

RESTORATION AND IMPROVEMENTS TO  
"THE COTTAGE", EAST MEON, HANTS.

East Meon has been described by Arthur Mee as "a delightful corner of Hampshire, . . . with its interesting old cottages in the rich meadows of a winding valley, the chalky hills above it crowned with lovely trees. . . ."

The village, having a population of about 1000, dates back to the dark ages, and, as might be expected, includes a number of outstandingly attractive Tudor and Georgian cottages and more sizeable houses.

In 1970 the main part of the village was designated a conservation area by the Hampshire County Council.

In a prominent position within the conservation area stood a Tudor house which had, prior to becoming vacant in 1973, been let for many years on a Rent Act controlled or regulated tenancy.

Its maintenance and repair had been so badly neglected that, viewed in conjunction with dilapidated corrugated iron outbuildings, it really constituted a blot on the landscape.

Nevertheless, when offered for sale with vacant possession in the summer of 1973, near the peak of the greatest property boom of all time, buyers competed for its ownership.

In the event, the successful purchasers were two old friends, an architect and a solicitor, both semi-retired, with a joint ambition to renovate and restore this potentially charming old building which had almost passed beyond the point of no return.

Before building work commenced, members of the Petersfield Area Historical Society carried out a thorough investigation and appraisal of the building, the following being an extract from their report:

"1. It is a timber framed house of 4 bays in which the two  
"eastern bays appear to be older than the western. The  
"chimney and fireplaces are part of the original structure

"which makes the date about 1580 - 1600.

"2. The two western bays are later work of much better material and workmanship. This end of the house originally had a jetty and a bay or oriel window under the jetty. This is Jacobean - probably 1625 - 50.

"3. At a much later period floors were inserted in the upper chambers of the house, the tie beams and queen struts in the roof of the two western bays being taken away. The two eastern bays seem to have been re-roofed, probably at the time that the attic floors were put in . . .

"4. The chamfering on the large main beams in the principal rooms is an indication that none of this work can be earlier than the dates given previously.

"5. The close studding in the north wall at the western end is very interesting in that it has flint infilling. If this is the original infilling, it is one of the few examples of this, and if possible should be preserved.

"6. The original entrance was probably on the south side of the chimney structure, known as a baffle entrance (as you had to turn left or right as soon as you entered.) The stair on the other side of the chimney structure is usual in this type of house.

"7. The out-shot on the south side is a much later structure, 18th century probably, again, possibly put on at the same time as the attic floors."

The attached "Ode to an Old House" was written by a member of the Historical Society.

Though the accent was to be on restoration rather than alteration, the aim of ending up with three reception rooms; four bedrooms and two bathrooms, inevitably involved some reconstruction. However,

after a few action-packed months, the planning authorities were satisfied with proposals to this end, which proposals left the original pre-18th century structure virtually intact.

Following specialist timber preservation treatment and, at the instigation of the County Museum Curator, the taking of a series of photographs by the National Monuments Record Office (some of which are attached to this report), a direct labour force of two craftsmen were recruited, to be fortified later by a labourer. Both craftsmen proved versatile, one possessing exceptional skill as a carpenter and joiner and the other as a bricklayer and flint worker. Both have produced work of unusually high quality.

By April 1974 work was well under way, and for many weeks there followed the depressing sight of more and more parts of the structure proving defective and needing to be dismantled and replaced. Fortunately, the main oak framework, floor joists and roof timbers were sound (although much displaced by settlement), apart from some low level timbers affected by rising damp and earlier crude repairs.

At last positive restoration and reconstruction had to be faced, and, using old bricks, old clay tiles, and ancient timbers acquired from widely varied sources, the craftsmen painstakingly proceeded. No decay was "covered up", and by Christmas 1974 the main structure of the old house was in sound condition and accepted as such by the local authority building regulations.

The jetty joists at the western end, referred to in paragraph 2 of the report quoted above, have been restored, as have two ancient oak triangular mullioned windows. Original herringbone brick panels comprising most of the external eastern elevation, previously hidden by deal weatherboarding, were once more exposed, and interior timbers, many of exceptional quality and beauty, were fully in view.

By the early spring of 1975 it is hoped that the rather sad old

house of a year before will have completely regained its former dignity, charm and usefulness, and be ready for occupation, but reconstruction costs of approximately £14,000 are anticipated before completion.

Due to worldwide economic conditions it is feared the venture will prove financially disastrous, but it is hoped something of value to posterity will have been achieved.



House coloured blue to be demolished.

Key Plan.