

FORMER RECTORY, FARNCOMBE, GODALMING, SURREY

A Brief History



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**Former Rectory, Deanery Road, Farncombe,
Godalming, Surrey**

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Report by Susie Barson

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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations

Summary	1
Historical Background	1
Design and Erection of the Rectory	2
Ewan Christian (1814-1895), Architect	3
Assessment	4
The Vicarage Today	5
Conclusion	5
Appendix: Ewan Christian's Listed Vicarages	6-7

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fig. 1 Site Plan
- Fig. 2 North Godalming Town Tithe Map, 1838-9
- Fig. 3 Ordnance Survey Map, 25-inch, 1871
- Fig. 4 Ordnance Survey Map, 25-inch, 1897
- Fig. 5 Farncombe Rectory, East Elevation, Ewan Christian, 1863
- Fig. 6 Farncombe Rectory, First Floor Plan, Ewan Christian, 1863
- Fig. 7 Ground Floor Plan, 2001
- Fig. 8 Farncombe Rectory, Exteriors, 2002
- Fig. 9 Farncombe Rectory, Interiors, showing original features, 2002
- Fig. 10 Portrait of Ewan Christian *The Builder* 21 May 1870, 406
- Fig. 11 Parsonage, Chadlington, Oxfordshire *The Builder* 28 Nov 1863, 845
- Fig. 12 Vicarage Forest Gate, Essex *The Builder* 14 Dec 1878, 1304

FORMER RECTORY, FARNCOMBE, GODALMING, SURREY

Summary

The former rectory at Farncombe in Godalming, Surrey was built in 1864-65 for the incumbent of the church of St John the Evangelist in the centre of Farncombe. The church was built to the designs of George Gilbert Scott Senior (1811-1878) and his partner William Moffatt (1812-1887) between 1844 and 1849. The rectory is a medium-sized, two-storey, faintly Gothic Revival-style house built of Bargate stone and brick, with a tiled roof, and occupies a sloping site close to the railway station. It has been in private hands since 1920, when it was renamed Bicton Croft; the present rectory is at Farncombe Hill.

In August of this year the former rectory was listed grade II, on the assumption that the house was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott, or his firm. In September, development consultants acting on behalf of the owners challenged the listing, claiming that there is no proof of Scott's authorship or involvement in the design of the rectory, and that the house has been stripped of many of its internal features, such as fireplaces, which were assumed to be still in place. The listing branch have asked the HA&RT team to identify the architect or builder of the rectory, to assist their position with regard to the listing.

Historical Background

In the nineteenth century Godalming formed part of the diocese of Winchester. The church of St John, Farncombe was completed and consecrated in 1849, as has been stated, to the designs of the London-based firm of Scott and Moffatt. With grant-aid from the Incorporated Church Buildings Society, a north aisle was added in 1860, to Scott's designs, and a south aisle and south chancel aisle-also by Scott- were built between 1873 and 1875.¹ Pevsner described it as a 'dull lancet chapel'.² As there was no glebe house belonging to the church already near the site, a parsonage fund was set up in 1849.³ However, as late as 1859, when the new incumbent, the Reverend Charles Robert Dallas, took up the 'perpetual curacy', no progress had been made, and Dallas resided at a house called 'Uplands' in Guildford. In 1862, Dallas wrote to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners requesting a rise in his income, with the lament: 'There being no parsonage I have to pay for the only obtainable residence within 2 ½ miles of the church capable of accommodating my family, at a rent of £90.'⁴

The next year, Reverend Dallas wrote again asking for another rise to match the increase in work created by a larger population, and a new vicarage. The Commissioners agreed to both requests. Through the land agents and surveyors Cluttons, they acquired land belonging to the Deanery of Salisbury, the 'parsonage lands' on the tithe map plots 1017,1018,1019, and part of 1043 for the cemetery (see tithe map, 1838-9, Fig.2). The Commissioners requested Ewan Christian (1814-1895),

¹ Churchwarden's accounts, FNC/7/2 (1) (Incorporated Church Buildings Society files, Lambeth Palace Library)

² N.Pevsner, *Buildings of England: Surrey* (1962; 2nd ed. 1971) reprinted 1987, 229

³ DW/CP/97 (London Metropolitan Archives)

⁴ Letter from Revd Dallas to the Commissioners, October 1862, file 26035 pt.1

architect to the Ecclesiastical Commission, to survey the lands, and prepare plans and specifications.

Design and Erection of the Rectory

In August 1863, Ewan Christian replied that he had prepared plans for the house, which could be built at a cost of £1,450. Copies of these drawings, an elevation of the east front, and ground, first floor and attic plans are attached to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners' files, signed and dated August 1863, and are deposited at the Church of England Record Centre, (26035 parts one and two). Attached to these is a copy of Christian's ground plan with suggested enlargements proposed by Reverend Dallas, in September, 1863.

Christian's elevation of the east front shows a two-storey house with attic, steeply pitched roof and basement. It has three bays, with a wider central canted bay running full height from basement to roof (Fig.5). The flat window arches on the ground floor are shown to have decorative brickwork above: pointed Gothic Revival brick arches containing brick circles. The ground floor plan (Fig.6) provided a dining room with the bay window, flanked by a study on the north side and a drawing room on the south side. A kitchen and scullery are shown adjacent to the drawing room, with a 'china and cook's pantry' on the north side of the staircase. On the first floor, five bedrooms were provided and one dressing room; on the attic floor was a sixth bedroom and box room. Cellars provided storage space for coal and beer, and a cold larder. An open yard was located on the west side of the house.

The correspondence between Christian and the Church Commissioners in the same files reveals that Christian had shown the plans to Reverend Dallas who had wanted some additions – a full height bedroom in the attic, a servants' hall, two lavatories for male and female servants, and a parish room. He also wanted to change the ground floor plan to increase the size of the kitchen (Fig.6). Ewan Christian must have accordingly modified the plans – although they have not survived – substituting a gable end for the canted bay on the south east front to provide a taller, daylit attic room. The kitchen area was extended into the yard on the west side, where outdoor lavatories were provided. These plans were approved in November 1863.

After the tendering process, the lowest quote, submitted from local builders Messrs H. Moon and Son of Godalming, was accepted in June 1864: a figure of £2,005 for the house and stables. A condition required the builders to use Bargate stone, a sandstone quarried nearby. Work began on site, an awkward irregular one of about 4 ½ acres with a steep slope cutting across it, in October 1864. The house was completed in June 1865, and a garden wall erected in August of that year.

When the house was completed the Reverend wrote to the Commissioners to thank them, commenting that 'in every respect it is a most comfortable parsonage which greatly increases the value of the living'.⁵ He requested another kitchen garden wall, and the addition of a cart shed to the stables. This work was approved by Ewan Christian and completed the following year. A retaining wall, which had formed one boundary of the site with land owned by the railway company, failed and had to be

⁵ Letter from Revd Dallas to the Commissioners, August 1865, file 26035, pt.2

rebuilt in 1867. The final settling up of the accounts with Moons the builders did not take place until 1875, when Christian wrote a letter stating that: 'The whole cost of the building has been large... but for a good house of substantial, durable work on a very awkward site'.⁶ The total cost was £2,200.

On 3 April 1866, *The London Gazette*, announced:

'St John Farncombe, Surrey, Diocese of Winchester: the said church of the new parish of St John Farncombe aforesaid shall be, and be deemed to be, a rectory.'⁷ This meant that the living was a rectory as opposed to a vicarage, where the rector had the right of the tithes, whereas the vicar would not directly control the tithes. Such an announcement does not necessarily signify the date of the building of the rectory or vicarage, but in this case at Farncombe, it did coincide with the completion of the new rectory.

