

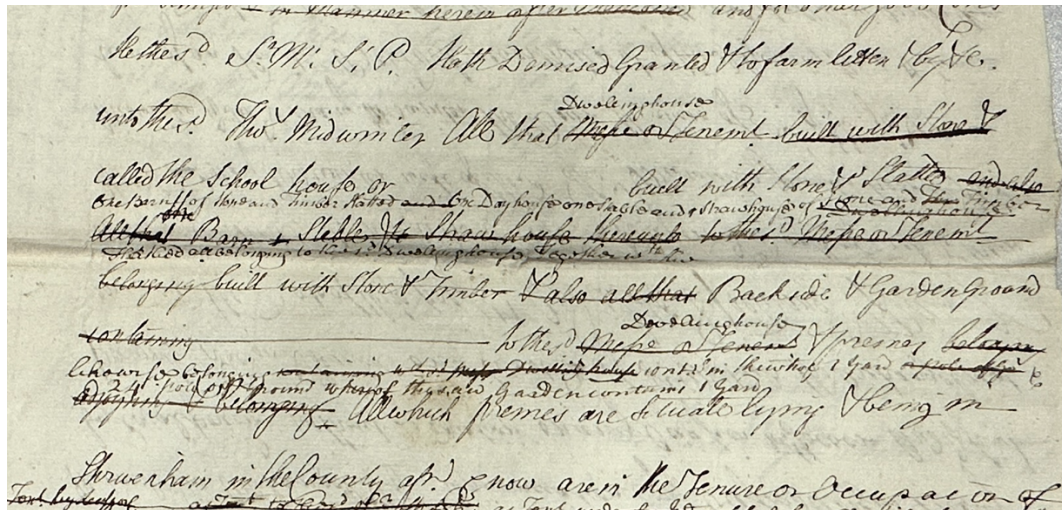
Thomas Midwinter's Property - High Street, Shrivenham

By Neil B. Maw

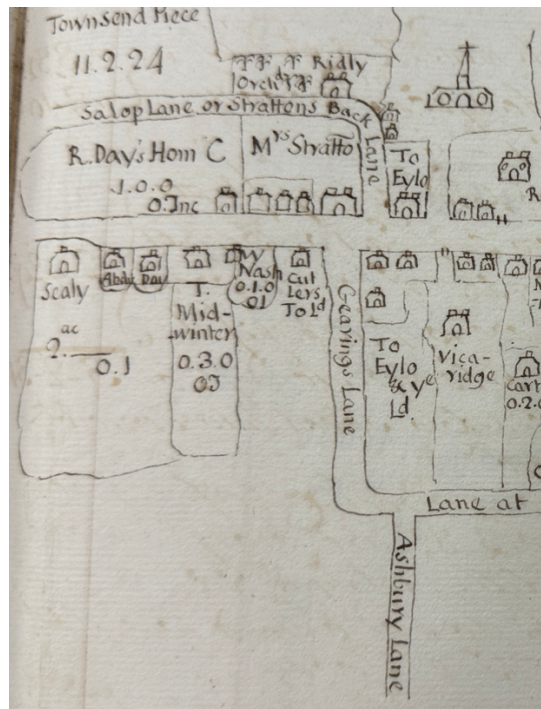
The land holdings of the Pleydell Estate of Coleshill (To become the Radnor Estate) in the 18th century were still considerable in Shrivenham and the surrounding area. The documents in the Berkshire County Archives in Reading contain many instances of leases and sales of land and buildings. One such lease concerned a plot of land and buildings on Shrivenham High Street and is particularly interesting in that it contained a building specifically named the '*School House*.' (D/EPB/E159). We know from the research of Edith Jeacock, that schooling in Shrivenham began in the early 18th century and written evidence described in 1717, '*A school erecting at the west end of the parish of Shrivenham.*' (SHS Listing N394). This location is at the west end of what would have been the extremity of the village then. It also solves the mystery of exactly where the school was.

