

Lower Gore End Farm:

The house is at present called Old Bay Cottage and now lies several feet below the road level at Minnis Bay in Birchington. Until the railway was constructed in 1863, this was the only dwelling in the area, with Gore End Cottage and Upper Gore End Farm lying some distance nearer to the main village. When it was bought in 1920, this part of the house had been the 'working end' of a large farmhouse. The left-hand brick and thatched section, now known as Elder Cottage, which was sold off separately, had formed the more opulent living quarters for the farmhouse. The land on which the farm was built once belonged to the great landed proprietor, Sir William Leybourne of Leybourne Castle Maidstone, in about 1310.¹

In the Grade II listing for the timber-framed half of the building, it states: -

“Fifteenth century timber framed and studded cottage,
with a brick portion added to the north west.

Two storeys.

Two windows and two dormers.

Casement windows on dormers.

Glazing bars missing.

New windows on the ground floor.”

This brief description was unfortunately made without an internal inspection, as was the case with almost all those listed here in Birchington. From the outside, the close-studding of the left hand two thirds is very noticeable now, but apparently, when it was bought in 1920, it was rough cast and covered in ivy.² When this was stripped off, the original mud and rushes infill was uncovered. The brick 18th century extension to the right of the front door, mentioned in the schedule, is mainly built in Flemish bond, though some of it is random. The suggested date for this is 17th century. The front porch was built sometime in the 16th or 17th century, probably the earlier date³.

The house is a two bay construction, 26' long and 21' wide, with a later 16-17th century chimney inserted. The whole structure stood on large chalk blocks, discovered when repairs were done in the 1920's. There are three main frames to the house, with the two outer ones being 'locked frames', while the middle one is like a goal post, so that the central space between is unimpeded. They are fixed together with tree-nails.

Once through the front porch, dated about 1560, you enter a narrow passage with wooden studding on both sides. The smaller room to the right has a beamed ceiling and inserted French windows in the outside wall. The roof-line above this part of the house continues the old shape and even has the gablet in the northern corner, which suggests that the brick section below may have replaced an earlier wood-framed part of the building. When the roof was investigated in 1920, the end section above the brick 'extension' were all very rotten and had to be replaced, whereas the rest were very well preserved with wood smoke.

Returning to the entrance passage, this could quite possibly have been a screens-passage when the house was originally built. There are two very old

¹ Barrett, J.P., (1909) p.17

² I am indebted to Adrian Jackson, the son of the 1920, purchaser, for much of the ensuing information.

³ Nick Dermott, Buildings Conservation Officer for Thanet Council.

doorways on the right side of the passage. These both have pointed arches, which were only discovered when black-painted boxings were stripped off in the 1920's. The pointed arches to the doors had been crudely notched out each side, in order to make square headings to them. This may have been done when the chimney was inserted in the 16th-17th century.

At the far end of the passage, on the left, is a doorway leading into a large living room. This room has four small glass insertions between the studding on the front wall and in between them there is a larger window, which is a later replacement. The living room is 21ft. from front to back and 15ft. across. There are 5ins. square beams, which have been chamfered on the lower edges. In 1920, when these were first uncovered, the new owners found words and sentences in Latin and Greek on the sides, chalked in capital letters.

The main beam stretching from the front to rear of the room is 3ft. out from the parallel with the passage wall. The beam, which is 20ft. long, 14ins. wide and 12ins. deep, is beautifully moulded with close spaced flutes and beading running its full length. Halfway along the beam is a crudely adzed housing for the main cross-beam, which is 8 ½ins. square and set at 90°, spanning the 15ft. width of the room.

On the wall abutting the passage, stands the chimney, with its massive inglenook fireplace built of 2ins. bricks. There is a double flue above the inglenook, which is 3ft. 6ins deep, 7ft. 6ins. wide and 4ft. 9ins. high under the oak bressummer. The division is made by a 'hanging' brick partition, arched at its base and only 2ins. thick. It extends approximately 10ft. up into the flue, with a vent opening up into the top of the flue. This section had been used for smoking and curing hams, and is fitted with a series of stout hooks. In the main flue, you could look straight up 25ft. to the sky above. At the top, the chimney-opening tapered to 13 ½ins. square. The inglenook itself is 10ft. 6ins. wide, by 3ft. 10ins. deep. The rear wall begins to round back at 4ft. 7ins. above the hearth.

To the left of inglenook is a baking oven with a fire-hole below it. The floor of the oven is lined with large flat stones set in sand. The space inside the oven is large enough for a small child to climb in. There is also a type of thermal flywheel under the domed brick roof of the oven.

There are two staircases in the house, one of which leads straight out of the living room. This one can best be described as a ladder with the back filled in with planks and the two sides set into a box frame. It is very steep and is not used at present. It was probably made in the 17th century, judging by the timbers used. The main staircase to the upper floor has been constructed in the outshut, on the right of the passage outside the living room. It has some very old timbers in it and was probably inserted when the right hand end of the house was renewed or added in the 17th century.

The upper floor has been divided up into six small bedrooms, as the house is now let as holiday accommodation during the summer months. The rooms are all tucked into the roof spaces and at some date before 1920, one of the main beams was cut through, to allow access from the outshut end into the main area above the living room. It is possible to go up into the roof space above, but this was not attempted on the recent visit to the house. Apparently this entrance gives access to the vast blackened roof space.⁴ Here, there are

⁴ Notes taken from Adrian Jackson's own account

axe-hewn tie beams, slightly cambered, with central King posts soaring up through the floor below, sprouting four curved braces. These then pick up the ridge beam and collars. The tops of the main support posts are mortise and tenoned into the ends of the tie beams, with each one being secured with three tree-nails. There are numerous curved braces sawn from the natural growing tree shapes. The collars which tie all the A-frames are all secured with tree-nails.

When the roof was first investigated in 1920, Adrian Jackson, the son of the new owner, said there was a lattice of little square peg-tiles without nibs, covering the roof. Each tile was hung from the battens by two square oak pegs inserted into the top edge of the tiles. The steeply pitched roof extended down to within 4' of the tops of the ground floor windows, 'and never leaked'.