Ewan Christian (1814-1895), Architect

Ewan Christian was born in Marylebone in London and educated at Christ's Hospital, Horsham between 1823 and 1829. In 1830 he was articled to Matthew Habershon, and subsequently to William Railton. He set up private practice in 1842, working in partnership with Charles Purday and his cousin Joseph Christian. Ewan Christian was elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1850, the same year in which he succeeded Railton as architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners; in 1887 he was appointed consulting architect to the Charity Commissioners. He served as President of the R.I.B.A. from 1884 to 1886, and received the Royal Gold Medal in 1887. Christian died at the house he designed for himself and his family, 50 Well Walk in Hampstead, and is buried in Hampstead cemetery.

Ewan Christian was one of the most prominent and prolific ecclesiastical architects of his generation, remaining in active practice until his death. He designed 90 new churches, 380 clergy houses and 80 schools, a total of 760 new buildings, and carried out an additional 1,300 church restorations. Yet Christian has always had a tepid reputation in comparison with George Gilbert Scott, George Edmund Street or William Butterfield. *The Ecclesiologist*, the journal of the Camden Society from 1841, seldom mentioned his work, nor was his work covered in any depth in the pages of *The Builder*. He is not mentioned in Charles Eastlake's *A History of Gothic Revival* (1872), Harry Goodhart Rendel's *Architecture Since the Regency* (1953), or Peter Howell's *Victorian Churches* (1968). Even the most recent books on Victorian church architecture have not attempted to describe, analyse, contextualise or assess Christian's architectural achievements. There is barely a mention of a church by Christian in *The Faber Guide to Victorian Churches*, edited by Peter Howell and Ian Sutton (1989). In *The Victorian Church: Architect and Society* edited by Chris Brooks and Andrew Saint, published in 1995, the only entry for Christian is a bald fact: 'at the very top [of new professional ecclesiastical appointments] was the architect to the Ecclesiastical Commission itself. William Railton and Benjamin Ferrey worked for the Commission in the 1840s; by 1851 Ewan Christian was its official architect and in this capacity restored many churches and church chancels in the patronage of the Commission.'⁸

⁶ Letter from Ewan Christian to the Commissioners, 1875, file 26035, pt. 2

⁷ *The London Gazette* 3 April 1866, 2212

⁸ Ed. Chris Brooks and Andrew Saint, *The Victorian Church* (1995), 167

Christian was unpopular with contemporary architects such as G.G. Scott, partly because, in his official capacity as Church Commissioners' architect, he was critical of the work of some church architects including Scott, but he was firm friends with Samuel Teulon, John Loughborough Pearson and George Edmund Street. Christian's own major restorations included Carlisle Cathedral from 1853, and Southwell Cathedral from 1857. Many of his own churches are listed, including two in Surrey which are almost exactly contemporary with the Farncombe rectory: Christ Church, Guildford (1867), and Church of All Saints, Tilford (1868). Both are built of Bargate stone, in thirteenth-century English Gothic style. One of Christian's best original designs is the church of St Mark, Leicester (1870-2), 'the finest of the nineteenth century in Leicester, with a tall spire and bold apsidal terminations.'⁹ This church is listed, grade II*.

In 1845 Mr Christian erected his first clergy house, a vicarage in Preston, Lancashire 'of quiet domestic character, stone built, with square-headed mullioned windows and well proportioned gables'.¹⁰ It was the first of 380 such buildings. When Christian was appointed 'advising and acting architect' for the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for England in 1852, his remit was to 'provide surveys and reports in detail on plans of churches, parsonages, rectories, vicarages and curates' houses of all grades, and more or less importance, in every county of England, exempting Northumberland, Cheshire, Cornwall, Isle of Wight, Wales, and varying in cost from £800-£4000; a portion of them for the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and the remainder by independent commissioners for incumbents.'¹¹ The Farncombe rectory was roughly in the middle of the cost range.

At least seven of Christian's vicarages have been listed at grade II (see list appended). The vicarages have many features in common, including gables, canted or square bays, mullion and transom windows or large plate glass sash windows, ornamental chimney stacks, and polychromatic brick decoration. A comparison with contemporary vicarages designed by other architects which were illustrated in *The Builder* shows that Christian's designs tended to be simpler (Figs. 11,12).

Christian's principal listed secular buildings include Eastbury Manor, Compton (1874), with steeply pitched roof, diaper work, canted bays and gables; Manor House, Market Lavington, Wiltshire (1862-9), in a neo-Tudor style; his own house in Hampstead, 50 Well Walk, (1881, since converted into flats); and Castle Malwood Lodge, Minstead (1884), also in a neo-Tudor style. But his most well regarded secular buildings are the minor canon's residence in Amen Court in the City of London in a Shavian style (1879), and the National Portrait Gallery in the Free Renaissance style (1891-93).

Assessment

Ewan Christian tried to produce functional, 'modern' church housing, sometimes using Gothic as a church style but not confining himself to follow particular historical examples. The results were not always exciting buildings, but they were comfortable

⁹ N. Pevsner *The Buildings of England: Leicestershire and Rutland* (1960); 1984 edn, 42

¹⁰ J. Standen Adkins, 'Ewan Christian: A Memoir' in *RIBA Journal*, 30 September 1911, 713

¹¹ Mss 5/9/85 Memo of works executed by Ewan Christian 1843-87, in his own hand, R.I.B.A. Library

and well built, as Reverend Dallas testified. Architectural historian Andrew Saint has written of Christian: 'He was certainly not among the most original of Victorian architects, but there is a high standard of competence in all Christian's new Gothic work, and much originality in the way he planned cheap urban churches on tricky sites'.¹² One could add that he was competent, too, with cheap rural vicarages on tricky sloping sites.

The Former Farncombe Rectory Today

The rectory is soundly constructed of Bargate stone rubble with red brick bands and dressings (Fig.8). The hopper heads are dated '1865'. The south east elevation has three sash windows and a projecting central, hipped gable with chevron cornice and chamfered corners. This is a significant departure from Christian's drawing of 1863, which shows a full-height canted bay, with windows on each face. The change may have been in order to accommodate Mr Dallas's request for a full-height attic bedroom. On the north side, a morning room and angled porch, with a pointed arched entrance, are additions probably built in response to Mr Dallas's request more space. They are not shown on the drawing of 1863, but were evidently part of the original build as they appear on the O.S. map of 1871. The brickwork details are meaner in execution than those proposed by Christian. A 'sun lounge' and canted bay window on the ground floor have since been added (c.1900) to the south west front. Other windows are later alterations.

Inside, many original features survive. Of most significance is the handsome original Gothic Revival staircase, with chamfered newel posts with ball finials, and pierced splat balusters. The original shutters and window panels in the dining room also survive. Important original fixtures and fittings include: the front door with decorative iron hinges; doors with chamfered joinery; a number of wooden fire surrounds with Gothic Revival detail, such as chamfered corners and quatrefoils; pointed arches to door and window openings in the staircase hall; and the original kitchen dresser (Fig.9).

Conclusion

The former rectory at Farncombe was not designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott, the architect of the church with which the rectory was originally associated. It was designed in 1863 by Ewan Christian, architect to the Ecclesiastical Commission, and at the top of the second rank of Victorian ecclesiastical architects. Christian designed 380 clergy houses, at least seven of which are listed at grade II. Farncombe rectory is a good example of 1865, being relatively unaltered, with many of its architect-designed features, fixtures and fittings dating predominantly from its original phase still in situ.

¹² A. Saint, 'Report on St Thomas's Church, Finsbury Park', HA&RT files, Isl. 159

APPENDIX

Ewan Christian's listed vicarages

All listed at grade II.

