



A Tale of Two Farms

By Eamonn Rooney

In 1869 a farmhouse in Guildhall Street, said to be one of the oldest building in Folkestone, was demolished. This is a hitherto unknown farm and the author set out to explore further and solve the mystery of two farms at or near that location.

A MYSTERY FARMHOUSE

?King's Arms Farm?

A long time ago C. P. (Peter) Davies, for many years reference librarian at Grace Hill, drew my attention to a piece of stone wall at the rear of some shops in Guildhall Street. Mr Davies was of the opinion that it was very old. I viewed the said wall and for many years give it no more thought.



Left, A large section of the wall and Right, another piece embedded in the rear of the buildings in Guildhall Street.

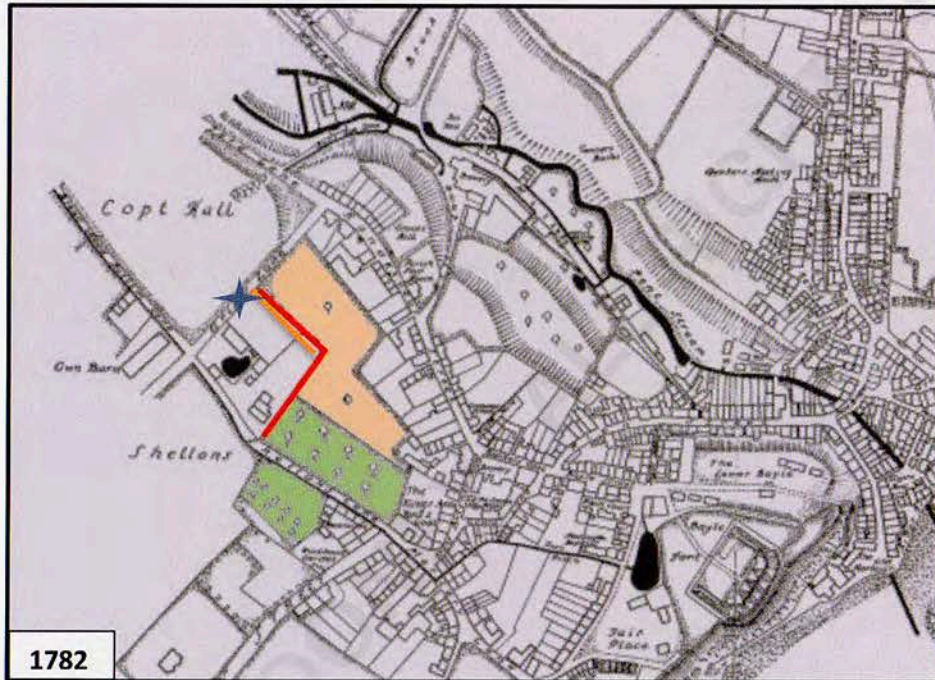
Then, a long time after, I came across a reference in an 1869 newspaper to the demolition of a building in Guildhall Street. The property stood on a piece of land on the east side of the street and when it was for sale by auction the owner had demolished all the premises on the site prior to the sale so that the site would be unencumbered.



On the map 1698 map (above) the plot of land is outlined in Red and we shall follow this method over several maps.

I had assumed for some reason that the Farmhouse stood on the West side of the street where numbers 21 to 33 Guildhall Street now stand These shops and living premises stand on the site of a large (17 acres) plot of land known as Shellons Close: hence the name of the street. However, I recently had occasion to look again at John Powell's 1782 Map and realised that there are no building

of any sort shown on Shellons. However on the other side at what is now the east side of the modern Guildhall Street it was a different matter. I noted that there is a group of buildings clustered around a pond: there are only two ponds shown on the map (below). On the right is the familiar Bayle Pond and on the centre-left is the aforesaid pond. This pond is perhaps between half to one third the size of the Bayle Pond.



The orange line intersecting part of the original farm yard represents the current Eanswythe's Way. The blue star marks the spot where No. 6 Shellons Street now stands (see page 6.)



The arrow on the above map shows the proximity of Towns End Farm to the old farm in Guildhall Street (outlined in red).

