

HOUSES THROUGH TIME

THE HISTORY OF NINE STEEPLE AND MIDDLE ASTON HOUSES
AND THEIR RESIDENTS - SOME ORDINARY, SOME EXTRAORDINARY.

2. Church Cottage and Merlins

5. The Nest

7. Paines Hill House

6. Cedar Lodge

9. Hill House

8. Manor Farmhouse

1. GRANGE FARMHOUSE, Middle Aston Lane



AN IDYLICALLY-LOCATED
TRADITIONAL FARMHOUSE, ALTERED
FOLLOWING A CATASTROPHIC
COLLAPSE, AND SOLE SURVIVOR OF
A NOW LOST HAMLET.



The Present Farmhouse: The present farmhouse, cottages and barns were built using stone from 2 quarries on the farm. Looking at the farmhouse, it initially appears to be two buildings and there are many tell-tale signs of changes over the years. In 2012 Rupert and Emily Davis kindly allowed SAVA to call in a local expert, Paul Clark, who was able to deduce its probable fascinating history.

The site: Grange Farm lies adjacent to the lost village of Nethercote, nestled in the Cherwell valley on the ancient causeway between Middle Aston and Somerton. The Black Death of 1348 took a severe toll on the inhabitants of Nethercote and the village never recovered, ceasing to exist by 1461. Today nothing remains of the village itself, Nethercote Grange, as it was known into C17th, being the only remaining representative of the settlement. Metal detectorists have found Roman and Saxon coins on the site.



*The house
pictured c.1900*



The Original Farmhouse: The oldest part of the present building is to the East, on the right of the photograph (top right), dating from around 1720, about 50 years earlier than the enclosure of land in Middle Aston. After investigation, our expert deduced that the original farmhouse would have had 7 bays, with the front door within the central bay and 3 dormers. It had a single rear extension which is likely to have been used as a wash-house and dairy. Inside, the house has a large central hall with a grand staircase which unusually continues to the second floor, suggesting that the attic area was intended to be inhabited.

Collapse: Not long after construction the western section of the building suffered a serious collapse, probably due to subsidence or fire, losing a large chimney stack and the upper storey of 2 bays. It must have been decided that there was adequate accommodation left to cover their needs, and what remained was shored up, blocking up 4 windows and adding 2 new ones. The layout of the rooms was adjusted and the kitchen was incorporated into the rear extension (left above). Eventually, probably between 1780 and 1840, the ruin was rebuilt, reinstating the 2 missing bays, but with a much lower ridge height and little attempt to match in with the existing structure (photo above).

Thomas Sirett: On 11th October 1880 a tenancy agreement was signed between Clement Upton Cottrell-Dormer, landlord, and Thomas Francis Sirett, at a yearly rate of £598. This included the dwelling house, called simply The Grange at this time, outhouses and land: “approximately three hundred and twenty five acres, three roods and eighteen perches, or thereabouts”. Thomas came from Hendon Farm, North Aston, and had married Mary Ann Rose of Yarnton in 1863 at the age of 27. They had 8 children, 4 boys and 4 girls.



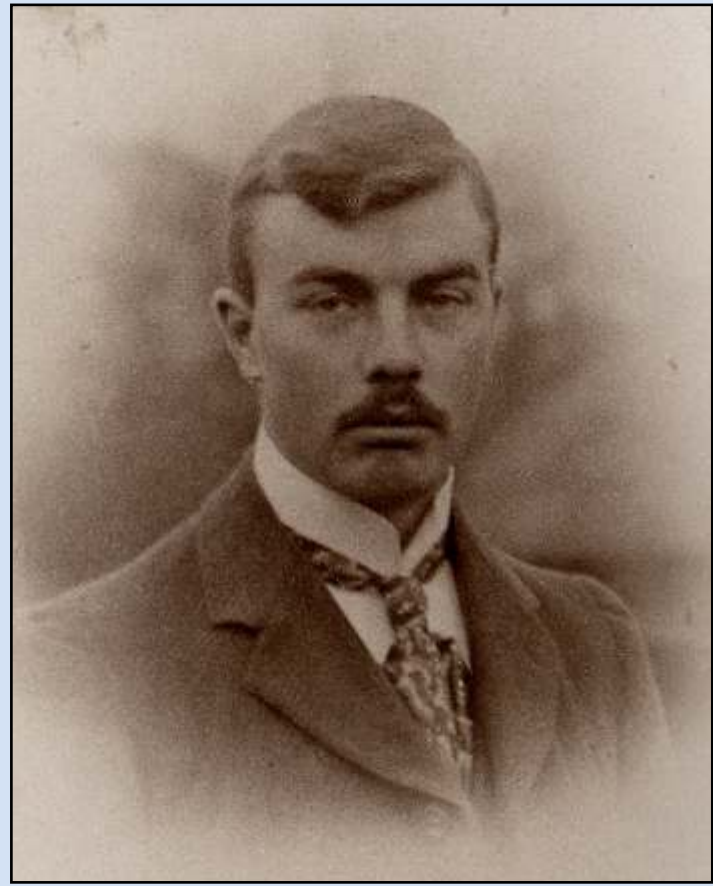
Thomas and Mary Ann Sirett (circa mid 1860s)



The farm had previously specialised in sheep farming. In his will dated 1521, John Fox of Grange Farm, left 400 sheep but only 7 cows and 7 horses. William Cother, another tenant, was a prominent sheep breeder in the 1860s, but in the 1880s the price of wool dropped, and at Grange Farm cattle gradually replaced the sheep. Mary Ann ran the dairy, yet Thomas was known for his prize-winning cheeses! Charlotte Brookes became the landlord in 1896. Thomas died in 1903 and Mary Ann took on the running of the farm. She died in 1926.

Mary Ann with her son Harold (circa 1920)





Harold Sirett: Thomas' eldest son Harold (far left), born in 1878, married Ethel Walton, daughter of John Walton, the Steeple Aston butcher, and he inherited the tenancy, as Charles Cuncliffe Brookes inherited its ownership. Harold and Ethel had 9 surviving children (some shown left, with Ethel, 1917). Valentine, one of the younger daughters, recalled the time in the 1930s when the donkey walk (photo far right) was in use for turning the paddle of the butter churn. Ethel's forte was rearing turkeys (right, in 1920s), and no doubt many ended up in her father's shop. Harold worked the farm until 1938.



Harold Sirett employed 11 men and 6 boys, notably Harry Wyatt (right, with his wife), who worked on the farm, man and boy, and was loved by the Sirett children. His wages varied, but in a week in July 1916 he was the second highest earner receiving £2.8.6d. The Sirett's horses (below) were soon to become redundant with the arrival of tractors.



North Aston was granted the mill in the 1086 Domesday Book, yet it lay closer to Somerton and Middle Aston. It was sited at the river crossing on the Causeway at Nethercote and surely served Grange Farm. The mill was run by the Rose family until it was converted into a private house in 1955, but the workings were abandoned on the riverbank and not cleared away until the 1980s.



Baltic timber marks, which are early quality marks, dated 1684, have been found in a barn. Similar timber marks in the house date from the early C18th.

Tim and Juliet Davis: In 1957 Tim and Juliet Davis (below extreme left) bought the farm from Laurence Robson, which included the farmhouse, 2 cottages and 185 acres, for £35,000. This was an entirely new way of life for them. In 1972 they added a further 240 acres at the cost of £50,000, from Spillers. The farm now consisted of 250 acres of arable land, 145 of grassland and much woodland. There was a large dairy herd of 120 Holstein cattle until the late 1980s, lorded over by a monster of a bull called Manywells Gaiety Julius.

Tim employed several people to look after the cattle and drive the 3 small tractors, notably Geoff Watts and Bob Bickley. He declared it to be a very happy farm run with excellent teamwork, obviously largely due to his leadership skills, and in 1979 he was elected Chairman of the Oxford and Berkshire branch of the NFU. Tim's major investment was in the tower silo, which cut out a huge amount of manual work.



After the Siretts left in 1938 the house was occupied by a series of tenants and was used as a dormitory by Spillers, resulting in it becoming sadly neglected. Much work was undertaken to revert it into a comfortable home for Tim, Juliet and their 3 children. Juliet cooked 3 square meals a day for Tim, and of course for the children when home from boarding school. As farmer's wife she reared the calves, "a tricky job", and tended the chickens delivering eggs locally. The children were expected to help out too.

Juliet was the leading light in Riding for the Disabled at Westfield Stables.



Rupert and Emily Davis: Tim's elder son, Rupert, was allowed to drive a tractor when he was 10. After gaining experience on other farms and attending the Royal Agricultural College (waste of time, grumbled Tim) at the age of 21, Rupert started working for his father and took over the running of the farm in the late 1990s. In Tim's day the tractors had open cabs, but Rupert's tractors are huge and air-conditioned. With the efficiency of modern machinery, as well as beef cattle being less labour intensive than dairy, only George Rogers is retained to work on the farm.

Rupert and Emily were married in 2001 and have 3 children (photo left, 2012). Emily is a part-time Maths teacher, but deals with the farm accounts and runs the household. The three children have diverse interests beyond the farm, but the daughters enjoy helping with the animals while their son prefers the tractor.

As Rupert says, "It's a very attractive farm, a very difficult farm to farm with its flood meadows, steep banks, 5 different soil types and constant drainage. I think my father probably would have sold it if I hadn't been so determined to stay here. I'll keep going for the time being."



2. CHURCH COTTAGE and MERLINS, Church Corner

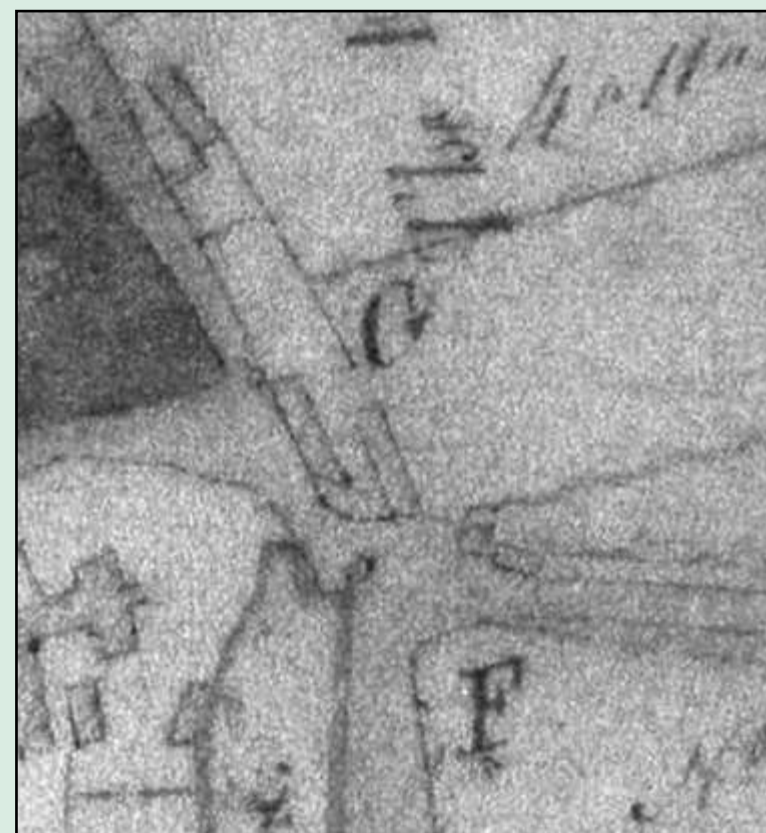


THESE COTTAGES, SITUATED IN A PROMINENT POSITION IN THE OLDEST PART OF THE VILLAGE, HAVE PROVIDED MODEST HOMES FOR MANY FAMILIES THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES. AFTER FALLING INTO DISREPAIR THEY UNDERWENT REBUILDING TO MAKE THEM SUIT MODERN LIVING.



Origins of the cottages at Church Corner

An early plan shows 2 separate dwellings on the site with another building to the rear which may have had an industrial use. Two fireplaces with chimneys can still be seen in the garden wall of Church Cottage (right). At some point there were three doors on to the street, strongly suggesting three dwellings.



In an early photograph (above), the door to the middle cottage seen on later views was then a window, with what appears to be the boundary marked by a wooden fence. The entrance at that time may have been at the rear, which was not uncommon.

Development of the cottages over time

Over time, due to neglect and lack of repairs, the properties were allowed to deteriorate and by the early 1970s they were unfit to be lived in.

Excerpts from the book of memoirs written by the Rev. Michael Hayter:

'The school caretaker in 1946 was Harold Grant, a man of many parts. He was a fine natural actor and ... also a stone-mason and a self-taught stone carver... He and Mrs Grant lived in one of three old thatched cottages at Church Corner. They were tidy and cared for then, but gradually over the years they deteriorated. Mrs Grant survived Harold for many years, working in the school canteen under Vera Calver.... She lived on in the same cottage until she was rehoused - outside the village - by the council, only just before the thatched roof finally fell in.'



Another resident was Perce Keen who lived for some years in the cottage at the other end of the row, and was the last to leave. His end stayed in repair longest because he used to patch up his part of the roof with straw and kept it more or less watertight.'

During renovations, the terrace of 3 cottages was made into 2 dwellings, and a chimney stack was removed. The fronts were altered by blocking up one door and changing another into a window. The roof lines were changed, to allow the rear to be raised and the front, so that the upper windows, originally under thatched hoods, could be made into dormers under a tiled roof. The internal walls may have been covered with lime plaster, with partition walls of lath and plaster.

Timeline of ownership

Pre 1749 - Owned by Rev. George Freeman, Rector of Steeple Aston, who died in 1745.

1749 - Rev. Freeman's trustees sold all his property to John George, blacksmith, for £85.

1809 - In his will, John George left all his property in trust to his nephew Henry Hedgekins, with the income to his heirs.

1837 - In his will, Henry Hedgekins left all his property in trust for his sister, Lucy Crosier for life and to pass to her heirs. Lucy died in 1838. With her mother dying in 1840 there were no further heirs.

One dwelling (now Church Cottage) was sold in 1840 for £50 and 2 dwellings on Fir Lane (now Merlins) were sold in 1843 for £137, both to Robert Rogers who already owned property in Cow Lane, referred to in a census as Rogers Row. Robert Rogers, followed by his wife Annie, owned the cottages from the 1840s until her death in 1913.

1913 - The 3 cottages were sold at auction to the Rev. C C Brookes, the author of *A History of Steeple and Middle Aston*.

By the 1950s the cottages were owned by Mr & Mrs Putt, who farmed at Hopcrofts Holt.

In common with many cottages in Steeple Aston throughout this period, these dwellings were tenanted, providing income for the landlord. In the Rate Books and Censuses, many families were shown to have lived in the properties for lengthy periods, sometimes decades.





In the rebuild, many of the timbers from the original dwellings were reused (Merlins, above), often to allow for raised ceiling heights.

Baltic Marks were quality marks carved onto softwood imported into Britain from some Northern European countries, particularly during the C18th and C19th. They relate to the exporting port as well as, sometimes, the name of the ship, plus various other letters and symbols. Those found above windows are also likely to have been reused from elsewhere in the dwelling.



Some of the facilities eg. water pump and drainage, would have been shared between the 3 dwellings. Might this intriguing external chimney connected to a structure below have been the place for doing laundry, perhaps communally?

