UPLANDS FOUR ASHES ROAD HIGH WYCOMBE HP15 6LB



Picture taken from website http://www.devere.co.uk/our-locations/uplands-house

A BRIEF HISTORY

A preliminary report researched & written by Marian Miller Ll.B, M.Sc. (Historic Conservation)

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Uplands, Four Ashes Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP15 6LB

Parish: Hughenden Grid ref. SU 874962

INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared in response to a proposal to demolish and redevelop the site of Uplands for housing. It has been written on a voluntary basis on behalf of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society (BAS) and the Historic Buildings & Landscapes Group of the Chiltern Society. This is a preliminary report with the findings based on rapid research in various websites and documents at the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (CBS), the National Archives at Kew (NA) and the BAS library together with a cursory inspection of the outside of the buildings during a quick walk around the grounds. Sources are given in the Sources section and there is a section containing recommendations for further research.

This preliminary report outlines the history of Uplands to provide evidence that it should be regarded as an undesignated heritage asset within the National Planning Policy Framework, with significance for its historic and architectural interest. It could also be used to support consideration of the addition of Uplands to Wycombe District Council's local list.

On Friday 17th May 2013 Redrow Homes held an exhibition at Hughenden Village Hall of their proposals which would apparently involve demolition of all the existing buildings on the Uplands site, landscaping works and the erection of 16 detached houses. The proposal is still at a pre-application stage and representatives of Redrow said they expect to submit a planning application in June 2013.

Uplands is currently used as a hotel and conference venue by the De Vere Group. More information and photographs can be found on their website: http://www.deverevenues.co.uk/locations/uplands-house.html

The buildings are set in wooded grounds of some 18 acres within the Green Belt and Chilterns AONB. Four Ashes Road runs along a ridge, typical of the Chilterns, with Uplands located between the 180m and 185m contours. The buildings overlook the Hughenden Valley with the National Trust's estate of Hughenden Manor on the opposite side of the valley. The site is, therefore, in a highly visible and sensitive location.

HISTORY 1858 - 1900

In his 1862 History of Buckinghamshire, Sheahan describes Uplands thus:

"Uplands is the property and residence of Captain J.M.M. Hewett, Adjutant of the Royal Bucks King's Own Militia. The house was built in 1859, in the Gothic style with castellated embellishments, and stands on an eminence surrounded by pleasure grounds, a lawn etc."

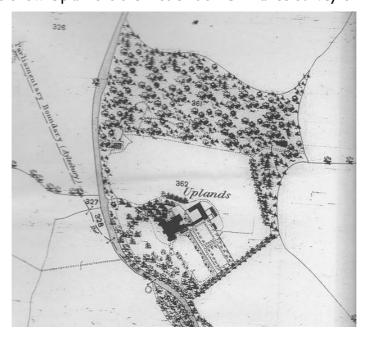
According to deeds held at the CBS, Hewett (then living at Loudwater) had bought some 135 acres of freehold farm land at Widmer End from Frances Fletcher on 25th March 1858. This included a nine-acre arable field called Nine Acres or Great Haggs (numbered 891 on the Hughenden Tithe map of 1844) which appears to be the site on which Uplands was built.

The deeds show Captain Hewett accumulating a substantial landholding between 1858 and 1874, variously called Widmer or Widmer End Farm, with several tenanted cottages. In 1865 a purchase of 40 acres for the sum of £1,900 included Birchin Grove Wood with an extra £465 paid for the timber.

In a conveyance of 1862 Captain Hewett's address is given as Uplands, so the house must have been built between March 1858 and May 1862. The name Uplands was well-chosen for a house on this hill-top site which would have commanded splendid views over Hughenden valley to the west and looked down upon Hughenden Manor, already owned by Benjamin Disraeli, but not yet remodelled by the architect Edward Buckton Lamb.

Hewett apparently needed to borrow money to finance his later purchases. He mortgaged Ravenings Mere (now Ravensmere) and Birchin Grove for £1,600 in 1865 and Uplands itself was mortgaged for £1,500 in 1874. This mortgage deed refers to the mansion "recently erected."