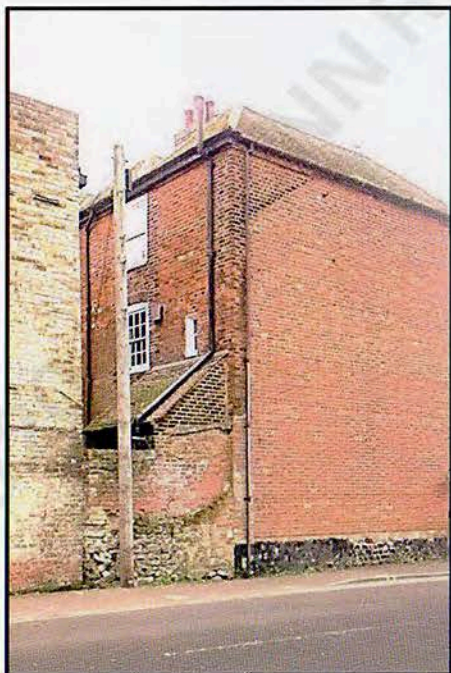
What farm had this house belonged to? Was it connected with Copt Hall? (No 26 on the map above) or Townsend Farm (No 10, No 10a an orchard and 14 Townsend Close)? A cluster of buildings is shown at Townsend Farm, one of which is referred to as a 'house': in all probability the farmhouse. The cluster of buildings with their pond can be seen directly over from Shellons Close (No 9 on the map). This leaves just one other possibility and that is that it was the old farmhouse in Guildhall Street was that of the Kings Arms Farm. Reference to the 1698 map reveals details of what Kings Arms Farm comprises i.e. *'A house, Yard & Garden, Great & Little Copt Hall and Shellons'*, these along with *'Great and Little Dirlocks (sic)'* amounted to just over 17 acres.

What other references are there to the old farmhouse demolished in 1869? S. J. Mackie speculating in 1856 as to the location of St Botolph's Chapel remarks that *'At the south end of an Elizabethan farm-house in Guildhall Street, there is a portion of old wall with a small stone window, evidently belonging to an ecclesiastical building ...'*¹ Whilst he is looking at the wrong location² for the chapel he does inadvertently supply information regarding the farmhouse.

When the 1861 Census was taken a Thomas and Jane Cockett were listed as living at the old farmhouse. Furthermore, in a local Court Case in 1864³ Jane Cockett was giving evidence and said that she and her husband Thomas⁴ lived at the Old Farmhouse in Guildhall Street.

In the 1869 newspaper report: the reporter said that the old farmhouse, *'had supplied St Eanswythe's Nunnery with dairy produce'*. I do not think that this is so but we have to consider that it may have supplied the later priory. However the reporter was a local man and was probably reciting local folk memory. I will quote the newspaper report in its entirety. Folkestone Chronicle, 5th June, 1869 **An Antiquity**

"During the past week, Folkestone has lost one of its oldest buildings, supposed to have supplied the nunnery of S. Eanswthe with dairy produce. The ground is to be sold in the course of a few days, and the proprietors decided on clearing it of buildings first"



The same issue has on the front page a notice of the sale by auction of two parcels of land, Lot one of which is *'situated on the east side of Guildhall Street'* and had a frontage to the street of about 133 feet and a depth of about 122 feet and the whole covered an area of about 16,226 feet or



¹ S. J. Mackie, Folkestone & its Neighbourhood, 1856 edition, page 26.

² St Botholph's Chapel was actually in the Folloy Road/Warren Road area.

³ Folkestone Observer, 22nd October, 1864, page 5?, col 'b'.

⁴ This Thomas Cockett was a labourer and must not be confused with Thomas Cockett Sexton and Town Crier who lived in the same period but dwelt in Church Street.

thereabouts. The land fetched the large sum of £1,000. Another newspaper also reported on the demolition saying :-

“The old farmhouse in Guildhall Street, supposed to have supplied the nunnery of St. Eanswythe with dairy produce was pulled down. One of Folkestone’s oldest buildings”⁵.

Of course we can decry the reporters’ statement re Eanswythe’s Nunnery, however we must bear in mind that Mackie’s further comments about the old farmhouse, *‘The old farm alluded to was, down to a recent period, surrounded by orchards and meadows...’* We know that the site was certainly surrounded on early maps by the King’s Arms orchards and gardens (? meadows) and also adjacent was the area now known as Cophall Gardens. We also know that when a row of eight houses was built in what is now Shellons Street they were named Eanswythe’s Place (1 to 8 and later 2 to 16⁶ Shellons Street). Sometime later when another row of house was constructed running parallel to those in Guildhall Street it was named Eanswythe’s Terrace. We have to wonder if those reporters and whoever named these houses knew something we do not!

In conclusion I have to say that whilst it is very unlikely that the farm served the Nunnery, it is perfectly feasible that it may have served the later Priory, i.e. the one dissolved in 1535.