The middle cottage had at this time consisted of 2 rooms downstairs with windows either side of the door, and 2 bedrooms upstairs, front and back, which were reached by spiral stairs. A passage at the back led to a small kitchen. In the rebuild, this cottage was combined with the one to the left, making what is now Merlins.



The Walton family - Richard, Joy, Anthony & Angela (Miggy) lived here from 1953 until 1958. Memories provided by Joy:

‘The cottage was 2 up 2 down and the bedroom of the first one was above our kitchen. The spiral stairs led to a front bedroom and a back one. The living room had an open fire with 2 bread ovens, one each side, where I aired my washing. The passage at the back led to the kitchen where the ceiling was very low, and if you know the Waltons, they are very tall. There was a lean-to at the back door. The only water was from a pump in the garden shared by other tenants, and the drain too. My father-in-law put in a pump at a butler type kitchen sink and a drain so I didn’t have to go outside. The sink doubled up for a baby bath. The outside had a shed where the coal was kept. However, the loo was up the garden and was back to back with next door’s. Dark nights it was a ghostly walk opposite the graveyard. My garden and washing line were closer to Mrs Keen’s house. The thatch was held on by

pegs which came through the ceiling and a family of spiders were always there - ugh. The wallpaper in the living room I put up and it was small snowdrops. I could see it through the window for years after I had moved to Bladebone Hall.

George and Dolly Haynes lived next door when I first moved there before Percy Keen and Jean. The cottages belonged to Roy Kinch’s grandparents, Mr and Mrs Putt, to whom I paid 11 shillings a week rent. The man in the photo (previous panel bottom row) is Cyril Blackwell who lived down the lane opposite. I put my pram in the gateway as I could see it and ran out when one of the American aeroplanes came over which was pretty often. Cyril used to take the pram and baby for a walk when he walked his dog.’



Attached at the right was what is now Church Cottage. This remained the same in size but was remodelled to make a single living space on the ground floor. As there are 2 fireplaces here, a previous layout may have been a central passage leading from the front door to a passage and kitchen at the rear, with a room either side. The large inglenook fireplace in the room on the right suggests that this would have been used for cooking, and also access to the bedrooms above from a staircase in the cupboard alongside. The present owner, Merrill Bayley, has since extended the property at the rear to enlarge the kitchen, add a bathroom and study, and reposition the staircase.

Peter Millward recalls his grandparents, Harold and Lilian Grant, who lived at Church Cottage. Peter, born in 1948, remembers “the outside toilet, barn and well. Inside the old tin lean-to was a cellar where apples were stored and an arch facing the road. The main kitchen was L-shaped with a cast-iron boiler with wooden lid and a range fire. The front room had a range fire with ovens, and

within the chimney was a seat either side, one of which was a commode. There were steps up inside the chimney with little shelves, he thinks they were used to smoke food. From the side of this fireplace were the stairs leading up to 3 bedrooms, one looked over Cow Lane, one looked over the church, and the third looked over the garden at the rear of the house”.



After the rebuild, the first owners of Merlins were Ralph Tanner and his wife, who purchased the property in November 1974. Ralph had trained as a commando in WW2 and served in Crete and Burma, returning there to help until independence in 1949. He studied for a degree at Oxford in 1959, which led to him working at universities in Africa and being awarded a PhD from Uppsala University, Sweden. On returning to Britain in 1965, he lectured at Heythrop, the Jesuit College of London University at Enstone. His great interest was Africa and, among other things, he donated African carvings to the Pitt Rivers Museum and thousands of pressed African native flowers to Kew Gardens. He also constructed the garden at Merlins.

3. RECTORY FARMHOUSE and MANOR COURT COTTAGE, North Side



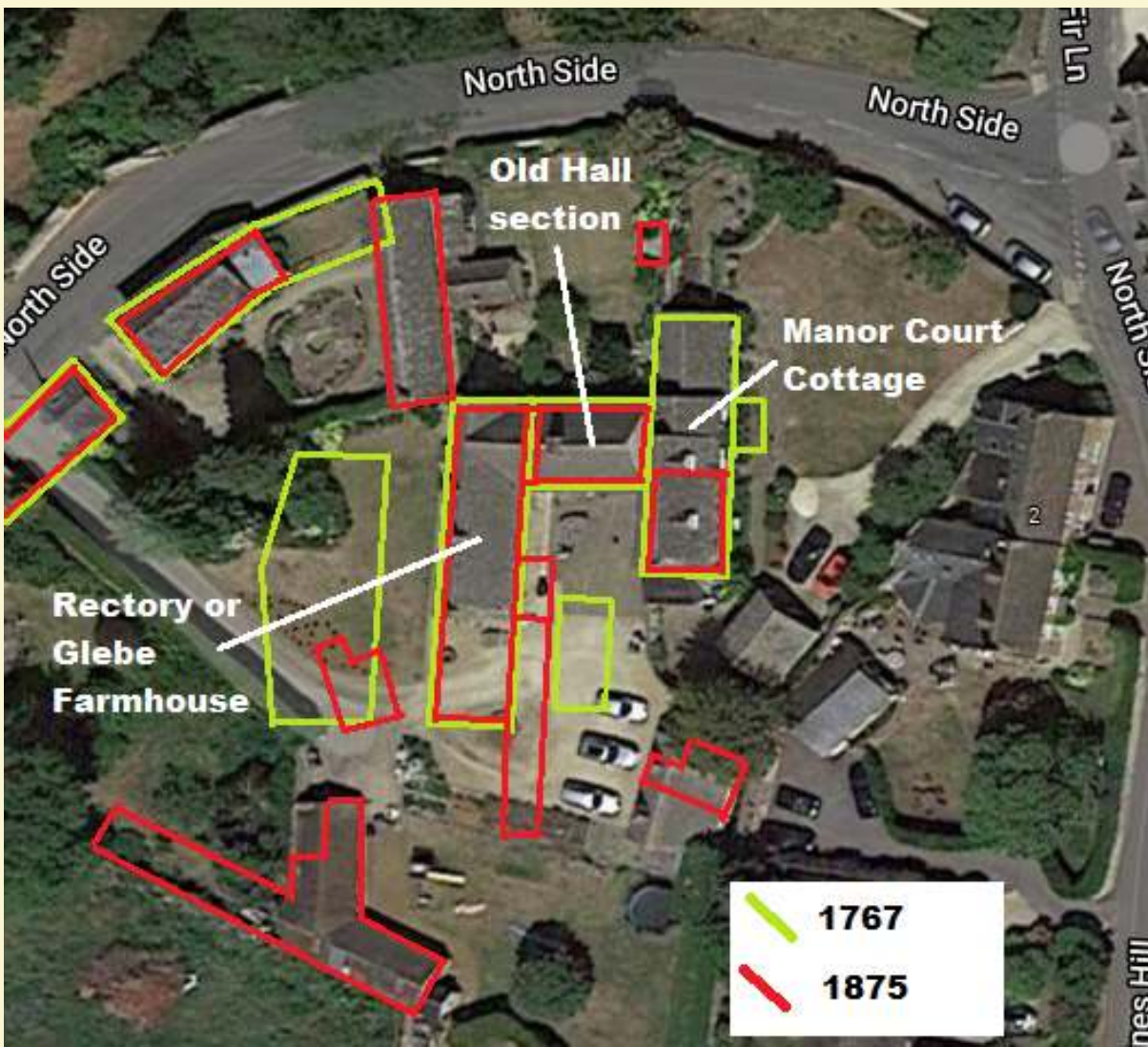
AN EARLY SURVIVOR FROM MEDIAEVAL STEEPLE ASTON, THIS GROUP OF BUILDINGS HAS ADAPTED TO SUIT CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES OVER THE CENTURIES; A WORKING FARM FOR MUCH OF ITS LIFE, ITS IMPORTANCE IS ALSO REFLECTED IN ITS FORMER ROLE AS THE MANORIAL COURT.



These buildings, now known as Rectory Farmhouse and Manor Court Cottage, have had a complex history dating to at least the C14th. In the 1750s, land was divided up under the Enclosure Act and reallocated, and it passed to Brasenose College and the Rector of Steeple Acton. It was subsequently referred to as Rectory or Glebe Farm.

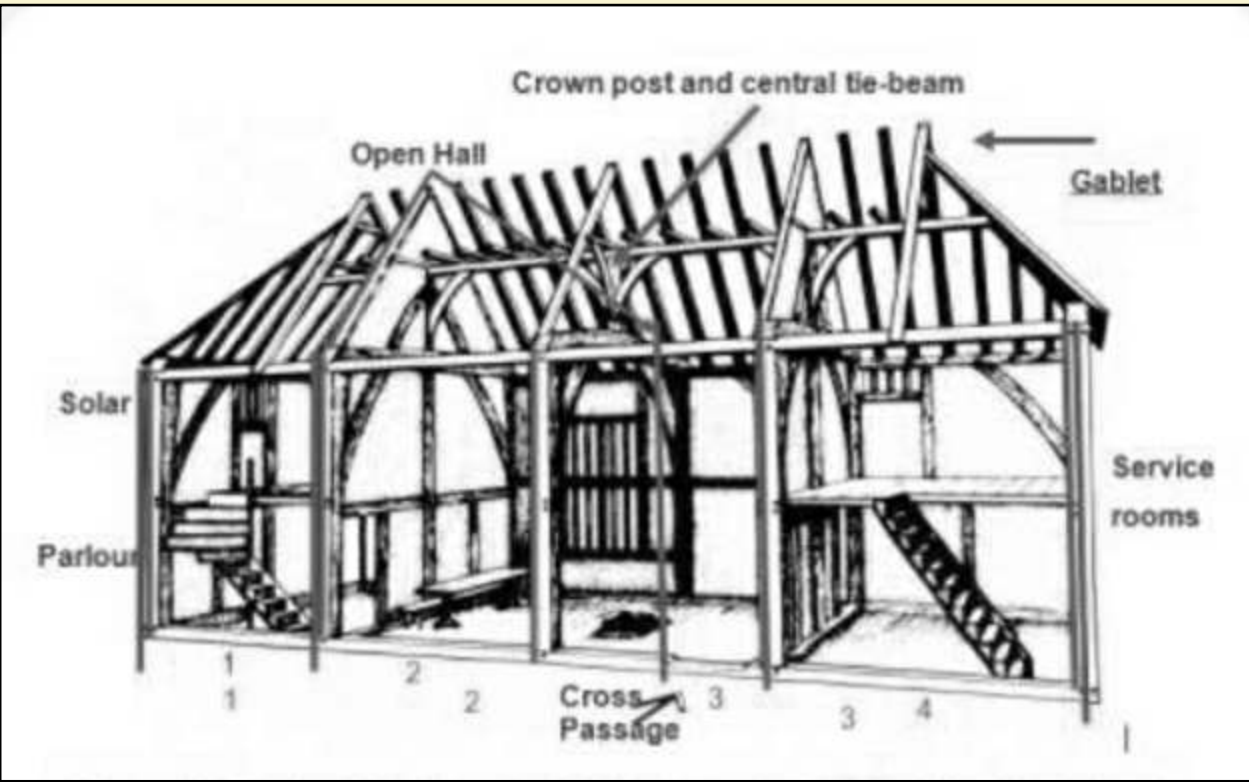
Maps show the many changes in the layout over time. While barns and other agricultural buildings are adaptable and often temporary, the changes to the wings at either end of the mediaeval hall have always been living accommodation.

Early plans are shown (right) superimposed on a current Google Map.



Early history: This group of buildings probably contains the remains of the mediaeval Manor House of the Adderburys dating from the 1300s and as such is one of the oldest buildings in the village. Examination of the structure in 1980 and 2010 revealed the remains of a C14th Hall House, with fine roof trusses visible in the roof (photo right) and first floor of the present building's central section. By the start of the C19th, it was hard to tell which of the wings was the high (solar and parlour) end and which the lower, service end - the deciding factor being the direction of the decorative elements of the trusses.

The overall impression is that the manor house went through a number of major changes between the C14th and the C18th. At first it may have been a simple stone-built thatched hall, to which the west wing was added in the C17th forming an L-shaped plan. At about this time, one bay at the east end may have been demolished, to be replaced with a cross-wing containing private accommodation. Half of this was gone by 1881. This arrangement remained for another hundred years until recent changes to its current form.



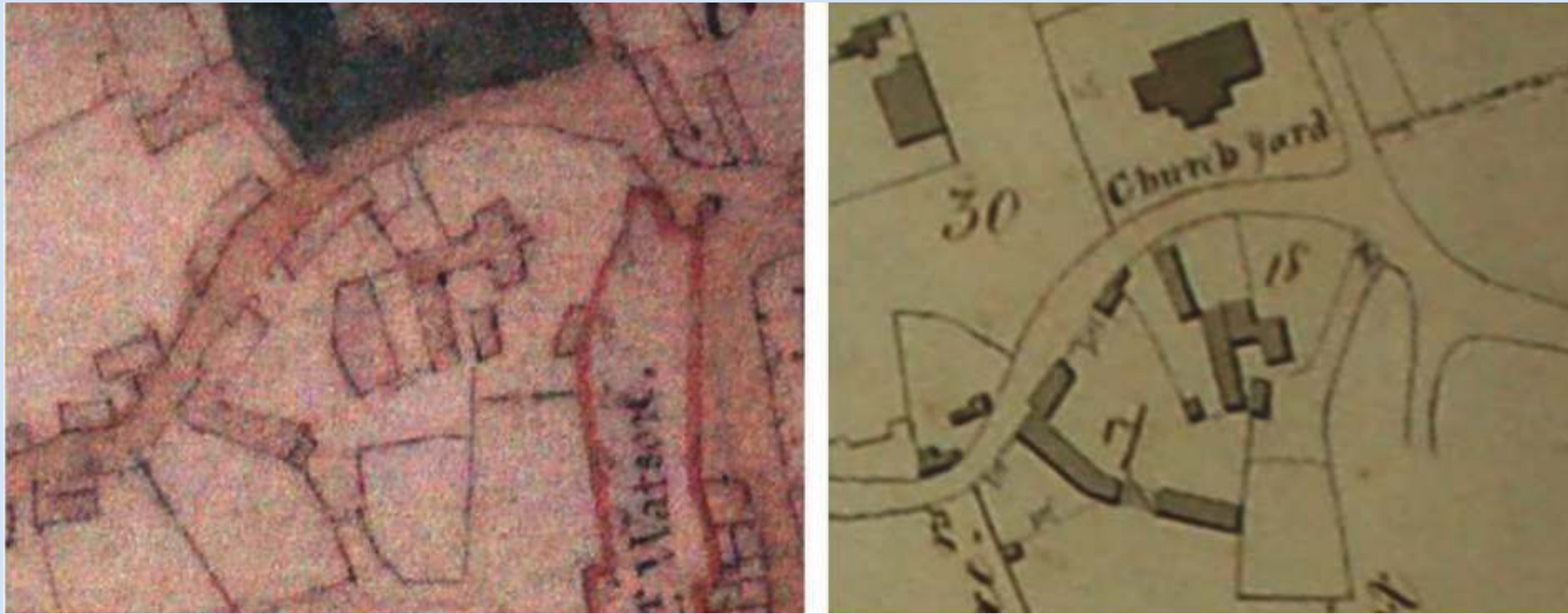
Use as a “Manorial Court” (Court Leet): The importance of these buildings can be ascertained from evidence that supports the longstanding tradition of holding the manorial court (Court Leet) in one of the dwellings. The Court Leets traditionally met hereabouts and continued to do so long after the Enclosure. Our two Steeple Aston chroniclers, Brookes and Wing, refer to these events. Brookes, October 27th 1848: “*At the yearly Court Leet holden this day at the house of Robert Weston, the Manor house, before Benjamin Holloway, Deputy Steward...*” (Brookes, 37); and William Wing in 1875: “*a cottage, south of the Church, adjoining the rectorial farm house, is a relic of [the] manor-house – recent improvements in this erection now forming two tenements, disclosed a noble dining hall which once had a high pitched open timber roof still existing but concealed; in it the annual Court-leet is still held by the Steward of the Duke of Marlborough, as Lord Paramount of the Hundred of Wootton...*” (Annals, 1875, 10). Interestingly, this suggests that neither of the present buildings named after the Manor Court were ever used in this way, and that it is the old hall, which now forms part of Rectory Farm, that is the actual former court location.



