

# The Sketches of Alice Young

These fascinating drawings appear in a tatty sketchbook owned by a descendant of Alice Young, although the owner knows very little about the artist. The address in the book is Crouch End but it appears that there were relatives living in both Hastings and Penn in Buckinghamshire.

Hastings and the wider area around Penn feature almost exclusively in the book, but it is the observations in Penn and the surrounding villages that are of particular interest to regional furniture studies. Alice was staying with relations close to Dog Hill, Tylers Green, part of Penn village, during the months of August and September 1883. Judging from her sketchbook Alice spent a lot of her time travelling the locality with pencil and paper. Her perambulations took her to Hazlemere, Penn Street, Totteridge, High Wycombe and Flackwell Heath, some four miles distant from her lodgings at Penn.

She had a good eye for details and the skill to transfer these to paper without, as far as I can tell, feeling the need to use artistic licence. I have compared her sketch of Sir Philip Rose's lodge at Penn with the existing building to

confirm this. So when we look at the two cottage interiors at Penn (Figs 1 and 2) we can feel confident that we are looking at exactly what the artist was seeing.

There are only two interiors in the book and in both we see the ubiquitous local scroll-back Windsor chair, the work-a-day mainstay seating in many a farmhouse and cottage. In one drawing (Fig 1) we also witness a more interesting Windsor of an earlier Chiltern type (Fig 3). Careful study of the two illustrations shows that this is the same room recorded from each end, and full of lots of interesting contemporary detail.

First we can see from the range that this is the kitchen. The size of the inglenook, the well-worn ambience and the exposed beamed ceiling and simple doors indicate an early building of at least the 17th century. Fig. 1 shows a flagstone floor and a much used brick step leading into a scullery with the fire-heated copper where, on a Monday, the water was boiled to wash the household clothes and linen. I still remember my mother washing our clothes in the same way, stirring and prodding the contents with a long 'copper stick'.

Fig 1



Fig 2

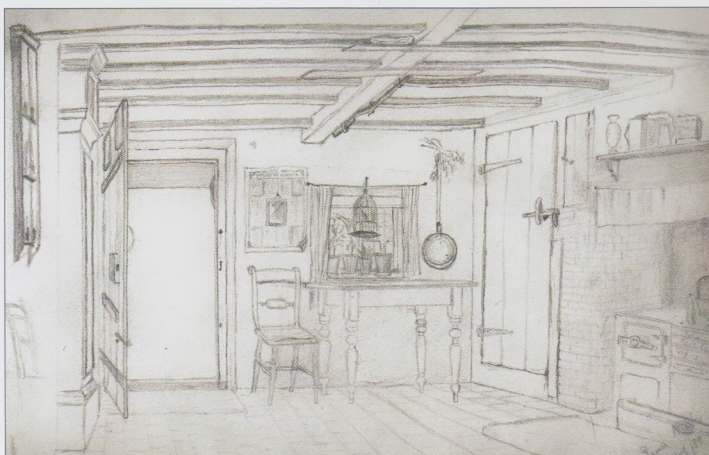


Fig 3



There is a set of hanging wall shelves containing what might be some prized family china and containers. The longcase clock may have been a hand-me-down from an employer; there seems to have been a close family working connection with the local squire, Sir Philip Rose (he filled the family's well from a horse-drawn bowser in times of drought) and the clock would have been considered old fashioned by 1883. On another wall are a weight-driven 30-hour American clock and a few framed pictures. Standing against the same wall is either a table, or possibly a chest of drawers, covered with a cloth on which are a few books and a box, maybe for writing, and what looks like a tea caddy. Beneath the window, with its early latticed glazing with small panes of glass, is a tantalising glimpse of an interesting Windsor chair used with a seat cushion.

Fig. 2 clearly shows the kitchen range that has been installed into the old inglenook recess, and a rug, maybe a rag rug, lies in front of the hearth. Above this to the left is the wooden door to a salt cupboard, kept dry by the warmth of the chimney. On the mantelpiece are various

containers including one that may be a spill vase. The plank door with its wooden latch may lead to the staircase and bedrooms - a common feature in the Chilterns.

A shotgun can clearly be seen lodged along a ceiling beam and a cage holding a bird is hanging teasingly in front of the window. Goldfinches were a popular choice, noted both for their beauty and song, and found abundantly in the local countryside. The scene is completed with a warming pan conveniently hung from a wall and a scroll-back Windsor chair standing by a typical Victorian table. This table could have been made of pine and used for preparing food as well as for eating.

Included in the sketchbook is a very rare depiction of what probably started life as a tiny squatter's two-room cottage built on Totteridge Common: a very isolated community at this time (Fig. 4). It is brick built with a simple thatched roof instead of the more usual local clay peg tiles. A wood house ('wood-us') for storing firewood is built as a lean-to on the left, and a privy is attached to the right. How tantalizing that there is no depiction of the interior!

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*(with thanks to Christopher Claxton Stevens)*

Fig 4

