



The History of Swanston House

In this account I will call the building itself “the house” or “Swanston”. It has had several names in the past. At first it had no recorded name or was only known as “Mr. Bond’s house”. It then became “Elm Grove”, then “Whitsley House”, then “Giddea House” and, finally, “Swanston House” before it was divided into the present three houses - “Forbes”, “Swanston” and “Hamilton”.

Building the house

The house was built in 1800/1801 by William Bond, the Chudleigh parish schoolmaster. It was first advertised for sale on July 1 1801:

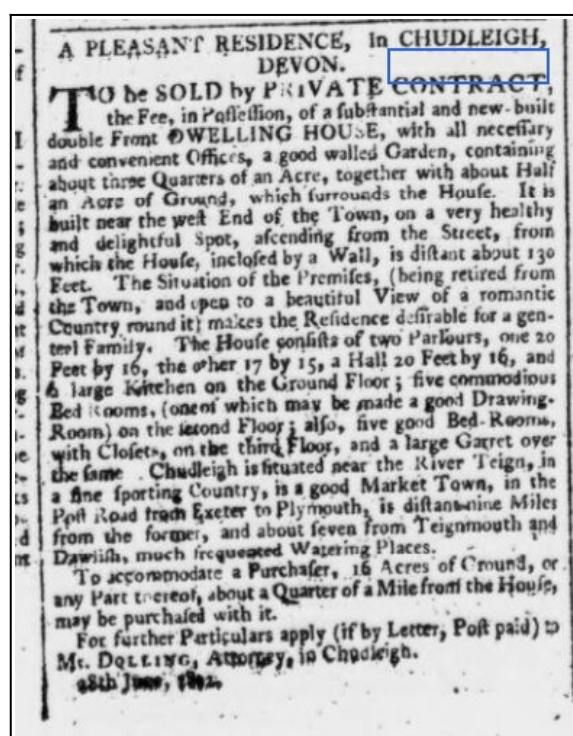
A PLEASANT RESIDENCE, in CHUDLEIGH,
DEVON.

To be SOLD by PRIVATE CONTRACT, the Fee, in Possession of a substantial and new-built double Front DWELLING HOUSE, with all necessary and convenient Offices, a good walled Garden, containing about three Quarters of an Acre, together with about Half an Acre of Ground, which surrounds the House. It is built near the west End of the Town, on a very healthy and delightful Spot, ascending from the Street, from which the House, inclosed by a Wall, is about 130 Feet. The Situation of the Premises (being retired from the Town, and open to a beautiful View of a romantic Country round it) makes the Residence desirable for a genteel Family. The House consists of two Parlours, one 20 Feet by 16, the other 17 by 15, a Hall 20 Feet by 16, and a large Kitchen on the Ground Floor; five commodious Bed-Rooms (one of which may be made a good Drawing-Room) on the second Floor; also, five good Bed-Rooms, with Closets, on the third Floor, and a large Garret over the same.

Chudleigh is situated near the river Teign, in a fine sporting Country, is a good Market Town, in the Post Road from Exeter to Plymouth, in distance nine Miles from the former, and about seven from Teignmouth and Dawlish, much frequented Watering Places.

To accommodate a Purchaser, 16 Acres of Ground, or any Part thereof, about a Quarter of a Mile from the House, may be purchased with it.

For further Particulars apply (if by Letter, Post paid) to Mr. DOLLING, Attorney, in Chudleigh. 28th June 1801¹



I have not found any pictures of the house at that time or, indeed, pictures of it at any time before 1949. Clues about it emerge from the succession of advertisements for the house and from the

¹ Exeter Flying Post, July 1 1801.



1838 Tithe Map shown on page 12. The current entrance and driveway off Fore Street did not exist. The entrance at that time was, almost certainly, through the stone gateway that is still visible between 32 and 34 Fore Street, but now has no access to the house. A driveway through that gateway curved around the house to its then front, which faced away from the street. The land where the garages of Forbes House, Swanston House and The Orangery now stand was then part of the churchyard and occupied by the Church House. The few spindly elm trees that now remain near the road to the right of the current driveway entrance are probably descendants of the elm trees that once lined the churchyard's entire frontage on Fore Street and survived from that time until they were felled in 1949². The house that William Bond built was largely hidden from the road behind the buildings to the left and right of the stone archway and the churchyard with elms at the roadside and the Church House behind it. It may have been then just the three-storey central section of the current building, without its two-storey wings. There is some internal evidence to suggest that the walls between the three-storey section and the wings were once external walls. If the house builders pattern book that I think William Bond must have used to build it could be found, it might settle that question and clarify its original internal layout. Unless pictures of the original house can be found, what it looked like rests on your imagination. One thing is fairly certain. It looked nothing like any other house in the Chudleigh that existed before the Great Fire of 1807.

William Bond (1757 – 1829)

William Bond was appointed as the Chudleigh parish schoolmaster in 1783, a position which paid £10 per annum and required him to teach around nine boys chosen by the vicar and churchwardens. He was also appointed parish clerk. This parish school in Chudleigh began in 1692, but was far from being its only school. Pynsent's Grammar School (in what is now named The Old House on Fore Street) was founded in 1771. Small scale boarding schools in private houses for girls or boys made brief appearances in Chudleigh throughout the nineteenth century. The Chudleigh National School (for promoting the education of the poor in the principles of the established church) was founded around 1813 to provide an alternative to the non-conformist schools which were being established in the area.

Until two years before his appointment the parish schoolmaster had used the upper floor of the Church House. This stood alongside Vicarage Lane, inside the present grounds of Swanston, roughly where the garages of Forbes House, Swanston House and The Orangery now stand. The previous schoolmaster, Henry Hooper had obtained permission to move the parish day school to his own house "recently built adjoining the churchyard" where he could also run a small private boarding school.³ William Bond followed this pattern, running a small boarding school as well as the parish day school in his own house from 1783. He stopped taking boarding pupils in 1815, but carried on as the parish schoolmaster until 1827, when he was 70.

Mary Jones, in her 1852 *History of Chudleigh*, wrote warmly about him:

² The Chudleigh Book has a photo of some of the elms before they were felled on page 36.

³ Henry Hooper's new house may have been the building in front of Swanston House on Fore Street which is now divided into a hairdresser and a nail spa. At that time it would have stood close to the Church House which was included in the churchyard.



Mr Bond filled the important office of this school which became one of the best of the description in the county. He was a clever and practical arithmetician and a good astronomer for his day, he had a most pleasing method of imparting knowledge. His mild and amiable temper greatly endeared him to his pupils, many of whom were in later life distinguished for their abilities in their various callings, ever recollecting their youthful sojourn here with delight.

It seems that he was something of a speculative builder as well as a schoolmaster, for she adds:

To Mr Bond is the town indebted for the erection of several commodious and respectable houses.

William Bond was not a product of a university education. His secondary education would have been at best at a grammar school. There were many multi-talented self-educated men at this time. There can be no doubt that he built Swanston to sell it. It seems that he must have used one of the house builders pattern books that were popular at that time and were widely used by speculative builders. He advertised it for sale for the rest of his life.⁴ It seems that he had misjudged the market and had built a white elephant he could not get off his hands.

The July 1801 advertisement is the evidence for when the house was built. For the proof that it was built by William Bond, you must wait 21 years, until his advertisement for it in May 1822 in which he declared that he was the builder.

William Bond came to Chudleigh in 1783 from Kenton, where he had just married Anne Bussell. They had two children born in Chudleigh: William born in 1786 and Ann born in 1788. They were 7 and 5 when their mother died in 1793. William married again the next year, marrying Dorothea Yarde. They had five further children, Walter Yarde born 1795, William born 1796, Frances, born 1797, Charles, born 1799 and John born 1801. The older son named William died, age 11, in 1798. When Swanston was being built, he and Dorothea, with young children to look after and a day and boarding school to run, must have been extremely busy as parents on top of the responsibility for the building of a very grand house.

I have not found further advertisements in 1801. William may have decided to wait for the building work to be fully complete. He began advertising the house again in January 1802, not only in the weekly *Exeter Flying Post* but also in *The Sun*, a London daily newspaper.⁵ The house did not sell, so he tried again in July 1802.⁶

When the house still did not sell, William decided he, his family and the school should all move in. This is the advertisement for the boarding school that he inserted in the *Exeter Flying Post* for July 7 1803:

CHUDLEIGH BOARDING SCHOOL

Mr. BOND respectfully informs his Friends and the Public, that it opens again, after the Recess, on Monday the Eighteenth Instant. Young Gentlemen are admitted under moderate Terms, and taught English, Penmanship, Arithmetic, Book Keeping, Mensuration, Navigation, Geography, and Astronomy, with the Use of the Globes, etc.

⁴ The implication is that there may be a house builder's pattern book that contains the original design of the house.

⁵ *Exeter Flying Post* 28/01/1802, *The Star* (London) 28/01/1802, 04/02/1802, 05/02/1802, 07/02/1802, 08/02/1802.

⁶ *Exeter Flying Post* 08/07/1802. *The Star* (London) 01/07/1802, 05/07/1802.



Though the long-established Success of the School must be its best Recommendation, it may not be improper to mention the peculiar Care taken that the Pupils are well grounded in several Branches. In ENGLISH, select Lessons and Exercises are strictly enforced in order to bring Youth to read and recite with Ease and Propriety, and to speak and write with grammatical Accuracy.

Mr. B. has lately removed into his new House, which is not only spacious, and built on a very healthy and delightful Spot, but it has also every desirable Accommodation for his Pupils. Dancing is regularly taught in the School. A good FRENCH Master is wanted. Application may be made personally, or by Letter post-paid.

Chudleigh, July 4th 1803⁷

William still wanted to sell the house and began advertising it again at the beginning of January 1806, then repeating the advertisement in March and April. It is an indication of his desperation that, as a sweetener for a purchaser, he was offering to grant the purchaser a mortgage on the house for half of the purchase price:

A DESIRABLE RESIDENCE IN CHUDLEIGH, DEVON

To be SOLD in fee, or let for a term, a handsome, double front, stone-built DWELLING-HOUSE, with coach-house, stable, cellars, laundry, larder, and all other necessary offices; an excellent walled garden and pleasure ground, containing about an acre and a half, most pleasantly situated in the town of Chudleigh, but secluded therefrom by a wall which surrounds the premises.

