

OAKHILL AND THE VICARAGE, INTAKE LANE, CROMFORD

These buildings, now known as Alison House and The Old Vicarage, were for most of their 160 year or so history known as Oakhill and The Vicarage and will be referred to as such here. Both are listed grade II. Their entries give a circa 1800 date for the former and a late 18th century date for the latter. Neither is correct.

The land the houses were built on is shown on the Cromford Tithe Award Map of 1841¹ as agricultural land in the ownership of Richard Arkwright II.

The house which came to be called 'The Vicarage' was built by Richard Arkwright II to provide the Revd Robert Morgan Jones, perpetual curate and minister of the Arkwright built chapel in Cromford, with an appropriate dwelling following his marriage in July 1841.² Robert Morgan Jones MA was installed as minister of the chapel in 1839. He lived at Matlock³ prior to moving into the house that, 25 years or so later, could correctly be called a vicarage, once St Mary's was given the status of parish church. He and his family are certainly living at the house by the time of the 1851 census but it seems likely they moved there immediately after it was built, perhaps at the end of the year of his marriage or very soon after.

The earliest definite fact known about Oakhill is that in 1847 William Melville, a cotton spinner and cotton merchant, formerly of Nottingham, died there.⁴ It would seem that by the mid-1830s Melville was tenant of Masson Mill and Cromford Mill. His precise business arrangements with the Arkwrights are not known (see section on occupiers). The first local mention of Melville is in the Electoral Register of 1835-6, where he is listed as being at Matlock.⁵ The Registers for 1837 to 1839 give his location as of Nottingham and Matlock⁶ but in the Register for 1841-2⁷ he is listed

¹ The Tithe Award map is dated on or before 25 March 1841, but the surveying for it would have been done before then.

² Frederick Charles Arkwright asked Robert Jones to record his memories of RA II, which he did in 1886. He stated that the house was built at a cost of £1400, not as a vicarage but as a private house, for which he paid a nominal rent of £1.00 a year. D Buxton

³ Robert Jones is listed in the 1841 Census as resident at Matlock. His predecessor, the Revd Richard Ward, also lived at Matlock.

⁴ Derby Mercury 16 June 1847 "On Friday 11th instant at his residence Oakhill near Matlock Bath. William Melville Esq. in the 70th year of his age deeply regretted."

⁵ Melville's voting qualification was that he was paying over £50 rental for Masson Mill.

⁶ In the 1837-38 Register he is listed as living at Standard Hill, Nottingham and Matlock and as occupier of Matlock Cotton Mill and premises. The 1838-30 one states the same address but mentions Masson Mill, which presumably may be equated with Matlock Cotton Mill.

⁷ The Electoral Register for 1841-42 was in force from 31st October 1841 and so was compiled earlier.

as living at Cromford. It seems likely therefore that he moved to Oakhill in either 1841 or 1842 and that the house was built for him.

Richard Arkwright II died in April 1843 at the age of 87. Upon his death his son Peter became head of the family, owner of the mills and squire of Cromford, but before then he took over management of some of his father's business affairs⁸ and probably had some part in the construction of the two houses.

The houses seem to have been conceived of as a single development. Even if they were not built at exactly the same time and their construction is unlikely to have been far apart. Certainly they are of very similar architectural style, are similar in scale and share the same carriage drive.

They are approached from two directions, eastwards from Intake Lane off Derby Road, which is shown on early OS Maps as being commanded by a lodge house,⁹ and westwards from the end of North Street. They were laid out so that both fronted onto a shard landscaped 'island', between the arms of the bifurcated carriage drive.

Oakhill seems to have prime position in the development, having a southerly garden front overlooking rising pastureland and eastern windows facing down the Derwent Valley. The Arkwright Estate sale papers of 1927 show the Vicarage standing in a relatively small plot of land, with the grounds of Oakhill entirely surrounding it, albeit by narrow strips of land at the north east and south east corners. This suggests that the Vicarage plot was of secondary status. The Vicarage was enlarged and is now of equal size and in some respects, such as the nature and quality of its east facing ground floor windows, of superior design and workmanship.

The two houses are built in local gritstone and have almost pyramidal slated roofs. It is understandable how they have been misdated on purely architectural evidence, as they are of a simple 'stripped' down classical style that was fashionable decades earlier, and the Vicarage has some details which allude back to the Regency period.

