

'CENTURIES', CHURCH HILL, HYTHE, KENT.

LISTED BUILDING GRADE II*

KCC HER No. TR 13 SE 73

Background

After many centuries as a home and from 1685 an Alms House, early in the 1960s Lionel and Dora Osborne moved into 'Centuries', then Listed Building Grade II now Grade II*, the oldest house in the Cinque Port and Town of Hythe and one of only seven, stone pre1300 vernacular (domestic) buildings in Kent, the original corner building being dated c1107.



In 2009, after his parents had passed away, their son, John Osborne, returned to 'Centuries' from the USA where he had lived and worked for many years, with his partner Milaena. They took up residence in 'Centuries 2', the building having been divided into two flats, but which included the cellar area which is entered through a low, arched door, from Bartholomew Street.

The Osbornes remained there until selling 'Centuries 2' in 2015 and returning to live in the USA (California).

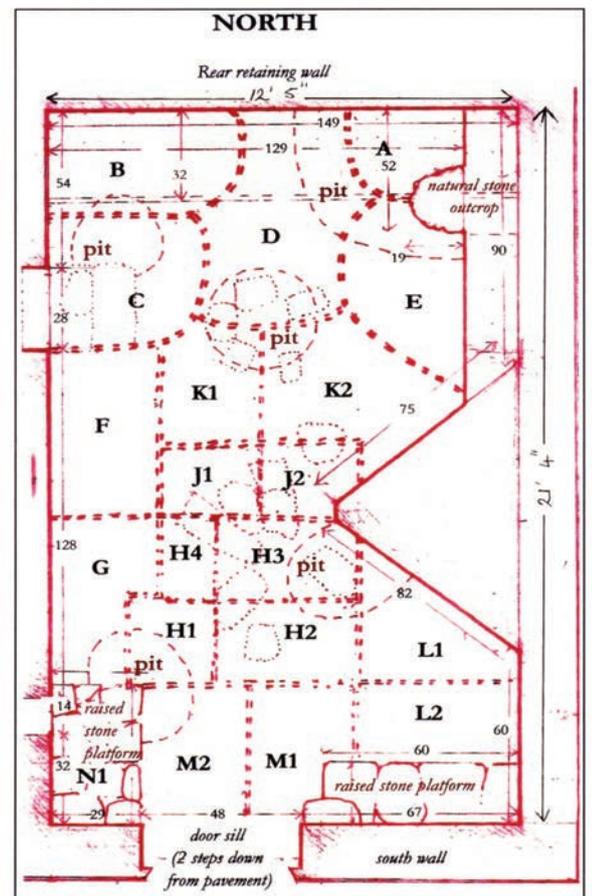
Lionel and Dora Osborne were leading members of the Hythe Civic Society and produced a 'Centuries' historical pamphlet. John and Milaena also became important members of the Society and in 2014, as a Committee Member, John founded and Chaired the Society's 'Hythe Local History Group' (HLHG) which continues to meet monthly to discuss, investigate and publicise its historical research and finds.

Archaeological Investigation

The Osborne family's great love of 'Centuries' and the history of the Cinque Port and Town of Hythe, led John and Milaena to further research the ancient Alms House Charters and documents which form 'Centuries' historical timeline, recording copies of the documents and seals onto CD for the Society's archives. In the hope that they could add to 'Centuries' long and important history, they also decided to make a personal archaeological investigation of their cellar floor.

They commenced in 2012 following a control grid location plan they devised for recording purposes (Appendix 2), linked to a ground depth guide and floor plan (Appendices 3 & 4). Over the following months, their investigations revealed a great deal of interesting detail and finds providing information of the history of life in the building since its commencement in 1107 and later two main extensions in the 1330s and 1811.

The Osbornes reported on their investigation and research in the Hythe Civic Society Newsletter No. 174 in 2013 (Appendix 5).



The undercroft – excavation site map

Their finds included metal, worked stone, tile/slate, shells, animal bones and teeth and some 500 pottery sherds all of which the Osbornes cleaned, logged and researched. Eventually, an expert, Dr Ben Jervis, MIFA, was identified who studied and reported on the pottery then found.

Finds Research

General

After Dr Jervis reported (Appendix 6), despite the Osbornes best efforts, they had some difficulty in reconciling the finds lists (Appendices 7 & 8) although they worked hard to uniquely mark the finds that they made. Consequently, many sherds are bagged with a reference to the area found within the Osbornes' grid location system whereas Dr Jervis has identified by general pottery type.

Pottery

Dr Jervis's report catalogues an assemblage of 492 sherds, weighing 1805g and representing a maximum of 314 vessels, by the types identified, principally of later medieval or post-medieval date although some earlier, including Roman, were represented. He noted that the excavations were shallow and the stratigraphic position of the pottery not recorded although the grid plan generally located the find spots within the cellar.

Nevertheless, Dr Jervis concluded that the finds were important as they were the first medieval assemblage to have been excavated in Hythe for some time. He noted that some sherds provide a tantalising glimpse of Hythe's role as a medieval port, in the form of a small quantity of north French and Saintonge Whiteware which pointed to the town being part of the wider east Kent trading network. A number of additional pottery sherds finds were located during/after Dr Jervis study.



Non-pottery items, mainly medieval, were examined by the Osbornes and later David Paton (HCS) with the assistance of the Folkestone Research Archaeology Group (FRAG). A small selection were also shown to the Finds Liaison Officer (PAS), KCC during his four monthly visits to Hythe Library in 2017 who advised a report to add to the 'Centuries' record via Paul Cuming, Historic Environment Manager (HER), KCC Maidstone*.

Animal Bones

4865g of animal bones - mainly cattle, but some goat, fish and bird were identified.

Shells

3077g of shells including oyster, mussels and winkles.

Metal

8015g mainly very corroded, including Iron (sickle, knife blade, forged wood chisel, cannon or mill ball, slag, 'dogs' head Tudor small knife blade, small finger ring, medallion/button and linked chain probably a Victorian dog collar. King Edward penny (c1300-1351 London); a Henry VII halfpenny since lost.

Lead, rolled possibly fishing weight and similar sheet piece, window, conical bullet head (?early 1800s).





Worked stone

Including - whetstones, fragments of window mullion and dressed stone.

Ceramic other than pottery

Tile - 7428g mainly Kent peg, some slate, floor.

Other - brick, spinning whorls x 2



Bone

Boars tusks, large and small animal teeth.

Finds Summary and Disposal

The overall variety of finds give an interesting historical view of the life of 'Centuries', located on the ancient sea front 'harbour' where all manner of ships would have been beached particularly in the heyday of the Cinque Port.

Prior to returning to the USA, John Osborne donated all the finds mentioned in this paper to the Hythe Civic Society and it is planned to retain the majority, particularly pottery, in the Society's Archive Room at 'Oaklands', the Hythe Town Council offices. Most decorated pottery sherds and some other finds are individually boxed and annotated.

This paper and Appendices, have, therefore, been prepared for information to be placed with the finds held in Hythe and at the archive held by Kent County Council, Maidstone which records 'Centuries' important Listed Building Grade II* status and documents which support the KCC Monuments, Heritage Environmental Record (HER) No. TR13 SE 73.

It must be noted that 'Centuries' is a private residence and that there is no public access to any part of the building. However, it is hoped that this will be of assistance to any future researcher of 'Centuries' and the Cinque Town and Port of Hythe, the continuous history of which Hythe is rightly proud.

David Paton

Hythe Civic Society (Hythe Local History Group)

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*Paul Cuming

Historic Environment Manager (HER)

Heritage Conservation

Kent County Council

County Hall

Maidstone

ME14 1XX

