

A brief History of Top o' Town House in Dorchester



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Introduction

Many people pass this house with barely a second thought. However, digging into its past reveals a fascinating history. At the time of writing the house is empty, but you would have once heard the voices of various families alongside the bustle of their servants. You may have then heard the clerks of the Inland Revenue or of Customs and Excise going about their business, followed by the voice of somebody looking for a job and even of somebody wanting to sign up for the army. All of these things happened here and, of course, much more.

The history of this house will always be incomplete. Although the period has been narrowed down, we still do not know the precise date when it was built and nor do we know precisely when the two wings were added. As for the people who lived here and the functions that the building served, we are reliant on the snapshots provided in documents like censuses, old maps and business directories. There is still more to learn and I hope that this history can be added to over time.

I am an amateur historian. My PhD was gained in the field of public health when I was a dentist. However, this is not my first venture into the mysteries of our historic environment. My main focus is on Anglo-Saxon history and I am the author of *King Alfred: A Man on the Move*.

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Top o' Town House stands in a prominent position at the north-west aspect of the roundabout at the top end of High West Street. Its location is just outside the former Roman wall and the west gate, from which once extended two Roman roads. The route of one still exists as Bridport Road, and this continued as the Roman road to Bridport and on to Exeter. The second was the road to Ilchester, and the line of this may even be beneath the house, then continuing under the public car park until its route joins the modern Poundbury Road, passing the southern edge of Poundbury hill-fort, and then continuing towards Bradford Peverill. Indeed, a 1757 map shows that what we now know as Poundbury Road came straight off the junction between The Grove and Bridport Road, at the approximately the location of the former West Gate.

It is important to note at the outset that the house has had three names. Going back in time, these are Top o' Town House, Grove House, and Grampound House. It is also helpful to know that for much of the house's history the area in which it was located was part of Fordington. To some this might seem strange, because Fordington is often thought of as being to the east of the centre of Dorchester, but in past times, it bordered Dorchester not only to the east, but also to the south and to the west. The area where the house is located was therefore once known as West Fordington and it is referred to as such on censuses from 1851 to 1901. In 1841 the location of the house is simply stated to be in Fordington. Throughout this period Fordington was nonetheless still part of the municipal Borough of Dorchester.

It is not easy to appreciate today that the house would have once had gardens, which would have been where the pay-and-display car park is now located. However, these are shown on

old maps and were presumably well looked after because Clare Mansel won a prize for cut flowers at the 1882 Weymouth Horticultural and Floricultural Society's exhibition at Alexandra Gardens. Furthermore, the West Fordington Flower Show, Vegetable and cage-bird show of 1898 took place in the grounds of Grove House itself on August 11th¹⁰. The publicity for this event declared that there would be a grand display of fire balloons, rockets and coloured fires. We are told that the grounds were to be brilliantly illuminated in the evening and that there would be dancing on the lawns. A grand procession of decorated cycles would be paraded on the lawn, and entertainment would be provided on a large stage. The Mansels clearly knew how to put on a show. The previous occupants, the Hennings, were described as "large contributors" to the 1861 Dorchester Horticultural Society show and Charles Burt Henning was described as a "highly successful exhibitor"¹². His geraniums were particularly special and it is noted that "in a few days (they had been held back by the damp weather) they would scarcely be equaled in the west of England." During the Hennings' ownership there were greenhouses present and they had a gardener called Henry Smith. Dorchester obviously needs its car park but it is sad to reflect on what has been lost.

Tracing the Name of the House

As has already been noted, Top o' Town House had earlier been called Grove House. The first reference to a "Top o' Town House" appears in the 1905 register of marriages for West Fordington, so it therefore seems that the name change took place between the 1901 census, when it is referred to as Grove House, and 1905. However, it is important to note that when it started to be referred to as Top o' Town House, it was also sometimes referred to as Grove House up to 1915. The

impression is that in this period the house had two alternative and equally accepted names. We know that it was called Grove House from at least 1841 as it is referred to as such in the census of that year. We also know that it was even earlier called Grampound House because the register of baptism on December 21st 1830 of an Eliza Ann Henning states her abode to be “Grampound House, now called Grove House Fordington.”

Going back just a little further, we find that Eliza Ann’s older sister, Marcia Rose Henning was baptised on August 21st 1827 and her stated abode is also Grampound House, although on this occasion the record does not inform us of a name change from Grampound House to Grove House. Eliza Ann’s baptism record is therefore important as it informs us that Grampound House and Grove House are the same building, and Marcia Rose’s baptism record is also important because it provides us with the earliest known date of occupancy by the Hennings family (see below), who would go on to occupy the house until about 1873.

So, who might have lived at Grampound before the Hennings and why was it given a name shared with a village in Cornwall? The most obvious candidate seems to be Robert Williams (1767-1847) who was briefly an MP for Grampound in Cornwall in 1808 and went on to be an MP for Dorchester in the period 1812-1835. He was the owner of the Bridehead Estate at Little Bredy. It may also be relevant that his sister, Harriet Rashleigh, was buried at Luxulyan, just ten miles from Grampound. However, I have been unable to find any evidence that he owned or lived at Grampound House. Other members of this family were also active in Dorchester, including in the ownership and running of Williams Bank. The other connection between Dorchester and Cornwall is, of course, the land ownership of the Duchy of Cornwall. However, if the house had been named Grampound by the Duchy, the reasons for naming

it after such a specific location are unclear. A further possibility emerged when I noticed that a widow (Martha Edwards) of the MP for Grampound (Bryan Edwards) had married a Thomas J Foster in Dorchester in 1801. However, I could find no evidence that Bryan Edwards or his widow owned a property in Dorchester.