The reason for the choice of location for the two houses is the next issue to consider. The name Intake Lane suggests the land it gives access to or traverses was 'taken in' from the common, although by the end of the 18th century it was in agricultural use. A 1776 agreement between Peter Nightingale and Richard Arkwright, giving Arkwright use of Rock House, refers to the Rye Croft and the Barn Croft, as part of a swathe of land surrounding the house and stretching uphill to beyond North Street, which the agreement requires should not be ploughed or tilled, presumably to retain a parkland type setting. A "Barn" Croft is listed in the Tithe

⁸ The Cromford Tithe Schedule credits of 1840 credits Peter Arkwright as "occupier" of Cromford Mills.

⁹ The building is shown on the 1841 Tithe Award map as a cottage. It would seem likely that after 1841-2 it was modified to become a lodge house. On its south side is a double entrance, one to the field behind the cottage and the other to the Oakhill residences. The central gateposts have been removed, making one wide entrance.

Award and corresponds to the area shown on the 1841 Tithe Award map as being the land on which the houses were built. Was the hill itself perhaps once known as Oak Hill?

As has been stated already, when Peter Arkwright succeeded his father, Richard Arkwright II, he became owner of the Cromford Arkwright estate and squire of Cromford. Since 1805 he and his large family had lived at Rock House, Following the death of his father he took up residence at Willersley Castle. By this time Rock House had lost some of its former prestige and its setting had been significantly compromised. The creation of the Cromford Canal Wharf behind the house in the 1790s and the turnpike road along the valley bottom (now the A6) in 1817/18 were major intrusions. The building of a village school at the end of North Street in 1832, further encroached into the land once considered 'parkland', as did a cluster of allotments.

OAKHILL: OCCUPANTS



Oakhill from the South East

As has already been stated it seems that Oakhill was built for William Melville, the “occupier” of Masson Mill and Cromford Mill, sometime in 1841 or 1842. His death at Oakhill in 1847 means that his occupancy was short lived.

The Melville family migrated from Scotland to Nottingham in or before 1775. They become cotton spinners and cotton merchants. The William in question (c1777-1847) was in partnership with his brother David as spinners and merchants in Angel Row, Nottingham. William built himself a grand house on Standard Hill, Nottingham, part of which still survives. It would appear that by 1830 he may have been in financial difficulties. By 1835 he was living in Matlock.¹⁰

Bagshaw’s 1846 Directory of Derbyshire lists William Melville under Matlock. The entry is for “William Melville & Co, Masson and Cromford Mills”. The London Gazette of August 4th 1846 announced “Partnership between William Melville and James Charles Arkwright cotton spinners dissolved by mutual consent”. The mills remained in the ownership of the Arkwrights so it is not clear what arrangement Melville had with the family. Production at Cromford Mill had by then contracted considerably as a result of loss of water power but Masson was still in full production.

On Melville’s death, in 1847, a sale of his possessions¹¹ was held at Oakhill. The list of items was extensive and included much furniture, pier, chimney and other glasses (mirrors), an extensive dinner service, a library of 400 volumes, 11 paintings, some with fanciful attributions (Rembrandt, Holbein, Rubens etc), and a double bodied phaeton.

It would seem therefore that Melville lived at Oakhill in some style, albeit in a smaller house than the one he built for himself in Nottingham. It was perhaps to meet Melville’s aspirations to a gentleman’s lifestyle that Oakhill was built in the form and location that it was.

The 1851 census reveals that by that date the house had become the home of the Revd Godfrey Harry Arkwright, although he was absent on the night of the census. His wife Frances is not mentioned. The only residents listed are five servants (housekeeper, housemaid, cook, kitchen maid and groom). G H Arkwright (1814-1866) was the third son of Robert Arkwright (brother of Peter Arkwright) who lived at Sutton Scarsdale Hall. Godfrey was the rector of Heath and Ault Hucknall and on the untimely death of his elder brother William, in 1857, was given the use of Sutton Scarsdale Hall for life.¹² This presumably accounts for the fact that in 1857 the

¹⁰ William’s son, William Rylance Melville (b. 1813), became Rector of St Giles Matlock in 1839 and remained the incumbent until his death in 1887.

¹¹ Derby Mercury 11 August 1847

¹² He had been the user of Sutton Scarsdale Hall for his lifetime in the will of his father Robert Arkwright (1783-1859).

occupant is recorded¹³ as being not Godfrey Arkwright, but Peter Arkwright's sister Frances (1796-1863).

