

# INTO THE 16th CENTURY - WHEN SMOKE BAYS REPLACED OPEN HALLS

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*Fowlers Wells Farm, Chobham*

**T**imber framed open hall houses, as detailed in the article last week, were not just a feature of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, they continued to be built around here into the early part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century – up to about 1540.

One such building is Fowlers Wells on what was the old Windsor Road at Chobham. Here an early 16<sup>th</sup> century open hall house of just two bays (or even 1½, as the bay that contained the fire was not full width) was later added to in the 17<sup>th</sup> century making the beautiful symmetrical 'brick' house that we can still see today.

When bricks started to become cheaper it was the fashion to have a brick built house, so in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century many old timber-framed houses were encased in brick (especially on the 'street' front), so that the owners could look up-to-date.

Other early 16<sup>th</sup> century hall houses in this area

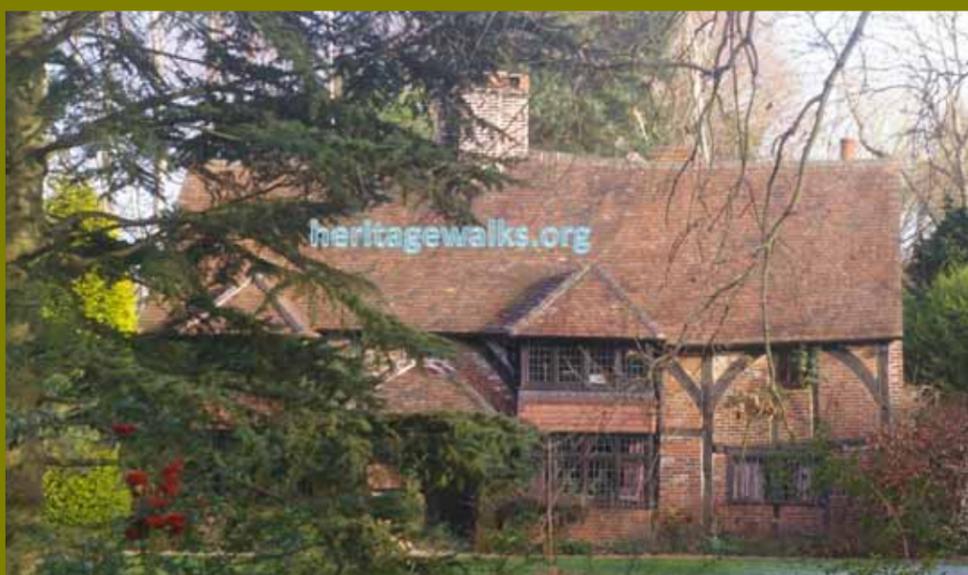
include Sunhill House at Mayford and Langman's on Goldsworth Park, where there is evidence of one of the rooms on the first floor being jettied out over the open hall, before a smoke bay or chimney was inserted and the smoke stopped from blackening the joists of the floor.

Smoke bays and smoke hoods were effectively a wattle and daub partition above a fireplace that took the smoke away from the upstairs rooms. It had the added advantage of allowing fish and meats to be hung up in the space above the fire. It did away with the need for a large wasteful open hall and meant that even small cottages like Old Oak Cottage in Vicarage Road at Kingfield could be built – with originally two small rooms downstairs on either side of the central fireplace. To the side of the fireplace and wrapped around the smoke hood was a staircase giving access to two equally small

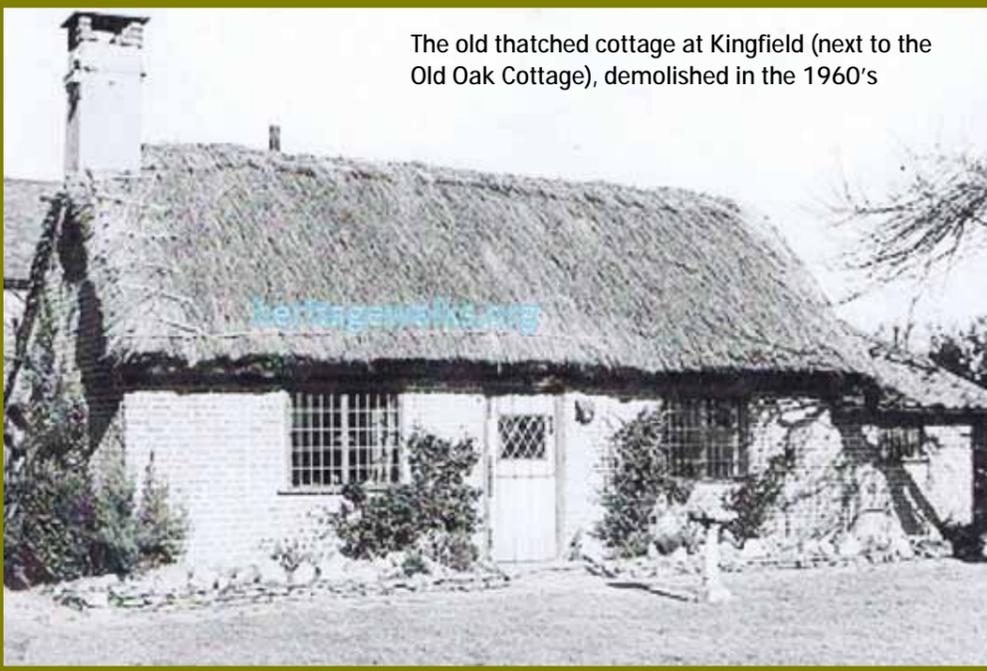
An old postcard of Fowlers Wells at Chobham, enlarged and encased in brick in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to make it look 'modern'.



