

SOUTH END FARM :

This is one of three 15th to 17th century Grade II listed properties in Birchington, excluding All Saints Church. Its present name is Court Mount, a name given to it at the beginning of the 20th century. Under this name, its listing in the Grade II schedule states that it is:

“An L-shaped building. [It is more like a ‘T’]
 The front is late 18th century to early 19th century.
 The rear wing is timber-framed.
 The front elevation is two storeys, part brown brick and part red brick.
 Tiled roof.
 Eaves cornice.
 String course.
 Four sashes with cambered head linings, three of which are three-light.
 Door-case with pilasters and projecting cornice.
 Six-panelled door, the top two panels cut away and glazed.
 Two stone ball finials on brick piers [outside the front door].
 Right side extension of two storeys in red brick, no longer with bay window.
 Rear wing has a 16th century to 17th century beamed ceiling and inglenook fireplace.”

The original name for the farm was South End Farm, for obvious reasons. During the first half of the 1600's, Thomas Kirby owned and occupied it and on his tombstone in All Saints Church it states:

“Here lieth interred the body of Thomas Kirby, of Southend, who departed this life the first day of Mar. Anno Dni 1651 and in the 78th yeare of his age. He married Joan, ye daughter of Richard Simons, of Tilmestone: and by her had issue 5 sonns and one daughter, of whom the 2 youngest sonns Paul and Thomas are yet surviving.”

On a separate stone is an inscription to his wife, which reads:

“Heer lieth interred the body of lone, the daughter of Richard Simons, of ilmanstone, late the wife of Thomas Kirby of Southend, who departed this life the 82 yeare of her age, June 13th Ano. Domi 1656.”

When I first read these inscriptions back in 1961, on my arrival in Birchington, I was amazed that someone should come from Southend all the way across the estuary to end up in Birchington. When I mentioned this to the then Archivist, Mr Alfred Walker, he showed me an old map of the village, dated 1688, where the southern end of the village is labelled “South End”. There are still two sets of cottages in the area called Southend Cottages and Southend Row.

When an inspection of the 16th–17th century wing of the farmhouse was made recently, the description of 'inglenook' for the fireplace is not a strictly accurate. This part of the building is like a semi-basement now, although it was at ground level originally. The fireplace is large, but has no seating spaces on either side. The bridge between the two sides is formed by a slightly arched series of stones set up on end, but with no supporting bressummer.

Earlier this summer, an elderly man called in at the offices, which now occupy the farmhouse, asking if he might view his old home. When he saw the fireplace, his only comment was that the old stones have now been painted white, but it was otherwise unchanged from his childhood. By the time he was living here, the farm is listed in Kelly's Directory as 'Court Mount'. The change of name from South End Farm occurred somewhere between 1906 and 1911.

The two main beams in the room were also as he remembered them, the one stretching from end to end, while the other ran across the shorter width of the room. He recalled that in his childhood, the ceiling was just the unpainted floorboards from the upstairs rooms, but felt there were more intermediate beams, though he couldn't be sure. This part of the complex was known as 'Court Mount Cottage', where he and his parents and family had lived. The 'Big House', as he called the front half, was where the owner of the farm (George Ashwood in 1916) lived. The old man's father looked after the cows and helped around the farm in general. In our archives, there is a photograph of the area behind the farm, taken about 1920, with the then occupant of Court Mount Cottage, Mr Morris and his daughter Marjorie, feeding the chicken.

On Thomas Hill's map of 1688, South End farmhouse is shown as a substantial dwelling, surrounded by an orchard. The map was drawn for the sale of Church Hill Farm to John Bridges, a wealthy local landowner. South End Farm stood then, (as it does now) on the junction of the main highway to Canterbury and a narrow lane leading down towards Acol ('Way to Accoll or Vil of wood' on Hill's map). The bounds of this particular part of South End Farm are delineated very precisely, as both its N.E. and S.E. boundaries butt onto John Bridges newly acquired farm.

Judging by its structure and also by its presence on Thomas Hill's map, it appears to be one of the later medieval buildings, but the farm itself could well have been in existence in early Medieval times.