

# **A history of Cobblers**

written by Philip Gorton, 1997

## Introduction

### The village of Shackleford

The parish of Shackleford is a comparatively modern creation. Until 1866 it was a tithing (a sub-division) of the larger parish of Godalming and the inhabitants had to go into the town to attend church. Along with Milford, Busbridge and Farncombe it was split from the mother parish and a new church was built. The village itself, however, is much older with some of the houses surviving from medieval times.

Shackleford was a part of the manor of Godalming upon which the ancient ecclesiastical parish was based. The majority of the properties in the village were held of the manor of Godalming and it is possible to trace the history of some of them using the records of the manor courts.

Cobblers is a timber-framed cottage that dates from the latter part of the sixteenth century. Unfortunately, little can be found about its early life. Although there are manorial records for many properties in Shackleford it cannot be proved conclusively which of the described houses is Cobblers. It is not until the last quarter of the eighteenth century that any definite record can be found. For most of the time since then it has been a part of larger estates: it belonged to the owner of Mitchenhall until it was sold at the end of the eighteenth century. It then passed to Lord Midleton and remained a part of the Peper Harow estate until the mid-twentieth century.

### The building

Cobblers itself is a timber-framed house of the post-medieval style that dates from the late sixteenth century. Medieval houses were built with a hall open to the rafters. The master and his family used the "high" end of the hall whilst servants and lesser members of the household used the lower end. In the middle of the floor was an open hearth on which a fire

burned. The smoke was not enclosed but drifted up from the fire and found its way out of the building where it could. Smoke from these fires deposited soot on the rafters.

The mid-sixteenth century is a convenient time to define the end of the medieval period. Certainly in terms of housing, it was a crucial time. The medieval hall houses went rapidly out of fashion during the course of the century and towards its end none were being built. New houses were built with upstairs rooms and with chimneys. Existing open halls were floored over to give extra rooms upstairs whilst chimney stacks were built to allow fires to be made in other rooms and to take smoke out of the house.

Cobblers is one of these post-medieval buildings. Unlike its predecessors it was not built with an open hall and neither, at first, did it have a chimney stack. Rather, it was given a smoke bay. This was a way channelling the smoke out of the house that was considerably cheaper to construct than a brick chimney. The narrow bay still exists and the soot stained rafters within it can still be seen in the roof. Subsequently, in order to improve the house and to enable hearths to be placed in other rooms, a brick chimney stack was built within the smoke bay.

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Cobblers was a farm house and as such has had other buildings and land associated with it over the years. A map of Shackleford House (Hall Place) estate dated 1772 shows two buildings on each side of the path that runs from the cottage to Lydling. (1) By the early 1800s they had disappeared as the Godalming enclosure map (2) of 1809 does not show them. However, a new building had appeared just to the west of the cottage. There is no indication of their use but they were probably farm buildings. By the time of the tithe survey of 1842 none of them remained and the house stood alone. It had also lost its land as, by that time, it had become a part of the Peper Harow estate.

In common with other villages in the area, the farmland of medieval Shackleford was held in the form of large, open fields in which the inhabitants owned numerous unfenced strips. The land to the back of Cobblers was open in medieval times and the owner of the house would have had his share of land scattered around these fields. There are many references to Shackleford's common fields in the manorial records of Godalming. The scattered pattern of land ownership survived until the late eighteenth century and the land associated with Cobblers would have been spread around the village.

## The ownership of the house

The earliest reliable reference to the ownership of the house is the map of the Shackleford House estate that dates from 1772. This shows that the house and garden were in the ownership of William Billinghamurst, the owner of Mitchenhall.

Various deeds relating to the ownership of Mitchenhall (4) indicate that the Billinghamurst family owned two pieces of property in Shackleford apart from Mitchenhall itself: a piece of land opposite Mitchenhall called The Breaches and a house, garden and eighteen acres of land called Horseman's and Stillwell's. It is probable but, unfortunately, not absolutely certain, that this was Cobblers, its garden and land. It is probable but, unfortunately, not absolutely certain, that this was Cobblers, its garden and land.

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1. Map of Shackleford House estate 1772 in the ownership of Freddy Hill. Shackleford House was previously known as Hall Place. It is now Aldro School.
- 2 Godalming Enclosure Map and Award, Guildford Muniment Room.
- 3 Godalming Tithe map and apportionment 1842, Guildford Muniment Room.
- 4 Midleton papers, ref. 145, Guildford Muniment Room.

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However, if we assume that Horseman's and Stillwell's was Cobblers, we can take the story of the house back to the 1664 when it was bought by Thomas Billinghamurst (5). He was a yeoman farmer already established in Shackleford - the manorial records indicate that he was owner of Mitchenhall at that time. Except for a short period in the 1730s, the family was to own the property for the next 133 years.

