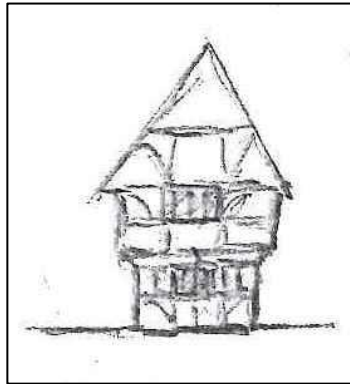


The Landmark Trust

HOLE COTTAGE

History Album



**Researched and written by Clayre Percy
1972, updated 1998 & 2016**

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205

Bookings 01628 825925 Office 01628 825920 Facsimile 01628 825417
Website www.landmarktrust.org.uk

BASIC DETAILS

- Built:** late 15th century (probably)
- Tenure:** Originally taken on a lease following negotiations between Sir John Smith and the Falconhurst Estate. On expiration of the lease it became a managed property.
- Repaired:** 1970
- Architect:** K. M. Benbow
- Builders:** H. E. Waters Ltd
- Furnished:** 1971

Contents

Summary	5
Introduction	7
The building	9
The owners	12
Iron, bloomeries and blast furnaces	17
Roads	28
The railway	30
The bombs	31
Photos of Hole Cottage before restoration	34
The storm of 1987	36
Bibliography	37



Hole Cottage

Summary

The name Hole describes somewhere in a hollow. Although now called a cottage, throughout the 16th -18th centuries this building was referred to simply as 'The Hole' (indeed, locals still call it that today but Landmark changed the name of the building to Hole Cottage, to distinguish it from its hollow). It is in fact one end of a relatively sophisticated yeoman's house, three-quarters of which has now gone. It is the kind of house that was once common in the Weald of Kent and Sussex, where oak was plentiful and the yeoman rich, mainly on account of the contemporary iron industry.

The present approach to the front door would originally have been through the single-storey hall, open to the roof. At the opposite end of the hall, nearest the existing shed, there would have been another two-storey wing, perhaps also jettied, acting as the service area. Typically on the ground floor there would have been a pair of doors leading respectively to the buttery (for the storage of liquid items such as beer) and the pantry (for the storage of dry goods).

The opposite wing, which survives today, was reached from the 'high' end of the hall. On the ground floor there is a parlour and upstairs the solar, which seems always to have been divided into two chambers. These rooms would have been for the personal use of the owner, his family and guests. It was probably built towards the end of the 15th century. A moulded beam just visible over the present front door confirms the impression that Hole was a house of considerable status.

Originally the entire timber-frame would have been filled with wattle and daub. As this deteriorated, often at low level, it became quite common to use bricks instead between the timbers - known as 'nogging'. Tile-hanging is also a very common method in Kent of protecting a timber-frame, a practice introduced in the late 17th century. Hole was perhaps first tiled on its upper walls when the main part of the house was pulled down in the early 19th century.

The roof is also tiled but with older ones than the walls. Peg tiles were rare and expensive until after 1600 and Hole would originally have had a thatched or possibly Horsham stone roof.

The two windows in the kitchen and the east window in the main bedroom are late-medieval. The openings and the holes for the vertical mullions were found in 1970. These mullions were replaced, set diagonally as they were originally. The only way of closing these windows would have been with internal wooden shutters that slid in grooves. The window in the sitting room is in its original position (although not medieval) and you can see the slots for the bars in the beam above it.

The main source of heat for Hole would have been the open fire in the hall. The existing part would only have been heated by glowing embers in a brazier. Later there would have been a big Tudor chimney (perhaps where the present 19th

century one is) with fireplaces back to back - one facing the hall and the other the sitting room. No trace of this remains however.

The stairs are probably where they always were, though at first they may have been steep and straight like a ladder. The newel post is a copy of an old Tudor one that had been incorporated into the 19th-century stairs.

George Baily, a local poet, wrote a stanza describing the destruction of most of Hole in the 1830s:

'But where is the homestead, the once happy spot,
Shall its memory perish and all be forgot?
A warrior possessed it and levelled it down
A desolate array of ruins around.'

Hole Cottage was restored in 1970 by the Landmark Trust and opened in 1971.

Introduction

The name

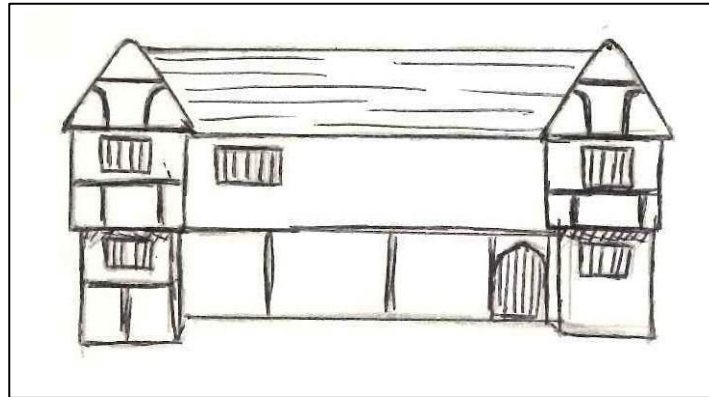
'Hole', used as a place name, refers to somewhere in a hollow.

Where Hole Cottage is mentioned in the Cowden Parish records in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries it is referred to simply as 'The Hole', and seems to have been a small manor or yeoman's house.

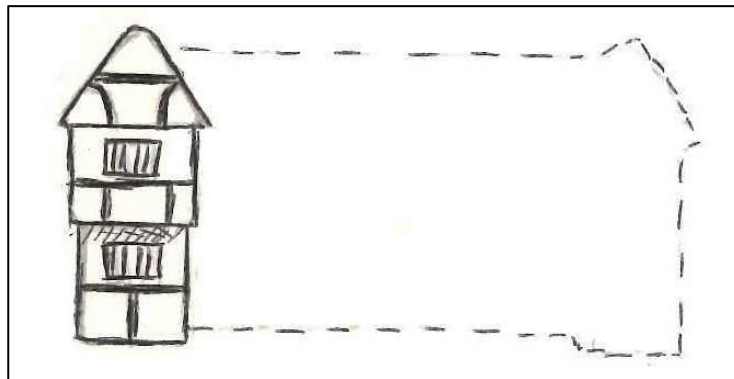
On the Ordnance Survey map of about 1805, the house is marked as Hole Farm. Adam Nicholson's *Sissinghurst, An Unfinished History* perhaps provides a general hypothesis for how it got its name:

..the place names around Sissinghurst are full of jokes and taunts, nicknames and insults thrown across the woods and fields by one set of neighbours at another. It is an element which brings the spark of life to this wood margin farming world. Out in the wet of the vale, where even now on a winter's day the water lies dead in the ditches, there are two neighbouring places called Sinkhurst and Hungerden. They are low in the damp ground, never where you would have gone if you had a choice, and their names clearly reflect what everyone else must originally have thought...Just as damp and not far away, until the nineteenth century, was a farm called Noah's Ark. By comparison, their near neighbours on slightly higher rising ground, Buckhurst and Maplehurst, glow with health and well-being.

