

# GEORGE DEVEY AND THE ROTHSCHILD ESTATE BUILDINGS IN THE VALE OF AYLESBURY 1850–1910

CATHY SOUGHTON

*This is a study of the Rothschild estate cottages and lodges which were built or renovated between 1850 and 1910 in the villages containing the seven country houses owned by the Rothschild family in the Vale of Aylesbury. Using fieldwork, archive materials including sale catalogues, estate maps and estate records, amongst them some original drawings and plans, and a range of secondary sources, the article identifies where the estate buildings were located and when they were built. It reviews the architectural styles of new and renovated buildings and considers the important part played by the architect George Devey, who designed many of the buildings in an innovative half-timbered cottage style, loosely based on vernacular timber framed buildings.*

*Whether the Rothschild villages were typical model villages is analysed from the detailed plans and features of cottages in two villages (Mentmore and Halton) considered in more detail, while the influence of the estates on later buildings is highlighted. The Rothschild estate buildings deserve more recognition, in view of the pioneering architectural style employed and the remarkable concentration of similar styled buildings in a small area of the country, giving the area a certain uniformity of appearance.*

## INTRODUCTION

In June 1868 an Industrial Exhibition was held at Halton Park in the Vale of Aylesbury attended by an estimated 25,000 people. The brainchild of Sir Anthony Rothschild, it was modelled on the 1851 Great Exhibition and designed to exhibit examples of local rural crafts and industries. A key component of the exhibition was a competition organised by Louise Rothschild, Anthony's wife, inviting local carpenters and builders to submit models of workers cottages 'in which greater attention was to be paid to substantial and interior comfort than to outward and architectural effects'.<sup>1</sup> The winner would subsequently be required to build the cottage in accordance with his specification within two miles of his workshop.

The competition typified the paternalistic attitude displayed by the Rothschilds in the local area. In the second half of the 19th century, various members of the English branch of the wealthy Rothschild Jewish banking family built or renovated a total of seven country houses in the Vale of Aylesbury, all within 8 miles of Aylesbury.

These were Waddesdon Manor, Mentmore Towers, Aston Clinton House, Halton House, Tring Park, Ascott House and Eythrope Pavilion. Simultaneously they also built or renovated a large number of estate cottages in the existing villages close to their country houses (Fig. 1), and in consequence several of the communities were subsequently labelled as 'Rothschild villages'. A number of public buildings were also built by the Rothschilds for villagers, including schools, village halls, reading rooms and pubs. Many of the buildings, both public and private, are readily identifiable by wall plaques showing the Rothschild 'Five Arrows' coat of arms or the initials of the respective Rothschild family member. In some villages such as Waddesdon and Mentmore, large sections of the village were rebuilt; in others, such as Wing and Aston Clinton relatively few estate buildings were constructed. Many of the buildings are also identifiable by the employment of an 'Old English' architectural style with mock Tudor black-and-white gables.

This article looks at only the estate cottages and lodges built or renovated by the Rothschilds. First it will identify where they are located and when they

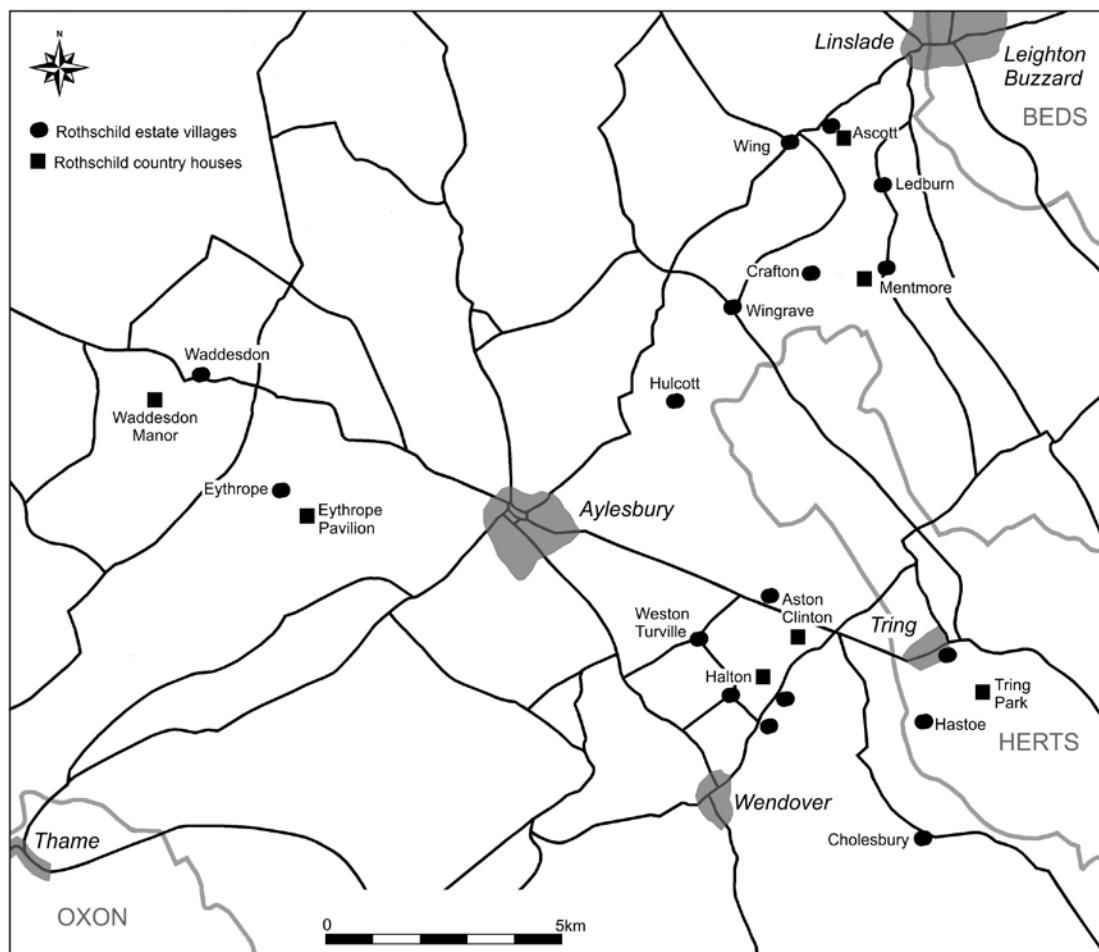


FIGURE 1 Location of Rothschild country houses and estate villages

were built or renovated. This will be followed by a brief review the architectural styles employed and the architects and builders who built them, before a consideration of the notion that they were model (estate) villages, and a specific study of the design and layout of the cottages and special features employed both externally and internally. Lastly the influence on other buildings in the locality will be reviewed. Two small Rothschild villages will be considered in some detail: Mentmore, which lies close to Mentmore Towers, and Halton, which is close to Halton House.

#### THE LOCATION OF ROTHSCHILD ESTATE COTTAGES

The acquisition of land by the Rothschilds in the Aylesbury Vale began in the late 1830s when Hannah Rothschild, wife of Nathan Mayer Rothschild, founder of the English branch of the Rothschild international banking dynasty, bought land near Mentmore to encourage her three sons Lionel, Anthony and Mayer to follow outdoor pursuits. With the opening of the new railway line from Euston with stations at Tring and Cheddington (with a branch line subsequently extended to Aylesbury), the area was in easy reach of London. The sons developed a love of stag hunting, and during the course of the 1840s and

1850s they acquired various estates in the area at Tring, Aston Clinton and Mentmore respectively. Unsurprisingly, the acquisitions were astute investments, often bought at the bottom of the market, a guiding principal being that agricultural land was only purchased by the family if it paid 3.5% of the purchasing price.<sup>2</sup> However, the Rothschilds were also representative of that group of 19th-century *nouveaux riches* who were attracted by the prospect of owning a country house as a measure of respectability and power. Mentmore Towers was the first country house to be built by the Rothschilds (1852–54): Aston Clinton House, purchased in 1849, was extensively altered and extended in the 1850s. Land continued to be purchased in the Vale throughout the 1850s to 1870s, with the result that by 1873 the family owned over 14,000 acres of land in the area, and the Rothschilds had become the second largest landowner in Buckinghamshire.<sup>3</sup> A second stage of building took place in the 1870s and 80s, when the other five Rothschild country houses in the Vale were built or renovated.

