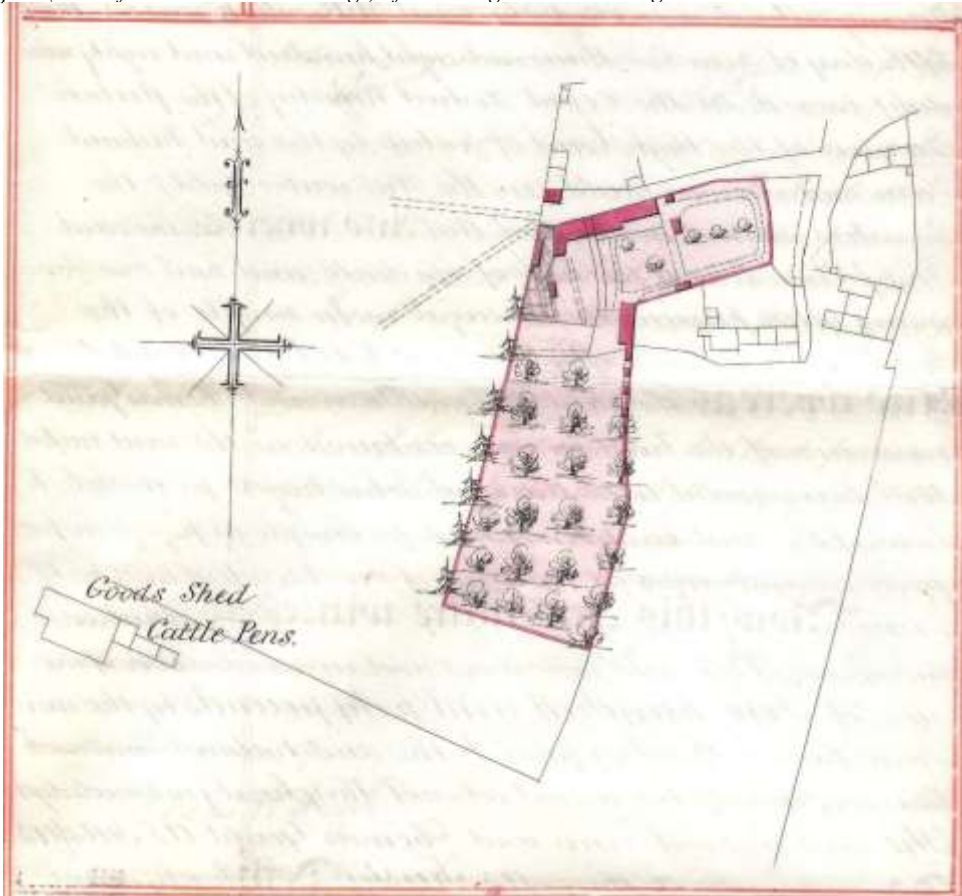


Stile Cottage, 8 Farm Close Lane, Wheatley

The deeds from 1750 until the 1950s appear to have related to some two-thirds of what-is-now Stile Cottage, when it was, perhaps, called Style Cottage. These two thirds excluded the part of the property to the south and closest to Farm Close Lane, shown coloured red and owned in common with the property 6-7 Farm Close Lane and the hovel to the extreme west, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: *The 1889 conveyance plan of 6/7 Farm Close Lane, showing separate ownership of the other part (also referred to as Putt's Cottage) of the contiguous three cottages to the north.*



This raises the question of when this whole property may have been built and what form it had taken originally, see Appendix 1.

Between 1750 and the early 1800s, the widowed Mrs Alice Harper, her son Thomas Harper I and her grandson Thomas Harper II had progressively occupied half of the cottage. The other half, which they also owned, had been split off in 1750 and sold as a 1,000-year lease to Robert Poovey, a harness and

coach-harness maker, for £50. By 1765, however, this £50 remained unpaid and by a further deed, this money was paid by Richard Forster and the property assigned to him. By 1802, this interest was held by the Gladdy family (nephew of Forster) and, in that year, Thomas Harper had bought back their interest for £52. This left Thomas Harper II in control of the freehold of the entire two-cottage property again. In 1806, he sold this for £200 to Samuel Leaver, a cooper. Samuel Leaver sold (presumably a leasehold interest) one of the cottages to Joseph Lovridge, linen dealer, for £60. The two occupiers were then Elizabeth Burnham and Richard Hickman who shared the garden area to the east. It appears that Elizabeth Burnham had the northern plot which started 46 feet from the wall to Farm Close Lane and went back to the wall to the stream which was 85 feet from Farm Close Lane. This latter dimension is more or less confirmed from the 1813 enclosure award map, see Figure 2¹, and is confirmed by the current measured distance between the walls, see Figure 3.² The width of the plot appears to have been 38.5 feet adjacent the stream and 30 feet where the plot was 46 feet from the lane.

