

# Fern House – Manor Lane – Shrivenham

A Farm House (also known as Fern Cottage)

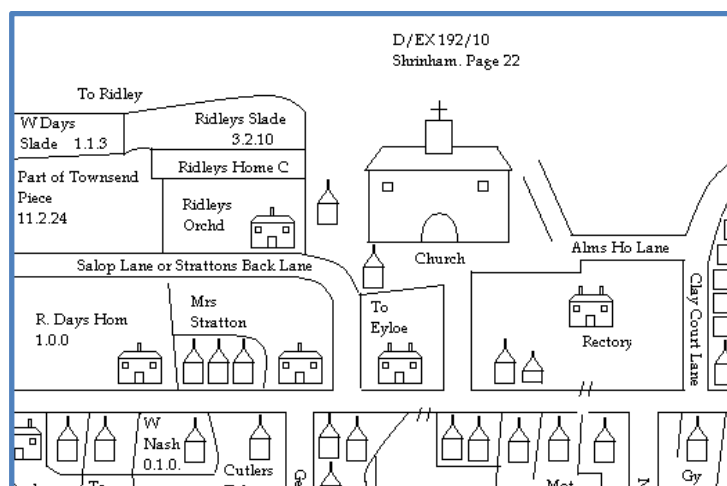
A general history – By Neil B. Maw



There are several families in the history of Shrivenham that are considered to be of significant importance, mainly so by the amount of land and property they owned; that in turn translated to how wealthy they were. The Strattons were certainly one of the larger families and it is to them that we start our history of the house that is known today as Fern House. It is not known what it was called historically by former owners or occupiers. What must be emphasised at the outset, is that it was built primarily as a Farmhouse. The whole area that is now occupied by Fern House and the school, including the play area, and the four cottages in Dodds Lane, were all part of a single farm and yard. When we look at its location, centre of the village, it may be difficult to comprehend this fact today, but even just 200 years ago, the village was nothing more than a small agricultural settlement. To emphasise the fact of it being a farmhouse and yard, the extract from the Barrington Estate map of 1815 below, shows exactly that, and the outline has been drawn on the modern aerial photo.



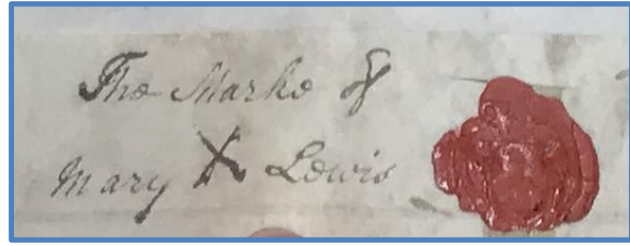
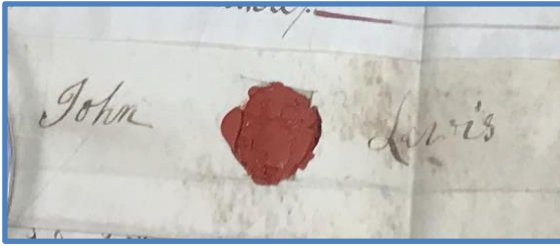
Two trails of documentary evidence have been used to confirm that the farm to which we are referring was in the hands of the Stratton family. The first reference is to the Quarto Survey Book of Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell of Coleshill, that may be found at the Berkshire County Archives (D/EX 192/10). The book consists of a series of simple, line drawn maps dating from 1730 - 1753. The whole purpose of the maps is unclear other than to assume they were about rents and tythes. By studying a copy of one of the maps below, it is clear to see that in the middle of the 18th century the ground that contains Fern House and the school today, belonged to Mrs Stratton. Secondly, we refer to the documents that are held by the Bath and North East Somerset Archives at the City of Bath, called the R.S. Neale collection, reference heading 0473/2. These are a remarkable series of deeds and papers concerning Shrivvenham. The connection between Shrivvenham and R.S Neale is not yet known. Mrs Penny Mann who had been tracing her ancestry, contacted Shrivvenham Heritage Society about the Canfield family. We were able to help to some degree but the location of the house known to have been owned by William Canfield was elusive. Penny discovered the collection at Bath and compared them with modern land registry documents and statutory declarations that had been made in 1965, concerning a house in Manor Lane known as Fern Cottage. It was plainly evident from the modern plans when compared to some of the indentures within the R.S. Neale collection, that it was one and the same property.



