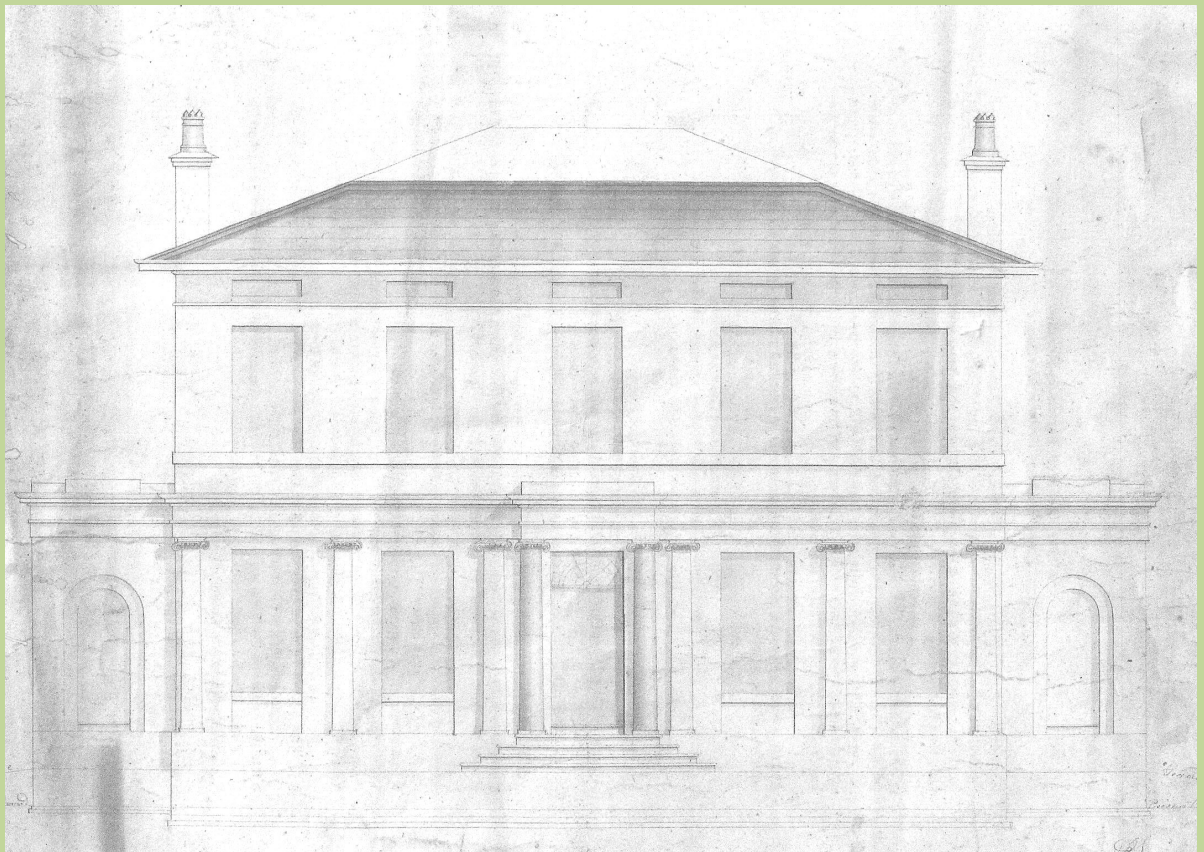


The History of Eagle House, Fleetgate, Barton on Humber.



Richard Clarke.

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At the time of writing (November, 2012) Eagle House stands boarded-up and, externally, in a state of some decay. I have been unable to gain access to the interior and, at the moment, the future of this significant property seems very uncertain. Given this situation it seems timely that some consideration be given to its history to raise its profile and to support whatever attempts are being made to improve on its present condition.

