

VILLAGE HISTORIES

Particulars and Conditions of Sale
OF VALUABLE
FREEHOLD PROPERTY,
SITUATE
AT STEEPLE-ASTON, OXFORDSHIRE,
To be Sold by Auction,
BY MR. J. CLEMENTS,
IN THE FOLLOWING LOTS,
AT THE RED LION INN,
On **MONDAY, the 4th day of May, 1840, at 2 o'clock in the Afternoon.**

Lot 1.—A very compact newly-erected
HUNTING BOX,
Comprising Entrance Hall, Dining and Breakfast Parlours, Drawing Room, 23 feet by 13 feet, Back Entrance Hall, Butler's Pantry, Housekeeper's Room and Servant's Hall, Four principal Sleeping Rooms, on the First Floor; Six Servant's Bed Rooms; an excellent Kitchen, Beer and Wine Cellars, Brew and Wash House, Force Pump, and Water Closet; Seven Marble Chimney Pieces in the different Rooms, and Beds being complete. Also a detached Coach House, Saddle Room, Stabling for 8 Horses with excellent Sleeping Rooms over, a Walled Stable Yard, and Large GARDEN about 1 1/2 Acres, together with a Piece of rich PASTURE LAND adjoining, Part of Great Dickarage, below the Road, about 2 Acres with 154 feet frontage to the House.
Steeple Aston is considered the most healthy and pleasant Village in the whole County, and within reach of three Packs of Fox Hounds.

Lot 2.
An excellent HOUSE and Premises,
With Bake-House, Stable, Yard, and large Garden, now in the occupation of Mr. Hall, Baker. Also a Blacksmith's Shop adjoining, in the occupation of Widow Plum.

NURSERY AND BUILDING GROUND.
Lot 3.—A Piece of LAND for Building Ground, opposite Mr. Hore's, butcher, 20 ft. in front, by 55 ft. 6 in. deep
Lot 4.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 3
Lot 5.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 4
Lot 6.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 5
Lot 7.—Ditto 41 ft. front, 212 ft. deep, adjoining Lot 6
Lot 8.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 7
Lot 9.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 8
Lot 10.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 9
Lot 11.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 10
Lot 12.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 11
Lot 13.—Twenty-eight feet Front by 66 feet deep: this Lot is opposite Mr. Hall's house, baker
Lot 14.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 13
Lot 15.—Thirty-two feet by 56 deep, adjoining Lot 14
Lot 16.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 15
Lot 17.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 16
Lot 18.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 17
Lot 19.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 18
Lot 20.—Ditto ditto, adjoining Lot 19
Lot 21.—A Piece of Nursery LAND opposite Lot 1, about an acre and a quarter
Lot 22.—A Piece of rich Pasture LAND in Great Dickarage, with 198 feet fronting the road to Lower Heyford, and down to the road crossing Great Dickarage, as stated in the Plan.

A Plan of the Estates may be seen by applying to Mr. C. HARRIS, of Steeple Aston, who will appoint a person to show the Lots any time prior to the Sale; and for further Particulars apply to Messrs. HALEY and OSMOND, Solicitors, or the Auctioneer, Bicester, Oxon.

A desirable property in 1840 in a healthy and pleasant village - where!

From its earliest days SAL published the recollections of a number of old or former inhabitants, and from time to time reproduced old documents that had come to light.

In SAL of February 1974, Victor and Sheila Side appealed for material for a Village Scrapbook. Talks on local topics, including village history, were organised from time to time. An Historical Society was formed in May 1985 and held meetings in the Red Lion and in The Grange, but was defunct by the time that SAVA - Steeple Aston Village Archive - was formed in 2000, with a storeroom scarcely bigger than a broom-cupboard at the back of the Village Hall. A more suitable Village History Centre was opened in September 2013.

Here are some of the nuggets from our village past which found their way into SAL over the years.

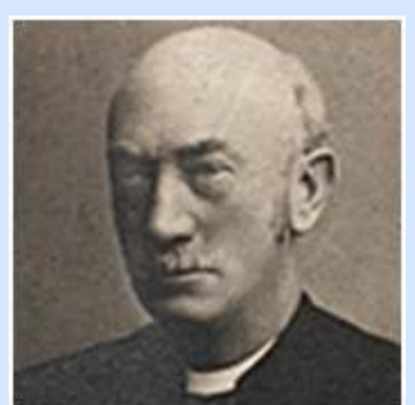


Harris, a London violin-maker, had inherited a 116-acre farm from his cousin, John Marten Watson, in 1828, but mortgaged himself way beyond his means in his efforts to erect an ambitious family home. In 1840 his creditors forced Harris to sell up.

Lot 1 is the New Manor House itself, built only four years earlier, but now marketed rather imaginatively as a hunting lodge. It was bought by a Bicester businessman, George Robert Stratton, and rented out to a succession of wealthy ladies, before becoming the headquarters of the Steeple Aston Co-operative Society. Oddly enough, the old photo of the Co-op (above) appeared on the front page of the same issue of SAL but without any indication that this connection had been made.

The other Lots involved most of the land in the vicinity either side of Heyford Road, which were subsequently developed. So this sale in May 1840 marked the starting-point for a radical transformation of this corner of Steeple Aston. Which still leaves us with a mystery: who gave SAL this poster, and where is it now? SAVA would love to know.