The lease was between Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell of Coleshill and Thomas Midwinter, a Carpenter of Shrivenham, dated 23rd January 1739. It was the sale of the Copyhold of the property which in effect was the purchase of it other than the land on which it sat. The lease was for 99 years on the lives of Thomas, his wife and two children, to take effect from Lady Day next (25th March). The occupier at the time was James House. There were several buildings involved and were summarised in the document as '*All that dwelling house called the School house built with stone & slatted, one Barn of stone and timber slatted, one Day house one Stable and a Strawhouse of stone and timber thatched all belonging to the said dwellinghouse together with the Backside and Garden ground.*' The payment was £54.10 with a further payment of £5.10 by Thomas Midwinter in order to turn the Barn and out-building into a dwellinghouse. There was also a payment of £5 per year ground rent in lieu of a Heriot (an ancient Best Beast payment). (Below extract BCA D/EPB/E159). The description above provided a reasonable chance of understanding what must have stood on this spot in the early 18th century. The schoolhouse had stone walls (probably rubble stone) and probably a stone-tiled roof. There are other examples of this in the village. The other building described as a '*Day House*,' most likely the part used as a classroom, a Stable and Strawhouse, built of rubble stone and timber

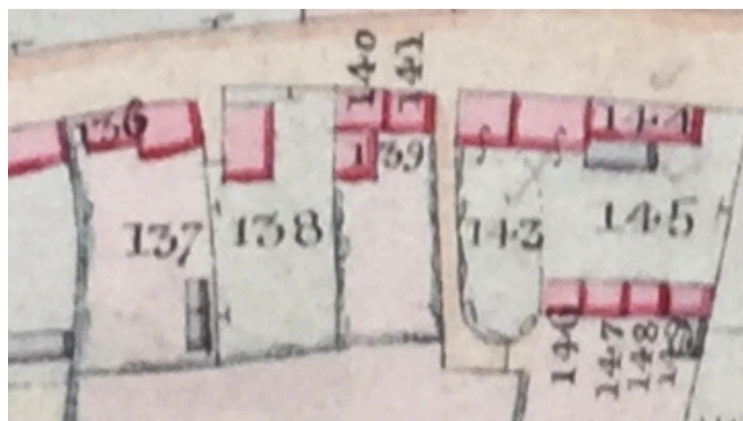
framing, with a thatched roof. The Barn description is rubble stone wall and timber framing but with a stone-tiled roof. It would seem that this plot of land was the designated spot for the school and was also the residence of the school master, all on land owned by the Pleydell estate at Coleshill. The indenture further described that Thomas Midwinter was going to convert the barn into a dwellinghouse.



Until around 100 years ago, location of properties was seldom accurately described, especially in rural villages, and this lease was no exception to that, other than being, 'In Shrivenham.' Confirmation of location came from a Pleydell Deed Book dated just a few years later with a drawing of a map dated circa 1750. (Below extract D/EPB/E158/1). This enabled the occupation sequence to be further extended and followed up into the mid 20th century.



The discovery of this document poses the question of whether the school was still being used as a school in 1739. However, 120 years later things had changed considerably when the Barrington Estate map of 1865 showed three properties, two cottages fronting the road and one behind. (See below). The occupiers were Henry Roby, Charles Walker and Charles Brunsdon. They were also then owned by Amariah Fairthorne. This is explained further in a separate SHS Listing No: N71.



All the earlier buildings have gone but there exists a photograph dated from 1905 that shows a cottages, (immediately on the right), but it could have been two cottages as shown on the estate map above. It was common to have very tiny cottages (basic hovels). (Photo courtesy of Paul Williams).



The Midwinter family had been inhabitants of Shrivenham from at least the middle part of the 17th century. During a recent survey (2023) carried out at St Andrew's churchyard, a gravestone was uncovered for Thomas Midwinter who died in 1689. (Below. Courtesy of Shrivenham Heritage Society). In the 18th century we have evidence of a link with the Barrington family and the Midwinters. In the family papers contained within the British Library (MS 73690) is a note from William the 2nd Viscount Barrington, who referred to Joseph Bliss, who married Mary Midwinter (Both died 1801). It's a charming note and was written at Beckett on 15th October 1784: *'Mr Bliss has behaved himself ever since he came to live at Shrivenham so much to the satisfaction of all his neighbours, and particularly to my satisfaction; that I will not take any purchase money for the bit of land which he has bought of me. I am the more inclined to make him this present, as he is married to a wife whom I much esteem, and who is daughter to a person who took great care of me and several of my brothers and sisters in our infancy.'* High praise indeed.



Joseph Bliss and his wife Mary (nee Midwinter) both died in 1801 and were buried in St Andrew's churchyard, Shrivenham. (Below. Courtesy of Shrivenham Heritage Society). In his Will, Joseph left his property to his wife, but upon her death just two months after her husband, the property passed to their son Thomas Midwinter Bliss. It seems likely that he just rented out the property and land rather than residing or working there himself. In a conveyance document of 1821, he was described as a '*Gentleman*,' implying that he was a man of means and had no need to work.



At this point, the history of this property is continued separately and can be seen in SHS Listing N71 - Link below.

<https://www.shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk/listing.asp?listID=71>