

**Kingsford House
(Chiltern Lodge)
Benson High Street
Home of Thomas Powell until 1851 and John
Powell from 1862**



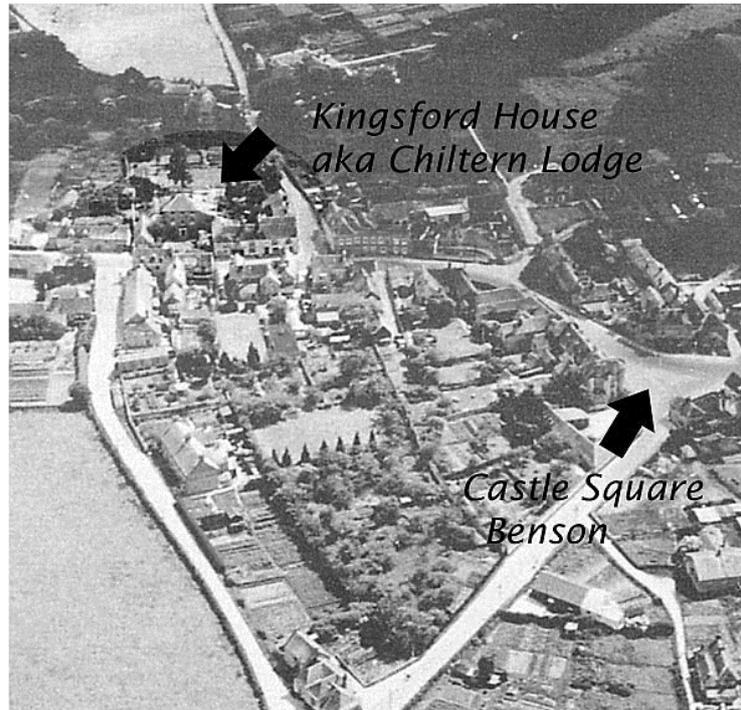
Fig 7.15: Kingsford house is an example of a new type of house, a villa, built in the early 19th century, and using blue/grey header bricks and red brick dressings to create the form of the facade

**Picture and caption, page 188, Benson: A Village Through Its History
edited by Kate Tiller**

The structure now known as Kingsford House and called Chiltern Lodge in the early 20th century was acquired by Thomas Powell (Thomas of the Window) prior to 1841 when he is resident there in the census for that year. He may have bought it as early as 1830. Thomas Powell, Esq. is listed under Gentry in Benson in Pigot's 1830 Directory of Oxfordshire, page 638. Thomas resided here until his death and left the property to his widowed sister for life and after her death to his nephew John Powell (John of the Two Families) who moved to the property in 1862 and died there in 1892. It was left to his unmarried daughters for their enjoyment as long as they remained unmarried and was then to pass to his three eldest sons who were the executors of his estate. They sold it at public auction in 1926.

The property owned by Thomas Powell at his death was apparently essentially the same as that sold by the Powell family in 1926 and included 'pleasure ground, house, offices, etc. along with a kitchen garden and orchard plots adjacent in the rear. It was described in the Benson Bulletin of November, 1995 (Vol. 2 No 3) as "**.... an early 19th Century residence, which had a large beautifully maintained walled garden to the rear until it was developed in the 1960s to accommodate Nos. 15 to 23 Mill Lane. It was built in vitreous bricks with red brick dressings and Westmorland slate roof. Paddock House, "Troys" at Gould Grove and "The Cedars" (since demolished) were built at the same period using the same bricks and slate to a very similar 3 storey design. The house had a formal front garden enclosed by a dwarf wall and fine wrought iron railings and gate parallel to the road, in line with the front wall of No. 12.**

As stated above, upon Thomas Powell's death in 1851, the use of the house passed to his widowed sister, Mary Powell Stevens, but upon her death it was to go to his nephew, John Powell, son of his deceased brother John. After her brother's death, Mary Powell Stevens married a second time to N. C. Corsellis, Surgeon of Ewelme. In the 1861 census they are resident in Kingsford House on the High Street of Benson with a nurse and two servants. It is probable that the doctor had his surgery in the house – it would have been a perfect location.



*Aerial of Benson from WWII, looking south
Kingsford House: three storied house set back from street*

Mary Powell Stevens Corsellis died on 16 May 1862 and John Powell moved his second wife, Mary Ann Keen, and their young family to the house very soon because we know that their son George Frederick was born at Benson on 23 November 1862. They lived in the house for the rest of their lives and their younger children, beginning with George Frederick, were born there.