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Figure 2: Extract from the 1813 Enclosure Award map with stream and with dimensions added



Figure 3: Front wall to Farm Close Lane, lined up with the back of Putt's Cottage and back wall (right) to stream with 85 feet between them (as measured)



¹ Stile Cottage is 'misplaced' on this map, appearing to straddle Farm Close Lane, although the cottage in separate ownership to the south does appear to be within the lane itself.

² At the left end of the wall at the bottom of Stile Cottage's garden, their land goes back a further few feet, perhaps where the stream previously was, allowing sight into the garden of the neighbour beyond, which is at a lower level by a few feet.

According to the available deeds, in 1807 Samuel Leaver sold to Joseph Lov~~er~~ridge, two more garden plots for another £55. The north to south measurement of the larger of the two plots, however, is incompatible with the immediate area and presumably was sited elsewhere. The north to south depth of no more than 85 feet (27 yds) between the lane and the stream could not accommodate a plot of 41 yards north to south, 11 yards at the east end and 15 yards at the west. The smaller plot measured 7.5 yards east to west and 13 yards north to south – this plot adjoining the existing garden.

After 1850, the history of ownership is taken up by a report already in the archive and reproduced below:

On the death of Joseph Lov~~er~~ridge in June 1851, his widow Eleanor and son Moses became entitled to the cottage and garden, and half of the two extra pieces of land. The other half presumably passed via a James Lov~~er~~ridge of whom there is no further trace in the deeds. Without measuring it all up, however, it seems a reasonable supposition that Eleanor and Moses now owned roughly the current area of Stile Cottage garden. The cottages were now occupied by Thomas Kelson and James Yeatman.

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On 10 July 1856 the property, mortgaged to Stephen Jones, passed to William Lovelock, grocer (1843) and postmaster (1856). Between 1856 and 1879 when the next sale took place, Lovelock demolished and rebuilt one of the two cottages. In 1879 they were occupied by Charles Sheppard and Mrs Thorpe and on 13 January of that year they were sold for £200 to John Johnson, yeoman.

Johnson died on 14 October 1894, less than a month after making his will. By this time the cottage was again one cottage, occupied by Richard Clements, and it is described as adjoining a cottage owned by Philip Town, who then also owned 6 and 7 Farm Close lane. This adjoining cottage (see De Luc's ownership for the incorporation of this into the present Stile Cottage) had been occupied by the Widow Jane Jones and then by W. Putt, who figures in the Oxfordshire Directory as a shoemaker from 1852. Town himself lived in No 6 and had gathered the properties together (6, 7, and Putt's cottage) in the 1850s. On 10 July 1895 Johnson's heirs sold 'Alice Harper's' cottage to Charles Elderfield, shepherd. Elderfield seems to have lived in the cottage and on his death his widow married Charles Clements, postal telegraph worker.

On 18 April 1907 the Clements sold to Thomas Parsons, labourer. (As will be seen from the next conveyance, dated 1925, Thomas Henry Parsons (now a contractor's foreman) sold the cottage to Miss Dorothy Rose Holness of Crown Rd on 15 January 1925 for £160. The cottage was occupied by Albert Hillsdon, and he was still there when Miss Holness (since 1 August 1927 Mrs Jeffs), sold the property for £200 to Mrs E. L. Hedges of Chilton, Thame.

In due course Mrs Hedges came to live in what was now called Style Cottage. She had married Hedges late in life and when she died intestate on 14 May 1944, the cottage passed to her nephew & niece (or possibly her son and daughter by a first husband), E. T. Day and his sister. They sold Style Cottage to F. A. de Luc on 19 April 1952. De Luc was an interior decorator. On 10 August 1954 he bought Putts Cottage from Mrs E. M. Hughes for £65; this was described as having been 'formerly in the occupation of Mr Edwards'. De Luc did not buy the hovel or the land adjoining and these was subsequently acquired by the Mr & Mrs Wood, owners of No 7.³

³ Dr Hassall's book contains a drawing of the 'hovel' in the garden of No 7, as the place where Edwards used to keep his rabbits, see W. Hassall (ed.), 'Wheatley Records: 956-1956', *Oxfordshire Record Society*, (Oxford, 1956).