I could find no earlier name for the house, so it is possible that Grampound House is its original name.

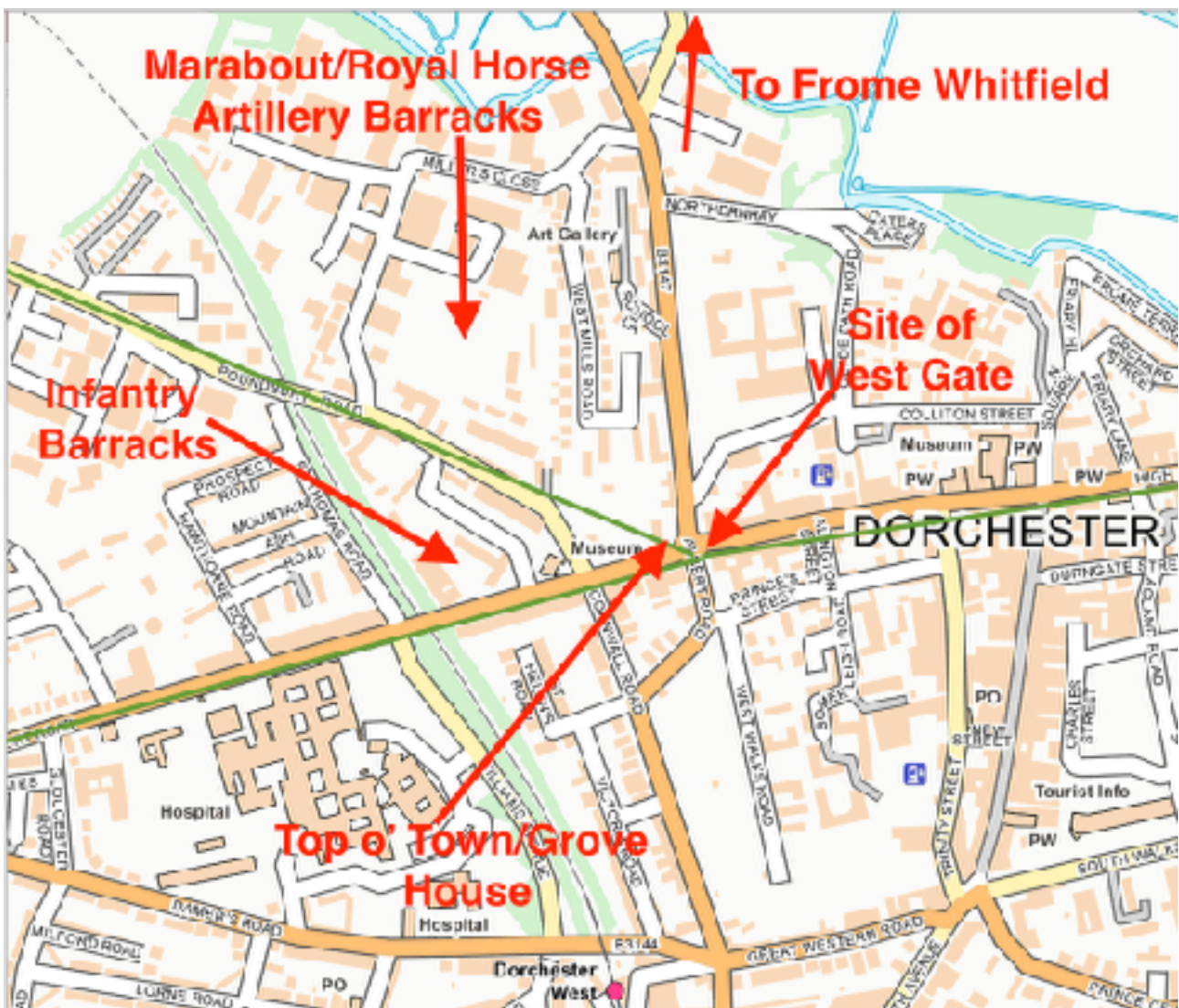
The age of the house

The earliest evidence that I found of a building at this location is a blurry mark on an image of an Ordnance Survey drawing by Charles Budgen that dated to 1805. A clearer 1810 map by Dawson certainly shows a building, making it more likely that the mark on the 1805 map really does indicate the house. The most recent map where there is no building present is the one made for the Mayor and Aldermen of the Corporation of Dorchester in 1771, although it is difficult to be certain because the map may be strictly limited to Dorchester (the house was just outside, in Fordington). However, no mention of a building at this location is made in the 1774 version of Hutchins¹, which perhaps allows us to set the date range as 1774-1805.

Nonetheless, caution may be required because the third edition of Hutchins, published after we know that the house was built, makes no mention of the house either. The house is certainly close to the former Marabout Barracks, which were built in 1794/5, when the Dorset Volunteer Rangers were raised and needed a base². However, on making enquiries I found no evidence that the house was built as part of the barracks.