The house is in complete repair, and consists of a drawing-room and eating-room 20 feet by 16 and a half each, a breakfast room 17 feet by 15, and a good kitchen, on the ground floor; a best and second staircase; five excellent bed-rooms and a store-room on the first floor; five other bed-rooms and closets on the second floor; and a large loft over the same.

Chudleigh is a good market town, situated in a very healthy and pleasant part of the country, in a fine sporting country, and within a few miles of which are kept several packs of fox hounds and harriers. It lies on the post-road from Exeter to Plymouth; distant 10 miles from Exeter and 7 miles from Teignmouth and Dawlish, both fashionable watering places.

For viewing the same, and for other particulars, apply to Mr Dolling, attorney at law, Chudleigh.

N.B. Half of the purchase-money may remain on mortgage of the premises.

Dated 27th Dec. 1806⁸

In a later advertisement he also offered it for rent. I do not think William was successful in either renting or selling the house in 1806. Then the Great Fire of Chudleigh on May 22 1807, which destroyed nearly all the buildings in the town, would have made it almost impossible for quite some time to attract the kind of buyer or renter he was hoping for. The house, however, did survive the fire, as a contemporary account confirms:

The devastation that the devouring element has effected is beyond all power of description; there is no resemblance to what the town was before; the spectacle is affecting and distressing to the utmost degree. Nothing is left but a few detached houses at the entrance to the town. The whole body of the place presents the eye nothing but chimnies and walls, that appear like ancient ruins. The number of houses destroyed is computed at 175. ...

A gentleman of Exeter, who was eye-witness to the melancholy scene, gives the following particulars in a letter, dated May 25th, to his friend in Bath: "The whole town may be termed destroyed, as there is not trade or occupation remaining; neither baker, butcher, publican, innkeeper, or shopkeeper left in the place—all destroyed. Not a yard of cloth for clothes, not a rag of linen, not a medicine; in short, the whole

7 Exeter Flying Post 04/07/1803. My bold italics.

8 Exeter Flying Post, 09/01/1806, 16/01/1806, 23/01/1806, 30/01/1806, 20/03/1806, 17/04/1806.



amount that are shut out of home and shelter, amounting to above a thousand souls, are fed by contributions of bread and provisions from the country. We yesterday sent out a cart with ten pounds' worth of bread and cheese, which came very seasonably; and in the evening arrived tents and marquees for the poor creatures; also, ten guineas' worth of bread, sent by chamber. Two wagons are gone out to-day, and to-morrow subscriptions will be made throughout the city. The Fire Offices will lose about 26,000£.; but the total loss exceeds 30,000£. Both inns are burnt, and **from the entrance from Exeter (where remain about nine houses) the eye sees only Mr Bond's house, and the church; the whole space between is one heap of ashes down to gardens, and they are literally scorched up by the flames.**⁹

The appeal for donations to compensate the people of Chudleigh for their losses in the fire was very successful, so there was money to pay for rebuilding the town. This would have been an opportunity for William to design houses without having to pay himself for them to be built. That may account for Mary Jones' remark, quoted earlier:

To Mr Bond is the town indebted for the erection of several commodious and respectable houses.

William Bond advertised his school from time to time, up to 1815. The last advertisement for the school, on July 6 1815, denies rumours that he was about to close it, but does indicate that he was winding it down:

BOARDING SCHOOL, CHUDLEIGH

MR. BOND begs thus publicly to contradict a prevailing report that he is about to relinquish his SCHOOL, and positively to assure his friends that he has no such intention. The School will therefore RE-OPEN on the Twenty-fourth of July Inst. and in which YOUNG GENTLEMEN will continue to be instructed in every part of Commercial Learning, as well as in the higher branches of Mathematics, etc. The same anxious attention hitherto bestowed on his Pupils will now be shared by a confined number; and as a FEW only in future will be admitted, these must obviously derive greater advantage. – July 3rd, 1815¹⁰

What must have fuelled the rumour was that he had made further attempts to sell the house in June 1814¹¹. It seems that while he continued with the parish day school until 1827, when he was 70, he did close the boarding school later in 1815. In November 1815, with room to spare now that he was no longer taking in boarding pupils, he advertised "Genteel Furnished Lodgings" in the house:

Genteel FURNISHED LODGINGS
IN CHUDLEIGH

THE HOUSE is retired, commands one of the finest rural prospects, and is surrounded with a shrubbery. The apartment to be let consists of a spacious sitting room, with or without a drawing room equally commodious, and a family can be accommodated with such bed-rooms as may be required. Apply if by letter, post-paid, to Mr. Dolling, attorney, in Chudleigh. Chudleigh, November 7th, 1815.¹²

By this time William and Dorothea's family had less need for a large house themselves. William junior had died in 1798 and Ann had married in 1812. Walter was 20 years old, Frances 18 and

9 Northampton Mercury, 30/05/1807.

10 Exeter Flying Post, 06/07/1815.

11 Exeter Flying Post, 16/06/1814, 23/06/1814, 16/08/1814.

12 Exeter Flying Post, 09/09/1815.



Charles 16. It is possible that only Frances was still living with her parents. William may have been successful in getting a tenant, for he did not advertise the house for sale again until 1819, when he began advertising in his own name for the first time:

A Commodious Freehold Residence

On a much admired Spot for pure Air, rural Views, etc
In CHUDLEIGH, DEVON,
To be Sold by private Contract.

The house, erected but a few years since, is a compleat and substantial stone building, stands alone near the west end of the town of Chudleigh, **at an eligible distance from the road, with an easy ascent, and pretty drive round to its front, which opens to a very beautiful landscape**. About three quarters of an acre of pleasure ground, planted with choice shrubs, surrounds the house, near which is a neat green-house; and attached to the pleasure ground below, is a walled garden, containing about three quarters of an acre, with an orchard about half an acre. The premises will be sold with or without the Fee of about SIXTEEN ACRES of PASTURE GROUND, at a short distance from the Residence.

The House consists of three stories; on the ground floor are very spacious dining, drawing and breakfast-rooms, and a large kitchen; on the second floor are five airy and commodious bed-rooms, closets etc; an on the attic story are also five excellent bed-rooms; over the whole of which is a garret or drying-loft; a hall adjoining the house, which is replete with offices of every description, stable, coach-house, etc. –

Chudleigh is in the midst of a fine romantic and sporting country; and from its advantageous and altogether pleasant situation, is become in great request as a place of residence. The premises, combining every wished for convenience, with such delightful retirement, cannot fail of being a desirable purchase for a genteel family.

For further particulars, apply (if by letter, post-paid,) to Mr. Bond, at Chudleigh.
Chudleigh, June 6th 1819¹³

The highlighted text in this advertisement describes the driveway: “at an eligible distance from the road, with an easy ascent, and pretty drive round to its front, which opens to a very beautiful landscape”. The driveway most probably went around the right side of the house where there is now a driveway down to the two new houses built at the bottom of the original gardens, Gidden House and Michaelmas House. The gateway in the wall at the front of the house still exists between 32 and 34 Fore Street, but now has no access to the house.

William advertised the house again in May and June 1821¹⁴, when he also advertised furnished lodgings in the house once more¹⁵, all apparently without success. Another advertisement appeared in the *Exeter Flying Post* on May 20 1822. In it he says the house “was erected by the present proprietor” and that it would be “Sold Cheap”:



13 Exeter Flying Post, 10/06/1819, 01/07/1819, 20/07/1819, 24/10/1819, 03/08/1820.

14 Exeter Flying Post, 30/05/1821, 14/06/1821.

15 Exeter Flying Post, 07/06/1821.



CHUDLEIGH, DEVON

To be SOLD by private Contract, and immediate possession had,
A FREEHOLD RESIDENCE,

With about two Acres of Pleasure Ground and walled Garden, including an Orchard.

This commodious house surrounded with highly beautiful Scenery, is most desirably detached from the Town, and standing alone also in the centre of the spacious Pleasure Ground, its situation altogether is much admired. – **The house was erected by the present Proprietor but a few Years since**, is very substantial, and remarkably dry; it has sitting, drawing, and breakfast-rooms of large dimensions, ten airy and good bed-rooms, (including those for servants,) all requisite offices, stable, coach-house, etc. – These excellent Premises, with the view of immediate disposal, **will be Sold Cheap**, and for convenient, as well as delightful retirement, are well worth the attention of a genteel Family; for whose reception the House is quite ready – The Purchase may also be accommodated with the Fee of about sixteen Acres of Land, at a short distance.

Apply (if by Letter, post-paid) to Mr. Bond, at Chudleigh.

Chudleigh, May 20th 1822¹⁶

The same advertisement appeared at the beginning of August 1822, with an added note that the house was unfurnished, indicating that he had moved out.¹⁷ Then a fresh advertisement appeared in June 1823. It shows that he had decided he might have a better chance of selling by downplaying its size:

CHUDLEIGH, DEVON

TO be SOLD, with Immediate Possession, EITHER of the TWO undermentioned
FREEHOLD HOUSES

The first House, with about an acre and a quarter of pleasure ground and garden (including a small orchard) is most eligibly and delightfully situated, is retired from the town, and is surrounded with highly beautiful scenery. This residence is a perfectly distinct part of Mr Bond's late extensive premises, and consists of a good dining-room and spacious drawing-room, six excellent bed-rooms, a garrett, with all convenient offices, out-buildings, etc. and is well worth the attention of a genteel Family.- About Sixteen Acres of Freehold Land, at a short distance, may be purchased with it.

The other House, now occupied by Mr. Bond, is situated in a very pleasant part of the town, and commands fine country views. It contains a comfortable sitting and drawing-room, five bed-rooms, a garrett, all requisite offices, etc.

For further particulars, apply to Mr. Dolling, Attorney at Law, Chudleigh, (if by letter, to be post-paid.)

