

## **Fosters Farm – Haysden Lane**

Fosters Farm in Upper Haysden dates back to the late 15th century and has seen many changes in the last 500 years. It was first attached to the manor of Bidborough, formerly owned by Henry Carey, believed to be the illegitimate son of Henry VIII. Fosters Farm has been the home of a number of thriving farming families, who have each added their mark on the house, including Lawrence Foster who gave his name to the farm! Today, the house is Grade II listed and features many original historic details, evolving from a small medieval hall house into a comfortable home for the 21st century.

### **Early history for Fosters Farm**

It is difficult to trace the precise details of the early history of Fosters Farm, due to a lack of documents, as well as the difficulty in the way the house was recorded. Fosters Farm has formerly been listed as part of Bidborough, Leigh and Tonbridge without a specific house name or address [it was only officially named Fosters Farm in the late 20th century]. However, despite these difficulties it has been established that it was formerly attached to the manor of Bidborough until around the 18th century.

### **The manor of Bidborough**

The manor of Bidborough dates back to the time of Edward I in the 13th century, when it was in the hands of George le Chaun. By the time Fosters Farm was first being built in the late 1400s, the manor had changed hands and passed to the Palmer family. It remained in the hands of the Palmers from Henry VII to Henry VIII when it was alienated to the Vane family. Sir Ralph Vane was found guilty of high treason in the 6th year of Edward VI and was hung on Tower Hill in 1552 at which time the manor returned to the crown.

### **Henry Carey – Illegitimate son of Henry VIII?**

Elizabeth I granted the manor to Henry Carey, lord Hunsdon, the son of Mary Boleyn (Anne Boleyn's nephew and Elizabeth's cousin and also thought to be Henry VIII's illegitimate son). The manor eventually passed to the Smythe family in the 17th century, who played an active role in court and politics, including Sir Sydney Stafford Smythe, lord of the manor in the late 18th century, who was lord chief baron of the Exchequer. Sir S. Smythe died in 1778 leaving the estate in the hands of his widow, Lady Smythe, who passed away in 1790.

### **Land transfer and Thomas Constable**

It was during the late 18th century that the farmhouse and land, today's Fosters Farm, were sold. In her will, Lady Sarah Smythe devised that the estate be sold for the benefit of her nephews and nieces. However, we know from land tax records that Fosters Farm was already in the hands of another prominent landowner, Thomas Constable. The Constable family were prominent landowners in the Weald area since the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Records show the family owned sections of land in Withyham and Groombridge, reaching the Bidborough area during the 18th century. The land tax records for Upper Haysden show the farm and house were in the hands of Thomas Constable in 1780, but it is possible the Constable's owned the farm before this time.

### **The Crundell family of Fosters Farm**

Through land tax records it is possible to see that up until 1789 Fosters Farm was owned by Thomas Constable and occupied by Thomas Pack, but by 1790, the Farm came into the hands of William Crundell and was occupied by James Godwin. William Crundell (sometimes Crundwell) passed the farm on to his son Henry in 1797, at which time the farm was occupied by Richard Miles.

### **Lawrence Foster – the origin of the name 'Fosters Farm'**

The tithe records in 1838-40 give us a clear indication of the land ownership and occupation, showing the entirety of the farmland, farmhouse and outbuildings (approximately 30 acres) were owned by Henry's son, Thomas Crundwell and occupied by Lawrence Foster. The 1841 census shows Lawrence Foster, aged 72 and 'farmer of 53 acres employing 4 labourers'. He was living in the house with his 63 year old wife, Elizabeth and 25 year old unmarried daughter, Jane. This is also where the name of 'Fosters Farm' originated. Although not recorded in official documents, it seems likely that the farmhouse was known locally as 'Fosters Farm' from the occupation of Lawrence and Elizabeth Foster.



### **Changing hands and the Deacons**

A rare surviving indenture from 1847 shows the transfer of the land and farm house, now amounting to over 56 acres, at the death of Thomas Crundwell. 'Upper Hayesden Farm' was broken up and given in trust to Thomas's sons, Thomas, Henry and George, 'with the exception of the said cottages and gardens now in the occupation of Lawrence Foster' to John Deacon of Mabledon in Southborough. Further details show that the farmland was also taken by others, including John Laouchere. This is significant, as both John Deacon and John Labouchere were partners in the London and Manchester bank 'Williams, Deacon, Labouchere & Co'. The bank is commonly referred to as 'Deacon's Bank' or 'William Deacon's Bank' and was a prominent high street bank both in London and the North East. Later records show that the land and farmhouse, today's Fosters Farm were also later acquired by John Deacon.

### **The Rogers family move to Fosters Farm**

By the time of the 1851 census, the farm house had become the home of the young, John Rogers, 30 years old and living in the house with his 31 year old wife, Anna and their four young children, James, Emily, Ruth and four month old, Louisa. The Rogers family also had two live-in servants. However, by 1861 the farmhouse had become the home of Jabez Rogers, 34 year old 'farmer employing 3 men & 1 boy', along with his sister Mary Ann Rogers, also 34 years old. It is uncertain of the relationship between Jabez, Mary and John, but from their similar ages and their birthplace in Wadhurst, it appears they were siblings. During the 1870s, Jabez and Mary Ann continued to live in Fosters Farm, now covering over 100 acres. It is also worth noting that other nearby farms were also occupied by members of the Rogers family from Wadhurst.

### **Early 20th century - George Hewitt**

By the late 1800s the farmhouse had become the home of George Hewitt. The 1901 census is the first document to officially name the house 'Fosters Farm'. The records show George, aged 45 as a 'House Painter' with his wife Eliza and their three children; 20 year old Frank, a clerk in the Gas Co. Office; 17 year old Herbert, a builders clerk; and 14 year old Nora. Also in the house at this time is an Irish boarder, John Brown, a 'Well Sinker' [a well digger]. The Hewitt family were still in the house at the time of the 1911 census, but by this time, a proof reader, Thomas Dealey was boarding with the family.

### **Landowners – the Deacon's of Mabledon**

The 1910 Inland Revenue valuation also shows that the farmland in Upper Hayesden continued to be in the ownership of the Deacon's. John Francis William Deacon (known as Frank) had inherited the lands from his father John Deacon II, the son of John Deacon first mentioned in the indenture of 1847. J. F. W. Deacon was also a banker, but along with his father and grandfather, he was also a charitable man. The Deacon's contributed to many charitable works in Surrey and Kent through the 19th and 20th centuries, including the building of a number of churches, giving to the poor and all three men were involved with the Church Pastoral Aid Society.

### **Post World War II and the Vizard Family**

World War II brought about much change in Upper Hayesden, as it did across the country. Frank Deacon died in 1941 and his estate was in the hands of trustees at the end of the war. Fosters Farm disappears from records after the war and only reappears at the beginning of the 1950s. It was at this time that the Vizard family moved into the farmhouse. Robert and Patricia Vizard were recorded at Fosters Farm in the early years of the 1950s and since this time the house has continued in the same family to this day.

### **Architectural highlights of Fosters Farm**

Fosters Farm has seen many changes since it was first constructed in the open Kentish fields over 500 years ago. It began life as an open medieval hall, but by the mid 16th century and again during the 17th century was floored and given further additions. Today, the house is Grade II listed and features a number of original historic details, including 16th and 17th century ceiling beams; 17th century oak stairs; and fireplaces, which even include keeping places and a bake oven.