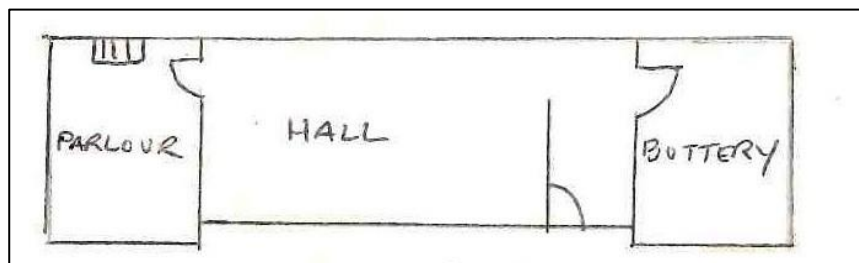
When the house was first built it probably looked something like this:



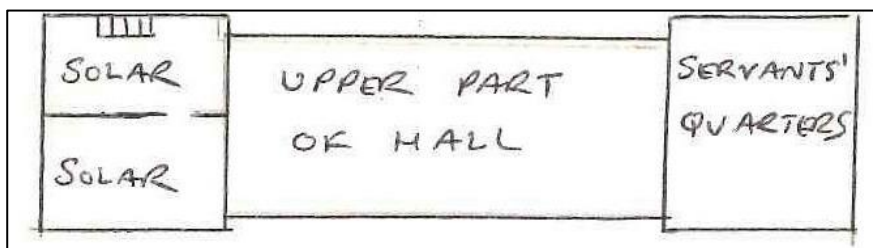
What is left is this:



The original plan would have looked like this:



The ground floor



The first floor

The building

The house was probably built towards the end of the 15th century. After 1500 good timber was becoming scarce in the Weald, and large beams like those in this house would not have been used. Moreover, the windows are early: late-medieval rather than Tudor.

Although it is called a cottage, and seems like one now, it was not built as a cottage. In the Middle Ages cottages were humble buildings, and did not have important first floors jettied out above the ground-floor rooms. If they had first floors at all, they were windowless lofts in the roof space. Hole Cottage is one end of quite a sophisticated yeoman's house, three-quarters of which was pulled down in the 1830s. It was a kind of house that was common in the Weald of Kent and Sussex, where oak was plentiful and the yeomen were rich, mainly as a result of the flourishing iron industry.

As you approach the front door you walk across the floor of what used to be the hall of the original house. You enter through what was a partition wall dividing the hall from the family's living quarters.

The walls

As you see them now, the walls are made up of four different materials. The fine oak frame is filled with bricks at the bottom and with wattle and daub in the middle, and is hung with tiles at the top.

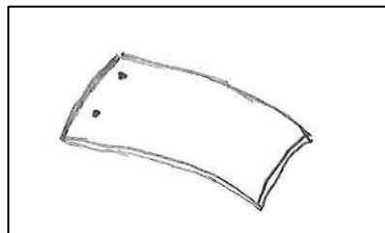
Originally the entire frame would have been filled with wattle and daub. Brick infilling, or 'nogging', was unknown until about 1550 and only became common in the 17th century as bricks became cheaper and more plentiful. At Hole Cottage, when the walls began seriously to let in the weather at the bottom, probably about 1700, the wattle and daub in the lower frames was replaced with brick nogging.

Tile-hanging is typical of Kent. It was introduced in the late 17th century, but the wall tiles here are considerably later than that. They were probably hung after the main part of the house was pulled down in the early 19th century. Sometimes the joints between tiles are mortared but the best are left open, as they are here. When Hole Cottage was renovated in 1970 the tiles had to be taken off and re-hung, and some crumbled away when they were handled. The original tiles that were re-used are the natural brick colour; the new ones are darker.

The roof

The main beams in the roof – the rafters and the tie beams – form a series of equilateral triangles. This was common practice in early houses; cutting all the beams to the same length simplified the construction and saved measuring.

The first roof that was put on The Hole was probably of Horsham stone, though it might possibly have been thatch. Roofing tiles were rare and expensive until after 1600. The tiles on this roof are older than the tiles that are hung on the walls, so the re-roofing must have been done when the whole house was still in existence, probably at about 1700. Like all tiles of this date they are slightly cambered in both dimensions:



They give the roof a more interesting texture than if modern, flat tiles had been used.

The windows

Two windows in the kitchen are late-medieval, as is also the west window in the main bedroom. The openings and the slots for the vertical bars were found in 1970. The bars were replaced (set diagonally, as they always were) and the openings were glazed. Originally the only way of closing the windows would have

been with shutters. These were not hinged, but slid in grooves. You can see the grooves into which they fitted above the windows in the kitchen.

The window in the sitting room is in its original position, although it is not a medieval window. You can see the slots for the bars in the beam above it. The south window in the main bedroom is also in the same place as an early window.

The fireplace, stairs and partitions

When the manor house was first built there would have been a fire towards one end of the hall, with a louvre in the roof to get rid of some of the smoke. The part of the house that survives today would have been heated only by glowing embers in a brazier.

Later there would have been a big Tudor chimney. It may have been where the present one is, with two fireplaces back to back, one facing the hall and the other the present sitting room. No trace of it remains, The existing fireplace and the bread oven beside it date from the 19th century. They would have been built after the hall was demolished.

The stairs are very likely where they always were, though at first they may have been steep and straight, almost like a ladder. The floor of the bedrooms is original and seems only to have been cut away to accommodate the 19th-century staircase. Incorporated into these was a very old newel post; it was much older than the stairs and may have been Tudor. It was too rotten to save, but an exact copy was made by our joiner and this can be seen in the present staircase.

The ground floor of Hole Cottage, with its three large medieval windows, was probably the parlour. Over the present front door it is possible, if you look carefully, to see a moulded beam, which is original; its presence confirms the impression that when it was first built The Hole was a house of considerable finish and elegance.

Up till the 16th century, or even beyond, rooms were not used exclusively as bedrooms or as sitting rooms. At The Hole the first floor, or solar, would have been used both for living and for sleeping. The main bedroom, with its high beamed ceiling, is grander than the ground-floor room. The doorway seems to be original, and it looks as though the solar was always divided into two rooms, the smaller containing the stairs.

The owners

The Hole is mentioned in the Cowden records at various periods in its history.

In 1589 Lady Katherine Burgh, Lady of the Manor of Cowden, held a court at which 'Thomas Wickenden de la Hole' was found to have encroached upon the land of the Lady, and was fined twenty pence. Guy Ewing, whose *History of Cowden* is an invaluable source of local information, thought that Wickendens were tenants of The Hole at least as early as 1500, when it may have been known as Kings. Three years later Lady Katherine sold the Manor of Cowden, which included The Hole, to Henry Streatfeild. The sale was forced upon her because her late husband, who had been Ambassador to Scotland and Lord Deputy in Ireland, had spent so much in the service of Queen Elizabeth that on his death his widow was left insolvent.

The tenancy of The Hole must also have changed hands, because in 1663 'John Saxby of The Hole' is mentioned as being an 'Overseer of the Poor' (an overseer was an officer of the parish, who administered the Poor Laws – Thomas Wickenden had held the same office 60 years before). Both Wickendens and Saxbys were well-known local families; another Saxby owned Pilegate at the time.

In 1735 a copy was made of the Church Marks, and again The Hole is mentioned. At that time churchyards were surrounded either by walls or by

wooden palings, and every owner of land in the parish gave lengths of fencing or the equivalent in walling stone which were 'marked' with the landowner's initials. They gave according to the extent of their property. This list of donors contains 38 names, which included Mr Henry Streatfeild, a descendant of his 16th-century namesake mentioned above, who provided 19 feet of fencing from 'Ye Hole'. 19 feet was considerably more than the average given; Crippenden, for example, only produced 12½ feet. This again points to The Hole as a place of considerable importance.