10th June, 1823.¹⁸

In April and May 1829 William made a final effort to get Swanston off his hands. He was no longer trying to sell the house, but to rent it out. He was 72 years old and, perhaps, aware that he would soon die. His wife, Dorothea, was ten years younger and I suppose that he hoped the income from the rent would support her when he was gone. A Land Tax return of 1829 shows that William was the occupier of a house in Chudleigh owned by a Walter Broad, so Swanston was unoccupied. He advertised it to let in the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* of April 18:

CHUDLEIGH, DEVON

TO be LET, with immediate possession, for such term as may be agreed upon, a commodious
DWELLING HOUSE

Enclosed with nearly an Acre of Pleasure Ground and Walled Garden

¹⁶ Exeter Flying Post, 20/05/1822. My bold italics.

¹⁷ Exeter Flying Post 01/08/1822, p.1.

¹⁸ Exeter Flying Post, 12/06/1823, 19/06/1823



Situated near the west end of the pleasant market-town of Chudleigh, but detached about 46 yards from the post-road leading from Exeter to Plymouth, and surrounded with fine rural scenery.

The House stands on a dry and healthy spot, and consists of three good sitting-rooms, five airy bed-rooms and 2 garrets, with all suitable offices including coach-house and stable; forming altogether a most desirable family residence.

For viewing the premises, apply to Mr BOND, Chudleigh; and for further particulars to Mr. MICHELMORE, Mamhead Cottage, near Exeter; or to Mr. MICHELMORE, Ware, near Buckfastleigh, if by letter to be post paid.

Dated April 4th, 1829¹⁹

He repeated the same advertisement in the *Exeter Flying Post* on May 9 and May 16 1829.

William Bond died “almost suddenly” on Saturday October 31 1829.²⁰ After his death, his widow repeated the same advertisement in the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* on September 11 1830 and September 18 1830, changing only “Mr Bond” to “Mrs Bond”.²¹

The next known owner was John Williams. The earliest record I have found that shows he was the owner of the house is the 1838 Tithe Apportionment map, but I think he must have bought it before that. I have found no record from those eight years that shows another owner before him.

John Williams (1787 – 1869)

No account of the life of John Williams can begin without first introducing the Rev. Gilbert Burrington junior, vicar of Chudleigh. He was the son of the Rev. Gilbert Burrington senior who had been vicar of Chudleigh from 1752 until he died in 1785. Gilbert junior succeeded him and he would remain the vicar of Chudleigh until he died in 1840.

It is said that John Williams was a foundling, left on the Chudleigh vicarage doorstep in 1787. The vicarage at that time was the house now known as Glebe House in Glebelands. He seems to have arrived at the vicarage with a name and his date of birth. The record of his baptism says “The Mother and Father names are not known” and that he was born on April 29 1787. The vicar at the time was Gilbert Burrington junior, but he was not married until February 1791, so it was his widowed mother, Maria Burrington, who first looked after the child at the vicarage where, no doubt, she was also housekeeping for her son.

When she died on October 24 1790, however, her son lost no time in getting married. Within three months he had married Jenny Matthew Packer, a widow.²² She brought with her two young children, Charlotte Packer, age 11 and Elizabeth Treby Packer, age 7. These children and John Williams, by then 3 years old, were brought up together by Rev. Gilbert Burrington and his wife Jenny. They had no children of their own. Understanding that he was brought up with Charlotte and Elizabeth Packer is essential background to understanding John Williams’ reasons, much later, for buying Swanston.

¹⁹ Exeter and Plymouth Gazette 18/04/1829, p. 1. Note that 46 yards is 138 feet, close to the 130 foot distance from the road in the 1801 advertisement.

²⁰ Western Times, 07/11/1829, p.2: On Saturday last at Chudleigh, almost suddenly, Mr. Bond, for many years a respectable school-master at that place.

²¹ Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 11/09/1830 p.4 and 18/09/1830.

²² Jenny Matthew Treby (1750 – 1832) married William Packer in 1778. He died in 1783.



According to the account in *The Chudleigh Book*, John Williams received his education at William Bond's school. He may well have gone on to Pinsent's Grammar School. As a young man he went to Plymouth as a clerk in a wine importing and gin distilling company. He rose rapidly, becoming a partner, perhaps with financial backing from his adoptive father. *The Chudleigh Book* has this account:

His home in Plymouth, comprising dwelling house, coach house, stables and garden was located at 13 Ham Street, Cattedown. By 1821 he had joined the established gin manufactory in nearby Southside Street then called Coates & Co. With two existing partners, Thomas Coates and James Fox, the company became Coates, Fox, Williams & Co. In a few years James Fox left and the name changed to Coates, Williams & Co. The firm advertised themselves as 'licensed rectifiers, importers and dealers in Foreign and British Spirits' and in addition were the first in Plymouth to use 'Plymouth Gin' as a trade name. The distillery, still located at its original premises, continues to hold the sole right to that name.²³

He was not only a gin distiller. Pigot's *Directory of Devon* for 1830 lists, under Taverns & Public Houses:

Freemasons' Arms, Jno Williams, Catdown

John Williams never married. The gin trade made him very wealthy and he used much of his wealth in charitable works for the poor. For example, there is this report on page 3 of the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, April 25 1835:

John Williams, Esq., of the distillery, Plymouth, has benevolently appropriated a dwelling-house, in North-street, as an asylum for seven poor and deserving widows, who are to be maintained, for the remainder of their lives, at his own expense.

Why John Williams bought Swanston

The event that I believe triggered John Williams' purchase of Swanston concerned the Rev. Gilbert Burrington's nephew, also called Gilbert Burrington. In the account that follows I will name him "the nephew" or "Gilbert Burrington Esq." to distinguish him from his uncle, Rev. Gilbert Burrington.

Gilbert Burrington Esq. was born in 1773. He was the son of Thomas Burrington, one of Rev Gilbert Burrington junior's brothers. Thomas married Ann Barnaby in London (by special licence that cost £200) in April 1772. Their son Gilbert was born in January 1773. Sometime in that year Thomas died in Grenada, West Indies.²⁴ His widow Ann married William Huntsman in London in 1778, so it is most likely that Gilbert grew up with his step-father, but he may also have spent time in Chudleigh with his grandfather, Rev. Gilbert Burrington senior and with the family of his uncle, Rev. Gilbert Burrington junior.

²³ The Chudleigh Book, Orchard Publications 2009, p. 90.

²⁴ A memorial tablet in the chancel of Chudleigh church: "Sacred to the memory of Thomas Burrington Esquire who died in the island of Grenada in the year MDCCLXXIII aged XXII. Also of Robert Burrington who died in Madras in the year MDCCXCI aged XXXVI."



Gilbert Burrington Esq. became a stockbroker in London where he married Margaret Douglas Johnston in 1797. They had a son in 1807, inevitably named Gilbert. Margaret died in 1819 and Gilbert moved to Chudleigh. In 1822 he married Elizabeth Treby Packer, the younger of the two Packer girls that had grown up in the Rev. Burrington's family with John Williams. Those girls were very well provided for, with inheritances from the Treby and Packer families. It was Elizabeth's main inheritance, called "Filleigh Cranmers and Chudleigh Woods", that allowed the new family to move to Filleigh, the mansion on New Exeter Road just outside Chudleigh. They had a son there in 1824, but he died three weeks later and they had no other children.

Then, on March 21 1831, Gilbert Burrington Esq. was declared bankrupt. One consequence was that the Filleigh Cranmers and Chudleigh Woods property was lost to the appointed bankruptcy receiver.

It will become very clear that his relations, particularly his uncle, Rev Gilbert Burrington, and his sister-in-law, Charlotte Packer, did not think the nephew's bankruptcy had occurred through no fault of his own. They treated him as someone who, like an addicted gambler, was not be trusted with the control of any asset whatever. He had shamed and disgraced the family and lost the provision, essentially the property known as "Filleigh Cranmers and Chudleigh Woods", that had been made for Elizabeth's support. The family had to move out of Filleigh leaving all their furniture and effects to be sold by a public auction held on the premises on May 26 1831. I do not know how much Gilbert owed, but the scale of his debts can be glimpsed from the fact that it cost his sister-in-law Charlotte £1,500 in January 1832²⁵ to recover from the receiver the inherited family rights to the Filleigh Cranmers and Chudleigh Woods property. She did not, however, do so to restore it to the nephew's family.

In January 1832 the nephew was living in White Conduit Grove in Islington and in 1835 somewhere in Paignton, but I believe that John Williams was already setting up the arrangement by which the nephew and his family would return to Chudleigh and live in Swanston. He bought the house and land around it and extended and adapted it so that both he and the nephew's family could live in it. One possibility is that the house that William Bond built was just the central three-storey section and that it was John Williams who added the two wings to it. The Tithe Map shown below, which was based on an accurate survey done in 1838, shows Swanston as a rectangle occupying the space it would with the wings added. That could be because the wings had been added before 1838 or because the wings were part of the original building.

John William's additions may have included a hot house or orangery because in 1838 Rev. Gilbert Burrington made in his will a specific bequest of his orange and lemon trees to his friend John Williams "to be delivered to him as soon as conveniently may be after my decease."

I guess that they would have moved in to Swanston around 1836. In effect John Williams was providing the nephew and his family with a house appropriate to their proper social standing, to

²⁵ Equivalent in spending power to nearly £200,000 today.



give the impression of restored creditability. In practice, however, they were there by John Williams' grace and favour and lived on his and other family financial support.

John Williams kept a part of the house for himself and would use it if he was visiting Chudleigh, but he was only nominally resident there. His real home and his business remained in Plymouth. That he would do all this only makes sense if you understand that he was truly an integral part of the Rev. Gilbert Burrington's family. Just how much he was a part of the family and the degree of the family's distrust of the nephew after 1831 are made clear in the wills that Elizabeth's sister, Charlotte Packer, and the Rev. Gilbert Burrington junior made.

