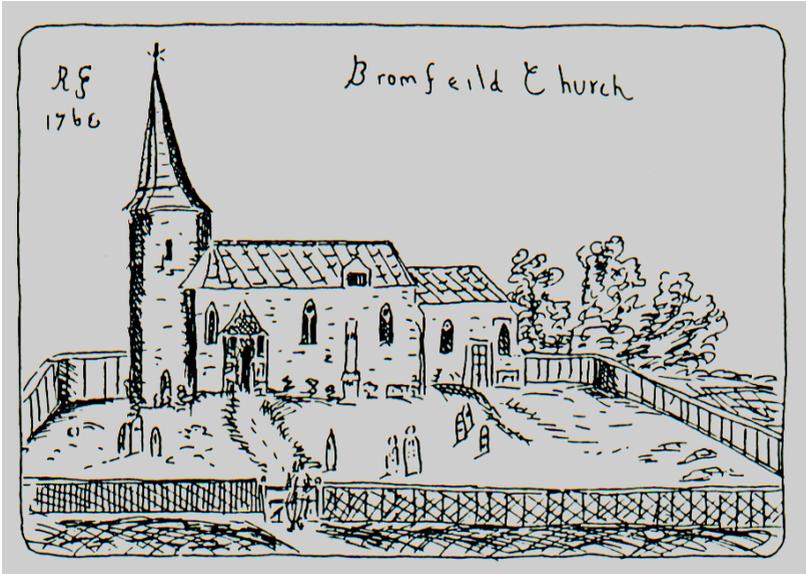


BROOMFIELD



THE CHURCHYARD FENCE LISTS.

THE PEOPLE AND THE BUILDINGS.

VOLUME ONE

VOLUME ONE

The Churchyard Fence Lists.

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Introduction

By the middle of the 14th century the manorial system in England was in serious decline. The plague which struck the Country in 1348-49, the Black Death, killed off around one-third of the population and made labour a valuable commodity, thus no doubt helping the decline on its way. A class of householders was arising, yeoman farmers renting their land from the lords of the manor. Labour was in demand and peasants could sell their service, that is receive a wage. The infamous Poll Tax of 1381 saw the peasants rise in rebellion, venting their anger on the manorial records, the proof of their servitude, and although the revolt was ruthlessly suppressed attempts to reimpose the rigours of the old manorial system were doomed. Things would never be the same again.

The churchyard of the church of St Mary and St Leonard, Broomfield, has probably been enclosed with some sort of fence since those far off manorial times, certainly from long before 1569. It probably served the dual purpose of demarcating the boundary and at the same time keeping stray animals out of the churchyard. If it was to serve the latter purpose then it had to be kept in good repair. This may once have been a manorial task, possibly a condition of holding land, and it is likely that with the decline of the manor it became the custom for the responsibility to be shared out amongst those same households or landholdings in the parish. The church was a powerful figure and at that time still a prominent landowner. The community would have felt an obligation towards the church if only to ensure that their souls went to Heaven and not to Hell.

At first the sharing out was likely to have been a continuation of the old manorial duties. Later it may have been by agreement amongst those concerned, perhaps after a certain amount of argument as to their relative lengths of fence. Did the length depend on the size of the house or landholding? Once it was agreed, and everyone knew his bit of fence, all was well. It was probably a simple fence of wooden pales and so repairs wouldn't have been difficult or costly. The vicar and churchwardens no doubt kept an eye on it. And so matters remained, maybe for a couple of hundred years or so, until 1569. In that year a list was drawn up showing the properties responsible for the maintenance of the churchyard fence. It set down in writing what had been ancient custom and it was ratified in the following year.

This very unusual agreement gives an insight into the people and the buildings of Broomfield as they were more than 400 years ago and subsequent lists enable us to follow something of the story of those houses and the people who owned and lived in them.

Acknowledgements.

This book could not have been written without considerable help from many sources. First and foremost I am indebted to the staff of the Essex Record Office, the prime source for much of the contents, and for permission to reproduce illustrations drawn from its records. A full list of sources consulted might try the reader's patience so I commend all who are interested to the Broomfield references in the ERO's excellent SEAX computer system. I also acknowledge the help I have received from the staff of the Chelmsford Library and the Public Records Office at Kew. The illustration on p155 is reproduced with the permission of the Public Record Office. Much of the research has relied on information from the Broomfield parish records and Rev. Peter Ball has kindly given me access to Canon Tancock's invaluable transcript of the church registers. Ken Newman put me right on the pudding stone in the wall of Broomfield church (and pointed out some others!). And I am especially grateful to Ann Haward for kindly turning Latin secretary hand into understandable English.

Many individuals have given generously of their time to give me information, point me in the right direction, check the relevant parts of this work, and correct my mistakes. In particular I thank Jean Blackie, Eileen Bower, and Alan Bayford (Essex Historic Buildings group) for help with The Pulling House; Mr & Mrs Gordon Eley, Mr & Mrs Fox and Mrs Edwards for The Well House; Mrs Rosamund Bazzett for Poddinge (later Wood House); Mike Holmes, John Latham and Mrs Brisbane for Brooklands; Rosemary and Leslie Appleton, Mrs Eva Barrett, Wendy Stubbings and Liz Sutton for Lewgers

alias Gutters and Mole Hatch, and Michael Williams for Priors.

This volume, the first part of a larger work, has been many years in the gestation. Sadly, some of those to whom I am indebted, Bob Blackie, Derek Bower, Geoff Garner, to name but a few, have died. Many other kind Broomfield folk have given me valuable information, sometimes in the course of casual conversation, and more will be acknowledged in future volumes. To all of you, named, and unnamed, a very big thank you.

Needless to say, all remaining errors are mine, and I will endeavour to correct in the next volume any that are pointed out to me