Henry Streatfeild, who lived at Chiddingstone, owned several houses in the parish as well as The Hole. There is a romantic story about his marriage. In 1743 Joceline, Earl of Leicester and the owner of Penshurst, died leaving everything to his illegitimate daughter Anne Sidney. He had no other children, but his nieces contested his will claiming that their uncle had been insane, and a lawsuit followed. Meanwhile, according to the local historian Thomas Streatfeild, Anne was thrown out of Penshurst and her mother, who was buried in the chapel there, was disinterred. Henry Streatfeild took the child in, and in 1752 he married her; they had two sons. Henry died in 1762.

In 1833 Colonel (later General) William Woodhouse bought The Hole, together with Edells (which lies between The Hole and Horseshoe Green), from a Mr Charles Brooke, who had bought it from the Streatfeild family in 1813. Woodhouse pulled down most of Hole Farm; Guy Ewing says – not strictly accurately – that all that remained was an orchard and a cottage, said to have been the dairy of the farm. A poem by the local poet George Baily includes a stanza describing the destruction of Hole Farm:

'But where is the homestead, the once happy spot,
Shall its memory perish and all be forgot?
A warrior possessed it and levelled it down
A desolate array of ruins around.'

General Woodhouse also demolished Edells and built a villa 'in the Indian manner' on the site; this was eventually replaced by the present house. He died in 1845, and three years later his brother sold Hole Farm to a Mr Talbot.

The Census return of 1841 shows the Buckwell family as occupants of Hole Cottage, with James Buckwell, aged 23, the head of household listed as an agricultural labourer. By 1851, Hole Cottage was occupied by Thomas Turner, a milkman and agricultural labourer, together with his wife Sarah and 3 sons and a daughter. From 1861, the Burfoot family lived there for some 20 years.

INHABITANTS OF HOLE COTTAGE:

from nineteenth-century census returns

Notes:

The accuracy of the information in the decennial census returns depends upon the accuracy and honesty of the person who supplied the information and on the accuracy and intelligence of the enumerator who wrote it down.

Ages often do not tally from one census to the next, and birthplaces are frequently at variance.

The information asked for in the 1841 census was less full than in subsequent censuses. Ages of adults were supposed to be rounded down, and birthplace was merely whether or not born in the county.

The Burfoots seem to have been numerous in this locality, and there are several references to them in Guy Ewing's *History of Cowden* (1926). In the eighteenth century there is mention of a Christopher Burfoot, and later in that century Mrs Streatfeild's tenant was a William Burfoot. A house called Curds was bought some time after 1780 by William Burfoot of Cowden, yeoman, who died in 1818. A J. Burfoot was church warden in 1814.

Abbreviations: ag lab = agricultural labourer, m=married, u=unmarried.

1841 Hole HO107/481 folio 8					
Name	Relationship	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
James BUCKWELL			23	ag lab	Kent
Sarah BUCKWELL			21		Kent
William BUCKWELL			7 months		Kent
Mary BUCKWELL			24	female servant	England (not Kent)

1851 Hole HO107/1613 folio 595					
Name	Relationship	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
Thomas TURNER	head	m	35	milkman – ag lab	Kent: Cowden
Sarah TURNER	wife	m	32		Kent: Leigh
Thomas TURNER	son	u	12	errand boy	Kent: Cowden
William TURNER	son	u	9		Kent: Cowden
Ann TURNER	daughter	u	5		Kent: Cowden
John TURNER	son	u	2		Kent: Cowden

1851 Cottage [next to Haysland] HO107/1613 folio 595					
Name	Relationship	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
William BURFOOT	head	m	50	ag lab	Kent: Cowden
Mary BURFOOT	wife	m	50		Sussex: Withyham
Fanny BURFOOT	daughter	u	11		Kent: Hever
Mary BURFOOT	daughter	u	10		Kent: Hever
Thomas BURFOOT	son	u	8		Kent: Hever

1861 The Hole RG9/490 folio 161					
Name	Relationship	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
William BURFOOT	head	m	54	ag lab	Kent: Hever
Mary BURFOOT	wife	m	49	lab's wife	Sussex: Withyham
William BURFOOT	son	u	26	ag lab	Sussex: Withyham
Thomas BURFOOT	son	u	18	ag lab	Kent: Hever

1871 The Hole RG10/926 folio 63					
Name	Relationship	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
William BURFOOT	head	m	63	ag lab	Kent: Hever
Mary BURFOOT	wife	m	59	lab wife	Sussex: Withyham
William BURFOOT	son	u	35	ag lab	Sussex: Withyham
Martha BURFOOT	grand-dau.	u	11	scholar	Kent: Cowden

1881 Hole Cottage RG11/911 folio 61					
Name	Relationship	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
William BURFOOT	head	m	74	ag lab	Kent: Hever
Mary BURFOOT	wife	m	70		Sussex: Withyham

1881 The Kentish Horse [next enumeration after Hole Cottage] RG11/911 folio 61					
Name	Relationship	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
Christopher BURFOOT	head	m	68	farmer of 23 acres employing 1 man	Kent: Cowden
Elizabeth BURFOOT	daughter	u	45		Kent: Cowden
Ann BURFOOT	daughter	u	39	barmaid	Kent: Cowden
Elizabeth WALKER	grand-dau.	u	13		Kent: Tun. Wells

1891 Pile Gate RG12/675 folio 58 {Hole Cottage not found; 6 households at Pile Gate including below}					
Name	Relationship	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
Thomas BURFOOT	lodger	widower	62		Kent: Cowden

Iron, bloomeries and blast furnaces

During the late Middle Ages and in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Weald of Kent and Sussex was the centre of the English iron industry – the Black Country of England. The raw materials required were plentiful: iron ore near the surface, wood from the forest to make into charcoal, and clay. Cowden was at the heart of the industry.

Coal and ironstone often go hand in hand geologically, and the first was eventually (but not initially) necessary for the exploitation of the second. Iron was introduced into Britain around 600 BC and became one of our most ubiquitous materials, necessary for even the most basic agricultural and industrial advances. Iron takes three forms: *wrought iron*, which contains no, or very little, carbon and is malleable; *cast iron*, which is rendered brittle and not malleable by the incorporation of 5% carbon but which can be moulded, filed, drilled and ground, and *steel*, which contains up to 1.5% carbon and can be both forged and cast.

Mining

The ore was dug out of pits, usually six feet wide at the top but wider at the bottom, and up to twenty feet deep. The phrases 'mine pit' and 'marl pit' are often seen on maps. A mine pit was dug for the extraction of ore only; a marl pit produced both ore and marl – a white clay, which was spread on the land as a fertiliser and soil conditioner. The pits can still be distinguished in woodland, though most of those on arable land have disappeared: there are large mine pits, now filled with water, on Mount Noddy, half a mile east of Hole Cottage ('noddy' means slag).

When the ore had been dug out it was washed and then burnt in order to break it up. It was then smelted.

Smelting

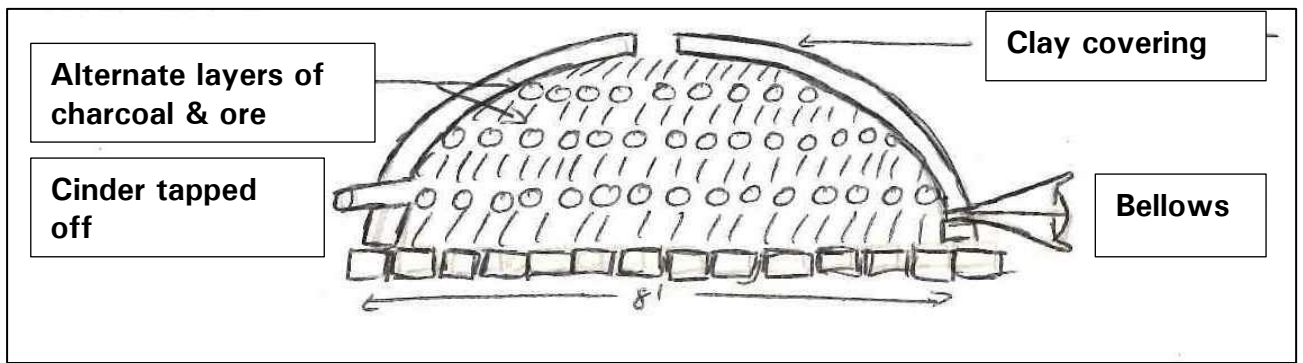
From prehistoric times until about 1500 iron was smelted by the same primitive method that had been employed by the Romans when they were in the Weald.

