



DBRG NEWS October 2024



Do you recognise this house or location?

(see p. 3)

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From the Editor

A very belated welcome to our October Newsletter. Sadly it is a rather sparse one, as there was very little copy forthcoming.

A correction to the last News – The building on the cover is in Limpsfield, not Nutfield.

Rosemary Hughesdon

Group Matters

Subscription Contributions 2025

You will recall that from 2023, the DBRG moved from a conventional fixed annual membership subscription to a voluntary annual donation as a means to support the continued work of the charity. This has gone well so it is intended that this will continue for 2025. The benefits of this are that it minimises the workload of the committee in terms of checking, recording and chasing up subscriptions and allows a greater focus on our charitable aims of researching the domestic architectural history of Surrey and sharing our findings with the wider public.

As this is a donation you are free to support the DBRG's work by contributing as much or as little as you wish. Last year an individual annual donation of £15 or a joint annual donation of £20 was suggested to ensure that we could cover the charity's costs and for the year ahead we are not changing this suggestion and the committee is very grateful for your continued support. Don't forget that, depending on your tax situation, your donation may be eligible for Gift Aid that the DBRG can claim. If you can, do please register for this if you have not already done so.

For ease of administration we would prefer payment by Standing Order and many of you already have this set up so do please continue with this. Alternatively, you can make your donation directly to the charity's bank account (details below) or by making a donation via our website.

Ways to make your donation:

Direct to the charity's bank account:

CAFBank account name: DBRG (Surrey)

Sort code: 405240
Account no.: 00007645
Reference: Please use your name

For other ways to pay please contact the Membership Secretary (details below) if:

- you would prefer a form to send in the post to your bank, or
- you would prefer to send a cheque payable to the DBRG (Surrey), or
- you have changed any of your details, especially postal or email address, or
- you wish to make sure that you have confirmed that you are willing and able for us to claim Gift Aid on your contribution

Membership Secretary contact details:

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Research Topics

Do you recognise this house or location?

Dorking Museum is trying to identify the building in the drawing reproduced on the front cover, which is thought to be in Surrey. The drawing has the name E Petty on the back. If this is the artist Edward Petty (1792-1865) this gives the latest it could have been drawn. He was curator of Maidstone Museum from 1820-1840 which may suggest it was sketched during this period.

Since the house may have been demolished it may be that the background will have to be used to identify the location. It appears to be in a group of three or four houses, one of which is relatively grand. This rules out many rural locations and suggests a village.

Note the stone wall in the foreground which suggests it was near the foot of the Downs or perhaps in the Surrey Hills. It is unlikely to be in the Weald or on the chalk. The tall house on the right has a distinctive roof shape which you may recognise. Note the thatched barn on the left which will now have a tiled or corrugated iron roof if it survives.

Turning to the house itself, the hip-with-gablet form of the roof screams SE mediaeval. The end timberwork fits with this date, the only oddity being the lower horizontal being under the left-hand corner post. If it's a true rendition this is either a repair or less likely an underbuilt end-jetty.

End jetties are a Kentish feature which would suggest the very east of Surrey.

The central chimney is just where a stack inserted into a hall house would be (in line with the front door). The short ridge of this section of roof suggests a one-bay open hall, with floored end bays. The far end of the building seems to be a separate house (with another front door), but this may have begun life as an extension.

The enquiry comes from Sue Tombs of Dorking Museum. Sue believes it to be near Dorking, but the character is very much East Surrey and that would fit with Petty's Maidstone home. Please send any suggestions, ideally with photographs, to me please.

Martin Higgins
martin-higgins@outlook.com

Lectures

Iron Firebacks and Houses – changing styles for changing needs

On 26th October Jeremy Hodgkinson gave a talk on cast-iron firebacks to the Wealden Buildings Study Group, DBRGs sister group to our south. Several DBRG members attended.



A historic sloping brick repair due to heat damage to a late 16th century fireplace in Betchworth.

Over time the soft bricks produced in the South-East can be damaged by the heat of a domestic fire. The picture above shows a fireplace where the centre part was refaced at some time. This repair slopes rather like a prop/underpinning but it is more common for the new bricks to be set flush to the undamaged areas. This particular stack was built with mud mortar so may have been more prone to damage through wear and tear. Firebacks are intended to prevent such damage.

Jeremy's interest stemmed from his study of the Wealden Iron industry and focused on the production of firebacks there from the late 16th century onwards. The Weald was the main English iron producing area for centuries and Wealden firebacks can be found throughout the country. The Weald also produced cannon at this time (see NEWS June 2020) so the skilled craftsmen needed to create the moulds for fine casting already existed in the area. The earliest confidently dated fireback is from 1546 although there is an undated one at Warbleton Priory which was dissolved in 1537. Early firebacks are often very wide (say 1.8m).



