

buildings – Little Dickeridge, the close (one acre three roods and thirty perches) nearest to Paines Hill, earlier probably the garden and orchard that went with Blizzard’s Cottage – and part of the Great Dickeridge which adjoins it to the east, a section now fenced off and given the new name of Middle Dickeridge. This was still pasture-land, but perhaps envisaged as the garden of the new mansion, and amounted to two acres and thirty-two perches (both measurements include the sites of the buildings). Harris also had a “piece of Nursery Ground lying across the road in front of the said newly erected Messuage (and which was heretofore part of the Deans)”, which measured two acres three roods and eighteen perches. This appears to be the site of the future “Harrisville”, a street of modest cottages opposite the end of Paines Hill erected in Harris’s lifetime, since they appear in the 1851 census.

Another mortgage

Despite the lifeline thrown him by Cottrell Dormer, Harris was not out of the woods: within a month, on 11 February 1840, he had raised a new loan of £1,200, by mortgaging all the above properties to a Mrs Ann Osmond, an Oxford widow – with power of immediate sale if he failed to keep up his repayments. But it soon becomes clear that Harris was out of his depth. Two months later, on 7 April 1840, he signed an agreement to sell the remaining estate, subject to the existing mortgages, either to or through three local businessmen, George Wakelin, a Bicester plumber and glazier, Alexander John Scott, an Oxford hatter, and James Wickens, an Oxford wine and spirit merchant. This seems to have been merely an agreement in principle, and was not immediately acted upon.

We learn two other details from this April deed – first that Harris himself has retreated to Oxford: he is introduced as

“Charles Harris late of Steeple Aston ... but now of No 1 Broad Street in the City of Oxford, Musical Instrument maker”

– second that he has been negotiating to buy an estate at Chetwode, Bucks., from one Henry Wyatt of Barnstaple, Devon. This was presumably intended as a substitute estate for his son and heir, John Marten Watson Harris, something Harris was obliged to find under the terms of the 1837 Private Act of Parliament. The Chetwode estate evidently fell through, but as will be seen below, Harris did eventually manage to acquire one at Charlton, Northants.

Over the next few months the Mansion must finally have been made ready for the family to move in, because the census taken on 7 June 1841 (by William Wing, as it happens) appears to show all of them in