Frances Arkwright had previously lived at Rock House. She was an invalid and unmarried and lived with a companion. Ann Wildey, together with four servants (lady's maid, housemaid, cook and parlour made).

Following the death of Frances the house was made ready for Peter Arkwright's sixth child, James Charles Arkwright (1813-1896)¹⁴ who moved there in November 1865.¹⁵ James Arkwright married twice, firstly in 1854 to Isabel Clowes who died in 1855 and then in 1864 to Mary Brodhurst, the year before James moved to Oakhill. He had no children by either marriage. He was a wealthy man¹⁶ and had a London house for much of the time he was at Oakhill. It may have been James Arkwright who enlarged the house and its service range. He certainly had the wherewithal to do so. It seems unlikely that the two storey block on the west side of the principal block was part of the original design. Following the death of James Arkwright in 1896 his widow Mary continued in residence, with 8 live-in servants,¹⁷ until her death in 1918.¹⁸

George Henry Key JP was resident from 1918 to 1958. He appears in the 1934 Willersley Estate sale catalogue as a tenant of Oakhill. He purchased the house just before the estate sale. It was probably he who, some time after 1924 added the flat roofed two storey extension to the garden front, creating a south facing dining room, and what is described as a 'sun loggia'. George Key died at Oakhill in May 1958.¹⁹

Lt-Col. W. A. Chislett, a music critic and cellist who wrote reviews for the journal 'The Gramophone', succeeded Key as occupant of Oakhill, and lived there until 1964. Planning permission for conversion of the stables to a flat was given to Mrs Chislett in 1965.

The house then remained empty until it was bought in 1967 by the Women's Association of Toc H. Planning permission was given for conversion of the house to a residential training and conference centre. It opened in 1968. It is said to have had a role as a women's refuge. It was renamed 'Alison House' after Alison MacFie, who established the Association's 'League of Women Helpers'.

¹³ White's Directory of 1857.

¹⁴ Matlock Bath Advertiser 1863.

¹⁵ The 1871 and 1881 census however only gives the names of resident servants.

¹⁶ He was a banker and partner with his father Peter of the Arkwright Bank at Wirksworth.

¹⁷ 1911 Census.

¹⁸ Newspaper account held at Alison House.

¹⁹ Wirksworth Parish Records 1600-1900 website.

In 1994 planning permission and listed building consent was given for the creation of en suite bathrooms and for the conversion of a garage to staff accommodation. Permission for the demolition of a greenhouse and boiler room was given in 2003. It is now run by Toc H as a high quality bed and breakfast establishment. The managers are Mr and Mrs Peter Groves.

OAKHILL: THE BUILDING

There are two clues to the c.1841/2 date of the house, rather than the earlier dates given by English Heritage: the generous floor to ceiling height of its two storeys and the asymmetry of the 'front' elevation. Victorians disliked low ceilings and, unlike the Georgians, did not mind asymmetry.

Whilst the north elevation must be considered the front elevation, as it contains the front door, it is clearly not the most important elevation, as two of its four bays (the outer two) have blind window openings. It is likely that these were built 'blind' because the two houses face each other. Before the shrubbery between them had matured there would have been an overlooking issue.

There is just one open window at ground floor level, a 'six over six' pane sash, without horns. Nearly all the windows to the main house are of this type. The sash windows to the first floor have their lintels incorporated within a simple geometric eaves cornice and their sills incorporated in a band course. The entrance door is off centre. It is within a shallow open porch, flanked by Doric pilasters. Within this a small eccentrically designed window lights a small room just to the right of the lobby. The door case has a simple but substantial entablature with a geometric cornice. The front door itself is nicely detailed: a false two leaf pattern, with two panels in each 'leaf', the top ones being tall and glazed. Over the door is a decorative fanlight of three square panes set in margin lights with diagonal glazing bars at the four corners. This joinery is probably original.



The entrance to Oakhill

It would seem the principal elevation was originally either the southern or the eastern one. It is difficult to be sure now as the original south front has been lost. The two principal rooms face east, as at the Vicarage, but the sash windows are not the showy Vicarage full height tripartite type, but are conventional six over six sashes, set within ordinary reveals ie without architraves. The smaller scale of the ground floor windows in the east wall of Oakhill is compensated for by there being two to light each of the two principal rooms. The room on the southern side is lit by a third, within the south wall. This gives the room a very pleasant quality, which is further enhanced by views down the Derwent Valley, through the two windows in the east wall.