Great Barr vicarage, Chapel Lane, Great Barr, Sandwell, West Bromwich, West Midlands (1847). Two storeys with attics, red brick with blue bands and voussoirs, stone dressings, steep tiled roof, gabled bay with canted bay on the ground floor, plate glass sash windows, ornamental stacks.

Goldhanger Rectory, Church Street, Goldhanger, Maldon, Essex (1851). The list description makes this rectory sound closely comparable to Farncombe : 'Two storeys, attic and cellar. Moulded pierced flat balusters, panelled shutters to the windows. All detail and materials of high quality as quoted in printed plans and specifications in the present owners' possession, total cost £2,000. Red brick with blue brick diapering, red tiled roofs gables decorative chimney stacks'.

Etton Rectory : alterations c.1854 of an earlier building. Prominent chimney stack.

Swanley, Kent (1861). Two storeys, red brick.

The Rectory, Broad Blunsdon, Burytown Lane, Blunsdon St Andrew, Wiltshire, (1868). Two storeys, attic and cellar. Rubble stone with ashlar quoins and dressings. Square hipped bay on ground floor.

The Old Vicarage, East Bank Road, Sunk Island, East Riding, Yorkshire (1876-7). Two storeys, three bays, symmetrical projecting central gabled bay canted to ground floor, single plate glass sash window.

Healey Vicarage, Healey, Tynedale, Northumberland (1877). Stone slate roof. Tudor style with gables, canted bays, mullion and transom windows. The list description says 'a large and well preserved rural vicarage.'

Unlisted Vicarages in London Attributed to Ewan Christian

From the Survey of London's index to *The Builder*, Christian's name appears against the tenders for building vicarages associated with the London churches listed below. They were presumably built to his designs, but it is not known whether they survive. They do not appear in the statutory lists, or in 'The Buildings of England London' volumes. The list gives the church or area, followed by the date that the tender was awarded for building the vicarage:

St Paul, Haggerston (1862)
St Paul, Bunhill Row (1862)
Holy Trinity, Hoxton (1862)
Holy Trinity, Lambeth (1864)
'Vicarage at Turnham Green' (1864)
St Mark, Kensington (1865)
'Vicarage at Shadwell' (1870)
St Mary, Kensington (1872)
All Hallows, Devey Road, Bow (1874)
St Dionis, Parsons Green (1884)
St Michael, Stockwell (1888)
Christ Church, Forest Hill (1888)
St Olave, Woodberry Down (1895)

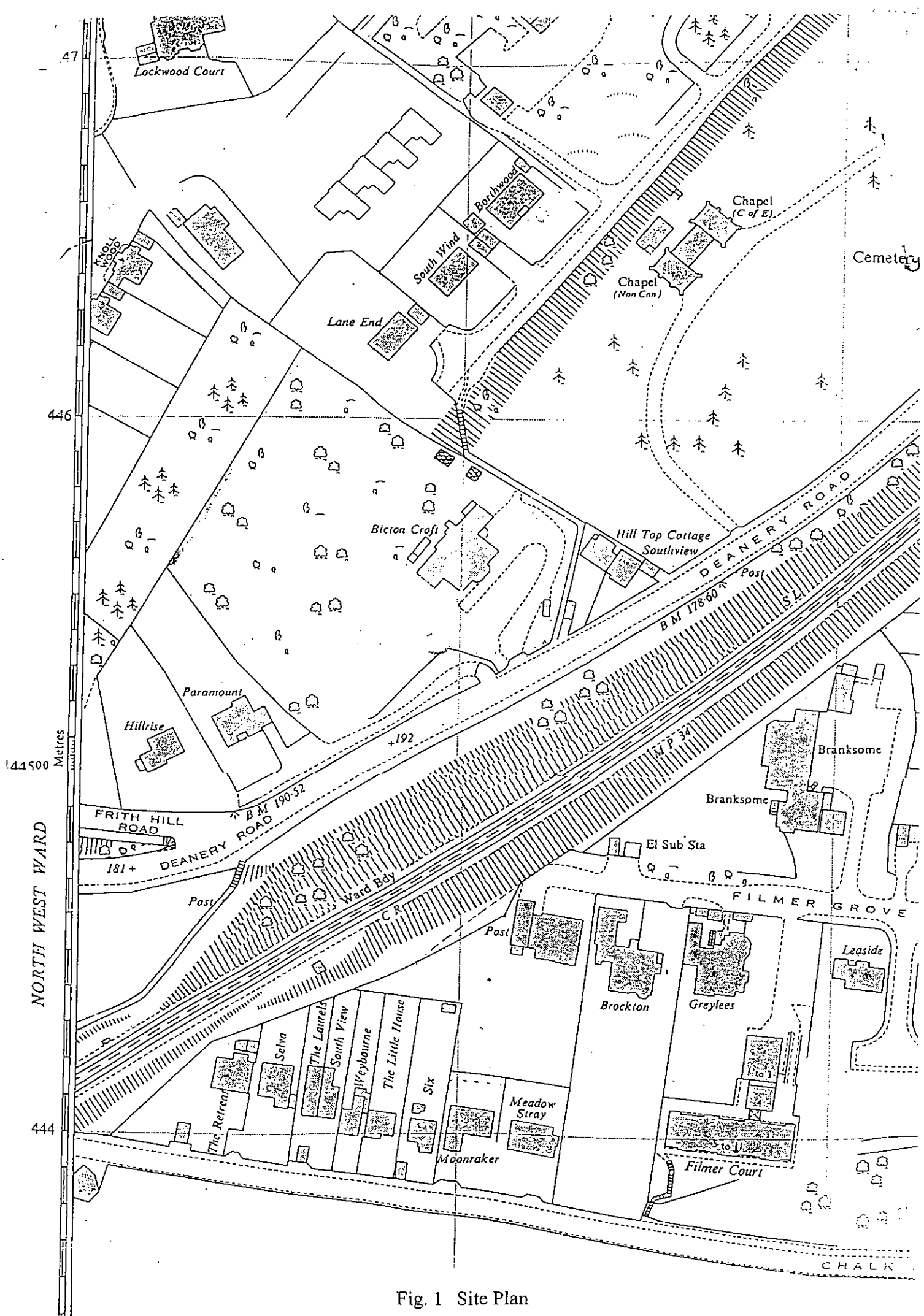
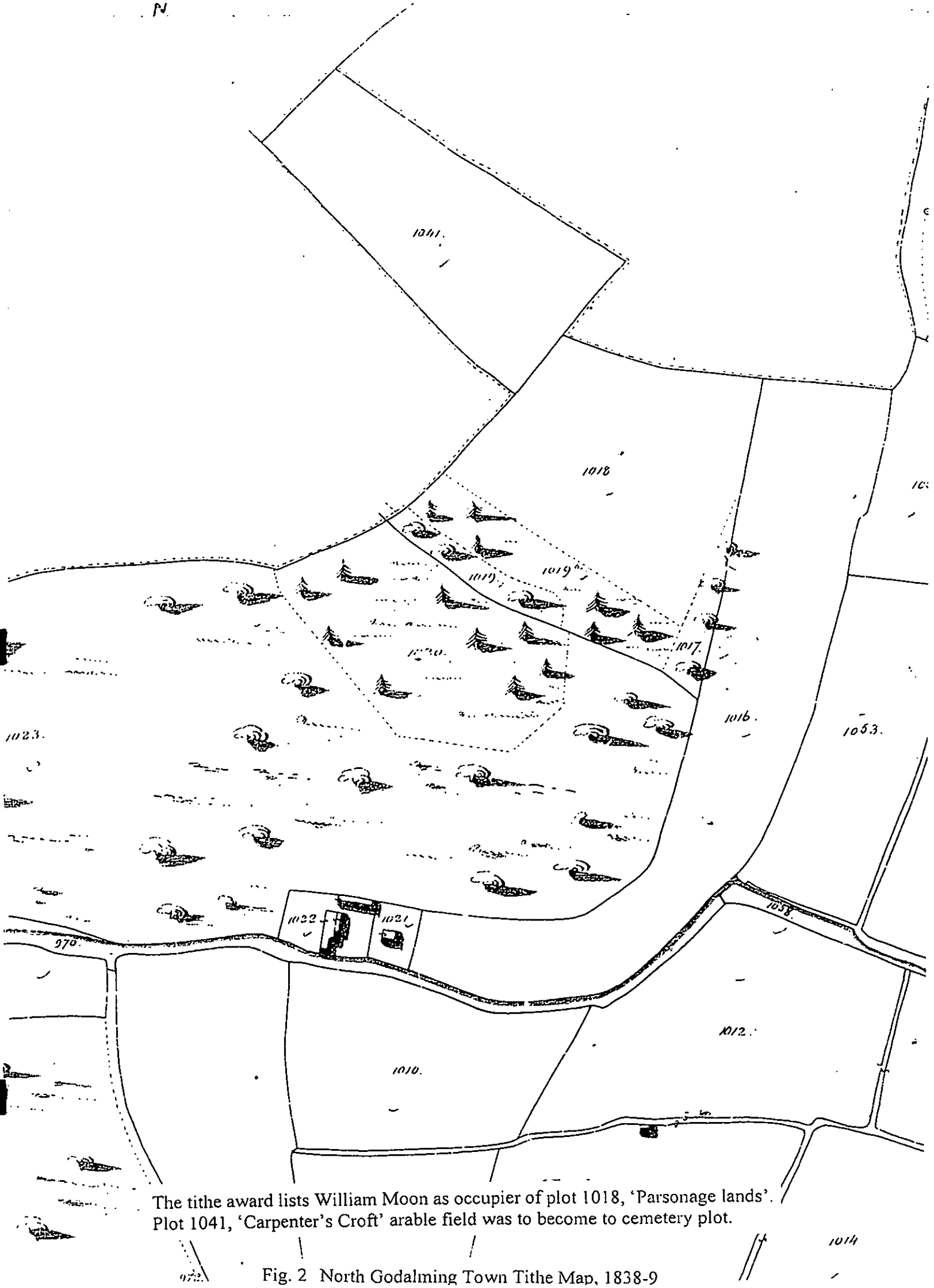