In trying to unravel at least some of that history I have accessed five main sources of evidence;

- *Thomas Tombleson's Notes* – Tombleson was a Barton solicitor in the early years of the 20th century. He hand-wrote voluminous 'notes' about the town and its history, having access to legal documents and by recording much oral history. I am indebted to Brian Peeps for providing me with access to this evidence, particularly *Book 7* which includes 2½ pages (pp 138 – 140) of notes entitled 'Eagle House'.
- The original plans for Eagle House housed at Lincolnshire County Archives, St Rumbold Street, Lincoln. This is a series of six architect's drawings catalogued as BH/12/Eagle House, Barton. All are in a fragile and faded condition and, although they were clearly drawn to scale, the scale was either not recorded or is not discernible. The *Barton Town Trail* records that the architect of Eagle House was one Nevis of Hull (Clarke, 2009, 16). Nevis was certainly an early-19th century architect in Hull and three of the drawings are signed bottom left, the words 'Hull July 1829' are just readable but the signature comprises freehand initials and gives no clue as to the author (although it does not appear to incorporate an 'N'). John French has had

these plans copied and I am indebted to him for allowing me access.

- Map evidence.
- Evidence from Trade Directories, although Eagle House is not specifically named until the 1870s onwards (see later).
- The building as it stands today (unfortunately I have not been able to gain access inside, and, as it is boarded-up, one cannot see inside).

When considering Eagle House it seems strange that a prestigious period house, according to the plans to be built as a detached property, should abut a three storey terrace, especially as there is compelling evidence that the three storey terrace may have been built a year or two before 'Eagle House' (see Clarke 2012, 24 – 26). From the outset it seems probable that 'Eagle House' was not built exactly as planned.

Tombleson presents some evidence about the site before 'Eagle House' was built. In 1769 the old house then standing on the site and called 'Chequer House' was bought by William Faulkner, baker of Barton, and his wife from Nicholas Morton, yeoman of Hull. To raise the purchase price of £130 Faulkner borrowed £100 on a mortgage from John Crowden, farmer of Kelsey. In an age before national financial institutions (except the Bank of England) loans and mortgages were often raised (as here) from private individuals with capital to invest and who had advertised such in the regional newspapers of the day. Allegedly 'Chequer House' was so named because the walls were built of coursed beach stones set in a thick mortar.¹ More common to Barton at that time would have been buildings of 'mud, stud and thatch' (see Clarke 2012, pp 57 – 59),

1

A building type more common to Holderness, for example.

plus the brick-built town houses and farmhouses² of the more wealthy.

It seems that reckless property inflation was not confined to the early-21st century for in 1772 John Fulstow, malster and later shopkeeper, bought 'Chequer House' and orchard for £210! In 1776 it seems that Crowden's mortgage was transferred to Edmund Dudding, farmer of Alkborough and again in 1783 to John Dudding, farmer of Burnham.

In 1813 the will of the late J. Fulstow bequeathed 'his cottage in Fleetgate' to his widow 'for life', after which it was to go to his son-in-law Robert Hall, tobacconist of Hull. By 1830 Robert Hall's mother-in-law had died and in, or before that year, he had had built 'Eagle House'. The evidence for this is that T. Tombleson records that in 1830 R. Hall borrowed £1000 from Marmaduke Prickett, George Fielding and William Gildas on a mortgage of 'the dwelling house lately erected by Robert Hall on the site of William Fulstow's cottage called Chequer House with the orchard, garden etc.' The following year M. Prickett lent R. Hall a further £500 and the equity was conveyed to the lender.

It would seem then that R. Hall had 'Chequer House' demolished and 'Eagle House' built 1829/30 but immediately finding his finances overstretched, he borrowed heavily and in 1831 gave up the freehold. Tomlinson then recorded that by 1832 R. Hall was bankrupt and that his assignees³ were completing the purchase 'of the messuage in Fleetgate ... bounded by the bowling green⁴ to the north and the gateway and yard of the Mansion House of Robert Hall to the south'. The 'gateway and yard' was presumably the entrance off Fleetgate we see today, now the entrance to Eagle House residential home.

2

This being before the Parliamentary Enclosure of Barton parish in the 1790s, after which new farms began to be built outside the town.

3

A person (or persons) who manage the estate of a bankrupt for the benefit of his creditors.

4

Presumably part of the pleasure gardens of The White Swan inn.

Clearly the 'messuage' was more than just Eagle House, it must have included property to its north.

Tomlinson then adds the quote (from a legal document to which he had access) 'And since the contract was made Robert Hall has joined this property to his mansion house premises'. What was 'the contract', and, what was 'the property'? Was 'the property' the three-storey terrace, which would explain the use of the word 'joined', or was it just land behind the three-storey terrace as Tomlinson then quotes 'and has built stable and coach-house' (on 'the property').