An east facing window in the former drawing room of Oakhill

As at the Vicarage the two principal rooms were (originally) of identical size, and of very similar dimension to those at the Vicarage, being 19' 0" x 15' 3" (as compared to the Vicarage 19' 6" x 14' 6"). The one on the south side was the drawing room. The other is described in the 1924 sale papers as "hall; dining room", a remarkably archaic arrangement for a house of this date. The two rooms are now conjoined, by means of the insertion of an elliptically headed opening within the dividing wall. The original drawing room has a nicely detailed painted wooden fireplace, with a reeded frieze and below it a central framed cartouche of carved leaves. This fireplace is probably the original.



The fireplace of the former drawing room at Oakhill.

The age and character of the house is much more obviously Victorian when seen from inside, with the doors being four panelled and the staircase having markedly 19th century style (gothic rather than classical) newel posts.



The staircase at Oakhill

Divining the date of the house from the exterior has been further complicated by a major 20th century alteration to the south elevation, which has given it three advanced bays, which are a two storey flat roofed extension. This was probably added during the occupancy of George Key. It was carefully done with matching stone and matching architectural detailing. In fact it would seem that a three bay length of the original south was dismantled and simply rebuilt 8' 0" further out, with even the original sash windows being reused. The 8' deep extension increased the length of the southernmost principal room, originally the drawing room to 27' 3".



The east elevation of Oakhill

At first built the extension incorporated a garden door, in the second bay from the corner of the house.²⁰ This was replaced by a window, perhaps when what the 1964 sale papers describe as a 'sun loggia' was created. This was simply a recess within the rebuilt wall, accessed via sliding glazed doors. It was later done away with when a glazed bay window/conservatory was built over the opening. The room it lights had by the 1970s become the dining room but would seem to have originally been the morning room. It is now a lounge. It has a fine polished fossiliferous limestone fireplace. The first extension increased the length of this room from 14' to 23' and the bay window further extended it to 31'.

Attached to the house on its west side is a two-storey block, with a pyramidal slated roof and with eaves lower than those of the house. It projects about 16' 0" beyond the original building-line of the house. Attached to it is a two-storey service range, the eaves of which are even lower. Were these perhaps added or extended by the wealthy James Arkwright? The 1880 OS map²¹ shows this extensive two storey service range was certainly in existence by then.

²⁰ Evidence for this came from a postcard view showing the new 'garden front', with a man mowing the lawn in the foreground.

²¹ The first map to show the houses.



South elevation of Oakhill



South elevation of Oakhill

The 1924 sale papers give the following description of the property:

11 acres 3 roods and 24 perch or 11.903 acres.

GROUND FLOOR: Hall, Dining Room about 19' by 16' fitted with marble mantel. Drawing Room about 28' 6" by 16' 3" with polished oak floor. Morning Room about 23' by 13' 6". Office.

FIRST FLOOR: Three Principal Bedrooms, respectively about 19' by 15' 6", 19' 3" by 15' 5" and 22' 6", two of which have Dressing Rooms communicating. Bath Room,

two Bedrooms, two Maids bedrooms, Playroom, Housemaids Closet, two Attic Rooms.

DOMESTIC OFFICES: Kitchen, Butlers Pantry, Servants Hall, Scullery, Larder, Store Room and Maid's WC.

THE BUILDINGS: Garage for two cars, Saddle Room, two Loose Boxes, Wash House, Store House, Coal House, WC and two lean-to Sheds.

The 1964 sale papers give the land holding as slightly larger – 12.232 acres. It is difficult to match the rooms described with those described in the 1924 papers as the names used differ. A 'Lounge Hall, Main Hall and Passageway' are listed. A 'Dining Room- south – 18' 2" x 12' 7"' is listed. This is clearly at least in part within the extension on the garden front as it has sliding doors opening out to a Sun Loggia. No Drawing Room is listed, although a 'Spacious Lounge – east 27' 3" x 15' 3" with open Cornish quarry tiled fireplace...and fitted cocktail cupboard' is. No morning room is listed.

It is not possible to identify which bedrooms correspond with which, but a total of six are listed, only one of which has a dressing room attached.

A 'Basement Cellar' is given as the location for the oil-fired boiler.

The list of ancillary accommodation is not too dissimilar to that described in the 1924 papers but by 1964 there is, in total, accommodation for six cars.

The principal garden, on the south side of the house has a tall stone wall bounding it on the west, beyond which, originally, lay a vegetable garden.