A common local view is that the Rothschilds built their country houses in the Vale in such close proximity in order that they would be able physically to see each other's properties. In reality the decision seems much more pragmatic. A concentration of land ownership in one area was an astute political move and gave the Rothschilds local political influence, which resulted in them over time being elected to various positions including High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire and MP for Aylesbury, culminating in the elevation of Nathaniel (Natty) Rothschild, son of Lionel, to the House of Lords in 1885. The country houses that the Rothschilds built reflected their new-found status and were advertisements of their power. Often effectively used as centres for corporate hospitality, they attracted influential guests including Queen Victoria to Waddesdon in 1890.

The purchase of large estates in the Vale resulted in the Rothschilds becoming landowners of many properties in the Vale. Although they owned few properties in the local towns, with the exception of Tring, they did acquire a number of rural farmhouses and many existing built properties in local villages close to their country houses, many of which were occupied by labourers who worked on the estates. The extent of their holdings varied from village to village, depending on how much land was owned by other landowners, although

many of the Rothschilds followed a policy of purchasing adjoining land wherever practical. In a couple of villages, notably Waddesdon and Mentmore, they acquired virtually all the properties in the village. In others such as Aston Clinton, ownership was much more piecemeal. The extent to which the Rothschilds built or renovated properties in the villages also varied from place to place, depending on factors such as the condition of existing properties, the altruism of individual members of the Rothschild families etc.

Before considering the programme of cottage building the Rothschilds inaugurated, the timing and extent of property acquisition in each location is set out. In Aston Clinton, Aston Clinton House was purchased in 1849 by Anthony Nathan Rothschild and was extensively renovated and enlarged in the 1850s. It was demolished in the 1950s. The nearby Aston Clinton village lies about four miles east of Aylesbury and is sited along the Roman road known as Akeman Street. The Rothschilds owned relatively few properties in the parish; consequently not many estate cottages were built or renovated other than two lodges, although a new school and also a village hall were constructed.

Mayer Amschel Rothschild purchased the manor of Mentmore estate in the 1840s and built Mentmore Towers in 1850–54; this was later inherited by his only child, Hannah de Rothschild, who married Lord Rosebery in 1878. Mentmore village lies close to Mentmore Towers, around seven miles north-east of Aylesbury. Mayer built some new estate cottages by the village Green in the 1850s, though most of the estate was built in the 1870s by Hannah. Mentmore Towers and most of the estate was sold in 1977. In Cheddington, Mayer Amschel Rothschild purchased land in the 1850s. Cheddington village lies around five miles north-east of Aylesbury and is close to Mentmore Towers. In the 1870s, Hannah Rothschild commissioned George Devey to design a pub (the *Rosebery Arms* at Cheddington station), three nearby cottages now called Mentmore End, a few cottages along the High Street, and the schoolmaster's house.

Lionel Nathan Rothschild purchased the Halton Estate in 1853 from the Dashwood family. The estate comprised the old manor and the village of Halton, then a small village four miles south-east of Aylesbury. Lionel subsequently bequeathed the

estate to his son Alfred, who built Halton House in 1883. The core of Halton village includes a number of Rothschild estate cottages, both new build and renovated. Most appear to have been built or renovated in the 1870s prior to Lionel's death. He also purchased Hulcott, a small nucleated village, three miles north-east of Aylesbury, together with the manor in 1859. Much of the village was subsequently renovated in the 1860s by George Devey for the Rothschilds, although new buildings were constructed, including the Rectory and the School.

Tring Park Mansion, lying close to the small Hertfordshire town of Tring, was purchased in 1872 by Lionel Rothschild for his son Nathaniel (Natty). As one of the principal landowners in the town, Natty built or renovated several public buildings, including the *Rose and Crown* inn and the Market House, and also built new estate cottages along Western Road and Park Road in the 1890s, including the Louisa Cottages. A zoological museum, which still operates, was built in 1892 to house the collection of Natty's son Walter. Estate cottages were also built in several of the hamlets near Tring Park including Hastoe, Buckland Common and Wigginton. The architect William Huckvale designed most of these buildings, the majority in Devey's style. Most of the Rothschild estate in Tring was sold in 1938 following the death of the Dowager Lady Emma Rothschild.

Ferdinand Rothschild purchased the Waddesdon estate in 1874 and built Waddesdon Manor, the main part of which was completed in 1883. Waddesdon village lies six miles west of Aylesbury. Most of the village was effectively rebuilt by Ferdinand, using W F Taylor as his architect. The buildings on the main road are in Devey's half-timbered style and include the *Five Arrows* hotel, a reading room and village hall. A large number of estate cottages were also built, but they tend to be plainer in style. Eythrope is a hamlet within the parish of Waddesdon. Alice Rothschild, Ferdinand's sister, purchased the manor of Eythrope in 1875 and commissioned Devey to design a house for her day use only. Three estate lodges were built in the 1880s, probably by W F Taylor.

In 1873, Mayer Amschel Rothschild purchased Ascott House in the hamlet of Ascott in the parish of Wing and gave it to his nephew Leopold. It was subsequently extensively extended, initially by Devey and after his death by his associates. Devey also designed the two estate lodges and large estate

cottages on Ascott Green in 1876. The village of Wing is around eight miles north-east of Aylesbury. Wing was a much larger village in the nineteenth century than many others in the vicinity. Although Leopold Rothschild and subsequently Hannah Rothschild (later Rosebery) acquired a fair amount of land in the parish, there were multiple property owners in the village itself and consequently fewer Rothschild cottages were built there. Those that were built were along Church Street and Vicarage Lane (some dated 1895). An imposing half-timbered Village Hall was also built in 1905, designed by J J Heady, next to a similar styled Cottage Hospital.

In 1875 Hannah Rothschild, Mayer Amschel's daughter and heiress, purchased 200 acres of farmland and seventeen cottages in the parish of Wingrave, a nucleated village, five miles north-east of Aylesbury. She demolished the old cottages and built about 35 new cottages, some set round a large new recreation area and others at Nup End. She also built an Infants' School and Reading Room in the same period. The cottages are in the Devey style and each house carries a plaque bearing Hannah's monogram and date.

The Rothschilds also purchased land and property in many other villages in the Vale and built or remodelled several buildings in these villages, for example Wendover, Weston Turville and Marsworth. Whilst a number are typical Rothschild, others were constructed in other styles or were not remodelled, and are only identified by a Rothschild plaque. Conversely there are a number of properties in several parishes built in the Rothschild style but which have no plaque, which would suggest that they were at one time owned by the family.

## ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

Architecturally, the Rothschilds' country houses in the Vale varied from the magnificent French chateau at Waddesdon to the neo-Renaissance of Aston Clinton, from the free interpretation of Wollaton Hall at Mentmore to the half-timbered Tudor style at Ascott. In contrast, the cottages built on the estate had a much more uniform appearance, most commonly characterized by a vernacular revival, black and white half-timbered rustic style. Ascott House was the only Rothschild mansion which bore this style, not unsurprising given that George Devey, the architect respon-

sible for renovating and extending Ascott from 1874, was also credited with designing many of the Rothschild estate lodges and cottages.

George Devey (1820–1886) initially studied art before later training as an architect. He is now belatedly recognised for being a pioneer of the vernacular revival in the mid Victorian period. Although relatively unknown at the time, his cottages and lodges at Penshurst in Kent which were built in the 1850s, some in the Wealden style, were seen and sketched by the better-known architects W E Nesfield and Richard Norman Shaw. These may well have influenced their creation of the ‘Old English’ style in the late 1860s and 1870s, which had a decisive impact on English domestic architecture.<sup>4</sup> Devey came to the attention of the Rothschilds in the early 1860s, perhaps following his work on cottages on the Cliveden estate in south Buckinghamshire. He was first employed by Sir Anthony de Rothschild to build a school at Hulcott near Aylesbury in 1864, and soon afterwards at

Mentmore he replaced the architect George Stokes, whose father-in-law Joseph Paxton had designed Mentmore Towers for Mayer Amschel Rothschild. Devey was employed to build many of the estate buildings at Mentmore and neighbouring Ascott.