Document number 0473/2/20 is the 'Lease' part of a 'Lease & Release,' dated 28th June 1765. This was a common form of conveyance of the period. The people concerned in the transaction are John Lewis of Wantage, a Glazier and Mary his wife on the one part, and Thomas Mill of Shrivenham, a Woolstapler on the second part. The important wording for ownership comes when it includes: *'which premises and messuages, house, garden and yard used to belong to a certain farm and lands formerly the inheritance of Thomas Stratton of Shrivenham, gent, deceased, and since of William Stratton, gent, his nephew, also deceased, and afterwards descended to and vested in Mary the wife of William Liddiard of the City of London, Draper, who were daughters and co-heirs of William Stratton.'*

The Stratton family ancestral line is large and complicated and it is not the intention here to try and make sense of it. The above-mentioned indenture informed us that a Thomas Stratton owned the farm and we can only say here that it is likely that it was the Thomas Stratton who died in 1703 and features on the Benefactions Board in St Andrew's Church and numbered 507 in the Records Book. We have a copy of his Will (PROB 11/496/74), and whereas it doesn't go into detail of the property at Shrivenham, a nephew William, features regularly in it as a beneficiary. Another important sentence in the indenture is that: *'William Liddiard afterwards sold and conveyed the messuage or house, garden, etc to John Lewis.'* This then, provides the line of ownership from 1703. The DofE listing suggests that Fern House was built in the early 18th century, so this would suggest that William Stratton was responsible for having it built. We know from the memories of Bill Knapp (SHS N661), there stood on the site previous to the school, a six gabled house, and we know from the memoires of Augusta Barrington that it was called, *'Courtney Cottage.'* (SHS N887 Page 23). Could this have been the earlier Stratton residence ? It should also be mentioned here that Indenture No. 0473/2/22, dated 12th August 1766, deals with a grant of access between neighbour John Wirdnam and Thomas Mill, and it was that access that seemed to cause legal problems even two centuries later (See SHS N890 for details).





John Lewis could write but his wife Mary could not.  
From Indenture 0473/2/20

Another document from Bath dated 18th April 1770, provided the information that Thomas Mill of Shrivenham, a Woolstapler, made a formal agreement to marry Sarah Taylor of Chalford Hill, Glos. (0473/2/25). We assume they married soon after but alas, Thomas died and was buried in Shrivenham churchyard on 25th June 1775. Sarah re-married on 6th February 1785 to Richard Burton. We don't know if Sarah Burton was still living at Fern House at this time with her new husband, but unusually, she seems to have kept control of the ownership when in 1797 she advertised the property as to let. But she wasn't successful and the following year put the premises up for auction at the Barrington Arms. The highest bidder at the auction was Thomas Bennett who purchased the property for £380.

**TO BE LETT,**  
**A** Very desirable DWELLING HOUSE,  
adapted for the Residence of a large Family, with  
Stabling, Coach House, and other convenient Out Build-  
ings; a pleasant Shrubbery and Garden well stocked with  
Fruit Trees, situate in the Village of Shrivenham, in the  
County of Berks. The Situation is extremely eligible for  
a School. Immediate Possession will be given.  
For Particulars apply to Mrs. Burton, Faringdon, Berks.

Oxford Journal 14th October 1797

SHRIVENHAM, BERKS.  
**To be SOLD by AUCTION,**  
 By W. SMITH,  
 At the Barrington Arms, at Shrivenham, on Thursday next the 14th of June Instant, at Three o'Clock in the Afternoon,—A very desirable FREEHOLD Residence, situate at Shrivenham, with Immediate Possession; comprising a genteel substantial Dwelling House, containing six Rooms on the Ground Floor, and a proportionate Number of Bed Chambers; with Stable, Coach House, and very spacious new-erected Out-Buildings; Shrubby and Kitchen Garden, well stocked with Fruit Trees, late in the Occupation of Mrs. Burton. The Situation is pleasant and eligible, in a good Neighbourhood, a sporting Country abounding with Game, and the Roads good.  
 Shrivenham is a neat Village, where a Pack of Hatters is kept, through which a Coach passes three Times a Week from Oxford to Bath, and is distant from the former Place twenty-one Miles, from Faringdon five, and from Swindon six.  
 To be viewed by applying to Mr. Fuce, Blacksmith, of Shrivenham.—Further Particulars may be had of Mr. W. Ward, jun. Attorney, Faringdon.

