

Barn at Cheney Farm



List entry for Cheney Barn: 1369356



The site of **Cheney Farm** at the top end of Cheney Lane (opposite the Warneford Hospital) is technically in St Clement's parish (and in that city council ward), but is generally considered part of Headington and (like the rest of South Park) is in the Headington Hill Conservation area. It is named "Headington Farm" on the 1876 and 1880 Ordnance Survey maps of Headington, and "Cheney Farm" in the 1871 census and on OS maps from 1898. (It must not be confused with Headington Hill Farm, as Highfield Farm was often known.)

The Threshing Barn of Cheney Farm is built of rubble, and has central gabled weatherboarded cart doors and a tiled and pantiled roof. It dates from the eighteenth century (when Cheney Lane was still the main route from Oxford to London via the Old London Road and Shotover).

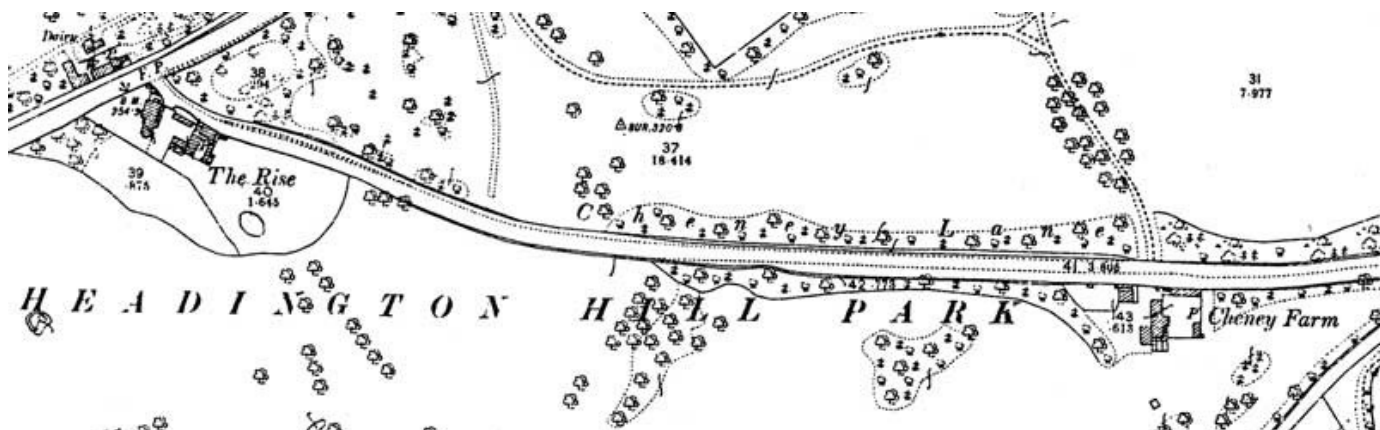
The **Smith** family owned the farm in the eighteenth century and were gentleman farmers: in 1771 the Rector of St Clement's said that there was only one family of note in his parish, that of Mrs Smith, the widow of **Thomas Smith**, of Headington Hill. The Smiths lived at a large house on the corner of Headington Hill and Cheney Lane called "**The Rise**" (shown on the left on the map below), and they owned all the farmland that is now South Park.

Jackson's Oxford Journal of 9 December 1775 reports the death of Mrs Smith, "the relict of the late Thomas Smith", at her house on Headington Hill. Her son **William Smith** inherited the estate. He evidently had several sisters, as a Miss Smith who died at his house on 24 May 1778 is described as his eldest sister.

William Smith died on 6 March 1793, and *Jackson's Oxford Journal* of 9 March reported: "On Wednesday, about Noon, died, deservedly regretted by his Relatives and Friends, after a lingering and painful Decline, aged Sixty, William Smith, Esq., of Headington Hill, in the Suburbs of Oxford."

His estate on Headington Hill passed to his unmarried sister **Elizabeth Smith**. On 13 September 1800 Miss Elizabeth Smith put an advertisement in *Jackson's Oxford Journal* about a black mare colt that had gone missing from "Headington Meadow".

Originally Miss Smith's farm bailiff lived in a Georgian house opposite her own, but probably in her time and certainly by the 1830s, that house had been demolished and the farm bailiffs lived at **Cheney Farm**, a decent distance from the mansion.



Above: 1898 map of Cheney Lane, showing *The Rise* on the left and Cheney Farm on the right.

Note that the present South Park is confusingly named Headington Hill Park.



Above: Detail from a painting by J. M. W. Turner in 1803/4, showing The Rise on the left and Cabbage Hall on the other side of Headington Hill on the right

Miss Elizabeth Smith died at The Rise at the age of 82 on 1 May 1825, and her property, including Cheney Farm, passed to a **Miss Ann Knapp** of Abingdon, and then to her nephew, **Tyrrell Knapp** of Hampton Poyle. He had moved into The Rise by 6 November 1841.