Whilst the styles differed somewhat, the buildings shared many similar characteristics. Generally of a rustic, picturesque design, being a free interpretation of the vernacular, they were usually brick-built, often with applied black-and-white timber framing to the upper floor. Many of his buildings were jettied and had steeply pitched roofs, often with prominent gables and dormer windows. Typical decorative detailing included patterned tile hanging, diapering, decorated bargeboards and tall Elizabethan style chimneys. Windows were generally small, often with wooden casement windows. The cottages were often built in pairs or in small terraces, cleverly designed to give the illusion of being one large property (e.g. Fig. 2). In contrast, the estate lodges (e.g. Fig. 3)



Figure 2 Mentmore End Cottages (Devey 1874), reproduced with the permission of the Special Collections Library, University of Sheffield



FIGURE 3 The Homestead Lodge, Eythrope (Images of England, © Stewart Martin Shaw ABIPP)

were usually detached properties and were more ornamental and elaborate in finish, reflecting their prime position at the entrance to the country house.

Many of the estate buildings were built with red bricks and roof tiles which were a characteristic of local vernacular buildings of the period. The Rothschilds owned at least two brickyards in the area, one near Mentmore, the other at Buckland Common, part of the Tring estate. Presumably many of the estate cottages were built using bricks and roof tiles from these brick yards. This conveyed a uniform appearance and helped define Devey's modified vernacular style.

Gillian Darley notes that Devey 'stood against the imitation of authenticity in materials and sham short cuts, he made a conscious effort to recreate the village proper' using the best materials and ensuring work was of the highest standards.<sup>5</sup> Such ideals were later a key feature of the Arts and Crafts Movement. As well as working on the Mentmore and Ascott estates, Devey also worked on major renovations at Aston Clinton house, possibly at Tring Park, and designed Eythrope Pavilion in 1876 for Alice Rothschild, sister of Ferdinand who was building nearby Waddesdon Manor at the time. Unfortunately, Devey's full catalogue of building works has not survived, but Jill Allibone's biography of Devey records details of payments made by various members of the Rothschilds to him for estate cottages, including five cottages on the Halton Estate in 1874 (Fig. 4) and cottages on the Ascott estate in 1876. Aston Clinton estate

ledgers show he was paid for providing plans for various cottages in 1867, and for drawings in 1875, but unfortunately what these were are not specified. He was also responsible for the *Rosebery Arms* in Cheddington, the schoolmaster's house and some cottages at Mentmore End in Cheddington.<sup>6</sup>

For unknown reasons Devey appears to have stopped working on the Rothschild estates in the late 1870s, but his overall style was maintained by several other architects and builders. In Waddesdon in the 1880s a local architect and surveyor, W F Taylor of Bierton, built many of the estate cottages and lodges. The more prominent buildings were very much in Devey's style, although many of the new workers' cottages built along the back roads in Waddesdon (Frederick Street, Quainton Road and Baker Street) were much plainer, predominantly brick-built, small terraced or semi-detached houses. W F Taylor had gone into partnership with John Durley who ran a small building company in Bierton, and who appeared in the Rothschild Aston Clinton accounts as builder and surveyor for some 20 years.<sup>7</sup> Taylor may well have also carried out work on the Halton estate, as a 'W F Taylor of Aylesbury' drew a detailed map of the estate in 1883.<sup>8</sup>

At Mentmore, the Clerk of Works John Aspell is credited by Pevsner and others with taking over from Devey and building some of the cottages around the Green for Hannah de Rothschild in 1877 and 1878.<sup>9</sup> Aspell is also credited with building 35 half-timbered estate cottages in Wingrave for



FIGURE 4 Ivy Cottage, Halton, occupied by Alfred Rothschild's butler (probably Devey c.1874)

Hannah in 1877. However, there is no documentary evidence that Aspell was employed at all by the Rothschilds in the late 1870s. Surviving documents at the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies (CBS) show that Aspell was Clerk from at least 1887,<sup>10</sup> but the census returns for 1881 show that he was then only 28 years old, a carpenter and joiner, living in Tottenham with his family.<sup>11</sup> It would appear more likely that the 1877/78 cottages, if not designed by Devey himself, were built by another architect in Devey's style. Original drawings show that M Manning, a London architect, designed the laundry and laundry cottages at Mentmore in 1881, again in Devey's picturesque style. Manning also submitted section drawings of Mentmore Towers in 1876, so he may well have worked on the estate cottages in this period.<sup>12</sup>

After Devey's death in 1886, his associate James Williams carried out further work on the main house at Ascott and also probably built the estate house and offices (Fig. 5).

Devey's general style was also continued in Tring by William Huckvale (1848–1936), a local architect who built many of the public buildings in

the town for Natty Rothschild in the 1890s and early 1900s, and a number of estate cottages including the estate lodges and the Louisa Cottages, built for retired estate workers in 1893 and 1901 (Fig. 6). Huckvale's black-and-white facades appear rather starker than Devey's work, and more representative of the more elaborate Midland and North-Western half-timbered vernacular buildings, although it is apparent from restoration work that the 'black-and-white' frontage was originally often painted in more muted colours of reddish brown and cream in some cases. As in Waddesdon, many of the estate cottages built on the side roads had a plainer brick finish, although internal features appeared to be similar to those in the more picturesque cottages.

Relatively few estate cottages appear to have been built for the Rothschilds prior to Devey's appointment in the 1860s, but those that were are plainer, lacking Devey's characteristic features. George Stokes designed two pairs of estate cottages in Mentmore in 1855 and probably others at nearby Crafton for the Rothschilds in the same period. Whilst these brick cottages had some decorative detail and were not unattractive, they lacked the





FIGURE 5 Estate house and offices, Ascott (Images of England, © Dr W A Cooper LRPS)



FIGURE 6 Louisa Cottages Tring, occupied originally by retired Rothschild estate workers (Huckvale 1901)

distinctive features of later estate cottages. As Jill Allibone notes, his cottages were generally comparable to many of the architectural pattern books then in circulation, and look rather outdated compared with Devey's work.<sup>13</sup>

A number of existing cottages on the Rothschild estates were also given the 'Rothschild treatment' to blend them in with the new-built properties. Generally these appear to be rather larger than average, brick-built properties, which were not destroyed presumably because they were in a fairly reasonable condition. No records appear to survive showing what specific work was undertaken to

modify them, but typical features were the addition of protruding gables (some tile-hung), applied timber framing, and the addition of elaborate chimney stacks (e.g. Fig. 7). Some of these renovations are explored in more detail later.

Many Rothschild estate buildings were also readily identified by various types of plaques (Fig. 8). Often these showed the initials of the relevant family member, generally with the year of build, but others displayed the family's motto *Concordia Integritas Industria* (Harmony, Integrity, Industry) and a number also with the Rothschild 'Five Arrows'. The English branch of the Rothschilds





FIGURE 7 Lower Farmhouse Halton (renovated c.1876, probably by Devey), occupied by Alfred Rothschild's assistant agent



FIGURE 8 a) Five Arrows Plaque, Waddesdon. b) Sgraffito panel, Halton. c) Hannah Rothschild plaque, Mentmore. d) Rothschild motto, Halton

were granted the right to bear arms in 1818: their coat of arms includes a clenched fist with five arrows representing the five sons of Mayer Amschel Rothschild, the founder of the banking dynasty. The Five Arrows symbol was particularly used in Waddesdon, where the eponymous hotel was built by Taylor in 1887 at the entrance to Waddesdon Manor.

At Halton incised plaster panels depicting rural scenes were also applied to the facades of a number of properties, using the specialist plaster technique known as 'sgraffito'. The technique was unusual in England, but Lionel Rothschild, who bought the Halton estate, may well have seen similar examples abroad and decided to use them in the village.

It is not known whether Devey's typical architectural style for estate cottages was one that the Rothschilds specifically requested be adopted for later estate buildings, though it seems probable; the distinctive style readily identified a village as one owned by the family (or where the Rothschilds were a major landowner), and the cohesive unity where buildings in different villages had a similar appearance served as a visual reminder of the Rothschilds' prominence in the Vale.

### ROTHSCHILD MODEL VILLAGES

A common perception held by current inhabitants of Rothschild villages is that the Rothschilds developed completely new model (estate) villages in the Aylesbury Vale to house their employees. However, all the villages where estate cottages were built were already well established long before the Rothschilds settled in the area. A significant number of estate cottages were built or renovated in several Rothschild villages including Mentmore and Halton and these two villages are considered in more detail to establish if they can be considered model villages.

