

Southside and closer to Watson's allocated land. However no documentary evidence has yet been found – the land behind Acacia Cottage is certainly labelled "Mr Watson" on the Enclosure Map, but it does not necessarily follow that he owned the buildings on the roadside.

In a slightly different context, the *VCH* offers a possible solution by remarking that when Steeple Aston was enclosed, no new farmhouses were initially needed:

The commissioners were able to set out a number of relatively compact farms with direct access from existing farmhouses.

But was that the case here? Both Brookes and the *VCH* may have been mistaken in searching for the Watson farmhouse among the buildings still visible in modern times. In the long history of the village the stock of houses must have been demolished and rebuilt over and over again.

Watson's will mentions a "house or cottage" in which he has recently been living, but provides no clue to its location. He clearly expects Harris to occupy the same house, because in a codicil he states: "My Italian pictures I give and bequeath to the said Charles Harris to remain in the same place they now are fixed". He also bequeaths to his housekeeper Ann Ell "my new stained bedstead with the furniture belonging thereto and a chest of ornaments in the small bedroom situate in the house or cottage at Steeple Aston marked with her name".

There are reasons for thinking that the old farmhouse of the Martens lay still closer to the lands eventually allocated to Jacob Watson, and inherited by Charles Harris. The evidence is to be found in the paperwork generated when Charles Harris's development schemes began to go sour. His projects were concentrated on the north side of the Heyford Road, along a short section between Paines Hill and the lane known as The Dickredge. Principal among them was of course the new Manor House or mansion which he built there for himself and his family. The house stands in an odd position some way along Heyford Road and set back from it on lower ground. It is partly obscured by the slightly later building which for much of its life accommodated the village shop, long known as Harris's Stores, but recently converted to residential use and re-named *The Old Manor House* (Fig 2).

The layout poses a question – why did Charles not build right on the corner, a prime site which would have stamped his authority more clearly on the neighbourhood? If we take a closer look at the Enclosure Map, the location of Harris's new Manor House begins to look less odd and more logical.