

GEORGE HARRIS'S WILL

'Dated 1713 May 4; Probate 1714 May 6

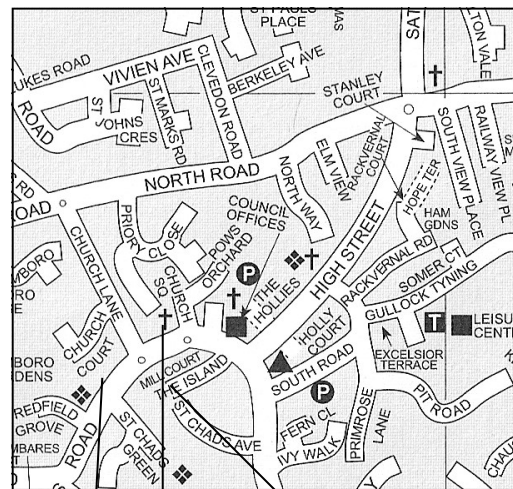
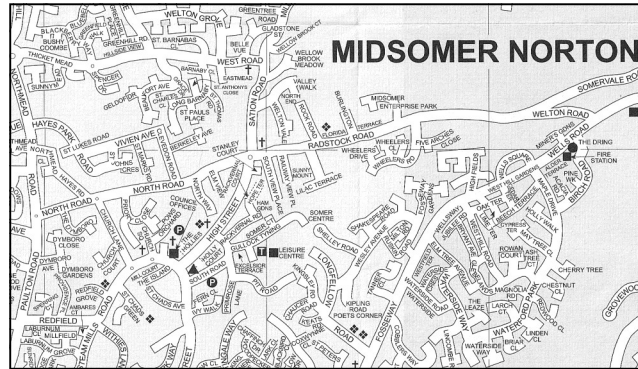
All lands, goods and chattels to dau Ann H who is sole exix.; but as touching such lands as I purchased, i.e. a piece of ground called Diers Close, another called Dicked Mead and anor called Clowd Hill all which I formerly purchased of James LANSDOWN, of Filton als Whitchurch, my will is that if my dau Ann H happen to die before she is 21, or without issue, then these pieces of ground shall be the possession or inheritance of my coz John HARRIS, the yr., of Welton, son of my coz John HARRIS, of Welton, clothier and if sd J.H. the yr decease before such time or before he is 21 the ground shall be the inheritance of my coz George HARRIS of Midsomer Norton and of Thomas LANSDOWN, Radstock, the yr., my kins to be enjoyed betwixt them. If my dau shall die before such time as afsd then my coz George HARRIS of Midsomer Norton and my coz Thomas LANSDOWN of Radstock, the yr., shall have £100 each of my moneys. I desire my friends, my bro-in-l William JAMES, Cameley, my coz John HARRIS, Welton, Clothier, my coz William MOOR, s of Richard M, Charlton in Kilmersdon, and my coz John LANSDOWN, of Radstock, s of Richard L decd to be overseers in trust. Witnesses John LANSDOWN, John HERRY, William COX.'

Just over 5 years later, Ann had died. In her will - making a will at such an early age suggests extreme foresight or maybe Ann knew she was very ill - she left instructions that a Charity School should be built in Midsomer Norton, the purpose of this school being to the benefit of 40 poor children so that they might be instructed, 'In reading of the English Tongue and in writing and arithmetic.'

This charity school was built on a plot of land belonging to the Ann Harris Trust on the north side of the Island in Midsomer Norton in 1721. It remained as the sole school in the town until 1830 when a National School was created in Rack Furlong. An increase in population meant that another new school had to be built. In 1840 a larger school was built on land known as Richmonds Thorn or Richman's Thorn in Redfield Road. The land was part of the Ann Harris Trust and lay close to St John's Church.

For a more detailed history of St. John's School see Norman Voake's book, 'St. John's School' published April 1994 by Geni Printing.

WHERE TO FIND ANN HARRIS'S MEMORIAL; THE SITE OF THE FIRST SCHOOL; AND ST JOHN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL



ST. JOHN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

ANN HARRIS CHARITY SCHOOL in 1721

ANN HARRIS and her LEGACY



A memorial in the North Aisle of St. John's Church, Midsomer Norton, quietly records that 'Ann Harris of Welton, in this Parish who died May 27th 1719. Aged 22 years. This pious Lady endowed a School for the Education of Forty poor Children.' Clearly this was a remarkable lady who had touched the hearts of her fellow townsfolk and who continues to have such an influence over the education of the children of St. John's Primary School. Unfortunately little is known about the life of Ann, and even one small piece of information in the memorial is erroneous. 'Mrs' Ann Harris died a spinster. Her home, a thatched cottage in the centre of Welton, was demolished in the 1960's.

Her father, George, was a yeoman. His wife presumably pre-deceased him as his will speaks only of his daughter, Ann. He seems to have been an important landowner, with three separate pieces of land passed on at his death in 1714, and a specific instruction for two sums of £100 to be given to two cousins should Ann not survive to the age of 21.