As regards 'the contract' this may refer to another 'messuage' on Fleetgate that Tomlinson writes about amongst the section of his *Notes* on Eagle House. The area seems to be that between Eagle House and The White Swan, although it is not clearly stated. In 1785 this 'messuage' was bought by William Faulkner, baker (of Barton?) for £105 of which £70 was borrowed from a yeoman of Brocklesby. In 1826 Faulkner's will bequeathed all this 'messuage, shop etc' to his son-in-law William Grounds on condition Grounds sold the land to pay off debts and to provide a legacy for five beneficiaries. In 1829 Robert Hall bought W. Ground's 'messuage, shop etc' and an 'allotment' for £450.

Clearly between 1828 and 1832, the time when Eagle House was built, Robert Hall had over-extended himself financially. But had he also in that time had the three-storey terrace built and possibly other properties between the terrace and The White Swan, or had the assignees had the terrace built, or did they already exist?

Pigot and Co. Lincolnshire Directory, (of uncertain date, but between 1829 and 1841), records one Robert Hall as living on Hungate, but as Tomblison had described him as being a tobacconist of Hull (in 1830) this was probably another Robert Hall.

Of the five architect's plans for Eagle House (dated 1829 and see above) one shows the front elevation.⁵ This part of the house, the façade we see today, was built as per the plan with one exception. The plan shows a five bay, centre entrance property with a low hip roof and a projecting, open sided, centre entrance porch with the entablature resting on two free-standing columns. These neo-classical features were complimented by two single-storey round-headed recessed arches (the ground floor plan shows that these were not entrances) on both the north and south side of the façade, these capped by a moulding continued from the main house (see Clarke 2012, 41-42 plus the rear cover). This is the exception as today on the north side is a narrow two-storey, recessed extension (this abutting the three-storey terrace), while on the south side no arch exists at all. It seems that at these points the elevation was changed by the builder or subsequent owners.

The architect's ground floor plan shows that the front door led into a spacious oblong hall, supported in the centre by two free-standing columns and leading to a cantilever staircase at the rear. Leading off to the south was a large 'Drawing room' facing the street which lead through to a 'Sitting room', this incorporating a wide, east-facing, apsidal extension including central bow windows. To the north of the central entrance hall was a large 'Dining Room' facing the street, and behind it a 'Library' accessed from the hall and which incorporated a walk-in 'China Closet'. Adjoined to the main block of the house was a two-storey rear extension, here on the ground floor was a 'Best Kitchen', 'Wash Kitchen or Scullery', 'Pantry' and 'Dairy' plus a rear entrance and small hall at the bottom of the stairs.

At first floor level the plans identify four 'Lodging Rooms' each accessed separately from the landing at the top of the stairs, the two north side rooms each having a walk-in 'closet'. Above the front part of the entrance hall was a separate 'Dressing Room'. On the first

5

The other four are too faded to copy effectively.

floor of the rear extension were two 'Lodging Rooms' each with a walk-in 'Store Room', one of these 'Lodging Rooms' includes the word 'Nursery' but it is not clear whether it states 'and' or 'or'.

Across the two floors each room was to have an open fireplace, the extra wide fireplace for the range to be built in the 'Best kitchen'. Each room, including the ones facing north, also had a window (or windows).

In 1836 the assignees had 'the mansion' auctioned at The Red Lion, but 'in vain'. However, by 1842 certain parts of Robert Hall's property on Fleetgate had been sold and the mortgage reduced. In the same year the 'allotments' were conveyed to M. Prickett, the mortgagee. The *Post Office Trade Directory for 1861* records Alfred Henry Pechell, barrister, as living on Fleetgate, this being relevant because *White's History, Gazetteer and Directory of Lincolnshire, 1872* records Pechill (sic) as living at 'Chequers House', Fleetgate. *Kelly's Lincolnshire Directory for 1876* however records 'Pechill' as living at 'Eagle House'. Clearly, although later writers refer to 'Eagle House' from the time of its building, in fact it didn't acquire that name until between 1872 and 1876 – for almost the first 50 years of its existence it retained the name of the cottage demolished in the late-1820s.⁶

Pechell (sic) continued to live at Eagle House, certainly up to 1882. However *Kelly's Directory of Lincolnshire, 1885* records one Thomas Piggott, secretary to the Farmer's Company Ltd. ('chemical manure and sulphuric acid manufacturers'), as living at Eagle House. This connection between Piggott, the Farmer's Co. and Eagle House was continued in successive trade directories up to the time of the Great War.