Looking through a hole in the hoarding surrounding the vacant plot in Guildhall Street, a portion of stone wall is discernible where some of the protective flashing had come adrift. To the right of that, some of the stone wall, painted black, continues at the base gable.

A point of interest is the stone lower courses in the building on the corner as we approach the old stone wall in Eanswythe’s Way.



Above: Shellons Street before demolition of most of the terrace.

⁵ Folkestone Observer, 5th June, 1869, page 4, col ‘d’.

⁶ Nos 2, 4 and 6 are still survive.



Above: Numbers 2 (Eanswythe House) to 6 Shellons Street.

A recent (October 2019) conversation with the occupier of No. 6 reveals that the ‘basement’ room has stone walls and recent visual examination has revealed that the ‘retaining wall’ under the steps up to the front door is also stonework.



Location of old stone walling (under steps).

This lady was Emily Spencer (nee Pearce) and was the Widow of the Reverend Peter Spencer, Vicar of Ewell near Dover. Prior to his becoming the incumbent at Ewell, Rev Spencer had been curate at the Parish Church of St Mary & St Eanswythe when a Reverend Thomas Pearce was the vicar there.

Emily Spencer was daughter of Rev Thomas Pearce, who died in 1855 and his Estate, which included the Priory House on The Bayle,

However there is a possible alternative reason for the appellations 'Eanswythe's House' and 'Eanswythe's Terrace. Sources show that a Mrs Spencer occupied number 2 Shellons Street (the house with the bay windows) was auctioned in October 1856⁷ and which it is revealed also included Eanswythe House⁸.



The eagle eyed observer will notice in passing Eanswythe House that there is the somewhat worn or defaced head of a woman (? Eanswythe) above the doorway. Although the property was recently renovated this figure does not date from then.

*The photograph above shows the head and shoulders of a woman (?St Eanswythe) above the door of a house in Shellons Street.
(Photo by Mark Hourahane)*

In 2002,⁹ between 10th April and 22nd August, Canterbury Archaeological Society mounted a 'watching brief' during street improvements in Sandgate Road and Guildhall Street. In the course of the work seven tree pits were dug in Guildhall Street. The pits are numbered TP1 to TP7 and pits TP3 to TP6 contained a length of stone walling aligned south-east by north-west. In addition tree pits 1, 2 and 7 contained material which led the writer of the report to suggest that the wall may have continued to the length of pits 1 to 7.

Currently (2020) tree pit No 3 is aligned between 18 and 20 Guildhall Street (Benham's) and No 6 is aligned with No 30 (Floor Shop), Tree Pit No 7 is aligned with No 36 and is thus not far out of alignment with the old wall at the rear of Guildhall Street.

More recent research shows that in 1698 King's Arms Farm encompassed, 'A House Yard and Garden; Little Copthall & Great Copthall; Shellons; Great Dirlocks & Little Dirlocks'.

⁷ Folkestone Chronicle, 25th October, 1856, Front page, col 'a'.

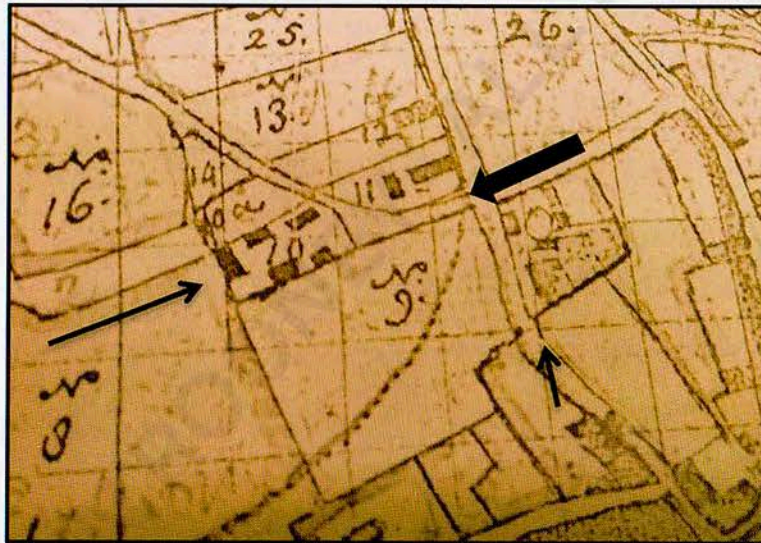
⁸ These buildings were reected just prior to 1850.

