

ROOKERY FARM, Balchins Lane (TQ 134485)

(Extract from DBRG Report No. 800 dated 1974.

A fine brick Queen Anne type house, facing east, of three rooms; two rooms to the South and one to the North of the imposing doorway. The house has two storeys with attics with dormer windows in the roof. There are cellars at either end. Unexpectedly, there is a Mansard roof. There is a central chimney in line with the front door as well as a stack outside at either end. These are of the same style but with much later bricks to the North stack. Ironstone footings are round the South end. There are different brick bondings and different sized bricks in the front facade. Some of the windows have been extended. There is a straight joint three feet in from the North end of the front and the string course here has been extended in plaster. In the North end service room the front window has been enlarged by one frame to conform with the others. The lengthened string course drops at the point where the smaller window had ended.

The house still shows signs of the rendering which had concealed all the non-conformities in the brickwork. The house is one room deep, except at the South end where the parlour wing extends back, and a stair rises in the raised back corner.

The large external south chimney to the parlour wing has brickwork in English bond (one row header, one row stretcher). The rest of the house is in Flemish bond (alternately, one brick header, and one brick stretcher).

At the back there is a late two-floored extension between the stairs and a modern kitchen wing at the North end. Also at the back and outside a partially blocked stair window, is a small modern bathroom on an old brick base.

The North wall of the modern kitchen wing is in a straight line with the extended service bay. As can be seen from the straight joint outside on the brick facade, the service room has been lengthened by three feet, and has been turned into a library and a chimney has been added outside to match the parlour chimney at the other end.

The front door is in classical style. A conventional baffle entrance leads to a room on either side. The central hearth room has a reconstructed hearth with inglenook. The central spine beam is 7'6" high and 12" wide with 3" chamfer and unusual double step stop. The joists are morticed in and are 3½" x 3½" with small chamfer and stop. A modern partition at the back divides off a passage with two low beams crossing at 6' 6" high at truss level, one from the chimney and one at the south side of the hearth room. At the chimney end the beam is 6" x 6" and has no features. The beam at the end of the passage is a moulded bressumer, 10" deep. Only 6" of this beam remains in the passage, over an original way through, the rest has been cut back to enlarge the entrance to the parlour wing. The major part of the bressumer may be concealed under a false wall in the hearth room. This entrance to the parlour has a chamfer and lamb's tongue stop, as also has the entrance at the side to the cellar under.

The Cellars. The older cellar is under the parlour wing with a fine brick circular stair of bricks on end descending down. The cellar is brick lined with three square niches 9" deep. On the South end wall there is a relieving arch for the hearth above. The main joist is old but the other timbers have been renewed. The newer cellar is under the room which has been extended on the north end of the front. The joists are later and plain.

Upstairs there are three bedrooms in line with a linking passage. On the top floor the same pattern occurs with dormer windows. Features on this floor are the 'Judas' windows in two doors used for watching over sleeping children without disturbing them, and a sliding door in a partition wall for the same purpose.

In the grounds are various barns and stabling, not yet recorded. A fine press remains in one barn.

Development of the House. The house had been built before 1550 as a mediaeval hall house of at least three bays. The basic hall of two bays with a service end remains. A parlour wing with cellar under was added in the 17th century. This possibly replaced an earlier solar. The house was modernised in the late 17th century to a central chimney house and the ground floor ceilings were raised and the walls and wallplate raised. All trace of the mediaeval roof and wallplate has gone. Then in the 19th Century a Mansard roof was built over all. The old conventional roof line can be seen on the chimneys in the loft. A kitchen chimney was rebuilt as a library chimney. A modern kitchen is now added on the back.

The Times on 29 May 1871 announced the birth of a son to the wife of Fredk K Hewett on the 26th May, at The Rookery Farm, Westcott.

For Sale 13th July 1927 Golden Retriever brood bitch; over distemper; prize winner. Price 8 gns. Puppies from 3 gns. Apply Miss Priestley Rookery Farm Westcott