The hall is now part of Rectory Farmhouse and is divided into twelve rooms on two levels, and cannot easily be perceived as the grand space it once was. However, the main truss is now no longer central in the length of the hall, suggesting that the hall has been shortened. The evidence of the south elevation suggests that the wall was raised about four feet probably when the floor was inserted, possibly in the C17th.

The east wing contains three features of particular interest: a lamb’s tongue barred stop to the beam in the first floor east room, a feature found in joinery of the C17th (left); a trefoil headed door lintel possibly of late C15th date at the head of the stairs (right upper); and a ground floor C17th segmental arch door head (right below).





The earliest plan we have is the Enclosure Map of 1767. This shows a much bigger cross-wing at the eastern end, apparently with a porch roughly in line with the Hall. This contrasts with the present dwelling, which has been extended northwards from a much smaller building at its southern extremity. The western wing (Rectory Farmhouse) appears much as now. An estate map dated 1833, displayed in the farmhouse, shows later changes. The west wing appears much the same, but the east wing has shrunk to a small building at the southern end only, an arrangement that could still be seen in the 1980s aerial photo (bottom of panel).

The large irregularly-shaped building to the west, probably a barn, has gone, to be replaced by another closer to the road, positioned and aligned as Manor Court is now. The latter building appears to have displaced part of an older barn alongside the road.



The Rectory, or Glebe Farmhouse throughout the C19th seems to have been the former west wing, much extended towards the south, and shown buff-coloured in the District Valuation map of 1911/14 (left). The central section and what remained of the east wing was divided into a number of cottages, collectively known as the Manor Court, Manor Yard or College Yard Cottages (coloured green on the map). The central hall section was occupied for much of the C19th by the Parish Clerk, Charles Wadham. On his death in 1891 it seems to have passed to Alfred Belcher, his successor as Parish Clerk & Sexton, and in 1921 to Belcher's daughter Mary.

The tenant farm: Following Enclosure, the Glebe land was let out to a number of different farmers, one of whom was Richard Fox, who died in 1778. Census returns confirm that tenants changed quite frequently in the 1800s, despite the farm consisting of 220 acres and employing around 5 agricultural labourers. In 1841 William East was in residence. In 1851 it was William Hollis, 1861 John Carter and in 1871 William Fenemore. In the 1881 census, William Fenemore was still the tenant of Rectory Farm, now described as “Manor Buildings” and with the acreage increased to 324 with 9 men and 4 boys employed. By 1891 William Fenemore had bought the farm at Westfield, and it was here that he and his family can be found in the census of that year. He had by then built a new farmhouse there.

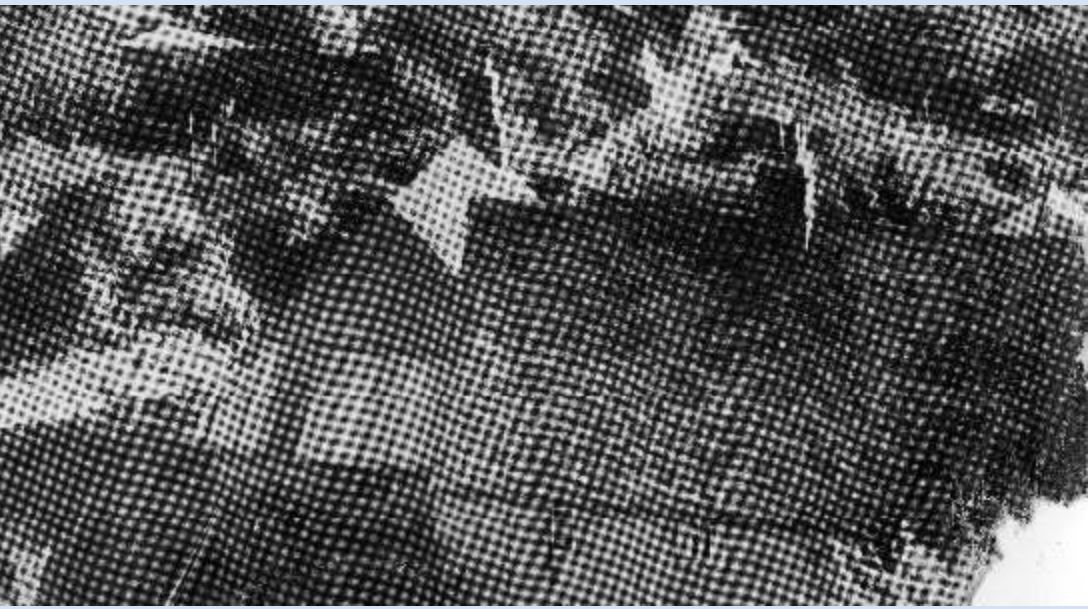
The Bryan(t) family were long-term residents of at least one of the cottages. Benjamin is recorded as a “gardener” from at least 1881 until 1915. The photo (right) is from around 1902 and shows Elizabeth and her husband Charles Edward Bryant with his father Benjamin between. Benjamin’s second wife Fanny is on the right (she is in the adjacent photo too). This was clearly a large family as Benjamin had 13 children from his first marriage!

Henry and Kate Gare are another of the households recorded in our records. Tragically, both their sons, Sgt George Vernon Gare MM and L/Sgt John Gare, were both killed in 1917 in the First World War. Kate died at the Farm in 1935 and Henry in 1939, whilst their daughter Catherine Gare (b. 1893) is recorded as being resident until 1969.



View of Rectory Farmhouse around 1920 when occupied by the Gare family. The building to the left, proud of the farmhouse, is a barn later converted to a dwelling now known as Manor Court.

In the 1891 census, some clarity appears in the recording process as the Rectory Farmhouse group are referenced differently with 3 entries for “Manor Court” and a new entry described as “Glebe Farm”. The heads of household of those at Manor Court are described as being a general labourer, seamstress and gardener. The fourth has no reference, but we believe is the central building facing North Street and occupied by Charles Wadham as described earlier. “Glebe Farm” was occupied by William Kinch who was still in residence in 1901. William came from a farming family in nearby Bucknell, and married Clara Elizabeth Fenemore (daughter of William Fenemore of Westfield Farm) in 1894. By 1911, this branch of the Kinch family had moved away. The College sold Rectory Farm and buildings to Richard Taylor in 1919, whose descendants still occupy the old and now enlarged farmhouse.



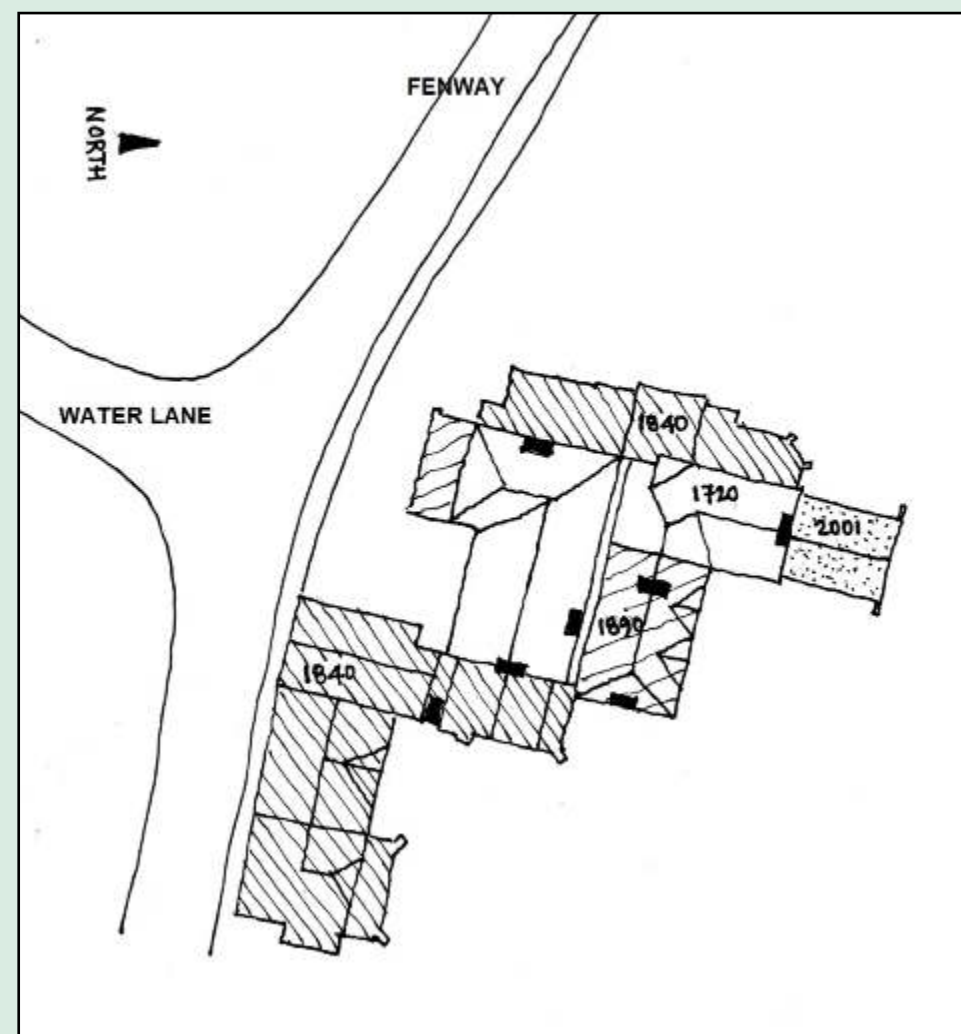
Very few external changes occurred until around 1980, as this series of photos of Manor Court Cottage shows. The view from the church tower (left) is from around 1950; the colour aerial photograph (right) is dated 1980 and shows Manor Court Cottage prior to its enlargement. In the view from Church Corner (far right) the original possibly C15th section is to the left. The post 1980s build is to the right (from a point just to the left of the green door) and this can be discerned by the taller windows and use of the darker Hornton stone and the further stepping down of the roof-line.



4. THE GRANGE, Fenway



NOW DIVIDED INTO FOUR HOMES, THIS RAMBLING GOTHICK REVIVAL HOUSE WAS FOR MANY YEARS THE COUNTRY ESTATE OF SUCCESSIVE LARGE AND WEALTHY FAMILIES, HOSTING VILLAGE EVENTS IN ITS EXTENSIVE GROUNDS.



John Davis bought land in Steeple Aston in or around 1726, which appears to have included agricultural buildings and possibly a farmhouse on the site of what is now The Grange. Successive Davises lived there until Thomas Davis (the third of that name) inherited the site and started re-building. Thomas had been appointed to the position of Royal Surgeon, attending on King William IV. He probably wanted his new family to live in the country, while he spent much of his time in London. Building work probably commenced in 1824 and continued for many years, incorporating stonework, statues and other decorative elements into the building. The conjectural diagram on the left shows how the building may have developed over time. The rambling Gothick-style country house, with over 80 rooms and 67 windows, has virtually no window or door the same as any other.



The house has numerous sculptures and plaster casts both externally (left) and internally, some of which - along with entire windows and ornamental friezes - are said to have come from the demolished Castellated Palace at Kew, built by the “mad” King George III, but never completed. Thomas Davis could have been given the run of the builders’ yard at Kew as a favour by King William.

Some elements of The Grange are more classical in design, such as the cantilevered stone staircase (below) which may have been retained from the earlier Georgian mansion on the site.



Above: the Bowyer crest on a wall of what is now East Grange. Henry Atkins Bowyer bought The Grange in 1868. Their eight servants were: the butler, footman, groom, housekeeper, two housemaids, a kitchen maid and a scullery maid.

In 1876 the estate went to auction (see the estate map, left) and was bought for £4,300 by Edward John Eyre (right), who subsequently built a sizeable extension to The Grange (further right). Eyre had been a pioneering explorer of Australia (Lake Eyre is named after him), and had then been appointed as Governor of Jamaica. He was notorious for a while for having ordered the



violent crushing of a rebellion there. There was public outcry in England over what happened, which led to the appointment of a Royal Commission to enquire into the events on the island. Famous figures such as Tennyson and Ruskin supported him, and Eyre was vindicated, but suspended from his post. He was given a pension as a retired Colonial Governor and perhaps sought refuge in Steeple Aston, eventually ending his retirement in Yorkshire, where he died in 1901. Eyre was described as “stubborn, obstinate, and unteachable.”





The next owner was retired Vice-Admiral Richard Bradshaw, who took on the estate in 1883, with his wife Emma and their seven children. Emma came from the wealthy Taylor brewing family, based in Southgate, London. Richard died in 1899 and Emma in 1911, at which point their youngest son, Arthur Edward, known as Moses, inherited the estate. The photo (left) of about 1902, on the Grange steps, shows Emma with members of her family. Moses is second from the left at the front.

The estate was very much the centre of village life during the Bradshaws' tenure, with events of various kinds regularly held in the grounds, including the annual Horticultural Show.



Moses with his wife Bet (right) enjoying the grounds as war broke out in 1914. The rose garden (right) was later replaced by a bowling green.



The Grange estate employed many village people over a period of nearly 100 years, until the last Bradshaws left in 1950. As well as the servants in the house, there were gardeners, groundsmen, a chauffeur and dairying staff. Villagers came each morning to the Grange's "back door" on the raised pavement of Fenway (left), where they would buy milk and butter produced on the estate from the 5 or 6 Jersey cows. The door was also next to the spring-fed well supplying water to many villagers in the days before mains water.



One of the surviving buildings from the 18th Century forerunner of The Grange was pressed into use as the servants' hall and sleeping quarters for the housemaids. After 1950 this was altered to become two separate dwellings - East Spring and West Spring (right). Amongst various owners were Francis Wheen, a well-known journalist, and his wife Joan Smith, also a journalist and writer, while living there, of a crime novel - the plot based on peace protests at the Upper Heyford base. Alison and David Moran are the current owners of both parts.



