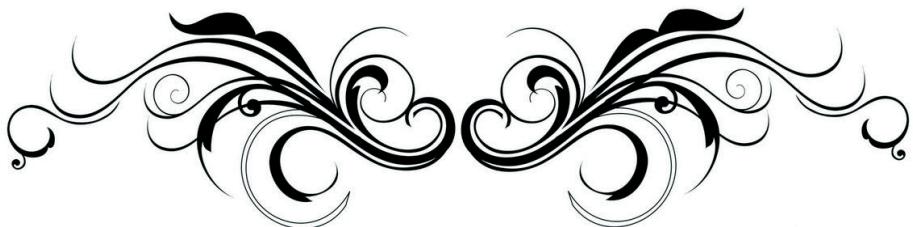


In and around Tilehurst



# A Short History of Tilehurst

**By Mike Keep**

This is the text of a talk given by Mike Keep  
in June 2018.

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# TILEHURST

Tilehurst, as we know it today, lies on top of a hill, and although the soil on top of the hill is good rich loam, the subsoil across much of Tilehurst is clay, with gravel and chalk quite common as well.

We will see the relevance of this later.

Evidence of people living in Tilehurst has been shown as circa 100-500,000 years ago, and there are signs of land being worked in the early Bronze Age, c.1200 BC.

Tilehurst is first named in 1291 AD, when it was listed as a hamlet of Reading in Pope Nicholas III's taxation settlement under the ownership of Reading Abbey, where it stayed until the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

However, the name is almost certainly older, coming from the two Anglo Saxon words:-

Tygel – tile  
&              hurst – a wooded hill

Alternative spellings down the centuries have included:-

Tygelhurst	13 <sup>th</sup> century
Tyghelhurst	14 <sup>th</sup> century
Tylehurst	16 <sup>th</sup> century

The present spelling became commonplace in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Tilehurst became an extensive parish, including the tything of Theale, as well as the manors of Tilehurst, Kentwood, Pincent and Beansheaf.

A tything was an historic legal, administrative or territorial unit, originally ten hides (and hence one tenth of a hundred). Tythings (tithings) later came to be seen as subdivisions of a manor or civil parish.

In 1545, Henry VIII granted the manor of Tilehurst to Francis Englefield, who held it until his attainder, and forfeiture, of the manor in 1586.

Attainder was the forfeiture of land and civil rights suffered as a consequence of a sentence of death for treason or felony.

Elizabeth I gave the manor to Henry Foster of Aldermaston and George Fitton.

These two held the manor until the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Elizabeth I sold it to Henry Best and Francis Jackson.

Over five years, the manor passed from Best and Jackson, to the son of Thomas Crompton, then on to a Dutch merchant and money lender from Utrecht. His tomb may be seen in St. Michaels' Church.

Sir Peter built a manor house on the estate – Calcot House.

Theale became a separate ecclesiastical parish in 1832, and a separate civil parish in 1894.

In 1843 the commissioners drawing up tithe records for the Church of England reported that they had found in the Parish of Tilehurst:-

3200 acres of arable fields  
1075 acres of meadow or pasture  
541 acres of wood or plantation  
7 acres used as homes and gardens

In 1801, the population of Tilehurst was 1353  
in 1821 1360  
in 1831 1878  
in 1881 4,400 (913 families, 783 houses)  
Census 2011 14,064

As well as Theale, Tilehurst parish originally extended down to Brock Barracks, which in 1889, became the separate parish of St Georges.

In 1911, Tilehurst became part of Reading, although a substantial part of it is now West Berkshire.

The area developed its own schools, charities, and, in the 1890s a water company.

The National School, in School Road, opened in 1819, closing in 1912, by which time both Park Lane and Norcot Schools had opened.

Between c1767 and c1843, Tilehurst has its own workhouse, and in 1817, the Poor's Land Charity was set up to provide donations based on income from land – for example, the area of allotments next to Victoria Recreation Ground.

In 1889, the “Dissenters Meeting House”, built in 1835, was replaced by what is now the United Reformed Church, in Armour Road.

In 1893, the Methodist Church in School Road opened.

Tilehurst Station was opened by the Great Western Railway in 1882.

Tilehurst has 4 local nature reserves:-

- Blundells Copse
- Lousehill Copse
- McIlroy Park
- Round Copse

There is a site of Special Scientific Interest just to the west of the village, the Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows.

Until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of working men in Tilehurst were employed in farming or similar agricultural work.

From the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one of the major industries in Tilehurst, employing many local men, was Tilehurst Potteries Limited located at the foot of Kentwood Hill.

