

Private Act of Parliament. He seems to have spent much of his earlier life in and around Steeple Aston. The 1841 census places him first, as the apparent head of the family at the new manor-house, describing him as a farmer aged 25. (Charles himself is listed second, and described as “independent”). William Wing identified both Charles and John as former managers of the “Manor farm, now dismembered and absorbed into other holdings”, so it appears that Cottrell Dormer kept John on as tenant for a while after buying the farmland in 1840.

John was supposed to carry the hopes and ambitions of the family’s benefactor, but seems to have been dogged by bad luck from the start. He was married in 1840 to Jane Mary Hore, daughter of a farmer, Thomas Hore. But Jane died less than a year later, aged only 33, and was buried at Steeple Aston. In 1844, the young widower was married again, this time to Sophia Hollis, daughter of another farmer, Edward Hollis. (He must have been related to William Hollis, tenant of the Rectory farm, who witnessed the marriage.) A year later, Sophia presented him with a son. He was christened at Steeple Aston on 28 September 1845, and named John Marten Watson Harris like his father. A daughter, Fanny, followed two years later in July 1847.



*Fig 9. Holly House, Charlton, undergoing extensive refurbishment, 2009.*

Some time during these years his father Charles, or the trustees appointed for the purpose, purchased the estate to which he was entitled under the 1837 Private Act of Parliament. Thanks to the researches of the Charlton and Newbottle History Society we know that his land lay to the south-west of the village. It was farmed from Holly House, tucked