During the nineteenth century, pressure mounted to improve housing for agricultural workers, particularly in the south of England where there was less industrialisation, a fast-rising population, and changes in the Poor Law prevented parishes from building and providing housing for the poor. Many Buckinghamshire families lived in accommodation which was poorly constructed, cramped and very primitive. Waddesdon for instance was described in 1842 as 'containing many cottages with mud walls and thatched roofs where the

earthen floors were full of organic matter which rapidly decomposed to create a foetid atmosphere in which fevers of every type were endemic'.<sup>14</sup>

By mid-century, in the absence of any local government responsibility, many landowners considered they had a social responsibility to build comfortable cottages with adequate provision for sanitation, or to radically improve those which were retained. The motives of landowners to build estate villages are explored by Gillian Darley in her book *Villages of Vision, a Study of Strange Utopias*.<sup>15</sup> Whilst for some it may just have been a fashionable pursuit to build a picturesque village near the park entrance, or pressure from their peers, others were driven by genuine philanthropic motives. More enlightened landowners were keen to house tenant workers in high quality buildings that not only reflected well on the estate, but also helped to maintain the value and appearance of the land, even if the profit from rents was minimal.

Many well-built estate cottages were therefore constructed in this period on landowners' estates. In some cases brand new estate villages were constructed close to the country house on fresh sites; in others the old hamlet or village was demolished and a new village was effectively built. Many estate villages were small, amounting to just a few cottages near the main entrance to the house, whereas others were larger and were effectively a ready-made community with the inclusion of shops and schools etc. A number of model villages were also built by philanthropic industrialists, such as George Cadbury's Bourneville estate and Titus Salt's Saltaire. The common factor with all such villages was that they were planned, rather than ones which had developed over time.

A large number of pattern books were published in the first half of the nineteenth century, written and illustrated by architects or would-be architects, which set out examples of workers' cottages which could be readily followed. Whilst these often offered great improvements in terms of size and comfort, architecturally they were pretty uninspiring. Many landowners used these pattern books as a basis for their estate cottages, although a few did employ architects to draw their own designs, a notable example being the eclectic Edensor estate village on the Duke of Devonshire's Chatsworth Estate.

Records show that all the villages where the Rothschilds built properties were already long

established communities. Census returns for Mentmore and Halton record that in 1801 the villages had a population of 279 and 159 respectively.<sup>16</sup> The population in both villages increased slightly but not substantially following the arrival of the Rothschilds, and by 1901 stood at 289 for Mentmore and 226 for Halton. The majority of the villagers in Mentmore and Halton were employed by the Rothschilds. Account books for Halton show that in 1900 well over one hundred people were on the payroll, and the vast majority of cottages in the village were occupied by estate workers.<sup>17</sup>

Maps which predate the building of the main country house also show the village structure at the time. The 1852 tithe map for Mentmore (Fig. 9) clearly shows all the buildings then standing. Work on Mentmore Towers had just commenced, although the house is not shown on the map.

In comparison with the later Ordnance Survey 25" to the mile map of 1898 (Fig. 10) it is evident that whilst the village Green had not been affected, the road layout to the west of the Green had been

altered, and a number of houses illustrated on the 1852 map had been destroyed and replaced by an aviary. The OS map also records that Roman and Anglo-Saxon relics were found in 1854 on the site where the new aviary was built, indicating that the old buildings were destroyed around this date. Whilst a number of properties still stand on the south side of the Green, it is evident that most of these were built after 1852, as the location and size of the properties differ considerably on the two referenced maps. A visual inspection also indicates that most were built in the latter 1800s. In the area near the Green, only the Manor House and the house on the south-west corner of the Green remained relatively unaffected.

Documentary evidence shows that two pairs of cottages situated on the Green near the school were built around 1855. A pub in the village (*The Stag*), is first recorded in 1847 and the current stone building was probably built in the 1850s.<sup>18</sup> The village school another stone building also probably belong to this period.

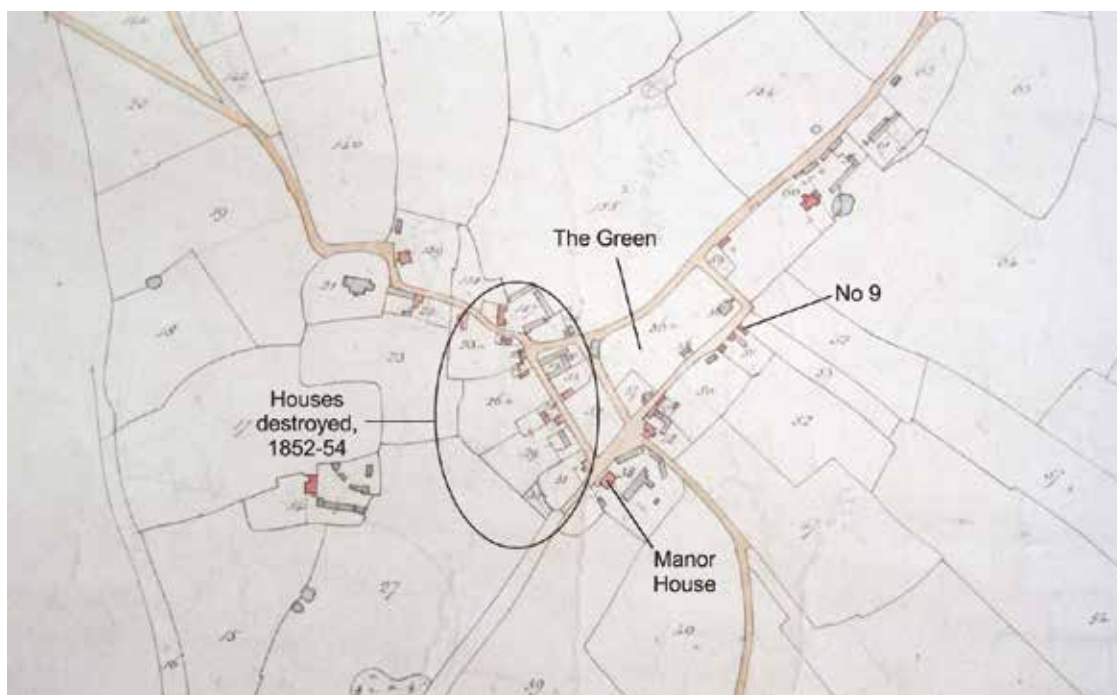


FIGURE 9 Mentmore Tithe map, 1852 (CBS: D/RO/4/1)