6

It is not known what was behind the change of name. However this is not the only example of such a name change in the 1870s. It possibly may have something to do with the unification of Germany under Prussian hegemony, this happening at the time, the eagle becoming the German national symbol. Maybe Pechill had some Germanic connections, as a barrister he would have been aware of European issues.

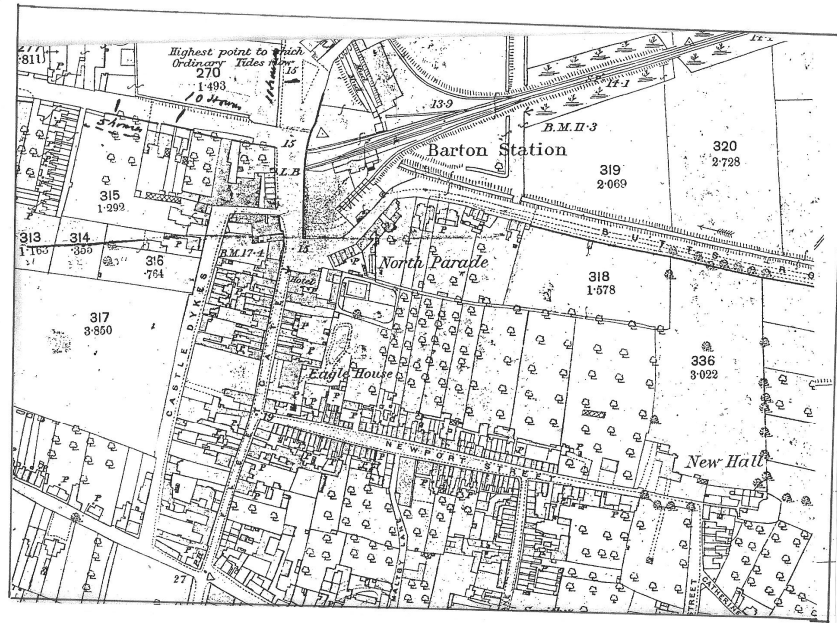


Fig. 3 Part of the 1888, First Edition 25" O.S. map. Eagle House is named.

The First Edition 25" O.S. map of Barton, 1888 (see fig. 3) shows a number of interesting points. One is that the planned two-storey rear extension did not by then exist. As the rear extension rooms had been intended as the 'work' rooms for the house presumably the arrangement of the existing rooms had been changed (from the plans, see above) in order for the house to have a kitchen and scullery.⁷ Had the two-storey rear extension ever existed? R. Hall was facing financial difficulties at the time the house was being built (see above) and today the north part of the rear wall shows no obvious signs of it having once been an internal wall. However the original plans show that the wall between the house and rear extension was to be continuous, so the question remains unanswered.

Also the 1888 map does not show the 'Sitting Room' and 'Lodging Room' as having a two-storey apsidal extension (see above), this perhaps another victim of cost-cutting? The map does clearly show

7

There is a very small, square rear extension shown on the 1888 map at the back of the house, its purpose is not known.

the grounds of Eagle House behind the small plots of the houses in north-west Newport and east of the properties in north-east Fleetgate that R. Hall, or his assignees, may have developed (see above).

By 1913 Harold (rather than Thomas) Piggott is recorded by *Kelly's Directory* as living at Eagle House while Thomas was still recorded as Secretary to the Farmer's Company. In *Kelly's Directory for 1937* Thomas was still recorded as the contact for the Farmer's Co. but after the late-1920s there is no mention in Directories of Harold or Eagle House. Thus, if the accuracy of the Trade Directories is not to be questioned, Thomas Piggott's name had been the telegram address for the Farmer's Company for over 52 years! For a variety of reasons trade directory evidence should not always be taken at face value.

The Barton upon Humber Town Guide records that during the Second World War soldiers were billeted at Eagle House. This suggests that either the person(s) then living there 'donated' it to the war effort or, that it was no longer a family house.

The salient features of the house we see today are identified in Figs. 4 to 12.



Fig. 4 View north from outside 51, Fleetgate showing how Eagle House partly abutted the three-storey terrace.