Even if we could work out the precise date of the building of the house, we would still be left with the puzzle of working out

when the two wings were added. One wing extends north, parallel to The Grove, and the other extends west, parallel with Bridport Road. An 1810 map by Dawson indicates that the wing extending down Bridport Road was already there at that early stage. This wing is also shown on an 1837 Boundary Review map and the tithe map from 1844. The 1854 public health map shows a partial wing extending parallel to The Grove, and an Ordnance Survey map dating to 1886 shows the house with the two wings constructed. Examination of later maps suggests that the shape remained in this form until the present day. The wing extending parallel to The Grove was therefore built between 1844 and 1886, with some structure extending in that direction by 1854.



Some features of Dorchester in relation to Top o' Town House. The green line shows the approximate routes of Roman roads. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2020

Who lived here?

In Victorian times the house was occupied by the Henning family and then by the Mansel family. From the snapshots available from censuses, the house was at its busiest in 1881 when seventeen individuals were present. These comprised a married couple with seven children, ranging from ages four to sixteen, a governess, and seven servants. Lets take a closer look at the Hennings who, as far as I could discover, were the first known occupants of the house.

The Hennings

The house was occupied by two different Henning families in succession. The families were related in that the second family was of the younger brother of the first family. These two brothers were the sons of of William Henning of Frome Whitfield and his wife Sarah, née Lewis. These parents had a memorial inside Holy Trinity Church, Dorchester (now lost)⁵. The Hennings of Frome Whitfield appear to have been related to the Hennings of Poxwell because they shared the same crest of a seahorse holding a plate²⁸. A grandfather of the two Henning brothers (Edmund) was part of a bank in Weymouth called Henning, Bower, M'Lorg, which, along with many other banks, ran into difficulties in 1825 ²⁷.

The first Henning family

The first family comprised William Lewis Henning, his wife Rose Ann (née Shurlock) and their children.

Because their daughter, Marcia Rose, was born in Bramley in Surrey on the 27th of March 1826 before being baptised, as we have already seen, in Dorchester, we can fix the Henning's first occupancy to between March 1826 and August 1827, unless

they had been there before in a period before they went to Surrey. It seems that William Lewis and Rose had been in Surrey since their marriage, which had taken place there in June 1825. However, prior to then, William Lewis Henning's military records appear to indicate that he was in Dorset between 1812 and 1820 (perhaps not continuously), although where he was living at the time of these particular snapshots is not revealed. A letter dated 20th June 1820, outlining his property qualifications for becoming a captain in the Dorset Militia, is revealing in that his father's estate at Frome Whitfield is mentioned, but no mention is made of Grampound House. This suggests (but does not prove) that the Hennings were not associated with Grampound House at that stage.

The 1841 census tells us that William Lewis Henning was from Hollis Frome (near Frome Whitfield) and we learn from the 1861 census that Rose was from Wonersh in Surrey. William Lewis Henning's father, William Lewis, remained at Frome Whitfield House until he passed away in 1842.

By 1851 the family of William Lewis Henning had returned to where he was born at Hollis Frome (see below). In fact, we know that William Lewis must have moved out by September 11th 1845 because he is named as being of "Froome House" (meaning either Frome Whitfield or Hollis Frome) in a list of funders and directors of a railway (see below). It seems that for a while he lived at Syward Lodge, Fordington, as that is his stated address on a later iteration of supporters of the railway. Syward Lodge no longer exists and was approximately where Syward Close is now to be found. The now obscure location of Hollis Frome seems to have been immediately south of the current Frome Whitfield buildings, near to where the site of a St Nicholas Church is marked on old Ordnance Survey maps²⁶. It seems almost certain that Hollis Frome was named after Denzil Holles because it is recorded that he gained Frome Whitfield when he married the daughter of Francis Ashley¹. On

7th March 1660, Denzil Holles had been the Keeper of the Rolls for Dorset and he certainly lived close to Hollis Frome as he is recorded as living in a building at the site of the former priory, to the east of the castle (which became the prison) ¹. Frome Whitfield was united with the parish of Holy Trinity, Dorchester, in 1610 ¹.

William Lewis Henning was mayor of Dorchester for 1840/1841. On April 31st 1844 William Lewis was on the Weymouth Road when one of the front wheels came off his carriage. He was thrown out and broke his leg. Fortunately, his wife and daughter were only slightly injured, although the footman was badly injured in the knee ²⁴. In 1845 William Lewis Henning is listed, with many others, as a funder and a director of the Bridport and Exeter Railway (also known as the South Coast Junction Railway), which was also intended to serve Charmouth, Lyme Regis and Sidmouth ²³.

In 1861 William Lewis Henning, his wife and daughter Marcia are living at 13 St James Place, London. This is now the Cypriot High Commission. In 1871 William Lewis Henning is living alone (wife died) with 2 servants in St George's Rd, nr Ecclestone Sq, Pimlico. He is a landowner and magistrate.

Shurlock Henning

One of the children of William Lewis Henning and Ann Rose is the significant Shurlock Henning (b 1829), who was of the 88th, 26th and 38th regiments, served in the Crimean war, and was present at Alma and Sebastapol. He also served in India against the mutiny, being present at Cawnpore. He was also at the siege and fall of Lucknow and the siege and fall of Kalpi ²⁵. He also commanded the 26th Cameronians in the Abyssinian expedition of 1868 ²⁵. When he was baptised on May 5th 1829 the family abode is described as Grampound House. By the time of the 1841 census he is at a school in Rodwell,

Weymouth, while his parents are at Grove House. It seems certain that Shurlock Henning would have been brought up in his pre-school years at what we now call Top o' Town House. I have been unable to discover whether he went each day to school in Weymouth or whether he boarded there. The information in the census indicates that this was a small school of eleven children and a tutor. He is later recorded as having attended Sherborne School ⁷.