Wrought iron is the simplest form, produced by smelting ironstone or ore with charcoal. At first this was done in a simple scoop out of the ground (a bowl furnace) but from around 100 AD an upright furnace was used, making it easier to maintain the heat and so burn the carbon out of the iron by oxygen, introduced with bellows through a clay pipe low down in the furnace wall. It was allowed to burn for six or eight hours. Gradually the ore was reduced to metallic iron, which at the temperature in the kiln was molten and flowed slowly to the bottom of the heap. The silicate impurities became liquid; being lighter than the iron they formed a layer above it that could be tapped off. As the impurities cooled they hardened into solid cinders.

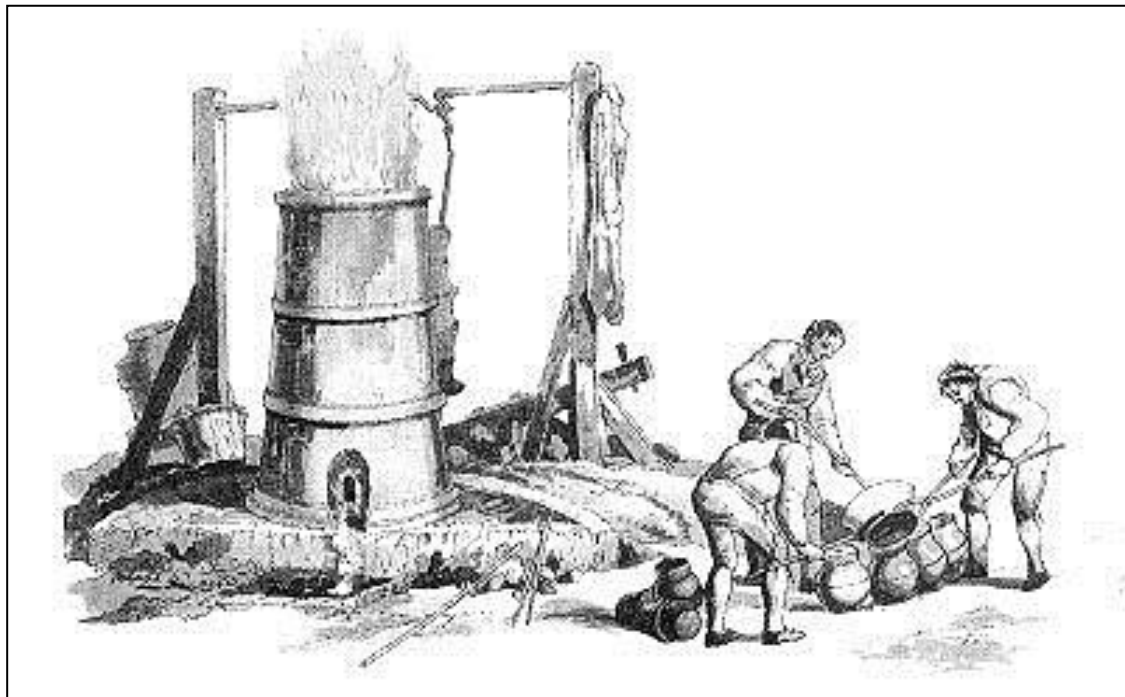
The iron collected at the bottom in a small lump known as the bloom – and the furnaces consequently became known as bloomeries. Finally the kiln was destroyed and the remaining lump of malleable iron or bloom was taken out and hammered by hand to consolidate it and remove any remaining carbon. It was then ready for reheating by the smith and working into any required form.



A medieval iron furnace, with bellows. It seems more likely that the furnace would have been enclosed than open as depicted here. Note too apparently female smiths at work.



A cross section drawing of a kiln or bloomery

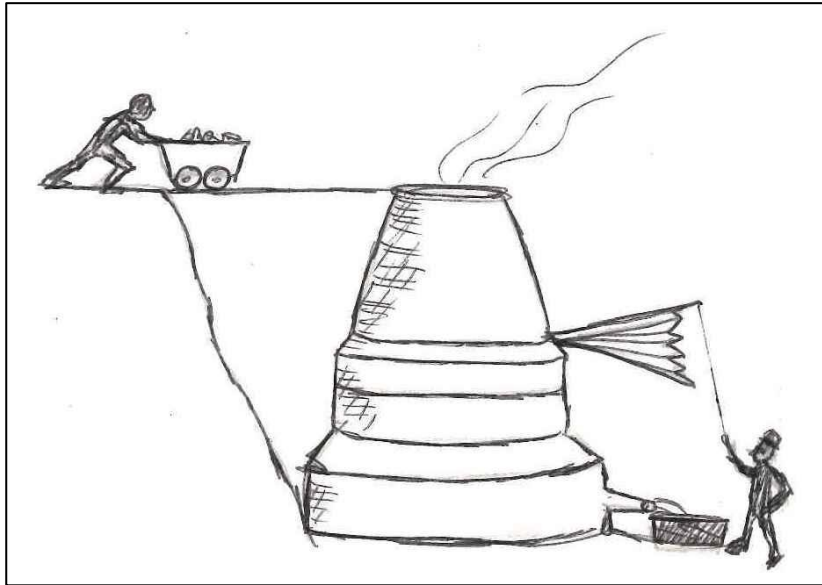


A bloomery

There are at least seven sites of bloomeries within three miles of Hole Cottage. The nearest is close to the railway track, between the cottage and Cowden Station.

The blast furnace, which provided a more sophisticated method of smelting, was introduced from France in about 1490.

One of the few surviving pictures of an early blast furnace is on an 18th-century clock-face. It looked like this:



The chimney was built of sandstone or brick, and was up to about thirty feet high and eight feet across. It was filled from the top with a mixture of charcoal and iron ore, and refilled as the contents burnt down: much higher temperatures, and better yields of iron, could be achieved in a blast furnace than in a bloomery. Smelting was continued for about a week at a time, the bellows being kept in continuous action and the molten iron being tapped off at intervals.