When Charlotte Packer (who never married) made her will in 1835 she left her estate, converted into government and other securities, to be held in trust during the life of her sister Elizabeth Treby Burrington by John Williams and Joseph Cuming, then curate to the Rev. Gilbert Burrington junior. The interest from these investments, apart from £40 to be paid annually to the Rev. Gilbert Burrington junior during his lifetime, were for her sister's "sole and separate use and benefit ... independent of her present and any future husband" and "not to be liable to his debts, assigns, liabilities, engagements or control". On her sister's death and not before it, Charlotte's executors were to pay "two thousand four hundred and thirty seven pounds" into her sister's estate, to be distributed according to the provisions of her sister's will, but with a condition that would prevent her present husband, or any future husband, from being a beneficiary. If that condition was not met, Charlotte's entire estate was to be divided between John Williams and her aunt Esther Treby. When Rev. Gilbert Burrington died in 1840, he was childless and a widower, his wife Jenny having died in 1832. His will, made in 1838, specified that all his property and goods should be sold, the money invested in government bonds and the interest paid by his executors to "my esteemed friend John Williams of Plymouth" during the lifetime of "my nephew Gilbert Burrington" and that John Williams should use as much of the money as he deemed fit to support the nephew, his wife and his son by his first marriage. The provisions of the will required, explicitly, that the nephew should never get his hands on the capital. It was to be held in trust by his executors until his nephew had died.

Gilbert Burrington Esq. played a significant, although ineffective part in a disputed election in 1841. The death of Rev. Gilbert Burrington in 1840 meant that there would be an election by the parishioners to choose his replacement. The right to the vicarage of Chudleigh had been, since 1682, vested in trustees who were responsible for organising an election when a vacancy occurred. Gilbert Burrington Esq. was one of these trustees. Another was Sir Lawrence Palk, a local grandee. The vicarage of Chudleigh was desirable because it had a very good income. The election took place on January 22 1841. There were two candidates. The first was Rev. Joseph Cuming, who had been Rev. Burrington's curate and was, at the time, Master of Pynsent's Grammar School. The other was Rev. Wilmot Henry Palk, Rector of Ashcombe and brother of Sir Lawrence Palk, who wanted the income but had no intention of moving from Ashcombe to Chudleigh. On the day of the election Rev. Palk's election agent, a Mr. Scott, invited voters to have breakfast with him at the Bishop Lacey public house and then accompany him to the poll. They were to have whatever food and drink they required and he, Scott, would pay.



The result was Cuming 68 votes, Palk 89 votes. Gilbert Burrington argued that the result was invalid because many of Palk's votes had been made by men who were not genuine parishioners. The remainder of the trustees ruled that the election of Palk was valid. The Bishop of Exeter, Henry Phillpotts, who had to induct the winning candidate, refused to induct Palk unless forced to do so, believing the election had been conducted improperly. If the vacancy was not filled after six months, he proposed to use his default power to fill it by inducting Cuming. The majority of the trustees first obtained an injunction to prevent him from doing this and then went to the chancery court to require the bishop to induct Rev. Palk. The case was finally heard in the Vice-Chancellor's court over three days in February 1843. Sir James Knight-Bruce, the vice-chancellor hearing the case, dismissed the allegations of electoral misconduct and decided against the bishop. Consequently Rev. Palk was inducted as vicar of Chudleigh in 1843, appointing a succession of curates to carry out his Chudleigh duties while he remained at Ashcombe. By that time Rev Joseph Cuming had already left Chudleigh in disgust, moving to a headmastership in London.²⁶

Elm Grove

The earliest and most definite evidence of John Williams' ownership of Swanston is the 1838 Tithe Apportionment map and index. The section of the 1838 Tithe Apportionment map of Chudleigh below shows the church in black and, above it, Vicarage Lane, and then the Church House (where the garages are now) and the pink rectangle of Swanston. In the corresponding index John Williams is recorded as the owner of the house (numbered 1785, but not legibly in this image), the house on Fore Street in front of it and all the open spaces to its right, numbered 1342, 1343, 1327, 1328 and 1315. The index lists "John Williams and another" as the occupants of the house.





The earliest record I have found in which the house is named “Elm Grove” comes from White’s Directory of Devonshire in 1850. Then the house was called Elm Grove and resident were Gilbert Burrington Esq. and John Williams Esq. These two are also listed as residents of Chudleigh in Pigot’s Directory of 1844, but without naming where they lived. They are also listed living in “Main Street” in Chudleigh consecutively in the 1841 Census:

John Williams, 50, Merchant	
Elizabeth Hicks, 50, F.S.	(Female Servant)
Elizabeth Bouyer, 50, F.S.	
Charles Cooksley, 40, M.S.	(Male Servant)
Gilbert Burrington, 68, Ind.	(Independent means)
Elizabeth Burrington, 52, Ind.	
Ellen Whiteway, 21, F.S.	
Sarah Mann, 22, F.S.	

The 1841 census does not name the houses where people lived, but their position in the census implies they were living in Swanston. The name “Elm Grove” suggests that the small group of elm trees currently at the end of the driveway are descendants of elms that once lined the edge of the church graveyard along Fore Street and some of the frontage of Swanston on Fore Street.

The very first advertisement for the house in 1801 says that the entrance was on Fore Street:

It is built near the west end of the town on a very healthy and delightful spot, ascending from the street from which the house, inclosed by a wall, is distant about 130 feet.

The 1819 advertisement shows that the driveway went around one side of the house so that it ended at the front, which faced away from Fore Street:

... stands alone near the west end of the town ...at an eligible distance from the road, with an easy ascent and pretty drive round to its front.

An entrance gateway to Swanston survives in the alleyway between 32 and 34 Fore Street, in line with the current front portico of Swanston House. The account on page 91 in *The Chudleigh Book* says that this was only the service entrance, that originally the front of the house faced away from Fore Street and “was approached by a sweeping carriage drive that had a shared entrance with the vicarage, accessed off Clifford Street (then Mill Lane).”²⁷ The vicarage of that time is shown at the bottom of the tithe map section shown earlier, and is numbered 1325, although it looks like 1375. It is now called Glebe House in Glebelands and an entrance gateway off Clifford Street is still there.²⁸ If Swanston once had a driveway that shared that entrance, which I think is unlikely, it must have been in the time of John Williams, because he owned all the land between. The obstacle that John Williams would have need to overcome was the alleyway shown in the 1838 Tithe Map between Vicarage Lane and the row of houses that in the 1887 map are called Saunders’s Cottages. By that time that alleyway had disappeared. It could have been removed by

²⁷ The Chudleigh Book, p. 91.

²⁸ The image of the 1838 Tithe Map above shows a lane going past the vicarage up to what is now named Clifford Street. I think that was part of the original line of the lane that survives in the present day as Millway.

DocRef: CHG/RR/008 Author: John Butchart Version: 1.3 – 17 March 2026	Swanston House	Chudleigh History Group 
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John Williams in order to create a new driveway. It could not have survived the later creation of the lane now called Parkway that is shown in the 1887 map.

In the 1851 census two households are listed at Elm Grove” in “Fore Street”:

Gilbert Burrington, 78, retired stock broker
Elizabeth Treby, 68, wife
Elizabeth Fletcher, 34, house servant
Eliza Bawden, 19, house servant
John Taylor, 56, house servant
Ann Taylor, 47, house servant

John and Ann Taylor were John Williams’ servants. He is listed at his Plymouth address, 13 Ham Street:

John Williams, 65, retired distiller
John Richards, 27, house servant
Elizabeth Pomeray, 42, housemaid
Sarah Bell, 37, housemaid

Both Gilbert Burrington and John Williams are listed as residents of Chudleigh in Slater’s 1852-3 Directory. Gilbert Burrington died July 1853 and his widow, Elizabeth Treby Burrington, in March 1858. Billing’s 1857 Directory and Gazetteer of the County of Devon lists only John Williams living in Fore Street, Chudleigh. The house is not named.

John Williams was able to improve the frontage of the house on Fore Street in 1859 by demolishing the church house. It had fallen into disrepair and the vestry committee had obtained permission from the Charity Commissioners to sell it and the land on which it stood. He bought it for £120 when it was auctioned in 1859 and promptly had the Church House taken down. The present line of Vicarage Lane, the wall on one side and the boundary of the churchyard were all determined by this purchase.

In the 1861 census only John Williams’ two Chudleigh servants, John and Ann Taylor, are listed living at Elm Grove in Fore Street, Chudleigh:

John Taylor, 66, head servant
Ann Taylor 58, wife

John Williams is listed at 13 Ham Street in Plymouth.

It may be that John Williams retired to Chudleigh towards the end of his life or, at least, spent more time there. He died in Chudleigh, age 82, on December 23 1869 and is buried in the churchyard. He is noted for leaving £1,000 to the parish of Chudleigh “to be invested in 3 per Cent. Consols, the dividends to be distributed among the poor of the parish,” £500 each for the poor in the parishes of St Andrew and St Charles in Plymouth and £500 each to the South Devon and East Cornwall Hospital, the Devon and Cornwall Female Orphan Asylum, the Plymouth Eye



Infirmary and Plymouth Public Dispensary as well as other bequests. He paid “nearly £200” for the stained- glass east window in the church as a memorial to his adopting father, the Rev. Gilbert Burrington.

In his will John Williams left all his real estate in Chudleigh and Plymouth to Mark Stephens Grigg, his immediate neighbour in Ham Street, Plymouth. That bequest would have included Elm Grove. The house was put up for sale by auction at the Clifford Arms on May 10 1870:

CHUDLEIGH – DEVON

Superior and Commodious Detached Freehold Residence and Land, and Dwelling House and Shop, for Sale

MESSRS. RENDELL and SYMONS are instructed to offer for SALE, by Public Auction, at the CLIFFORD ARMS in Chudleigh on TUESDAY the 10th of MAY next at the hour of Three in the Afternoon, the Fee-simple and Inheritance of all that substantial built and convenient DWELLING HOUSE situate in the town of Chudleigh, but detached from the street, late the property of John Williams Esq., deceased, with the Shrubbery, Pleasure Ground, Gardens, Hot House, Green House, Offices, Stables, Coach House and Premises adjoining and belonging thereto.

And also, a FREEHOLD HOUSE and SHOP adjoining the entrance gate to the above, now occupied by Mr. William Cleave, saddler, as tenant thereof.

The dwelling house is charmingly situated, has a south-eastern aspect commanding beautiful views, including Chudleigh Rocks; the Belt of Ugbrooke Park and the intervening undulating lands and woods, has been occupied by the late proprietor for many years and is in excellent repair.

It contains dining, drawing and breakfast rooms and library of suitable dimensions, kitchen, servant's hall and convenient domestic offices on the ground floor and eleven bed rooms, two dressing rooms, with spacious attics on the upper floors.

Early possession may be had.

