



Local History Collection

19 - History of Yew Tree Cottage, Coningsby Lane

July 2023

Researched & written by Sarah Grace

In the last magazine I wrote about the number of 15th Century houses in the local area and how often it was due to close links and proximity to Windsor Castle and Windsor Great Forest.

The drovers road from Windsor to Reading and beyond came along the Oakley Green road where the land either side of the road was grazed by animals and used by drovers. In the 100 of Bray there were several Manors you may have heard of; Lowbrook, Ockwells, Shoppenhangers, Lillibrook as well as 7 Manors in Holyport(i.e. Philliberts) and our local ones such as Fifield and Foxley Manors; both with ancient moats.

Fifield Manor was not located on the site of the present Fifield House at the junction of Fifield Road and Oakley Green road and as Coningsby Lane is the oldest part of the village then it is possible that Fifield Manor could have originally been sited along that lane.



One of the oldest houses in Coningsby Lane is the early 15th Century Yew Tree Cottage previously known as Manor Cottages. This was a Hall house and possibly an ancient Manor. This house was altered and extended in the late 16th century and early 20th century. It has a timber frame, part painted render and part painted brick infill with an old tiled gabled roof(the original peg and tile roof was replaced after the ancient yew tree; 10 m from the front door, was blown down across the roof in the Great storm of 1986). The cottage has a large ridged chimney left of centre with another chimney at the rear. It has diamond-leaded casements, a late 16th century oriel on the 1st floor, diamond mullions and moulded sill

on carved wooden brackets. There are sooted timbers in the roof, an arched brace collar truss and redundant crown post truss for side purlins. Inside are signs of its age with a 17th century cupboard in the dining room, scalloped shelves, panelled head and dado and moulded cornice, as well as a large inglenook fireplace in the sitting room.