When John Powell died in 1892, he left the 'enjoyment' of the house and its contents to his daughters who were unmarried for as long as they remained single and chose to live in the house. At the time of his death, two of his daughters were single and living at home: Annie Maria and Fanny. In Kelly's Directory of Oxfordshire for 1895, Miss Powell (Fanny) is listed among the private residents in Benson, presumably in Kingsford House. In that same year in the June quarter, Annie Maria married John Wyatt Painter, a farmer's son from Benson.

Apparently the remaining single daughter, Fanny Powell, moved out of the house between the time her sister married and December of 1898 when her three elder brothers (Thomas Henry, Charles Augustus, and William Arthur) who were administrators of her father's will and, as stated above had a personal financial interest in the property, sought legal opinion as to whether she lost of 'enjoyment' of the property if she ceased to live in it.

Put simply the opinion, based upon the Settled Land Acts, said Fanny could do what she pleased including leasing the house and even selling it under certain circumstances but that she was responsible for keeping it in good repair and insured.

The House Becomes a Rental Property

In the 1901 census, Fanny Powell is still single, aged 34, and living on her own means in the Parish of St. Giles, Ward of Redlands, County Borough of Reading, Berkshire. Apparently the house was rented.

We don't know what was happening to the house in the late 1890's or to whom Fanny rented it. However, we think we know who was living there when the 1901 census was taken:

William Neill	Head	42	Barrister	b. Geelong,
Amy Gertrude	Wife	34		b. Dullish
Frederick H.	Son	2		b. London
Harry I Neill	Son	4		b. London

The household also includes four servants: 2 nursemaids, a cook and a housemaid.

William Neill married Amy Gertrude Rich in the June Quarter of 1893 in Kensington, District, London (Vol. 1a, page 188). Amy Gertrude was the daughter of F. H. and Elizabeth Rich, both born in Ireland. F. H. Rich was a retired Col. and associated with the Board of Trade. (1881 census, Kensington, RG11/0022, Vessel 1a, Folio 13, page 19). Although Amy, the youngest child, was born in Dulwich, two older daughters were born in Malta and a son in Ireland. The family had 7 servants including a footman, Ladies maid, cook, two kitchen maids, and 2 housemaids.

As to the Neill children, Harry John L. Neill was born in 1897 Sept. Quarter, Pancras, London (Vol. 1b, page 40) and Frederick Henry Neill was born in 1899, March Quarter, Kensington (Vol. 1a, page 138).

William Neill, 32, Barrister at law, born Geelong, Australia, appears in the 1891 census as a lodger at 52 Maddox Street, Mayfair. (St. George Hanover Square, Vessel 7 Folio 39, page 30) in the household of George C. Sutton (born Devizes) and his wife Sarah J. Sutton (born Somerset). Also listed as a Lodger is Charles Neill, 22, Medical student, born in Ireland and John F. S. Cridland, 30, Solicitor, born, Slough, Bucks.

If we have the correct family living in Kingsford House – and there is hardly a house big enough for them anywhere else along High Street in Benson – then Fanny was renting to good quality people by 1901. Several questions immediately come to mind:

1. Did Charles Augustus, a solicitor in London, help arrange this rental?
2. Was William Neill the child of a soldier as his wife was and does that explain his birth in Australia?
3. Is the Charles Neill lodging in the same house with him in 1891 his brother?

Kelly's Directory of Oxfordshire in 1907 has a fascinating entry: Henry Reeve Cooper, **Kingsford**. Normally, the name of the house or street address is what follows the name. This is the first time we seem to find the name Kingsford attached to the brick house on High Street.

Henry Reeve Cooper is in the 1901, 1891, and 1881 census as a Commission Agent working on his own account and living with his wife and at least one servant in Crowmarsh Battle. He was born about 1843 in Newington, Surrey.

By Kelly's Directory for 1911, Mr. Cooper is gone from High Street. So, what was Fanny doing with the house at that point? Part of the answer is provided by the Benson Bulletin of November 1995 which says that:

**“...From about 1914 to 1926, under the name of Chiltern Lodge, Miss Rebecca Anne Bishop used the premises as a boarding house
...”**

The House if Sold Out of the Family

Thanks to Margaret Havell Humfrey who has made available many of the papers of her father, Cousin Bruce Humfrey, we now have a copy of the publication printed for the sale of what was then known as Chiltern Lodge in 1926 which gives a full description of the property and fills in a number of blanks in the story of the house.

On Friday, 30 July 1926, Franklin & Gale, Auctioneers of Wallingford and Oxford offered the sale of freehold residential property in the Oxfordshire village of Benson known as “Chiltern Lodge.” The sale was managed by Messrs. Kingsbury & Turner, Solicitors of 369 and 371 Briston Road, London, SW. The property was described as a highly attractive commodious

residence containing 9 bedrooms, 3 reception rooms, good offices, and having extensive stabling and outbuildings, good pleasure grounds and kitchen garden and also thriving and well-stocked orchard, the whole containing about 1 acres, 2 rods and 14 poles.

