

All that cottage or Tenement with the Hovels Gardens and Orchard thereto adjoining and belonging situate and being in Steeple Aston aforesaid commonly called or known by the name of the Blacksmiths lately belonging to the said John Marten Watson deceased and by him devised to the said Charles Harris ... and heretofore in the tenure of Elizabeth Plumb ... **Together with** such part of the Messuage or dwelling house or other buildings lately erected and built by him the said Charles Harris and now standing or being thereon or any part thereof

The last sentence suggests that Harris's new Manor House extended into part of this site, although the smithy evidently continued to operate for a while. The 1851 census shows Elizabeth Plumb, her blacksmith son Frederick, and her unmarried sister Mary Rogers, living just around the corner in Paines Hill, right next to the corner-shop.

The presence of these two properties at the western end of the Heyford Road site – both initially outside Harris's control – must have influenced his decision to build at its eastern end, away from the junction of the village streets. But why was his new house set back from the road, on lower ground, further reducing its prominence? Although there is no direct evidence, it seems likely that the position of the old Farm House played a part in determining this arrangement. Given the sharply sloping site, it probably stood alongside the road, like other old houses in the village (for instance Grange Cottage in Southside). If so, and Charles needed it to accommodate his family while building went on, he had little option but to place his new mansion *behind* the existing house. The view from the east shows that there was (and is) just room for a house in front the same depth as the shop building next door. Charles gained just enough space for a short unimpressive drive in front of his new home (Fig 5, page 84).

Watson's other bequests

To appreciate the position Charles Harris found himself in, we need to look at the other bequests in John Marten Watson's Will, supplemented where possible from other sources, and try to establish what other properties Harris did, or did not, inherit from his mother's cousin. Firm evidence for only two has come to light so far, in the form of entries in an isolated Rate Book for 1837. This shows that rates were paid on just three properties belonging to Charles Harris, including his new mansion:

<i>Occupier</i>	<i>Owner</i>	<i>Property</i>
Charles Harris	himself	house buildings & land
Stephen Belcher	Charles Harris	cottage & hovel
William Gilkes	Charles Harris	cottage