The Grange was sold to Dr William Reynard, a doctor working at Pressed Steel in Cowley. He sold on to Guy Wilsdon in 1956, a builder/developer, who made the house into apartments. Later these were rented to the USAF as staff quarters, during which time the famous basketball star, Miles Aitken, was one of the occupiers. The house then fell into disuse for the first time in its history. At this time there was a real possibility that the Grange might be demolished, but eventually Wilsdon sold the estate to the Cherwell Development Company. About half of the grounds were developed for housing, with 37 houses being constructed as the Grange Park estate in 1970-2, leaving the Grange bereft of its former setting. Fortunately, many of the specimen trees in the grounds were kept, although they were perhaps somewhat out of place in the small gardens of the modern houses. The Grange was subdivided into two dwellings, East and West Grange, each retaining a small remnant of the park as its garden.



East Grange retained the main staircase of the house, but lost its connection to the main entrance, and in the 1970s part of East Grange was used as a private playschool. Its latest owners are Rebekah and Robin Tuluie.

In 1972 Roger and Margaret Mason bought West Grange. As it was prior to the listing of the house, they modernised it quite dramatically, installing a floor in the double-height entrance hall to create a study above, and removing the gallery. In 1983 they divided West Grange into two parts, creating South Grange. This separated the southern range from the main entrance and required the construction of a new staircase for South Grange, closure of various door openings and the creation of a new kitchen for West Grange by making major alterations to the basement. A garage and driveway were constructed on the north side of West Grange.



The once grand approach to the house had been lost and now seemed to be a back entrance; the surprising frontage of the house was virtually invisible except from within the small garden of West Grange. Martin Lipson and Caroline Langridge bought this part in 1999, and they demolished the garage and replaced it with a new reception room on a similar scale to the existing drawing room, to which it was connected. The removal of the garage permitted a new footpath and stepped approach to the original front entrance to be created, opening up a new view of the house from the north.

5. THE NEST, Cow Lane



THIS DELIGHTFUL HOUSE HAS EVOLVED FROM ONE TO TWO SEPARATE DWELLINGS, BEFORE REVERTING BACK TO A SINGLE HOME, INHABITED BY THE SAME FAMILY SINCE THE 1930s. ITS MANY GUISES INCLUDE A GROCERS, HAIRDRESSERS, CHILDRENSWEAR SHOP, TAILORS AND B&B.



Building The Nest: ‘John Barrett the gardener’ was so called in his day to distinguish him from a number of other local Barretts, including a farmer and a family of stonemasons. He enjoyed a long, productive career as a market gardener in Steeple Aston, and local historians note his achievement in reaching an amazing 90 years upon his death in June 1842! Barrett cultivated land in the North Dickredges, the area between Cow Lane and the village stream (62 & 103 on map), extending his domain north to territory known as Lockhall (71). He appears to have made his family home on the north edge of Lockhall, the house & barn known as Wincote (P). Whether he had it built or acquired it remains to be clarified. By 1841, Wincote had passed to his gardening successors, the Parsons family.



Later in life, Barrett benefitted from the growth of Steeple Aston, selling off small building plots on Paines Hill (east) and Cow Lane (south) on the fringes of his main land-holding. In his final years, he appears to have built himself a modest home on one such plot on the north-west corner of the site – the property known (at least since 1891) as The Nest. His wife, Rose (nee Wickham) died in 1817 aged just 49, leaving him to raise three young daughters, and his only son who sadly died aged just 19 years. He was assisted by his wife’s unmarried sisters, Elizabeth & Hannah Wickham, who lived at ‘Wickhams’ on Paines Hill. Elizabeth died in 1836, leaving her share of the house to sister Hannah, who remained there until at least 1853, when she returned to live in her native Hook Norton, until her death in April 1860.

When John Barrett died, he bequeathed funds to Hannah Wickham, with his remaining estate to his three daughters, all of whom had married Fenemores, and their offspring. John was buried in the churchyard presumably beside his beloved Rose, although the gravestone is no longer visible. Sale particulars (Oxford Journal, 22 April 1843) show that The Nest was purchased and rented out by Stoke Lyne blacksmith, Alexander Kirby, who later commissioned Minerva House (now North Ridge). Kirby himself settled in the village of Hethe.



Architectural change: The Nest has undergone a number of major transformations over the years. Photo A shows the house on the left, with the neighbouring cottages opening out onto Paines Hill c. 1900, and B shows the house in c.1920.

C shows The Nest adjacent to Lot 2 in the Minerva House auction map of 1920. D is a view of The Nest in c1955 after the neighbouring cottages had been demolished.

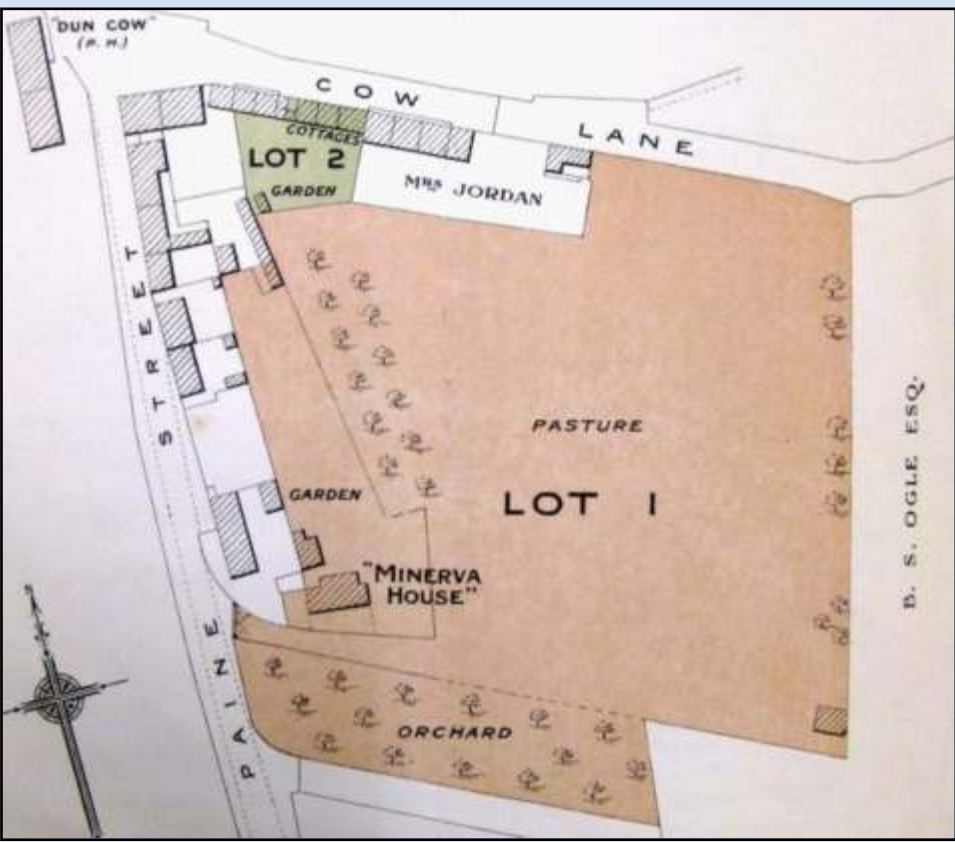
E shows major works during 1986 when the property was completely refurbished, and F (together with the photo on the left) is the house as it is today.



A



B



C



D



E



F

Right: a conjectural plan based on 1986 photographs and a verbal description. A possible sequence of building work is as follows:

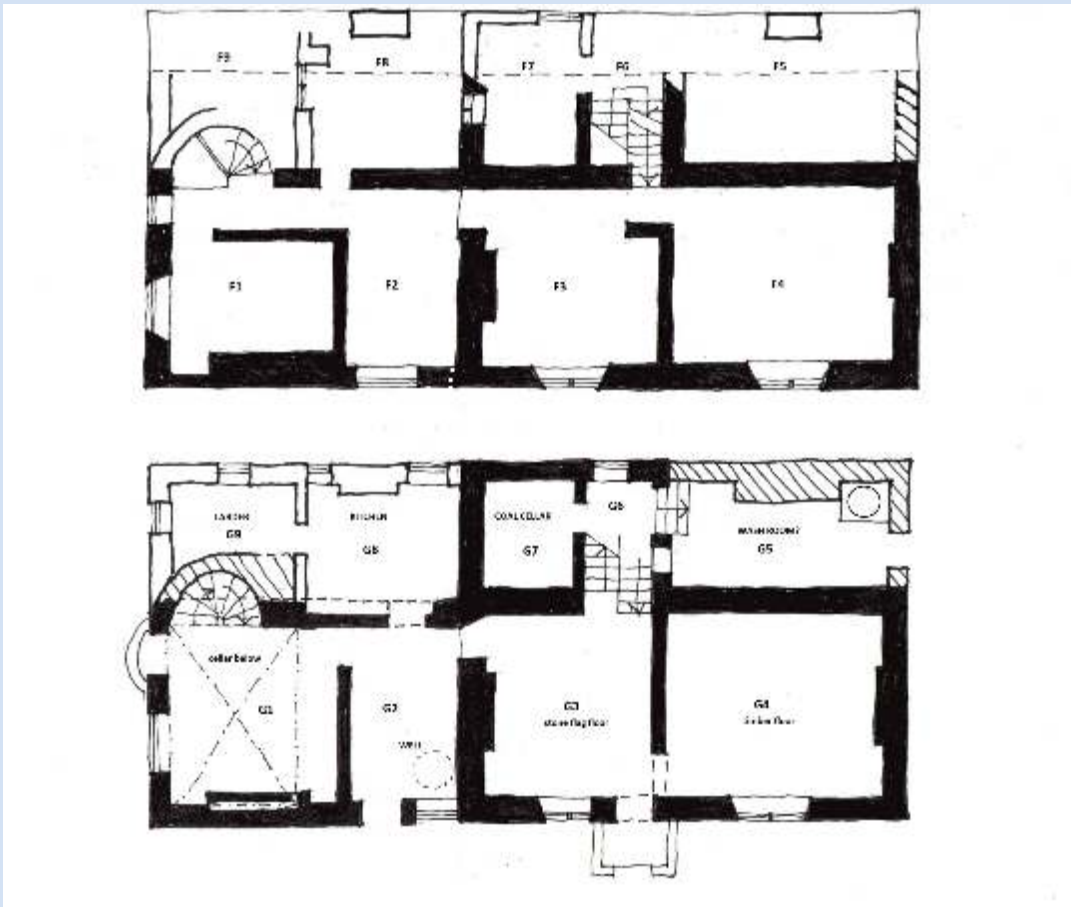
1775 – 1805: Eastern range built with single storey westward extension of G1, G2 and G8.

1820 – 1830: G5 may have been added subsequently.

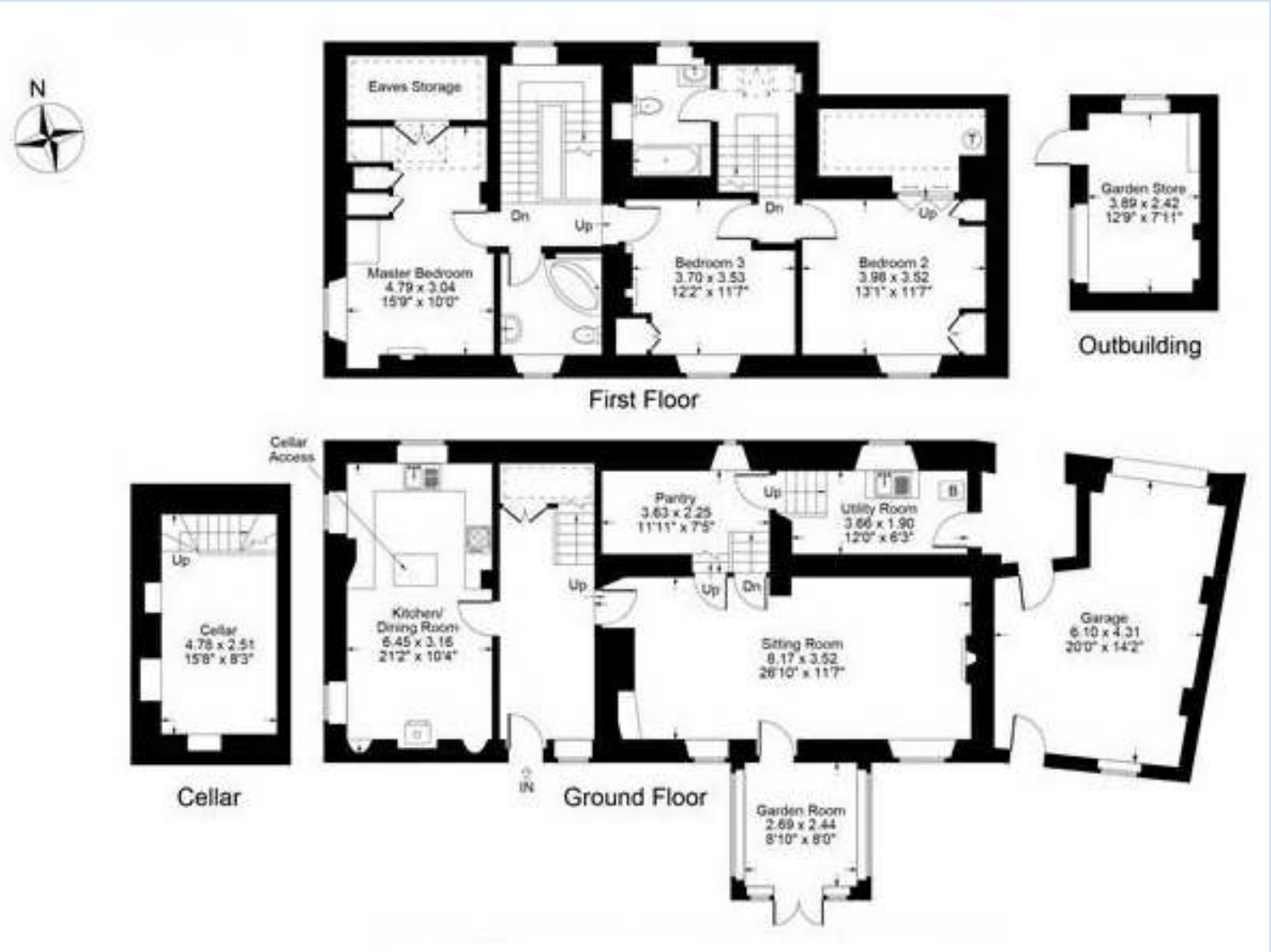
1850 – 1870: (from first floor cast iron hearths) G9 added, together with an upper floor comprising F1, F2, F8 and F9; the western range was then divided from the eastern range to create a separate dwelling.

C1900: The house was reinstated as a single dwelling.

1986: Major refurbishment. This included complete removal of fireplaces and chimneys to G5 and G8, demolition of the ground to first floor staircase in G1, and the door to Paines Hill was blocked internally (leaving it intact externally). A new staircase was inserted in place of the former kitchen G8 and a new kitchen added. Walls between G1 and G9, between G3 and G4, and between F1 and F9 were removed.



Right: Estate agents’ plan of 2017 shows the layout of the house today.



Feathering the Nest: Peter (or Pete) Stone (pictured left, as a young boy in 1937 and centre, in 2021) on the steps of the former grocery shop that his mother, Elsie Stone, ran from 1934 until the early 1960s. Ice cream, butter and cheese were stored in the cool cellar below to keep them fresh. Elsie also sold a multitude of necessities, including candles, matches, hairnets & hairrips, boot polish, Aspros and paraffin oil. On her death, the shop closed and most of the remaining stock was bought by Harris Stores. Alf Parish used a room upstairs to provide a hairdressing service, and water had to be carried up the spiral staircase from the well below, which is still in existence in the hallway.

