

ORIGINS OF PENN STREET

The Penna - Old English *penn*, means 'enclosure or pen'. The Anglo-Saxon citizens of London used Wycombe Heath, of which Penn Wood was a part, as a hunting chase. It seems that Penn (& Common) Wood was the enclosure or pen used to safeguard their deer in order to hunt them both there and on the wider heath. Because it was unique, it was called 'The Penn' and gave its name to the later parish. Norman scribes translated the name as La Pennec or La Penna, because Saxons pronounced the second 'n' as a separate syllable. Thus a Saxon resident would have said he came from The Pen-na. This form lasted for more than three hundred years after the Norman Conquest in 1066.

straet. The earliest known reference to the name Penn Street is in the parish register for 1592 and the oldest house is about a century earlier, but the name is much older than that. Old English *straet* was the name the Saxons gave to a road used by their Roman predecessors. There was a Roman villa and iron smelting and smithing industry near Shardeloes, about 1 1/2 miles north of Penn Street and the route connecting them with a main Roman road just south of Beaconsfield is marked to this day by the surviving road names of Penn Street and Clay Street and the forgotten name of Old Street (part of the B474 at Knotty Green).

Thus Penn Street was once understood to mean the former Roman road by the enclosed part of the Heath.

The church was built in 1849 by Earl Howe, apparently at the suggestion of Queen Adelaide, together with a school and a vicarage, all designed by Benjamin Ferrey.

Population. A century ago, there were 35 households, almost all in small cottages and nearly half working directly for Earl Howe. They included a postmaster, policeman, baker and coalmerchant.

1923/38 O.S. MAP SHOWING LINE OF PONDS AND COMMON



Colour Code:

Green overall - shows registered common

Green perimeter - land owned by Penn Parish Council

Brown - former common, now private land

There is a separate leaflet and information board for each of the three ponds, which are linked by a mile-long belt of nearly continuous common land. They are the product of a combined Penn Parish Council and Penn Estate project largely funded by a Local Heritage Initiative grant.

Useful references:

'Wycombe Heath and its 'charter', by John Chenevix Trench and Miles Green, *Records of Bucks*, Vol. 36 (1994), pp.144-59, in public libraries.
The History of Penn Wood, Miles Green (1995)
Penn and Tylers Green in old photographs, Penn & Chepping Wycombe Parish Councils (2000)

Miles Green, March 2004
Penn Parish Council

Typeset by Bill Bundy - Penn Support Services



GATESTAKES

POND & COMMON



The pond in early April 2004, soon after it was cleared.

Gatstakes Pond is on common land owned by the Penn Estate. It was completely hidden by tall trees and shrubs and has recently been revealed and cleared out. Behind it, in the woodland, is a second pond and a very large clay pit, the result of a century or more of the activity of a large works on the other side of the road which was making bricks, tiles and pottery for at least a century from the 1770s.



*Looking towards Gatstakes Pond from Penn Street common, with the Hit or Miss on the far left. c.1914
(Postcard from Colin Seabright)*

ANCIENT CHARTER

Manor House. The present hamlet probably first grew up on the heath outside the gates to service the new manor house, now Penn House, after the de la Penne family moved from their first cramped manor house at Penbury, near Penn Church, to a site which had room for an enclosed warren for breeding game, a dovecote, a rookery and a windmill, all important manorial benefits. This must have been at some time after a Statute of 1285 first allowed a lord to enclose part of a shared common, provided he left enough pasture for the commoners.

