

The name Layham has its origins in the language of the Anglo-Saxons, who started to settle Suffolk from AD 449. The village is recorded as Hligham in 995; Leiham in the Domesday Book in 1086 and Leyham in documents of the 1300s. The Old English words 'hlig' and 'ham' come together to describe a 'sheltered homestead or village'. 'Ley' is derived from Old English 'leah' meaning a 'clearing in a wood'.

Both possible origins indicate that there was no very special feature here – it was probably simply a desirable place at which to set up a small farming community in a clearing in what would have been a wooded area near to a river. The soil was from glacial outflow and offered a loam of good fertility.

Whilst there is no written record of habitation prior to the tenth Century, the area was generally favourable for settlement and there is evidence of earlier peoples setting up home nearby. Half way up Hook Lane, towards Hadleigh and overlooking the valley of the Brett, a Roman habitation has been identified and in Lower Raydon (the next door Parish) there are crop markings that suggest a circular defended settlement from the Iron Age.



It appears that Layham has always been a farming community based on two manors. These are recorded as far back as the Domesday survey when they are described as being held by Harold in one case and farmed by Eudo, a tenant, in the other. These manors eventually became named Netherbury and Overbury – names which survive today. Ownership of these manors has changed many times over the years, sometimes both being in the possession of the same lord. Occasionally owners lived in the village but more often than not the land would be managed on his / her behalf and many families lived in tenements and worked small parcels of land. The life of the village has remained centred on agriculture and associated activities right up to the present day.

A little local history