The first map to show Uplands is the first edition Ordnance Survey of 1880:



Map courtesy of the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies

This shows a substantial country house of symmetrical plan (perhaps emulating a 16th century E-plan house?) with a stable-range on three sides of a yard to the rear of the house. The drive approaches the front of the house obliquely with a branch going off to the stables. The landscape has clearly been designed with two walled gardens, and some outbuildings on the south-east (sunny) side of the house. There is a conservatory at the south-east corner of the house.

There appears to be a sort of wilderness-walk in the woodland to the north of the house and a garden building near the road on the southern edge of the wood. This woodland is presumably the remnant of Birchin Grove Wood added to Hewett's estate in 1865.

The four ten-yearly censuses from 1861 to 1891 show the Hewett family living at Uplands with their children and servants. Captain Hewett had married Jemima Fleetwood at Blackburn, Lancashire in 1849. She was the daughter of a banker then living at Woodfold Park, a large country house at Mellor, near Blackburn. In 1851 the couple were living at Woodfold with the in-laws and their four-month old son. It seems likely that Captain Hewett, then with the 62nd regiment, had been serving in India prior to his marriage. Whilst Jemima was a Lancashire lass, John Maddy Moore Hewett had been born at Fort William, Calcutta in 1826, presumably whilst his father, William Wright Hewett was a surgeon with the East India Company. A posting to the 62nd's depot in Mullingar, Ireland must have followed since the Hewett's baby son had been born there and their other son was also born in Ireland, a year later. Three daughters followed, one born in 1858 in Wycombe (presumably before Uplands was built) and the other two born later at Hughenden.

The quota of servants living at Uplands was between five and six with a cook, lady's maid, two housemaids and a footman generally appearing in the censuses, and a nurse for the two little girls in 1861. An advertisement was placed in *The Times* for a new footman in 1891 – "only abstainers need apply"! Other servants, to look after the grounds, horses, carriages etc, probably lived nearby, perhaps some in Hewett's tenanted cottages.

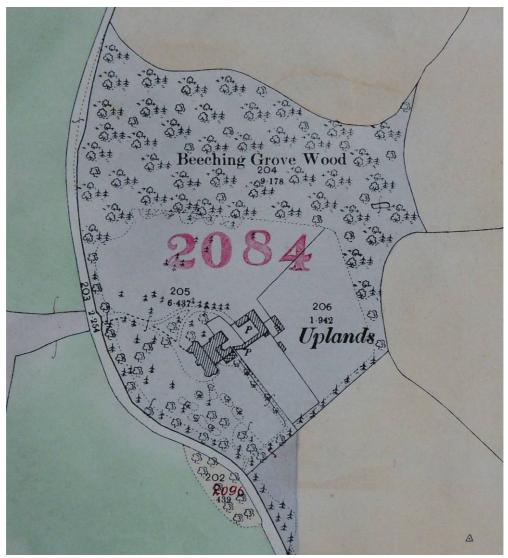
It is assumed that Captain Hewett transferred to the Royal Bucks (King's Own) Militia on his move south, where he was appointed Adjutant in 1854. By 1881 he had been promoted Major and was retired. He was also a Justice of the Peace for Buckinghamshire and presumably well-connected in the county's society. A notice in the *London Gazette* of 26th July 1889 shows he was an executor of the estate of Dame Elizabeth Dashwood of West Wycombe Park.

Major Hewett sold Uplands in 1900 and retired to Eastbourne where he died in 1905. The next owner, and occupier, was Thomas Somers Vernon Cocks.

1900-1935

Thomas Somers Vernon Cocks (generally known as Vernon) was born in London in 1850 and educated at Eton and Christchurch, Oxford. He was a partner in the family banking firm of Cocks, Biddulph & Co. which later became a part of Martins Bank. His connection with Buckinghamshire started in childhood when his father inherited Thames Bank, a house near the lock at Marlow (since lost in a fire). When Thomas inherited the Marlow house on his own father's death in 1899 he sold Thames Bank and bought Uplands. He was to live there until his death in 1932. He and his wife, Ethel Mary (daughter of Horace D. Fellowes) who died in 1936, are buried in Hughenden churchyard. They had three daughters and one son. Like Major Hewett before him Cocks was also a Justice of the Peace (his appointment was recorded in the Bucks Herald 14th February 1903).