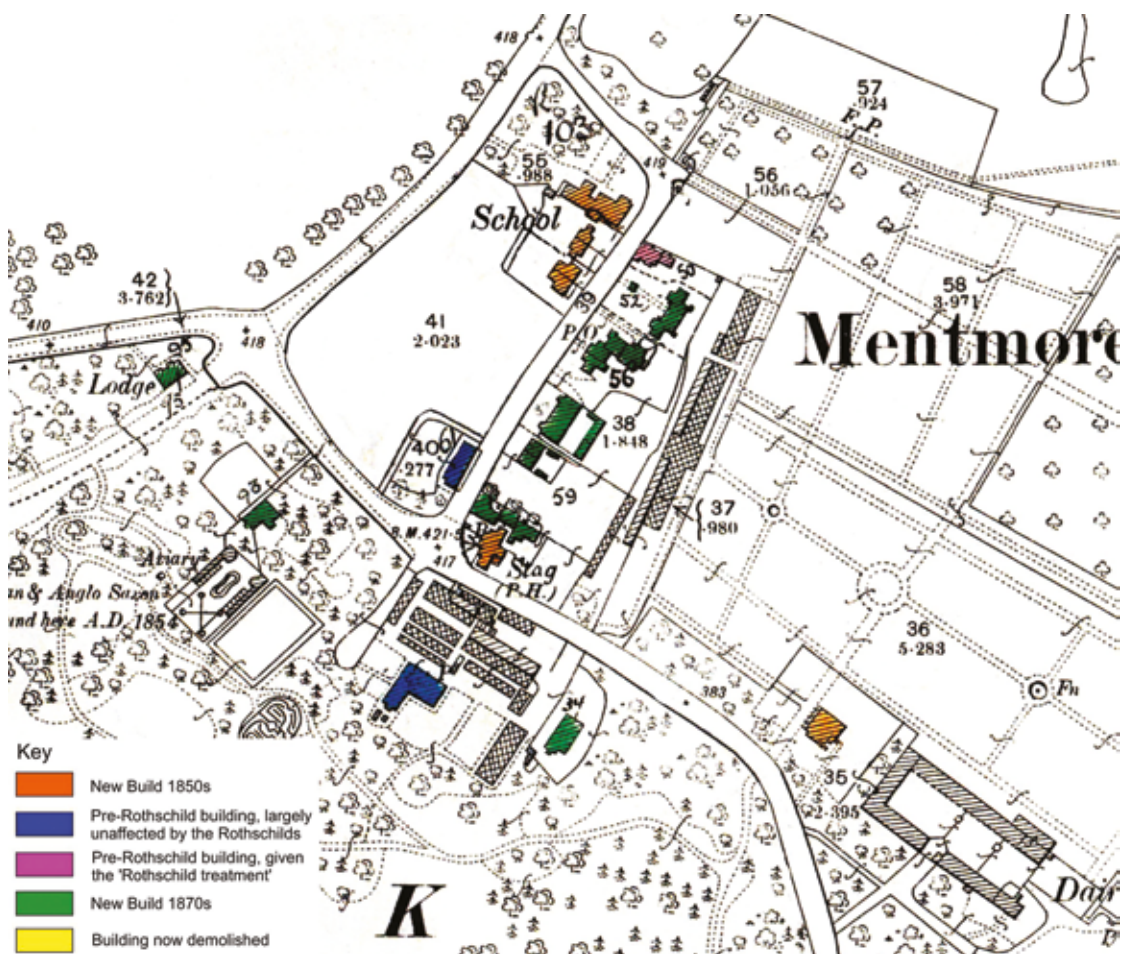


FIGURE 10 Mentmore: extract from Ordnance Survey Second Edition 25" sheet, 1898, showing development of the village by the Rothschilds

Most of the other properties in the village were built some twenty years later in the 1870s under the direction of Hannah Rothschild, the heiress of Mentmore who married Lord Rosebery in 1878. The majority stand on the south side of the road adjoining the Green and have a plaque with the initials HR and dates of 1876–1878 indicating the year of completion. Most were newly built, replacing the older properties, and are typical picturesque brick-built Rothschild estate buildings in the Devey style. Although now converted into cottages, two of the buildings were originally built as a post office and a smithy. The three estate lodges designed by Devey were also built in this

period. However, one double-fronted property, 9 The Green, clearly dates from an earlier time, probably the late eighteenth century, but was modified by the Rothschilds. It bears a plaque on the left chimney with Hannah's initials and the date 1876. The two half-timbered jettied gables were added to the original structure, the windows were replaced with wooden casements and ornamental bargeboards were added, as well as new chimneys and brickwork, including some herringbone detail. The building (Fig. 12) is now one property, but had been two cottages under the Rothschilds. The size of the building suggests that it originally was a fairly substantial property.





FIGURE 11 Terraced cottages, The Green, Mentmore



FIGURE 12 9 The Green, Mentmore

Evidently when Hannah Rothschild inherited the estate from her father in 1874, she decided to create a model village for her employees. Whilst her father had built a few cottages for estate workers in the 1850s, probably to house those tenants who were displaced when their cottages were knocked down to make room for his aviary, Hannah proceeded to create a new small estate village, complete with necessary public amenities.

At Halton it is also evident that a village existed before the Rothschilds bought the Halton estate. An agricultural survey undertaken in 1813 recorded 5 tenant farms and 31 houses in the village.<sup>19</sup> The village is concentrated along one main road and is intersected in the centre by the Wendover arm of the Grand Union Canal built in the 1790s, which passes through the village. The 1840 Tithe Map (Fig. 13a) which predates the arrival of the Rothschilds shows a number of properties in the village lying either side of the canal. These included the old Halton House, which by the 1870s

had fallen into decay and was demolished. The new Halton House was built south of the village.

A visual inspection of the nineteenth-century buildings in Halton shows that Devey's Rothschild style dominates, the vast majority having characteristic steep clay tiled roofs with ornamental bargeboards and black-and-white timber or rough plaster facing. Incised panels and plaques decorate many of the cottages. Some consider that Halton was virtually demolished and rebuilt by the Rothschilds.<sup>20</sup> However, in comparison to Mentmore it is evident that whilst some of the buildings date from the late nineteenth century, a number are much older and have been renovated in the Rothschild style, including Lower Farm, which was the main farmhouse in the village (Fig. 6). An estate map produced in 1883 (Fig. 13b), when most of the estate work had been completed, shows many of the same properties as recorded in the 1840 map. Presumably more properties were deemed suitable for restoration. An example of such a property is

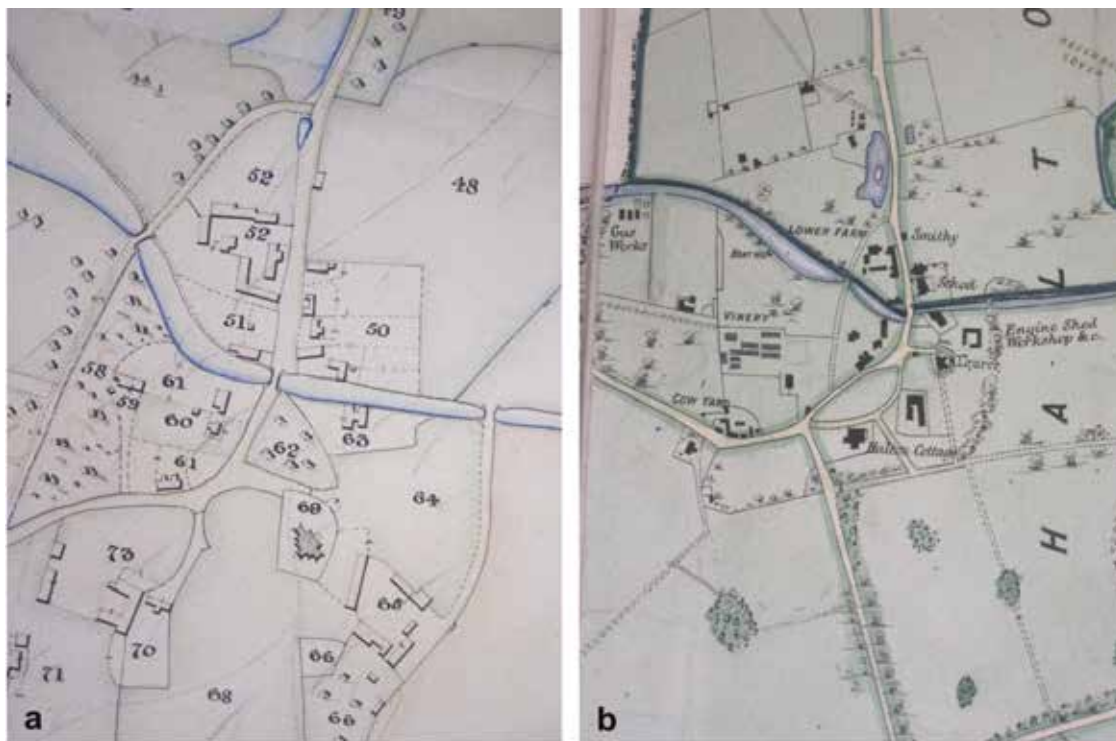


FIGURE 13 a) Halton Tithe map, 1840 (CBS: 192). b) Halton estate map, 1883 (CBS: Ma/88/1)



15 Halton Village (Fig. 14: plot 63 on the Tithe map). Dendrochronology tests have revealed that the core of the house was built in 1678. The 1840 tithe map shows that the building was then in the form of an ‘H’ and was occupied by three families. An internal inspection shows that originally it was a timber-framed building (Fig. 15a), probably comprising three bays which were one room or one and a half rooms deep. Two fireplaces are located on the ground floor (with evidence of a third) and two on the first floor. There is also a second floor which evidence during renovations suggests was used as a grain store (the canal runs alongside the property). The two half-timbered jettied gables were evidently added at a later date, together with a dormer window on the second floor, new brickwork, windows and chimneys, all in the Rothschild style. During recent extension work, newspapers were found under the first floor floorboards dating from 1878, suggesting that the Rothschild renovations were undertaken at this time (Fig. 15b). The additions are broadly similar to those undertaken on 9 The Green at Mentmore; hence the same architect, possibly Devey, may have been responsible. As noted earlier, Devey was paid for work at Halton in this period, so he

may well have planned the alterations. The development of Halton is illustrated in Fig. 16.

Compared with Mentmore there were fewer new estate cottages built at Halton, but the effect was not dissimilar. Visually, the village would have appeared vastly different in 1880 to that ten or so years earlier, and it can be considered a model village, even though Halton House itself was not built until 1880–1883. Interestingly the 1881 census return for Halton records a number of properties as being a ‘model cottage’ or ‘model farm’.<sup>21</sup> These were occupied by estate workers such as gamekeepers and grooms (Fig. 17).