Fig. 5 Eagle House from the south-west. The bottom right section of the side wall has been rebuilt in more modern brick than that seen in the rest of the wall. The first floor windows in the side wall are not like those proposed on the 1829 plan.



Fig. 6 The voussoirs set into the earlier brick side wall suggest that four original side windows were subsequently blocked-up – if so none of the four were shown on the original plan.



Fig. 7 The rear wall and south-east corner of Eagle House. The section of machine-cut bricks suggests that a single-storey annex once existed here.



Fig. 8 The rear wall of Eagle House, built of hand-made bricks laid to English Garden Bond at the ratio of three courses of stretchers to one course of headers. Notice the vertical join in the brickwork showing above the drainpipe hopper.



Fig. 9 The left hand side of the rear wall, here again evidence that four windows have been blocked up. If so none of the four were shown on the original plans. This is where the two-storey apsidal extension was to have been.



Fig. 10 A section of the rear wall showing the vertical join – usually a low budget method of bonding two brick walls. However the two string courses of protruding bricks appear to be continuous.



Fig. 11 The north-west corner of Eagle House, showing how the recessed wing abutted the rear gable-end wall of the adjoining three-storey terrace. This wing was not shown on the 1829 plans. Were the two sections of render in the gable-end wall originally windows? The low segmental arch of bricks on end above each suggests they once were.



Fig. 12 The sculpted eagle that once adorned the top of the porch entablature was removed during the Second World War (see Clarke 2009, 16).

The house we see today was certainly built in 1829/'30 but not exactly to the plans drawn up in July 1829. The early history of Eagle House is tied up with the problems of indebtedness and bankruptcy of Robert Hall and his assignees – as, probably, was that of the properties immediately north of Eagle House. If, as seems likely, Pechell and Piggott bought the freehold rather than being tenants then from 1872 for the next 50+ years the house was in the continuous occupation of just two families. The first occupants were probably tenants of the assignees. It is not known whether Robert Hall ever actually lived there.

Today with the traffic, the narrow street and the density of surrounding buildings it might seem an unlikely location for a high status Georgian house. However, Robert Hall inherited the plot (rather than having to purchase it) and it was then a prime location. Fleetgate remained a 'desirable' area throughout the 19th and much of the 20th centuries and this prestigious house must have been admired by successive generations of Barton people.

Part II.

The desire to raise awareness of this neglected property which prompted this follow-up article to part one in Barton Civic Society's Newsletter, 2013 was overtaken by the fire which gutted the house on the night of November 5th 2013 (see Fig. 13). At the time of writing (late January 2014) the remains remain and the site is now for sale by auction.



Fig. 13 Photograph of Eagle House taken on November 7th, 2013.

As recorded in the first article, by 1885 Thomas Piggott, 'Secretary to the Farmer's Co. Ltd.', was living at Eagle House and continued to do so into the 20th century. By 1913 Harold (rather than Thomas and probably his son) Piggott was recorded as living at Eagle House (see Barton Civic Soc. Newsletter, 2013, 14). The article then stated that for the late 1920s there was no record of Eagle House. This was so for the trade directories I had seen but since then John French has kindly trawled some other directories and has provided me with information to somewhat fill the gap.

Kelly's Directory of 1926 is the first to record one Anthony Wagner as living at Eagle House. The Wagner family then continued to be associated with Eagle House up to the Second World War, Anthony

being named in each case up to 1937 and 'Mrs. A. Wagner' in 1939.⁸ The 1940 Directory gives no occupant for Eagle House but states that it was a 'Public ARP Shelter'. So what happened to the Wagner family and had the property been bought by the War Office by 1940, or merely commandeered (a question posed on p. 15 of Part One)? Later in the War it seems that Eagle House became a hostel for American airmen, presumably some of those stationed at the airbase at Goxhill, five miles east.

An interesting muse on this situation is to wonder whether the Wagner family experienced any antagonism, indeed was this why they left the house or had their house been taken-over? Hearsay has it, that the Barton family claimed family history connections with the famous German conductor of the same name, and much admired by Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of the German Reich. Such circumstances might have resulted in them being interned in the Great War. Whatever the situation Mrs. Wagner figures once more in Barton records, living at 45, Waterside Road in 1940 (Fox Smith, 1940). This house is one of the early 19th century three-storey terrace on Waterside Road with the Clapson's Lane entrance at ground level in the centre. However, it is at 43, Waterside Road that the step inside the open fronted porch has engraved in it the words 'Eagle Holt', so was this to where the Wagners moved? The word 'holt' has Anglo-Saxon origins and is generally considered to refer to a home or lair. Did the 1940 trade directory get the address wrong?