In June 1975, SAL printed some vivid recollections of Steeple Aston in the late Victorian period. They had been written, probably in the 1960s, by a son of the Rev. Abraham Spencer (photo, right), who was curate here under Rector J H Brookes from 1872 until 1887.



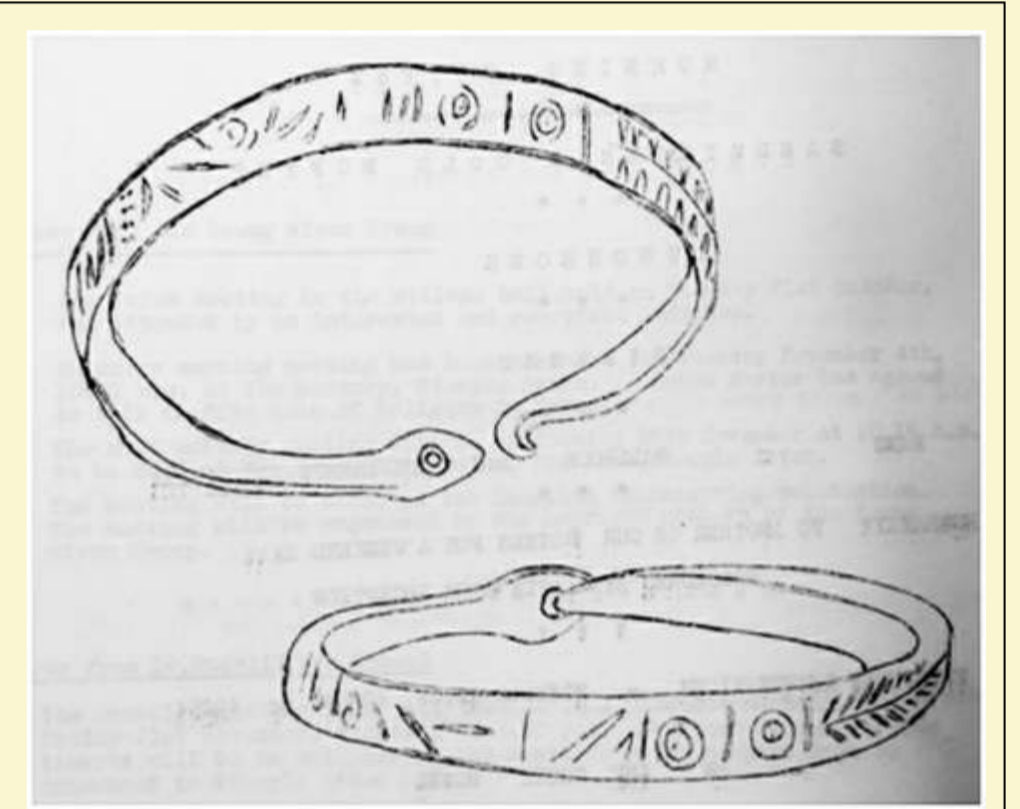
"John Rogers was the blacksmith at the forge opposite the Church near the Infant School [i.e. at Fir Cottage]. He succeeded his father [Robert], the wonderful blind blacksmith. My grandfather [William Wing] used to say that if a broken implement was brought to blind Rogers, he could pass his hands over it and say "yes I see" and would know at once how to make a job of it..."

"No recollections would be complete without some mention of Doctor Hemingway [at Paynes Hill House]. A capable doctor, he was well-known in the neighbourhood, and would often be encountered in his dog-cart many miles away, for his practice was extensive".



Steeple Aston's Roman Bracelets

A local history talk to the Young Wives Group in 1975 prompted Elaine Parry to visit the Ashmolean Museum with young Richard. They wanted to see for themselves the two bronze bracelets which had been found a hundred years earlier on the skeleton of a Romano-British woman as workmen prepared the site of the Infant School in Fir Lane. The museum assistants were keen to help but at first could not find the bracelets. Eventually they were traced via a reference in the *Victoria History of Oxfordshire*, and the Parrys not only saw the bracelets but returned with this drawing supplied by the museum which Elaine passed on to SAL. The actual bracelets were displayed in the village in 2003.



Living here in the 1870s and '80s the Spencer family witnessed an ancient and puzzling form of amateur dramatics: *"The young men used to get up as Mummer's on Christmas Eve. They visited the various big houses 'made up' with cloth masks, sacking and straw, and acted a sort of play which was very likely a garbled version of St George and the Dragon. It was an extraordinary production so stereotyped by tradition that it had become quite devoid of originality".*

This sounds remarkably like the Marshfield Mummer's (photo above from 1930s) who still act out a similar five-minute play on Boxing Day. It is acted at various points around their village near Bath, heralded by the Crier with his hand-bell. They wear costumes festooned with strips of newsprint and coloured paper, rather than "our" sacking and straw.

The Sale of Harris' New Manor House - May 1840

The poster on the left, which announces one of the most dramatic house sales in Steeple Aston history, was reproduced in SAL 140 years later - in the May 1980 edition. It appeared without comment, apart from the hand-written footnote you see. The answer to the question it poses is this: it relates to the New Manor House built by Charles Harris on South Side (Heyford Road end) which still bears his initials "CH 1836".