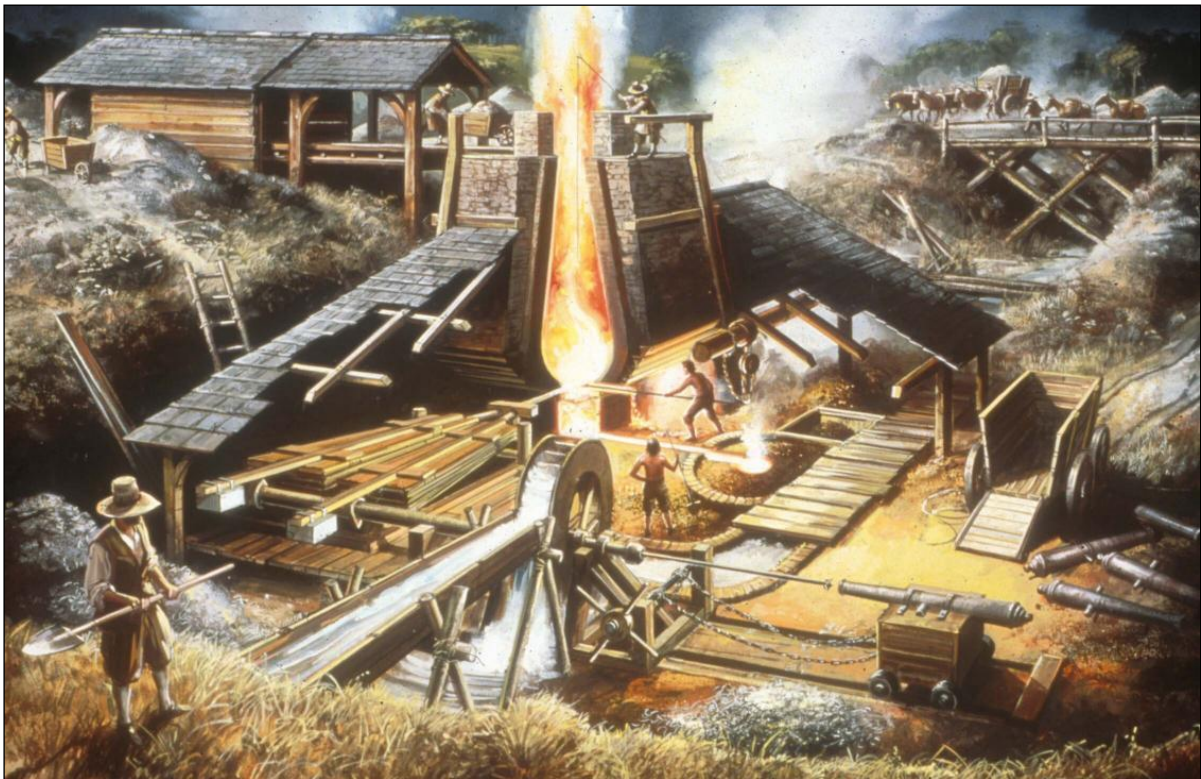
Early Wealden iron industry; ironstone is dug from shallow open cast mines and carted off to the furnaces. Charcoal burners in the coppices and woodland laboriously burn the charcoal needed for smelting.



Experimental archaeologists have successfully recreated early blast furnaces. Ironstone and charcoal are fed from the top in layers, and the fire fanned with bellows. The 'bloom' settles at the bottom, but is initially contaminated with impurities: fragments of charcoal and glassy slag (below left). It must be reheated and hammered ('wrought') to remove these impurities, the carbon burning off as sparks.

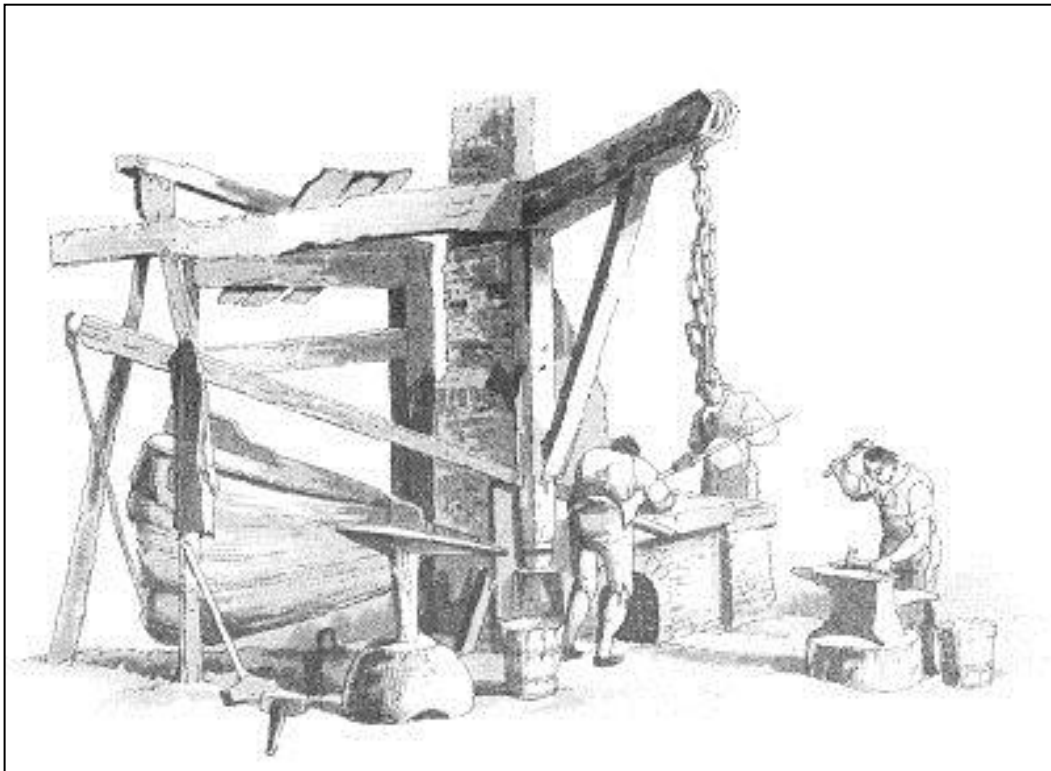


The furnaces got progressively larger, requiring the bellows to be powered by water by the mid-15th century. From 1496, blast furnaces began to appear in Britain. One of the earliest was built at Hartfield, about three miles south of Hole Cottage. They were heated with a powerful blast of air from two water powered bellows, worked by an overshot waterwheel fed by a millpond. The larger quantities of molten iron so produced ran out from the bottom into moulds sunk into sand or loam outside the furnace. This was cast iron, and the ingots were known as sows or pigs depending on their size. The fuel was still charcoal, since the sulphur found in coal ruined the iron.



Reconstructive drawing of a water blown iron furnace, such as were once found along the River Rea.

<http://www.wealdeniron.org.uk/hist.htm>



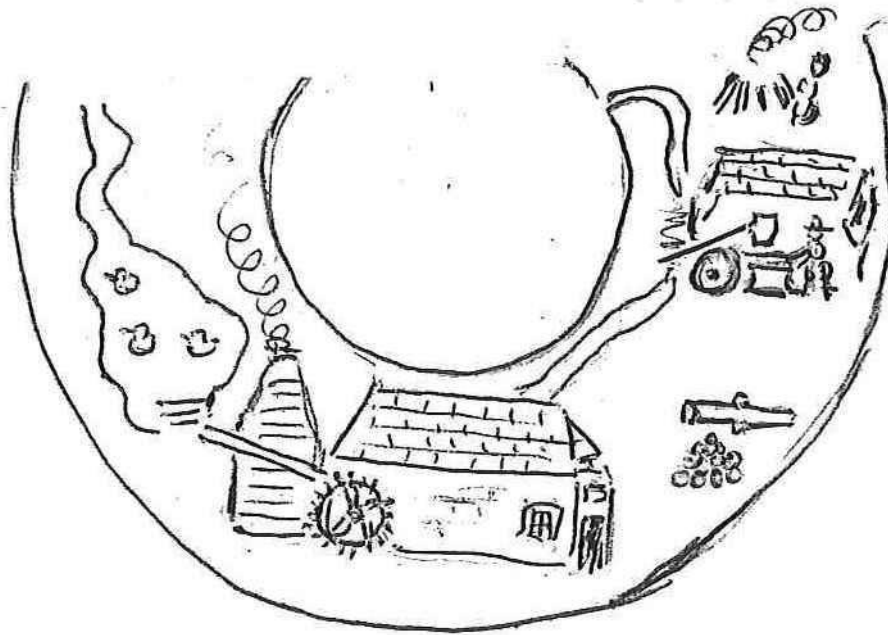
A (still small scale) blast furnace, 1790s. Note the bellows. On a water blown furnace, the bellows would have been harnessed to a waterwheel, rather than pumped by hand as here.