In 1964 Mrs Jill Birk opened a baby and childrenswear shop called Kinderland, which ran for four years, after which The Nest reverted back to a private dwelling. From the late 1980s, Pete’s wife, Gwen (pictured right, with Pete) provided a tailoring service altering clothes for residents of Steeple Aston and the surrounding villages, with regular adverts in the Steeple Aston Life.



Pictured above is Mrs Elsie Stone (bottom left), after her team won the Country Dancing Cup in 1928.

Pictured below - In the 1940s, vegetables were grown in the garden as part of the ‘Dig for Victory’ effort during World War II.



Pictured below is a young Pete Stone (in the middle with a cap) and friends sitting on the pigsties in 1938. His father kept pigs in the back garden and his uncle butchered them for the table.



From 1933 to 1943, Mrs Elsie Stone took in lodgers at The Nest, recording their details in a guest book. Guests included girl hikers, male cyclists, police and military personnel, who stayed for periods of just one night to six months or even longer, although the majority stayed for just a week or two. Some were local, hailing from Banbury or Oxford, but most had travelled some distance, including from Portsmouth, Sussex, London, Lincolnshire, Cornwall, Blackpool and even one from Midlothian. It appears that guests were looked after very well, as illustrated by their comments: ‘*more comfortable and homely lodgings could not be desired*’; ‘*with gratitude for every consideration and comfort*’; ‘*The Nest – home from home*’, and many returned to stay.

An account of previous owners and tenants of The Nest is available in a separate folder.



Remodelling the garden: When Pete’s father, Frank Stone, bought The Nest in 1933, the two cottages along Paines Hill owned by Mr Wilkins were still standing, with front doors opening directly onto the street. However, due to their dilapidated condition, they were soon condemned and demolished, and Frank bought the land and rebuilt the front of the cottages to form a boundary wall. On higher ground were four plum trees, an apricot tree, stable, pigsties, toilet shed, woodshed and small building. The stable with manger still stands today (top left).

The attractive floor tiles from one of the former cottages were incorporated into the new sunken garden (top right), a good example of early recycling! Whilst builders worked on the house, Pete and Gwen enrolled at night classes to study bricklaying and bridge construction, to enable them to construct a pond complete with delightful bridge for their grandchildren to play on (bottom left). After the little ones had grown up, the bridge was replaced by an equally attractive raised water feature complete with frogs (bottom right).



6. CEDAR LODGE, North Side



**A GEORGIAN HOUSE WITH EARLIER ORIGINS,
INHABITED BY SOME INTERESTING CHARACTERS,
CEDAR LODGE PRESENTS ITS REAR TO THE VILLAGE
AND ITS FRONT TO ITS FINE LARGE GARDEN.**



This typically symmetrical mid-18th century house (right), now the "service wing" of Cedar Lodge, seems to have been the farmhouse of Edward Lamley, the last in a line stretching back to the 1570s. Edward died in 1761, leaving no male heir, and the farm passed to his widow, Judith Lamley.

In 1762, an apothecary from Banbury, Robert Rainbow Kening, married their daughter Mary Lamley and settled in Steeple Aston. When Mary died in 1792, Robert had her buried by torchlight in her wedding attire, willingly paying the £5 fine for breaking the law stating that grave-clothes must be made of wool.



In 1766/7, Steeple Aston's farmland was reorganised under an Enclosure Act. The resulting map appears to show the house (marked A) linked to the road by a slanting row of outbuildings, with a narrow close to the south-east (B), labelled "Mr Kenning". Judith Lamley was awarded some 56 acres for the strips they had previously held in the open fields. Her new fields were scattered -- hardly a compact farm. But "exchange" was the name of the game -- the word appears 36 times in the Award document -- and the Kenings managed to end up with a substantial estate (parcel 47) adjoining their house.



The Kenings had just one surviving child, a son, Robert Lamley Kening, born in 1763, who inherited the property at his father's death in 1797. Robert is credited with extending the farmhouse to the east, adding the main part, with its unusual but striking arrangement of two parallel roofs, one higher than the other. It is not known who carried out the work or exactly when it was completed.

(This much later aerial view is undated, but was evidently taken before a second gateway was opened up onto Northside).



Robert opted for a career in the church, and became curate of Somerton, but was barred from the pulpit for preaching in favour of the ideas behind the French Revolution.

He then travelled extensively in Europe (sadly writing no memoirs), leaving his house to be let to a succession of tenants. The surviving Rate Books show Robert himself as a ratepayer in 1808, but in 1809 he was replaced by Mrs Elizabeth Rolls, a widow, who continued as a ratepayer until at least 1825.



When Kening was at home, he is said to have lodged in the stables, to avoid disturbing his tenants. His wandering nature did not prevent him from having children by at least two local women; he made arrangements for their financial support both in his lifetime and, by his Will, after his death in 1822. Ann Doyle and her daughter Judith are buried with him in the Kening family grave near the church porch. In 1829, Kening's solicitor, Crews Dudley, advertised the house in the local press, as a "Genteel Residence at Steeple Aston". This may have been the moment when it was taken by John Moberley, father of the explorer Walter Moberley, who was born here in 1838.

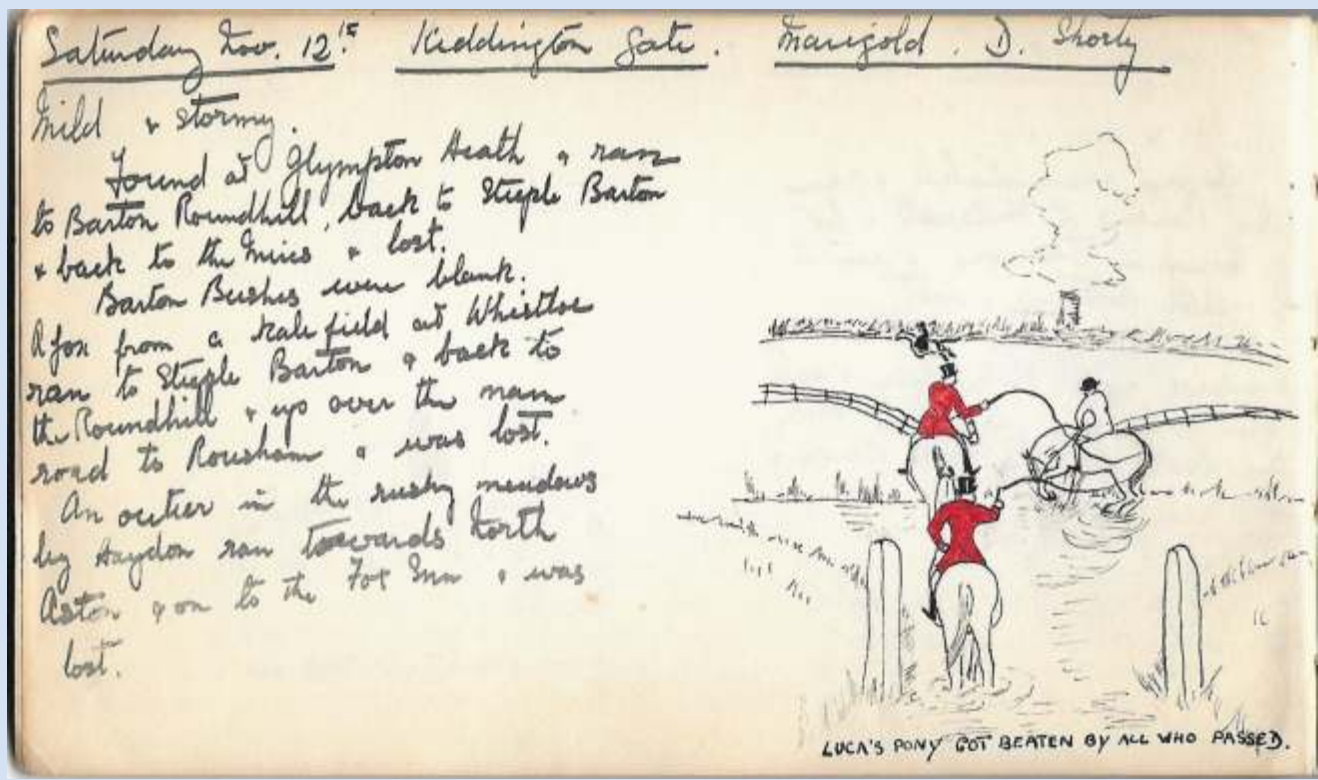


The house, which at some point came to be called The Lodge, was occupied at least from 1841 to 1861 by an independent woman, Mrs Elizabeth Jones, while the Rate Books for 1852 and 1853 make clear she was the owner-occupier. The following year she moved out, apparently downsizing, since she chose to part with many of her belongings, advertising them for sale in the *Oxford Chronicle* in April 1854. Mrs Jones let the house to Mrs Ann Brooks from Great Rollright, who appears as her tenant in the Rate Books from 1858 to 1861. Mrs Jones then evidently sold The Lodge to a retired local mealman and farmer, Edmund Creek, who appears as Mrs Brooks' landlord in the 1867 Rate Book. This was probably a private sale and no mention of it has been traced so far.



Shortly after this, Edmund Creek gave up work, and moved into The Lodge, describing himself in the 1871 Census as a retired farmer and landowner. With him came his 93 year old mother, Ann Creek, who died two years later, and a niece, Mary Rowland, from Islip. She was the daughter of Edmund's sister, Ann, who had married an Islip farmer, John Rowland, back in 1840.

Edmund died in 1873, leaving a Will by which his property, including The Lodge, passed to a succession of Rowland nephews and nieces. The house itself was again let to women of independent means - Elizabeth Fry, Sarah Cartwright, Charlotte Vincent and Madeline Vincent. It was then briefly owned by a widow, Catherine Caroline Letitia Chamberlayne, who sold it on to a relative of hers, Henry Fitzroy Chamberlayne in 1925 for £2,250.



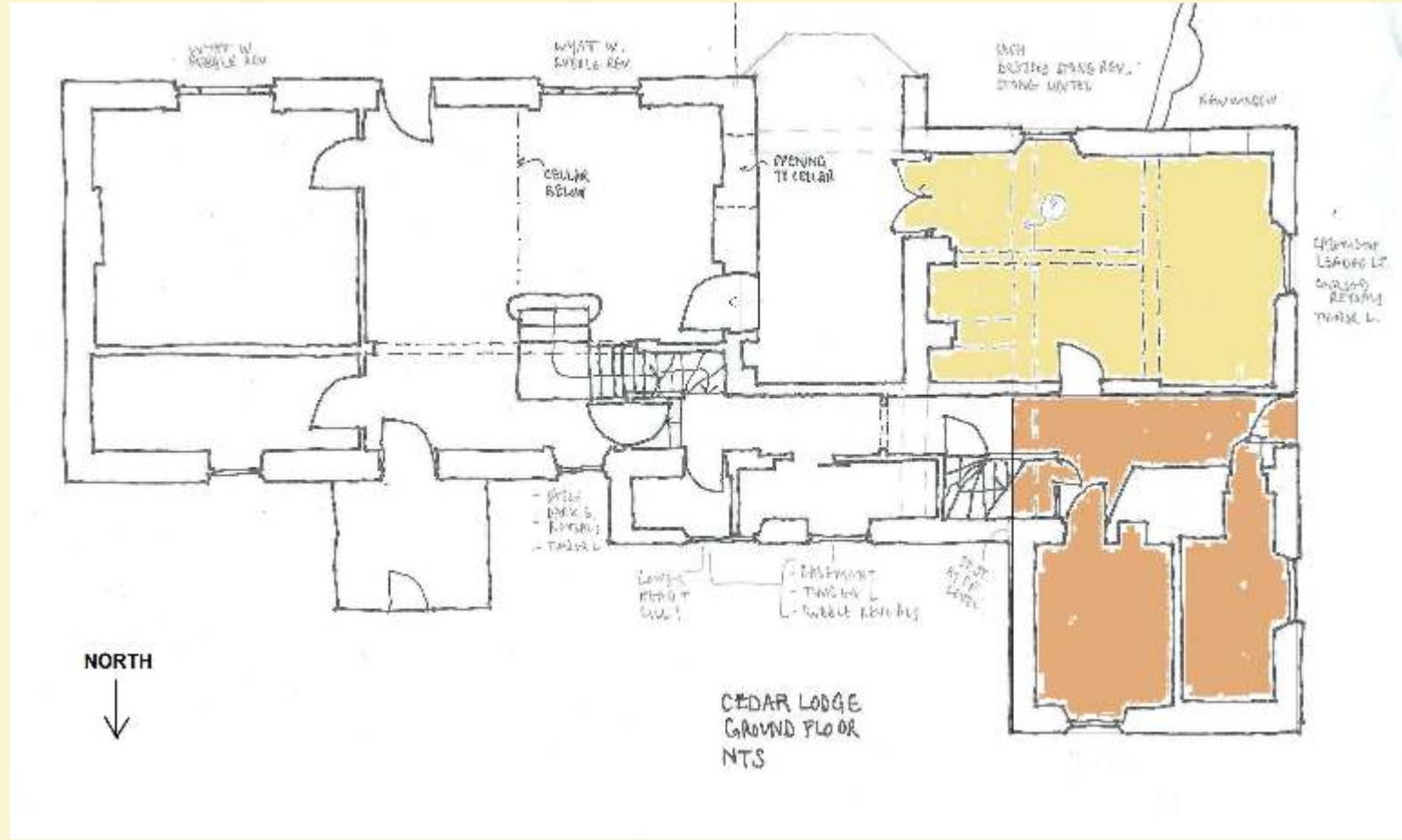
Chamberlayne lived here for many years, during which he evidently changed the name of the house from The Lodge to Cedar Lodge. He was a veteran of the First World War, in which he served as a Captain in the Household Cavalry. In private life Chamberlayne was a keen huntsman, a passion shared by his daughter Margarita. She kept a delightfully illustrated diary of their exploits. A selection from her journal, covering the years 1928-1939, was later published under the title *Pictured Memories of Hunting*. SAVA is fortunate to possess both the book and one of the manuscript journals, from which this page is taken.

Next came the novelist Iris Murdoch, seen here in the garden of Cedar Lodge in 1959. She moved here with her husband, fellow-academic and eventual biographer, John Bayley, two years earlier, and they stayed nearly 30 years. John recalled that it was startlingly cheap to buy but in bad condition, and they needed constant attention from Mr Palmer (from Southside) - a veteran builder "with very bright blue eyes". The couple became well known here, entertaining local villagers as well as their Oxford colleagues. Iris loved the relatively wild garden, with its occasional badgers, and her plunge-pool, created from a derelict greenhouse. She also decorated the garden with small statues; and was so distressed when they were vandalised in 1986 that John engineered their immediate return to Oxford.



For the next seven years, Cedar Lodge was owned by Guy and Patricia Croft. In 1993 they sold it on to the Kewleys - David and Jan (Maulden), both publishers, who owned the house for the next 25 years. David writes: *"It was/is a wonderful family house and we all loved it deeply - most intensely for the garden which we reclaimed from near wilderness and which Jan designed, planted and oversaw in detail"* (photos right and below right).