EXTRACT FROM THE CHARITY COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS (1819 - 1837)

'by an indenture dated 22nd October 1731, made between William Moore of Charlton, in the parish of Kilmersden in the county of Somerset, of the one part, and William Savage of Midsomer Norton, in the said county, and Sydenham Poynts of the same place, of the other part, reciting that Ann Harris, late of Midsomer Norton, spinster, in her lifetime (17th November 1719) made her will, and thereby, after giving some legacies, and directing her debts to be paid, gave all the residue of her personal estate for keeping poor children of the parish at school to read and write, and in order thereto, directed the said William Moore, whom she made her executor, to get in her effects and dispose of the same at interest, to remain as a stock or fund for ever to raise interest for such charity, and directed that after the death of the said William Moore, the vicar of the said parish for the time being, and the two churchwardens of the same for the time being, or two of them, whereof the vicar to be one, should have the appointment of the children ...in the Court of Chancery ... the Master of the Rolls ... conceived it to be the intention of the said Ann Harris to found a charity school, and decreed the same accordingly, and that the surplus of the said Ann Harris's personal estate should be laid out in the purchase of lands in fee simple for establishing such charity ... the said personal estate, after making all due deductions, amounted to 744l. 0s. 4d. And that the said William Moore had purchased the messuages¹, lands and tenements thereafter mentioned, to him and his heirs, at the price of 744l. 0s. 4d ... the said William Moore should be the sole governor of the said school and charity during his life, and receive the rents and profits of the said premises, and fit up a school-room in part of the said messuage, for teaching poor children of the said parish, not exceeding 40 in number. And it was thereby ordered and agreed, that the said William Moore should nominate a schoolmaster and put him into possession of the said messuage, in which he should dwell rent free, as long as he should continue schoolmaster, and no longer; and that such and every other schoolmaster thereafter to be nominated, should diligently and carefully instruct in reading the English tongue, and in writing and arithmetic in the said school, such poor children, not exceeding 40 in number.'

¹ messuage, a dwelling with its adjacent buildings and lands (property law)

THE ANN HARRIS CHARITY SCHOOL, 1721

The Ann Harris Trust accounts show that George Bakley, the mason, supervised the building of the schoolhouse. It was built with freestones, paved and had an outside toilet, which was known in those days as a 'necessary house'. A stone with an inscription carved by Joseph Cheaseman was placed over the entrance to the school, but the words carved on the stone were not recorded. The carpenters then raised the roof beams and rafters and finally the house was thatched.

Once the house was completed and the inside whitewashed, Henry Moses the carpenter made seats for the scholars, books were bought and a schoolmaster, Mr Hodges, was appointed. Mr Hodges remained until his death in 1734.

Mr Hodges was followed by Mr Taylor, then Mr Boyten and then , in 1776, by the seventeen year old Elijah Bush. Mr Bush added a new school room and bed chamber to the east end of the building (see below).

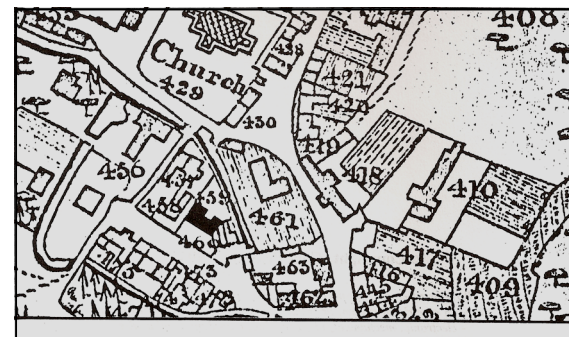


The Ann Harris Charity School House (photographed about 1960, showing the extension on the left side)

In 2013, the Ann Harris Charity School, renamed St John's Primary School some years ago, became an Academy School overseen by the Ann Harris Academy Trust. Thus, nearly 300 years later, the name of Ann Harris is perpetuated, and the money from her Trust continues to be spent in the spirit of her will.

THE SCHOOL

Evidence that the charity school was built on a plot of land belonging to the Ann Harris Trust on the north side of the Island in 1721 comes from the 1841 list of field numbers refers to the area of land numbered 459 as a 'School House & Garden' and part of the Midsomer Norton Charity.



Map of the Island showing the position of the School House (459) to the south of the Church, in 1822

In the first part of the 19th Century, the Charity Commissioners recorded, 'The school is regularly carried on, and the master receives a salary of 20 l. He is generally an inhabitant of the parish, if one competent can there be found. The minister superintends and visits the school occasionally. There are 40 children altogether, 32 boys and 8 girls, who are taken in about the age of seven, and are not permitted to remain longer than four years. The instruction given to them is in reading, writing and the rudiments of arithmetic, agreeably to the directions of the deed. It is a day school, but there is also a Sunday school in the parish, at which most of these poor children attend, and they are brought regularly to the parish church on the Sunday.

The master resides in a small house upon the lands, having a garden attached to it, in which house a room is appropriated to the purposes of the school, which is kept in repair by the trustees.'

The boys at the age of 11 were apprenticed out to local masters in order to learn a trade.