Old Oak Cottage in Vicarage Lane, Kingfield (above), with Langmans at Goldsworth Park (bottom left) and Sunhill House at Mayford (Bottom right)



The old thatched cottage at Kingfield (next to the Old Oak Cottage), demolished in the 1960's



The Old Cottage in the High Street, Old Woking

rooms with dormer windows on the first floor beneath the low roof.

A brick chimney was later inserted into the smoke hood, probably in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the front of the timber-framed house was encased in brick (probably a protection against the weather, rather than fashion).

In 1841 the census records William Elson (an agricultural labourer) and his wife Caroline living in the little cottage with their three sons (Richard, George & Thomas) and three daughters (Jane, Caroline and Mary Ann). Where they all slept I do not know. In the 1851 census William is recorded as a widower, but the three sons are still living in the house, Richard being recorded as a shepherd, George as a farm labourer, and Thomas as a ploughboy. Of the girls only Mary Ann remained, although two other young daughters, born before Caroline died are recorded - Lucy and Eliza. With three strapping lads presumably in one room, and the girls in the other, it must have been very cramped.

By 1861 William had remarried and was living in the cottage with his new wife Alice and children William (a flower gatherer), Thomas, Elizabeth and Alice. Alice Elson died at the Old Oak Cottage aged 75 in 1919.

There were other small timber framed cottages next door to the Old Oak Cottage until they were condemned in the 1960's and the same fate could have occurred to the Old Cottage in Old Woking High Street, which at one time was threatened with demolition for road widening. It is not the only old house in that part of the road as the house opposite (No 30) is also an early 16<sup>th</sup> century open hall house.

Brookwood Farm off Robin Hood Road (not to be confused with Brookwood Farm on the Bagshot Road at Knaphill) is also lucky to have survived the 20<sup>th</sup> century, having been set alight



on a number of occasions whilst it remained empty during the construction of Goldsworth Park. Thankfully it was saved from too much damage and has been restored.

We are lucky also to still have Lady Place Cottage at Pyrford. It too contains a 16<sup>th</sup> century hall bay, with a slightly later four bay cross-wing being added to the side, presumably replacing part of the original house attached to the hall. But there was another cross wing that has now been lost, being destroyed during the Second World War when a bomb fell on the area.

No. 34 High Street, Old Woking.



Below Left: Lady Place Farm at Pyrford from the road, and cleaning up after the bomb, during the Second World War (below)



## SORTING OUT FACT FROM FICTION AT THE OLD MANOR HOUSE



A lot has been written about The Old Manor House in Old Woking (shown on the left of this picture), but not all of it is backed up by the evidence. It was once suggested that Charles II gave the property to (some say even had it built for) his mistress the Duchess of Cleveland, but that is unlikely – it would have been much too small a home for

her. It was probably built in the mid to late 17<sup>th</sup> century using re-used timbers and bricks, but whether these came from the ruins of Woking Palace (as is sometimes claimed) or from an older building on the site is unclear. The name suggested to some that it was the successor to Woking Palace as the Manor House of Woking, but as Hoe Place obviously

took on that role, it has been suggested that it was once the home of the Steward of the Manor (rather than the Lord of the Manor). That could, in a way, be partially true but the 'Manor' to which the name refers is not the Manor of Woking, but a smaller 'sub-manor' of the area known sometimes as the Manor of Emley, or the Manor of Woking Rectory.

## SORTING THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF AT HUNTS FARM BARN

The old Barn at Hunts Farm, Mayford – now converted into a house – was originally built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Then it consisted of five bays with large doors that allowed the threshing carts to be pulled in one side and out the other. Here when the doors were open, the wind could blow through, separating the wheat from the chaff, but with the advance of mechanisation in the Victorian and Edwardian period, Hunts Farm Barn (like so many others throughout the area) became redundant and almost lost forever. In fact part of it was destroyed in 1928 when the council decided that the old Guildford Road (and the nearby bridge over the River Bourne) needed to be widened. One bay of the barn was removed (the one nearest the road), which explains why the once 'central doors' are no longer central.

