

1) The Old Farm House

Not long after settling in, on May 29 1830, Charles Harris raised a mortgage of £150 with Ann Shirley, wife of John Shirley, Gentleman, on a farmhouse and its land. The house and associated outbuildings are described as follows:

All that Messuage Tenement or Farm House with the Barns Stables Outbuildings Yards Gardens Orchards Backsides and appurtenances thereto belonging situate in Steeple Aston aforesaid and all new Erections and Buildings erected upon any part of the ground belonging to the said Messuage or Tenement and premises by the said John Marten Watson deceased and then in the possession of the said Charles Harris.

This description does not reappear in later documents, no doubt because the house itself disappeared in the course of rebuilding by Harris. The reference to new buildings already erected by John Marten Watson suggests that Watson had begun to make improvements to this property in his later years, perhaps in anticipation of the handover to Charles Harris. The land mortgaged with the farmhouse is described as follows:

... all that plot or parcel of Land situate in the Fields of Steeple Aston aforesaid containing by statute measure Ninety two acres three roods and three perches and which allotment has since been estimated to contain one hundred and fourteen acres (more or less) including the Roads and ways going through the same ~~allotment~~ allotted and awarded to Jacob Watson upon the Inclosure of the said Fields of Steeple Aston and bounded as therein mentioned and then in the occupation of Richard Prentice with the Appurtenances.

Between them, these two paragraphs describe in detail the house and land which Charles inherited from Jacob's son John Marten Watson, and show that the land remained the same, give or take a couple of acres. It is impossible to tell from the description how old the Watson farm-house was, but it is at least possible that it represented the ancient manor house of the Martens. Since they had migrated from Rousham, they might well have chosen to settle on this side of the village. Equally, the existence of a farmhouse at this point might well have influenced the allocation to the Watsons of the farm land to either side of it.

The farm became subject to several further mortgages over the next few years, as Harris ran into financial difficulties. In 1836 he also raised a separate loan of £260 from Weston Aplin of Chipping Norton, by mortgaging two adjacent properties which had only come into his control since his arrival in Steeple Aston.