By the start of the 20th century there seems to have been little or no change at Uplands apart from the loss of the building in the woods. The walled gardens appear to have been amalgamated into one and lost some of their planting. The following map was used for the 1910 Valuation Survey (the so-called Lloyds George Domesday) based on the second edition Ordnance Survey map of 1898.



1910 valuation survey map ref. IR126/9/93 held at the National Archives, Kew

The Field Book for the 1910 Valuation Survey unfortunately has no sketch plan of the house and outbuildings but lists the rooms, and so gives us some indication of the house-plan. The date of the actual survey is not given but other High Wycombe surveys were generally done in 1912 or 1913. The extent of the house, stabling and grounds is given as just over nine acres. The area of the woodland, referred to as Beeching Wood in the field book but Beeching Grove Wood on the map, was also nine acres. The assessment gives the sale price in 1900 as £8,600 and mentions subsequent expenditure of £240 on the grounds and £1,350 on the house.

The building materials were brick, cement and slate. The list of rooms is in abbreviated form (so some have been guessed at) but the accommodation appears to have been as follows:

Entrance vestibule; hall - board floor; billiard room - board floor 20×18 ; library 20×17.6 ; gun room, smoke room, lavatory; drawing room 23 bay 18×28 with marble mantelpiece; dining room $28.6 \times 18 \& 2$ bay marble (mould?) Pantry; servants' hall; kitchen; scullery; larder.

Lean-to passage; boot room; lamp room, laundry; two cellars.

I bedroom; 2 small bedrooms; I bedroom & bay; I bedroom; I bedroom; I bedroom; bedroom & bay; 2 bedrooms; WC & box room; 4 bedrooms; WC & I H? C; I bedroom.

"No bath. Only rain water". Oil room; cycle room, kennel.

So there appear to have been ten bedrooms and another five, probably for the servants.

In the grounds the following are listed:

Brick, wood and slate woodbarn, potting sheds and two greenhouses measuring 15×37 and 8×17 . [The former may be the conservatory already noted.]

Brick, flint and slate harness room; coachhouse; oddplace; lumber room and washing place all with a loft over.

Built of wood and slate were 4 boxes, 2 pigstyes, and sheds.

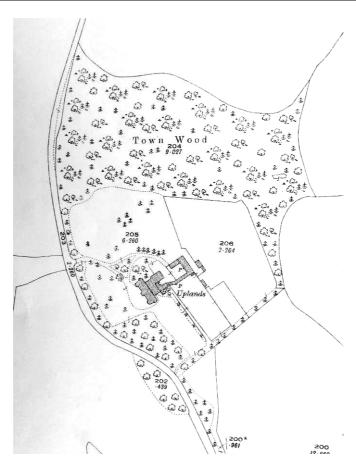
Brick and slate acetylene gas house.

Finally there was a tennis lawn.

Cottages and an orchard at Four Ashes also owned by Cocks were included in the valuation of Uplands. They were tied cottages occupied by James Nash and Charles Scott rent-free.

The 1901 and 1911 censuses show that the Cocks family had six servants living in the house; a cook, ladies maid, parlour maid, two housemaids and a kitchen maid.

The 1925 Ordnance Survey map does not indicate any changes in the buildings but does show what was probably the addition of a tennis court next to the walled garden. By this time the wood was called Town Wood.



1925 Ordnance survey map courtesy of Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies

There is a description of the house in J.V. Somers Cocks' History of the Cocks Family (p.185):

"Uplands...had a considerable acreage attached to it even if the farm and most of the fields were let off. Its two main rooms, the drawing and dining rooms, were for example connected by a passage which, including the hall, was twenty-two yards long, the length of a cricket pitch, and there was a library, a billiards room, the large hall and a box and gun room apart from the kitchen quarters. Upstairs there were some eight bedrooms. The entire water supply was obtained from the extensive roofs which drained into a large underground tank and the water had then to be hand-pumped up to the storage tanks in the roof space. The gardens were extensive with a croquet lawn, a large walled kitchen garden, a long herbaceous border and a wood. There were also stables round the yard and two cottages lived in by the gardener and the coachman (later to become the chauffeur) respectively. There was also an indoor staff of at least half a dozen."

In 1934 Charles Somers Cocks, Vernon and Ethel's son, put the Uplands Estate on the market. The times of 3rd July 1934 carried an advertisement for the sale, either in whole or lots.

