

Ightham

Ightham (pronounced "Item") is situated 4 miles East of Sevenoaks on the A227.

It is a very small village made up of tile-hung cottages and half timber cottages and the George and Dragon pub. The church has a monument to Dorothy Selby who perhaps uncovered the Gunpowder Plot.

Just across the busy A25 is Oldbury Hill - an iron age hill fort covering roughly 150 acres on the top of a ridge.

The History

Ightham's Saxon name was Ehteham. At the foot of a hill, with a moat fed by the Shode, stands the small fortified manor house of Ightham Mote which has a fascinating, though blood-thirsty history. The Great Hall was built in 1340 by Sir William Cawne. It was positioned on the moot, an ancient gathering place. The manor house had a crypt which was below the water level of the moat - and this allowed the swift disposal of prisoners occupying the prison by the opening of a sluice gate.

The tower at Ightham Mote was added at the time of the Wars of the Roses. During this time a trap was included in the floor of a room in the tower so that suspicious visitors could be dropped into a small dark hole where they would be left to starve. A ghost of an unlucky visitor is said to haunt the room above the main gate.

Ightham Mote was purchased in 1591 by the Selby family. Sir William Selby, as the Gentleman Porter or the border town of Berwick, was the first to welcome James Stuart to England. Dorothy, his wife, is said to have saved James I's life two years later by disclosing details of the Gunpowder Plot. It is believed that the skeleton of a woman discovered bricked up in the wall of the Great Hall is that of Dame Dorothy, her death seen as an act of Catholic vengeance.