Fig. 1 Site Plan

The tithe award lists William Moon as occupier of plot 1018, 'Parsonage lands'. Plot 1041, 'Carpenter's Croft' arable field was to become to cemetery plot.

Fig. 2 North Godalming Town Tithe Map, 1838-9



Frith Hill

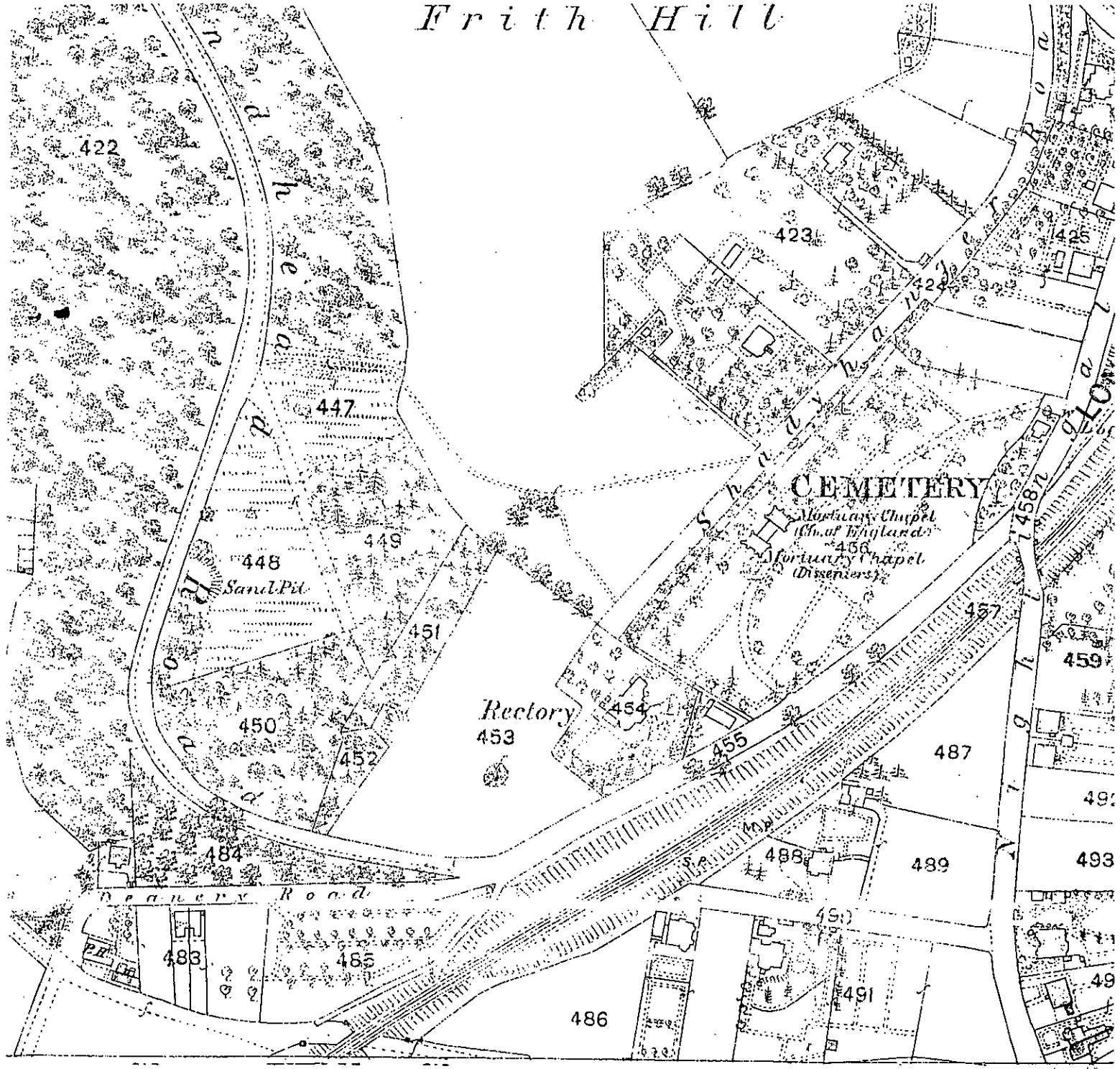


Fig. 3 Ordnance Survey Map, 25-inch, 1871

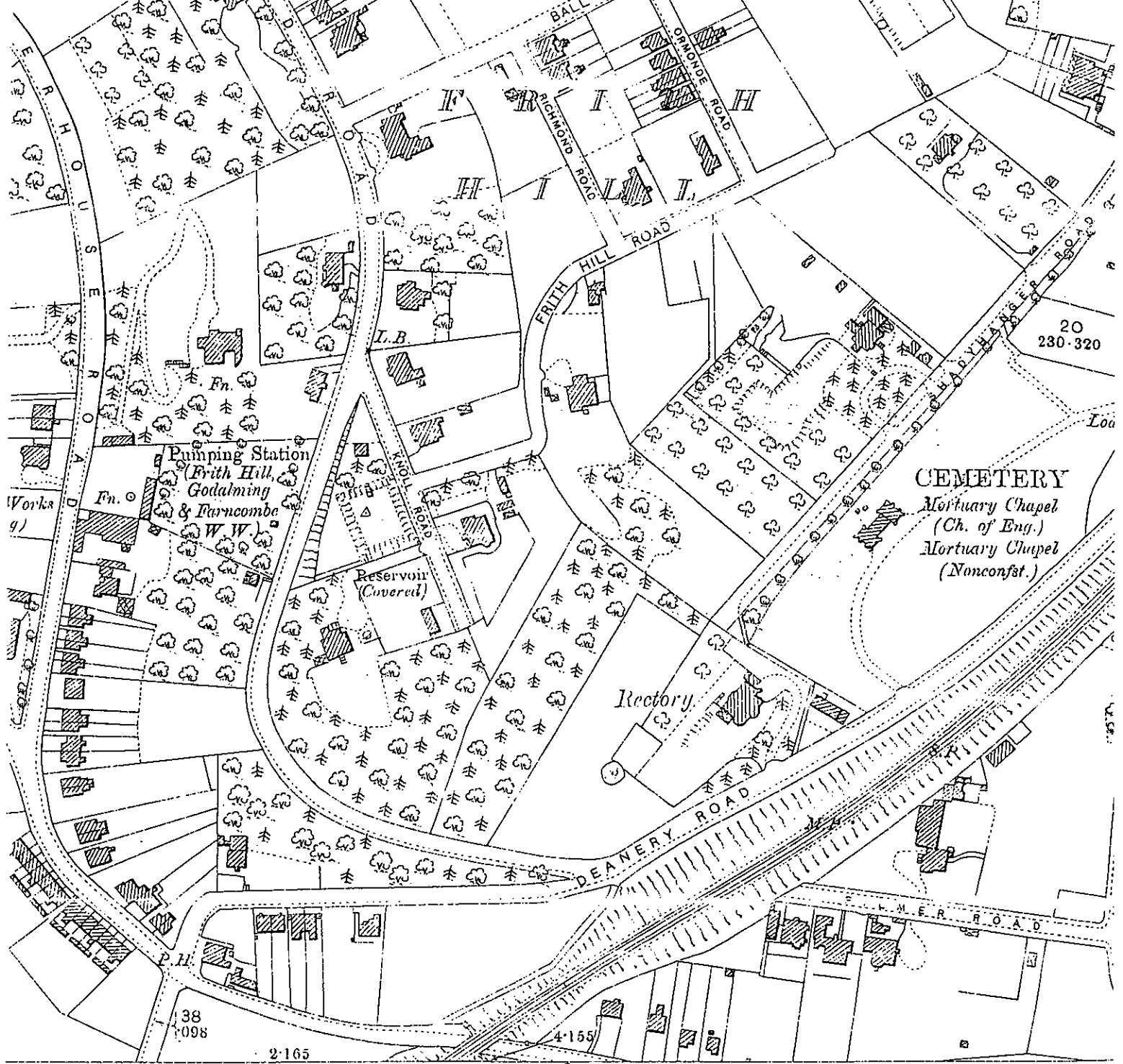


Fig. 4 Ordnance Survey Map, 25-inch, 1897

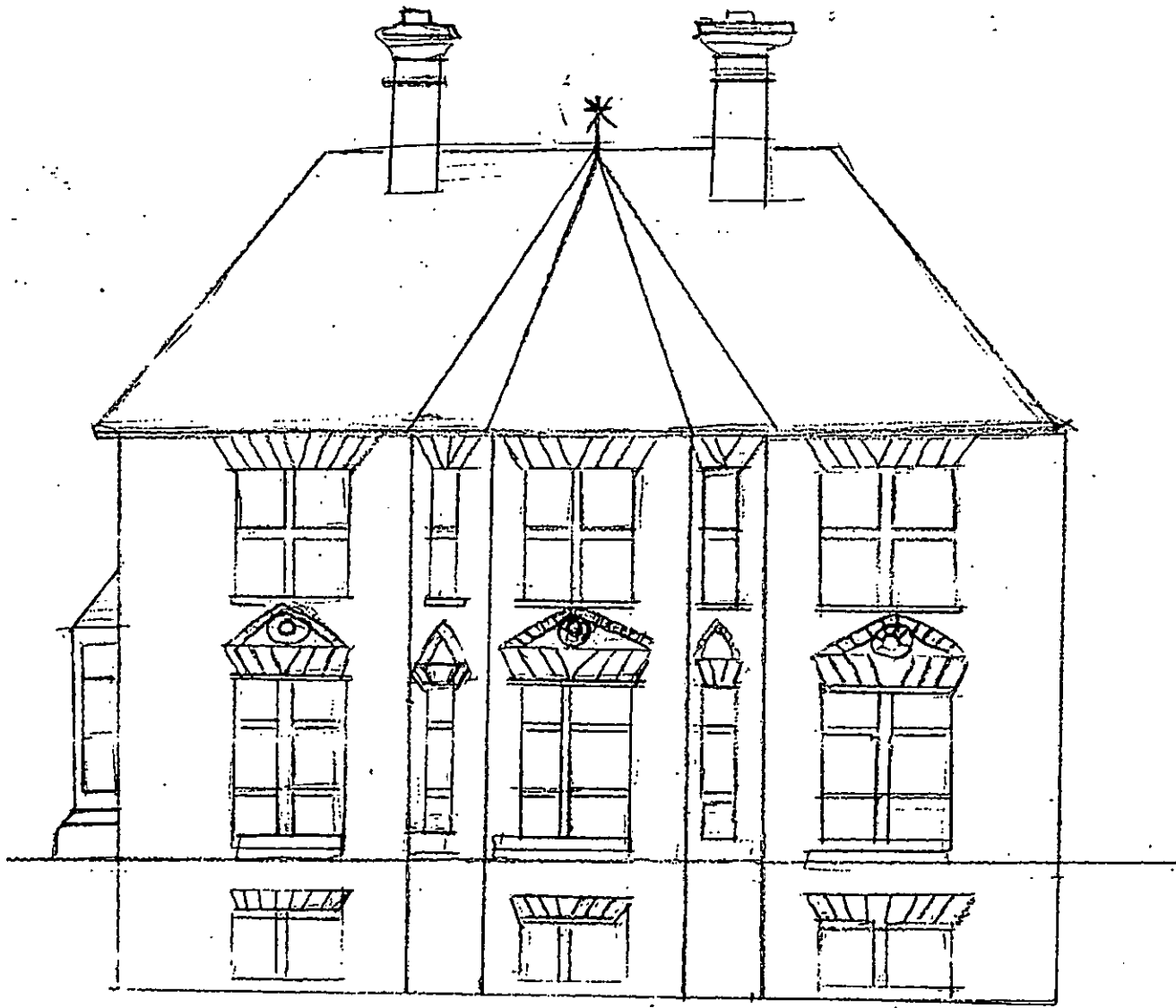
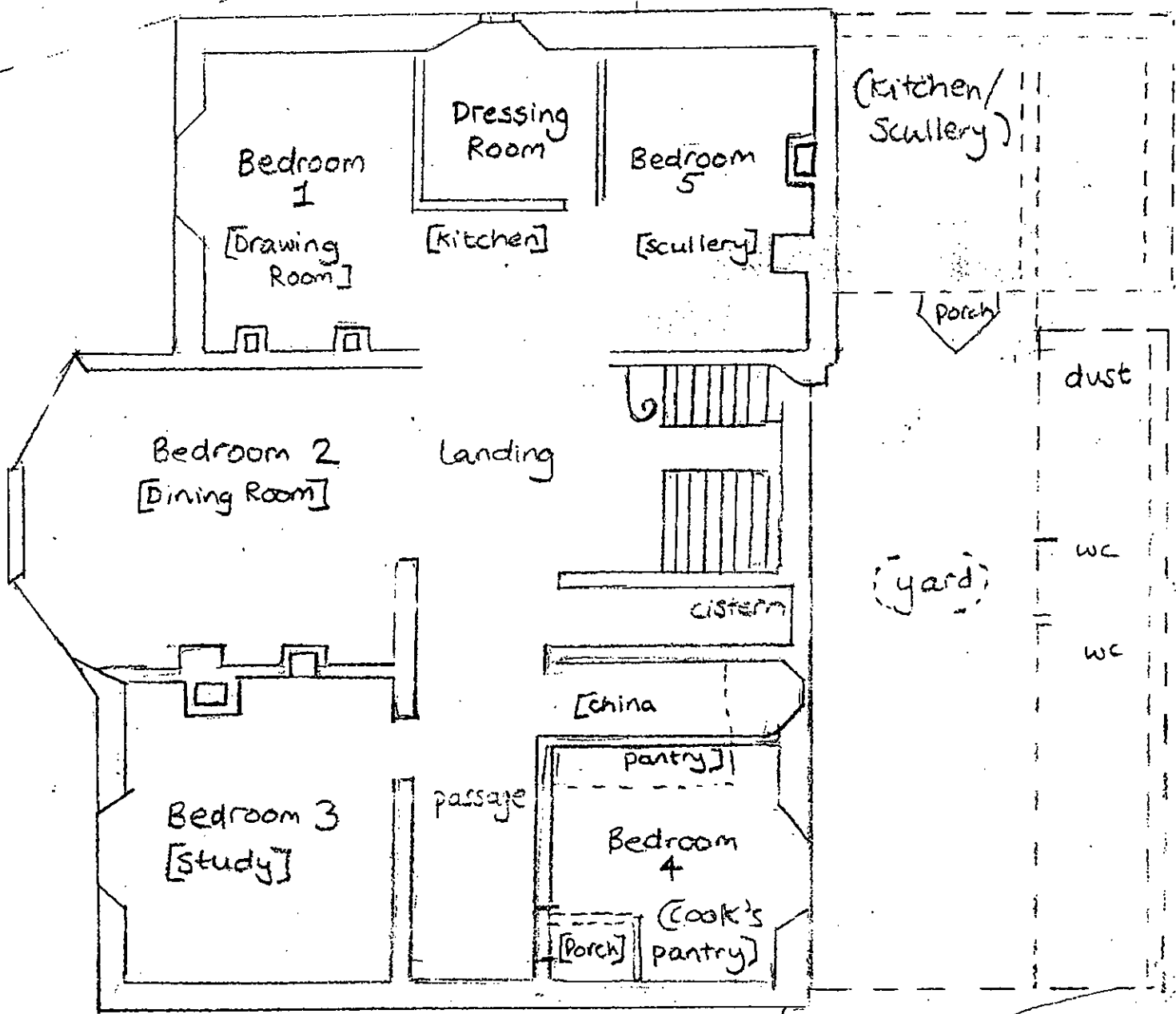


