

Fostall conservation area character appraisal

(Extract from report to Development Committee 7 April 1999, Item no. 7F, Annex A.)

Location

1. Fostall is situated some three miles east of Faversham in the parish of Hernhill. It lies immediately south of the A299 (Thanet Way) and approximately half a mile north of Hernhill village itself.

Settlement development

2. The hamlet is set around the T-junction of two rural roads: Kemsdale Road which runs east-west, and an unnamed road which runs south east through the settlement towards Dargate. Summer Lees and Godfreys Grave comprises a slightly separate group of buildings to the south, and are perceived locally to be part of Fostall.

3. Fostall is a form of 'Forstal', which is a dialect word for the land in front of farm buildings. Edward Hasted described, in 1798, the presence of several small greens or forstals in Hernhill parish. It seems likely that the hamlet's growth has derived from the cluster of farms which established here, and which included until quite recently Bessborough, Myrtle and Forstal farms.

4. Godfreys Grave, marked on the Ordnance Survey map on the green triangle which once existed at the T-junction to the south of Fostall, was the grave of a local person hanged for sheep stealing. Human remains were discovered at the location when underground services were being laid at the road junction.

Buildings

5. The central part of Fostall consists of a cluster of modest cottages and farm buildings set along the edge of a curving road. The exceptional presence, however, is that of Bessborough House. Formerly known as Bessborough Farmhouse this is a substantial 18th century red brick dwelling house. Although it stands in the centre of the hamlet, it is also set slightly apart from other properties, within a sizeable garden. Its size and appearance mark it as a building of substance, and the stepped parapet gables and attractive red brick give it a distinctive appearance.

6. To the south of Bessborough House lies the red brick Bessborough Cottage and the original farmyard. However, the farmyard function has all but ceased. A range of single storey red brick buildings backing onto the road through the hamlet has survived and is an important component in the street scene providing physical form to the road and being the physical evidence of the earlier farmyard use.

7. The west side of the road through the hamlet is defined by a series of houses and cottages. The oldest of these are nos. 1-2 The Fostall which date from the 1500s; they are single storey with attics, timber-framed, and characteristically Kentish in appearance with red brick, weatherboarding and clay tiled roofs. Their contribution to the street scene is somewhat constrained by their situation well back from the road. Other buildings are more recent in date. Downes House, built in the late 1800s, is a yellow brick house now extended by the conversion of the older, adjoining single storey building. The Corner House is also brick built, and also dates from the 1800s; a small group of wooden outbuildings adjoins to the rear. Cottages on the rising ground to the south are clad with white painted weather-boarding and are pleasantly distinctive in the street scene.

8. The Godfreys Grave area to the south comprises another small cluster of buildings, separated by a short length of country lane set between banks and

overhanging hedgerows and trees. Two pairs of cottages are set above the sunken road, whilst the remains of Black Oast stand on the edge of the highway and mark the south eastern limits of the hamlet.

Landscape

9. The countryside is ever present in Fostall, although the best vantage point for views out is from the higher ground to the west of Godfreys Grave, where orchards have been recently grubbed out. The roads into and out of the hamlet are for much of their length marked by banks, hedgerows and trees, and they consequently have a fairly enclosed character. Agriculture around Fostall consists mainly of fruit growing, and commercial orchards are present around the hamlet.

The physical fabric

10. The old farmyard site to the south of Bessborough House has been relatively little used in recent years and has consequently become somewhat run down in appearance. A new, single storey farmhouse is currently under construction which will incorporate the frontage building. An improvement to the site is therefore anticipated.

11. Properties in Fostall have generally been sympathetically maintained, but instances of replacement windows and replacement roofing materials have occurred which are detrimental to the appearance and character of buildings.

12. The relaxed informality of the highway treatment contributes to the simple rural character of the place, although overhead wires are intrusive in places.

Character

13. Fostall is a modest hamlet comprised of modest buildings, but it has the exceptional and substantial presence of Bessborough House. The contrast between the simplicity of the ordinary buildings and the substance of Bessborough House is especially striking and is, perhaps, the key feature of the place.

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Sources:

The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent Volume VII 1798.
The Place Names of Kent by J Glover (first published 1976).