The amount of estate building that was undertaken in the other ‘Rothschild villages’ varied. Waddesdon was similar to Mentmore in that most of the labourers’ cottages were knocked down and replaced with estate cottages, and the centre of the new village shifted further to the east. Wingrave, where Hannah Rothschild became a major landowner, also had a considerable number of new estate cottages and public buildings, but the other main Rothschild villages (Tring, Aston Clinton and Wing) had relatively few new or renovated estate buildings, although a number of public buildings were constructed for the community.



FIGURE 14 15 Halton Village, renovated 1878



FIGURE 15 15 Halton Village: a) Timber beams. b) Newspaper cuttings, 1878

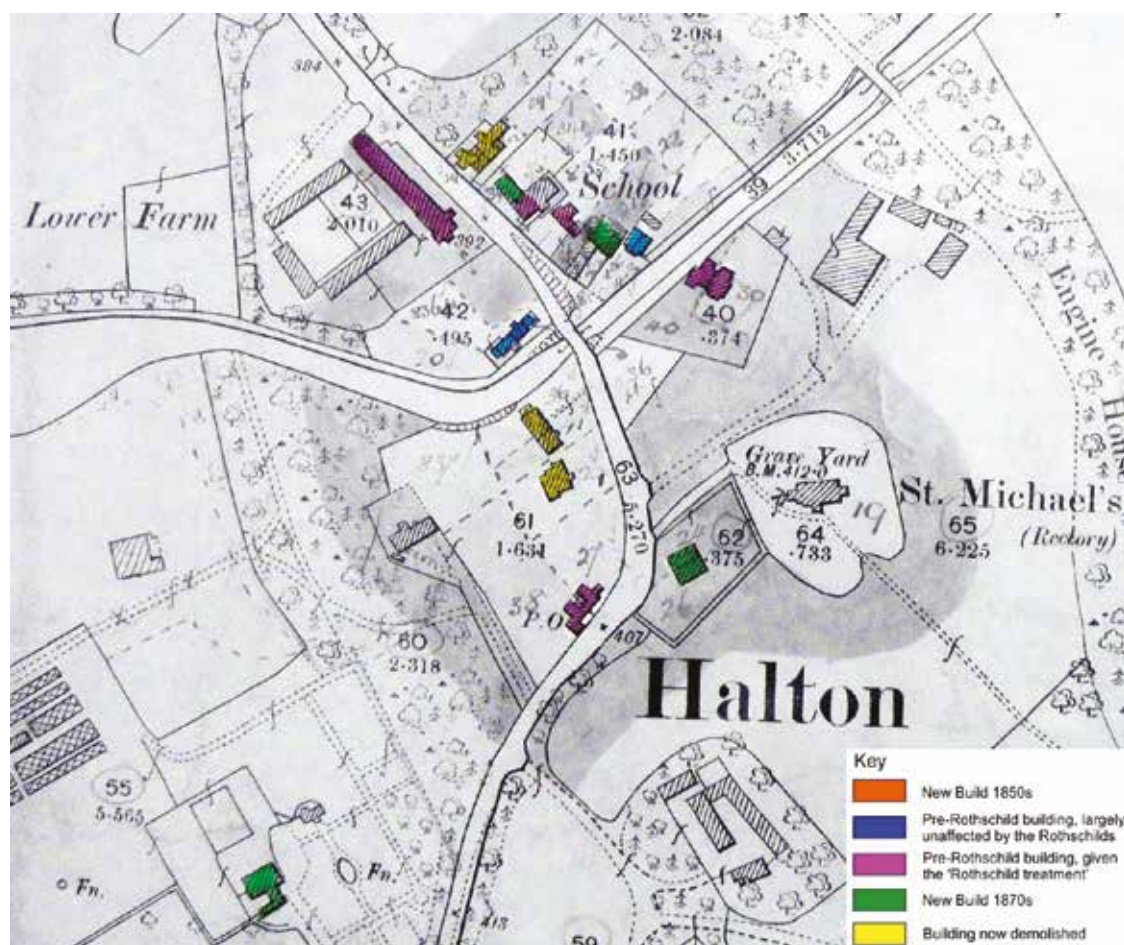


FIGURE 16 Halton: extract from Ordnance Survey Second Edition 25'' sheet, 1898, showing development of the village by the Rothschilds



FIGURE 17 Gamekeeper's House, Halton estate, built 1877

The extent of the new build seems to have been determined by how much land the Rothschilds owned in the parish. In Mentmore, Halton, and Waddesdon they acquired the vast majority of the land including the manor and its estate, but their share of ownership of land in other parishes was smaller. Whilst none of the Rothschild villages were built on new sites, certainly some of them can be construed as 'typical model villages' characterised by Michael Havinden using the example of East Lockinge in Berkshire (now in Oxfordshire), as 'an ancient historic village.., which was partly re-sited and subjected to large scale redevelopment, modernisation and 'prettification' by its owners in the mid-19th century.<sup>22</sup>

#### ORIGINALITY IN THE PLANS AND FEATURES OF THE ESTATE COTTAGES

The Rothschilds' philanthropy and generosity are often cited as a notable feature of their residence in the Vale. Numerous examples are given in local history books of measures they took to help the local communities, such as supporting many local charities, giving birthday and Christmas presents to village children and, in the case of some of the

Rothschild women, establishing village schools and visiting the sick and poor. Rothschild estate workers were also very well treated; the pay and benefits were excellent and a Rothschild labourer could expect to be employed all year long and not laid off during the leaner winter months. This was valued especially during the agricultural depression which ran from 1873–96, when many agricultural workers lost their jobs. However, relatively little information is given in secondary sources regarding the actual cottages provided by the Rothschilds, other than general observations such as that they provided comfortable well-constructed cottages with low rents.<sup>23</sup>

Many of the cottages built or renovated by the Rothschilds have since been modernised and often extended, masking or removing original features, but it is possible to make some observations about their original form, plan and features. Unfortunately most Rothschild estate records have not survived, and those that have are generally accounts which postdate the building of the estates. Sadly there is also no record of the model cottages (or their location) which were designed for the Exhibition referenced at the beginning of this article. However, some estate records are included

in the Rosebery collection at CBS, including a small number of drawings produced by Stokes and Devey for pairs of semi-detached estate cottages at Mentmore and Cheddington (Figs 18–21).<sup>24</sup> Stokes's drawings date from 1855 and show two pairs of cottages in Mentmore which have been positively identified. Both drawings show a living room, scullery and pantry on the ground floor and three bedrooms upstairs. By the mid-Victorian period three bedrooms was the recommended norm for cottages, reflecting the Victorians' moral view that there should be separate bedrooms for parents, boys and girls. The drawings show that the scullery incorporated a sink and copper (with fireplace below for heating water). An oven is also shown in the scullery in one of his drawings (Fig. 19): the other set shows an adjoining barn with possible privies. In comparison with earlier estate cottages, such as the well-known ones at Blaise Hamlet where the rooms were very small, the dimensions of Stokes's rooms appear a good

size for the period. The living rooms in the two drawings were 13' x 11' and 14' x 12' respectively. These dimensions appear to be representative of those for many later Rothschild cottages built in the Vale as evidenced by specifications in sales catalogues and estate agents brochures, although the layout in many cottages has since changed.

Stokes's plans are not dissimilar to some of those produced in the various published pattern books available at this time, including plans for a pair of cottages produced by the Central Cottage Improvement Society which also form part of the Rosebery collection at CBS.<sup>25</sup> They may well have influenced Stokes's designs, although this is not certain as the CCIS drawings are undated.