The name of the property itself refers to its former owners. It was common for houses and land to be defined by the names of their previous holders, particularly in the records of the manor court. Very often the names of these previous owners stayed with the property for hundreds of years: a rental (6) of the manor of Godalming dated 1452 lists one John Stylwell as holding land called Brightwold's whilst Arnold Champion held Horseman's. In the same list is John Michenalle who was holding Mitchenhall itself. One can see how, over the

years, the lands were bought and sold, amalgamated and divided and how the names of the medieval owners survived despite this.

Thomas Billinghurst bought Horseman's and Stillwell's for £220 from John Combes of Pitfold near Haslemere. As Combes was living at some distance from Shackleford he did not farm the land himself but rented the holding to a tenant farmer called Richard Castillion. By then the house itself was about sixty or seventy years old.

By 1686 Thomas had died and his property had been inherited by his son James. In that year James married Elizabeth, daughter of Henry Gearing of Stepney, and Horseman's and Stillwell's was a part of the marriage settlement. It was passed to Elizabeth and her father. In fact it remained in the family ownership as, after Elizabeth's death, the property passed to her son James Billinghurst. The deed drawn up for the marriage settlement describes the property (7):

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5. Bargain & sale 25 Nov. 1664. Ref.145, box 256, Guildford Muniment Room.

6 Rental of manor of Godalming. Transcription in the Percy Wood collection in Godalming Museum.

A rental is a list of manorial properties and their tenants together with the annual quit rent that was due. A quit-rent was not a commercial rent but a payment to the lord of the manor in lieu of services owed by the tenant.

7 Bargain and sale 6 Jul 1686. Ref.145, box 4, Guildford Muniment Room.

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All that messuage or tenement and the barn curtilage garden and orchard adjoining and all those five closes of land meadow or pasture and the moiety or one half of five little parcels of meadow called Horseman's and Stillwells containing eighteen acres in the tything of Shackleford and Lydling in the said parish of Godalming late in the tenure of Richard Castillion

James was an absentee landlord. He lived in Kelveson in Essex where he made his living as a draper. In 1732 he decided to sell Horseman's and Stillwells and it was bought by Edmund Burke of Spitalfields.

In 1734 the property was sold to Henry Huscroft a linen draper of London. He later made a declaration that the money used to buy was not his but that of Jonathan Beezley, a mercer. (8) Why this declaration was made is not clear: he may have obtained and used the money fraudulently but more likely, he bought the property on a mortgage with money borrowed from Beezley. When the property was sold again in 1738 both men are listed as a party to the sale. It is significant that throughout this period the house and land were owned by London merchants. They were all in the cloth trade and doubtless knew each other as business rivals or partners. Even in those days, the economic influence of London could be felt strongly in the heart of rural Surrey.

The sale of 1738 brought Horseman's and Stillwell's back into the ownership of the Billingham family when it was bought by William Billingham of Mitchenhall (9) who described himself as a gentleman.

Throughout this time it would have been let to tenant farmers - Richard Castillion was succeeded by Henry Holt and he by Henry Budd - and there is no indication that the property was anything other than a financial investment for its owners.

The tradition of renting to tenants continued and, ten days after William Billingham bought the farm, he granted a new lease to Thomas Ede of Shackleford. (10). The ownership stayed with the Billingham family of Mitchenhall until William's grandson, William Woodruffe, died in 1792. (11) The estate was then held by three trustees who, in 1796, put it up for sale.

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8 Declaration of 12 June 1734. Ref. 145, box 4, doc. 27 1, Guildford Muniment Room.

9 Enrolment in Chancery, 3 Jul 1738. Ref. 145, doc 274, Guildford Muniment Room.

10 Lease for 21 years, 14 Jul 1738. Ref. 145, box 57, Guildford Muniment Room.

11. Indenture, 7 Mar 1792, ref. 145, box 65, Guildford Muniment Room. For reasons unknown William Billingham changed his family name to Woodruffe.

During the next year it was transferred to Viscount Midleton. (12) He incorporated it into his Peper Harow estate and from that time the house lost its individual identity. In common with many small farms at that time, the land became a part of a larger holding and the house itself became the rented home of landless labourers or, possibly, was used by the estate to house its workers.

Throughout the nineteenth century landed estates grew steadily larger as their owners bought up individual properties when they became available. On the Peper Harow estate, in common with many others, the land was divided into larger farms, which were rented to individual farmers. The land that was once attached to Horseman's and Stillwell's became a part of a larger farmed area rented to Mr.Roker.

