



Mill Cottage – Champion Court

Today, Mill Cottage is surrounded by gardens and sits within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Special Landscape Area, but underneath these picturesque features is an ancient history dating back to the Anglo-Saxons and even as far back as the Bronze Age. Mill Cottage was built in the 19th century to accompany a new windmill that had been constructed in 1819, but the site had been occupied long before, with a motte and bailey, when the Anglo-Saxons chose this location to settle. The site has also been linked to a Bronze Age barrow, as well as a possible Roman settlement, with ancient swords and urns being uncovered.

Archaeological surveys

A survey of the site was conducted in 1880 (even though, by this time a windmill had been built on top of the mound) by George Payne, Curator of the Kent Archaeological Society, which revealed that the mound was 5 ft high and 38 paces in diameter surrounded by a ditch 15 ft deep. There was an additional semi-circular ditch as well as an additional chalk mound, believed to be a tumulus or barrow which contained ashes, human bones, urns, part of a sword, and spurs. In addition to this, to the north of Mill Cottages, around 100 yards north of the windmill site, was another tumulus site where Mr. F.A. Crow uncovered a rusty iron and broken pieces of pottery believed to be Roman, in 1825.

Ancient history in the Newnham

Very little is known of the specific history into the early settlement near Newnham, but archaeological studies have shown that this was definitely the site of an Anglo-Saxon encampment, chosen for its defensive location and the ability to view approaching enemies. However, the belief that it was also originally a Stone Age burial site and possibly occupied by the Romans has never been analysed. Certainly, this quiet corner of the North Downs has seen plenty of history in its time.

The Manor of Newnham – Champion Court

Although this early history is not documented, we do know that the manor of Newnham or Champion Court can be traced back to Hugh de Newnham at the time of King Henry I in the 12th century. It passed through the Newnham family until Juliana Newnham brought the manor to her marriage with Sir Robert de Campania or Champion – where the name Champion Court originated. Their son, Sir Robert de Campania fought with Richard I at the siege of Acon during the Third Crusade.

The Newnham Mill

Along with large parts of the surrounding countryside, this part of Kent was largely used for growing crops and in the early 19th century farmer, John Filmer decided there was an opportunity to provide a mill to grind local corn. He set up three mills in the area, including Newnham Mill, which was built on the top of the ancient mound in around 1819. It is believed that the first Newnham miller was a John Barnett, but by the 1830s Henry William Filmer and his wife, Esther, were the millers in Newnham. However, at this time, the house we know today as Mill Cottage was not yet built.

Still no Mill House

The tithe map and apportionment shows that in 1840 the site of the mill and surrounding land was owned by Henry Palmer and occupied by Henry Filmer, but at this time it was simply described as 'meadow' and there was still no mill house built. A history of Newnham completed by W.T. Berry for the Faversham Society records that Thomas Knight Hope succeeded Henry Filmer as miller and baker in the 1850s. However, the 1861 census shows he was living in the village and there was no record of a Mill House or Mill Cottage, although he was recorded as 'miller and baker'.

Mill House built

It appears that today's Mill Cottage was only built and occupied during the 1860s. The 1871 census reveals that at this time 'Mill House' was the home of Thomas Filmer, aged 25 and 'Miller Master employing 11 men'. Thomas was living in the house with his wife Mary, aged 22 and their two children; Edith aged 2 and Thomas only 4 months. Also in the house at this time were Mary's sisters, Catherine and Jane along with one servant and a boarder, a miller, Frederick Southern.



The loss of Newnham windmill

However, by 1876 the windmill, now almost 60 years old was apparently not stable and it closed. The sweeps (or sails) were sold to Doddington Mill and the remainder of the mill was dismantled and sold. However, half the tower was retained and on Guy Fawkes Day 1876 it was filled with tar barrels and set alight!

Mill House divided

The 1881 census shows that Mill House had now been divided into two cottages with one part occupied by the Bunchley family, with head of the house, agricultural labourer John, 35 years old, with his wife, 33 year old Agnes and two daughters, Kate and Agnes. Also in this part of the house was Agnes's mother, 73 year old Emily and nephew, 8 year old Albert. In the other part of the house was the Chapman family, with coachman, 27 year old Thomas Chapman, along with his wife Mary and 2 month old son, Walter.

Mill Cottages – Victorian occupants

By the turn of the 20th century, the house continued as two cottages with one part occupied by widowed, Agnes Bunchley with her daughter Agnes and son-in-law Walter and grandson, Reginald. By this time, the other part of the house was occupied by Robert Croucher, agricultural labourer with his wife, Rose, a dairy maid, and their three children, Edith, William and Alice.

20th century Mill Cottage

During the early 20th century, Mill Cottages remained separated, until in the 1950s there were some changes at the house. From around 1953-5 it appears that the house was transformed back into a single home and the surrounding gardens were landscaped, including further levelling of the motte and bailey and filling in of the surrounding ditch in 1957, although there are still some traces that remain. From 1955 Mill Cottage was the home of the Brown family, who continued in this corner of Kent for many years until the house was sold in the 1980s.

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