

## **BEDLAM COTTAGE:**

This is another of the properties that were probably standing in the village in the late 15<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. There are a number of photographs of this house and also a possible early drawing of it. The drawing appears in Barrett's 'History of the Ville of Birchington', where it is simply labelled 'ANCIENT HOUSE – SOUTH END. (Condemned 1893)'<sup>1</sup>. As Bedlam was the only house standing out on its own at the turn of the century, it would appear to be one and the same building. It received its name from Bedlam Fields, on which it stood. This was land that was owned by the Bethlehem Hospital in London. On Thomas Hill's map, the land immediately opposite the cottage, on the other side of the track way, is labelled 'Bellom', which was probably either a local contraction of the name 'Bethlehem', or perhaps an error of copying from his source, by reading 'd' as 'el'.

When the photographs and the picture of the Ancient House were shown to Nick Dermott and Anthony Swaine, they were both of the opinion that they could well be one and the same, and that the house was quite possibly 16<sup>th</sup> century and possibly a little earlier. It appears on the Thomas Hill map of 1688, with the name of 'wid: Hills' beside it<sup>2</sup>. It stood on the track way that led from Canterbury Road down towards Gore End, with a branch that ran down to the back of Brooksend and the two Hales of Nether and Upper.

From the photographs, it was a thatched house of some substance, but in its later life, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was in dire need of modernisation<sup>3</sup>. During its last years, prior to 1939, it was the home of Taffy Hooker and for this reason is often still referred to 'Hooker's'. Taffy's grandson kindly made the picture available for this study.

Its demise came in the early 1930's, when the farmland on which the house stood was bought for development by Alderman George B. Farrar. By early 1939, the new estate had been laid out and Bedlam stood on the edge of it. With the possibility of a war ahead, Mr Farrar then offered the house to Thanet's Auxiliary Fire Brigades, to be used for fire-fighting practice. In an article in the Isle of Thanet Gazette for February 1939, it speaks of a '400-year-old' building, and mentions 'the picturesque but antiquated cottage, which stood in grim solitude on the Garden Estate, as a relic of the years that were'<sup>4</sup>. Sadly, these mindless acts of the demolition of old buildings have continued through to as late as the 1970's.

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<sup>1</sup> Barrett, J.P., 1893 / 1909, p. 178

<sup>2</sup> Appendix No.

<sup>3</sup> Illustration No. 13

<sup>4</sup> Isle of Thanet Gazette, Feb. 18<sup>th</sup> 1939. (Photocopy of article in the Archives)