Earlier I mentioned that much of Tilehurst apart from the very top of the village, lay on clay, and it was this clay that Tilehurst Potteries used to make their tiles.

Clay was dug from enormous claypits on Norcot Hill, and taken to the kilns on Kentwood Hill.

By the early 1920s, Tilehurst Potteries had been formally established at Kew Kiln on Kentwood Hill.

However, by the time of the second World War, more modern methods for tile and brick manufacture has been established elsewhere, and Kew Kiln fell in disuse.

#### Fire in 1940s (sugar storage)

Clay from the Norcot Hill claypits continued to be used at a kiln in Grovelands (Collier & Catley), and the clay was transported from the pits to the kiln by overhead buckets, which ran over Norcot Hill.

The claypits were closed in 1967, and now a school, doctors' surgery and houses have been built on them.

From the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century too, many nurseries and market gardens, taking advantage of the rich deep loam in the top of Tilehurst, always known as 'The Village', grew up,

When I was a boy, the nurseries in Tilehurst were:-

- |                         |             |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| (1924) Keep and Duffin, | Church Road |
| Lainsbury and Dew,      | School Road |
| Reg Peters              | Halls Road  |
| Faulkners               | School Road |

Previously, there had been Boseley's Tilehurst Nurseries, opposite the Village Hall in Victoria Road.

The original wall of this nursery is still standing.

Other nurseries from earlier times were:-

- |                                                |
|------------------------------------------------|
| Menpes, opposite where Denefield School now is |
| Timmings, where Chichester Road now is         |
| Dunsters, where Walnut Way now is.             |

St Michael's Church is first documented in 1189, where it still stands today. The church was rebuilt in the 1850s, but still has some medieval windows. It also has windows by William Blake.

# **NOTABLE ‘TILEHURSTIANS’**

## **WILLIAM LLOYD**

William Lloyd was born in 1627, the son of a Tilehurst vicar, and was educated at home and at Oxford University. He became Bishop of St Asaph, during which time King James II issued the second Declaration of Indulgence, with directions for it to be read in every church and chapel in the country.

Lloyd was the ringleader of seven bishops who were sent to the Tower of London, in 1688, for opposing this.

He was a virulent anti-Papist.

At their trial in Westminster, the bishops were found not guilty.

He went on to become Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry, and then Worcester.

Lloyd died at the age of 92, and was probably mentally unsound at that time.

## **DR MARTIN JOSEPH ROUTH**

Dr Routh was born in 1755, in Suffolk, the eldest of 13 children.

His mother was descendant of Archbishop Laud (a Reading man, pupil at Reading School). In 1791, Routh became a very young president of Magdalen College, Oxford, and within two months a Doctor of Divinity.

He was presented to the living of St Michael’s Church, by his brother-in-law, a Dr Sheppard, a wealthy benefactor, and Routh was Rector from 1810-1854.

However, he only came to his country living during vacations, when he arrived in his carriage and pair, and always wearing a wig.

Dr Routh also exercised considerable influence in the setting up of the Episcopal Church in America.

In 1820, at the age of 65, he married Eliza Agnes Blagrave, who was only 30, and the daughter of John Blagrave, of Calcot Park.

He used to walk to Theale and back where his sister, Mrs Sheppard, had built a church.

He lived to be 99, and Routh Lane is named after him.

## **FRANCES KENDICK**

In the early 1700s Frances Kendrick was a very beautiful and very independent-minded 17 year old.

As her mother had also died, Frances inherited Calcot Park from her late father, Sir William Kendrick, of Whitley Park.

At the same time, a young attorney, Benjamin Child who lived in London, was staying at the home of his uncle, a brewer, near Abingdon.

He was invited to a family wedding, in Reading, in 1707.

Benjamin was looking for a country heiress as a wife, and he was a handsome young man, but had debts from his rich living in London.

Frances Kendrick had been invited to the same wedding, and the couple met and danced together.

Frances at once determined to marry Benjamin.

However, he thought that Frances had another alliance, and so danced with all the other young ladies. Frances thought that her wealth might cause a barrier between them, and so she wrote an anonymous letter to him as if from a man, saying that he (Frances) had been slighted and challenging to a duel.

Benjamin, being quite uncertain as to, why, he was being challenged, and by which ‘man’ arrived at the place of the duel, which is described variously as:-

‘at the entrance to Calcot Park at the foot of the slope where there is a fountain an hour after sunrise, and defend your insolence as best you may with a sword.’

or

‘a small open space of ground, surrounded by trees and bushes, near Tilehurst Church, at 6 o’clock next morning.’

