

away down a side road, Drury Lane, a house with “an elegant Georgian façade facing the open countryside” (Fig 8, page 19)). Both the land and the house had previously belonged to one Richard Gilkes, whose initials with the date 1790 appear on the guttering.

John Marten Watson Harris is listed in the 1851 census as a farmer of 140 acres, but bad luck continued to pursue him, and he died two years later, aged only 38. His widow and children continued to live there until the 1870s – his son, the younger John Marten Watson Harris, described himself as a landed proprietor but apparently rented his fields to other farmers.⁷ Like his grandfather, he came to the attention of the Chancery Division of the High Court,⁸ between 1852 and 1855 and again after 1859; the papers remain to be examined; but their subject-matter sounds ominously familiar.

Death of Charles Harris

Charles Harris himself lived on until July 1851, when he died at the Oxford Infirmary. His body was brought back to Steeple Aston for burial on 7 July, although no headstone marks his grave. Little is known of his final years, which cannot have brought him much joy. Despite describing himself variously as a farmer and a gentleman, he had never completely abandoned violin-making, as the inscriptions on some of his later instruments show, although relatively few from this period have surfaced in recent years. His move to Broad Street, Oxford, in 1840, and his description of himself then as a musical instrument maker, may have marked an attempt to return to what he did best, following his failure as a farmer. He evidently encouraged his second son, Richard, to take up the craft. The 1851 census shows Richard – described as a musical instrument maker – sharing a cottage on South Side with his sister Elizabeth, the only Harris children still in the village. Richard later moved to “Old Tom’s” in Northside where he continued making violins, married his landlady Martha Spittle, and ended up as a corn and hay merchant. The shop built by Wall and Louch on the corner of Paines Hill eventually became “Harris Stores” in the hands of Richard’s son, John Watson Harris.

⁷ *Charlton and Newbottle, The History of Two Villages*, Charlton and Newbottle History Society, 2000, pp 69, 71.

⁸ National Archives. C17/2, dating from between 1852 and 1855, catalogued “In the Matter of the Estate of John Marten Watson Harris, an infant”; and C30/1480, simply labelled “Re John Marten Watson Harris” from a series described as “Receivers’ Accounts covering dates 1859-1901”.