**DANEHILL PARISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**Notes made during a conversation with Hylda Rawlings in November 2020**

**Thoughts on the early history of Church Farm, Fletching.**

Church Farm, Fletching, stands almost in the churchyard itself and very close to the church. A peculiar situation for a farm house.

The 18th century frontage hides a much earlier interior. Although the Fletching guide records that *the interior was in such a dilapidated state that it was gutted and completely rebuilt in 1951* when Hylda visited Mrs Randall, who was then lying ill in bed, she noticed beams of an unusually high quality and the foot of a crown post in the upper room. On a later visit, Hylda, accompanied by Margaret Holt, former president of the society and an expert on timber-framed houses, together with other members of the Historical Society’s housing group were able to climb into the loft and found a wealth of oak timbers.

After a further society visit in 2019, David and Barbra Martin, who have published many books on the vernacular architecture of the Sussex Weald, were asked to investigate. Their subsequent report describes a mid-fifteen century house of exceedingly high quality, perhaps of the quality of a house like Great Dixter.

Hylda has been pondering the possible builders of the house and its subsequent fate. There has been a long line of rectors in Fletching, the earliest known being William de Perpund who died in 1249 and many other Anglo-Norman names appear as witnesses in local deeds. A member of the society had remarked that some of the timbers appeared to have been influenced by French building techniques. Having read Rupert Taylor’s *East Sussex Villages Book,* Hylda wondered whether the monks of a local priory, perhaps Wilmington, could have built a house in Fletching church yard at the time when the present structure of the church was mainly completed around 1230? In 1398 the rectory was acquired by the Prior of Michelham although eighty years were to pass before they were able to appoint a vicar. Might that priory be responsible?

After the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the sixteenth century the property of the monks passed into lay hands. Perhaps it was then that part of the building was pulled down and the remainder adapted for use as a farmhouse and taken over by a local farmer, perhaps a member of the ubiquitous Awcock family?

*Note: Alien priories were religious establishments in England, such as a monastery or convent, which were under the control of another religious house outside England. Usually the mother-house was in France. Coredon Dictionary of Medieval Terms.*

*As told to Anne Drewery by Hylda Rawlings. Research is still on-going.*