It seems that Vernon Cocks must have retained the farms and other properties amassed by Major Hewett since the whole estate being sold amounted to "about 344 acres". This included the dairy farm at Widmer End with four cottages, Poynatts farm, a small country house (perhaps Ravensmere) and two smaller detached houses. According to the Cocks' family history Poynatts was a farm at Fingest, near Henley.

Uplands itself is described as follows:

"Attractive country residence well sheltered from the North. Hall, billiards room, 3 reception rooms, 14 bed and dressing rooms, 2 bath rooms, compact offices. Garage and Stable Block. Lodge. Electric Light. Central Heating. Good drainage. CHARMING PLEASURE GARDENS. Well timbered grounds, tennis court."

There had clearly been some improvements during the Cocks' tenure such as installation of bathrooms, electric light and central heating.

The rather grainy photograph in the newspaper shows the front of Uplands looking much as it does now, except that it has a large front porch, no doubt the entrance vestibule mentioned in the 1910 Valuation Survey, and the explanation of the "E-shape" of the house on the maps.

In 1935 there was an auction sale of furniture and effects. The sale catalogue is at the CBS listing the items by room thus:

maids' bedrooms; eight further bedrooms; landing staircase and hall; library; dining room; domestic offices (servants' hall, pantry etc); kitchen and scullery; garage.

The omission of the drawing and billiard rooms is probably accounted for by the sale being held there and/or the many paintings and pieces of china being on display in those rooms.

1935 onwards

The next owner to appear in the directories as living at Uplands is Sir Alexander Robertson Murray (1872-1956). His *Who was Who* entry shows he was a director of numerous companies and other associations which had an Indian connection. His photograph in the National Portrait Gallery can be seen online:

http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw219919/Sir-Alexander-Robertson-Murray

The Times of 19th April 1944 carried a notice of the marriage of Captain A. Grant Murray, The Seaforth Highlanders, only son of Sir Alexander Murray, K.C.I.E, C.B.E., and Lady Murray, Uplands, Hughenden to Pamela Mary Upham, A.T.S.

Tragically Captain Murray was to die later that year whilst serving with his regiment, probably in Normandy. His name is included on the plaque in the north aisle of Hughenden Parish Church which commemorates the men of the parish who died on active service during World War II.

The house and parts of the estate were up for sale again after Sir Alexander Murray's death in 1956 (*The Times*, 11th July 1956). The advert reads "...the well-known country house. Five reception and 14 bed rooms. 4 bath rooms, modern domestic offices, central heating, 74 acres. In superb order throughout. A detached country cottage, (2 living and 3 beds, bath etc). 8 1/4 acres of thriving woodland and a delightful orchard building site. For sale by auction in lots shortly..."

Much of the original house was demolished and new buildings added between 1981 and 1984 when Uplands was a conference and training centre for Nationwide Building Society. This work is discussed below. As mentioned above Uplands is now a De Vere hotel.

THE ARCHITECTS

The original building - E.B. Lamb

The first (1960) edition of Pevsner's Buildings of England, Buckinghamshire describes Uplands thus:

"Uplands, Kingshill. 1859. With pointed window arches and heavy castellation. It could be by *Lamb*, judging by the handling".

There is no mention of an architect for the original house in the second (1984) edition by Pevsner and Williamson, where it is described as "a small Tudor-style country house of 1859 in yellow brick." This edition dwells on the 1980s work (see on).

C. R. Gee, in the second (July 1988) edition of his booklet at the RIBA library, *Edward Buckton Lamb*, *Architect 1806-1869*, includes Uplands in the list of houses designed by Lamb and also gives its date as 1859.

Edward Buckton Lamb (1805 or 1806-1869) was an architect who aroused strong emotions. Much of his practice was in church architecture, both in restoration and new-build, and his work was fiercely criticised, even derided, by the Ecclesiologist and the purists of the Camden Society because he refused to conform to their ideas about the "correct" style, i.e. Middle Pointed. In a lecture of 1949 the architect and critic H.S. Goodhart-Rendel coined the phrase "rogue architect" for Lamb (along with Thomas Harris, John Shaw and J.W. Wild).