In 2018 Cedar Lodge passed to its current owners, Mr & Mrs Pasteur. Frances Pasteur tells SAVA they have had the lean-to conservatory rebuilt as a kitchen with views into the garden; work has also been done to eliminate damp and replace rotten structural woodwork.



The plan on the left shows an indicative sequence of the building of Cedar Lodge. The two coloured areas may be survival of the earliest buildings, retained as part of the service wing. The ochre-coloured area contains a massive fireplace and may be the oldest survival. The uncoloured area was built later, and deliberately offset so that the service corridor could connect up all the elements. The two coloured elements together were substantially remodelled to create a unified whole as seen from the west, where an apparently symmetrical "front elevation" to the service side has been created with stonework and windows (see right) of a different type to that used anywhere else on the house.



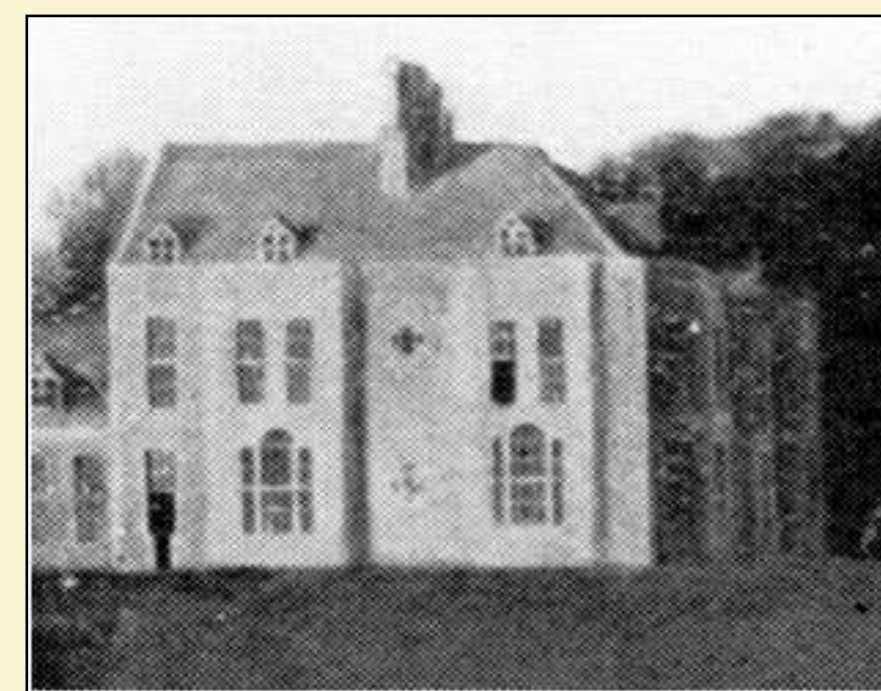
7. PAINES HILL HOUSE, Paines Hill



A COMMANDING GEORGIAN HOUSE WITH CLASSICAL PROPORTIONS RARELY SEEN IN THE VILLAGE. BUILT ON THE SITE OF AN OLD INN OWNED BY AN ENTERPRISING PUBLICAN, IT WAS THE DOCTORS' HOUSE FOR WELL OVER 100 YEARS.



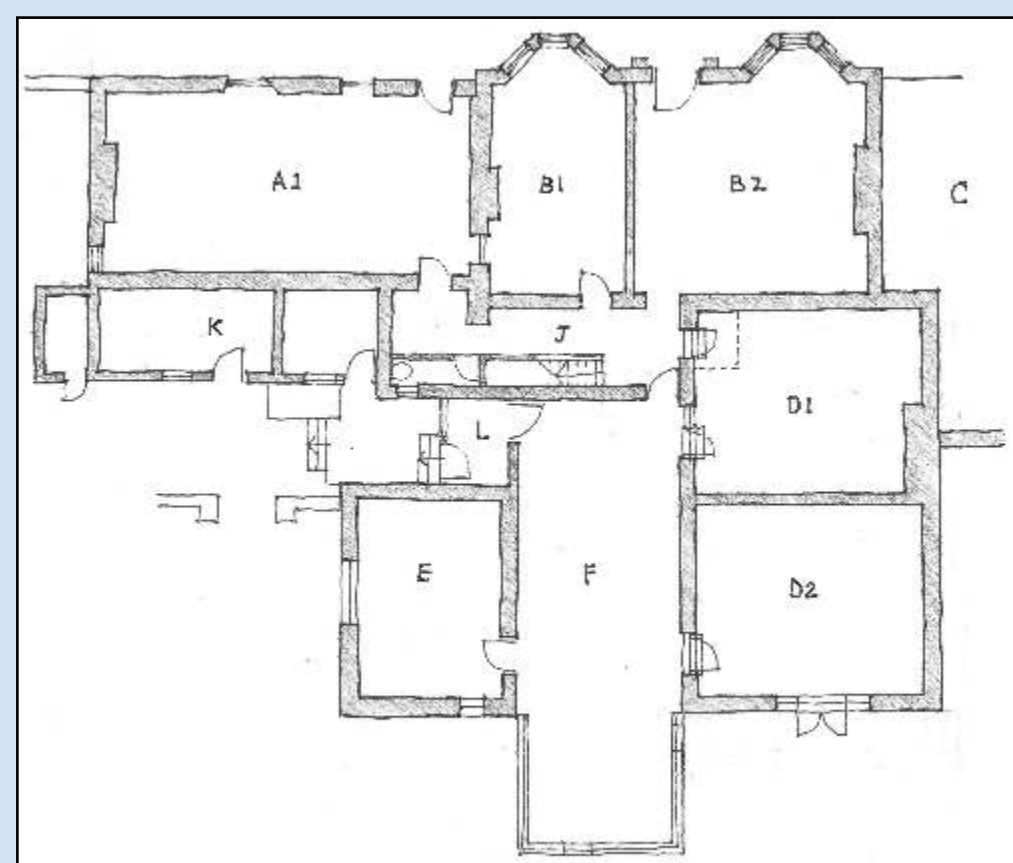
The Steeple Aston Enclosure Map of 1767 shows a cluster of existing buildings which mark the site of the Fleur-de-lys Inn which flourished from c1750-1780 in the hands of John Paine, a butcher turned innkeeper. John Paine was an entrepreneurial character who seems to have made the inn a centre for business and legal activity. Such was his reputation that the hill on which the inn stood has borne his name ever since (although the correct spelling of his name is unclear). Paine went bankrupt in 1779 and the inn was sold in 1783 to another butcher, William Wall (c1730-1817) who settled in Steeple Aston shortly before 1770. Wall bought the only other pub in the village, the Chequers (now The Red Lion) from Paine in 1777. In 1806 Wall came into money from his elder brother, Devereux Wall, a prosperous London butcher. These funds probably supported the purchase of expensive old stonework from the dismantled Middle Aston House.



Payne's Hill House's fine façade and sides were constructed out of the front of the old manor. It is of good cut stone with bay windows, apparently made smaller and with a storey added, as can be seen by this painting (by Thomas Jones) of 1774. It shows a long, low range of eight bays with four dormers which adjoined a two-storeyed block with square bays.



The Wall family are known, from rate books, to have received rent from the various doctors who tenanted the house until 1902. The façade of the building (left) is of classical proportions and detailing, with quality ashlar stonework, storey-banding, and a corniced parapet wall. The rear elevation, however, is constructed in a mixture of at least three types of uncoursed stone - the majority being limestone. The present Payne's Hill House incorporates a separate cottage to the north (above). Census evidence suggests that this was a cottage "bought from Robert Barrett" and William Wall II mentions it in his 1837 Will, as the only property not inherited from his father.



The incorporated cottage is shown as A1 in the plan of the ground floor (left) to distinguish it from the double-bayed rooms to the south marked as B. Other rooms of the house are marked accordingly. The hall and staircase marked J indicate a number of changes, which were made when the house turned from being a doctor's to a private house during the 1930s. The ground floor stair in J has been reversed. It is thought that the main entrance to the house was through building A, and along the passage to the foot of the stair in J. Later, probably when the house ceased to be used as a doctor's surgery, the front entrance was switched to that in building B, making it more convenient for the stair to be reversed.



Photographs taken in 1902 and the 1920s (left) give an indication of how the house was arranged for the purpose of receiving and treating patients. The adjoining cottage has a rustic porch attached and, importantly, the railings in front of the two bays are unbroken, suggesting that the grand doorway, which today acts as the main entrance to the house, was either blocked or else did not exist at all. Certainly the steps to the road, which can be seen today, are absent. The Listed Building description refers to a later (C20th) stone doorcase. The ashlar facings and string courses have clearly been cut to form an opening. It would appear that when the house was in use as the Doctors' House – between approximately 1820 and 1930 – patients used to enter by the rustic porch in A, which led



into the receptionist's area and waiting room. The doctor's surgery was presumably through the connecting corridor into building B.



However, if it is the case that access to the central front door was not created until the C20th, this does not explain why Day and Night bells – for the doctor - were located next to this door. Inspection shows that the bell pushes have been relocated from the left jamb of the entrance door in building A, where they had been operated as mechanical pulls before electric bells were in use. The steps and stone doorcase were installed together after the house ceased to be the Doctors' house, and became a family home – probably after 1930.

The Doctors, surgeons and medical officers of the Doctors House

Payne’s Hill House was the home of the village doctor for over 100 years and gave rise to the alternative name for the hill on which it stood - Doctors’ Hill.

1) John James Perry married in Steeple Aston in 1818 and lived in Paynes Hill House from at least 1835 (previously at Orchard Lea) until the mid-1840s. He served as Medical Officer of the Farmers and General Fire and Life Insurance Institution for Woodstock and Steeple Aston. His son, Marten Perry, was born in the village in 1826 and also became a doctor in Worcestershire and Spalding. There is a memorial plaque to Marten inside the church.

2) Edmond Consett Wilson served as Medical Officer from the late 1840s to at least 1861. He was born on the 17th March 1803 at Guisborough, Yorkshire, and had previously practised as an apothecary-surgeon at Thame, where he had married Hester Field, a native of that town, in 1833 and had three daughters, Ann, Mary and Fanny. He was still in his Steeple Aston practice in 1861, but died in Banbury aged 64 in 1868. He survived an accusation of misconduct in 1849/50 in an inquiry which received wide local interest (*see right*).

3) John Pearson Cresswell MRCS occupied Payne’s Hill House from about 1863-69. He was born in Redditch on the 13th May 1833, the son of Joseph and Cresswell, a family of silk weavers, though his own father was probably a solicitor. He met his aristocratic bride, Margaret Lydia Trevelyan whilst working as a surgeon in Seaton, Devon and they married in Axminster in 1862. They had 8 children, 4 of whom were born in Steeple Aston with 2 buried here. After leaving Steeple Aston, the family moved frequently. By 1871 they were at Penge in Surrey and in 1874 they were in Ramsgate in Kent. 1881 saw them in Wolverhampton, where he was declared bankrupt. In 1891, he was a visitor registered as a general practitioner on a farm in County Durham. Finally, in the 1901 Census, he was a retired surgeon living alone on own means in Carlton, Durham. He died in 1905.

4) Edward Vavasour Hemingway (about 1871-1901) came from Leeds with his wife Harriet and other family members including his brother Marmaduke and three stepdaughters. Harriet died and was buried in Steeple Aston in 1876. He married Louise Bouton in 1878. In the 1891 Census, Edward and Louise, and brother Marmaduke by now a "lunatic 4 years", are registered at the house. Four years later, Marmaduke died in Warneford Asylum. By the next Census in 1901, Hemingway was still living in the house with Louise but in practice with a young partner.

5) Gordon J Lane, born in Dublin in 1873 and doctor of medicine, appears to be the senior (or at least most active) partner. When Payne’s Hill House was finally sold by the Wall family in 1902, Lane and Hemingway (now 72) were named as tenants with Lane as “head of household”. Hemingway died in 1904, his wife moving away. It is not known how long Gordon Lane stayed on for but by 1911, there was a new doctor.

6) James Arthur Venning (1881-1965). Venning was originally from Devon, and served with distinction as a Captain in the Army Medical Corps during World War 1. He features as a Medical Officer for Steeple Aston in a 1915 profile of Bicester Union, indicative of the fact that The Woodstock and Bicester Unions still formed the backbone of medical health provision, as it had in Edmond Consett Wilson’s time 60 years earlier. He moved to Rickmansworth and practised there for many years.

The Poor Law and an Accusation of Misconduct

Edmond Consett Wilson was accused of misconduct in 1849/50. His experience throws some light on the life of doctors in villages like Steeple Aston after the Poor Law Act of 1834. The Act, which established the Workhouses, also set up “medical officers” who worked at the behest of the Unions, which were groups of parishes which oversaw the administration of the Act and the various reforms that followed. Steeple Aston came under the Woodstock Union.

A tenet of the Poor Law had been to banish “outside relief” which was the receipt of benefits for people living in their own homes, that is to say, outside the Workhouse, the idea being that the poor must endeavour to keep themselves out of the Workhouse through their own efforts. However, in practice, the very poorest parishioners could still apply for medical help and sometimes food. This provided an income for doctors like Wilson. The pauper recipients of medical aid paid nothing. This arrangement was the subject of great controversy with many taxpayers demanding that the Poor Law be upheld in every respect - that the poor stand on their own two feet and they were convinced that the shame of the Workhouse was necessary to “motivate” them. On the other hand, more liberal thinkers favoured a humanitarian approach to the poor. These opposing forces came into play with the inquiry into Wilson’s alleged misconduct.

Wilson’s chief accuser was the Rector of Steeple Aston, Joseph Burrows. The case was referred upwards and he was reinstated by the Guardians, helped by a public petition. Before the decision Wilson published the following notice:

To the Guardians of the Woodstock Union,
GENTLEMEN,
I Beg to return my heartfelt thanks for your kind and continued support as one of your Medical Officers, and also to assure you that, if re-elected on Tuesday the 12th instant, no exertion shall be spared on my part to retain the good opinion of my supporters, or to win that of the Gentlemen who at present are opposed to me.
I am, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,
EDMOND CONSETT WILSON, M.B.C.S.

A more detailed account of the case can be found in the separate folder.



Payne’s Hill House had been owned by three generations of the Wall family when it finally came to auction in 1902.

LOT 7.
A PARTICULARLY WELL-BUILT & PLEASANTLY PLACED

FREEHOLD RESIDENCE

Situate on Payne's Hill,

Containing on the Ground Floor: Entrance Hall, Study, large Dining Room, Surgery, Pantry, Kitchen with range, Larder, Scullery with range, Copper, and Force Pump, and 2 large Cellars; on the First Floor: W.C., Housemaid's Closet, handsome Drawing Room, Boudoir, and 4 Bedrooms; on the Second Floor: 2 good Bedrooms and 2 Attics. The house is very conveniently fitted up with Cupboards.

