

About Barham Court

Barham - originally Berham - Court is a fine old house made even more interesting by association as the home of Randall Fitz Urse, one of the knights who murdered archbishop Thomas Becket in his cathedral at Canterbury in 1170. As a result of that deed, Fitz Urse fled to his lands in Ireland and the manor passed into the ownership of his kinsman, Robert de Berham. The de Berhams prospered in Kent and became one of the great families of the county. Richard Barham, author of the *Ingoldsby Legends*, was one of their descendants.

But at the end of Elizabeth I's reign, the property passed to Sir Oliver Boteler and his wife, Anne. The Botelers (later they changed their name to Butler) were Royalists and Barham Court was sacked by Cromwell's New Army during the Civil War. Their son, William Butler was imprisoned in London for his support of the Kentish Royalists petition of 1642.

The last of the Butlers, Sir Philip, was responsible for changing the course of the old Tonbridge-Maidstone road, which used to run north of the church and then south of the house on it's way to Barming and Maidstone. He had the road moved 'some hundred rods' (say five hundred and fifty yards) to the south.

In the 18th century, Edward Hasted described Barham Court, then owned by the Bouverie family, as the greatest ornament of this part of the county. William Wilberforce was a frequent house guest of the first Lady Barham, who is said to have inspired and supported him in his fight against slavery. He loved the place and once wrote that 'for the charm of softness and elegance I never beheld a superior to Barham Court'.