The **1851 census** shows Tyrrell Knapp (59) living at The Rise with his wife Harriet (39), eleven of his children, and seven servants. Also listed in Cheney Lane, almost certainly at Cheney Farm, were Richard Belson (46), a farm bailiff, and his wife Ann (45).

Sheep were evidently kept on the farm, as *Jackson's Oxford Journal* of 27 December 1856 reports that in the Christmas show of meat, ten Downs sheep, bred and fattened by Tyrrell Knapp, Esq., of Headington Hill, were shown by Mr H. Turrill of Great Milton.

The Knapps were still at The Rise at the time of the 1861 census, and again their farm bailiff Richard Belson is listed in Cheney Lane in the next census entry.

Tyrrell Knapp died in 1869, and his widow moved away, planning to sell off the land for development. At the time of the 1871 census, The Rise was occupied by three of Tyrrell Knapp's unmarried children. **Cheney Farm** (which is named thus for the first time in the censuses) was occupied by Robert Earle (22), who is described as a farmer of 90 acres employing four men and two boys, and his sister Rebecca (29).

Tyrrell Knapp's widow started selling her husband's estate, first the more distant land and then in 1874 the site at the top of Headington Hill where the **reservoir** was built. She also planned to sell The Rise itself and all 65 acres of its adjoining farmland for development, and on 24 July 1875 the following advertisement appeared in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*:

Headington Hill, Oxford.

Messrs Jonas Paxton & G. Castle

Have received instruction from the Representatives of the late Tyrrell Knapp, Esq. to submit to public competition, some time in September, next — Upwards of 65 Acres of most eligible freehold building land, situate on Headington Hill, within five minutes' walk of Magdalen Bridge, representing charming Sites for the erection of Mansions and Villa Residences, and commanding extensive and unequalled views over the University of Oxford and the surrounding country. Also the Residence, Premises, and Gardens, occupied by the late Proprietor.

The full advertisement was inserted on 18 September 1875:

HEADINGTON HILL, NEAR OXFORD.

A PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT

FREEHOLD ESTATE,

Comprising 66A. 0R. 15P. of valuable PASTURE
and ARABLE LAND,

Presenting singularly attractive and most eligible BUILDING SITES, commanding extensive and unequalled views over the University of Oxford and the surrounding country; also a good FAMILY RESIDENCE, with Pleasure Grounds, large Garden, Fish Pond, Terrace Walk, and Premises, on Headington Hill, being part of the Estate of the late Tyrrell Knapp, Esq.,

TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
By JONAS PAXTON, SON, & CASTLE,

In lots, at the Roebuck Hotel, Oxford, on Wednesday, October 27, 1875, at Three for Four o'clock.

Lot 1 comprises a FREEHOLD FAMILY RESIDENCE, situate on Headington Hill, a short distance from Magdalen Bridge, adjoining the Oxford, Wheatley, and London Road, and now in the occupation of Mrs. Knapp. The House is exceedingly commodious in its internal arrangements, and the premises include spacious coach-house, good stabling, and a most useful range of premises. Belonging are pleasure ground with croquet lawn, large and productive garden, with terrace walk; also rich Close of Pasture Land, possessing long frontage to the Oxford and Wheatley Turnpike Road, the whole containing 6A. 3R. 22P., and forming one of the most attractive Homes in the vicinity of Oxford.

Lot 2.—Two Enclosures of excellent Old PASTURE LAND (adjoining Lot 1), approached by Chaney Lane, the acreage being 6A. 2R. 23P. This is unquestionably one of the most eligible Building Sites in England—the scenery is grand beyond description, embracing every object of architectural beauty in the University and City of Oxford, overlooking also the fine Valley of the Isis.

Lot 3.—A valuable Piece of FREEHOLD PASTURE LAND (1A. 1R. 2P.), with frontage to the Oxford and London Road.

Lot 4.—A similar Piece of LAND, with like frontage, containing 1A. 1R. 26P.

Lot 5.—A most eligible Piece of BUILDING LAND, in extent 1A. 2R. 6P.

Lot 6.—Another Piece of BUILDING LAND, containing 1A. 0R. 30P.

	A.	R.	P.
Lot 7.—Ditto ditto	3	1	21
Lot 8.—Ditto ditto	3	2	21
Lot 9.—Ditto ditto	4	2	38
Lot 10.—Ditto ditto	2	2	2
Lot 11.—Ditto ditto	6	3	21
Lot 12.—Ditto ditto	2	1	29
Lot 13.—Ditto ditto	4	3	0
Lot 14.—Ditto ditto	8	0	0
Lot 15.—Ditto ditto	10	3	14

§ The Auctioneers respectfully assert that, in their experience, no Property with similar attractions for the erection of Mansions and Villa Residences has ever been brought into the market for public competition within 50 miles of Oxford. Its close proximity to the University and City—its healthy character—the scenery which it commands—and the easy access to all parts of the kingdom by the London and North Western and Great Western Railways (the Stations whereon at Oxford are about one mile distant only), renders this Estate most valuable for building purposes.