Shurlock Henning appears on the 1861 census as a "visitor" to Charles Burt Henning and his wife at Grove House. Charles was therefore being visited by his nephew. On this census he is described as unmarried, 30 years of age and a major in the army. A few years later, on 21st June 1864, he would marry in London a Frances Amelia Pedlen of Poole, daughter of an officer in the East India Company. At this stage he was a major in the 26th Regiment. By the 1881 census he is aged 51 and is with his wife and family at Froome Whitfield. He is described as a "major general Infantry Active Ser[vice]". He has children born at Preston, Dover, Aldershot. These locations help trace his movements. On the 1891 census he is at Froome Mansion (Frome Whitfield) and is now a retired Lieutenant General of the Army. He had retired in 1885 ²⁵. The probate records show that Shurlock Henning had a CB (Companion of the most honourable order of the Bath), which he gained at Queen Victoria's 1873 birthday honours. He died 1st September 1898 from "heart trouble"²⁵, leaving his wife a widow. It seems that it was he (Colonel Henning C.B. is stated) who was in charge of the new depot barracks at Dorchester, which had just been completed ¹⁴. Indeed, he granted permission for the use of the enclosure for the Dorset County Horticultural Society's annual show (in previous years it had been held in Colliton Park, the grounds of Colliton House)¹⁴. Shurlock was also into his flowers, winning 2nd prize for his fuschias at this show.

The second Henning Family

By 1851 the house was occupied by William Lewis' younger brother Charles Burt Henning (who in 1841 had been living on High West Street), his wife Charlotte, and an adult son called Frederick Charles who is described, like his father, as an attorney. His subscription to Dorchester Hospital shows that in 1851 he was a "solicitor of High West Street" ⁶ In 1858 and 1859 Charles Burt Henning was the under-sherrif of Dorset.

Charles Burt Henning was baptised in Dorchester in January 1798, so it seems that he was born in late 1797 or in January 1798. On the 1851 and 1861 censuses he is to be found at Grove House with his wife, Charlotte (née Way and born about 1797 in Bridport) ,who he had married at Burton Bradstock on 2nd Dec 1822. By the 1871 census, he had died (on 25th February 1871), but Charlotte was still living at Grove House, living with her sister Frances, who was also a widow. In fact, this census, taken on the 2nd of April, is the last record of the Hennings being at Grove House. Indeed, it seems that they left shortly afterwards as a notice appears in a newspaper that furniture, carpets, crockery and paintings, books, a pony phaeton, a dog cart, guns and stuffed animals were being auctioned from July 17th to July 19th, 1871 ⁸. The 1881 census shows that the widowed Charlotte had moved to Bathwick, Bath with elderly relatives. She died at Bath in 1883.

The 1844 Tithe Map tells us that Charles Burt Henning was not just the occupier but also the owner of Grove House. Interestingly, the plot on the Tithe Map is called "Clarks Close, House and Garden". I suspect that Clark's Close may have been the name of the field on which the house was built. The tithe map also shows that he owned the land and buildings extending north to where the adjacent flats on The Grove now stand and also what is now the Top o' Town car park. Furthermore, his cousin, George Henning, owned a significant

amount of land to the north of here, where West Mills Road is found today. They would have known each other and perhaps co-operated.

There has been speculation, because the location is set near “the Western Wall” that Thomas Hardy’s 1898 poem, *Her Death and After*, might have been written about an occupant of Grove House ³. In this poem, a wife dies in childbirth and the husband takes another partner. However, this wife could be neither Mrs Henning nor Mrs Mansel (who were the only wives listed as present in the censuses between 1851 to 1901) as both of these women out-lived their husbands. The first Mrs Henning can be excluded as she went with her family to live in London, where she died.

On 1851 census he has a son, Frederick Charles Henning, who is an attorney, born about 1826 in Dorchester. Frederick Charles became an Ensign of the Dorset Militia in 1853 ²⁹ and then a lieutenant in 1855 ³⁰. However, he passed away when he was just 32.

It seems that just before the Mansels moved in the house may have been occupied, clearly for a short period, by Colonel Horace Newton of the Royal Horse Artillery. This is because there exists a notification of the birth of a son on July 2nd 1872 at Grove House. The Newtons had moved from West Walk Terrace, where they show on the 1871 census, and by 1881 they were in Devonport, Plymouth.

The Mansels

The house was then occupied by the Mansel family, with Arthur E. Mansel (1828-1905) denoted as the “head” on censuses from 1881. The earliest record of the Mansels being at Grove House is on the July 1873 baptism record of their daughter Eleanor. We know that the Mansels were not at Grove House in July 1872 because another daughter called Clare was baptised at Affpuddle that year. It seems that they lived at Affpuddle for some time because their three previous children were also baptised at Affpuddle. The baptismal records do not reveal precisely where in Affpuddle they lived, and by the 1871 census they are at The Royal Crescent, Melcombe Regis.

Arthur Edmund Mansel was baptised on 19th May 1828 at Melcombe Regis and his parents were John and Louisa Mansel. John was a Lieutenant Colonel and lived at Smedmore House, near Kimmeridge. Smedmore House came into the Mansel family through Arthur’s mother, Louisa Pleydell.

