

# The Landmark Trust

## **OBRISS FARM, NR. WESTERHAM, KENT**

Obriss Farm was given to the Landmark Trust in 1990 by the executors of Mrs Helena Cooper, Mrs Cooper had inherited the farm from her father, who bought it in the 1920s. While neither actually farmed Obriss themselves, both took a close interest in it, and in the way it was run by their tenants. As pressure mounted on farmers in recent decades to rely more and more on chemicals and to industrialise their production, so Obriss, run along traditional lines, became a precious reminder of different values. Its fields remained unsprayed and wildlife thrived.

Mrs Cooper was keen that this aspect of Obriss should be preserved, but also wished for the buildings to be repaired and cared for, and enjoyed. It was for this reason that her executors opted for the Landmark Trust as its new guardian. The farm buildings at Obriss remain in agricultural use, and those who stay in the farmhouse enjoy the unspoilt surroundings and the life of a small working farm through the seasons.

Managing a farm is not a typical task for Landmark, so the fields are laid to permanent pasture and grazed, mostly by sheep but with some cattle, on a low input/ low output basis by a farmer whose family have farmed in the area for many years. We successfully completed a ten year Higher Level Stewardship Scheme in 2021.

### **The buildings of Obriss Farm**

Obriss is typical of the small mixed farms which were formed in this area in the Tudor and Elizabethan era by yeomen, some freeholders, some tenants of larger landowners. Such farms were often the result of enclosing the large open fields of the medieval period, and this seems to have been the case at Obriss. A field to the north-east of the house has the clear 'ridge and furrow' pattern left by medieval ploughs. The farm straddles the parish border of Brasted and Westerham and its own boundaries, and those of its fields, have probably changed little in the last few two or three hundred years.

The earliest building dates from between 1550 and 1600. This is the timber-framed bakehouse which stands behind the farmhouse. Examination by archaeologist David Martin has revealed that this is in origin a detached kitchen, a rare survival of a once common building type. It was once about twice the size it is now, and probably served a combined use not only as a kitchen but as a bakehouse and brewhouse as well, with storage rooms and possibly some accommodation for servants. In the 19th century, when its brick chimney was added, it was used as a bakehouse and washhouse, and possibly a smokehouse, smoking bacon from this and neighbouring farms.

The front part of the farmhouse itself, which is timber-framed, is also thought to date from before 1600, although it has been added to and altered since. The character of the house as it is now, with its parlour and large kitchen, belongs more to the early 19th century.

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW  
*Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205*

*Bookings 01628 825925 Office 01628 825920 Facsimile 01628 825417 Website  
www.landmarktrust.org.uk*

In 1844, when a map was made for apportioning the tithes in the two parishes, Obriss and adjoining farms belonged to a Mr Eyre, as heir to one Charles Parker. The tenant was William Bowra. The farm consisted of a mixture of arable land and pasture or meadow, with some orchards and hop gardens as well. The woods occupied the same area that they do now.

The farm buildings are only sketched in on the tithe map but none seem to be shown in front of the house. These only appear in 1870, when the first 6in. to the mile Ordnance Survey map was made. They consist of stables and cowhouse on the right (as seen from the house), and a wool store on the left. South of the track there was formerly a cartshed, and slightly further away is the great threshing barn, which was probably built in the early 17th century.

### **Restoration of the buildings**

The most urgent task in 1992 was the repair of the great threshing barn, which was near to collapse. This, and some work carried out on the other farm buildings, exhausted the funds available at that time. It was therefore not until 1995 that Landmark was able to start work on the house itself, and to complete the repair of the buildings round the yard and the bakehouse behind.

The house needed some structural work, where the sole plate had rotted at the east end and along the front. The roof was railed on new battens and insulation, and the tilehanging on the back and sides of the house renewed, using a mixture of old and new handmade tiles. The walls were repointed using a lime and sand mortar to match some areas of old mortar that survived. 1920s windows were replaced with ones of a more sympathetic design.

Inside, restoration was kept to a minimum. Some replastering was needed, and the creation of two new bathrooms and a new kitchen. A second stair, inserted at a time when the house was divided into two cottages, was removed and the floor made up with new oak boards. The sitting room and bedroom above were painted in colours of which traces were found on the walls, using traditional distempers,

The work was carried out under the supervision of the architect Peregrine Bryant by Head and Southon of Lingfield, and Clive Whitby, roof tiler. The house was furnished in January 1996. A grant for the work was received from the Raymond and Blanche Lawson Charitable Trust. Support for work on the farm has also been given by the Countryside Commission under the Countryside Stewardship scheme. Two ponds were cleaned and new hedges are to be planted.

*The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Obriss Farm sleeps up to 5 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.*