THE OUTBUILDINGS

Consist of Knife House, Harness Room, Coal House, and Ash House, brick and slated Stable with 2 Boxes, and Carriage House having Loft over (with receiving door facing street), Stable Yard paved with Staffordshire Blocks, with draught entrance from the Street through folding doors. In the rear is

A WARM AND PRODUCTIVE WALLED-IN GARDEN,

With a large number of thriving wall Fruit Trees, and in which are a lean-to Greenhouse, Dog Kennel, and W.C. On the other side of the road is a

PRETTILY LAID-OUT LAWN

On which are 2 very fine Ornamental Beech Trees and Flowering Shrubs,

Also a rustic Summer House, and a stone and thatched 3-Box Stable and Carriage House, BILLIARD ROOM and 2 Rooms over.

PIECE OF GARDEN GROUND, & STONE & THATCHED HOVEL.

The whole is let to E. V. HEMINGWAY, Esq., and GORDON J. LANE, Esq., M.D., at the **Annual Rental of \$42.** No Land Tax has been paid.

The adjoining owners are Mrs. Walton, Mrs. Grantham, and Hall's Oxford Brewery Company, Ltd.

It was bought by Dr Gordon Lane, already the tenant. In 1905, it was sold to a Dr Peacock but by 1911 it was occupied by Dr James Arthur Venning, probably as tenant. Venning was a Cambridge graduate who was to be taken away from practising in Steeple Aston by World War 1, when he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps.

The next known occupants were Canon Michael Wood and family. Canon Wood featured in a recent Steeple Aston Life feature by Geoffrey Lane. Here is an extract:

Canon Michael Wood came to live in Steeple Aston in 1920. He had only fairly recently returned to England after serving in the church in South Africa. Wood took up residence in Paynes Hill House, accompanied by several sisters, and was soon befriended by the Rev. Charles Cunliffe Brookes (son of the late Rector J. H. Brookes), who urged him to set about researching the history of Steeple and Middle Aston. Wood did so with relish and was soon delving among the archives at Brasenose College and ancient documents in the Public Record Office in London. He was perhaps embarking on one such outing on 1st August 1923 when he met his unfortunate end. Newspaper reports say he left home to catch the 9.20am Oxford train and “appears to have hurried somewhat”. After crossing to the up platform he fell forwards, and soon passed away, “despite the attentions of Dr. Hodges, of Deddington, who happened to be passing”. Wood's sister later passed his research notes over to Brookes, who used them as the basis for his own History of Steeple Aston and Middle Aston, published in 1929. Seemingly without medical qualifications, the Wood sisters followed the tradition of the house and dispensed first aid and medication to those who arrived at the door.

In 1939, a Sylvia M. Wood (b1872) of private means was the owner occupier and probably one of Canon Wood’s sisters. James Young appears as the occupant in 1958, and Beatrice Birkbeck in 1969. In 1994, Tim and Caroline Edwards purchased the house, and in 2021 moved away to Middle Aston.

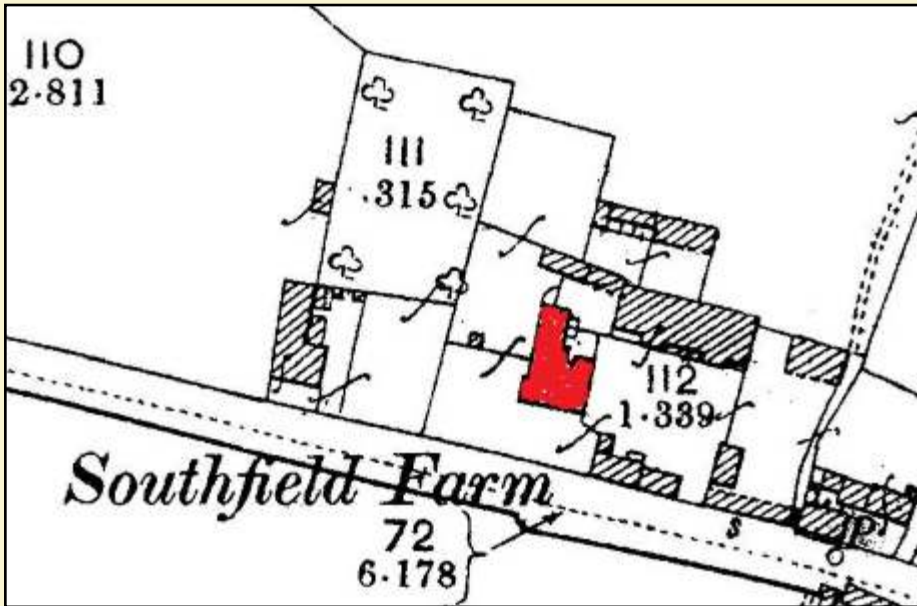
8. MANOR FARMHOUSE, South Side



THE FORMER FARMHOUSE IN THE CENTRE OF THE VILLAGE HIDES A COMPLICATED AND FASCINATING HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURAL CHANGE.



Manor Farmhouse sits on a sloping plot on the north of Southside. It is set back from the road and was once known as Southfield Farm (see 1900 OS map extract with farmhouse coloured red). The farm existed prior to Enclosure in 1767 and was owned by the Standards and Belchers. It had 8 hearths in 1662. It was later acquired by the Cottrell-Dormers of Rousham, and the name Manor Farm is said to be from this purchase. They sold it in 1896 to Joseph Kinch, whose descendants farmed it until the sale and conversion of the farm buildings for housing in 2005.



The farmhouse offers a striking early 18th century façade to the visitor; a degree of symmetry derives from a pair of elliptical panels – formerly windows – to each side of the first floor. But the doorway is off-centre to the left, and the fenestration either side was at the time of survey quite different. To the left there were two wide timber casements with timber lintels (through which the attic floors within can be clearly seen). On the right, four cross-windows in masonry light tall rooms. The whole is linked by a string-course which returns to the right gable (but not to the left).



At either end of the roof are ashlar stacks, one flue to the left, and two at an angle to the right. The roof is of Cotswold stone slates to the front (with some artificial replacements) with plain red tiles to the rear. There appear to be carved fox-like heads to the cast iron rain gutter.

To the east the structure can be seen to consist of two distinct ranges parallel to the road, with a long wing at right angles to the rear. In the re-entrant is a porch, and at the north end a two-storey extension, probably erected as a granary with poultry house below. There are openings for pigeons in the north gable.

In the street range is a further blocked elliptical window to the first floor, and a rectangular one below to the ground floor. There is also a small window to the basement (see photos below). The next range has modern windows and a brick stack. In the rear range one of the windows has been blocked in with brick. There is a pump outside the rear porch doorway.



The blocked ground-floor window.



The cellar window, possible evidence of C17th century origins.

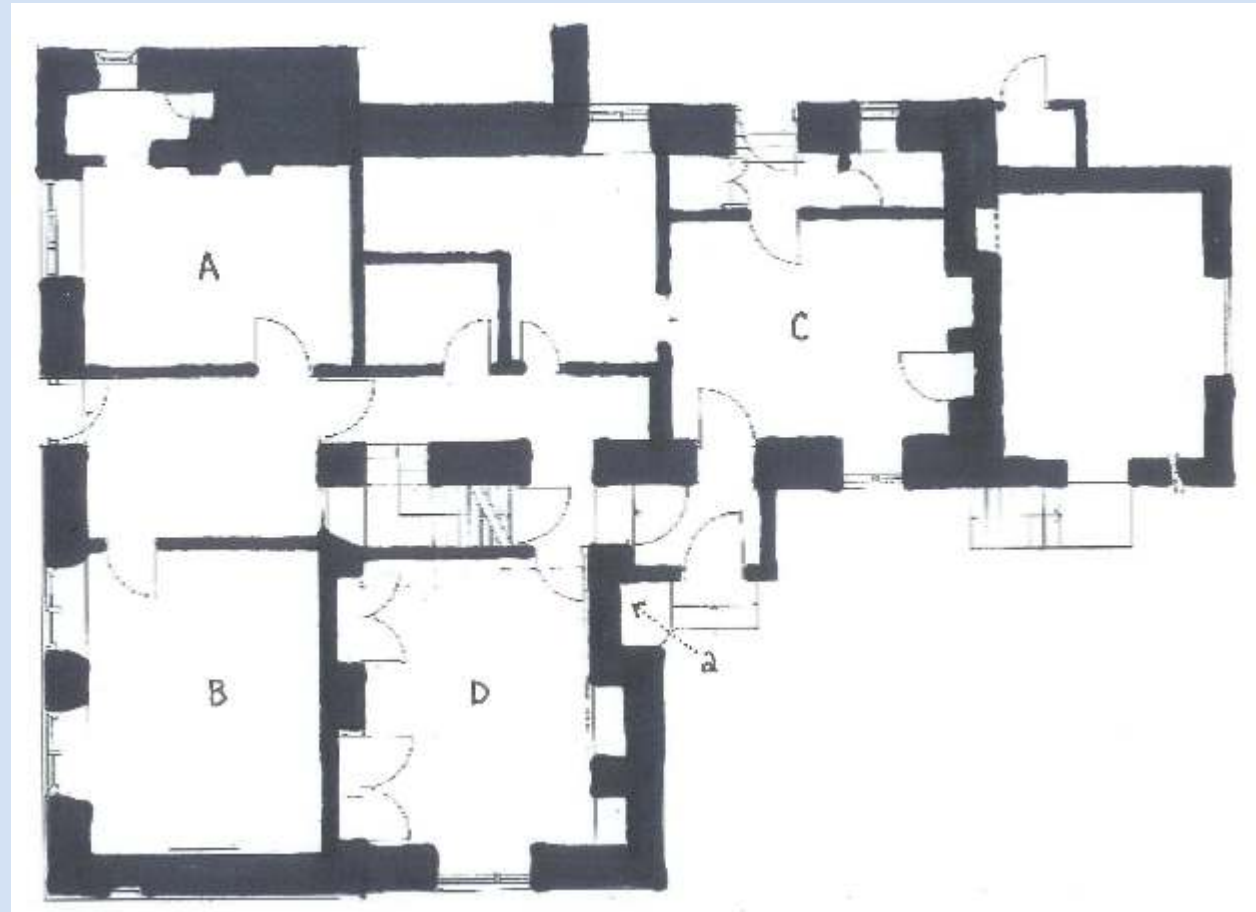


The re-entrant showing how Bay B masters the rear wing; note also the blocked first floor window.

Compare the photos above and below.



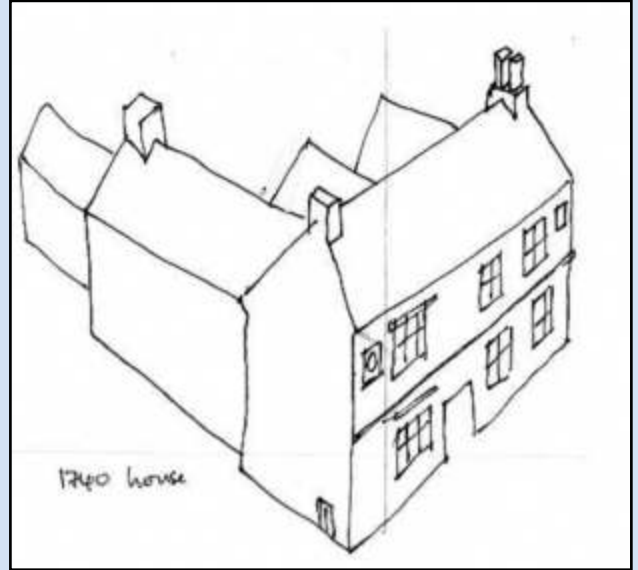
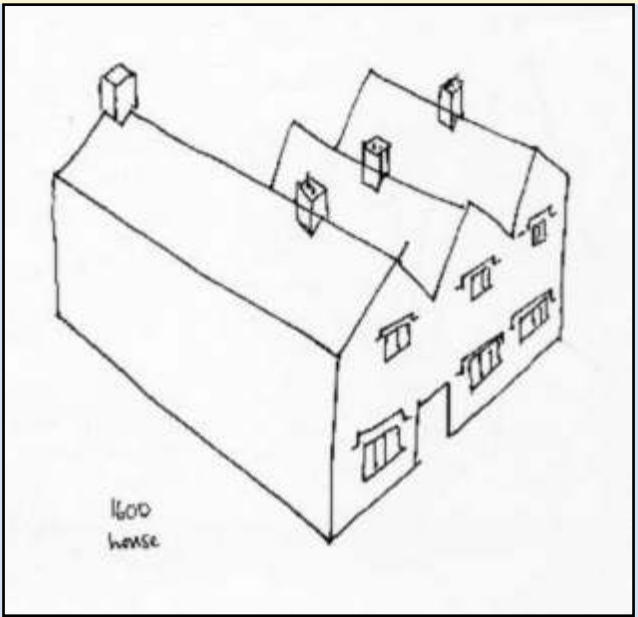
The replacement in 2007 of the timber casements and lintels in Bay A with masonry frames that match the ones in Bay B, has unfortunately removed the evidence that the bays have different origins.



The complexities of the exterior are also reflected inside. The ground plan (left) shows the main elements. The principal features which contribute to the developmental history and dating of the phases are as follows:

- The west wall of A is wrapped around the south end of C, creating a thick wall – with possibly a void inside.
- At ‘a’ is a stone mullioned window opening to the cellar.
- There is a straight-joint between B and D.
- The roof structure of C extends into that of A, and can be clearly seen within it. At least one bay appears to have been removed.
- The floor levels in A bear no relation to the façade or to those in B.
- There is a blocked window in the rear wall of B visible within the roof structure of D.

Apart from the porch and the granary building, the most recent structure is the range marked D, as it is butted up against the rear wall of the front range B, and partially obscures the blocked window at first floor level in C. However, the blocked mullion window to the cellar appears to be in situ, and suggests that D was built over a pre-existing cellar. As the staircase is within D, there must have been another way up to the first floor before this was built.



Most of D seems to be C19th in date. The roof gives the clue for the front range. Range C dictated the floor levels in A, but in B the ceilings are higher and unconstrained by another building. As for putting dates to the phases, the stone mullion window to the cellar has plain chamfers, and is thus ca.1600. The roof structure of the rear wing has some re-used timbers, but the two end trusses have cambered collars and could also be of ca.1600. They are pegged and the purlins are joined at the trusses with free tenons, very much a post-mediaeval technique. We can conclude that the north-south range C and the cellar under D are the earliest elements, then the front A and B, then D. A conjectural development history is shown in the sketches to the left.



The fireplace in Bay A has only recently been rediscovered.

One puzzle is where the original stairs were to range C. If the diagrams are correct, one of the rear wings could have contained a stair turret, but if these were demolished before D was built, the only place for a stair is adjacent to the fireplace in A (see photo below). Perhaps they remain intact within the wall?



A coved ceiling to one of the upper floor rooms is typical of Georgian improvements. This is the supporting structure viewed from the attic.



The string course on the frontage returns on the right gable end, but not on the left one.



In 1640, John Marten of Rousham left to his second son Edmund “all land closes pastures meadows houses whatsoever in Steeple Aston and Middle Aston”. According to Brookes (p 86), Edmund married Elizabeth Watson, of Thame, and lived here, presumably in the Manor farmhouse, which would seem to date from around this time. Edmund’s share of the manor lands eventually passed to John Marten Watson (1765-1828), and then to Charles Harris, and in 1837 Charles Cottrell-Dormer. But the land allocated to Watson at the Inclosure is all at the eastern end of the village. If the farmhouse went with the land, Harris would have inherited it, but perhaps Cottrell-Dormer wanted it for his own tenant farmers when he acquired the land, and so provided Harris with the land to build his new Manor House in Heyford Road.