AE Mansel was keen on cricket and he appears in an old newspaper as playing for Kingston Park, which seems to have effectively been the Dorchester cricket club, playing at Kingston Maurward.

The 1851 census shows Arthur Edmund as a cornet in the 3rd dragoons (NB the 3rd hussars became the 3rd dragoons in 1818), based in the barracks at Maidstone, Kent. His place of birth is, interestingly, stated on this census as “Dorset. Knowle”. His family history has connections with Church Knowle, Purbeck, so he may have been born there and not Melcombe Regis. Alternatively, he may have been born at Church Knowle and then baptised at Melcombe Regis. In 1858 he became a captain in the 3rd Regiment of Hussars ⁴ and in 1860 he married Clare Henrietta Lascelles in Runcorn registration district in Cheshire. He retired from the 3rd

Regiment of Hussars in 1865 ⁴ and in 1871 he was living with his wife at 11 Royal Crescent, Weymouth, along with three daughters, two sons and six servants.

As we have seen, by 1881 they are at Grove House. On this census, Clare Henrietta's place of birth is stated as Ripstone, which presumably means Ribston, which is very close to Goldborough (see below). She may therefore have been born at Ribstone Hall. They now have five daughters, two sons, seven servants and a governess from Prussia. In 1891 his wife is absent from the census for no reason that I can establish.

They are still at Grove House in 1901 when he is described as a retired army captain and JP for Dorset. Interestingly, his wife is now described as being born in Goldsborough, Yorkshire. This would have been Goldsborough Hall, which had been bought by a Daniel Lascelles in 1760. Clare was the granddaughter of Henry Lascelles, the 2nd Earl of Harewood. The 6th Earl went on to marry Princess Mary, daughter of King George V. In 1901 they have four adult daughters and one adult son living with them: Evelyn Louisa, age 37, born at an unspecified location in Scotland; Margaret, age 36, born at Preston in Lancashire; Susan, age 33, born at Affpuddle in Dorset; Eleanor, age 27, born at Dorchester and Algernon, 32, born at Affpuddle. They have six servants.

Arthur Edmund Mansel had attended Sherborne School and he remained strongly interested in its affairs, as demonstrated by a letter that he wrote to the Western Gazette to complain about the dismissal of a master who had been there many years ¹⁸. He also took the opportunity in this letter to bemoan the state of "decadence" that he felt the school had fallen into at that time.

Arthur was also occasionally a thorn in the side of Dorchester Town Council, complaining, for example, about the ability of

traffic to pass on High West Street. He said that people blamed him for not using his influence to improve matters ¹⁹, but he indicated that he felt that there was little he could do when the Town Council sanctioned and approved matters. He wrote to the Mayor about the congestion, who found that Arthur had previously made similar complaints. The council communicated back to Arthur saying that he could seek legal remedy (i.e. that they would not do anything to improve matters). ¹⁹

AE Mansel was the Honorary Secretary of the local RSPCA and in 1894 the annual meeting of the Dorset Branches took place at Grove House, where he presented a report ¹³. Mrs Mansel (Clare) was the Honorary Secretary of the Dorchester School of Art, while their president was General Pitt Rivers. She was also vocal in criticising “conscientious objectors” to small pox vaccination, pressing for this to become compulsory.

Arthur E Mansel died at Grove House, aged seventy-seven, on a Thursday night after a long illness ¹⁵, and was buried on the 24th July 1905 on a Monday afternoon at Fordington St George. His burial was covered by the Western Gazette, where his role in the local branch of the RSPCA was stressed and where it was also indicated that he had “an innate horror of wanton or selfish cruelty.” He was buried by the side of another one of his daughters, Rhoda, who had died a few years previously.

Without wishing to drift too far from the main subject of this booklet, it is worth mentioning a couple of Arthur’s interesting brothers because they were influential locally.

One brother, Owen Luttrell Mansel, served at Church Knowle for many years, before retiring and passing away at a residence called Iscoed in Greenhill in Weymouth ¹⁷. He was a staunch teetotaler and a “vigorous advocate of total abstinence” ¹⁷. He was for many years the president of the Dorset and Southern Counties Temperance Association ¹⁷. Another brother, John

Clavell Mansel-Pleydell was the president of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club ¹⁷ and wrote several articles for their proceedings, including on barrows.

It is also interesting to take a look at Arthur and Clare's children, who would have known this house so well.

Arthur's son, Hugh Arthur Mansel (1870-1931), fought in the Tirah Expedition between 1897 and 1898, following an uprising in the Khyber Pass in what is now called Pakistan. He fought in the Boer War in 1900, where he was wounded on 11th June at a place called Almond's Nek. In this conflict he was a Captain of the 2nd Dorset Regiment who were fighting as part of the Natal Field Force. On that day the Dorset Regiment lost nine men killed in action and fifty one were wounded. Nonetheless, this engagement with Boer positions was successful because the Boers fled and Sir Redver's Buller's forces were then able to open up the Transvaal. This was in contrast to the British defeat at Spion Kop several months earlier. Hugh Arthur Mansel's medal awards show that he was also at Tugela Heights and the Relief of Ladysmith, which both took place earlier in 1900. He went to Canada and in 1921 he was living in Montreal, where he died in 1931. He was described as a bachelor and as Captain of the 39th Dorset Regiment.