Garden wall at Oakhill



Gateway through garden wall

On the south side of the garden a tennis court was laid out, on a raised platform, but this was abandoned and given over to vegetables as part of the war effort.

Toc H, the current owners, have recently carried out extensive works to the interior.

THE VICARAGE: OCCUPANTS



The east elevation of The Vicarage

Richard Arkwright II held the gift of the living of St Mary's Church and as patron appointed the 'vicar' or, as was at first the case, the 'perpetual curate', as the incumbent clergyman could not claim the title of vicar until 1869 when St Mary's Cromford became a parish church. For the same reason it was not until then that the house could be called the Vicarage. Early references to the two houses describe them both as 'Oakhill', which was presumably simply the name given to the location.

Bagshaw's Directory of 1846 describes the living as 'a perpetual curacy' and the incumbent as the Revd Robert Morgan Jones. He succeeded the Revd Richard Ward,²² the first minister of the Cromford chapel, in 1839.²³ Robert Jones was a graduate of Pembroke College Oxford.²⁴ The census of 1851 identifies his household as his wife Fanny, 55, his daughter Fanny, 17, a cook and a maid. Jones retired in July 1886, after almost 50 years as incumbent and first vicar of the newly

²² Fitton (p 294) says RA II made provision in his will for a token of remembrance to be given to the Revd Richard Ward, incumbent of the Cromford Chapel for upwards of 40 years

²³ Fitton

²⁴ Alumni Oxoniensis 1715-1886

formed parish of Cromford. Richard Arkwright II left Jones £100 'as a token of remembrance' in his will. Jones lived in retirement at The Dimple Matlock.²⁵

Kelly's Directory of 1887 records that Jones' successor was the Revd William Harry Arkwright, of London, second cousin to Frederic Charles Arkwright of Willersley Castle and son of the Revd Godfrey Harry Arkwright of Sutton Scarsdale Hall, one time resident of Oakhill. In 1893 W H Arkwright left St Mary's Wirksworth.²⁶ He was succeeded by the Revd Egbert Hacking.

In 1898 F C Arkwright gave the Vicarage to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The vicar in 1900 is The Revd Canon George Herbert Sing MA. Between 1904 and 1912 the Revd Alfred Thomas Humphreys is vicar and between 1916 and 1941 the Revd George Arthur Hazelhurst.

It was announced in 1949 that the benefices of Bonsall and St Mary Cromford should be held in plurality with the incumbent, the Revd Thomas Stephen Jones living at the Bonsall parsonage. The County Council gave planning permission for conversion of Cromford Vicarage into three flats in January 1950. Cromford PCC objected to the proposal for the living of St Mary's Cromford to be held in plurality with Bonsall but its objections were overruled and the London Gazette published the order in April 1956.

An assistant priest in charge post was established for Cromford and the Revd Basil Simpson Ainley was appointed in November 1956, a role he fulfilled until his death in 1966. He was 72 at the time of his appointment and this new duty followed on immediately from his retirement as vicar of Doveridge. The Revd Basil Ainley was the last clergyman to live at The Vicarage, but in only part of the building, which was split into three flats. Initially he and his family had the ground floor of the main house together with the first floor of the post 1880 extension. This flat was still known as 'the Vicarage'. A second flat was made out of the remaining first floor rooms and a third from the former stables. Mr Ainley and his family moved into the smaller second flat on the departure of the first floor tenant in 1962. The Vicarage was put on the market by the Diocesan Parsonages Board following the death of Basil Ainley in 1967.

Planning permission was obtained by 'Construction Computing' to convert the house to office use. In 1978 Granwood Holdings Ltd also converted the first floor of the two storey outbuilding for office use when it became their administrative headquarters.

²⁵ 1891 Census

²⁶ High Peak News, November 11th

Planning permission for conversion of the former Vicarage back into a single dwelling and for the creation of a swimming pool in the garden was given in July 2003. Listed building consent for alterations and the creation of a swimming pool was given in 2006. Planning permission was given for a new 4 bay garage in 2007.

The house is currently (2009) owned by Mark and Sharron Cooper, who purchased it in 2005.

THE VICARAGE: THE BUILDING

The Vicarage bears some striking resemblances to Oakhill, in fact some details are identical, namely the entrance door and the staircase.