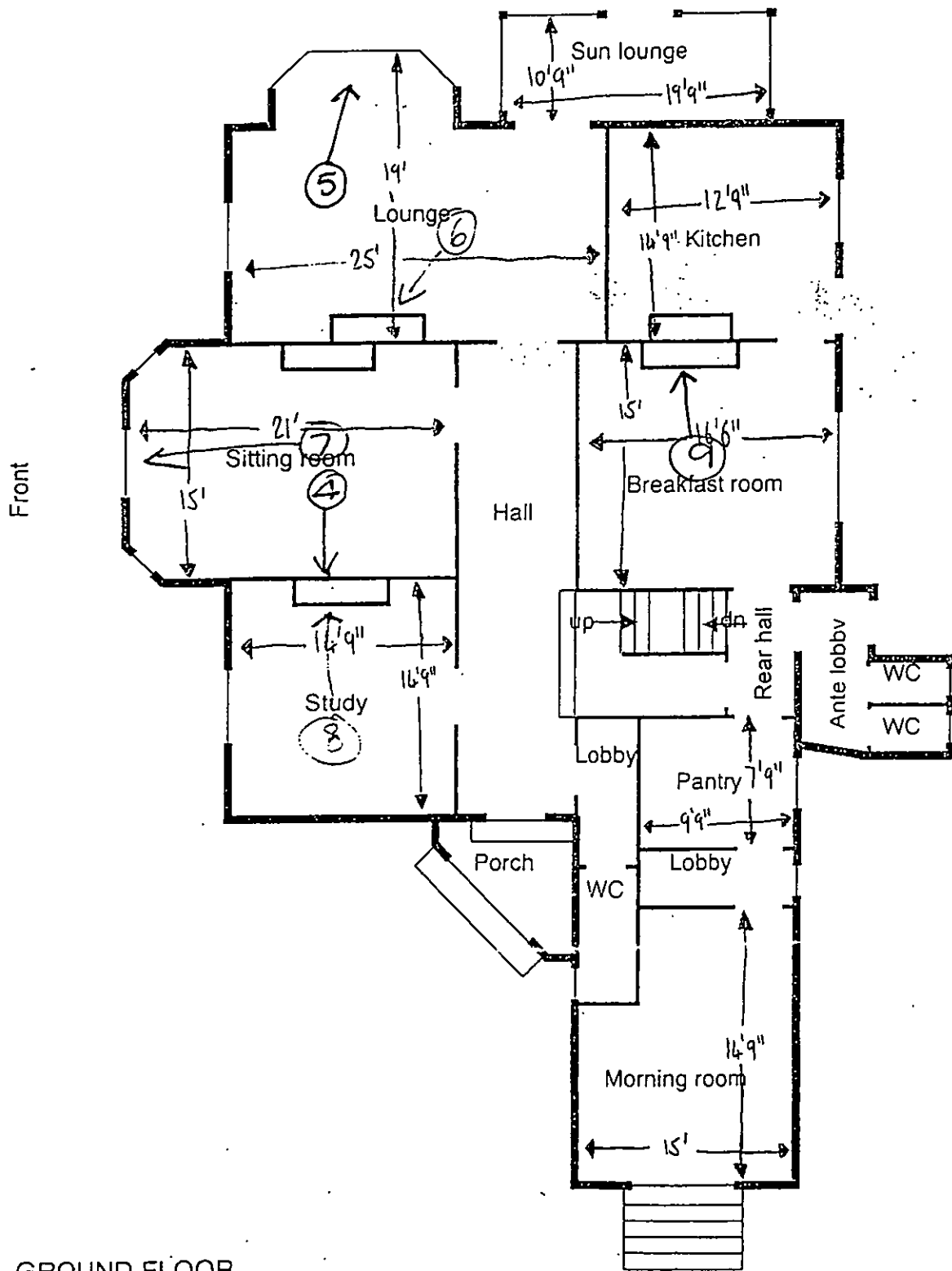
Fig. 5 Farncombe Rectory, East Elevation, Ewan Christian. 1863

Present slope of ground



Sketch copy of Ewan Christian's First Floor ('Chamber') Plan, ground floor rooms in brackets. The attic plan comprised bedroom 6, and a 'box room'. The cellar provided room for coals, beer and a larder. Signed and dated August 1863. The dotted lines show Dallas's subsequent suggestions for enlargement, September 1863. Copied from the delicate originals in File 26035, pt 1, Church of England Record Centre.

