

Account of Purley on Thames

Hemmington

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Gail Eaton

An article by Gail Eaton, a former resident of Hemmington in Purley Village

I believe that Hemmington was originally one house, so not an insubstantial house. I think it is probably 17th c. It was originally a rectangular shape, built around a central fireplace with two rooms each side and two smaller rooms at the back. The internal construction on the lower level is of large cobs of chalk and of flint. The external walls are brick with flint insets. The roof slopes down at the back of the house to the top of the first floor. Lovely large oak beam support the upper floors. Internal walls have an oak beams between brickwork (we did expose all the beams). Ceilings joists are oak, and seem to have been covered with lathe and plaster. Only one ceiling, in the right first floor bedroom, had the original lathe and plaster (we left this despite it having artexed!). I know that the ceiling joists in at least one room are numbered. There are two large curved beams internally supporting the roof (curving up at the back of the house to the third floor); these are not on external walls, but about 8 foot in. The stairs were at the back (long since gone when we moved in).

All the doors on the top two floors were original when we lived there – lovely but battered.

There is clear evidence of dormer windows in the two top rooms, but later taken out (probably because of the window tax).

There is a bread oven in the left hand room, and I am told perhaps a priest hole – I am not sure of this. I was also told that the oven door is in the Museum of Rural Life. In the right room there is a very unusual fireplace – a very small one set above the floor. We found the ends of a large beam in the left hand room – cut away at some time.

The house was substantially altered at the front around 1850. It became the school house(s) and was split into two. The right hand side being the bigger of the two homes. An extension was built on the front. I think on the ground floor this served as a kitchen – we found evidence that there had been a flue going into the original chimney. The top room was a bedroom. There is evidence of small winding stairs to each floor at the back of the house. A bay window was added to the main room downstairs – a wonderful hotchpotch of probably second-hand leaded glass window and the original window. The doorways to each of the properties could still be seen when we left– one at the front (on the right), and one at the side (I assume that this can no longer be seen since the extension was built). The headmistress lived in the bigger house. When we were renovating one of the top rooms we found a bradawl, c. mid-19th century, in the roof space of the Victorian extension. The Rawlins lived in one half for a number of years, and eventually bought both properties, turning it back into one house. The Victorian extension became the hall, stairs were added, and the top room of the extension became a landing. The left first floor room was split to allow a passageway right through the back, and the door to the right-hand bedroom was closed up. A new set of stairs were built up to the two third floor rooms. The front porch was added when a new front door was created.

Hemmington is named after the village in Somerset where Fred Rawlins grew up. It had previously been the School House.

Rita Denman

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Hemington, Purley Village. History can be traced back to 1733. Around 1800 the cottage was divided into two and a small free school was established in one half of the cottage.