The two pairs of cottages in Mentmore that Stokes designed have been altered and extended since they were first built: the pantry and barn for instance have been replaced by a modern kitchen, but their original form is still evident. The original rear elevation drawing of the cottages is shown in

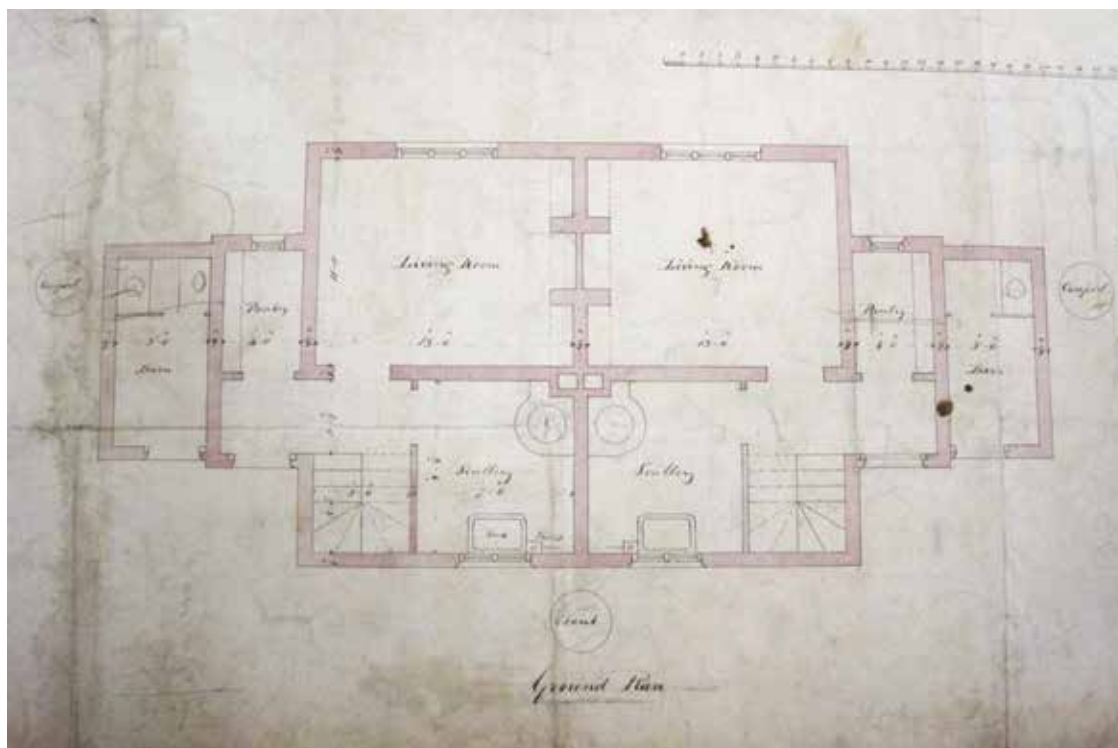


FIGURE 18 Plans of Mentmore Cottages, 11 and 12 The Green



Figure 20, together with a photograph of the rear of the building. Despite a number of extensions, the original roof line and gables are clearly evident.

Devey's drawings of a pair of cottages at Cheddington (Fig. 21a) are undated, but probably were made in the mid-1870s. His plan is not as detailed as Stokes's, but is not dissimilar in having a similarly-proportioned living room and scullery. Only two bedrooms are shown, although the majority of his estate cottages had three bedrooms originally. The actual cottages based on the plans have not been positively identified, but may be the cottages shown in Figure 21b, which have since been substantially modified internally.

It is not obvious from his plans, but Devey or some of his successors may have been influenced by reformers such as the architect John Birch, who did much to try to improve labourers' cottages. A copy of Birch's booklet 'Examples of Labourers

Cottages' dated 1871 is also in the Rosebery collection.<sup>26</sup> It shows examples of award-winning cottages built on various estates (although none were Rothschild ones). Birch considered it desirable that as a minimum, cottages should have three bedrooms, an entrance porch, scullery, pantry, fuel stores, piggery, privy, cesspit and ashpit. He further specified that dwellings should be brick-built with a tiled roof, and external walls should be constructed in two thicknesses, with space between to prevent dampness. This promotion of what was essentially cavity-wall insulation was novel at the time. Cavity-wall insulation did not become commonplace until the twentieth century, but there is evidence that at least some of the Rothschild cottages were built with a double wall.<sup>27</sup>

The Rothschild country houses were designed with pioneering techniques such as underfloor heating and the use of plate glass. Obviously

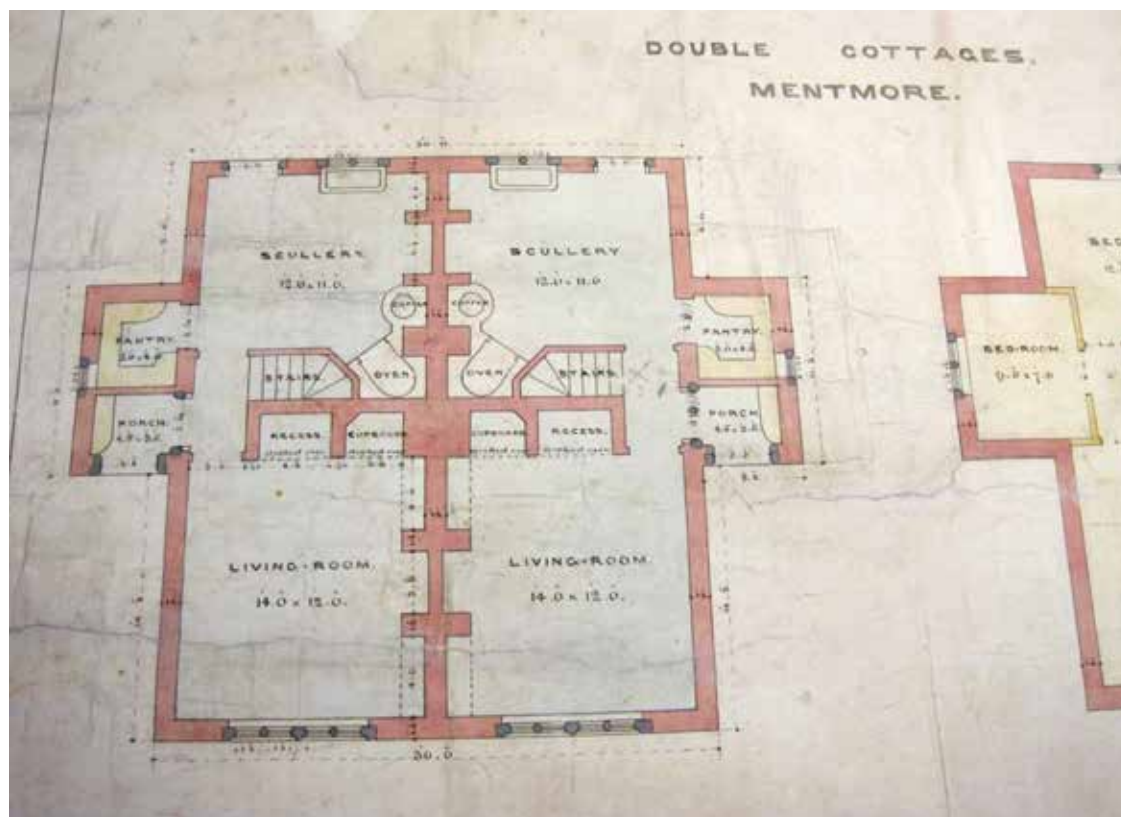


FIGURE 19 Plans of Mentmore Cottages, 13 and 14 The Green



FIGURE 20 a) Rear elevation drawing of Mentmore cottages. b) Photograph of the actual cottages



FIGURE 21 a) Devey's plan of Cheddington cottages. b) Rothschild cottages, Cheddington

such techniques would not have been applied to workers cottages at the time, but it is apparent that modern utilities were incorporated in the Rothschild cottages where feasible. Properties built for the lower classes in this period (or at least those in rural areas) did not have bathrooms or water closets as there was no piped water supply; hence, most people in rural communities had to share an outside privy. In the 1860s the earth closet was invented by Henry Moule, whereby a measured amount of dry earth was released by handle and mixed with waste matter, serving as an effective means of neutralising odours. The Rothschilds were one of the first to use the system on their estates. Advertisements in *The Times* from 1869 noted that Baron Rothschild had fitted them for his cottagers on his estates including

Halton.<sup>28</sup> Earth closets were also built for each cottage in Mentmore, and were used well into the 20th century according to local sources.<sup>29</sup> In Wingrave a detached brick outhouse was built for most cottages which originally housed a closet and also an oven (presumably separated!). Many of these have since been destroyed, though some have been converted for modern use.

The Rothschilds did ensure that fresh water was supplied to their estates where possible. Anthony Rothschild helped establish the Chiltern Hills Spring Water Company in 1864 to pump water from wells near his Aston Clinton estate and supply pure water to several parishes to the east of Aylesbury, including Halton. Mentmore did not receive a mains water supply until the 1970s, but a waterworks had been built to supply the estate





FIGURE 22 Water pumps in lych gate at Mentmore

when the main house was built. Two local pumps were also installed to provide drinking water to the estate cottages, housed in a picturesque covered gateway modelled on a lychgate (Fig. 22).