Fig. 6 Farncombe Rectory, First Floor Plan, Ewan Christian, 1863



GROUND FLOOR


 <p>Highfield Associates Chartered Building Surveyors 26 Church Street Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 1AU</p>	<p>Title: Bicton Croft Deanery Road Godalming Surrey GU7 2PQ</p>	<p>Scale: Do not scale</p>
		<p>Date: 12/05/2001</p>

Fig. 7 Ground Floor Plan, 2001



Fig. 8 Farncombe Rectory. Exteriors 2007

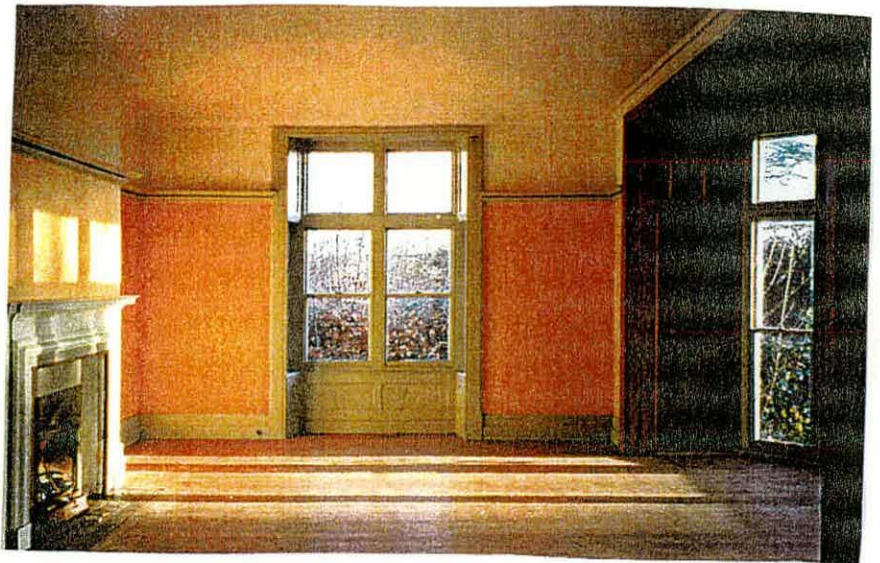
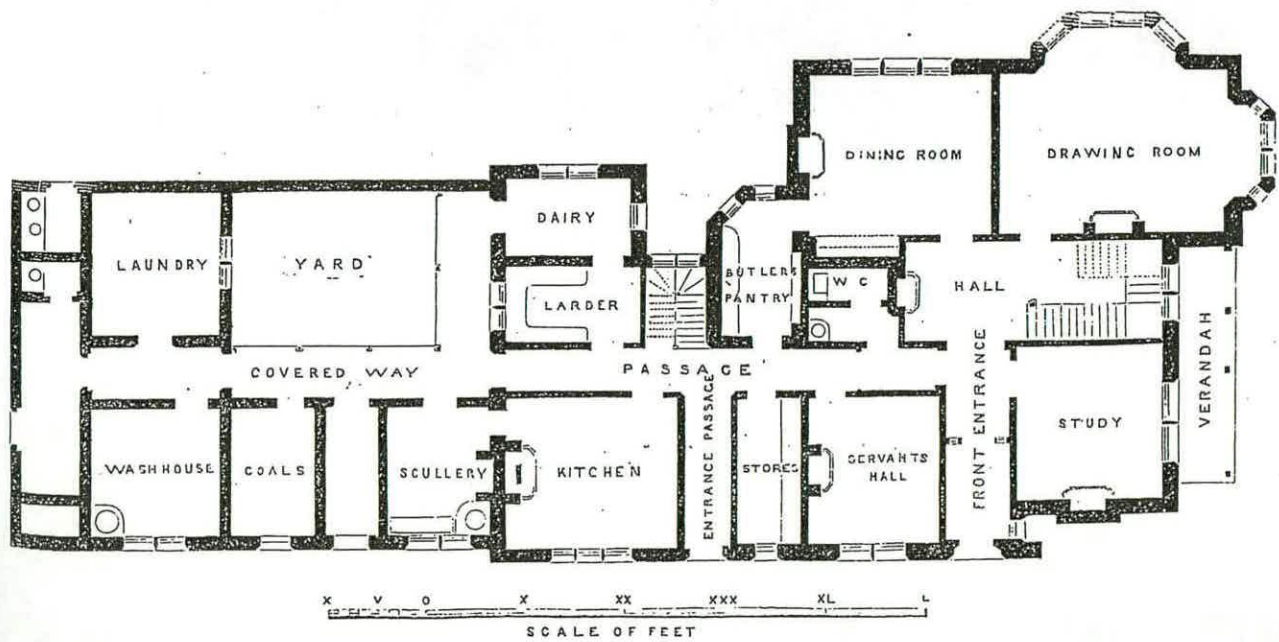
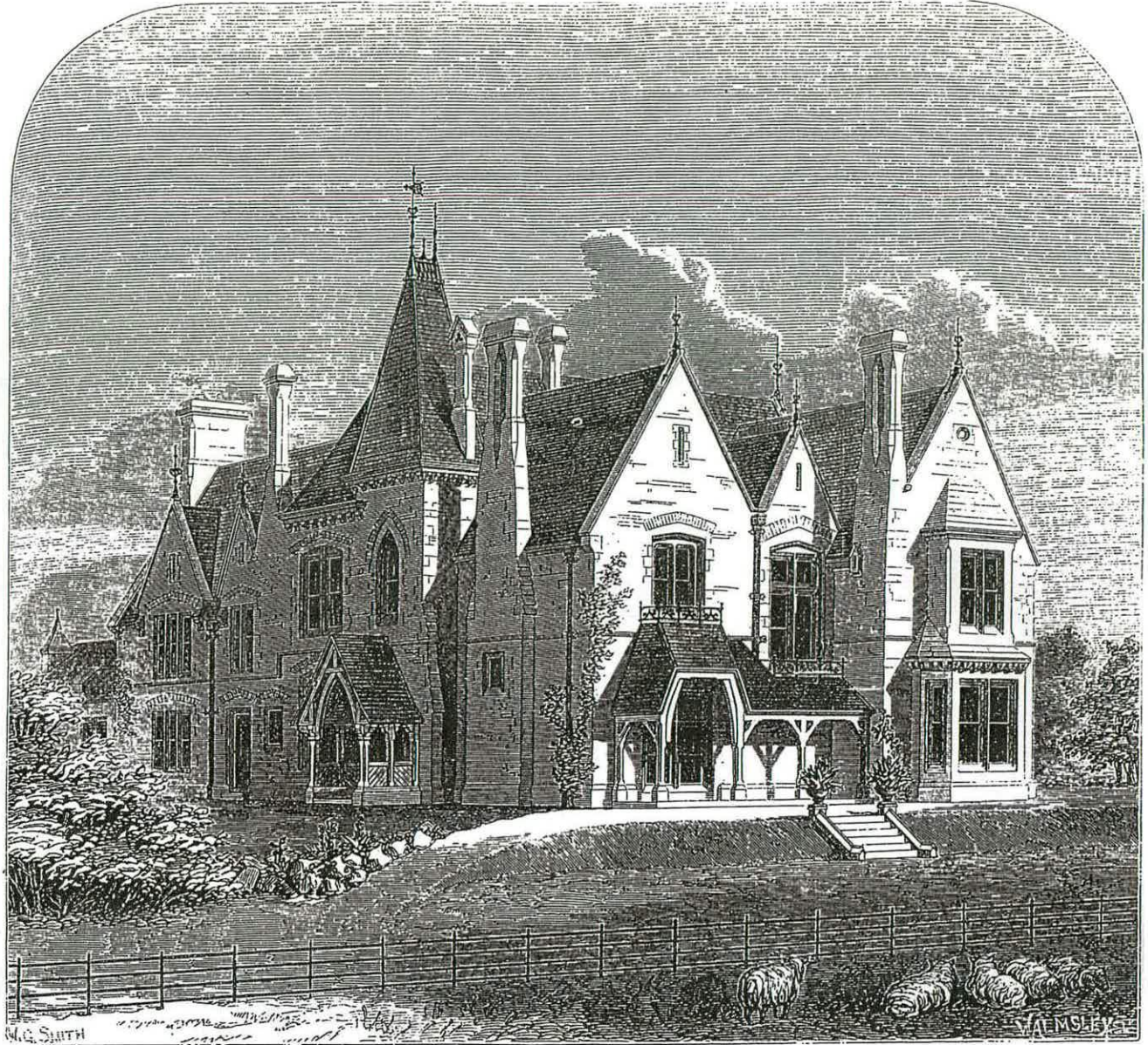