⁹ Canterbury Archaeological Trust: An archaeological watching brief during the excavation of 13 tree pits associated with the improvement of Guildhall Street and Sandgate Road, Folkestone. October Andy Linklater 2002.

TOWNSEND FARM

The existence of this farm first caught my attention when researching the demolition of an old farmhouse in Guildhall Street in 1869. Townsend Farm takes its name from being just that, situated at the edge of the town in times gone by.

The earliest mention I have found to date is in a Will dated 30th August 1472¹⁰ when John Cole left to his son '*John junior (a) barn at Townsend*'. This reference may not of course relate to a farm at Townsend, however the following undoubtedly does. In his Will dated 16th December 1480, Thomas Willyams clearly states '*My farm with land at Townysend ... to be sold*'¹¹. There are other mentions of Townsend such as 1484 when one Thomas Cooke whose Will included '*the barn at Townsend to my wife for life and after her death to be sold*'¹² and one Alice



The arrow indicates Townsend Farm. The thick arrow indicates the present day Cheriton Road. The Roman Catholic Church stands roughly on the land marked 12 and 13. Gloucester Place now runs across N9.

In 1545 Thomas Kenet in his Will mentions '*my 2 acres at Townsend and 2 messuages*'¹³. Between 1608 and 1619 Thomas Harvey father of the renowned William Harvey sold of most of his land and other properties, including '*A tenement adjoining the road S and S.E., plus a Barn, 2 Gardens, and land (2 acres) called Copthill alias Townsend, adjoining to the house of Richard Kennett, Jurat, N.W.*'

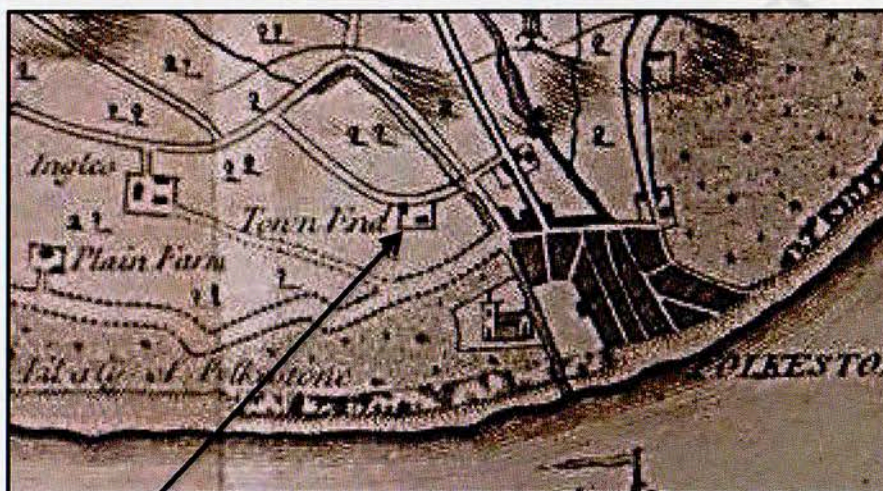
¹⁰ Last Will and Testament of John Cole, dated 30th August, 1472, Probate date 28th April 1473. Extracts of Medieval Wills at Peter Davies Heritage Room, Grace Hill.

¹¹ Last Will and Testament of Thomas Willyams, dated 16th December, 1480. Extracts of Medieval Wills at Peter Davies Heritage Room, Grace Hill.

¹² Last Will and Testament of Thomas Cooke dated 28th November, 1484, Probate 5th May, 1485. Extracts of Medieval Wills at Peter Davies Heritage Room, Grace Hill.

¹³ Last Will and Testament of Thomas Kenet dated 25th November, 1545. Extracts of Medieval Wills at Peter Davies Heritage Room, Grace Hill.

The records of the Folkestone Overseers of the Poor reveal that c1705 the farm may have been held by one Roger Pilcher and after his death in 1713¹⁴, by Alice his wife who is last recorded in 1717/18: the owner was one Mr Bouverie. I have also found that c1738/9 one Jacob Wraight, brewer, '*had Plain Farm and Towns End Farm*' (*This was rented from the Bouveries*).¹⁵ It is interesting to note that while he was paying just £6 rent per annum for Plain Farm, he was paying £30 per annum for Townsend Farm.



A map from Edward Hasted's History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent.