Arthur's daughter, Clare Frances Mansel, married Francis de Sausmarez Shortt of Martinstown in West Fordington in 1905, unfortunately only about a month after her father had died. Francis de Sausmarez Shortt's father was Francis Henry Shortt, a Vice Admiral of the Royal Navy. Clare's address is stated as "Top o' Town", indicating that the name change from Grove House had taken place by August the 16th 1905 (the 1901 census still shows it as Grove House). There had been an entry in the September 13th 1894 Bath Chronicle Forthcoming Marriages section that she was to marry CMF Luttrell of Dunster, but there is no further evidence that this took place.

Arthur's daughter, Eleanor Maud, married Robert Lionel Foster at the end of September in 1909. The reception, attended by three hundred guests, took place at Top o' Town House in a large marquee erected on the lawn. Arthur's son, Algernon Lascelles Mansel, became a stockbroker living in Windlesham, Surrey, and Arthur's daughter, Susan Emma Mansel was in the Voluntary Aid Detachment in World War One and served in theatre 1a between 22/10/18 and 15/5/19. (1a = France and Belgium)

By the time of the 1911 census, Arthur's widow is still at Top o' Town House, along with four daughters, including the married Clare Shortt (see above). Indeed, Arthur's widow is still listed as present at Top o' Town House on the 1912-1914 electoral registers. Interestingly, between 1912 and 1914 the building was being referred to as Grove House again and, indeed, Mrs Mansel is recorded in the 1915 Kelly's Directory as being at Grove House. However, when Mrs Mansel dies in Nov 1917 she is described as "of Top o' Town."

After the Mansels

An advert is placed in the 4th of October 1918 issue of the Western Gazette indicating that the "Misses Mansells" had instructed Dukes to sell the contents of the house because it was being taken over by "The Ministry of National Service". The 1918 electoral registers for the locality make no mention of a Grove House or a Top o' Town House and no Mansels are mentioned either. Working out what happened after 1918 is dependent on piecing together scraps of information from old newspapers and directories etc. The building certainly was used by the Dorset War Pensions Committee and the first mention of this role is an advert placed in the Western Gazette issue of

17th Oct 1919. Other newspaper articles indicate that this role continued until at least 1922. It is clear throughout that this was a volunteer organisation. The Kelly's Directory of 1920 tells us that the Ministry of Pensions Medical Board was also based here.

The Kelly's Directory of 1927 tells us that the Inland Revenue had a base at Top o' Town House and the Kelly's Directory of 1931 has Customs and Excise located there.

The Western Gazette issue of the 3rd of February 1939 tells us that there was going to be an interview panel set up at Top o' Town House to advise members of the public who wish to volunteer for National Service but who are in doubt as to which service they ought to join.

The 1956 Ordnance Survey map shows the building as "Emp Ex", meaning Employment Exchange. A newspaper entry dated 15th Nov 1935 reveals that it was serving as an employment Exchange in 1935, when it was also accepting gifts of used clothes and boots ²². A book published in 1970 ³ tells us that this house then held an office of the Ministry of Labour and military recruiting offices. The 1971 Ordnance Survey map simply refers to the building as "Govt Offices."

More recently, Top o'Town House had housed the Council's Learning and Development Centre. In June 2016 the Council approved Top o' Town House as being surplus to requirements and approved the disposal of the lease.

Servants

It would have been potentially interesting to look at the servants, but the vast majority seem to have been there short term, appearing on one census only. However, there are two exceptions to this. One is Mary Ann Trott, born about 1828,

who appears on both the 1851 and 1861 censuses, although her place of birth is described as Exmouth on the first and Crewkerne on the second. Her age on the second matches (i.e. ten years older), so I think it is probably the same person. I found it difficult to confirm that she was at either Exmouth or Crewkerne, although a family at North Petherton in 1841 is possibly the correct one. Another is James Chutter, born at Fordington in about 1835, who appears on both the 1861 and the 1871 censuses for Grove House. Just a couple of months after the 1871 census was taken, James married an Emma Read from Blandford on the 25th of June 1871 in West Fordington. On the 1881 census they are living at 11-12 Park St, Melcombe Regis and he is described as an innkeeper. The Jury Lists indicate that he had been there since at least 1874. This was the Prince of Wales pub in Weymouth (and is recorded under that name in the 1875 Kelly's Directory). However, his association with Grove House preceded his appearance on the 1861 census. On the night of the 1851 census he was a farm labourer visiting at Grove Buildings (which were separate to Grove House). In 1841, when he was six years old, he lived at Grove Buildings in a location close enough to Grove House to appear on the same page on the census. He died in Weymouth on 21st June 1888 leaving his wife a widow.

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21. Whitby Gazette. 8 Oct 1909
22. Western Gazette 15 Nov 1935
23. Dorset County Chronicle 11 Sep 1845
24. Hampshire Advertiser. 4th May 1844
25. Homeward Mail from India, China and the East. 5th September 1898.

26. Hutchins, J. The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset. 2nd ed. Vol 2. 1803.
27. Dorset County Chronicle. 2nd Feb 1826.
28. Fairbairn, J. Fairbairn's book of crests of the families of Great Britain and Ireland. Vol 1 1892
29. Dorset County Chronicle. 10th Feb 1853.
30. Salisbury and Winchester Journal. 3rd February 1855.