It is this period that has made the identification of the house in the early records difficult. Although there are many old deeds in the Midleton collection it is not possible to identify the house positively. When it was built it was the home of a moderately wealthy farmer. However, by the beginning of the nineteenth century it was just an old cottage that was no longer considered important and which had become the home of the rural poor. Houses like these were just listed as a "cottage" or a "tenement" and their original names were lost. Some, like Mitchenhall and Hall Place (now Aldro School), kept their names for centuries and it is possible to trace their histories and the changes of ownership.

#### The nineteenth century inhabitants

The census returns (13) of the nineteenth century give some insight into the lives of the inhabitants of the cottage and of Shackleford during Victoria's reign (1837-1901). Unfortunately, it is not possible to identify the house in some of the returns.

For over thirty years the house was home to James Pincott and his family. The house can be identified in the returns from 1861 to 1891 and they give details of the Pincott household living at Cobblers. (14)

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12 Indenture 4 Jul 1797. Ref. 145 box 57, Guildford Muniment Room.

13 Census returns are available on microfilm at the Surrey Local Studies Library, Guildford.

14 The "Penfold" map and apportionment at Godalming Museum lists Pincott as occupier of the house.

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James Pincott was born in 1810, possibly in the Milford area. There is some confusion here as in the early returns he has named Witley. He was evidently not a Shackleford man but once he was there he stayed for the rest of his life. Returns from 1841 and 1851 show that Pincott lived near Lydling Farm until the 1850s before moving to the cottage in Lombard Street. Neither did he did not look far for a wife: Frances Searle came from the neighbouring parish of Puttenham and they married in 1833 at Godalming parish church (15) when they were in their early twenties.

James and Frances set up home in Shackleford and they had at least four children during the 1830s: John, George, Mary and Jane all feature in the 1841 return. John moved away between 1851 and 1861, as did Jane, the latter probably to become a household servant, which was the fate of most female children of the working classes. George was not in the household on census day 1861 but had returned by 1871 to share his parents' home with his wife, Phoebe. They remained childless and were still living in the house in the 1890s.

Mary was not destined to marry and she too stayed at home. After the death of her mother in the 1870s she was to run the household and was still looking after her elderly father in 1891.

For all his working life James Pincott was an agricultural labourer, as were his sons, and he was still described as such in 1881 when he was aged over 70 years. In those days men of Pincott's class worked for as long as they physically able. There were no old-age pensions and the fate of many elderly people was to end their days in the workhouse. Although he was living in a house owned by the Peper Harow estate he does not appear to have been employed by Lord Middleton as estate wage books (16) from the middle of the century do not mention Pincott.

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15 Godalming Parish register Transcripts Surrey Local Studies Library. Until the creation of the new parish of Shackleford in 1866 the village was a part of the ancient parish of Godalming

16 Midleton papers 145, Guildford Muniment Room.

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Examination of the census returns, particularly those from the middle of the century, show that the occupation of the villagers was lowly: the men were mostly agricultural labourers. They were poor families. Agricultural workers were badly paid, had uncertain conditions of employment and were at the mercy of the weather and market forces. A poor harvest meant lower wages and a hard winter may have meant little work for many weeks. The work was hard physical labour and accident or illness could lose them their livelihood.

Consequently, the labourer lived a life of insecurity. He feared the prospect of unemployment, lay-offs, old-age, sickness and, ultimately, the workhouse. Throughout his working life he laboured long hours at hard physical tasks and was paid poverty wages that frequently had to be supplemented by charity and poor relief. Finally, when old age or sickness prevented them from looking after themselves, the labourer and his wife would have been removed to the Union Workhouse in Guildford. This was a fate that was feared more than any other amongst the labouring classes but it was a lucky man who escaped it. This was the general picture but some places were more fortunate if there was a paternalistic landowner in the parish.

James Pincott appears to have been lucky in this respect. The 1891 returns show that, in his eighties, he was still living in his old home with his family and that he had some kind of income for he is described as "living on his own means.

Whilst the man of the house was out earning his wage his wife would have run the household. It was possible to do this on her husband's income but only with a great deal of thrift and ingenuity. The wages were spent on the household items that could not be made or grown by the cottagers themselves. About three quarters of the food budget went on tea, sugar, flour, bakers' bread and beer. What little that was left over each week was put towards the occasional items of shoes and clothing.

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The Labour Commission described a typical labourer's budget in the 1890s but there are some significant omissions from the calculations. (17) This family, for instance, appears to have been tee-total! There were also other forms of income not accounted for in the calculation. The children of the family for instance, would have brought home some coppers by truanting from school and working in the fields. This was accepted practice for decades even after the introduction of compulsory education (1870), particularly at harvest time. After the children had left home, the spare space was often taken by lodgers whose rent would have helped the family income. Such arrangements can frequently be seen in the census returns of that period.