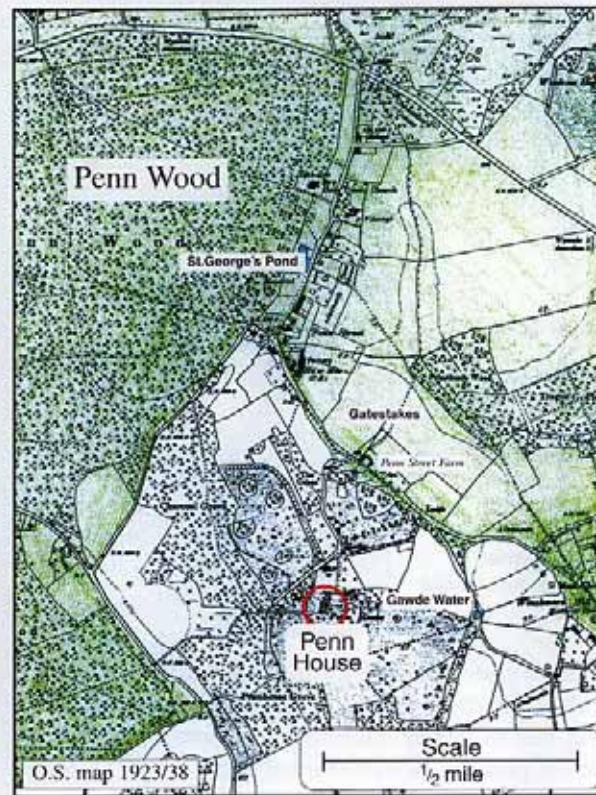
An 'ancient' charter was produced as evidence for an inquiry, in 1665, into rights of common on the 4,000 acre Wycombe Heath, which covered parts of seven parishes, including the northern quarter of Penn. The charter was a forgery, but it included the traditional bounds of the heath that are judged to be authentic. The bounds define the heath after a large rectangular bite (see map) had been taken out of it, presumably to allow room for the de la Penne's new manor house, shortly after 1400.

Field names around Penn House, Ashmoor, Shinglemoor, Culvermoor and Horsemoor, confirm that it stands on former heathland. The names Great and Little Readings tell us that trees have been cleared around it. As late as 1829, Lady Howe paid a quit rent to the manor court for building part of Penn House on the manorial waste of Segraves Manor

Gatestakes. The part of the ancient charter's bounds relating to Penn Street goes, *'and so the way leadeth to woods heeves lyeing and beinge towards the Gatestakes of Pennbury the Manor of Sir Roger Atte Penn Knight'*. The 'Gatestakes of Pennbury' are the gates to Penn House opposite Penn Street Farm. There is another record of a 'Roger atte Penne' in 1384.

Wood Eves. 17th C deeds show that 'Woods heeves', i.e., the eaves or edge of the wood, was an earlier name for part of Penn Street, presumably the part between Penn House gates and Penn Wood.

WYCOMBE HEATH, c.1285



Green shading shows part of the southern boundary of the 4,000 acre Wycombe Heath, as defined by the 'ancient charter' in c.1400. Note that what is now Penn Street village was then part of the common heath.

A poll tax of 1377 records that after the ravages of the Black Death there were only 81 people over 14 years old in Penn parish. Thus, there would have been little objection to the loss of part of the common heath to accommodate the new manor house.

The present Earl Howe is a descendant of the de la Pennes and the Penn Estate still owns approximately 1,100 acres of farm land, 450 acres of woodland with 33 houses and cottages.

ENTRANCE TO PENN HOUSE



*At the entrance to Penn House, c.1914
(Postcard from Colin Seabright)*

Another Statute of 1285 required that a 200 foot wide (i.e. a bowshot) strip of land was kept clear of trees between a highway and woodland, in order to remove any cover for highwaymen, who were then a serious problem. Thus, the Penn Street gates to Penn House, today, are 200 feet from the road and the common is roughly 200 feet wide with the same open width up to the wood boundary running all the way down, past the school, to the main Wycombe-Amersham road.

Penn Street Farm was on the edge of the main common until it moved here after the 1855 inclosure to join the large works which made bricks, tiles and pottery for at least a century from the 1770s. The field next to the farm was called Kiln Slip on the 1838 Tithe Map.

In 1840, William Hearne started a small chair factory in a shed behind the Hit or Miss, which grew into Dancer and Hearne, the largest chair factory in Europe employing over 300 people until closure in 1966. They had their own cricket team and ground opposite the pub, which still continues.