Oxford Journal 9th June 1798

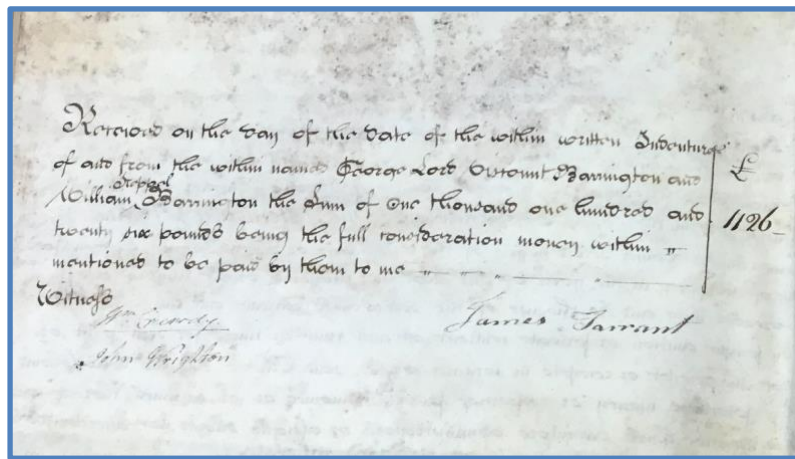
Received the day of the date of the within written Indenture of the certain named Thomas Bennett the sum of one hundred and ninety pounds being the consideration money  
 Witness  
 By me  
 Sarah Miller  
 Received the day of the date of the within written Indenture of the certain named Thomas Bennett the sum of one hundred and ninety pounds being the consideration money  
 Witness  
 By me  
 William Taylor Miller

Signatures and payment of the purchase of Fern House in 1798 by Thomas Bennett

Within a few years, Thomas Bennett was to sell the property to a local who was obviously a successful businessman. To buy the kind of property that was Fern House, required serious money. Most of the owners that we've covered so far were eventually classed as, 'Gentlemen,' in that they did not need to work in order to be able to live a comfortable life. Thomas Bennett was in that category, and although the next purchaser, William Canfield, was a Butcher, he was well on his way to becoming a gentleman. It is something of a mystery

where he came from. We know he married Bet Belcher Penstone from Stanford-in-the-Vale in 1790 and he was noted in the Barrington Disbursement Book as supplying beef to the Estate. In later years he expanded his business to be a Linen Draper. His Will provided the names of his children, Ann, Elizabeth, William, Mary, Henry, Sarah, George & Maria. It was George who would grow up to be the landlord of the Barrington Arms in 1835, and it was he who built the Victoria Hotel at Shrivenham Station in 1842, just one year after the station opened. William Canfield's name appears regularly in the letters of George Merryweather, Steward of the Beckett Estate 1815-1821, recently published by Shrivenham Heritage Society (SHS N1549). In letter number 13, dated 17<sup>th</sup> November 1815, George Merryweather described that William Canfield sent for him when he was on his death bed, and asked him if he would allow his daughters to remain in the house that he rented from the estate. George Merryweather assured him this would be so, provided they paid the same rent as was paid at that time. William Canfield wanted Fern House, the house he owned, to be sold and the money divided among all his children. He died shortly after that meeting.

There was much discussion between George Merryweather and his boss, George Lord Viscount Barrington (5<sup>th</sup>), who was the Vicar of Sedgefield, Durham. At first Merryweather tried to dissuade Lord Barrington and his eldest son, William Keppel Barrington, from purchasing the house that was constantly referred to as, '*the house late Canfield.*' He cited that he and Edward Berens, the Vicar, had examined the house carefully, and discovered that it was in a poor state of repair. But once he realised that his boss and heir were determined to buy it, he placed his full weight behind the transaction. Even though the agreement to buy the house had taken place in early 1816 it was another year before the paperwork followed. The indenture 0473/2/39 dated 29<sup>th</sup> April 1817, set out the sale of the house, stables, outbuildings and also included 3 acres 2 roods, of Glebe Land that was located at the West End of Shrivenham, (Bowles Club/allotments today) and a Pew or Seat in Shrivenham Parish Church that was appointed to the house. The whole purchase price was £1126.