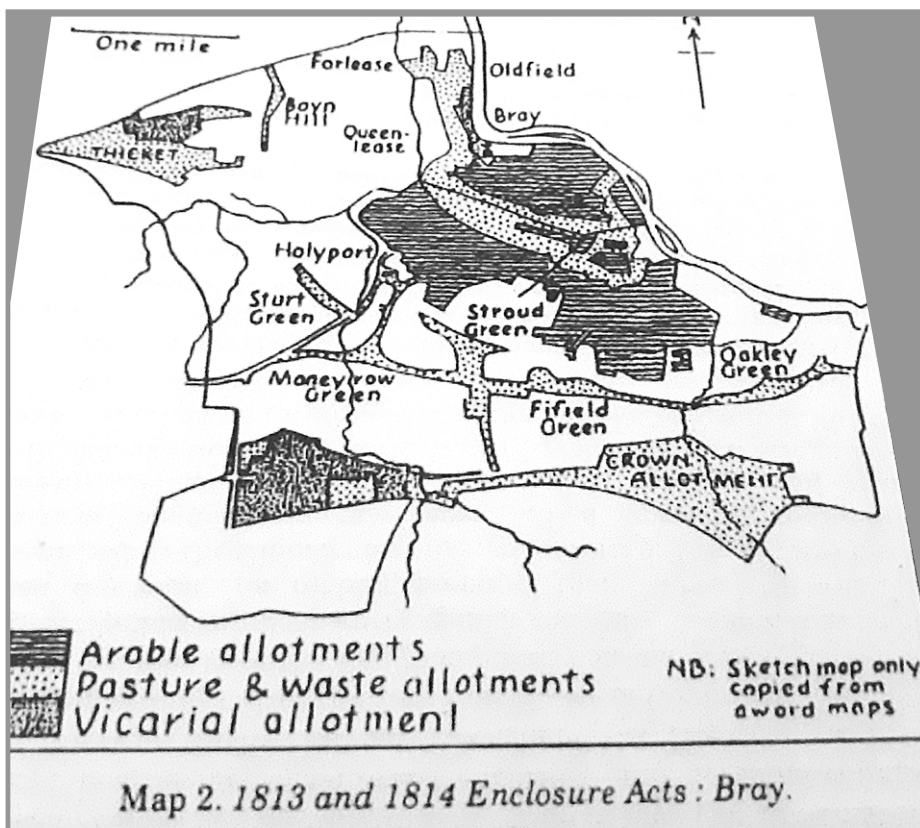


Arched brace collar truss



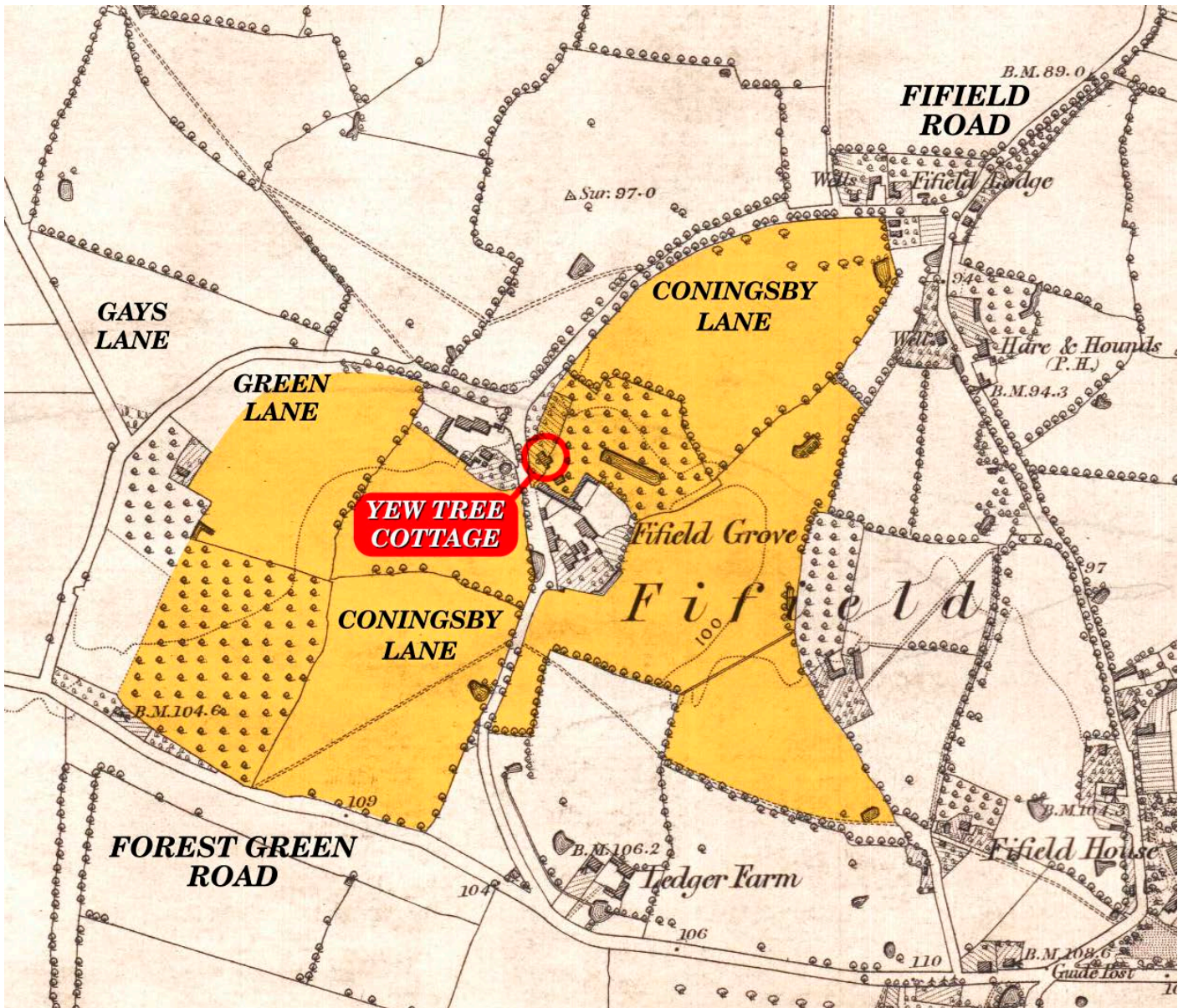
Crown post truss

Before 1750 most farmers held their land in strips intermixed with their neighbours in the great open fields of Bray Parish (a Royal Manor since Saxon times). Once crops were harvested the same land was available to everyone to pasture animals, the right of the individual farmer was not reinstated until the following planting season. This meant that the area around Fifield and Oakley Green was shared amongst the community for common grazing. After 1750 there was a major change to the agricultural life of the parish with the introduction of The Enclosures Act.