The whole area of the property is about an acre and a quarter in extent. The completion of the Teign Valley Railway (which is in course of construction) will give railway accommodation, and the beauty and salubrity of Chudleigh and its neighbourhood are too well known to need description. Exeter is ten miles, Torquay thirteen and the fashionable watering places of Dawlish and Teignmouth only seven miles distant from Chudleigh.

Application to view the Premises should be made to the undersigned, and particulars and conditions of sale may be had ten days before the Auction, on application to the AUCTIONEERS, Market-Place, Newton Abbot or to

C. LANGLEY, Solicitor, Chudleigh

Dated Chudleigh 7th April 1870.

Evidently the house did not sell because it was advertised again in the Devon & Exter Gazette and in the Exeter Flying Post by the same solicitor in late April and early May. The description of the house and grounds was the same as in 1870, but included other properties in Chudleigh as well.

In the 1871 census Elm Grove is not named, but its position in Fore Street is listed as unoccupied. It was sold eventually to Mary Nice, who changed its name to Whitsley House, the name of the house she was born in.

Whitsley House

Mary Nice was born Mary Shapland in 1845 at Whitsley House in St Giles in the Wood, a parish two and a half miles east of Great Torrington in Devon. She was the daughter of George



Shapland, a farmer of 300 acres. She married Onesiphorus Pearson Nice, a draper and grocer in 1866, who was named Onesiphorus after an early Christian supporter of St Paul.²⁹ They are listed with three children near the beginning of Fore Street, Chudleigh in the 1871 census. By August 1874, however, they had moved to Coburg Cottage, because Mrs Nice advertised for a Nursery Governess in the *Western Times* 04/08/1894:

WANTED a middle-aged lady as NURSERY GOVERNESS in a tradesman's family to educate four young children – Apply to Mrs NICE, Coburg Cottage, Chudleigh.

It seems that Mary Nice may not have bought the house until 1876. I have not found any mention of Whitsley House in Chudleigh until an advertisement in the *Western Times* in October 1876:

WANTED a GENERAL SERVANT, also a HOUSE and PARLOURMAID, not under 20. Apply, stating wages and particulars to Mrs NICE, Whitsley House, Chudleigh.

My impression is that she bought the house not to live in it, but to operate it as a business. She was not separating from her husband. They remained together until he died in 1903. She would have needed a lot of help, however, in getting the house ready for what she intended, to let it out furnished as this advertisement in the *Western Times* of 14/04/1877 shows:

CHUDLEIGH. — To LET, Furnished, for a term, No. 2, WHITSLEY HOUSE, late the residence of J. Williams, Esq., deceased, containing drawing-rooms, dining-room, 8 bedrooms, bath-room, and 2 w.c.'s, kitchen, and all domestic offices, a well-stocked kitchen garden, gas and water laid on. Also No. 1, WHITSLEY HOUSE to be LET, Furnished or Unfurnished. — For particulars apply to Mr. Nice, Chudleigh, near Newton Abbot.

Both Onesiphorus and Mary Nice appear in the list of Chudleigh residents in White's *History, Gazetteer and Directory of the County of Devon 1878-9*:

Nice Mrs, lodgings, Whitsley House
Nice, Onesiphorus Pearson, grocer and draper, Fore street

There are a few clues about the people living in the house between 1876 and the 1881 census when it was unoccupied. Between 1877 and early 1881 the house was also occupied by the family of the Rev. John Gilman and his wife Emily. Three of their children were born there: Irene Beatrice in 1877, Dorothy Maud in 1879 and Leofric Hale in February 1881. By the time of the 1881 census the family had moved to Charlwood in Surrey, where the Rev. Gilman became the curate. In the *Western Times* of June 7 1878 there is this intriguing advertisement for a nursemaid:

²⁹ See 2 Timothy 1: 16-18 and 4: 19.



NURSEMAID, about 20, to live at Newton Abbot ;
must be accustomed to children and be able to sew.
—Address Mrs. CANDY, Whitsley House, Chudleigh.

I think that “Mrs Candy” was Elizabeth Candy, the wife of Frank Candy, a Pottery Master employing 100 men and 10 boys. By the time of the next census in 1881 they had moved to Highweek in Newton Abbot with six children ranging from 2 years old to 13. The implication is that they lived in Whitsley House temporarily before moving to Highweek.

In the 1881 census the house is not named but its position is listed as unoccupied. The next clue is this advertisement from the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, March 20 1883:

AUCTION THIS DAY.
WHITSLEY HOUSE, CHUDLEIGH,
About 1 mile from Chudleigh Station, 10 from Exeter,
and 6 from Teignmouth and Dawlish.
MESSRS. HUSSEY and SON are instructed to SELL
by AUCTION, This Day (TUESDAY), March 20th,
commencing at Eleven o'clock, the excellent HOUSE-
HOLD FURNITURE and EFFECTS in the above resi-
dence, comprising drawing and dining-room suites, in
rosewood, mahogany, and other fancy woods; and the
appurtenances of six bed and dressing rooms, consisting
of brass-mounted and other bedsteads, marble-top wash-
stands, Brussels carpets, &c., the whole in excellent condi-
tion, and fully described in catalogues (3d. each), which
may be obtained of the AUCTIONEERS, 14, Queen-street,
Exeter, three days prior to the sale.
We respectfully solicit the favour of an early attend-
ance, as the lots are numerous.
14, Queen-street, Exeter, March 12th, 1883.

William Henry Worthy Bennett

The family of William Henry Worthy Bennett, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Royal Marines, were the next residents of Whitsley House. Kelly's 1883 Directory of Devonshire shows Lieut. Col. Bennett living at Whitsley House, so I think the sale of furniture and effects in March would be Mrs Nice clearing the house so that it would be ready for the Bennett family to move in. I also think that Colonel Bennett may have rented the house from Mary Nice. Kelly's 1889 Directory of Devonshire shows Lieut. Col. Bennett living at Whitsley House, so the family lived there for at least six years, but by the time of the 1891 census the Bennett family had moved to Newton Abbot.



William Henry Worthy Bennett joined the Royal Marines in Portsmouth in 1848 when he was 17 years old. He was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant. At the beginning of his career he served in the Pacific, patrolling along the eastern coast of South America, mainly to suppress the slave trade. During the Crimean War of 1854 – 1856 William served on *HMS Miranda* in the summers of 1854 and 1855, blockading Archangel and other ports in the White Sea. As a Captain in the Marines, he was serving on *HMS Conqueror* when it was wrecked off the Bahamas on January 29 1862. All 1400 men on board got off safely. In 1870 he served on *HMS Terrible* and *HMS Scorpion* escorting a floating dock to Bermuda. In 1872 he became Brigade Major on the Flag Ship *Royal Adelaide* at Devonport. From 1875 to 1878 he was responsible for recruitment at Exeter, being made Lieutenant Colonel in 1877, the year his wife Anna died. From 1879 to 1883 he was the commandant of the Chatham Division at Walmer, Kent. He was placed on the retired list on July 4 1883 when he was 52.

As a 1st Lieutenant William married Anna Maria Sanders in 1852. They lived at Stonehouse and would have ten children together, three sons and seven daughters, one of whom died in infancy. Anna died at Stonehouse in 1877, when five of their children were under 18 years old and Ethel, the youngest, was six. William then married Lucretia Worthy in 1878. She was the daughter of Rev. Charles Worthy, vicar of Ashburton. (She came from the same extended family as William's mother, Mary Worthy, which was why his third forename was "Worthy.") They had three children together, the youngest of whom, Thomas, was born in Chudleigh in 1885. They lived briefly at Stonehouse and then at Walmer in Kent. It was when William retired in 1883 that they moved to Whitsley House in Chudleigh, no doubt so that Lucretia could be closer to her family in Ashburton.



Detail from the 1887 25 inch to mile Ordnance Survey map published in 1888.

Kelly's 1889 Directory of Devonshire still listed Lieutenant Colonel Bennett at Whitsley House, but by the time of the 1891 census the family had moved to Hillsden, Forde Park in Newton Abbot. William died there on August 4 1893, age 62. Lucretia, eleven years his junior, died in 1916.

William Bennet may have had to move because Mary Nice was selling the house or his move to Newton Abbot the opportunity for her to sell it. Onesiphorus and Mary Nice were moving out of Chudleigh about that time. By 1888 they were established in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk



Giddea House

The house was re-named again when the Rev. Herbert Marriott and his family moved in. The name they brought was “Giddea House.” I have found no obvious connection in his life that would explain why he chose this name. The fact that he gave the house a new name suggests that he intended to make it a permanent home and it must be said that his family were in great need of some permanence in their lives.

George Herbert Marriott, known as Herbert Marriott, was born in Claverton, Somerset in 1832, third son of Rev. Harvey Marriott. He went to Trinity College, Dublin, where he was ordained in 1861. He was never the rector or vicar of a parish, but was a jobbing curate, having only one or two year appointments and always moving from place to place. He was first in Belfast, then Templemore in Tipperary, then Doon in Limerick. In 1864 he became curate in Crichel in Dorset and there, on January 17 1865, he married Cordelia Isabella Paterson, the daughter of the vicar of West Hoathly in Sussex. On June 18 1866 Cordelia gave birth to a daughter, but died five days later. Her daughter was baptised with her mother’s names, Cordelia Isabella Marriott.

Herbert Marriott then became curate in Trowbridge, Wiltshire. On December 5 1867 he married Angelina Elizabeth Berry, known as “Angel”, the daughter of Rev. Marlborough Sterling Berry, perpetual curate (effectively the vicar) of West Ashton, near Trowbridge. They would have ten children together, but it was a very unsettled life. They were in Weston-Super-Mare for a year (where their first son, Herbert, was born), then Montacute in Somerset for a year (where their second son, Basil, was born), followed by a year in Cornwall at Polruan (where their daughter Sophia was born). Then Herbert began serving abroad with the Commonwealth and Continental Church Society. He was in Tangier in 1872 (where their daughter Charlotte was born), and Seville in 1873, where Charlotte died. At that point Angel must have insisted on returning to England. Their next four children were all born in England. Their son Edward was born at Princess Square in Plymouth in 1874, then Charles on December 22 1875 and Emily on July 29 1878, both at 3 Gascoyne Place, Plymouth. Their eighth child, Alfred, was born on January 8 1880 at 11, Beresford Road in Canonbury, London. That year Herbert was appointed Chaplain at Beirut and I guess they were waiting in London for Angel to be able to travel. Herbert was Chaplain at Beirut from 1880 to 1885. However, it seems that Herbert and Angel then spent a year in Jerusalem, where their ninth child, Cyril, was born on November 11 1886, but died there just over a month later. They returned to Plymouth, where their tenth child, John, was born on March 23 1889 at 9 Whitfield Terrace, Plymouth. They were still at Whitfield Terrace in 1890, just before they moved to Chudleigh.