Water power

The two most arduous jobs in smelting were working the bellows and hammering out the crude metallic iron. During the 15th century water wheels began to be used to power both these processes.

Sometimes small streams were dammed up to make ponds; more often bigger streams were partially diverted, the mill pond being made at the higher level. This minimised the danger from flooding and also prevented the pond from silting up too quickly. The water from the 'hammer pond' was carried in oak chutes to turn the mill wheel, which worked the bellows or the trip hammer.

The clock-face mentioned above described the whole process in pictures:



Camden, in his *Britannia*, described what the Weald was like in 1610 when the activities of the furnaces and forges were at their height:

'Full of iron mines it is in sundry places, where for the making and firing thereof there bee furnaces on every side, and a huge deale of wood is yearly spent, to which purpose divers brooks in many places are brought to runne in one channell, and sundry meadows turned into pooles and waters, that might bee of power sufficient to drive hammer milles, which beating upon the iron resound all over the places adjoining.'

The nearest hammer pond to Hole Cottage is Furnace Pond, just beyond Cowden. There were two furnaces there. Beside the road that runs along the north side of the pond you can see the cave from which the sandstone for the furnaces was quarried. They must have been highly profitable, because the iron master Leonard Gale wrote in 1670:

'If you can get one of the Cowden furnaces it will be very well, for I do assure you that if I were but forty years old, I would, by God's help, get a good estate by this employment, for I have within these twenty years cleared near £300 per annum out of that very forge.'

There was a forge a mile south of Cowden, at Little Cansiron; at the point where the road crosses a stream you can see the cinder in the water.

The first cast iron gun to be made in England was produced at Buxted, 15 miles south of Cowden in 1543. Cannon and cannon balls were soon the main products of the Wealden iron foundries, though they also made cast iron fire-backs and grave markers.

We cannot leave the story of early iron working in the Weald, which lasted for 300 years, without reference to Abraham Darby's revolutionary discovery at Coalbrookdale in 1709, in what is now known as the Ironbridge Gorge. Darby deduced that coke, already used for roasting malt as part of the brewing process, could also be applied to iron smelting. It has been suggested that his initial breakthrough was facilitated by his use of the low-sulphur Shropshire 'clod-coals.' This was important because by the 1700s, the increasing scarcity of the timber required to produce charcoal had made timber per se too valuable a commodity to transmute into a mere industrial fuel through the laborious process of a long, slow, airless heating. Another drawback was the speed with which charcoal broke down in extreme high temperatures, which meant that only small quantities of iron could be produced at a time. Abraham Darby realised that coke, produced in a very similar fashion to charcoal could provide a solution to the by then acute shortage of charcoal, at the same time avoiding any danger of sulphur contamination from untreated coal.

Airless heating of heaps of coal at very high temperatures would drive off volatile impurities from the outer layer, which left the inside in a carbonised state. Brick beehive ovens were developed later in the 18th century as a more effective method of producing coke. Darby's coke-fired blast furnaces in the north enabled the production of large quantities of inexpensive iron, a key driver for the rapid development of the Industrial Revolution in Britain.

The last remaining Wealden furnace closed in 1813 at Ashburnham near Battle in Sussex.¹ No other industry came to this part of the world.



The remains of Abraham Darby's coke-fired blast furnace at Coalbrookdale. By using coke, Darby was able to build taller, and therefore hotter, furnaces.

Iron Working in the Weald, by Merv Allen FWCB, Forge Magazine

Roads

Roman roads

The Roman road connecting Lewes and London runs roughly north and south a mile to the west of Hole Cottage. Although in Roman times the Weald was almost covered by uninhabited forest, the road was built here because the iron workings in the clearings were already important, as were the grain-growing areas of the South Downs.

The road became of renewed importance in the 15th century, when the iron industry of the Weald began to prosper. Of the seven bloomeries within three miles of Hole Cottage, four are on, or nearly on, the line of the Roman road: those at Holtye, Waystrode, Leighton Manor Farm and Beechenwood.

Today, the only part still in use as a main road is the stretch that is Edenbridge High Street. It continues for a short way south of the town as the B2026, after which it turns into a footpath for another mile and then disappears.

South-west of Cowden, a few hundred yards east of Holtye Golf Course, there is a footpath off the A264 which heads south towards a section of the Roman road which was excavated in 1939 by the Sussex Archaeological Society. The excavation has remained uncovered since then, surrounded by a fence. The road at this point is about 15½ feet wide, with a camber of 8 inches. The metalling is 12 inches deep in the middle and 3 inches at the sides, and consists of cinder from a nearby working. You can clearly see the ruts made by the chariot wheels.

Medieval roads

These are not as easy to identify as are Roman roads, but sometimes their course may be marked by footpaths that are old rights of way; sometimes, too, they are mentioned in parish records, mainly in the context of legacies of money for their upkeep.

Spode Lane was an important road in the Middle Ages. The name means 'cinder lane'. It runs north and south, three-quarters of a mile west of Hole Cottage, from Kitford Bridge to the B2026 at Brook Street, where there was a paygate. John Still, who lived at Waystrode Manor, left money for it in 1511. Part of Spode Lane is now a country lane, and part is a footpath and right of way.

In 1473, William Moys left 3s. 4d. 'to the Vile Way from Cowden to Pilegate'. This was probably the path that runs directly to Cowden across the fields; it is still a right of way.

In 1512, William Turner left 10s. 'to the Highway betwixt Kentwater and Pylegate', now the B2026 road. He also left '2 nobles for the highway betwixt Henry Wickenden and Bryde Brook'. As we have seen, the Wickendens were tenants of The Hole, and a farmhouse called Bryde Brook Farm once stood opposite where the station is now. So this may have been the path that runs from Hole Cottage to Cowden Station.

The road from Horseshoe Green to Cowden, by Cowden Cross, is mentioned in both the 16th- and 18th-century records.

There are no waterways in the Weald, and the iron bars (later, the iron cannons) were dragged by teams of oxen to London or to the coast. All the transporting had to be done in the summer when the ground was reasonably dry. Deep ruts were cut in the unsurfaced lanes. Daniel Defoe was in this part of the country in 1724, and wrote:

'I saw an ancient Lady and a Lady of very good quality, I assure you, drawn to Church in her Coach with six Oxen, nor was it done but out of necessity, the Way being so stiff and deep, that no Horses could go in it.'

In 1814, Dearn writes in his account of the Weald of Kent:

'From the badness of the roads in this neighbourhood Cowden is a place but little known, it has no turnpike road through it, nor indeed is it likely to have while the materials are so difficult of attainment. ... The soil here is a deep clay and from its retentive property, the lands are for the greater part of the year extremely wet and miry.'

The railway

The length of railway between Oxted and Ashurst, which passes through Edenbridge, Hever and Cowden stations, was one of the last stretches in the Southern Region to be completed.

Authority to build it was given by Parliament to the Surrey and Sussex Junction Railway in 1865. It was backed, and was soon bought out, by the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway, which already controlled the routes to Brighton and which wanted this line in order to ensure that it should gain the lucrative traffic from London to Eastbourne, rather than its powerful rival the South Western Line.

By 1866 the work was under way and Jacomb-Hood, the Brighton engineer, records that in August of that year there was 'a serious riot at Edenbridge against the Belgians brought over by Messrs. Waring to assist in the Surrey and Sussex railway works'.