Benjamin waited at the duelling place, and was soon confronted by a masked lady, who insisted that he should fight her, or, if he did not, then he must marry her.

Benjamin decided that, as his opponent was a lady, he might just as well marry her.

Frances had already made all the wedding arrangements, and the ceremony took place in St Mary’s Church, in The Butts, Reading, later that day, the bride refusing to remove her mask until after the wedding. The couple returned to Calcot House and were very happy.

They had 3 daughters, one of whom died as a child, and tragically, Frances herself died when she was only 35.

This whole episode had been given to history in a long poem, “The Berkshire Lady”, and here are 3 verses of it:-

Batchelors of every station  
Mark this strange but true relation  
Which to you in brief I bring  
Neither was a stranger thing.

It is I that did invite you  
You shall wed me or I’ll fight you  
Underneath these spreading trees  
Therefore choose you what you please

You shall find I do not waver  
For there is a trusty rapier  
So now take your choice, said she  
Either fight or marry me.

# **Notes made by Mike Keep in preparation for the talk**

*Population: 14,064 (2011 census)*

*First recorded in 1291, listed as a hamlet of Reading in Pope Nicholas III's taxation settlement under ownership of Reading Abbey where it stayed until Dissolution of the Monasteries.*

*Tilehurst became extensive parish, including the tything of Theale, as well as the manors of Tilehurst, Kentwood, Pincents and Beansheaf.*

*1545 Henry VIII granted manor of Tilehurst to Francis Englefield, who held it until his attainder and forfeiture of the manor in 1586.*

*1546 Elizabeth I gave the manor to Henry Forster of Aldermaston and George Fitton.*

*These 2 held the manor until the turn of 16C, when Elizabeth I sold it to Henry Best and Francis Jackson.*

*Over 5 years, the manor passed from Best and Jackson to the son of Sir Thomas Crompton, then on to the Dutch merchant Peter Vanlore, who built a manor house on the estate – Calcot Park.*

*Throughout the 17C the manor passed through the Vanlore family, before being purchased in 1687 by the Wilder family of Nunhide (builders of Wilders' Folly) for £1,075.*

*In the early 18C the manor was also owned by the family of John Kendrick but only for a short period. The manor subsequently passed to Benjamin Child. Child sold the manor to descendants of John Blagrave in 1759.*

*The Blagrave family built the present day Calcot House, which according to one story, was made necessary by Child's eviction.*

*After Child sold the estate to the Blagraves, he was reluctant to leave the house, and so the Blagraves were forced to remove the building's roof to "flush" him out, therefore requiring a new building to replace the now uninhabitable house.*

*The Blagrave family retained the manor until the 1920s, after which it served as the clubhouse for the estate's golf course and was later converted into flats.*

*In 1819, a National school was founded to provide education to children not in private schooling.*

*Theale became a separate ecclesiastical parish in 1832, and a separate civil parish in 1894.*

*The Great Western main line was built through Berkshire in 1841, and Tilehurst railway station opened in 1882.*

*Alternative spellings have included Tygelhurst (13C), Tyghelhurst (14C), and Tylehurst (16C). The present spelling became commonplace in the 18C.*

*Tilehurst is situated on a hill (approx 330ft above sea level), 3 miles to the west of Reading. The land is steep to the west and south of the village. The gradient is smoother north (towards the River Thames) and East (descending towards Reading).*

*Bordered to the west by wood and farmland to the north by other settlements, such as Purley-on-Thames, to the east by Reading.*

*Tilehurst is centred around Tilehurst Triangle, known locally as ‘the village’.*

*Has a site of Special Scientific Interest, just to the west of the village, called Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows.*

*Has 4 local nature reserves – Blundells Copse, Lousehill Copse, McIlroy Park and Round Copse.*

*Until late 18C, majority of working men employed in farming or similar agricultural work..*

*Main industry manufacture of tiles. Claypits or Norcot Hill – overhead cable transported the clay-filled buckets between the pits and the kiln across Norcot Road (The Buckets) to the kiln in Grovelands.*

*By 1920s Tilehurst Potteries had been formally established at Kew Kiln on Kentwood Hill*

*The pits were closed in 1967.*

You can see Mike Keep's memories of growing up in Tilehurst on the website [www.tilehurstmemories.org.uk](http://www.tilehurstmemories.org.uk)

If you have any memories and recollections that you would like to share, please send them in a letter to Jenny Cottee, 85 Westwood Road, Tilehurst RG31 5PY or Liz Ellis, 59 Armour Road, Tilehurst RG31 6HA or you can email them to [tilehurstmemories@hotmail.com](mailto:tilehurstmemories@hotmail.com).



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