Entrance doorway



Principal staircase

The most notable difference in design of the Vicarage, apart from its later wing, is the design of the two east facing ground floor windows, which are large and tripartite sashes, which extend down to floor level and are set within moulded architraves surmounted by entablatures and cornices. Presumably this elevation was conceived of as a garden front. The remainder of the windows are 'six over six' pane sashes without horns, as at Oakhill, but unlike Oakhill's they are set within finely dressed moulded architraves. Despite the Vicarage having much less extensive grounds its architectural decoration and the craftsmanship of its construction is superior to that of Oakhill.

The large tripartite windows light two rooms of identical size, 19' 6" x 14' 6". Presumably one would originally have been a drawing room and the other a dining room. They have a reeded cornice detail of decidedly Regency style.



Cornice detail

The 1880 OS map showing the ground plan of the house, reveals that the northern wing with its two storey canted bay windows had not been added by then and it is reasonable to assume that it was added by William Harry Arkwright, once he had succeeded Robert Jones as vicar in 1886. This wing has been carefully detailed to harmonise with the original house, having a matching band course and cornice, but windows have 'one over one' plate glass pane sashes with horns. This newly added wing provided a much larger room than the original two principal rooms, being 23' 0" x 18' 0", excluding the bay. Presumably it became the drawing room, although it is possible that it was built as a billiard room. Its addition made the Vicarage larger than Oakhill.

The entrance hall is essentially square, 16' 6" x 16' 6", with the principal staircase in a broad corridor leading off it. A service staircase is located at right angles to the corridor, within an enclosed space.



Sandstone fireplace within the entrance hall/the room to the left of the entrance door

The original use of the ground floor rooms is not clear but the room in the north west corner of the original house was perhaps a study/office.



Polished fossiliferous limestone fireplace with flanking cupboards within the room in north west corner of the original house

As at Oakhill the service range is of substantial size and here included kennels as well as stables. Did one of the vicars of Cromford hunt?

The carriage drive has square section stone gate posts with chamfered corners commanding the east and west entrance points to the Vicarage garden. Modern metal gates and garden railings were installed in 2008 but they are in the original positions.



Gate post to the Vicarage

Land to the east of the Vicarage garden, which originally was part of the grounds of Oakhill, was developed in the 20th century for a single house, which was demolished in 2006 and the site redeveloped for two houses.

The length of carriage drive between the houses and the gateway off Intake Lane nevertheless retains decorative yew and laurel planting for much of its length and this makes an important contribution to the character of the setting of the two historic houses.

THE FORMER LODGE HOUSE

Early twentieth century OS maps identify the building at the junction of Intake Lane and Derby Road, now known as Lyntree House, as 'Lodge House'. A building in this location is shown on the 1841 Tithe Award map. It probably represents a cottage. It seems likely that after 1841-2 this cottage was modified to become a lodge house.



The former Lodge House

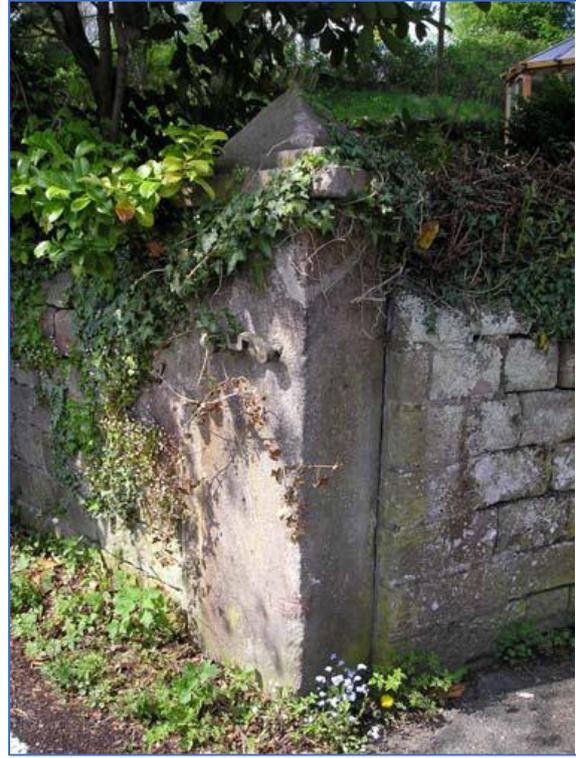


Now known as Lyntree House

On its south side is a double entrance, one to the field behind the cottage and the other to the Oakhill residences. The central gateposts have been removed, making one wide entrance.



Left hand gate pier



Right hand gate pier

Barry Joyce

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