In John Powell's 1782 Survey of Folkestone¹⁶, the land is still in the possession of the Earl of Radnor and is now occupied by one John Pilcher. The farm (10) is described as '*Towns End Farm House Barn and Stable*' and contains 2 roods and 15 perches, which seems a very small acreage¹⁷. However there is also a small orchard (10a, see map on page 8), occupied by John Pilcher. These may have collectively comprised Towns End Farm. It is interesting to note that all the parcels of land held by John Pilcher, here and elsewhere, are owned by the Earl of Radnor.

A Mr Ham Tite, who had started in business as a brewer c1822¹⁸ at Rendezvous Street, bought Townsend Farm c1844¹⁹ and founded what became known as the Gun Brewery. He expended some £4,000 on setting up the brewery. By 1865 what is now Bouverie Road West had been constructed. In 1894 the Folkestone Express reported on the local farms and their rentals and Land Tax payments: my two farms are not mentioned.

¹⁴ Roger Pilcher was buried 21st March 1713, Bishops Transcripts 1563-1812 at the Peter Davies Heritage Room, DCa/BT/75/

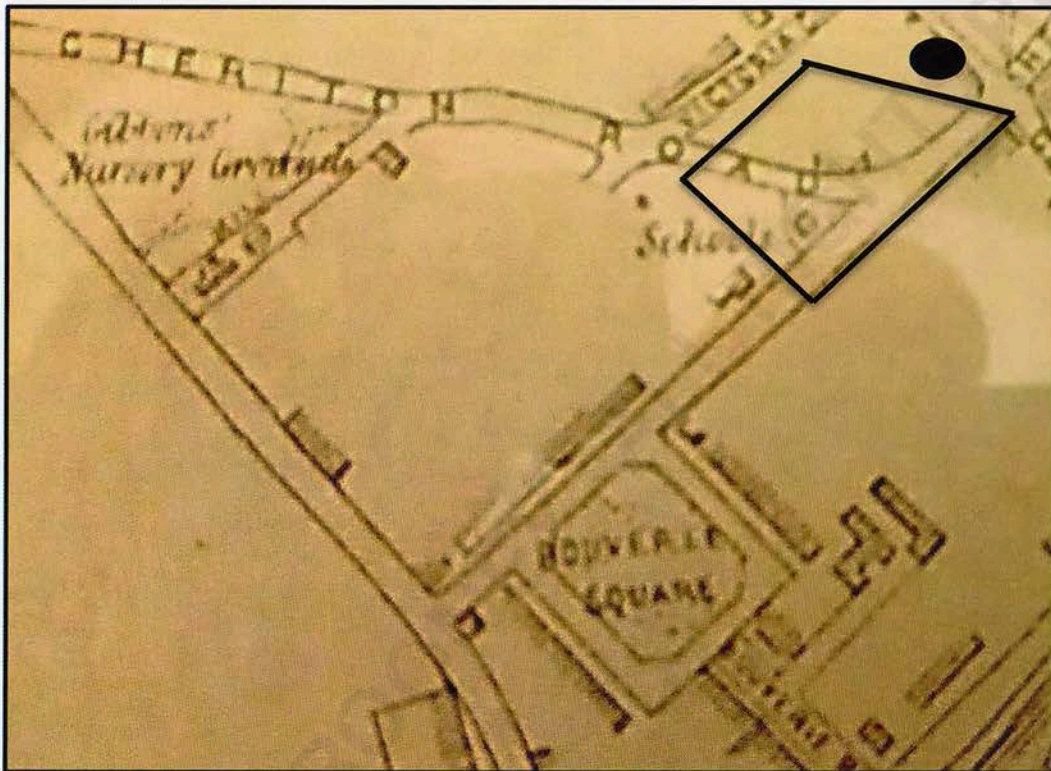
¹⁵ Who's Who in Folkestone 1700-1840, Vol 2 K-Z. Held at the Peter Davies Heritage Room, Public Library, Grace Hill. Folkestone.

¹⁶ The Survey was made for the Earl of Radnor.

¹⁷ However the rent is now £22, although this was raised to £25 just after Alice Pilcher succeeded her husband John.

¹⁸ Folkestone Common Assembly Minutes 1812-1835 Transcripts, page 71 original folio 171v, 1st July 1822, Held at the Peter Davies Heritage Room, Public Library, Grace Hill. Folkestone.

¹⁹ Folkestone Common Assembly Minutes 1812-1835 Transcripts, page 71 original folio 171v, 1st July 1822, Held at the Peter Davies Heritage Room, Public Library, Grace Hill. Folkestone.



*The black lines mark the approximate site of Towns End Farm on this 1865 map.
The black oval marks the location of the Roman Catholic Church.*

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