

Hill corner cottage
Fordcombe
Kent
TN3 0RS

Heritage statement created from original and extended 23.05.22

Extract from the Heritage listing

Heritage Category:

Listed Building

Grade:

II

List Entry Number:

1243035

Date first listed:

16-Jan-1975

Statutory Address:

HILL CORNER, 1-3

Extract: Early C18 or earlier timber framed house of 2 storeys, 3 and 4 windows, irregular. Hipped tiled roof. Tile hung 1st floor, brick ground floor. C19 and modern square paned casements. Plank doors in moulded frames, No 1 on right return.

General village History

Fordcombe is in the designated High Weald area of outstanding Natural Beauty. It is also designated as a conservation area in its own right.

Until the middle of the 19th century, 'Fordcomb-Green' was a hamlet with a few houses set around the crossroads near the Manor of Chafford, located within a triangle of three long-established villages, all with 'hurst' names: Ashurst, Penshurst and Speldhurst (a hurst: a hillock or wooded rise). The spelling of the village name seems to have been rather a matter of choice. Kelly's Directories suggest that the 'e' was not added to 'Fordcomb', and also the '-Green' suffix not discarded, until some time during the 1880s and 1890s. But officiating ministers recording in the church's Registers from 1849 never used the '-Green' suffix and some added an 'e' as they thought fit.

The hamlet had a population largely involved in agriculture, but from early times there had also been workers at the Chafford Mill on the Medway, between the Chafford and Colliersland bridges. However, due to the discovery of the special quality of the spring water (hence the name Springhill nearby) the mill changed from grain milling to high quality paper-making, which required additional labour, at one time a workforce totalling 70, and so Fordcomb-Green's population grew.

In the 19th Century, Fordcombe continued to expand. Chafford Mill “gave work to a thriving community” – witness the millworkers’ dedicated houses: seven in Stone Row, one later becoming the shop; the original six of St Peter’s Row; and ten in the Chafford Cottages beside Chafford Bridge, and therefore close to the Mill. With an increasing population came the services needed to maintain it, including the shop-cum-Post Office, a fishmonger, a butcher, a baker and a cricket ball (not candlestick!) maker, and a laundry. Most of these had sadly disappeared before World War II, but the shop, now much missed, remained until the 1990s.

For over 150 years from 1756, the paper produced at the Mill was used for many purposes throughout the world, including the Bank of England’s £5 notes, many postage stamps, especially foreign stamps, cartridge paper for the Tower of London, and paper for the Government of India because it was found that important documents were not devoured by ants, as were ant-succulent papers from other suppliers. It is possible that Lord Hardinge, when Governor-General, mindful of his friend Richard Turner’s gift of the site for the new church, arranged this contract. However the mill was bought by Wiggins Teape in 1913 and promptly closed, causing many villagers to be out of work, and the equipment was transferred to their works in Dover. The Mill buildings were eventually demolished in the 1930s and today only the outline of the walls and the mill race can be seen.

Early Picture of the cottage (date unknown)



Hill corner Cottage

Hill corner cottage is rather tucked away from the village green, some 30 meters back from the road, and unlike the historical picture above, it is now surrounded by high hedges. It cannot now be seen from the road or the nearby lane. Parts of the original timbers survive. What is left should be properly maintained and restored where necessary.

The Fordcombe Conservation area appraisal was adopted by Sevenoaks DC as Supplementary Planning Guidance in 2003. The document refers to 1-3 hill Corner still as a group of timber framed cottages. The history of this site suggests that the

house was one originally and then converted into three dwellings and eventually back into one house.

There were a number of consents granted in 1991, 1993 and 1995 that appear to have entailed a rear extension to the central part of the house and the removal of several internal walls. Further internal alterations were approved in 2008 and the officers report at that time refers to one house.

There was a large extension to the North rear of the house in 2015 as approved by Sevenoaks DC. It should be noted that the tile hanging on two sides of this extension was badly done and requires some reinstatement to bring it up to a reasonable aesthetic and waterproof standard.

It should be noted that the extension referred to covers an area approximately 1/3rd of the total area of the house. This extensive addition, is therefore detracting away from the origins of the house, as it is deemed so large by comparison with the original footprint.

As A recent owner of Hill Corner Cottage, I have examined the history more; and established a date mark by a builder on the North side of the house as being 1813. In all likelihood, this could have been repair work to the original wall covering, as there is evidence of the original wooden posts and sole plate rotting away. Examination of the internal roof space; also shows evidence of the original oak rafters suffering smoke staining and hardened soot deposits are present.

The size spacing and composition of internal roof and wall structure shows very large oak timbers *some possibly from a galleon ship being present. They are in some cases curved and carved as would be the case in vertical posts at a ship prow, called stem posts or thwart beams.

All this construction leads to the possibility of this house being a much older "Wealden hall house" typically built in the late 15th and during the 16th Century.

It is difficult to establish facts on the Hall house theory but the blocking of the through passageway by a large double inglenook fireplace does lead to this conclusion.

Adding to the confusion further over the origins and evolution of the house, an 1898 map of the village shows only one path leading to the house which suggests that it was not divided into cottages at this stage. However, The Conservation Officer at Sevenoaks District Council has stated the following:

By the circa 1838 Tithe map and apportionment, the house was grouped with Stone Row and described as cottages. Stone Row was built in the early 19th century as workers cottages to house mill workers at the nearby Chafford Mill. The fact that the house is grouped together with these and also described as cottages suggests it was divided up into workers cottages by this time.

Save it to say that there remains doubt over the evolution of the house and the date it was converted to three cottages, and later converted back again to one house.