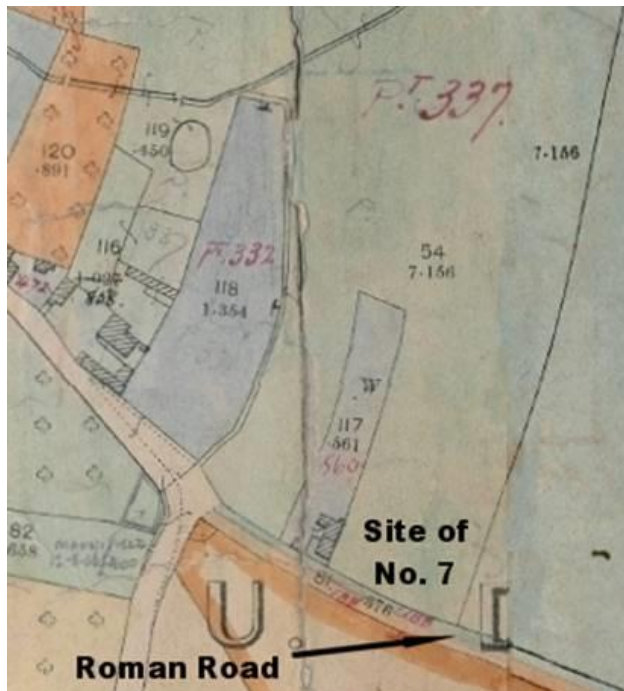


Benjamin Thornton (great-uncle to Margaret Smith, contributor to this article) was born in Headington in the 2nd quarter of 1856. He was living with his parents in Forest Hill according to the censuses of 1861, 1871 and 1881, being an apprentice shoemaker in 1871 and a gardener in 1881. In 1891 he was living in Wheatley and was described as a farmer, but we have no idea where he lived.

In the 1901 census, Benjamin was still living in Wheatley, described as a market gardener and he was almost carrying on this trade, by then, at Gardencroft, 5 Roman Road, as shown in the 1910 valuation survey. In 1911, he lived at Iliffe Cottage but, by 1921, he had moved to Crown/Roman Road presumably into the old house there. His ownership was shown by numbers 560 (number in red) and 561 (successive numbers not necessarily shown on this map) on the 1910 valuation (see images below). This shows him as owning 2 acres (the '2' after 'Crown Road End') whereas the plan shows 0.561 acres. The fact that the acreage (.561 below the plot number 117) is a strange coincidence with his second ownership number, which is part of the house let (first column of text) in 1910 to Goodin Walker. We know from the 19th century censuses that there were three families living here and there is still evidence of this in the surviving three 'front' doors, but by 1910 there were just two occupations.

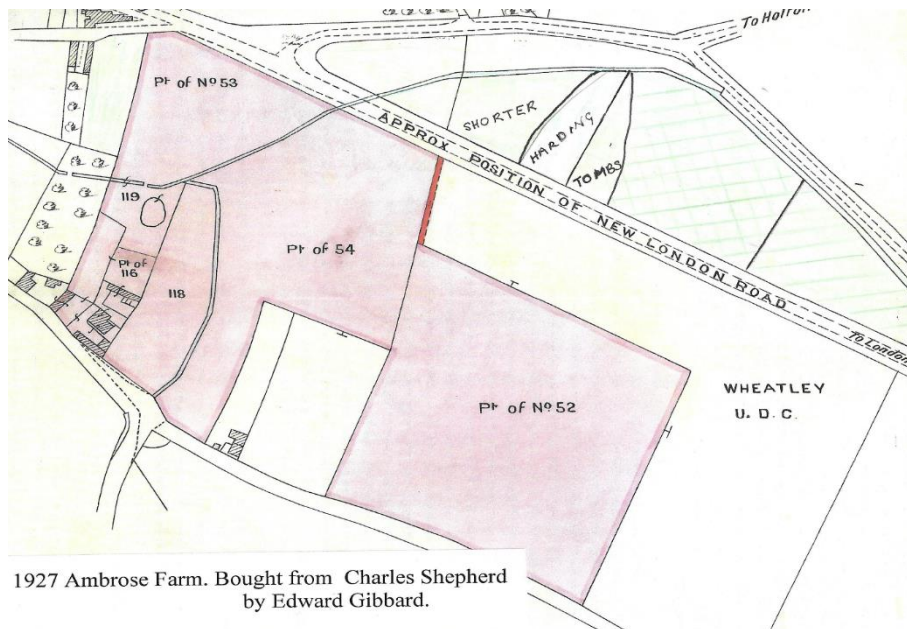
5006	242	Thornton Benj ^r	Thornton ^{Whealey} Benj ^r	"	x	Crown R ^d End	2
17	243	Goodin Walker	" ^{Whealey}	"	x	"	



Ambrose Farm, shown on the plan as '337' was sold in 1922 and the conveyance plan clearly shows that the only exclusion to the frontage to Roman Road was the Gardencroft site. So, the site which eventually became 7 Roman Road and the site of Oxonian Nurseries was not a separate ownership in 1922.

