

**Church Hill Farm : Walnut Tree Cottage<sup>1</sup>**

In 1688, John Bridges, a local landowner, bought Church Hill Farm, which stood in the heart of the village. As was usual for this kind of enterprise, he commissioned a cartographer to draw up a map for him, to delineate the properties and land that he was buying.<sup>2</sup> The man he chose was Thomas Hill, a well-known cartographer of his day. Just nine years earlier, the same man had already drawn up a map for another farm lying on the north-western edge of the village, known as Upper Gore End Farm.<sup>3</sup> This may have been the reason for choosing Thomas Hill, although the second map is quite different from the first, which was not as accurate as his later attempt. His rendering of the church on both maps is inaccurate, as he placed the tower at the south end each time. This may be because he has drawn what he saw of the church from the Square, where it does stand on the left end of the building.

Unfortunately, unravelling the history of the house did not begin until it had already been demolished in 1970. By then there were only photographs, a slide and the map, together with some of the bricks, which had fortunately been incorporated into the chimney breast of a new property in Westgate. Armed with the size of these bricks, which were 9" x 4" x 2 1/2", the map and the photographs, the writer sought out Tim Tatton-Brown, the Diocesan Architectural Historian, for help in dating the old house. With this information, he came up with a date of not later than 1680, and possibly earlier. In Thomas Hill's earlier map of 1679, there are six houses on that side of the road and one of them will certainly be Church Hill Farmhouse.

The house had stood empty from c. 1960, when the last tenant, Mrs Winch left. The site was bought by a builder and then sold on to second one, while the house was

used for storage for the next ten years. The son of the last occupant was unable to help with any memories of the internal features and neither was the last builder. So we are entirely dependent on the photographic evidence.

The brickwork appears to be in mainly Flemish bond and there was a projecting course of bricks between the two storeys. The gable ends stand outside the roof, but are quite plain, unlike the Dutch gables in the houses round the Square. The chimney is probably a Victorian insertion, or may have been a rebuild of the original one. The off-centre porch also looks Victorian and the entrance was probably moved from the centre, where it would normally have been.

The site on which the house stood was one of the oldest inhabited areas in the village, so even if Church Hill Farm were only built in the 1670's, there would certainly have been a property there before this. It may have been another Wealden house, which was demolished when the new Dutch influence started the craze for brick built structures in the 1640s to 1690s.<sup>4</sup> The house next to the Powell Arms, now called 'Mulberry's', was rebuilt in 1746, using the Dutch gable style. We do not know what the demolished property looked like unfortunately, but rebuilding on old sites was, and is, very common practice.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix No.46

<sup>2</sup> For a simplified version see Appendix No. 13

<sup>3</sup> This one is stored at St John's College Cambridge. All Saints Archives holds copies of the two segments that show the farm and the village itself.

<sup>4</sup> For an example of a Wealden house in Birchington, see Appendix No. 48