A simple fireback from Godstone with straight lines created from rope twisted around a rod flanked by rose and shield impressions

The casting took place by pouring molten iron onto a flat sand bed into which a pattern could be pressed. Considerable skill was needed as if the iron were poured too vigorously the sand would be dislodged and the casting spoiled. Early decoration was created by pressing day-to-

day objects into the sand bed before pouring. The simplest was a hand print, which for some reason is always a left hand. Daggers, scissors and the ends of andirons often feature in these early firebacks,, which are generally early 17th century. Straight bars with rope twisted around them were used to create crosses and VV marks which seem to apotropaic.

The practice of casting brass pots and church bells was well established by this period. Because the makers were producing cooking pots these metal-casting craftsmen were known as potters. Such specialists pressed small purpose-carved wooden patterns including lettering into their moulds to create relief inscriptions on the bells. This was the natural next step for firebacks and Jeremy has been able to associate sets of small heraldic and figurative patterns with particular furnaces by recording the distribution of the products. The biggest of these is the 'Pounsley series' produced by John Harvo in his foundry there. This runs to sixty-three different combinations.

Whole pattern designs using large carved pattern become common in the mid 17th century. These could be armorial or figurative. The wooden pattern allowed multiple identical copies to be made although dates and initial could be added separately.



Royal Oak fireback from Chobham.
Its condition and fine detail suggests it's a modern casting.

Loyal themes were always popular. The 1588 'Armada' series was especially versatile as side panels allowed castings of different widths. The date should not be taken as the date of the casting or the building it is in as there are so many of them they must have been produced over a long period and the IFC initials do not change.



Basic Armada fireback IFC 1588
(Pendeon at Weald and Downland Museum)

The early firebacks were typically wide with a landscape format. As smaller first floor fireplaces came into use narrower firebacks were produced. From the late 17th century the images on these were influenced by Dutch firebacks made in Germany. Jeremy believes this accelerated after 1685 when the Edict of Nantes was cancelled leading to the protestant exodus from the Continent. With the immigrants came



Armada fireback from Nutfield with single side panels, two panels each side were used if a very wide fireback were needed.

continental engravings and specialist skills. He suggests wooden patterns were carved in London and sent to the foundries in Sussex. This resulted in firebacks that were a fusion of images with English shapes and surrounds. All these patterns were timber and had a limited life so it is no surprise only five are known to survive.

Documentary sources provide some context for how the firebacks were commissioned and whether they stayed with a house or moved with the owners. The Pelham family in the late 17th and early 18th centuries provided firebacks to their tenants so those firebacks stayed with the houses. In 1657 the Reverend Giles Moore of Horsted Keynes bought a fireback at a reduced rate by offsetting the price against tithes due. At the same time he commissioned a fireback bearing the Michelbourne coat of arms when the potters were next available. This suggests the pattern was at the forge but not the skill to make the mould. At Horley, in 1579, James Hyde married Joan, but the fireback has an inscription THES : IS FOR IAMES : / HIDE : AND : ION : HIS : WIF and the date 1582. At Ightham Mote is a rather indistinct fireback carrying the date 1583. The reason it is indistinct is because the original heavily worn 1583 fireback was used as a pattern to cast the new one. I suspect this was a case of

wanting to recall the antiquity of the building rather than a reluctance to pay for a new pattern.

Firebacks are mentioned in probate inventories so some were considered moveable personal items (typically valued at 5 shillings). One personalised dated fireback Jeremy has recorded predated the ironmaster's house it was in so he must have brought it from his previous house. Similarly in 1557 the owner of Scotney Castle left in his will two firebacks to his wife. On the other hand Peter Farden of Brickwall, ironmaster, required the firebacks to remain in the house after his death. Firebacks have always been moved around and the antiques market mean some have moved a long way. A published early example initially evaded Jeremy but he eventually tracked it down to a hotel in Wales!

Jeremy's publication *British Cast-Iron Firebacks of the 16th to the mid-18th Centuries* 2010 includes a gazetteer of the fire backs he had by then identified from published sources or in person. Since then extra entries have been made, some continental examples included and the catalogue posted on line at hodgers.com/firebacks



An example of an apotropaic fireback from the Firebacks Database

[1060 x 630 mm](#)

Description: Rectangular shape; twisted rope edging (top and sides); top centre, cross-shaped arrangement of fleurs-de-lys between crosses formed of lengths of twisted rope with single fleurs outside and beyond each of them a dagger, point upwards; to **the** right a single fleur; bottom centre, a triangle formed of three lengths of twisted rope, vertex to the bottom, between two non-identical groups of three fleurs arranged in a star pattern

Notes: The style of these fleurs-de-lys associates this fireback with a series with several examples. The dagger type (approximate length 32cm) is different to others in the same series. Bishop & Miller auctioneers, Stowmarket, 27th Jan 2022, lot 88, (£110).