Present on 6th June 1841

	Age as stated on census	
William Henning	45	Husband
Ann Henning	35	Wife
Marcia	15	Daughter
Eliza	10	Daughter
William	9	Son
Sarah	3	Daughter
Sarah Boyton	20	Governess
Mary Sargent	30	Servant
John Phillips	30	Servant
Ann Foot	20	Servant
Elizabeth Northover	25	Servant
Lucy Hardy	15	Servant

Present on 30th March 1851

	Age as stated on census			Birth location, according to census entry
Charles Burt Henning	53	Head	Attorney	Trinity, Dorchester
Charlotte Henning	54	Wife		Burton Bradstock
Frederick Charles	25	Son (unmar)	Attorney	Trinity, Dorchester
Elizabeth Ellen Way	57	Sister-in-law, visiting	Annuitant	Trinity, Dorchester
Walter Morey	29	Servant		Exmouth, Devon
Elizabeth Trott	25	Servant		Crewkerne
Mary Ann Trott	23	Servant		Exmouth, Devon
John Phillips	40	Visitor	Servant "out of place"	Turner's Piddle, Dorset

Present on 7th April 1861

	Age as stated on census			Birth location as on census entry
Charles Burt Henning	63	Head	Attorney	Dorchester
Charlotte Henning	63	Wife		Burton Bradstock
Shurlock Henning	30	Visitor	Major in the Army	Dorchester
Elizabeth Ellen May	65 (unmar)	Visitor		Burton Bradstock
Mary Ann Trott	33	Servant		Crewkerne
Anna Maria Woolfries (?should be Woolfryer)	22	Servant		Moreton
James Chutter	26	Servant		Fordington
Edward Samuel Partridge	28	Visitor	Groom	Newton, Suffolk

Present on 2nd April 1871

	Age as stated on census			Birth location as stated on census
Charlotte Henning	74	Head(widow)	Landowner	Bridport
Frances Sanderson	68	Sister (widow)	Landowner	Bridport
James Chutter	36	Serv (unm)		Dorchester
Anna Read	33	Serv (unm)	Housemaid	Blandford
Asenath Welch	32	Serv (unm)	Cook	Bere Regis

Present on 3rd April 1881

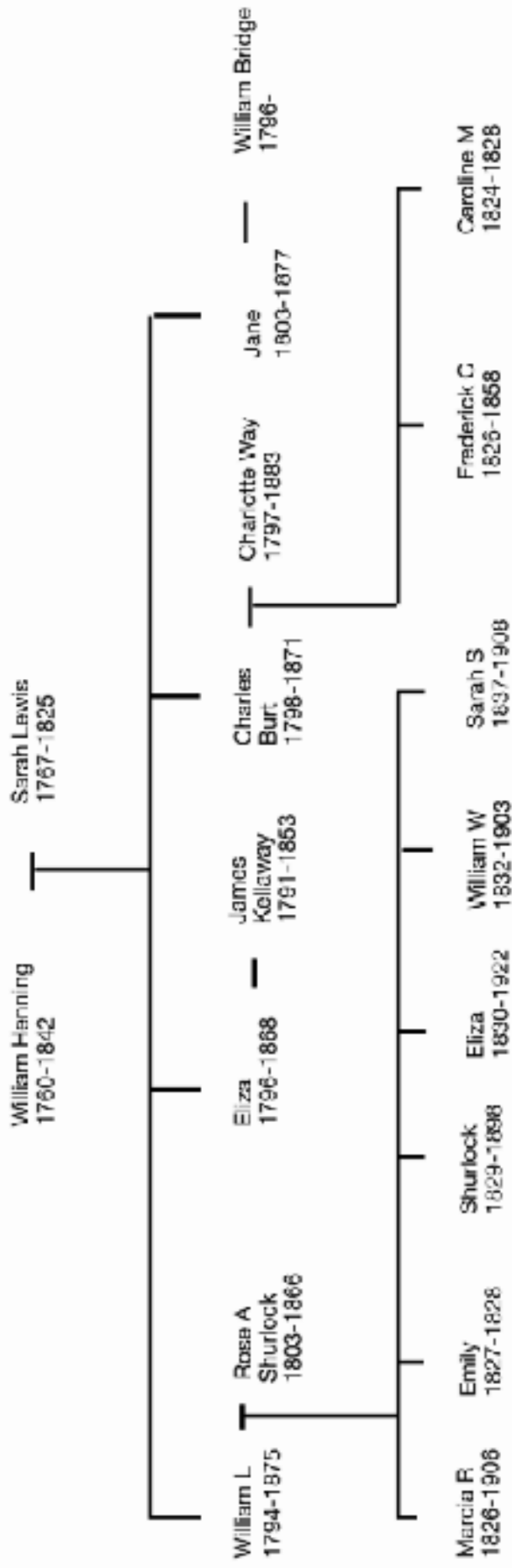
	Age as stated on census			Birth location as stated on census
Arthur E Mansel	52	Head	Magistrate	Weymouth
Clare H Mansel	44	Wife		Ripstone, York [probably meaning Ribston]
Margaret B	16	Daughter	Scholar	Preston, Lancs
Susan E	14	Daughter		Affpuddle, Dorset
Algernon L	12	Scn		Affpuddle, Dorset
Hugh A	11	Scn		Affpuddle, Dorset
Clare F	8	Daughter		Affpuddle, Dorset
Eleanor M	7	Daughter		Fordington, Dorset
Rhoda C	4	Daughter		Fordington, Dorset
Anna Herkel	24 (unmar)	Governess	Governess	Prussia
Sarah Miles	23 (unmar)	Servant		Ireland
Henry Bartlett	25 (unmar)	Servant		Sturminster Newton
Mary J Klei	25 (unmar)	Servant		Blandford
Emily Martin	22 (unmar)	Servant		Oxford
Emma Harvey	32 (unmar)	Servant		Topsham, Devon
Sarah Carter	17	Servant		Monkton, Dorset
Mary Martin	16	Servant		Athelhampton

