

origins are unknown, also had some family connection with north Oxfordshire or south Northamptonshire – “Banburyshire” as its inhabitants like to call the region. (One of his best fiddle-making pupils, Samuel Gilkes, certainly had – he was born in 1787 in the south Northamptonshire village of Moreton Pinkney, and was taken there for burial in 1827 following his early death in London. Violin historians have suggested that Harris and Gilkes were related.)

Charles and Marian Harris had just the one son, Charles junior, born about 1791 and trained in his father’s trade; they were fine craftsmen, working in a fine tradition, and today their instruments fetch high prices, but at the time they were far from wealthy. Even though Watson’s Last Will and Testament naming Charles as his heir is dated 27 December 1827, Charles and Marian must have known for many years already that Watson was planning to make their boy his heir. He may even have invited the lad down to have a look around.

### **The move to Oxfordshire**

What is certain is that in his mid-20s, Charles Harris junior settled in Oxfordshire with a wife named Elizabeth. Their marriage (not so far traced) had probably taken place in London about 1815. Early in 1816 their first child, a son, was christened at Woodstock. He was given the name John Marten Watson Harris – a pretty clumsy hint unless Watson’s intentions were already known, but more likely part of some understanding or agreement already reached. Though the parish register does not record the fact, Watson probably stood as godfather to the little boy. The entry for 7 February 1816, slightly mis-spelt, simply reads:

Harris, John-Marten Watton, son of Charles, musical instrument maker,  
& Elizabeth.

The young family remained in Woodstock for about three years. This is shown both by local records and the inscriptions on various Harris instruments that have come on the market in recent years. Two more children, Mary Anne and Richard, were born in Woodstock between 1817 and 1819; three instruments made there have been logged from various sources including a viola helpfully labelled

*Charles Harris Junr/Woodstock/Oxon/1817.*

Some time around 1819 the Harris family settled in Adderbury, where Charles made more instruments and Elizabeth bore him more children – Sarah about 1821, Charles about 1822 and Elizabeth (c1825), although oddly their baptisms have not so far been found – the information comes