Manufactured: in the mid- to late-16th century in the Weald area of England

If you would like to see examples of firebacks there is a collection at Petworth House (ask for the illustrated folder). There are firebacks all over the country, most early ones made in the Weald. If you see one you can't find in Jeremy's on-line catalogue ask to take a photograph and send it to him to at jshodgkinson@hodgers.com

Martin Higgins

And Further Afield...

Jacobes Hall, Brightlingsea, Essex

While on a recent holiday in Brightlingsea, Essex I drove several times past an intriguing timber framed building with a fancy brick stair turret.



Jacobes Hall, Brightlingsea

When I got home I did a little research and discovered that the building, Jacobes Hall, is Grade 1 listed.

According to Historic England, Jacobes Hall is first recorded in 1315. The house was built facing the sea – the road frontage (High Street) is actually the rear of the property.

Whether any of the original fabric still exists is not clear and sources disagree on the dating of the extant building. It originally had an open hall in the middle and jettied cross-wings at both ends. It is described as having arched braces to the tie beams, those to the crosswings supporting 2 armed crown posts. The hall has an octagonal crown post with moulded capital and base. C.A. Hewitt suggests a date of circa 1460-70 for this (English Historic Carpentry, 1980).

Later the hall was floored and the decorated brick turret, with its spiral staircase, was built to access the upper floor. 'British Listed buildings' suggests a C15/C16 date for this work which would fit with the historical evidence as in the 15th century, the property came into the hands of some rich shipping merchants named Beriffe, who were connected with weaving. They enriched and enlarged the house.

It certainly sounds as if it was richly decorated as the interior is described as having "original doors with 4 centred heads, one with foliated spandrels. The inserted hall ceiling with moulded ceiling beams, main beams carved with twisted leaves and foliate stops. Moulded and crenelated wall plates. Large inglenook fireplaces that to east with a moulded lintel with foliate spandrels." (www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk).



Detail of stair turret

In 1932 the ancient Buildings Trust bought the property and restored it.



References

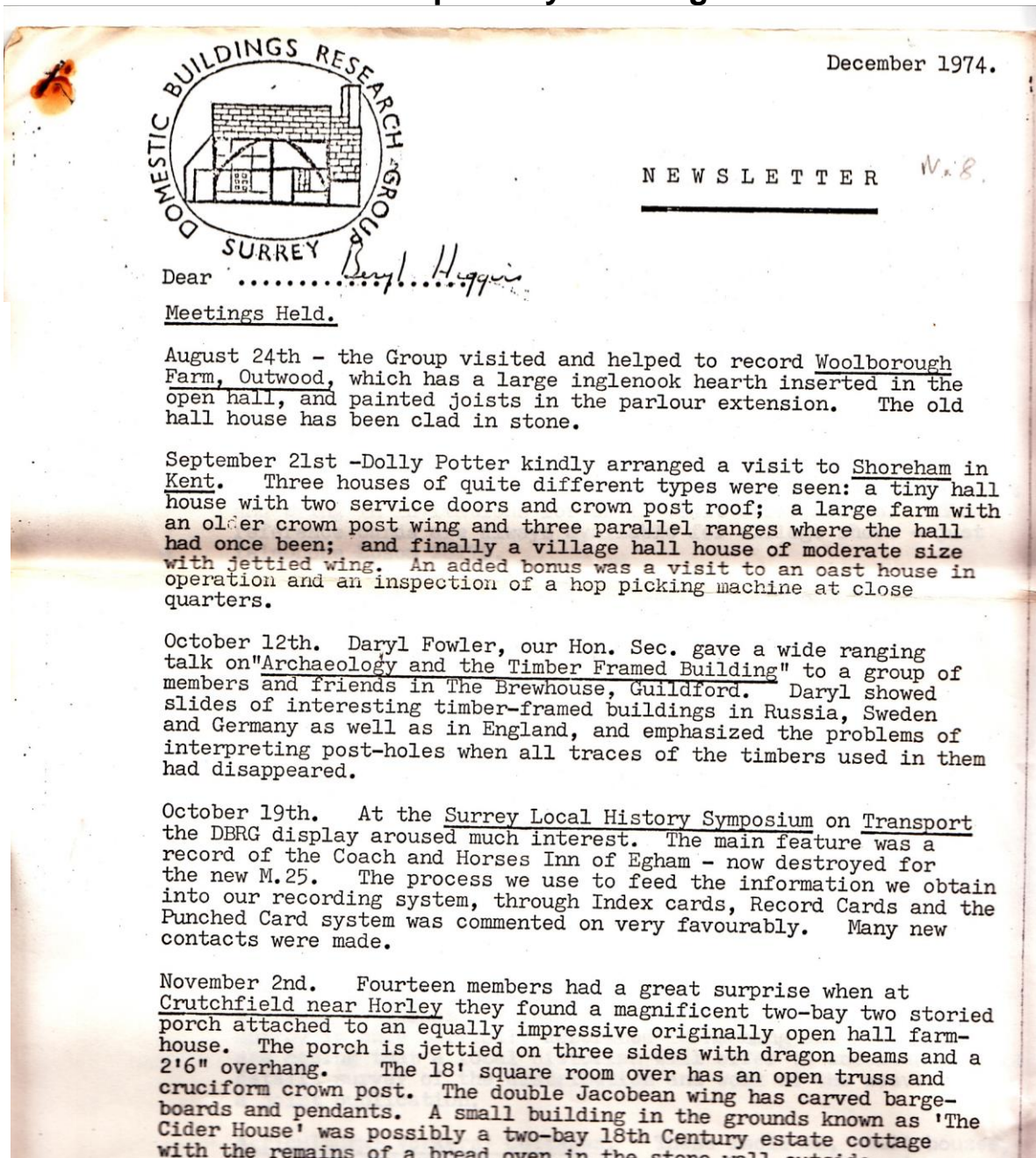
www.british-history.ac.uk/rchme/essex/vol3/pp14-18