James Tarrant, the Executor of William Canfield's Will, sold Fern House and his Estate to Lord Barrington and his son and heir William Keppel, for £1126

We can only assume that Lord Barrington's intention was for the occasional use of the house for when he or his family visited Shrivenham. Elizabeth Lady Viscountess Barrington took quite an interest in the decoration of the house and would send regular instructions to George Merryweather. In letter No 30 dated 10th May 1816, of the beds, Merryweather was most desirous to know, '*but does my Lady mean the mattresses to be of straw, flocks or hair and of flecks whether white or coloured flocks? I cannot receive instructions on this point too soon.*'

We have no further information from George Merrweather as he left the Beckett Estate in April 1821. The new Estate Steward was Robert Dawson up to 1825, and then his brother Joseph took over the post until his death in 1832. Two advertisements appeared in the newspapers in 1825 and 1827, offering the house to let, and both invited applications to Mr Dawson.

From the Tithe Survey of 1844 we learn that the premises that is Fern House was occupied by John Badcock. The census for 1841 listed a John Badcock as a Grocer and there are six others living with him, including 60year old Charlotte Wrighton who was John Badcock's mother. This lady is listed as, '*Independent,*' meaning she had money to live off and we know that she owned property in Shrivenham, such as the Bakery in Church Lane just around the corner, opposite the present-day Elm Tree Surgery. (SHS N1025). We also have evidence that Fern House included a shop in the 19th century, and it is quite possible that this is when it happened. But it was rented as it still belonged to the Barrington Estate.



Badcock	John	Grocer	20
Badcock	William	Same household as John	19
Badcock	Thirsa	Same household as John	15
Lea	William	Same household as John Badcock	20
Habgood	Thomas	Same household as John Badcock	15
Waighton	Charlotte	Independant. In Badcock household	60
Rix	Sarah	Servant with the Badcock household	25

If we jump forward to the Barrington Estate Map for 1866, it is clear that the occupier is Samuel Lamb. The map below also shows just how much things have changed since the days of the Stratton Farm in the 18th century.



Barrington Estate Map of 1866. No 75 = Owner Lord Barrington. Occupier = Samuel Lamb

If we go back to the census of 1851, it showed that John Badcock had left and Samuel Lamb had taken over and he too is described as a Grocer. The census for 1861 showed that Samuel had added Drapery to his business and his household had grown in number considerably. The property was also noted as being the official Post Office, but that would move in 1866 to the high street. (SHS N2553).

**Record Transcription:**  
 1861 England, Wales & Scotland Census  
 Post Office, Shrivenham, Faringdon, Berkshire & Oxfordshire, England  
[Learn about this record set](#)

**Household Members** ⓘ

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
Samuel	Lamb	Head	Married	Male	41	1820	Draper & Grocer	Swindon, Wiltshire, England
Caroline	Lamb	Wife	Married	Female	35	1826	-	Cricklade, Wiltshire, England
John	Lamb	Son	-	Male	2	1859	-	Shrivenham, Berkshire, England
Thomas	Lamb	Son	-	Male	0	1861	-	Shrivenham, Berkshire, England
George	Austin	Apprentice	Unmarried	Male	19	1842	Draper & Grocer Apprentice	Reading, Berkshire, England
Mary	New	Servant	Unmarried	Female	16	1845	Nurse Maid	Shrivenham, Berkshire, England
Ann	Stallard	Servant	Unmarried	Female	19	1842	General Servant	Bourton, Berkshire, England
Louisa	Lamb	Visitor	Unmarried	Female	37	1824	Independent	Cricklade, Wiltshire, England

**Household Members** ⓘ

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
Samuel	Lamb	Head	-	Male	47	1824	-	Wiltshire, England
Caroline	Lamb	Wife	-	Female	45	1826	-	Wiltshire, England
John	Lamb	Son	-	Male	12	1859	-	Berkshire, England
Thomas	Lamb	Son	-	Male	10	1861	-	Berkshire, England
Henry	Gibbs	Servant	-	Male	21	1850	-	Suffolk, England
Charles	de Laurry	Servant	-	Male	14	1857	-	Berkshire, England
Caroline	Toombs	Servant	-	Female	16	1855	-	Gloucestershire, England