Soon after work had begun, the whole country was hit by a recession. Banks failed and railway schemes were abandoned all over Britain. The London, Brighton and South Coast Railway wanted to give up the project

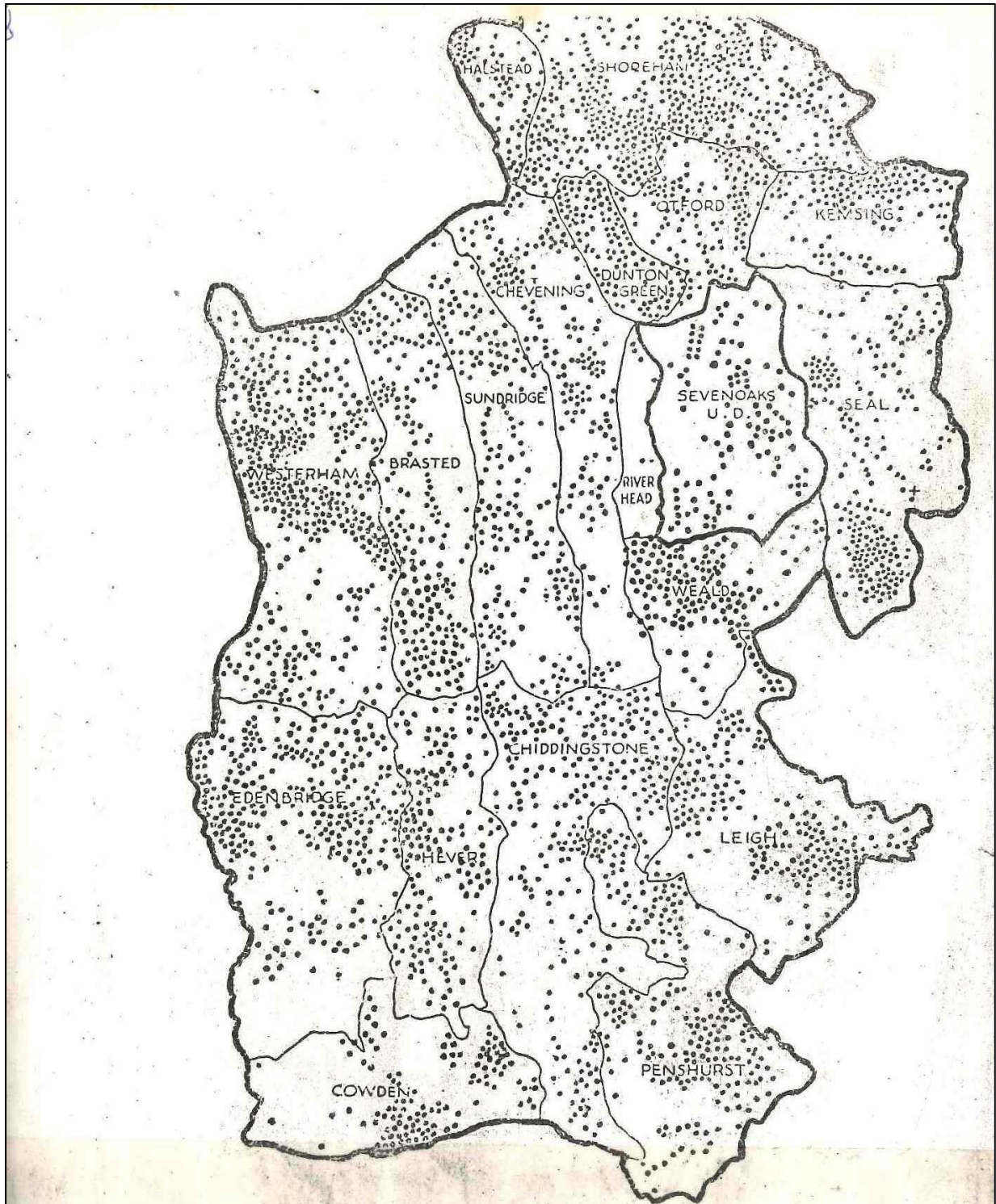
altogether, but were forced to accept their legal liability to build the line. Rather than continue with the work, however, they invoked the penalty clause and paid £32,000, in order to avoid risking a far greater sum.

In 1881, the Oxted and Groombridge Company was formed to complete the line. It was again backed by the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. The earthworks constructed in 1866 were used, and the whole stretch of 12½ miles of line was opened in 1888.

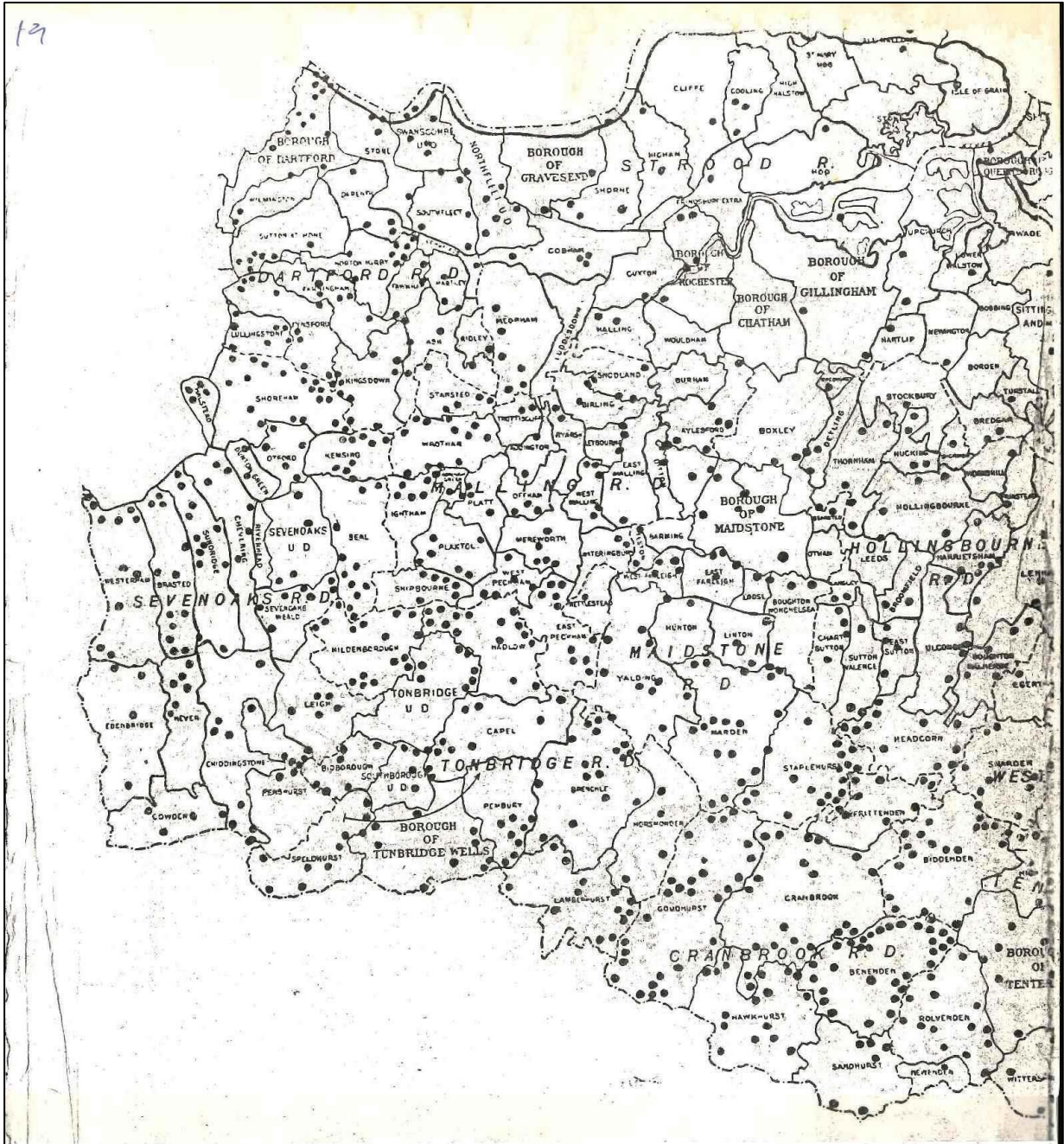
Until 1968, the trains that passed through Cowden Station either branched off to Tunbridge Wells at Groombridge, or went on a mile or so further to Eridge, beyond which the line split. The easterly fork, known as the 'Cuckoo Line' (it was so called after a fair at Heathfield), went to Eastbourne, while the westerly arm went to Lewes via Uckfield. In 1965 the 'Cuckoo Line', which had become uneconomic, was closed to passengers, and in 1968 it was closed altogether. Now, every train that runs through Cowden Station, or stops there, goes on to Eridge. At the time of writing, there is a train roughly every hour on weekdays. The station was built during the 1880s and, by an amazing piece of good fortune, has remained untouched until the present day; the original paraffin lamps were replaced by electric lighting only in 1976.