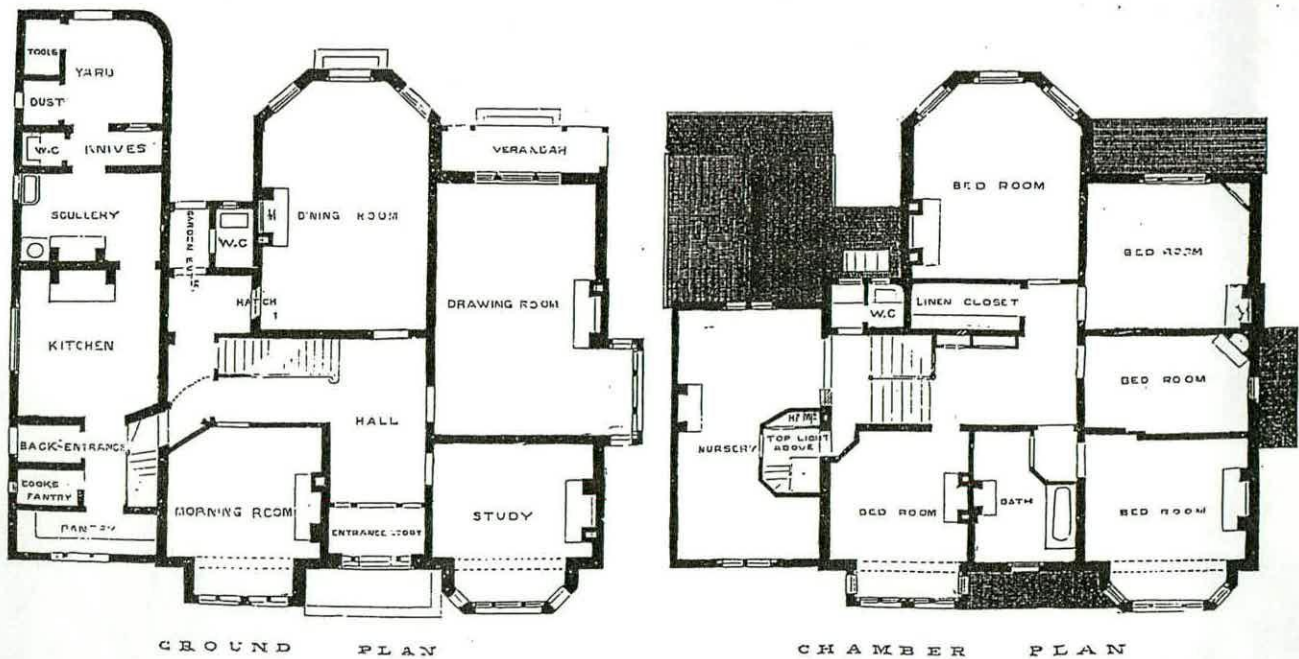
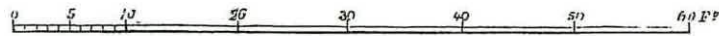
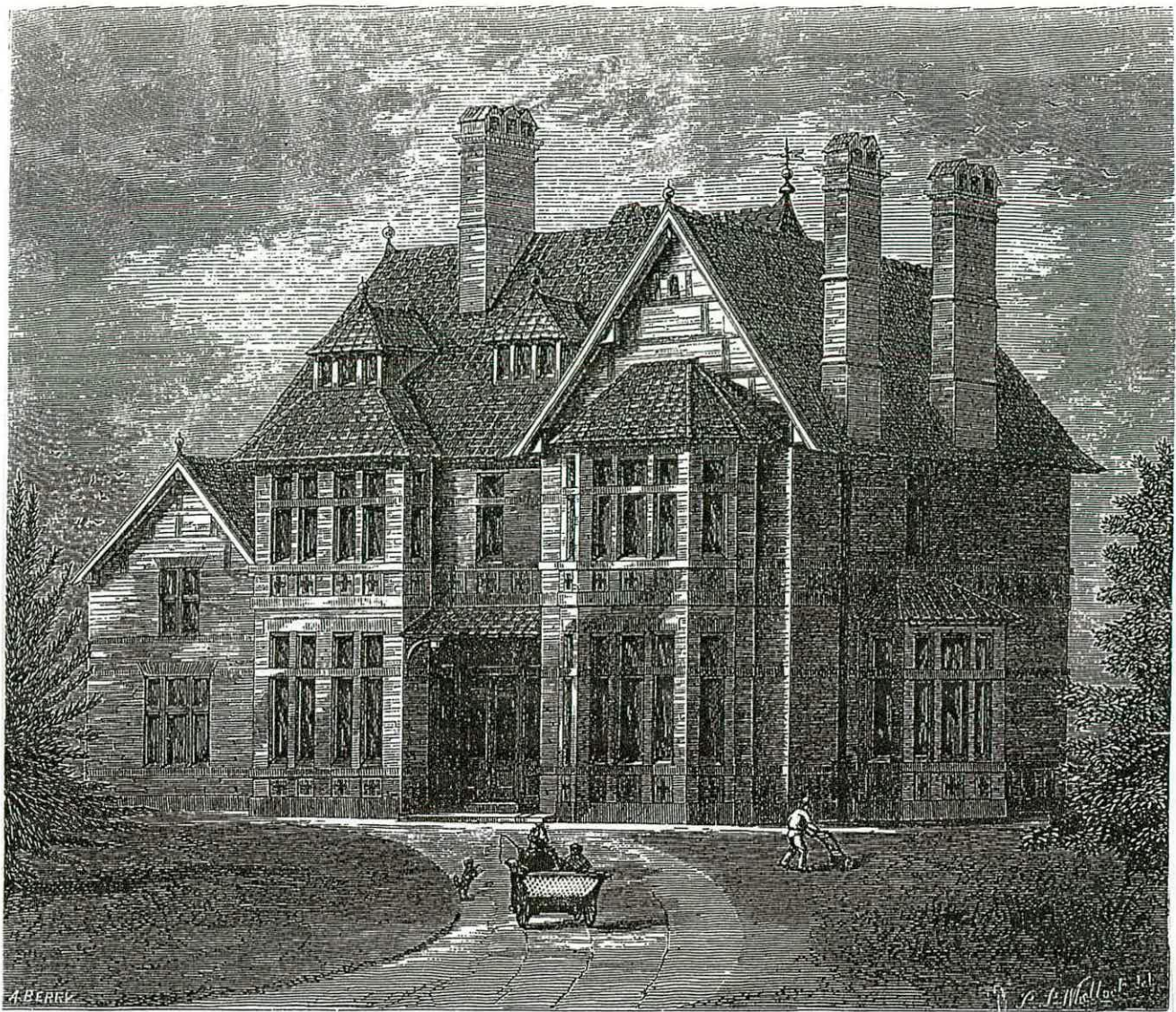
Fig. 9 Farncombe Rectory, Interiors, showing original features, 2002



MR. EWAN CHRISTIAN, *Architect of East Lavington Manor House.*



PARSONAGE HOUSE, AT CHADLINGTON, OXFORDSHIRE.—MR. WILKINSON, ARCHITECT.



GROUND PLAN

CHAMBER PLAN

R. P. Whillcock.

NEW VICARAGE, FOREST GATE, ESSEX.—MR. GEORGE M'DONELL, ARCHITECT.

Fig.12 Vicarage Forest Gate, Essex *The Builder* 14 Dec 1878. 1304