

## **The Upper High Street Survey and the Heavy Goods Vehicle Campaign - an Update**

When the Sevenoaks Society initiated the campaign in 2009 to get Heavy Good Vehicles (HGVs) out of the upper High Street, it also decided to extend the Town Centre survey on its website to include the Upper High Street from Park Grange to the Red House. This had been formerly excluded on the grounds that the information in a pre-internet age was readily available in published works.

The campaign, well supported by the public, eventually ran up against the insoluble objection that any action to prevent HGVs entering the upper High Street would inevitably shift them to other roads already equally burdened by heavy traffic, such as in Riverhead or along the A25. The only way forward was to redirect efforts towards the existing campaign to extend the slip roads at Junction 5 of the M25 (J5 slips), so that HGVs travelling, for example, from the south to Maidstone or Dover would be able to turn in that direction.

The new survey of the Upper High Street readily confirms John Newman's view that it has the best selection of buildings of its kind in Kent. Almost every building is listed, with the notable exception of the Temple House, which unfortunately breaks the continuity of the street by the demolition in the 1880s of buildings which matched those still existing on the east side of the High Street, such as what is now Greggs Restaurant.

The survey reveals the three main phases of building in the town as its size and prosperity grew between the sixteenth and early twentieth centuries. Only parts of the church are earlier and they have been largely obscured by later alterations. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are still represented at least structurally by such as The Old Post Office, the main building of the Chantry. the row of shops on the west side by Six Bells Lane, the Red House and the building, once the Carpenters Arms, more recently the Top o' the Hill restaurant which stands to the south side of the Red House. There may well be internal timber work from that period in some of the other buildings, such as Nos 19 & 21, the Coachmakers Arms and Nos 43 & 45 on the west side and Greggs on the east..

The Georgian period is represented very fully by the 1729 buildings of the School and Almshouses, and also by The Manor House, the Old Vicarage and

the present appearance of the Old House, as well as the row of town houses at Nos 25-29.

Temple House represents the demonstrative character of Victorian building in the second half of the nineteenth century, clearly making a statement about its owner and his wealth, but there are also other late nineteenth century and Edwardian developments which are full of interest. Oak End originally faced west and the west front is still in an eighteenth century style, but the High Street front has been remodelled probably in the Arts and Crafts style. When the Chantry was extended in the Edwardian period the new part to the west was built in a rather assertive Queen Anne style and similarly the early twentieth century faux-Georgian fronts of Nos 20-24 on the east side actually disguise what was two shops. The double pitched roof of the original building can still be seen from the rear.

With such a fund of interesting buildings in this short stretch of road it remains a great sadness that it should be subject to such heavy traffic, which not only shakes and rattles the structures but on occasions has knocked pieces off them. The awkward narrow bend where the Violin shop stands opposite Greggs is particularly vulnerable and dangerous.

If you have never looked behind that row on the west side, do take a walk a few yards down Six Bells Lane and look backwards to your left. There you will see the catslide roof with its descending series of windows which is one of the great hidden architectural treasures of the town among so many others.

Tim Pearce, February 2012



The catslide roof



Oak End: High Street front



Oak End, West rear