Hearsay has it that 43, Waterside Road was home to a specter resulting from the acquisition of a sedan chair which, it seemed, brought supernatural happenings to number 43. Whether this Georgian artifact had been brought from Eagle House is not known. The Barnes family, recorded as living at 43, Waterside Road during the Second World War, was the married name of one of the Wagner's daughters.

⁸ The Directories trawled by John were; 'Barton Direct', 1934, 'Fox Smith' (Directory) for 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939 and 1940, as well as Kelly's Directory for 1937.

After the War the house came into the ownership of the Leaning family and the following information has been kindly given by Steve Leaning in conversation with myself, this coupled with some personal observations. The first point to make is that certainly by the 1960s the house was not like the plans dating from the late 1820s (see before) and had almost certainly not been so for a long time, probably never, this confirming my suspicions expressed in Part One. Eagle House then presents a classic example of where the planned construction was not fully followed in the actual construction.

However there were conformities, mostly at the front of the property – with formal brick-bonds, decorative features and the like it was at the side seen by the public that the building was built to impress. On the ground floor were two large rooms facing the street each with two large vertical sash windows, these rooms being separated by the entrance hall behind the centre entrance front door. Above at the first floor were two large bedrooms. However at the ground floor the entrance hall was much shorter than on the plans and the cantilever staircase much further forward.⁹

On the ground floor immediately after the staircase was a corridor running the width of the house north-south. Leading off at the north end was the kitchen still with a large ‘yorkist range’ in the 1970s while immediately south was a small living room. The space at the south-east corner was partitioned to create an office, a scullery and a ground floor toilet. This confirms my suspicion, recorded in Part I, that the two-storey rear extension shown on the original plans was never built and that the services that would have been there located had to be incorporated into the main house block. The planned rear extension first floor was to have been servants quarters but in the revised building plan these were to be accommodated in a north side extension, seen today and adjoining the three-storey terrace immediately north. By the 1960s this side extension comprised three

⁹ Standing on the pavement opposite Eagle House it is just possible to see among the damaged fabric the upper part of the curved wall that backed the cantilever staircase.

stories and had a flat roof accessed by a small flight of stairs. By then the ground floor comprised a pantry, 'coalhouse' and scullery. Thus is explained the curiosity that the original plan showed north facing windows planned for the proposed detached house. Furthermore, the perceived oddness of building a high status property adjoining a pre-existing terrace is explained.

The 'blind' entrances either side of the main house block as shown on the plans were built although the southern one was taken down at some point. A very similar feature may be seen at Elm Tree House, High Street, a roughly contemporary property to Eagle House and one retaining its original symmetry.¹⁰

The large north-west bedroom had in it a door leading to a landing (presumably above the ground floor cross passage) from which a small bathroom and back bedroom were accessed.

The rough brickwork near the south-east corner of the main block, commented on in Part I, is explained by the fact that here was once a small bolt-on extension.

The existing detached single-storey building to the south of Eagle House was built post-war to incorporate a dairy, bottling plant (for milk) and garage, alongside which was set into the ground a petrol tank for the private use of the then residents.

In the 1970s the House still had a very big garden stretching behind the house to the east and along behind those of the three storey terrace and as far north as the land of the White Swan. The development of Overton Court in the 1960s had swallowed up some of the original garden and later, in the 1980s, the building of the care home to its rear left Eagle House with the little space around as seen today. Also in the 1980s the then owner divided the interior space of Eagle House into four flats, this further compromising the internal arrangement, a process which continued up to the early 21st century.

¹⁰ I am grateful to Geoff. Bryant for bringing this point to my attention.

Thus Eagle House was never to achieve the grandeur and classical symmetry shown in the plans archived at Lincoln County Archives, like a deprived child it was to witness misfortune from its beginning and to reflect that misfortune in its history. Nevertheless 'Chequers House', later Eagle House (see before), was the home of a relatively small number of separate owners over a long period of time and, as is sometimes mused, 'if walls could talk' there would be many a tale to tell.

Update – February 2016 Eagle House undergoing a gradual restoration.

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