The bombs

During the London blitz of the Second World War, Kent became notorious as 'Bomb Alley'. The following maps illustrate how widespread the damage was. Between July 1940 and February 1944, about 120 bombs of over 50 lb weight fell on the parish of Cowden alone, as well as very many incendiary bombs (see maps); in 1944, it was struck by four flying bombs ('doodlebugs'). This must have been one of the most dramatic pages in the history of Hole Cottage and the neighbouring districts, and must still be fresh in the memories of many of the older inhabitants.

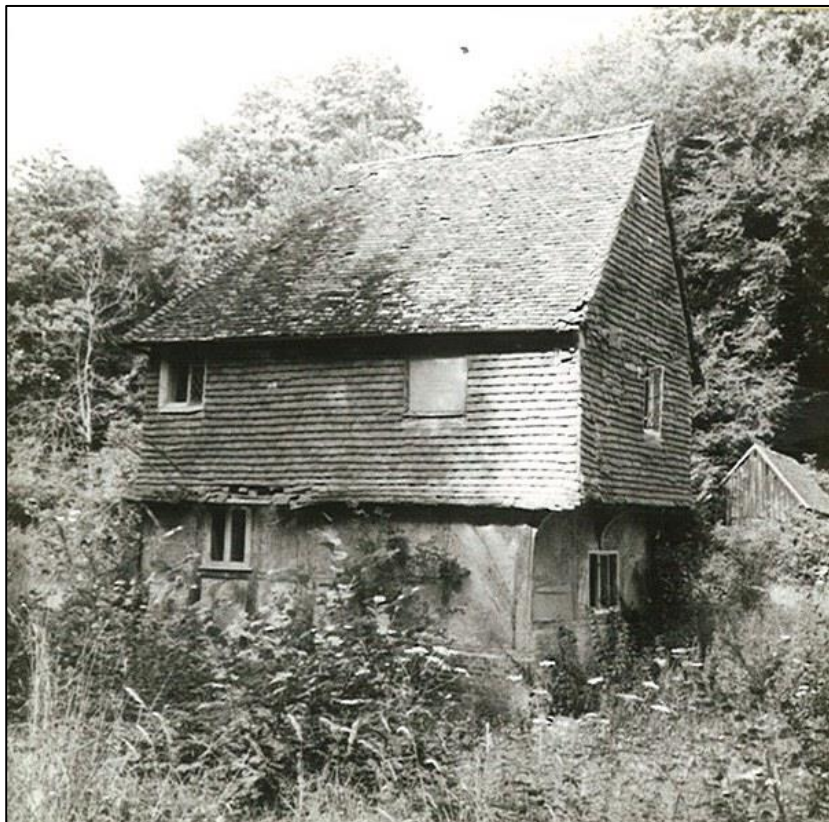


Few people have any idea how much Kent was bombed. A map of Kent that showed where every bomb fell could not be made on a page this size because the map would be completely black. This small section, showing just the Urban District and Rural District of Sevenoaks, was officially plotted by the local A.R.P. (Air Raid Precautions) Control, and is as correct as any bomb map can be. Each bomb shown weighed at least 50 pounds (about 22 kg) and fell between 28th July 1940 and 28th February 1944; over 50,000 incendiaries and 'butterfly' bombs that fell in the same area are not marked.



Kent soon gained the name of 'Bomb Alley'. This map, prepared by the County of Kent Civil Defence Authority, shows where each of the 'doodlebugs' (V1 rockets) fell in 1944, and how they formed a pathway across Kent to London. London was protected from doodle bugs all the way by the R.A.F., who fired at them or tipped them over with their wings, by Ack Ack gunfire, and by the balloon barrage, with the aim of destroying them if at all possible before they reached London. Fortunately many of the intruders were brought down over almost open country, with perhaps only a farmhouse or a few cottages damaged or destroyed, but the results were often tragic 'incidents' for the people of Kent.

Hole Cottage before repair





The storm of 1987

The hurricane that crossed southern England during the night of 15–16 October 1987 devastated the woodlands of Kent, and those surrounding Hole Cottage suffered as badly as any. The story of the most destructive storm this country had known for centuries – the destruction, the economic disruption, the (mercifully small) loss of life – has been told by many writers and journalists. But the ordeal of this house is best described by the two indomitable Landmarkers who were here at the time. On the morning after the storm, they wrote:

‘It began to blow about 10.30 or 11 p.m. and was raining as well. We went to bed, but were awakened between 2.30 and 3 a.m. by the sound of a roaring wind and a large tree falling near the house. The noise of the wind grew steadily louder, and limbs and trees were breaking loose and falling. Tiles began coming loose and sliding off the house. We decided to go down to the sitting room, as the din had become unnerving in the extreme. As we sat huddled in blankets with our own candle burning (the power had already gone off) we heard a terrific crash in the big room upstairs. A big tree had fallen right on the peak of the roof, knocking some of the tiles through the hole. Roof tiles were scattered all over the room and on the beds. Luckily there was little rain falling but the noise of the wind was horrendous. As the night went on, trees fell one after another all about the house. Occasionally there would be a lull, but immediately afterward the wind was roaring more loudly than before. The great yew over the stream is damaged dreadfully, another yew to the south-west is down, the big chestnut tree looks to be gone, and everywhere trees are snapped and twisted off. ‘Our’ Hole has become a woodyard.

But it is a great testimony to the fibre of this ancient house that it withstood such gales. As we sat in the sitting room in the fearsome teeth of the storm, we knew the stout rafters, the beams over our heads, and the age-old oak planking above would shelter us in safety – and so they did – the roof tree even continuing to support the tree that had fallen across it. We feel lucky to be alive after such a night of terror and are grateful for the sturdiness of the house that sheltered us through it all. Truly, a night to remember.’

The flood of light that followed the disappearance of the dense tree canopy stimulated the germination of dormant seeds, leading to vigorous growth of grass and wild flowers at ground level and the renewal of woodland by the springing up of young trees and shrubs.

Bibliography

Guy Ewing. *History of Cowden* (1926)

Straker. *Wealden Iron*

Margary. *London–Lewes Roman Road*