The exact arrangement of rooms is listed as:

On second floor – Three bedrooms, 2 having grates, bath room with bath fitted (h. and c.) WC
On first floor – Five good bedrooms all fitted with grates and 4 with cupboards.

On ground floor – Entrance hall with door to garden, drawing room with slow combustion grate with tiled panels and marble hearth, dining room with register grate and cupboards, morning room with grate and cupboards, housekeepers room with grate and cupboard, kitchen with tradesmen's entrance, range with over, boiler and plate rack, dresser, cupboard, sink with South Oxfordshire Company's water supply and force pump, pantry, servant's bedroom.

It was further noted that there was good cellarage in the basement, a rear verandah and a coal house. The extensive outbuildings were described as principally brick and timber built and tiled and comprised: large wash house with 2 coppers, fire place and sink, and a long range of stabling with loft over. Approached from Mill Lane was a brick-built and tiled stable and coach house.

There was a garden in front of the house and in the rear were good lawn and pleasure grounds and productive kitchen garden well stocked with fruit trees and bushes. The property had a frontage to Benson High Street of about 74 ft. and a return frontage to Mill Lane, on the opposite side of which was a well-stocked and thriving orchard running down to the stream and having a timber-built and tiled shed thereon.

The material further states that the property was currently let at the exceedingly low rent of £50 per annum by Miss R. M. Bishop whose lease was to expire on 29 September 1933 'but who might be willing to consider a good offer for vacant possession to be given on Nov. 11th, 1926.'

From a letter of Thomas Henry written to Charles Augustus we know that Thomas Henry went down to Wallingford for the sale of Chiltern Lodge which passed out of the family in 1926 although Fanny did not die until 1930. One assumes that she was compensated in some way by her brothers financially for her loss of 'enjoyment' of the £50 per annum rent.

Later History of the House

In the mid 20th century, Kingsford House became the site of shops. In *Benson: A Century of Change 1900 – 2000* by Janet Burt 7 Peter Clarke on page 65 is a picture of five young women, the staff of Gerald Aldridge' shop, standing in the doorway of Kingsford House in 1960. When David John Powell first saw the house, it was a bicycle shop.

Later, the entire house was turned into flats. H.M. Land Registry provides the information that Kingsford House (No. 16 High Street) is now divided into five flats as follows:

Flat 1 (Ground Floor and Basement with Car
Park Space 1) Flat 2 (Ground Floor and Parking
Space)
Flat 3 (First Floor and Car Parking
Space 3) Flat 4 (First Floor and Car
Parking Space 4) Flat 5 (Second
Floor and Car Parking Space 5)

The Registry material traces the property backwards to 1976. It appears that the flats were divided in manner described above and registered in 1987. Apparently, Gordon James Smith and Marjorie Anne Smith of Fountain Court, Oakley Lane, Chinnor, Oxon. OX9 4HT bought the freehold of the entire property and registered it on 20 April 1989 (ON97201). They are apparently granting leaseholds on the apartments, all of which changed hands in 2003 and 2004.

The registration further states that the land in this title, and other land, was conveyed on 2 July 1976 by Patricia Sheilah Holtorp to Quenteams Investment Limited. It is probable that Guenteams Investment Limited is the entity that cut up the property since the house as currently constituted has lost its rear land running down to the stream and also a portion of its original site to the left as one faces the house. Sheilah Holtorp seems to have retained ownership of the land to the right of the main house as well as a portion of land to the rear and it is separately registered (ON107764) and is numbered 14 High Street. This may be the unit that in 2010 was offered for sale as a free hold with one off-street parking place entered from Mill Lane.

Unanswered Questions

But other questions remain. Who built the house and when? Thomas Henry in his letters seeks Charles Augustus' help in remembering the date carved over the fireplace in the kitchen. He thought it was 1812. Was this the date of its building? Who in Benson in 1812 had the wealth to build and live in this house?

When did Fanny actually leave the house and did she return to live there from time to time between 1898 when her brothers were concerned about her not living there and 1914 when she apparently gave Miss Bishop a long-term lease on the property? Stewart John Powell recalled visiting his Auntie Fanny at the house in Benson. This was most likely in 1896 or 1897 when Fanny was planning to rent the house but before she moved out. Annie Maria married in the June Quarter of 1895 and left the house. Stewart was born in January of 1886 and would have been ten in 1896 or eleven in 1897 so that seems the most likely time for the visit that Stewart John made in company with his father, Charles Augustus, who may well have gone down to Benson from London to discuss Fanny' intentions concerning the house.