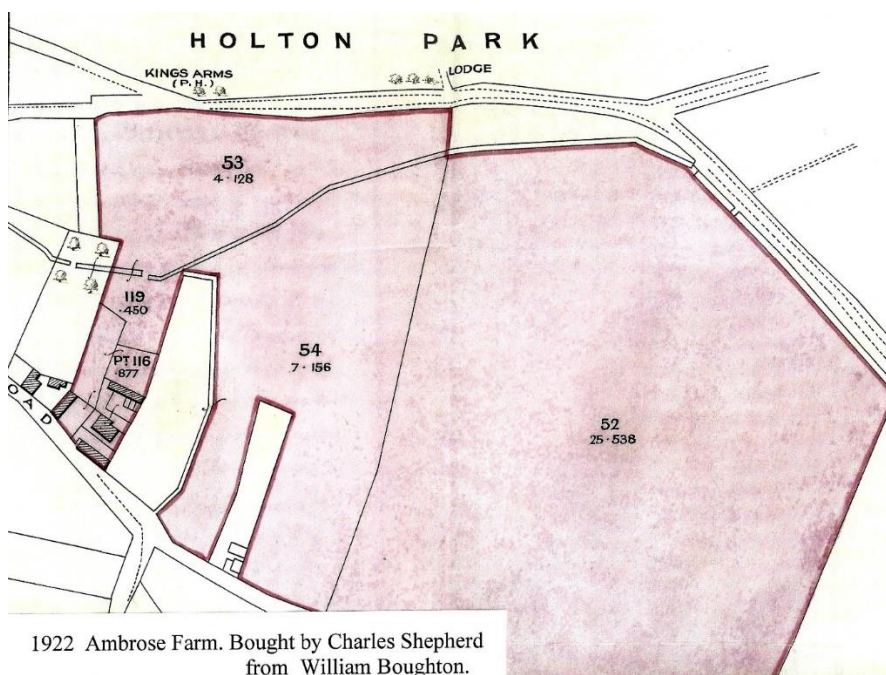
This begs the question as to where was Benjamin Thornton's other acreage, unless the 2 acre entry was a mistake which seems increasingly likely. It is not found (via the numbering of 560 or 561) anywhere else on the 1910 valuation map. It is understood that the land adjacent to Gardencroft was agricultural in 1934 when the Paris family bought Gardencroft – and presumably came to an arrangement with the adjacent agricultural owner.

The only map reference that has been found to the site of Oxonian Nurseries is the one below which shows it excluded from the sale in 1927 from Charles Shepherd to Edward Gibbard.



There is no record of who bought the land to the east (right) of Gardencroft but, almost certainly, it was Benjamin Thornton as this was included in his auction sale of 1934, see below.

Plot 118 had been bought by Shepherd in 1927 ahead of this sale as evidence by the sale map of 1922 which shows this in separate ownership (Hall & Co)



Shepherd also retained the frontage to Crown Road on which he built the houses for his family. All the farmland of Ambrose Farm and Crown farm was sold to Magdalen College as shown in the schedule below:

Areas of farmland sold to Shepherd in 1922 and to Magdalen College in 1927

Map No.	Field name	Use	Acreage
42	Little Clay Hill	Pasture	3.859
41	Big Clay Hill	Pasture	15.762
40	Fulbrook Furlong	Arable	11.878
21	Shed Field	Pasture	16.856
20	Wheat Furlong	Arable	17.276
19	Crown Meadow	Pasture	4.904
	Part river	Water	0.103
		TOTAL	73.579

Gardencroft was sold by auction in 1934. (In the 1939 Register, Benjamin Thornton is described as 'Market Gardener retired' so, presumably, he decided to retire in 1934 and sell Gardencroft). The auction particulars refer to the property owning 2 1/3rd acres which includes an adjacent plot, so it appears that Benjamin Thornton had acquired it by then.

Charles Henri Paris (born in Switzerland in 1900 and moved to UK in 1920. Later they ran the Old Headington nursery. He and his wife Florence (they were married in 1931) bought the Gardencroft plot at auction in 1934, as supported by the history of Oxonian Nurseries which they founded in 1934 (accession number 1061). The plot was, at the time, described as '3 acres' which is a generous interpretation of the two plots. A general store was added later. They lived at Gardencroft as their children were born there in the early 1940s.