The estate cottages were heated by fireplaces which were fitted in the sitting room, the main bedroom and often the second bedroom if there was an oven in the scullery underneath, as was the case with some of the Mentmore properties. A feature of a few Rothschild properties was a protruding round oven (Fig. 23). A search of the Listed Buildings database suggests that this was a characteristic that Devey favoured, and hence indicates that he was probably responsible for those buildings where the architect is uncertain, e.g. Lower Farmhouse at Halton.

Although gas works were built to supply many of the country houses with gas lighting, there is no evidence that it was used in the estate cottages.

The interior finish of the cottages was generally high. In a number of cases the original wooden and tiled floors, doors and fireplaces have been retained and their quality is evident (Fig. 24). The cottages were often well provided with cupboards and shelved alcoves. Few of the Rothschild cottages are listed buildings other than some of the estate lodges, hence several cottages have been altered in ways which unfortunately are not sympathetic to the original building, such as painting

the brickwork, and UPVC windows replacing the original casement windows.

A notable aspect of the Rothschilds' programme of building was that they built many estate cottages for tenants who were not employees. For example, at Wingrave and Hulcott they built or modified a number of cottages. The tenants may have indirectly worked for the Rothschilds on their tenant farms, but do not seem to have been directly employed. Such cottages in outlying parishes appear to have been built to the same standards as those close to the country houses, in contrast to the practices of some landowners, as noted by Darley.<sup>30</sup>

It also appears that the Rothschilds did not attempt to make any profit from the rentals. Rental charges were very low for the period; in Mentmore for example the standard weekly rent was 1s 4d in 1877, rising to 2/- in 1899.<sup>31</sup> Similar rentals were charged in other villages, and there was no distinction between estate workers and other tenants. The cottages appear to have been well maintained, and in times of hardship rents were often reduced.<sup>32</sup> No evidence has been found that Rothschild tenants had any irritating restrictions or loss of independence placed upon them, as was sometimes the case in other estate villages, for example at Lockinge as reported by Havinden.<sup>33</sup> The newspaper reports and reminiscences recounted in the local history books listed in the



FIGURE 23 Protruding round oven, Lower Farmhouse, Halton



FIGURE 24 Living room and scullery, Lilly Cottage, the Green, Mentmore

bibliography are all positive about the Rothschilds as landowners.

Whilst it is evident that the Rothschilds' philanthropy extended to their estate cottages, the extent of their patronage varied. At Halton Alfred Rothschild was criticised by his cousin Constance, who wrote 'to him the village was an unknown entity and he never tried to understand the lives and conditions of the inhabitants'.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, she praised her uncle Nathaniel Rothschild for building 400 cottages on his Tring estate. This seems an excessive number and Constance may well have exaggerated these claims. Perhaps Alfred, a noted playboy, was not interested in his model village, but it is noted elsewhere that he did treat his employees extremely well.<sup>35</sup>

#### INFLUENCE ON OTHER LOCAL BUILDINGS

The Rothschilds still continued to build estate cottages well into the twentieth century, for example in 1915 'Horseshoe Cottages' at Buckland Common which formed part of the Tring estate. In general though, building work was greatly reduced by this period, partly because most estate workers had already been accommodated, whilst the era of grand country houses was also coming to an end. This was hastened by World War 1 during which time a number of country houses were requisitioned, and staff joined the war effort or were employed elsewhere. Halton House was one such property. Loaned to the Home Office during the war, it was sold soon afterwards to the RAF for £112,000, although many of the cottages were

retained by the RAF and were not sold off until the 1970s. A large RAF base was developed in the parish, and Halton House now serves as the Officers' Mess. The village has increased substantially since the RAF base opened, and a number of service houses for RAF personnel were built adjacent to the old village, which was designated a conservation area by Aylesbury Vale District Council in 2003.

In contrast, Mentmore has changed little since the new estate village was built in the 1870s. Most of the cottages in the village remained in the hands of the Rosebery family but, following the death of the 6th Earl in 1974, Mentmore Towers and the remaining estate was sold off in 1977. The sales catalogues for the estate show that 10 cottages (mainly on the Green) were still occupied by estate workers, the majority being gardeners or stud hands. A further 9 cottages were let to tenants. The rates charged at the time of the sale (to both estate workers and tenants) were still considerably cheaper than the normal rates. For example, the rent value for 12 The Green, a let property, was £52 per annum, whereas the estate agents handing the sale recommended its rental value should be £312.<sup>36</sup> Many of the cottages were in a fairly poor condition though, which could explain the low rentals. The sales catalogues did not provide a detailed description of the cottages at this time, but all had a kitchen and bathroom and most had two reception rooms and two or three bedrooms. In a number of cases the smallest third bedroom had evidently been converted into an upstairs bathroom.

There has been little new development in Mentmore. A few new large properties have been built on the far side of the Green in a half-timbered Mock Tudor style, seemingly in an attempt to integrate them with the rest of the village. In contrast, most of the other Rothschild villages have seen significant development over the last century. In the main, most of the new housing has not directly copied the architectural style of the Rothschild cottages.

However, the Rothschild style has been copied to varying degrees in new housing in neighbouring areas. There are many examples of houses which have some resemblance to the Rothschild cottages built in a Mock Tudor or Arts and Crafts style in the early 20th century in south and east Buckinghamshire. Many of these were built on new rail

commuter estates in the 'Metroland' area, along the line of the Metropolitan Railway which ran through the Chilterns and reached Aylesbury in 1892. Pevsner quotes the *VCH* entry for Chalfont St Peter as summing up the situation, 'within the last few years [since 1906] many estates have been sold for residential purposes, and the type of house erected is that of the country cottage with plastered or half-timbered front, tiled gabled roof and small lattice windows'.<sup>37</sup>

It is debatable whether the builders of these estates had any direct knowledge of the Rothschild cottages, but their legacy is apparent. The key difference is that the new estates were designed for middle-class commuters looking for a rural idyll. As such, the properties built were generally detached, and were individually considerably larger than those built by the Rothschilds, which were often built in pairs or groups of three, designed to appear as one large property.

## CONCLUSION

The Rothschilds are well known in the Aylesbury Vale for the many country houses they built or renovated, Waddesdon Manor being the most famous. In contrast, little has been written about the estate buildings that the Rothschilds built or renovated for their estate workers and tenants and their existence seems relatively unknown outside of the Vale. Whilst the majority of estate cottages built in this period followed standard examples laid out in pattern books and were as a consequence pretty monotonous, the Rothschild cottages were atypical. Many were built or renovated in the innovative vernacular 'Old English' style, pioneered by the architect George Devey. As such, the Rothschild estate buildings represent significant examples of a novel architectural style which was subsequently copied by many later architects, and which was also a prelude to the Arts and Crafts Movement.

As many of the Rothschild villages were small, the number of estate cottages and lodges built in each location was typically between 15 and 40, although on some estates such as Waddesdon and Tring the number was significantly greater. Certainly some of the Rothschild villages, including Mentmore and Halton, can be considered as model villages, given the high proportion of estate buildings in the villages in the later nineteenth century, including

public buildings. What is striking is the concentration of similar estate buildings in such a small area of the country: as such, the total number of Rothschild estate buildings in the Vale must rival those of well-known model villages such as Cadbury's Bourneville. It is also remarkable that the building style introduced by Devey in the 1860s in the Vale was continued with few variations for a further 40 years, thus giving a visual uniformity to a number of villages in the area which survives to the present day.

The Rothschilds' arrival in the Vale was initially resented in some quarters, but in the space of a few decades they had firmly established themselves in the affections of the local community. They were imbued with a deep sense of social responsibility, and they ensured that they took good care of their workers and tenants, including providing them with well-built, good-sized accommodation. Internally, the plans of many of the cottages appear to have been based on plans for model cottages published by reformers. No unique internal features are apparent but the Rothschilds ensured that where feasible the latest services and utilities were provided.

All the Rothschild country houses in the Vale have now been demolished, privately sold or donated to the National Trust, with the exception of Eythrope, which is still owned by a member of the family. However, their building legacy is still apparent in the numerous readily identifiable estate buildings which survive and which remain sought-after properties.

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