Census of 1871

**Record Transcription:**  
 1881 England, Wales & Scotland Census  
 ?, Shrivenham, Faringdon, Berkshire & Oxfordshire, England  
[Learn about this record set](#)

**Household Members** ⓘ

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
Samuel	Lamb	Head	Married	Male	63	1818	Draper Etc	Swindon, Wiltshire, England
Caroline	Lamb	Wife	Married	Female	57	1824	-	Cricklade, Wiltshire, England
Agnes	Powell	Servant	Single	Female	14	1867	Dom Serv	Stratton, Wiltshire, England

We can see above the long tenure of Samuel Lamb in Fern House, but we don't see such consistency in the recording of his age, a continual problem on census' of this period. We know that Samuel Lamb was still in Shrivenham in 1885 when he acted as the Executor for the Will of local builder James Birchall who died on 24th November 1884. (See SHS N230 for more details). He was required to place an advertisement in the local paper in order to complete the

distribution of the estate. (Faringdon Adver 21st March 1885). But he moved away from the area two years later and died at Bromley in Kent on 8th August 1887, aged 71, after 37 years in Shrivenham. (Berks Chron 13th August 1887).

Partridge	Elizabeth	55	Today - Fern House. Old Post Office. Grocer & Draper
Honeybone	Ann	58	Living on own means. Widow
Honeybone	Sarah A	25	Teacher in Elementary School. Daughter of Ann
Cocks	Mary A	23	Teacher in Elementary School. Boarder with Ann Honeybone
Johnson	Eliza	33	Dressmaker. Boarder with Ann Honeybone

The census for 1891 listed Elizabeth Partridge on her own, and the property is listed above as the, 'Old Post Office,' and that she is a, 'Grocer and Draper.' It's likely that she was not alone in the large premises that is Fern House, and although Ann Honeybone was listed as a separate household, she may have been the tenant of the cottage there and was assisting with the shop.

**Record Transcription:**  
 1901 England, Wales & Scotland Census  
 Grocers Shop, Shrivenham, Faringdon, Berkshire & Oxfordshire, England  
[Learn about this record set](#)

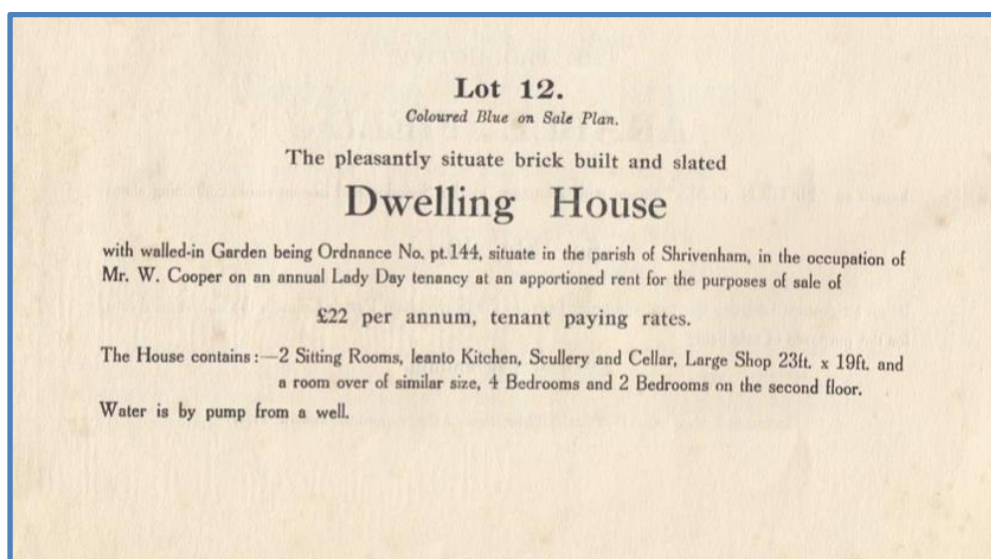
**Household Members** ⓘ

First name(s)	Last name	Relationship	Marital status	Sex	Age	Birth year	Occupation	Birth place
William	Cooper	Head	Married	Male	59	1842	Grocer And Draper	Empingham, Rutland, England
Hannah	Cooper	Wife	Married	Female	52	1849	-	Llanbrynmair, Monmouthshire, Wales
John H	Cooper	Son	Single	Male	28	1873	-	Boston, Lincolnshire, England
Margaret S	Cooper	Daughter	Single	Female	24	1877	-	London, England
Rose H	Cooper	Daughter	Single	Female	15	1886	-	Shrivenham, Berkshire, England

