

Forge Cottage has been known throughout most of its history as Pillstyle Cottage. The name is derived from the Romano-British word "pill" being a ditch, hole, or pool and the still evident position of the cottage on the edge of a steep dip to the road combined with the familiar word "stile" accounts for its origin.

Forge Cottage is a substantial thatched timber framed house built around 1600 and represents a significant and innovative advance in house design. The hall-house (of which East Meon has many) had been the common design for 1000 years. Its central open fire in the middle of a beaten-earth floor vented through the thatch guaranteed a smoky environment and precluded an upper floor in heated areas of the house. Forge Cottage is a 'closed hall-house' and introduces for the first time the revolutionary idea of using chimneys in an ordinary domestic dwelling. The practice had begun in the mid 16th century and was facilitated by the increasing production and use of bricks by the Tudors. Significantly our area had its first brick works opened in 1571 when "*the Lord of the Manor surrendered part of Stroud Common to John Robynet for the making of bricks and tyles*". The massive brick chimney in Forge Cottage almost certainly uses Robynet bricks. The walls of the house are timser froamed infilled with wattle and daub most of which remains.

This chimney, unlike typical later houses, forms a stack in the centre of the building with large inglenook fireplaces either side and smaller fireplaces above in the now possible upstairs bedrooms. There is evidence to suggest that the bedrooms were ventilated and illuminated by narrow "letter-box" windows (probably unglazed). Downstairs, one fire heated a hall characterised by its fashionable (and expensive) chamfered ceiling beams, the other the kitchen which still contains a bread oven which, again innovatively, allowed the householders to bake their own bread.

The house was probably built and occupied by a yeoman, farming a small number of acres around or near the house. This was an occupation above husbandry (self sufficiency) with some cash crops being grown and perhaps a few labourers employed. In addition to hall, kitchen, and bedrooms a single story annexe on the west end contained a narrow room, almost certainly a pantry or dairy.

We know in 1752 an additional section of the house (or at least fireplace/chimney) was added to the road-end at a lower level, probably with tiled roof from its outset. The fireplace mantel is inscribed with the construction date and the initials "RD" (almost certainly Richard Dance). The mantel over the inglenook in the hall also has an interesting feature ... "Trinity marks". These occur in other houses in the area and are three triangulated parallel vertical lines burned into the massive oak beam allegedly to protect the house from evil spirits by invocation of the Trinity.

This house demonstrated a yeoman's prosperity when built, prosperity matched by the village as a whole. However, succeeding centuries saw economic decline and by at least the 19th century the house had been converted into two, or possibly three cramped dwellings

We know that in 1853 the house was owned by Randall Vinn who himself lived at the much larger Drayton House but rented Forge Cottage to others. In 1841 and 1851 the two halves were occupied by carpenter William Luff and wife Sarah (nee Budd) and the ageing William and Martha Spiers respectively. They were all probably still living here 30 years

later in 1871, Luff now running a sawyer's business and Spiers a pauper. The newly married Henry and Harriott (nee Welch) Hiscock probably also part-occupied in 1841. By 1891 Walter and Sarah Kille and their six surviving children lived here with James Spiers living next door. Walter was a thatcher: James a bricklayer. In 1901 Henry Steele had replaced James whilst Walter was no longer a thatcher but a farm labourer. His widow Sarah still lived here in 1911 with her unmarried son, Samuel. James Blackman, wife Harriett, and son Ernest shared the property.

In 1934 it was occupied by Pollard and Kille, Mrs Holder and Mr William Nicholson and the thatched shed was occupied by Jim Hobbs the blacksmith. It had an area of 2 roods and twenty perches or thereabouts. In the 1950's the house was owned by Celia Trubshawe.

The house name was changed to "Forge Cottage" in 1960 when purchased by Frederick Gould Standfield for £4150. Freddie Stanfield's work "The History of East Meon" was written here.

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