Present on 5th April 1891

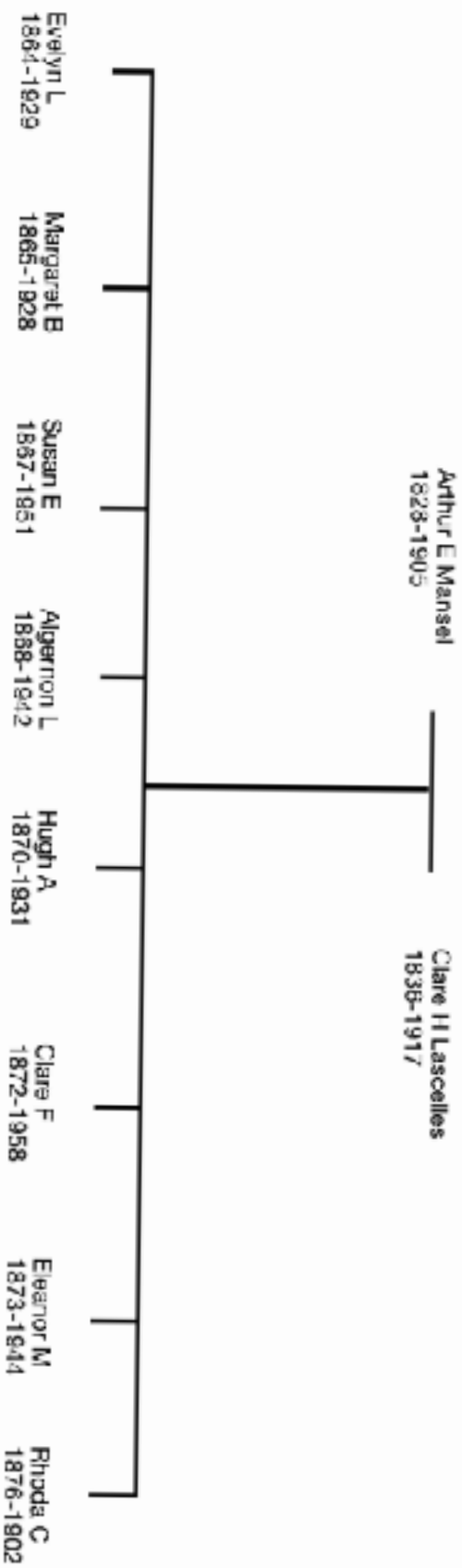
	Age as stated on census			Birth location as stated on census
Arthur E Mansel (wife Clare absent on this census)	62	Head	Magistrate. Retired officer 3rd Hussars	Weymouth
Evelind L	28 (unmar)	Daughter		Scotland
Margaret B	27 (unmar)	Daughter		Weston, Lancashire
Eleanor M	17	Daughter		Moreton, Dorset
Christine E Schlüster	33 (unmar)	Governess	Governess	Germany
Mary Jane Mills	46(widow)	Servant		Cerne Abbas
Hamilla Irish [?]	27 (unmar)	Servant	Parlormaid	India
Nora Whittle	19 (unmar)	Servant	Ladys Maid	Winfrith
Eliza Walls	28 (unmar)	Servant	Housemaid	Dorchester
Agnes Dowis	18 (unmar)	Servant	Kitchen Maid	Bradford Peverell
Sarah Guppy	19 (unmar)	Servant	House Maid	Upwey

Present on 31st March 1901

	Age as stated on census			Birth location as stated on census
Arthur E Mansel	72	Head	J.P. and retired army captain	Weymouth
Clare H Mansel	64	Wife		Goldsborough, Yorkshire
Evelyn Louisa	37 (unmar)	Daughter		Scotland
Margaret B	36 (unmar)	Daughter		Preston, Lancs
Susan F	33 (unmar)	Daughter		Affpuddle, Dorset
Algernon L	32 (unmar)	Son		Affpuddle, Dorset
Eleanor M	27 (unmar)	Daughter		Dorchester
Elizabeth Cardell	30 (unmar)	Servant	Lady's Maid	Dorchester
Martha Bartlett	19 (unmar)	Servant	Cook	Winfrith
Hetty Davis	20 (unmar)	Servant	Parlour Maid	Crewkerne
Olive Nelhercott	23 (unmar)	Servant	House Maid	Seaton, Devon
Blanche Riglar	17	Servant	Under House Maid	Powerstock
Anne Bartlett	16	Servant	Kitchen Maid	Winfrith



The Henning family at Grove House, focusing on the families of William L. Henning (1794-1875) and Charles Burt Henning, who are known to have lived at Grove House (Later Top o' Town House).



The Mansel family. Occupants of the house from 1873 to 1917.