The family are listed in the 1891 census, living in “Giddea House”, Fore Street. Seven of their eight living children were with them, the one missing being Basil, who had enlisted in the Rifle Brigade in 1888 when he was 18:

Herbert Marriott, 58, Minister of Religion
Angelina E. Marriott, 44, wife
Cordelia I. Marriott, 24



Herbert Marriott, 22, Graduate C C Coll Camb^{9e} School of Theology
Sophia C. Marriott, 19
Edward A. Marriott, 16, scholar
Charles D. Marriott, 15, scholar
Emily M. Marriott, 12, scholar
Alfred R. Marriott, 11, scholar
John F. L. Marriott, 2
Jane Thomas, 29, cook
Lavinia J. Bate, 29, nurse
Henrietta C. Hammacett, housemaid

Herbert Marriott was a man of pugnacious character with very definite ideas of what was right and wrong. Very early in his time in Chudleigh he took exception to the services in the parish church, particularly services led by the Rev T. J. Yarde. Officially Rev. Yarde was curate at St John's Church in Torquay, but he was one of the Yarde family living in Culver House in Chudleigh. The current vicar of Chudleigh, Rev. Charles Ward, evidently encouraged Yarde to take services for him in Chudleigh from time to time.

It seems that both Yarde and Ward were too "high church" for Herbert Marriott. Instead, he began attending the services at the Baptist Chapel at Chudleigh. On November 28 1890 the rural dean at Moretonhamstead drew this to the Bishop of Exeter's attention. When the bishop asked Marriott for an explanation, he replied by citing Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, saying:

I beg to inform you that since the year 1854 I have endeavoured to obey the divine commands "that ye all speak the same thing", "that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement." In accordance with which I thankfully unite with all branches of Evangelical Worship.³⁰

The bishop then withdrew Marriott's licence to preach.

The withdrawal of Herbert Marriott's licence to preach for attending Baptist services became a minor national story in the press. It fed into the long-standing conflict between "high" and "low" in the Anglican church that had begun half a century earlier with reaction to the "high church" Oxford Movement. There was even a question to the Home Secretary in the House of Commons "whether the action of the bishop had given rise to grave dissatisfaction and if the Government intended to do anything about it." The Home Secretary replied that "the matter was quite outside the jurisdiction of the Home Office and he had no authority to interfere."³¹

This was not the only conflict that Marriott had with officialdom. When he was in Jerusalem in 1886, he accused Arthur Hastings Kelk, the head of the mission in Jerusalem of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews, of conducting an affair with a young woman, Emma Caroline Fitzjohn, who directed the London Society's school for girls there. Getting no support for his claim Marriott published a pamphlet in May 1886, *Exposé of an Extraordinary Appeal in a Case of Scandal at Jerusalem*, only to be refuted by a counter-pamphlet from the

³⁰ Western Times, January 23 1891 p. 2.

³¹ Hansard, February 5 1891.



London Society, *A Few Facts Respecting Pamphlet Circulated by the Rev. Marriott of Jerusalem*, that found no blame at all in Kelk's conduct.

One other story from the Newton Abbot petty sessions in 1895, perhaps speaks volumes about Marriott's sense of right and wrong:

Samuel John Brimmicombe 11, and Thomas Stevens, 13 were charged with stealing apples and plums, valued at 4d., the property of the Rev. Hebert Marriott, Chudleigh. Defendants pleaded guilty and were sentenced to receive, Stevens four and Brimmicombe six strokes from the birch-rod.³²

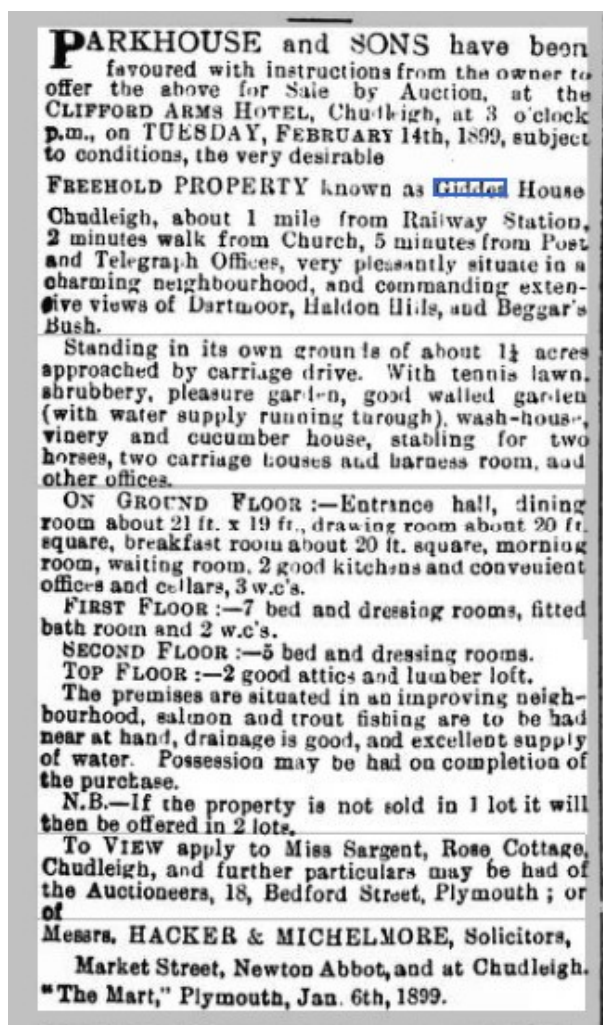
Controversies aside, Marriott involved himself in village life in ways appropriate for an ordained minister. He became a committee member of the Chudleigh Cottage Garden Society and eventually became its chairman. He served on the committee of the National School in Chudleigh and he and members of his family were very active members of the Chudleigh Young Men's

Christian Association, founded in January 1891. The fact that the Y.M.C.A. was non-denominational would have been very much to Rev. Marriott's liking.

The Marriott's stay in Chudleigh lasted for eight years, ending in 1898. Their daughter Sophia died in Chudleigh on May 20 1896 when she was 24. Her death may have been the trigger for the family's move to Plymouth, which must have happened by 1898, because their son Charles died there on December 21 1898 when he was only 23. It could be that his illness, which might have been tuberculosis, was another reason for their move.

It appears the house was put up for sale by auction on May 5th 1898 because there is a flyer for the same in the Devon Archives.³³ The auctioneer's sale particulars were appropriately enthusiastic:

Charmingly situated private dwelling house (formerly known as Whitley house) known as "GIDDEA HOUSE", standing in its own well laid out grounds of about 1¼ acres and free from Land Tax. Parkhouse & Sons have been favoured with instructions from the owner to offer for sale, by public auction



32 Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, August 30 1895, p.11.

33 FOR/B/6/2/53 Sales particulars for auction of Giddea House, Chudleigh 1898.



on the premises, at three o'clock on Thursday May 5th 1898, the freehold property known as Gidea House, Chudleigh.

About 1 mile from the Railway Station, 2 minutes' walk from the Church, 5 minutes from Post and Telegraph Offices, very pleasantly situated in a charming neighbourhood and commanding extensive views of Dartmoor, Haldon Hills and Beggar's Bush, standing in its own grounds of about 1¼ acres, approached by carriage drive with Tennis Lawn, Shrubbery, Pleasure Garden, Good Walled Garden (with water supply running through), Wash House, Vinery and Cucumber House.

Stabling for 2 horses, 2 carriage houses and Harness Room and other offices.

ON THE GROUND FLOOR: Entrance Hall, Dining Room about 21 ft x 19 ft, Drawing Room about 20 ft square, Breakfast Room about 20 ft square, Morning Room, Waiting Room, 2 good Kitchens and convenient Offices and Cellars, 3 W.C.'s.

FIRST FLOOR: 7 Bed and Dressing Rooms, fitted Bath Room and 2 W.C.'s. SECOND FLOOR: 5 Bed and Dressing Rooms.

TOP FLOOR: 2 Good Attics and Lumber Loft.

There were, however, no newspaper advertisements for this auction in the Exeter newspapers. If it did take place, the auction was not successful. There was another attempt on February 14 1899. This was advertised in the *East and South Devon Advertiser*³⁴ in the weeks leading up to the auction.

It was to no avail. On February 18 the *East and South Devon Advertiser* reported the outcome:

Messrs Parkhouse & Sons, auctioneers of Plymouth offered for sale at the Clifford Arms Hotel, Chudleigh on Tuesday a private dwelling house known as Gidea House. Mr. H. A. Crook's £500 was the highest bid and the property was then withdrawn.³⁵

In the 1901 census "Gidea House" was listed as unoccupied and Kelly's 1902 Directory has no identifiable listing for the house.



Detail from the 1904 Revised Ordnance Survey map published in 1905.

³⁴ *East and South Devon Advertiser* 28/01/1899, 04/02/1899 and 11/02/1899.

³⁵ *East and South Devon Advertiser*, 18/02/1899.



Herbert's wife, Angelina, died in Plymouth in 1910. Their youngest son, John, died in January 1915 in training at Aldershot as a Second Lieutenant with the 7th Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. Herbert himself died in Plymouth in May 1918.

Kelly's 1906 Directory of Devonshire lists a Mrs Knight-Bruce as living at Giddea House. I have no information about her than "Knight-Bruce, Mrs," which makes it difficult to trace her further. She could have been Louisa, the widow of Rev. George W.H. Knight-Bruce, vicar of Bovey Tracey, who died in December 1896. Her stay was temporary. In 1911 Louisa Knight-Bruce was living in lodgings in Bovey Tracey with her daughter Enid (21) and son, Gordon (19).

