



History of Forest Green and The Parrot Inn



Forest Green, 1924

Forest Green

Forest Green is a hamlet that lies perfectly spaced between Dorking, Guildford and Horsham. Early settlers on these hills were known to be Saxon but the Weald was sparsely populated as deep clay and streams from the hillside rendered it impassable in the winter, while the hard-baked soil of summer was not conducive to settlement.

The emergence of Forest Green as an entity appears in 1580, when a record refers to "Folles Green" and later in the same document to "Forest", the modern spelling. Intervening years show Forrest in 1738, back in 1807 as Folles, while scattered about is "Farleys", "Ferless", and "Farleys Green". During the middle of the last century the spelling "Forest Green" seems to have been settled upon.

The Green sits at the heart of the village, roughly triangular and approximately 26 acres, it played an integral part in the community's history. A track crossed diagonally from the apex, sufficiently wide enough for horse-drawn carts to travel to Waterlands. Cricket was played on the pitch to the east of this rough road and the cricket pavilion still sits opposite the pub.

The Green stands as a war memorial and is dedicated to the memory of those from the Parish of Abinger who fell in the Great War 1914-1918. The land was purchased and endowed by their friends and neighbours and placed in the custody of the Abinger Parish Council in the year of 1920.

There is mention in Domesday Book of a manor, Hoclei, which may have been Gosterwood which stands in Forest Green, behind our pub today. Certainly the Manor of Gosterwood is of very early derivation.

Following the Norman Conquest and deed without date, a Daniel de Gostrode granted to Maurice de Gostrode and his wife Maud, all his heritage of Gostrode.

When the name changed from Gostrode to Gosterwood seems uncertain; it was probably a gradual emergence over the centuries, as with Farleys Green to Forest Green. It was part of the Manor of Wotton rather than a separate manor in its own right. From 1444 until 1593, families named Bardsey, Wyatt and Hill owned the Manor, then described as a "moated grange." In 1593, Richard Hill conveyed it to George Evelyn Esq., from whom it descended with the Evelyn Wotton Estate until it was sold by the Evelyns in two parts, the first including the house in about 1922, the second, comprising the fields on the east side and the wood in 1972.

The advent of the Evelyn family was significant. The Evelyn Estate, still a major land owner today, was formed in 1579, and by 1625 included Forest Green.

There are other houses of great age within Forest Green. The oldest surviving cottage is Tillies Cottage, built in the 15th Century, and still today having no pseudo decoration, a genuine brick and timber home, with a Horsham stone slab roof. Wicklands Farm bears the date 1610 over the fireplace, and at one time housed the bailiff for nearby Forest Green Farm. Cobbetts is reported as dating from the end of the 15th century, but the present house is 100 years later, with further additions in the 17th Century. 16th Century records show Castle Cottage and the farms of Bridgham, Lyfield, Shoes and Wastlands [Mayes Green]. Pratsham was a farm in the possession of the Charman family from 1664 until 1812. During the 17th Century a number of other farms arose, among them Bulcroft, Collins, Ives, Pondhead and Waterlands.



The Smithy, Forest Green, 1924



Parrot Inn circa 1955

Our Pub

The Parrot sits on the east side of the Green and has stood there for at least 400 years. In the Records Office at Guildford there is an entry "Parrot Inn" stating that, "in 1712, on the 8th day of February, in the tenth year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lady Anne, an agreement was signed between John Evelyn, Esq., of Wotton, and Walter Miall of Abinger, for a cottage and one rood on Farlyes Green, this being renewed in 1812." This may have been transference of business, or possibly for an additional cottage. It appears to have been privately leased as a Free House designated as a Cottage Inn, with two tiny bedrooms available for visitors for bed and breakfast, which in 1930 was stated as costing three shillings and sixpence per night.

The name is somewhat of a mystery (that we would love help solving if you are that way inclined). We know that the pub would have certainly sat on a mail coach route between Dorking and Horsham; a route that would absolutely have been targeted by smugglers as in parts the track is narrow and winding with high banks either side that are perfect to cover 'illegal transactions'.

Many locals at the time did quite well hiding contraband for these men and women, who would give them a decent tip for their help.

The problem of course was that being that the better the smuggler, the less likely anyone was to know what they were up to, so the history books are a little thin on the ground on stories about those involved in the trade.

Local historian Kathy Atherton said: "There is lots of anecdotal evidence linking that inn to smuggling in the memories of people who were writing in the 19th century, including excise officials being attacked there. The trouble with smuggling is that in terms of evidence, we are reliant on hearsay for the most part, as if smugglers were successful they never came to trial or entered the official record.

Local memory would seem to suggest that contraband material did come up from the coast on its way to London, and those bringing it would want to avoid the main roads where they might be intercepted at toll gates and so on, so they would have used out of the way tracks, farms and barns.

It has been speculated that the Tilt family in Holmwood had a number of isolated houses in the area and left a suspiciously large amount of money for lowly farmers, so might have been engaged in the trade."

Even after a toll road was built in 1755, linking Horsham and Dorking and increasing the level of policing in the area, this criminal behaviour continued although it is known that with the presence of so many highwaymen in the area, they were often disappointed, more likely to chance upon a fellow criminal than a traveller with gold in his pocket.

This left the humble locals leaving home with pistols loaded as they went about their business. Petty theft was rife and the law was scarce as highwaymen roamed as far north as Leatherhead.

.. All that being said – we can't quite make the connection between smugglers and parrots? Parrots and pirate yes, but that's only because of Treasure Island which wasn't written until 1883... perhaps it was renamed through the course of its life? Perhaps a characterful landlord once had a parrot... answers on a postcard please!

With thanks to the Forest Green Village website for providing such interesting reading and historical information.

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