Some later architectural historians such as James Stevens Curl have taken a more balanced view of Lamb as an Eclectic: "The Rogues employed an originality, a bold eclecticism, and a showmanship (perhaps more suited to commercialism) that did not go down well among the arbiters of taste." (p.242) However even Curl is somewhat damning with his statement that Lamb's "work cannot be regarded as issuing from the top drawer of nineteenth-century design." (p.84).

Whilst Lamb's individualism upset advocates of the "true" Gothic Revival, Lamb was a busy architect; Farrington says that "between 1845 and 1869 his small practice produced over a 100 buildings, including some thirty to forty churches, a London hotel, and a consumption hospital. He entered upwards of 25 architectural competitions and, while all but three of these came to nothing, his designs invariably attracted much critical praise."

Lamb's relationship with Buckinghamshire began with the restoration of Chequers for Sir Robert Frankland-Russell Bt. in 1937. Russell helped Lamb set up his practice and Lady Russell continued this support after her husband's death, recommending Lamb to her family and friends. As well as work on the main house at Chequers, Lamb designed estate buildings and the local school at Ellesborough (now a centre for Girl Guides). This connection led to the commission to design Prestwood church, school and vicarage (1848-9). Some of Lamb's work in the county, such as Great Brickhill Manor, has been demolished but surviving buildings include the Judge's Lodgings in Aylesbury and Great Kimble vicarage, as well as several church restorations. The remodelling of St. Huberts, a country house in Gerrards Cross, is "fairly securely" attributed to Lamb (Pevsner, p.343).

Lamb's best known work was for the Disraelis at Hughenden Manor where he designed the Isaac Disraeli monument (1862) and remodelled and refaced the house

(1862-3) - although Pevsner says he was remodelling the interior in the late 1850s. Pevsner is quite withering in his condemnation of Lamb's changes to the house at Hughenden. For example he describes the stables and coach house as having "characteristically perverse details."

Perverse possibly but Lamb's individualism nonetheless charmed his many clients and achieved good reviews in contemporary journals such as *The Builder*. Patrons were pleased with his originality and non-conformity, perhaps because Lamb aimed for a combination of the picturesque and utility. Disraeli was certainly a satisfied client and expressed his delight with the changes at Hughenden.

Gee cites no authority for his attribution of Uplands to Lamb. Identification of Lamb's buildings has been hampered by the loss of his archive and the fact that his work was often not advertised. Lamb is best known for his churches, where his work was publicised, but he built or remodelled many houses. Kaufman has demonstrated how Lamb's career depended on the patronage of the landed classes. He was recommended by one client to another through the sometimes labyrinthine networks of family and political ties. His clients were generally people who did not need, or want, to advertise themselves or their houses so much of his work may have gone unreported in contemporary journals such as *The Builder or Building News*.

Thus attribution often depends on observation of style and details, as for instance, in 1960 when Pevsner referred to "the handling". Uplands does not fit neatly into any particular stylistic box, being a combination of Tudor and Gothic. The loss of its front porch has given it a rather flat appearance, without the exuberance it must have once had. Nonetheless it retains the castellation, oddly shaped window arches, and pale brick with diaper work, all somewhat idiosyncratic. In modern parlance it still looks rather "quirky"!

Lamb is said to have been introduced to the Disraelis by the local Conservative party manager, Sir Philip Rose, who thought Lamb to be "not only a remarkable architect, but a genius and an artist" (Gee, p.23). Rose lived at Rayners in Penn. His father, like John Maddy Moore Hewett's father, was a doctor and had been a surgeon in India so might there have been some connection? As neighbours Hewett and Disraeli must have been known to each other. Both of them, as well as Rose, were Justices of the Peace for Buckinghamshire and the web of local social ties may well have been at work in the choice of architect for Uplands.

The 1980s additions - Edward Cullinan Architects

The second edition of Pevsner (p. 407) makes much of the work done by Edward Cullinan Architects between about 1980 and 1984 for what was then the Nationwide Building Society Training and Conference Centre. As evidence of the significance of the work it includes a black and white photograph of the building (opposite p.417). The entry is set out in full below:

"A small Tudor-style country house of 1859 in yellow brick given a frill of red brick battlements and bold flanking pavilions (by Edward Cullinan Architects, 1978-86). This apparently calm Palladian composition is fraught with complexity and contradictions. The mixture of colours, materials and whimsical details is rich – and perhaps indigestible – with the solidity of smooth red brick and lumpy Portland stone combined with coloured steel, glass and timber fretworks. The plan is ingenious. The symmetrical front screens two open courts of study bedrooms which have brick

cloisters. The back of the original house has been sheared off and replaced by a long wing with a dramatic top-lit staircase and bridge spanning old and new. The main entrance is at the side, a mysterious slit into a spine corridor reached from a maze of mounded garden."

