

uncle, William IV – when the two men met to sign a formal “Contract or Agreement”. This paved the way for the Act of Parliament, passed in the first year of Victoria’s reign. Among other things it required the assent of Harris’s Dew cousins to renounce for ever any residual claim they might have had on Harris’s estate. In December 1839 the entire estate was sold to Cottrell Dormer, who was required to safeguard the £5,800 purchase money by lodging it with the Bank of England “with the privity and consent of the Accountant General of the High Court of Chancery”. Local trustees were also appointed. The process was concluded on 1 February 1840, when the new Manor House and other properties were conveyed back to Harris for £300. Both transfers were effected by the cumbersome two-day process of Lease and Release, shortly to be replaced by Conveyancing as we know it, and much of the detail in this article comes from the 1840 Deed of Release.

Among other things, it reveals one important difference between the Private Act and Cottrell Dormer’s earlier Agreement with Harris. The Act specifically excluded the manorial rights and privileges, but they had been included in the Agreement, and Cottrell Dormer appears to have insisted on this part of the bargain. His immediate forebears had already acquired the rights (such as they were) to the other three manorial divisions, in 1706, 1739 and 1806 (see Brookes pp.82-3); he now became not only a prominent landowner in Steeple Aston, but also the first lord of the whole manor since the reign of Henry VII.

The 1840 Deed also gives us an update on the state of play regarding the buildings and land abutting Heyford Road. In place of Blizzard’s Cottage we have a “Messuage or Tenement ... late in the occupation of Charles Harris and now of Edward Hall”. Hall was a baker, and this seems to be the first reference to the building that replaced the cottage Harris had acquired in 1835 and then demolished. Next we have “all that other newly erected Messuage of Tenement ... adjoining to the last mentioned Messuage in Steeple Aston aforesaid at present unoccupied”. This seems to be the new mansion, fully built but apparently still not fit for habitation, which leaves a puzzle – where were the Harris family living at this point? Finally, separated from the rest, we have “all that Blacksmith’s Shop and premises near to the said premises hereinbefore described now in the occupation of [blank] and which is also further delineated in the said plan and coloured blue”.

As far as the land is concerned, it reveals that Harris’s estate had been reduced from 116 acres to just seven. He still had two pieces behind the