She must have left Giddea House early in 1906 because it was offered for sale by auction on May 31 1906:

CHUDLEIGH, SOUTH DEVON

WHITTON and LAING will SELL by Auction, at the Queen's Hotel, Exeter on THURSDAY, May 31st at 3 p.m. all that comfortable FREEHOLD DETACHED FAMILY RESIDENCE known as "GIDDEA HOUSE", Chudleigh, 1 mile from Chudleigh Station, 6 from Newton Abbot, 10 from the City of Exeter and within easy distance of the Sea and Dartmoor. The Residence has a South-East aspect and contains 3 box, 12 bed and dressing-rooms, bath-room, 3 staircases, entrance hall, 4 reception-rooms, waiting-room, kitchens and offices, is approached by a carriage drive and stands in its own grounds of about 1¼ ACRES, consisting of well-shrubbed pleasure gardens, tennis lawn, large walled fruit and kitchen garden, well-stocked with choice trees, bushes, etc., with vinery, conservatory, tomato house, etc.; also stabling comprising 2 stalls, coach-house, etc.

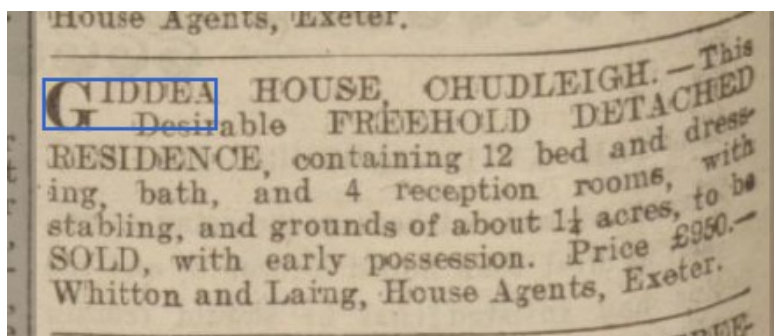
Possession will be given on completion of the purchase. The Property is in a good social, hunting, shooting and fishing district. There are capital golf Links near.

To view and for illustrated particulars and conditions of Sale, application must be made to Messrs. Whitton and Laing, Auctioneers, 24 Gandy-street, Exeter. Particulars and conditions of Sale may also be obtained from

Messrs. HASTIE, Solicitors

65 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London W.C.³⁶

Evidently the house did not sell, because it was then offered for sale³⁷ at a flat price:



It may be that this was when it was bought by Mrs Forbes, the next owner.

³⁶ Western Times, May 11 and 18 1906.

³⁷ Western Times, June 15 1906



Swanston House

Kelly's 1910 Directory of Devonshire lists "Forbes, Mrs" living at Swanston House in Chudleigh. She and her family are listed at "Swanston House" in the 1911 census:

Lillias Miller Forbes, 78, widow, private means
Henry Keith Forbes, 41, son, civil engineer
Betha Forbes, 52, daughter, private means
["Betha" must be a family name derived from Elizabeth, for Lillias Elizabeth Marion Forbes]
Ethel Forbes, 43, daughter, private means
Elizabeth Green, 47, lady's maid
Maria Frost, 25, parlour maid
Daisy England, 22, house maid
Ivy Courtier, 15, between maid

Lillias Miller Forbes was the widow of Alexander Clark Forbes, who had died on August 22 1901. She was the mother of thirteen children, born between 1854 and 1876. Her husband, Alexander was a barrister and the only son of Sir John Forbes, physician to Prince Albert and Queen Victoria between 1841 and 1861. Sometime in the 1840s Alexander built a luxurious house in Whitchurch-on-Thames, Oxfordshire named Swanston House. He and Lillian were living there at the time of the 1851 census and were still there (with ten servants) when the 1901 census was taken. Presumably the house was sold after Alexander died and Lillias had to find a home elsewhere. She chose to give her new home in Chudleigh the name "Swanston House" to remind her of the house where all her children were born and she had lived for fifty years.



Swanston House, Whitchurch-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

Kelly's 1910 directory is the earliest record I have found of Mrs Forbes living at Swanston House in Chudleigh, but I assume that she moved to Chudleigh in 1906 or very soon after. She brought with her one of her sons, Henry Keith Forbes and her three unmarried daughters, Eliza Mary,

DocRef: CHG/RR/008 Author: John Butchart Version: 1.3 – 17 March 2026	Swanston House	 Chudleigh History Group
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Lilias Elizabeth (known as Betha) and Ethel Marion (known as Ethel Mary). She also brought Elizabeth Green, who had been her lady's maid for more than twenty years.

Lilias Forbes died in Chudleigh on June 5 1912 age 79. After a brief service in Chudleigh Church at 9.30 a.m. on June 8th, her funeral service was in Whitchurch-on-Thames at 5.30 p.m. where she was buried with her husband. There is a small brass memorial to her on the north wall of the church in Chudleigh.

Swanston House remained the home of her unmarried daughters for forty years, until 1946. Henry Keith, a civil engineer, used it as his base. They were joined later by two of her sons who never married when they retired, Rev. Hugh de Burgh Forbes and John Chichester Forbes. This was the longest occupation of Swanston Huse by any single family.

Chudleigh Auxiliary Hospital

Ethel Marion Forbes, the youngest of the three sisters, had a significant role during the Great War. Britain declared war on July 28 1914. Eleven days later the following item appeared in *The Western Times*:

Chudleigh Prepares to Receive Wounded

Having received information that the hospital will probably be required at Chudleigh for the reception of wounded, Mrs Walters, Miss Forbes and Mrs Brown of the Red Cross, assisted by a large number of ladies and gentlemen have taken a house in Chudleigh and 34 beds are at present available for use. Mr R. Bathurst of Chudleigh has organised a fleet of motor cars, of which he is in charge, for the purpose of conveying the wounded from any point to Chudleigh.³⁸

“Miss Forbes” was Ethel Marion Forbes, mostly known as Ethel Mary Forbes. According to The Chudleigh Book the house made into a hospital is the house now called Alpha House in Fore Street, but then as The Fernery. It had been the home of Dr. Henry Blanchard Walters, the local doctor, but to make it available for use as the hospital he moved across the road to the house now called Kingsley House. He became the hospital's Medical Officer. Ethel Forbes became its Commandant and Hilda Brown the Quartermaster.³⁹

No wounded arrived at the hospital until October 31 (ten soldiers from Belgium). One month later the hospital was officially mobilised, which meant that it became an auxiliary hospital used for less seriously wounded and men in need of convalescence. The army made a contribution towards its costs, but most of the funding of the hospital came from local people.

The hospital closed in January 1919. The following report from the Western Times summarised its work:

³⁸ Western Times, August 8 1914, p. 3.

³⁹ The Chudleigh Book pp. 223 – 226.



The Chudleigh Red Cross Hospital, after having been opened since October, 1914, has now closed down. The total number of patients treated and the total number of beds occupied during the time the hospital has been opened are as follows: Beds occupied, 33,241; patients admitted, 784. The patients mainly treated came from France, others came from the Mediterranean, Persian Gulf, Salonika, Egypt, Garrison, Canadian Forestry Corps, Portuguese, and Belgians.

I assume that the total of 33,241 “beds occupied” is the total sum of days its patients occupied a bed. The Canadian Forestry Corps patients were, presumably, men from the detachment of loggers and sawyers from Canada who were working at Stover to provide timber supplies for the front. There is now a memorial to these men close to the Stover Heritage Trail near Stover School. Ethel’s role as Commandant meant that she had overall responsibility for the running of the hospital. For her work she was awarded an O.B.E. in the 1919 New Year Honours list.

In the 1921 census, taken on June 19, the three sisters had an intriguing number of visitors:

Eliza Mary Forbes, 65
Lilias Eliza Marion Forbes, 62
Ethel Marion Forbes, 53
Frederick C. G. Campbell, 33, Captain, Indian Army, visitor
Elizabeth Green, 64, servant
Elizabeth Margaret Keen, 21, visitor
Marion Beatrice Keen, 47, visitor
Ruth Marion Keen, 15, visitor
Olive Fox, 18, servant
Gladys Sarah Skinner, 19, servant

All of the visitors apart from Ruth Marion Keen had been born in India and were visiting from there. The reason is clear in this report, which I have abbreviated, from *The Western Times* of July 15 1921:

SOCIETY WEDDING

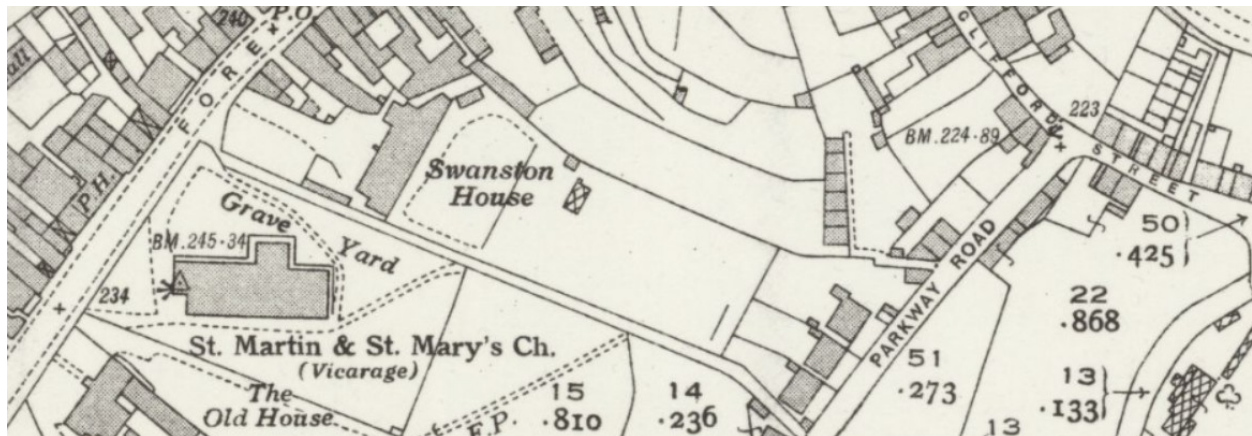
Captain F.C.G. Campbell M.C. and Miss E.M. Keen

PRETTY CHUDLEIGH SCENE

The wedding of Captain F.C.G. Campbell, M.C. (40th Pathans and Frontier Militia) to Miss Elizabeth Margaret Keen drew a very smart gathering of guests to the Parish Church, Chudleigh yesterday afternoon. The bride is the elder daughter of Lieut.-Colonel W. J. Keen, C.I.E., O.B.E., and Mrs. Keen and the bridegroom the only son of General Sir Frederick Campbell, K.C.B., D.S.O. (O.C. the Peshawar Division until his retirement two years ago) and Lady Campbell of Pitlochry, Perthshire. ...

