

# The Landmark Trust

## HOLE COTTAGE, COWDEN, KENT

The name 'Hole' describes somewhere in a hollow. Although now called a cottage, throughout the 16-18th centuries this building was referred to simply as 'The Hole' (indeed, locals still call it that today but Landmark changed the name of the building to Hole Cottage, to distinguish it from its hollow). It is in fact one end of a relatively sophisticated yeoman's house, three-quarters of which has now gone. It is the kind of house that was once common in the Weald of Kent and Sussex, where oak was plentiful, and the yeoman, mainly on account of the contemporary iron industry, rich.

The present approach to the front door would originally have been through the single-storey hall, open to the roof. At the opposite end of the hall, nearest the existing shed, there would have been another two-storey wing, perhaps also jettied, acting as the service area. Typically on the ground floor there would have been a pair of doors leading respectively to the buttery - for the storage of liquid items such as beer - and the pantry - for the storage of dry goods.

The opposite wing, which survives today, was reached from the 'high' end of the hall. On the ground floor there is a parlour and upstairs the solar, which seems always to have been divided into two chambers. These rooms would have been for the personal use of the owner, his family, and guests. It was probably built towards the end of the 15th century. A moulded beam just visible over the present front door confirms the impression that Hole was a house of considerable status.

Originally the entire timber-frame would have been filled with wattle and daub. As this deteriorated, often at low level, it became quite common to use bricks instead between the timbers - known as 'nogging'. Tile-hanging is also a very common method in Kent of protecting a timber-frame, a practice introduced in the late-17th century. Hole was perhaps first tiled on its upper walls when the main part of the house was pulled down in the early 19th century.

The roof is also tiled but with older ones than the walls. Peg tiles were rare and expensive until after 1600 and Hole would originally have had a thatched or possibly Horsham stone roof.

The two windows in the kitchen and the east window in the main bedroom are medieval. The openings and the holes for the vertical mullions were found in 1970. These mullions were replaced, set diagonally as they were originally. The only way of closing these windows would have been with internal wooden shutters that slid in grooves. The window in the sitting room is in its original position (although not medieval) and you can see the slots for the bars in the beam above it.

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The main source of heat for Hole would have been the open fire in the hall. The existing part would only have been heated by glowing embers in a brazier. Later there would have been a big Tudor chimney (perhaps where the present 19th century one is) with fireplaces back to back - one facing the hall and the other the sitting room. No trace of this remains however.

The stairs are probably where they always were, though at first they may have been steep, and straight like a ladder. The newel post is a copy of an old Tudor one that had been incorporated into the 19th century stairs.

George Baily, a local poet, wrote a stanza describing the destruction of most of Hole on the 1830s:

“But where is the homestead, the once happy spot,  
Shall its memory perish and all be forgot?  
A warrior possessed it and levelled it down  
A desolate array of ruins around.”

Hole Cottage was restored in 1970 by the Landmark Trust.

*The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Hole Cottage sleeps up to 4 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.*