

closely enough – by my reckoning she was actually 70). She had presumably moved to Steeple Aston after losing her husband. His own death has not been found, but probably took place in London some time between 1820 and 1830. Add to this a couple of live-in servants – they had only one in 1841, when their finances were more precarious, 19-year-old Mary Martin – and it becomes easy to imagine that the Harris family needed more accommodation than the old Farm House (Watson’s “House or Cottage”) could provide.

The double-pile building was completed, at least externally, in 1836, the date displayed below Harris’s initials CH on its façade:



Figs 7 and 8: Charles Harris’s new Manor House, with the plaque on its front bearing his initials and the date 1836.

Though contemporary documents refer to it as a “mansion” or manor house, its four-square appearance is oddly institutional (it has been likened to a workhouse, or even a factory). No details of the actual building-work have come to light so far, but its progress can be followed through Charles Harris’s growing debts as he tried to keep pace with his builders’ invoices:

<i>date</i>	<i>details</i>	<i>total debt</i>
May 1830	farmhouse and land mortgaged to Ann Shirley for £150	£150
October 1832	Shirley mortgage transferred to William Borton of Fewcott and increased by £350	£500
February 1834	mortgage with Borton increased by £300	£800
November 1834	another £350 borrowed from Borton	£1150
July 1836	another £650 borrowed from Borton	£1800
October 1836	Blizzard’s Cottage and Blacksmith’s mortgaged to Weston Aplin of Chipping Norton for £160	£1960