Other sources show the house already had battlements, but perhaps they were not of red brick. Planning records and/or research in the Cullinan archive at the RIBA library should establish whether the "red brick frill" was new. It is certainly distinctive, thanks to the contrast with the pale brick of the walls and looks like a salute to Disraeli's red brick battlemented house on the other side of the valley. But which came first?

Edward Cullinan Architects is a co-operative practice established by Ted Cullinan in 1965. It continues today under the name "Cullinan Studio". The practice is nationally and internationally significant and has won numerous architectural awards. See its website:

http://www.edwardcullinanarchitects.com/practice/about.html

which has photographs of Uplands in its "Mixed use/workplace" project archive.

The 1984 RIBA book Edward Cullinan Architects" features Uplands in chapter 5 as follows:

"Working with old buildings":

"A symmetrical house on a hilltop has been stripped of its many rambling and rather battered additions and is restored as a hall and four South-facing social rooms and meeting rooms on each of its two floors. It becomes the centrepiece and the pivot for a much larger composition. The hall is extended Northwards through a new two-storey grand hall that leads on North to dining rooms downstairs, seminar rooms up. Link blocks of bedrooms stretch East and West of the house and beyond the links are two pavilions. By foot, you can enter the building on axis; by car, you park under the trees and proceed direct or via the maze to any room or to the central hall where the reception desk is. The symmetry of the original house is respected, asymmetrical movement accepted."

The small sketches reproduced in the book show a cloister, and with the new buildings arranged around courtyards it seems the architects were aiming for a college-style assemblage. It could also be said to respect the 1859 plan whereby a covered passage connected the house with the stables ranged around a courtyard.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- Buildings are generally the best evidence for their own history so a detailed inspection is essential.
- Landscape and tree surveys would show how much of the historic design, structures and planting of the grounds and gardens has survived as well as assessing the quality of the existing landscape, e.g. the maze next to the car park looks like an interesting modern garden feature.
- Maps and aerial photographs should show later development of the site.
- More research in the RIBA library and enquiries of scholars who have studied Lamb's work (e.g. architect Dr Anthony Edwards and architectural historian Dr. Gavin Stamp who wrote his Ph.D thesis on Lamb). The Victorian Society may also have more information.
- The Edward Cullinan archive has been deposited at the RIBA library. The library catalogue indicates that the archive contains drawings and photographs of Uplands. The library also has a copy of Kenneth Powell's 1995 book Edward Cullinan Architects, and Tubular Structures, a journal which featured Uplands (no. 38, 1985 Aug. p.13)
- The only historic photograph of Uplands found so far is that in *The Times* sale advertisement of 1956. There is an indication (verbal comm) that a member of the Cocks family may hold some old photographs.
- The county's Historic Environment Record holds historic maps, aerial photographs, and the 1998 Historic Parks and Gardens Register Review by Nicky Smith which indicated that all garden features have survived to some extent. There may also be information on the archaeology of the site and its setting.
- Wycombe District Council will have historic rating records and possibly byelaw records for building alterations as well as planning records. Of course planning permissions do not necessarily indicate that the alterations were actually made. Is there a record that Wycombe D.C. gave a design award for the Edward Cullinan alterations (as per verbal comm.)?
- Investigation of title deeds from 1900 onwards would show the full chain of ownership.
- The known owners, Hewett, Cocks and Murray, were all substantial local landowners and establishment figures. More could be found out about them and their families by further research in national and local archives and the press. For example, no birth record has yet been found for John Maddy Moore Hewett but information found so far indicates he was probably the brother of Victorian national hero Admiral Sir William Nathan Wrighte Hewett V.C.
- In particular it would be interesting to find out more about how the Hewetts interacted with their neighbours, especially the Disraelis.
- I am grateful to Mrs Janet Idle for telling me about her research on the history of Hughenden parish which is a valuable resource for further study. Local people may well be able to provide photographs, documents or anecdotal evidence.

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