Part of the Windsor Forest had been enclosed so that by the early 17th century about two thirds of the parish was already enclosed but the remaining third was not enclosed until three separate acts of parliament in 1786, 1813 and 1814. It appears that the Crown received 470 acres of land in lieu of Forestal, manorial and proprietary rights near New Lodge in 1817. Even though farmer Carswell Winder who owned 40 acres in Oakley Green complained that loss of grazing on common land would make the poor parish families suffer, the enclosures went ahead.

By 1817 the land west and east of Coningsby Lane was enclosed and farmed and rented by Nathaniel Micklem (born 1788 in Bisham) from the Windsor Forest estate. The Micklem family were landowners and farmers from the Henley area who were old non-conformists. Nathaniel's Grandson, Nathaniel, was a lifelong Congregationalist who lived in Fifield House and paid for the wooden chapel to be moved from Grove Farm to its current location on the corner of the Fifield Road/Coningsby Lane junction.



1817 - Land farmed and rented by Nathaniel Micklem

In the history of the New Lodge estate I previously explained how the estate had been sold in 1852 to Joshua Bates of Barings bank USA and then lived in by his Daughter and son-in-law, the Van De Weyer's. So from 1852 to 1916 the farms and many of the Cottages in Coningsby lane were rented from the Van De Weyer family.

The history of Yew Tree Cottage in the 20th Century is entwined with Coningsby Farm and these properties with its land has changed hands many times. The 1916 sale of New Lodge in over 70 lots (3,700 acres) included some 20 farms, cottages and pubs. The Good Family (Dairymen) from Sturt Green who ran Stroud Farm Holyport bought Yew Tree Cottage in December 1916 with a mortgage that was paid off by 1924 and farmed the land until June 1936 when Sidney Medwin of Cookham Dean purchased it for £550. The name of Barings Bank crops up many times in the Deeds and mortgage documents of these sales.

By December 1936 Sidney Medwin sells Yew Tree Cottage (still 2 cottages at this time) to Gilbert Keith Dunning of Rails, Holyport for £2150 and in October 1940 Dunning purchases an additional strip of land (73' x 77') from the Good family for £15 to extend the garden.

In 1946 Dunning also buys Coningsby Farm (again Barings Bank* noted on the deed documents) for £4,750 from the personal representatives of Thomas Maher (who had originally purchased the farmhouse and 70 acres for £2,800 in 1917 from the New Lodge sale). Dunning also buys additional land, farm, buildings and pasture of 25.3 acres for £1846 the same year. Dunning's wife also purchases land on the Fifield Road known as Windyridge for £1500 in 1947.

By 1954 the Dunnings had moved to Devon and Harry Cornelius Jacob of Stoke Row buys Yew Tree Cottage, Coningsby Farm, Orchard Cottage and 43 acres N. and N.W of Yew Tree Cottage.



Harry Jacob, President of the Royal East Berkshire Agricultural Association 1984

Harry was a dairyman farmer, originally from Middlesex and was one of the 1st farmers to produce and sell milk in glass bottles. His mother lived in Yew Tree Cottage until she died at the age of 88 in the 1970's, whilst Harry and his wife (a member of the local farming Emmett family) ran a herd of Jersey and Shorthorn that were milked by hand from Coningsby Farm. He moved his cattle around his fields, used a horse and cart to move his manure and an old 1953 grey Fergie tractor (still in use today). Harry was a 'salt of the earth', quiet, gentleman farmer who was closely involved in the farming community and became the President of the Royal East Berkshire Agricultural Association in 1984. After his mother died Harry moved into Yew Tree Cottage and leased out Coningsby Farm for a rent of £275 per annum. Harry died in 2000 and Alison Potter, the current owner, has lived at Yew Tree Cottage until now - summer 2023.