De Luc incorporated Putt's Cottage into the rest of Style Cottage, renamed it Stile Cottage, and on 30 May 1958 sold it to the Jensens. It is possible that the current east facing window replaced the entrance door to Putt's Cottage see Figure 4.

Figure 4: *East-facing downstairs window to Putt's Cottage*



So the end part of Stile Cottage appears not to have been part of its ownership until 1954.

This makes sense of the ownership of the Jensen's ownership and Liz Jensen's description of living in a room at the top of a spiral staircase. She was born in 1959 and recounted her teenage years when her bedroom was on the top floor of what had once been Putt's cottage.

My favourite room was an attic bedroom up a spiral staircase, which I colonised when my older sister went off to university. One time when I was there with my boyfriend, he heard my dad coming up the stairs and became so nervous that he jumped out of the window into the street. [The window is about 10 feet above ground level, see Figure 5].

Figure 5: *Windows to lane*



Up in that room I felt cut off from the rest of the cottage, listening to Cat Stevens and David Bowie, moping because the world didn't understand me, teaching myself to smoke and reading Thomas Hardy. As I didn't have a wardrobe, there was a curtain arrangement, and I had a recurring Narnia-type dream that involved going behind the curtain and emerging in a fantasy landscape.

I started writing my first novel in that house when I was 15, on a desk my father made. It came to nothing, but later I wrote about Wheatley in my first published novel, *Egg Dancing*. I came up with a city called Gridiron, which was a cross between Manchester and Wheatley, but I think the connection was more in my head than anywhere else.

If you are a teenager living in the country, there comes a point when you begin to loathe everything about it. I think it was the fact that I had changed and home hadn't - but that's a universal rite of passage. I went to Oxford High School, about seven miles away, and most of my school friends lived in massive Victorian houses. In many ways I was very conformist, so I became quite ashamed of where we lived - I'd have done anything to live in a big, posh house. I became increasingly rebellious, and left home at 18 after a row with my parents. I got a job in a restaurant and a place to stay on the same day, then went off to university. I never lived in Wheatley again after that.

It is hearsay that this part of the property had a concrete spiral staircase, since removed.

This report therefore rests with the likelihood that Stile Cottage was built as a single dwelling in the 1690s, with the southern one-third owned or sold off to another party before 1750 and the remaining two thirds of Style Cottage split into two from 1750. The southernmost one-third part of the property, in separate ownership and later known as Putt's Cottage, was incorporated back into the ownership of Stile Cottage during the ownership of the De Luc family in the 1954.

The northern most of the two cottages, was rebuilt between 1856 and 1879 under Lovelock's ownership.

Figure 6: *H-hinge on 'old' cupboard door*

Sadly, and as at the date of this report in 2021, there is no old physical evidence remaining in the two older cottages to help date the property. However, the cupboard door, Figure 6, and perhaps even the H-hinge, may be original.