In the census taken at the beginning of the new century, William Cooper is listed at Fern House, still carrying out what had become a hallmark of the property for over 50 years. He was considered a respectable man but unfortunately for him, had something of a wayward son. In October 1904, the local newspaper reported on a case of drunken high jinks when Henry Cooper and William Town, stole a pony and trap from outside the Royal Oak pub in Watchfield belonging to Mr Wheeler. They ended up in a prison cell in Oxford and were tried at the Berkshire Assizes Quarter Sessions, their crime considered then, to be most serious. The Jury returned a verdict of 'Not Guilty,' and they were discharged. (Faringdon Adver 22nd Oct 1904). But there was news of a more pleasant nature for William Cooper when his daughter Miss Rose Harms Cooper married Mr Frank Smallbone at Shrivenham Parish

Church on 21st November 1917. (Faringdon Adver 24th Nov 1917). William Cooper was still at Fern House according to Kelly's Directory of 1927, but he passed away the following year and was buried at St Andrew's churchyard on 11th October 1928, aged 84.

We know from the deeds of Church House that Hannah Beatrice Day lived at Fern Cottage in the mid 1920s as it was that address she gave on the documents when she sold Church House, purchased from Berkeley Fairthorne two years earlier. From the documents acquired by Shrivenham Heritage Society in 2021, we learn that William Herbert Parsons purchased the Manor House close by in 1926. Soon after that he purchased the farmyard and buildings opposite the Manor House, and the remainder that included Fern House shortly after. His son, Major Anthony Dallin Parsons, recalls that when his father purchased the property it was partly used as a shop. William immediately converted it wholly into a dwellinghouse and let it to a Mr Frogley. The Major further recalled that his parents left Shrivenham in 1942, but when his father died four years later, his mother Edith moved back to Shrivenham in 1950 and occupied Fern House. The Electoral Register for 1958-9 listed the occupiers as, Anthony Dallin Parsons, Edith Winifred Parsons and Sylvia Anne Parsons.



We are grateful to Diana Crockett who told us about Charles and Marion Edwards, whom she described as, *'a very glamorous couple even into their 80s.'* It was in the 1970s when Charles first saw Fern House and was so impressed with it that he bought it on the spot for cash before his wife had even seen it. Charles was in the Royal Navy during the Second World War and after, applied for the post of manager on a tea Plantation in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). He got the job, *'probably based to a large extent on his considerable natural charm and good looks.'* He met Marion, his second wife, when she came to the island on holiday. When they left Ceylon they invested their money in to copper, brass and artefacts that was clearly successful for them as they enjoyed a very comfortable lifestyle in Shrivenham. Diana recalls that they had bags of style and maintained an interest in life, and always had a drink on the go whatever time of the day you should happen to call. They had a radiogram in the hall and played 78 vinyl records on it for much of the day. They also had whisky and gin optics screwed to the mantelpiece in their dining room. When they got older Charles would attend game fairs and shooting schools to promote the Game Conservancy Charity and was their top salesman, *'that old charm again.'* Apparently, he was a terrifying driver and one day entered the garage workshop in Shrivenham High Street and drove into the inspection pit - at speed ! It was soon after that he gave up driving. Diana ends by saying, *'We were so sad when Charles died. Marion went into a home and died soon after. You don't find characters like them anymore.'*

And that is as far as we can go for Fern House (Stratton Farm) at the moment, and it has covered a substantial amount of time - 300years. If any reader can add any further information, then please contact us at:

[info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk](mailto:info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk)

### **DofE listing. 21/11/1966**

*'Early 18th century of chequer brick and stone sills with a gabled stone tiled roof and three brick stacks. South front of two storeys and seven bays with two light, four pane casements under*



*segmental heads. Six panel door in the fifth bay from the left under a flat hood on cut scroll brackets. Above this a blocked window. 20th century outshuts to the rear and two 20th century dormers.*

*The garden to the rear is enclosed by a 12foot high wall with a stone base, rat-trap brick courses above and cement coping. The brick courses change to rubble stone at the north-east corner and this continues along the end of the plot.'*