

'OAKLEIGH HOUSE' 197 Canterbury Road, Birchington

'Oakleigh House' is a Grade II listed building, clearly shown in the 1872 Ordnance Survey map of the area. The listing states:

"It is mid 19th century : 3 storeys.

Brown brick with stuccoed quoins and base.

Dropped moulded cornice.

Three sashes with verticals only, set in moulded architraves.

The ground floor has two 2-light canted bays.

Portico with two plain Tuscan columns and 2 pilasters.

Rectangular fanlight : two stone lions."

These bare facts were gleaned by the 'listing' official from only viewing the front of the property and ignoring the stable block that stands at the rear (separated from the old house in 1996).

The description of "mid 19th century" is probably misleading, as its neighbour is either late 18th century or early 19th and the two buildings are so similar that it would seem likely they were built about the same time. On the right hand side wall of the house there is an original brick with the date 1769 incised into it. The style of script matches the date and does not appear to have been faked later.



If this is so we are looking at a much older property, which an inspection of the cellar and loft may be able to confirm. In the earliest of the

deeds it states that the property consisted of "*a messuage or tenement ('house'), wash-house or chaise house, outhouses, edifices, buildings, kitchen, water well, yard and garden, stable, backside and land.*" The last remains of the 'backside', which used to jut out at the rear of the stable, was demolished in 1999.

Who "Oakleigh House's" first owner was is still unknown, but the earliest name connected with it is John **PAIN**, who owned it in 1840. His tenant was Thomas **SIDDERS**, who was the schoolmaster of the Crispe Charity School (housed in 191 Canterbury Rd at that date) and remained there for 23 years. Charles **HINLOCK** is the next name we find in the deeds, but unfortunately we do not know what date he was occupying the property. He was followed by Lieut. Charles **LYON**, who was there in 1884. It was possibly under his ownership that the portico was added. The next owner was J.C. **PHILLIPS**.

They were followed by Thomas William **WILLETT**, who bought the house in 1876. He was an ancestor of Sir Alan Willett, at present (2008) Lord Lieutenant of Kent. Thomas Willett was married to Emma Talbot Sackett in 1865 and between them they had four children, Harry Thomas, Charles Sackett,

Frederick William and Emmeline M. Butters¹. When William Willett died in 1902, he left the house to his widow and thence to his four children. By the time he died his eldest son had already died while his second son, who was in New Zealand, had relinquished his claim on the estate. Perhaps his father had already given him financial support when he chose to emigrate? Although Thomas Willett did not die until 1902, he appears to have moved out of the house by 1889 and the first three names that now follow were very probably tenants.

In 1889 we find Thomas **GLOVER'S** widow was living in the property, followed by Colson **PHILLIPS** in 1896. In 1900 Henry **BUTTERICK** is listed as the occupant in Kelly's Directory, so must have already been there the previous year, to get included in that edition. Dr Paul **SLEVIN MD** is next to appear in 1905 and his widow was still there between 1911 and 1916.

There were two owners of the house listed in the deeds but not in Kelly's, Hugh **MARSHALL** and Cyril Halcombe **WARD**. In 1924 Ward sold 'Oakleigh' to Mr **ORR** and Alice **HARRIS**, who was living at "Myrtle Lodge" at the time (This is now known as 242 Canterbury Road, just above "Vine Cottage"). The occupant of 'Oakleigh' in 1925 was Harold **SABEY** and his wife, who, in a separate listing below her husband in Kelly's, is listed as a photographer. Inclusion in the directory merely indicated the occupant, not the owner.

By 1951 the property had been divided into two flats, whose occupants are listed as Mrs **CRAIG** (Flat 1 downstairs) and George **HAYWARD** (Flat 2). By 1967 the lower flat was occupied by E.M. **WILLIAMS**, while the upper flat was occupied by Mrs I. **GILES** and her two daughters, Angela and Christabel.

Mr Williams was the only occupant in 1974 as the Giles family had moved to Wiltshire. At this point Kelly's were no longer printing their directories so we can only rely on the deeds, which state that at some time around 1980 Colin **FRANCIS** and Diana **CHURCHILL** owned it. Mr Francis decided to separate the old stables-cum-coach house at the rear of the property from the main house deeds and sold as a separate unit. In 1996 it was bought by a goldsmith and his wife.

Since this date "Oakleigh" has been made into one dwelling again and completely refurbished and updated. It is looking forward to its next new owners' tender loving care, as, after well over 200 years, it stands at the start of the 21st century.

Jennie Burgess, Parish Archivist September 2008



1999

"Oakleigh House"



2008

¹ There is a fascinating story concerning her, which is held in the Birchington Heritage Trust Museum at the Village centre, Birchington.