Particulars with plans and conditions of sale may be obtained three weeks prior to the Auction of Mr. Bartlett, solicitor, Abingdon; of Messrs. Ford and Lloyd, solicitors, 4, Bloomsbury-square, London, W.G.; or of the auctioneers, Bicester, Oxon.

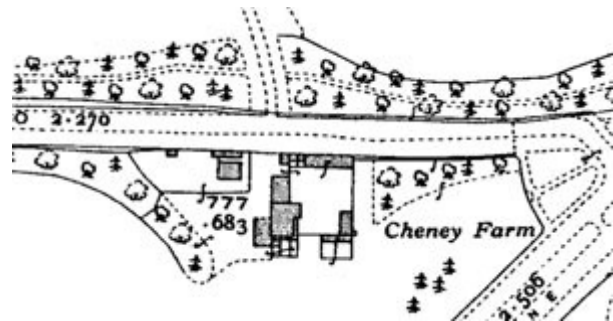
In 1876 the house and adjoining farm were bought by the **Morrell Trustees**, who did not want to see a housing estate so near Headington Hill Hall. This mansion on the other side of the hill had been inherited by a minor, **Miss Emily Alicia Morrell** (1854–1938), who had just married her cousin, **George Herbert Morrell** (1845–1906).

Herbert Morrell (as Emily's husband was known) let "The Rise" out to tenants but managed South Park as a working farm, and his bailiff continued to live in Cheney farmhouse. The **bridge** he built over Headington Hill in 1877 greatly facilitated access between the two parts of the family estate.

After her husband's death in 1906, Emily Alicia Morrell continued to own Cheney Farm, but left it in the hands of her bailiffs.

In the 1920s Oxford City Council hoped to use South Park for housing, but the Morrell Trustees would only release a strip of land to the south, where Morrell Avenue was built.

In 1932 the Morrell Trustees sold the remaining 60 acres of the present South Park to the **Oxfordshire Preservation Trust**, with the stipulation that no building should ever be erected on it.



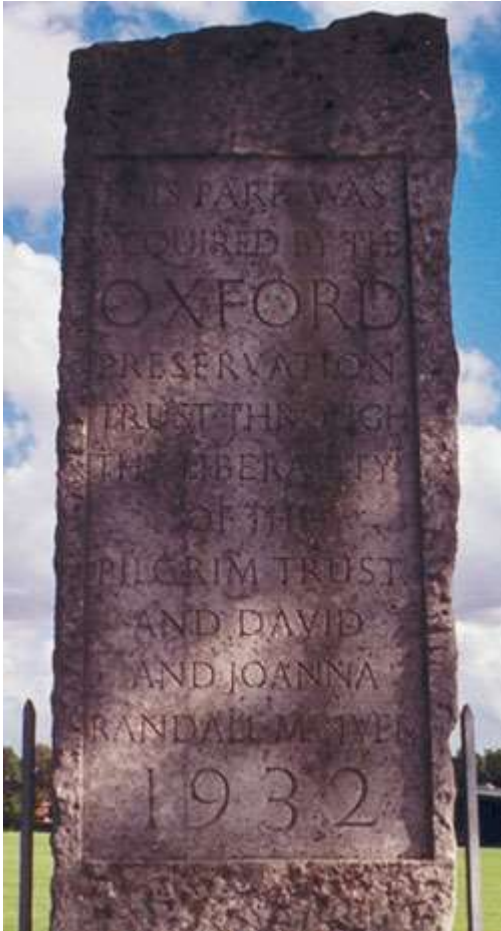
Cheney Farm, however, continued as the Morrells' working farm: *Kelly's Directory* for 1935 and 1936 lists: "Cheney Farm: William Ing, farm bailiff to Mrs G. Herbert Morrell". Mrs Morrell died in 1938, and in 1939 Ing was still listed as farm bailiff to her executors. Cheney Farm is still shown on the 1939 OS map (*right*).

Later in the twentieth century, until 2016, the barn was part of a city council depot.

In 2016 the **Oxford Artisan Distillery** (Toad) converted Cheney Barn into a small-batch gin distillery, with ancillary buildings. It opened to visitors on 27 July 2017.



South Park



In 1959 the land of the present South Park (presumably including the Cheney Farm area) was handed over to the **City of Oxford** to be preserved as an open space for the benefit of the public, and it is now **South Park**. An inscription (*left*) by Eric Gill reads:

**THIS PARK WAS ACQUIRED BY THE
OXFORD PRESERVATION TRUST THROUGH
THE LIBERALITY OF THE PILGRIM TRUST
AND DAVID AND JOANNA RANDALL McIVER
1932**

“The Rise” was not so lucky, and was demolished by a building speculator in c.1970. Drawings of it made by Malchair can be seen in the Bodleian Library (MA Top. Oxon c.475) and in Corpus Christi College, Oxford (Malchair Vol. 1, 14; Vol. V, 9; Vol. VII, 11–12).