Historic England: Listed buildings

www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk

Rosemary Hughesdon

Postscript - Fifty Years ago!



RECORDING.

Progress. 855 Surrey farmhouses and cottages have now been entered into our system - 475 of these have measured drawings - 50 reports have been completed and copies of these are deposited in our Library for loan. We are grateful to the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments for encouragement and help.

Record cards for 110 of our houses have now been deposited with the Surrey County Council and Surrey Archaeological Society.

Recording before demolition. DBRG members are helping the Egham by Runnymede Historical Society to record buildings in Thorpe which are on the route of the new M.25 motorway. "The Coach and Horses" and Muckhatch Farm have already gone

Village Shows. Last year WESTCOTT and now CHOBHAM have put up a series of colourful panels with your DBRG illustrations and plans of local houses. These displays arouse much interest and bring in invitations for us to visit other houses. DBRG reference cards are always available for village shows - just telephone Epsom 28178.

Village Surveys. Recent Newsletters have suggested that members would enjoy recording small houses in their own villages and would find it a satisfying occupation. Problems of such recording will be discussed at our next Chairman's Open Evening at 11 Lintons Lane, 7.30 p.m. onwards, on Friday, December 6th (Soup and cheese provided). Village recorders and those about to embark on this work would be especially welcome.

The Surrey Women's Institutes and European Architectural Heritage Year. After discussion with the DBRG and a look at our records, the WI is recommending that as a contribution to EAHY '75 villagers should record the outsides of their cottages and note the interesting features inside on 8" x 5" cards, which could be added to the DBRG Index. We are delighted to have this help, especially as field record sheets will also be completed.

Weavers in Surrey. The DBRG is making a special study of Weavers' Cottages and would be pleased to have introductions to any such buildings for recording. The history of weaving in Surrey is only partially described in Manning and Bray and we are hoping that a local historian will offer to undertake a more details survey of the distribution and work of the weavers for a joint publication.

Agricultural Workers' Cottages. These isolated, small houses, sometimes in pairs, are vanishing fast. As yet there is not one record of such a building in our index. Will you please help by drawing up (in black ink) the outsides of one or two? (To fit 8" x 5" cards).

There were two further pages. How times have changed! (Ed.)

DOMESTIC BUILDINGS RESEARCH GROUP (SURREY)

Surrey is rich in the smaller mediaeval timber-framed buildings. The Domestic Building Research Group (Surrey) is a voluntary group that has recorded, analysed and reported on more than 4,000 domestic and farm buildings, mainly in Surrey, over the past fifty years.

The DBRG has a few remaining publications for sale

George Howard, *The Smaller Brick, Stone and Weatherboard Houses of Surrey, 17th to mid 19th century. A statistical analysis*

Peter Gray, *Surrey Medieval Buildings An analysis and inventory*

Joan Harding, *Granaries in Surrey - An Obituary.*

Currently available from Rod Wild, 01483 232767

and

Marion Herridge & Joan Holman, *An Index of Surrey Probate Inventories.*

Available from Martin Higgins, 01737 842625)

For an index of recorded buildings, glossary and membership forms,
visit www.dbrg.org.uk

DOMESTIC BUILDINGS RESEARCH GROUP (SURREY)

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I would welcome items for the next Newsletter
to reach me by 20th December, please

Please send them to me at
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If it is possible, it is always very helpful if contributions could
be sent by e-mail, as an attachment, to
rosemary.hughesdon@virginmedia.com
Illustrations as separate jpegs please – you can always indicate in the
text approximately where they should go.