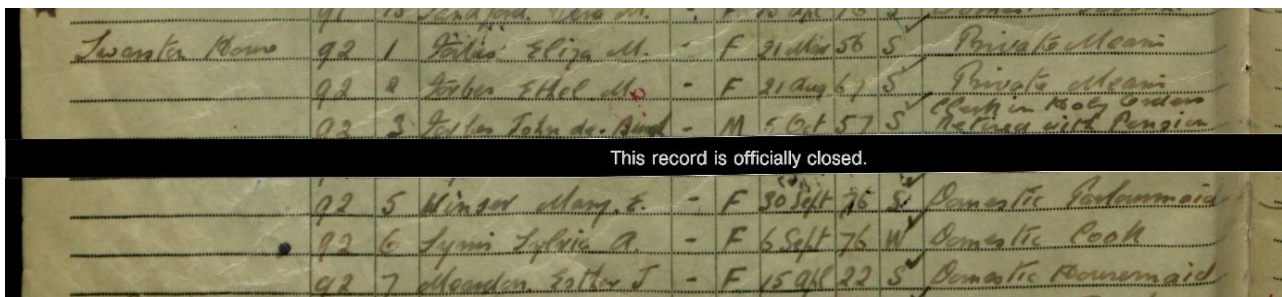


In the unavoidable absence of Colonel Keen, her father, who is Political Agent of the Khyber, Miss Keen was given away by her uncle, Lieut.-Colonel F.S. Keen, D.S.O. ...
The wedding took place from Swanston House, the residence of the bride's cousins, the Misses Forbes, where the reception was held after the ceremony. ...
Capt. And Mrs F.C.G. Campbell left later by motor for the honeymoon.



Detail from the 1936 Revised Ordnance Survey map published in 1938

Betha died at Swanston in 1929. George Chichester Forbes died there in 1934. In the 1939 Register Eliza Mary and Ethel Marion Forbes were living in the house together with their brother Rev. John de Burgh Forbes who had joined them on his retirement.



I assume the record closed was of someone who could still be alive. They had three servants living with them, a cook, a parlourmaid and a housemaid. Elizabeth Green was no longer with them. She would have been about 73 in 1939.

Rev. John de Burgh Forbes died at Swanston in 1942. The surviving sisters, Eliza Mary and Ethel Marion and, sometimes, their brother Henry Keith remained living at Swanston until 1946. The sisters first advertised the house in July 1946.⁴⁰

By direction of the Misses Forbes
SOUTH DEVON

10 miles Exeter, 6 miles Newton Abbot. 12 Miles Torquay and 6 miles from the edge of Dartmoor.

⁴⁰ Exeter and Plymouth Gazette July 19 1946 p. 1.



THE FREEHOLD DETACHED RESIDENCE known as SWANSTON HOUSE, CHUDLEIGH, containing: 5 Reception Rooms, 7 Principal and 5 Secondary Bedrooms, Bathroom, etc., and with about ONE ACRE ATTRACTIVE WALLED GARDEN with STREAM RUNNING THROUGH will be offered for SALE by Auction, by RICKEARD GREEN & MICHELMORE at the Commercial Hotel, Newton Abbot, on WEDNESDAY July 31st 1946 at 3 p.m., unless sold privately beforehand, and subject to Conditions. Auction Offices: 82 Queen Street, Exeter. 'Phones: Exeter 3934 and 3645. 'Grams: "Conric" Exeter. Solicitors: Messrs HAROLD MICHELMORE & CO, Market Street, Newton Abbot. 'Phone: Newton Abbot 534 and 535.

The auction was advertised again in the Exeter and Plymouth Gazette on July 26 1946, this time describing it as:

An attractive well-built early Georgian Residence, suitable for private occupation, use as a small Private Hotel, or conversion into Flats.

The house was auctioned on July 31 1946 for occupation at Michaelmas. It was sold to Walter George Beaven and his wife Lilian. The Forbes sisters and their brother moved into Number 2, The Parade. They took with them furniture and effects that they needed. The furniture they did not take with them, which was extensive, was sold by auction on September 26 1946:



Henry Keith Forbes died at 2, Parade in May 1949 and both of the sisters Ethel Marion and Eliza Mary died there in 1954, Ethel in July and Eliza (Lilias) in September. Eliza was 98.

The Beavens at Swanston House

Walter George Beaven was a London builder and decorator living in Ruislip in 1939. In 1946 he would have been 59. He and Lilian opened Swanston House as a residential hotel in 1948. I assume that was their plan when they bought the house and that they spent the intervening time in preparing the house both for themselves and for their intended residents. Here is an example of their advertisements in 1948⁴¹:

⁴¹ Western Gazette April 9 1948 p. 4.



IF you wish Carefree Holidays, try
Swanston Hotel, Chudleigh, S. Devon.
Amidst Devon's beauty spots. Lovely
grounds. Sun lounge. Rest. Relaxation.
Good food. From 5 gns.—'Phone 2179. '9

This advertisement also appeared in newspapers in Somerset and Gloucestershire, but it appears they were not getting enough bookings. By the end of the year they had reduced their price⁴²:

SWANSTON HOTEL,
CHUDLEIGH, S. DEVON. Permanent
residents welcome. Set in lovely coun-
try. Quiet, comfort. Good food assured.
Terms 4½gns. 'Phone 2179.



1949 photo showing the hotel sign

⁴² Western Morning News November 4 1948 p.1.



There were no more adverts in 1949. Instead the Beavens attempted to sell the house, if necessary, by auction:⁴³

Chudleigh – Adjoining the 14th Century church, in the interesting old town, 6 miles Newton Abbot, 10 miles Exeter, 12 miles Torquay. At present used as a Residential Hotel, but of equal appeal for private family occupation. It also has undoubted possibilities economically of dividing into two houses or conversion into flats. The DETACHED FREEHOLD EARLY GEORGIAN RESIDENCE known as SWANSTON HOUSE built of local stone, with a slate roof, and having beautifully-proportioned rooms, characteristic windows and doors, and a delightfully matured atmosphere, 5 reception-rooms, 13 bedrooms, sitting room, 2 bathrooms, usual offices. Main electricity, Gas, main water. Main drainage. Southern aspect. Garage. Stabling. Charming Old-world walled garden, with lawns, rockery, vegetable garden, with walled and other fruit trees and a never-failing stream of water running through it. Greenhouse and a garden-room. Total area just over one acre. Vacant possession on completion of the purchase. Subject to Special Conditions of sale and unless previously Sold privately, will be offered for SALE by PUBLIC AUCTION by Messrs. WAYCOTTS at THE QUEENS HOTEL, Torquay on THURSDAY 28th April 1949 at Three p.m. Auctioneers Offices: 5 Fleet-street, Torquay, Tel. 4333 (3 lines) and at Paignton, Solicitors: Messrs. LEWIS W. TAYLOR & CO., 1, Verulam-buildings, Gray's Inn, London, W.C. 1.



1949 photo of the front of Swanston

It appears the house did not sell. The Beavens then began advertising furnished rooms, progressively reducing the rental, first at 5 guineas⁴⁴, then at 4½⁴⁵, then 3½ guineas⁴⁶.

⁴³ Western Morning News April 16 1949 p. 5.

⁴⁴ Western Morning News June 10 1950 p. 9.

⁴⁵ Torquay Herald Express June 17 1950 p. 2.

⁴⁶ Torquay Herald Express October 24 1950 p. 2.



TO LET FURNISHED
FURNISHED self-contained FLAT;
dining, 2 bedrooms, kitchen, bath-
room; 3½ gns.—Swanston Hotel, Chud-
leigh 2179. 8902

It seems that rooms were let as there were no more advertisements until 1953⁴⁷.

FURNISHED or partly, sunny, large
BED-SITTING-ROOM, kitchen; all-
electric; share bath, one other; second
floor; 37/6.—Swanston House, Chudleigh.
Telephone 2179. A2962

After 1953 there were no more advertisements, perhaps because lettings in the house were being managed by an estate or accommodation agent. By 1955 the Beavens had moved out of Swanston, moving to Ashburton. By then Swanston was divided into five unfurnished flats. The flats were certainly occupied up to 1986, when a resident, Neil Fergusson, was injured in a crash on the M5. It seems that in the 1990s the house gradually emptied and became neglected. Walter Beaven had died in Ashburton in 1972.

The house was sold to developers on 30/07/1999. By then it was unoccupied and vulnerable. The *Herald Express* reported the theft of “a heavy oak wardrobe worth £800” from the house sometime between August 25 and 27 1999, noting that “it would have taken at least two people to carry the wardrobe”. The police were appealing for witnesses. The picture of the house below taken in 1999 or 2000 gives an impression of its state at that time.



⁴⁷ Torquay Herald Express November 12 1953 p. 2.



In 2000 and 2001 the house was renovated and divided into three houses. In the new division the middle house retains the name Swanston House, with Forbes House at the eastern end and Hamilton House the western end. Three new houses were added within the original grounds of the house, The Orangery to the east and, at the southern end of the grounds, Gidden House and Michaelmas House



Swanston House from the church tower, 2010

John Butchart
Forbes House
john@butchart.org.uk

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This revision January 2026

Resources

Hoskins, WG (1966) *Old Devon*
Jones, Mary (1852) *The History of Chudleigh* [reprint of the 1852 first edition]
Jones, Mary (1875) *The History of Chudleigh* [reprint of the 1875 second edition]
A free version is available online at
<http://ukga.org/england/Devon/towns/c/Chudleigh/History/Contents.html>
and hardcopy reprints are available from various online retailers.

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Swanston House

Chudleigh
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Findmypast.co.uk
Our4bears.net/southhams
Familysearch.org
Discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk
Devonheritage.org
Genuki.org.uk/big/eng/dev
Britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk