



History unveils a story to behold

How knowing the history of your house can bring it to life

BY MELANIE BACKE-HANSEN
HISTORIAN FOR CHESTERTON HUMBERTS

An exterior view of the Old Sweet Shop



Living in a listed building can be a great joy and delight, while also being a challenge and often quite a bit of work. However, in looking at the history of houses we often may not get past the architectural features of a listed building, but what hides beneath? Whether your home is 500 or 50 years old there is a wealth of information that can be hidden in the story of the life within the house; the former residents, events and changes it has seen for those who have called it home.

In my job as historian for Chesterton Humberts, I am very fortunate in being able to delve into the history of houses every day. I have looked at medieval hall houses, Georgian town houses, stately homes, Victorian terraces

and modern apartments, every one of which has a story to tell. Listed buildings, in particular, often have stories that will add a greater understanding and depth to the value of the house, both emotional and potentially financial.

To give you an example, I have chosen to tell the story of the history of a house in Kent that looks like many other houses across the country, but behind its walls are the stories of many families and lives going back over 500 years.

The Old Sweet Shop, No.22 the High Street, is Grade II listed and has had many guises over the years. Today it is attached to Nos. 24 and 26 the High Street, but when the building was first constructed, over 500 years ago, these three homes were one entire house. The house is

believed to have first been built during the late medieval period, in the 15th century and is a good example of a medieval hall house. Although the house has changed a great deal over time, it is still possible to see sections of the original building structure in today's No.24 and 26.

The house sat within the manor of *Chepstead alias Wilkes*, which can be traced as far back as the 14th century, but from the time of Elizabeth I the house was part of the Chipstead Place Estate. The Chipstead Place Estate passed through the hands of a number of wealthy and prominent landowners, but by 1658 the owner Ralph Suckley sold the house and estate to David Polhill. The Polhill family had a long association with the estate, ➤



even though it was sold in 1665 to Sir Nicholas Strode and changing hands during the late 1600s, it was re-purchased by David Polhill in 1711. The estate remained in the Polhill family until 1829 when George Polhill sold it to Frederick Perkins, esq.

While the greater estate was changing hands from one wealthy landowner to another, what was going on in our house along the High Street? Sadly, very little is recorded of the early occupants of the house, but it was most likely that the occupants were farmers or agricultural labourers of some kind. The title map of 1840 shows the house labelled as 'The Croft House and Garden' with the owner identified as Frederick Perkins.

As we enter the mid 19th century we can gain a better picture of the actual occupants of the house. Although the census records for Chipstead were not clearly labelled with house names or numbers - or

even street names - it has been possible to identify the occupants of the house. In the 1840s the house was home to William Cowland, a 60 year old agricultural labourer, along with his wife, Sophia, also 60 years old and 20 year old Sophia Cowland and two year old Sophia Durling. By the 1850s, the head of the house was James Cowland, a 60 year old carpenter in the house with his wife, Charlotte and their two grown up children, Frederick and Harriet.

At this time, the house had not been divided into separate homes, although of course the house would have changed and been refurbished as the years had passed. It is thought that the house was divided into three separate homes during the 1850s and it was also at this time that our particular home, No.22 the High Street was also fitted with the large Victorian shop window and became a vital shop for the village of Chipstead - the sweet shop!



Main image:
The Kitchen

Inset:
19th century
postcard of the
Old Sweet Shop

The Cowland family continued to live in the house, with the 1861 census showing No.22 as the home of Jesse Cowland, 'bricklayer and grocer', with his wife Susannah and their three children, Charles, Martha and George. Meanwhile, James Cowland and his family still lived next door. However, during the late 19th century, No.26 the High Street changed to become the working men's club, recorded in documents as 'The Club House'.

Jesse and Susannah Cowland continued to run the sweet shop until the 1890s, but by the 1891 census Jesse had passed away and the widowed Susannah, 76 years old, was living in the house with two unmarried children, Daughter, Selina and son, Charles.

By the turn of the 20th century, ➡



close to 100 years since the Cowland family were living in the house, the sweet shop was sold and had become the home of William Arthur Ford. Mr Ford's move to Chipstead highlights some of the changes coming to the villages of Kent, as he was not a local man, but a 'Prudential Agent' from Surrey. William was 38 years old, living in the house with his wife, Emily Jane and their three children, Mabel, Arthur and Ethel.

It was also during the early 20th century that change came to the ownership of the land. By the beginning of World War I, the estate was still in the hands of a descendent of Frederick Perkins who had purchased the estate back in 1829. However, by 1916 the entire estate, including the three homes (formerly the one house) and surrounding gardens were on the market. The sales particulars show that No.22 was still occupied

by Mrs Ford, who was paying five shillings and six pence a week in rent, amounting to £14 a year. The particulars described the house as "the end cottage compris[ing] a Shop and Parlour, Kitchen and Cellar...three good Bed Rooms and an Attic".

The cottages were sold to Edward Cordy, who it appears did not make many changes, as in 1925 No.22 was still occupied by William and Emily Ford's daughter, Mabel. By the 1930s the house became the home of George and Edith Avis, who continued to live in their quiet home for the next 50 years, until the 1970s.

At the turn of the 21st century, when new owners were renovating their grade II listed home, they discovered many neighbours and friends referred to the house as 'the old sweet shop' and in an effort to acknowledge and honour this history of their home they officially renamed it.

The Bedroom

No. 22 the High Street, Chipstead has seen many changes over the years, transforming from a medieval hall house, built during the 1400s, to a Victorian sweet shop and finally a family home. The stories of hard working agricultural labourers to the local children loitering outside the house ready to spend their pocket money on sweets, this house has had a strong vital presence in the village of Chipstead, not to mention the people who have lived in it and called it home.

**For more information
please contact:**

*Melanie Backe-Hansen
Chesterton Humberts
020 3040 8240*