

STORY of UPPER GORE END FARM HOUSE

Upper Gore End Farmhouse is unique in Birchington. Built of dark, nut-brown bricks using Flemish bond, it is three storeys high, excluding the attics and cellars. It is double-fronted with a blocked window on each of the first and second floors, over a central doorway.

There has been a house on this site since probably medieval times. As far back as 1310 the surrounding land there is evidence stating that it belonged to Sir William Leybourne, who lived at Leybourne Castle near Maidstone. He certainly owned the land that eventually became Lower Gore End Farm.

On the earliest extant map of the farm, drawn in 1678 by Thomas Hill, Cartographer and Surveyor of Canterbury, it shows a tall house standing roughly where the present building is sited. Lying just to the south of the house stood a parterre garden with straight paths dividing it into four equal squares. This was set within what was usually known as the 'home paddock', with gates to the north and south sides as well as access to the farmhouse from the east.



East side of Upper gore End Farmhouse

Information about the house is very thin until it was left to St John's College Cambridge in the will of Henry Robinson in 1642. Henry had received a BA degree from St John's College in 1616. He had two relatives, 'cozen' Thomas Everard and 'cozen' Thomas Beake, for whom he provided annuities, using the rents from the farm to fund them. When these had been fulfilled, the money from the rents was to be used to endow two Fellowships and two Scholarships at his Alma Mater. The money eventually became available to the College in 1664. At this point the first two Scholars were elected.

The College has a large collection of documents and entries in its account books relating to the tenants of Upper Gore End Farm. The information includes references to the rents, the repairs to the

property and correspondence connected with various problems that arose. Their main difficulty was that, from the start, there was never enough rent from the farm to fund the Scholarships *and* the Fellowships. After a very short while, the Fellowships were dropped in favour of Scholarships, being the cheaper option. The College had to go to law to get this changed, and obtained a Chancery ruling in their favour.

In 1738, when Richard Wilson was tenant of the farm, he applied to have his lease renewed, but was told this could only be done if he agreed to build a 'new barn'. It is quite clear from inspecting the barn that all he did was repair



its western end. This had probably been badly damaged in one of the fierce storms that periodically ravage our north Kent coast. The eastern end of the barn is clearly still 16th century, (see the Grade II Listing notice) while about halfway along the building the 'new' timbers can be clearly seen. These have been dated from the late 1600s to the early 1700s.

This possibly means that Richard Wilson may have only done some major repairs to the roof - or even have been the person who organised the replacing of the timber walls of the barn with bricks. These were built section by section and the top layer of bricks was specially shaped to fit under the great beams that supported the huge roof.

In the Listing of the farmhouse (Grade II), it is suggested that the North and West wings of the property are mid 18th century. This is interesting in the light of the next piece of the story from the College.

In 1789, when George Friend became the tenant, he was granted the sum of £130 towards building a 'new house'. It had been thought from a first viewing of the farmhouse back in 1999, that it was possibly an 18th century building, perhaps mid-century. It would appear that George Friend did not start from scratch, but improved and enlarged the property that he had taken on.

From that early map, George seems to have realigned the front to face onto the highway rather than eastwards towards the village, but it stands on the same footings as before. The most useful action would be to inspect the cellars, as these will almost certainly give a fairly clear indication of house's earliest date.

Just prior to 1860, it was only possible to fund one Scholarship at St John's College from Upper Gore End Farm rents, so by the middle of 1860 the College authorities closed the Robinson Scholarships down and directed the farm rent straight into the general funds for the running of the College.



Upper Gore End Farmhouse - 1999