Michael Heaton
Wheatley Village Archive
August 2021

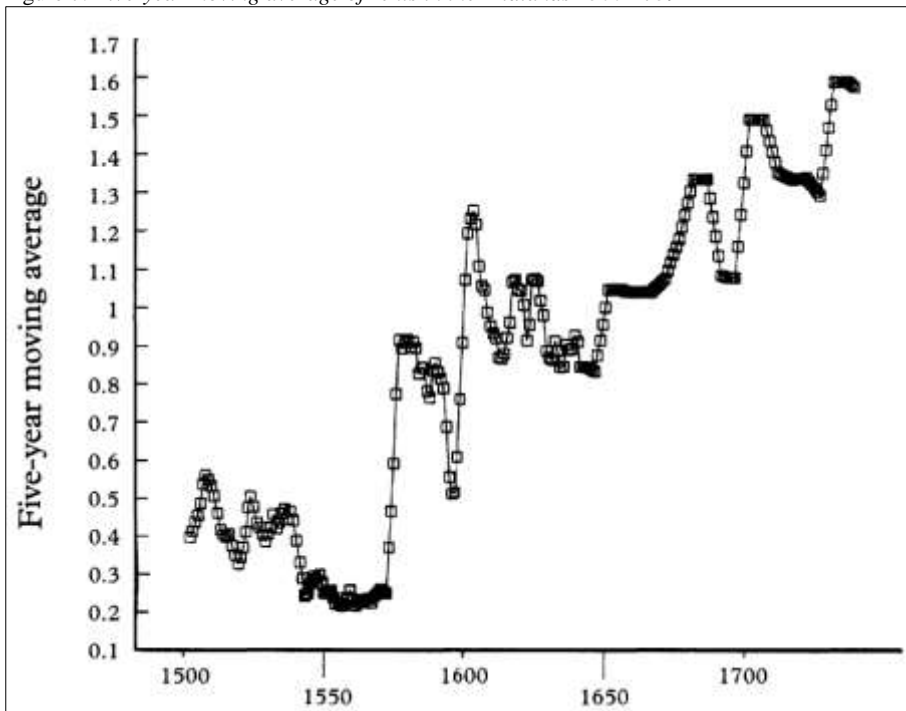


Appendix 1: Speculation as to when the three-bay cottage may have been built

There are no deeds prior to the references to ownership and occupation in 1750. However, it is believed that this cottage was possibly built earlier and maybe, according to hearsay, in the last decade or so of the 17th century. It might be logical that it had been built at the same time as what-is-now 6 Farm Close Lane. The ownership of this has been established to the same period, the 1690s, with the possibility that it was earlier.⁴

Despite the fact that farming had suffered from a dramatic fall in the wool price in 1650, rental values of (farm) properties recovered strongly in the second half of the 1600s, see Figure 7.⁵ This could have sparked a building boom and in other parts of the country, it is known that there was a building 'boom' of farmhouses at this time.⁶

Figure 7: *Five-year moving average of rents in the Midlands 1500-1739*



Appendix 2: Harper family as small-time farmers

At the beginning of the 1800s, the Harper family owned two-thirds of the freehold of what-is-now Stile Cottage, which was occupied by the family. In or by 1750, they had split the property into two occupations, one being occupied by the family, the other to Poovey and later Richard Forster.

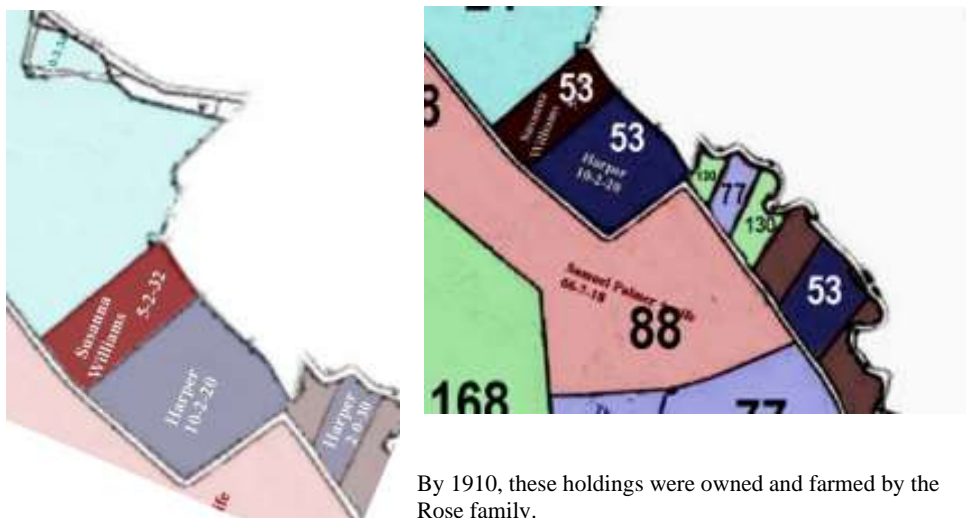
⁴ See Wheatley Village Archive, archive <https://www.wheatleyarchive.org.uk/>, record 2368.

⁵ Reproduced from Allen, 'Tracking the agricultural revolution', p. 215.

⁶ Evidence from Spratton, Northamptonshire, where the author previously lived.

In the 1813 award, the Harpers received the plot of 0.75 acres opposite the top of Friday Lane above, and two plots, one of 10.5 acres and the other, adjacent to the Thame of about 2.2 acres, as below left, see Figure 8. By 1845 they had leased Susanna Williams' adjacent plot of 5.5 acres and had 'moved' to a larger plot adjacent the Thame river, their holdings shown as '53' and totalling 21 acres.

Figure 8: *Harper's other holdings in 1813 and in 1845*



By 1910, these holdings were owned and farmed by the Rose family.