There was also the important supplement to the diet of home-grown produce. Nearly every cottager grew his own vegetables. A large plot of potatoes would have been found in the gardens of Cobblers and its neighbours and a good harvest made the difference between eating or going hungry over the winter.

The other important addition to the family economy was the family pig. This would have been the family's pride and its insurance against hard times in the coming winter. A piglet was bought in the spring and the fattened on the household scraps with the occasional treat of especially bought feed. Throughout the summer the animal was cosseted and cared for with the intention of growing it as large and as fat as possible. In November the pig was killed. The meat was salted down or turned into bacon and, for once in the year, the family had a meal with no expense spared. A part of the meat was often sold to a local butcher and the money raised would go towards buying the next piglet.

As the century drew to a close, the life in the countryside was becoming more difficult for the working man. The agricultural depression had reduced his pay and opportunities for work and he was making more demands on the Guardians of the Poor. Many gave up the struggle and migrated to the cities to look for work and the population of the countryside fell noticeably during the 1870s and 1880s. The economic importance of the countryside had been eclipsed by the cities during the previous hundred years and the skills of the countryman were of declining importance.

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17 Quoted by Richard Muir, *The English Village*, Thames & Hudson 1980.

The twentieth century

During the first part of the century the house continued much as before. It was a part of the Midleton estate and was probably used to house estate workers. In the twenties and thirties there was an out-building fronting onto the road that was used as a shop by Mr Sydney Lucas from Elstead. He made his living as a cobbler and by mending bicycles. Freddy Hill remembers both the shop and the inhabitants of the house: a family called Wyatt who he describes as "very poor".

The house continued as a part of the Peper Harow estate until the Second World War. After the death of the last Lord Midleton, the estate was broken up and the cottage and its garden sold as a separate lot.

This was to be a dramatic break with the past. The house ceased to be the home of the rural poor. The new owners were Alan and Gwendoline Chalmers, just two of the many middle-class arrivals on the rural scene in the post-war period. The break up of many estates during the 1950s and 1960s saw many houses, previously tied cottages, being sold to the comparatively affluent buyers who wished to live in and commute from the country.

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Alan Chalmers was an architect who, as well as renovating the house itself, was responsible for the new wing that has been added to the western end of the cottage. In memory of its earlier use as a cobbler's shop they gave their home its present name. They stayed at the house for some twenty years, moving from the house in the mid-1960s. However, they stayed in the area and are buried in Peper Harow churchyard.

There has been a succession of inhabitants since the Chalmers left the house. It was bought by Mr & Mrs Mayers and, after Mr Mayers died she shared the house with the entertainer, Billy Dainty. After his death Mrs Mayers left and the house was bought by Mr & Mrs MacIntyre. Since 1989 Cobblers has been the home of Mrs Renata John who commissioned this research.

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## Appendix 1 Owners of Cobblers

pre-1664 John Combes of Pitfold, yeoman, and Elizabeth his wife.

James Billinghamurst of Stepney.

1686 Henry Gearing, citizen and draper of London,  
and Elizabeth his daughter.

1732 Edmund Burke of Spitalfields.

1734 Henry Huscroft of London, linen draper,  
and Jonathan Beezley of London, mercer.

1738 Wm. Billinghamurst Esq.

1753 Wm. Billinghamurst Jnr.

1790 Death of Wm. Billinghamurst (now called Woodruffe),  
after which the estate was administered by trustees.

1797 George Viscount Midleton

1836 George Alan Lord Midleton

Successive Lords Midleton until:

Alan and Gwendoline Chalmers

Mr & Mrs Mayers

Mr & Mrs MacIntyre

1989 Mrs Renata John

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Author's postscript

With any historical research there is a danger that once something is on the printed page it becomes regarded as fact. It must always be borne in mind that the records from which much of this story is derived were created, not with the intention of recording information for posterity, but to help individuals to sell their property, to enable the church to collect their tithes or for the government to learn about population changes. They do not, therefore, present a full picture, merely pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. I hope I have made clear in the text what is recorded as fact what is deduction and what is supposition.

This history was commissioned by the current owner, Mrs R. John.

I would like to acknowledge the help of the staff of Guildford Muniment Room the Surrey Local Studies Library, the Godalming Museum Library, the Surrey Records Office, Mr Freddy Hill of Godalming and Major James More-Molyneux of Loseley House for making the Loseley Manuscripts available for research.

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Courtesy of Renata John

Editor's note: missing pages contain census returns and maps not essential to the text and available publicly.