1767 Enclosure: land including close around the farm was allocated to Lucy Buswell – but did she have the house as well? Brookes and Wing tell us nothing about this lady, or what happened to her.

Victorian occupiers of Manor Farm:

- 1841: Thomas Creek.
- 1851: James Hirons, 50, from Long Compton, farming 109 acres.
- 1861: Anthony Hirons, 48, (only 12 years younger, so probably James’ brother) farming 127 acres.
- 1871: Anthony Hirons, 59, acreage not given.
- 1881: Edward Henry King, 43, from Lower Heyford, farming 158 acres, employing 4 men & 1 boy.
- 1891: Edward H King, 57.
- 1896: Captain Cottrell Dormer sold the “Manor farm”, of 124 acres, to Joseph Kinch.



The Manor Farm barn in its heyday (photo of around 1900)

9. HILL HOUSE, Sixty-Foot



A ‘HANDSOME’ RESIDENCE ORIGINATING FROM AT LEAST THE MID C17th, THE OCCUPANTS HAVE INCLUDED A VICE-ADMIRAL, A RETIRED ARMY OFFICER, A VINEGAR MAGNATE, SEVERAL JUSTICES OF THE PEACE, A HIGH SHERIFF OF OXFORDSHIRE, AND A RACEHORSE TRAINER.



One of the “Big Houses” of Victorian Steeple Aston, our records suggest that there has been a building on the site from at least 1640. Altered and extended many times, its mix of architectural features together with an eclectic range of occupants over time makes Hill House an intriguing “work in progress” as we develop our understanding of the property.



Above: Hill House in the early 1900s.
Right top: aerial view of Steeple Aston from the west, with Hill House prominent in the foreground. Thought to date from 1930s.
Right: Hill House today: the “Entrance Range”.



Early history: Our first record of the land on which “Hill House” stands is from 1640 when a John Davyes, a butcher by trade, bought a “close”, an enclosed piece of land of about 1 acre. By 1691 his son had sold this land to Richard Hopcraft of Steeple Aston. We know from deeds that he had built a cottage on the site by 1693 with the help of a £10 mortgage. By 1732 the land had been sold again to a descendant of the original John Davyes, a John Davis III. (His older brother Thomas was at this time, owner of the Grange.) He soon began building a second cottage on the site, together with a malthouse which we first learn of in May 1734, when John mortgaged the properties for £100. The description reads:
“All that lately new erected Cottage or Tenement and also all that Cottage or Tenement then erecting & building with the Stable & Barn & Malthouse & all other Outhouses to the same...”

John died around 1769 and the estate was sold to Sir Hans Fowler Bart. We have no documentary evidence of the house at this time, but John Davis claims to have created a "Dwelling House". Identifying this is difficult, as the Hill House we see today is a collection of buildings of various styles and extensions. However, we can assume that by 1766 at least one of the “cottages” had been demolished, and the building John Davis left us was perhaps either the Georgian style range to the SW, or perhaps a similarly plain and now heavily modified Entrance range.

Hill House on the Enclosure map of 1767 (below) with two distinct buildings shown. Could the “Dwelling House” be the building orientated N-S, and the other cottage and Malthouse be that shown W-E?



Sir Hans Fowler had no time to benefit from his purchase as he died in 1771. It was offered for sale in 1771 (right) and intriguingly includes many references to its status: "A handsome Freehold *sashed* HOUSE" - sash windows being still something of an up-market element, particularly evident in the Georgian SW range.

AUGUST 10th, 1771

To be sold and entered upon immediately, A handsome Freehold sashed HOUSE, neatly furnished; consisting of two Parlours, four good [Bed?] Rooms, Garrets, Kitchens, Cellars, and all other Offices, with a Garden, a Spinney well planted, a large Court Coach Yard, Barn, Malt House. Dove House, good [Sta-] bling for twelve Horses, a Close with Timber thereon, [an] Orchard well planted &c. &c. The Whole con[taining] above 3 Acres of Land, all well fenced in with Str[ong] Walls; now in the Occupation of Lady Fowler; sit[uated] and being in the Parish of Steeple Aston, in the Co[unty] of Oxford, about half a mile from the Turnpike [Road] leading from Oxford to Banbury, and in a fine Spo[rting] Country.

N.B. The Mansion House &c. may be purchased [with] or without the Furniture; Also a Phaeton, a Post [Chaise] with Harness complete, and three Ricks of Hay to [boot?]

For further Particulars enquire at the House [for?] Mr John Walker; or Mr Holloway, Upholder in Ox[ford].

Late C18th/early C19th: Current views of the Georgian SW Range from back and front (right). Whilst we think this section was built by 1771 it might have originally been an annexe, with the “Mansion House” (Entrance Range) being a separate building to the front. More investigation work is needed.

In 1772 the estate was sold to Edward Taylor of Lincolns Inn. Taylor’s career as a lawyer and writer, and his devotion to his orphaned niece, Mary Locke, are well-documented in the SAVA booklet *Steeple Aston Village Personalities*, including the touching memorial Mary commissioned for the church when he died in December 1797. At the time of Mary’s marriage in 1798, an Indenture of Release was signed between William Mister (her betrothed) and Mary Locke "by her description of Mary Locke of *Hill House* in the Parish of Steeple Aston". This is the first mention we have of the name “Hill House”. However, the newlyweds soon sold Hill House to George Dashwood of Kirtlington.



It is likely that the building(s) were extended or at least “modernized” around this time by either Edward Taylor or the Lechmere’s, as suggested by the architecture of both the SW Range and the Entrance Range. In any case, the “Entrance Range” would have been much plainer than that now seen. The roofline was lower (evidenced by the addition of several courses of stonework) and the bay window was absent. It appears likely that these two ranges were not connected originally, and would have been separated by some form of courtyard. However, maps suggest that this had been filled in by 1881, and this may account for the “matching up” of the rooflines.

Right: Vice-Admiral William Lechmere.
Below: Trafalgar by R S Thomas. Possibly the one displayed at Hill House until the 1930s.



The Lechmeres: We believe that George Dashwood left Hill House in 1802 to his sister Elizabeth. Her husband was Vice-Admiral William Lechmere. Their daughter Georgiana Sarah, one of 10 children, was baptised in Steeple Aston in 1805. Shortly after this, Lechmere returned to sea, and was in command of HMS Thunderer under Admiral Calder in the naval battle off Cape Finisterre that July. However, Lechmere was recalled to London to give evidence at Calder’s court-martial for refusing to engage a superior French fleet the following day, and so missed the far more important Battle of Trafalgar. He died at Hill House aged 63 in 1815 and is buried in Worcestershire, near the family seat. The house was subsequently rented out until 1827 when William and Elizabeth’s son John Lechmere RN took possession on his mothers’ death.

John Lechmere became a leader in the public life of the community, and a magistrate, and gave an organ to the church. He is said to have commissioned a picture of the Battle of Trafalgar (previous page) by Lt Robert Strickland Thomas RN in honour of his father. John Lechmere’s wife, Anna Maria, continued to live at Hill House following her husband’s death in 1866, although the house itself was inherited by Caroline Amelia Ogle, sister of John Lechmere. The Ogles appear to have spent much of their time travelling, as the 1871 census shows Anna Maria as the head of the household, aged 91, with her much younger brother-in-law Arthur Ogle JP (65, Major, ret'd. and husband of Caroline Amelia Ogle) present but only as a "visitor". A butler and 4 female servants attended to their needs. Anna Maria Lechmere was finally laid to rest in Steeple Aston churchyard on 25 January 1878, just 2 months short of her 97th birthday.



Hill House in the Victorian Era: During this period the Ogles appear to have done much to create the Hill House we see today with the “garden range” (left) being added to the NW of the building. This is evidenced from the armorial panel dated 1879 (below left) which confirms that this part of the house was built for Major Arthur Ogle and his wife. It is likely that the “Entrance Range” was raised at this time to connect with the newer elements as well as having the bay window and other refinements added to the frontage. If so, this was the last significant work done to the exterior of the house.



This comparison (left) of Hill House over 4 plans gives an indication of how the property developed. Bearing in mind artistic licence, the early Victorian map suggests a building with a courtyard open at its southern end. This shape would support a theory that the “SW Range” and “Entrance Range” were separate and infilled later. The 1900 map shows “Garden Range” extensions, an Orangery or conservatory to the southern end of the entrance range, now gone, and the addition of the bay window to the front.

The Ogles: In 1880 Bertram Saville Ogle (1846-1930) inherited from his mother. Like his father he was a JP and barrister. He married Edith Somerset in 1885. Edith’s grandfather was Lord Somerset, one of his brothers being Lord Raglan of Crimea fame. We have found a collection of letters in the National Archives between the Ogles and their relatives the Oglanders, Boscawens and Randolphs. These letters give a wonderful insight into the lives of the “upper classes” in the late Victorian era. The young Joan Oglander, who was Bertram and Edith’s niece, appears to have spent much of her time at Hill House. Her mother Florence (Edith’s sister) was ill and confined to their home on the Isle of Wight. Some extracts from their letters follow :



The entrance hall

Edith Ogle, 29 December 1885, Hill House Steeple Aston, to her sister Florence Oglander: “We have had tremendous snow here and our poor trees and shrubs are terribly broken and goodness knows we could not well spare them. However, it has been brilliantly sunny all through and today is thawing a little, so Elijah and I got down to the station and we have spent the day in Oxford. The streets were in a filthy state as it was thawing there much more than it is here. It is curious to see the telegraph wires in festoons all along the line and the signals are permanently down as they won’t work. At Rousham they are tobogganing and sent the best tea tray floating down the Cherwell to the indignation of the housekeeper.”

Joan Oglander, aged 14, Hill House to her mother, Florence Oglander, I.O.W. 10 September 1898: “I am alone this evening, Aunt Edith has gone for a bike ride with Major Carlton and Miss Vincent. As they all ride



1890’s view showing cyclists at Hopcrofts Holt – could these be “Major Carlton”, “Miss Vincent”, “Aunt Edith” and their ladysmaid as described in Joan’s letter ?

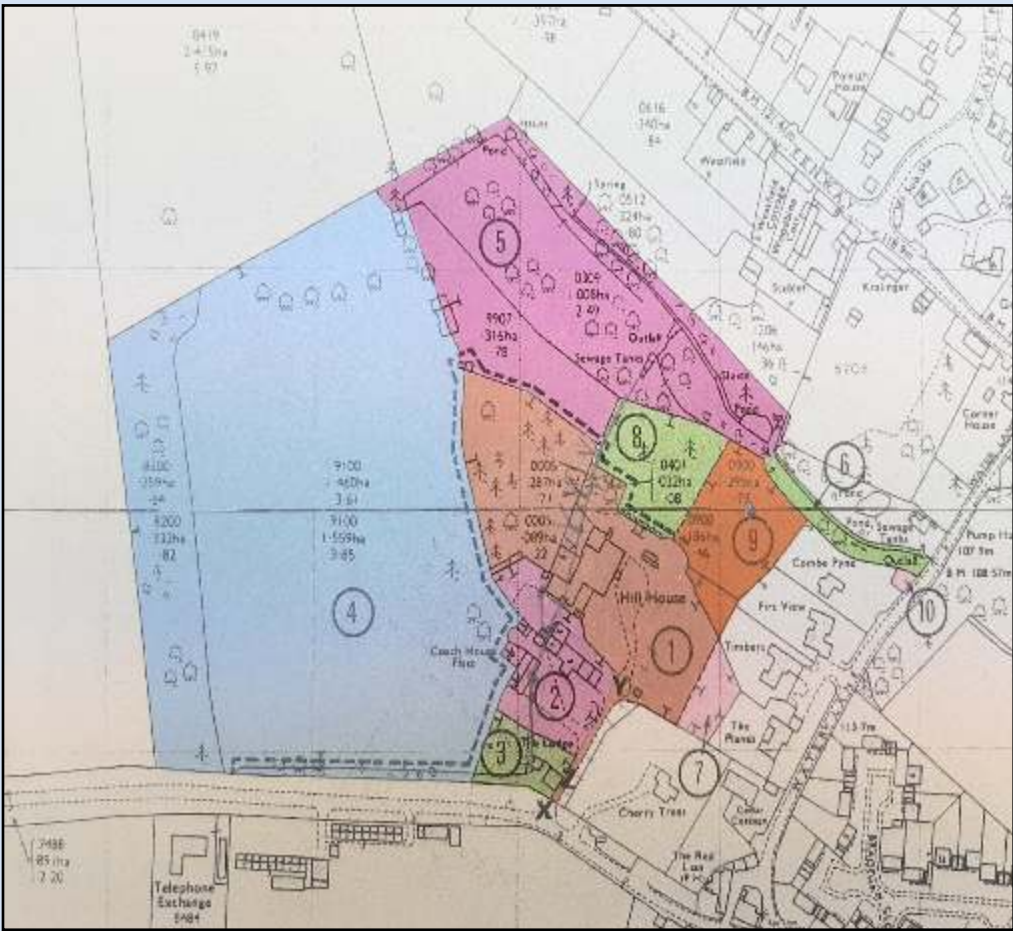
very fast, I thought I had better stay at home! Yesterday I drove Mrs. Carlton in her pony cart to Sandford (Sandford St Martin?) and back. She was so nervous, it was very funny, and the pony was very quiet. I must tell you about it when I come home. It was so horrid on Wednesday night. There was a fair in the village quite close to us - swing boats - merry go rounds - shooting at bottles etc. - and there was a most awful hurdy gurdy which did nothing but play from 7 o'clock till 11 o'clock - 'Two little girls in blue'. Aunt E. and I seriously thought we should go mad!” (This was the annual Flower Show held at the Grange)

Edith and Bertram Ogle had no children. When Edith died in 1928, the funeral in Steeple Aston was presided over by her cousin, John Granville Randolph, Dean of Salisbury.



Records after 1930 are few and far between, but there is nothing to suggest any significant changes were made to the buildings during this time. We do know that in 1932 the property was sold to Henry Beaufoy, a member of the Beaufoy’s Vinegar dynasty. Henry was the High Sheriff of Oxfordshire for 1944.

In the mid-1960s, Hill House was owned by Len Coville. Described as a farmer and bloodstock breeder, he gained his trainer's licence in 1961. Although he had a few winners in his own right, his most famous horse was the aptly named “Hill House” (photo right). Spotted by Ryan Price, another trainer who took Hill House to his stables in Sussex, Len Coville still had a 50% share in the horse when it controversially won the 1967 “Schweppes Gold Trophy”. Regarded as a “nightmare to train” but “extraordinary” by his jockey, Josh Gifford, the outsider won handsomely by 12 lengths. Wrongly accused of doping, it was 6 months before the horse and Ryan Price were cleared.



The break up of the Hill House estate: This sales plan from the 1976 brochure (left), shows Hill House as “Plot 1”, the Coach House as “Plot 2” and The Lodge as “Plot 3” with further plots 4 to 10 dividing up the gardens, fields and woodland. Hill House was subsequently converted into the 8 flats that exist today.

The Coach House has also subsequently been subdivided, with the western section forming “Mulberry House”.