

St Michael's House, 7 Pound Street Lyme Regis

Graham Davies and Richard Wells, May 2020



The house is set back from the roadside and adjacent properties on the Pound Street hill in Lyme Regis.

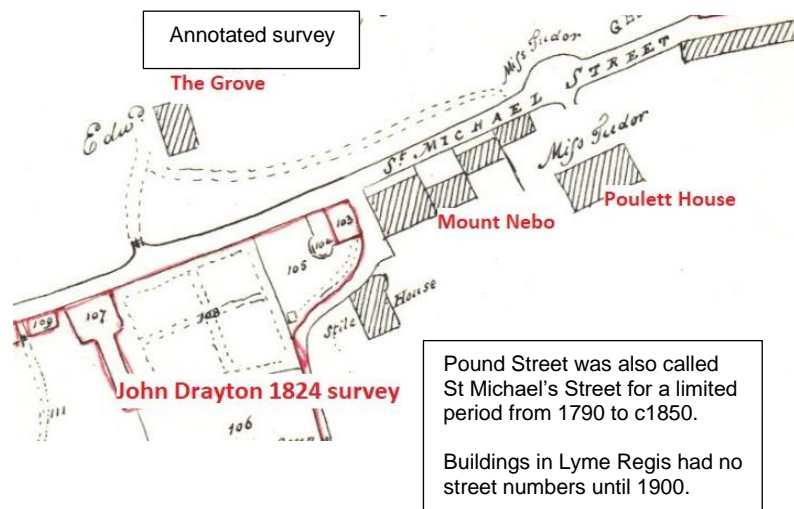
Of Regency origin, the house underwent a Victorian makeover followed by further changes in the 20th/21st centuries. Initially a private house for almost a hundred years it became an hotel for most of the 20th century before being converted into flats in 2004.

The Rev Michael Babbs bought the house in 1818. Did he name the house Mount Nebo or was it the earlier owner and/or builder?

The Rev Babbs (1743-1831) came from London to Lyme Regis as a curate in 1792. He was accompanied by his daughters, Elizabeth and Mary Ann, and their step-mother, his second wife Mary. He rented the recently built house, Belle Vue (today's Kersbrook), in Pound Road from Samuel Coade and was tenant there for the next 30 years. He served under four different vicars and seemed content to act as a perpetual curate at the Parish Church of St Michael the Archangel. He was a gentleman of additional means. The parish records show him to be a very busy clergyman, well known, not only in society, but to all classes of people in the community. He was described by his sexton, John Upjohn, as 'a nice gentleman who wrote like copperplate'.

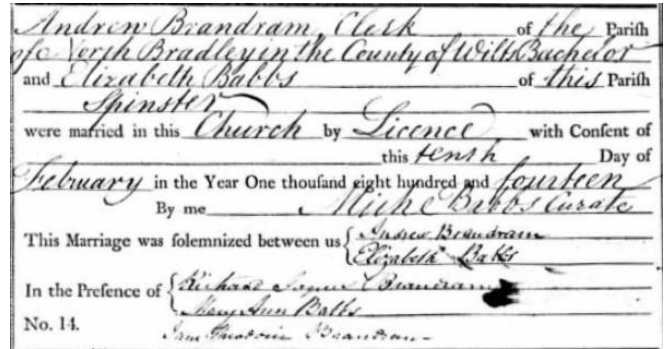
It is not known when the house was built, by whom, and from whom it was purchased in 1818. What is known:

1. A detached house, with a forecourt, will have been built later than its roadside neighbours.
2. The neighbouring Georgian town houses towards the town were built in the first decade of the 19th century.
3. The Rev Babbs will have seen the house being built. He bought the house, forecourt and garden in March 1818, with William Hooke as the occupying tenant, but did not move in himself until 1823.
4. An 1835 plan of Poulett House and its environs indicates that the 'late Giles Davie', brewer and builder, owned and/or lived in the house next door further up the hill. After his death in 1816, his widow put his baths in Church Street up for sale in 1818.



The authors favour a build date of around the beginning of the Regency period in 1811, with Giles Davie as a possible builder and investor in the property. The period from the 1780s to about 1850 was a time of investment in the increasing tourism in Lyme Regis. Houses were built as retirement homes, second homes or for leasing to the visiting gentry. In the 1790s, Giles Davie was involved in the Georgian development of Stile House in Stile Lane.

Elizabeth Babbs (1784-1855) was married by her father to the Rev Andrew Brandram of North Bradley, Wiltshire on February 10th 1814 at the parish church of Lyme Regis, St Michael the Archangel.



The house was subsequently owned, first by the Babbs family, and then by Elizabeth’s eldest son, Andrew Babbs Brandram and his family; a total of 95 years.

1819 was the Rev Babbs’ last year as a full time parish curate; he finally moved into his new home in 1822 with his wife and daughter Mary Ann. Michael Babbs died in 1831, aged 88. He was buried in the parish churchyard on September 28th. The site of his grave is not known. In his will he left his assets, including the house, in equal shares to his two daughters. Mary Ann Babbs (1786-1862) continued to live at Mount Nebo, her step-mother, Mary Babbs, having died in 1827.

Andrew Babbs Brandram (1815-1887), the eldest son of the Rev Andrew and Elizabeth Brandram, was born in North Bradley, Wiltshire where his father was curate at the parish church of St Nicholas. By 1819, the Rev Brandram and his family had moved to the rectory at Beckenham. In 1839, at St Alfege, Greenwich, Andrew Babbs Brandram married Maria Read. Andrew was an oil and colour merchant who subsequently lived in the Lewisham/Blackheath area of London and was a Colonel of the Blackheath Artillery Volunteer Corps.

The records indicate that the house, now owned by the sisters, had several roles during the 1830s-1850s period: a residence for Mary Ann, probably more so in the earlier years; a holiday retreat for her sister Elizabeth and family, and possibly friends; and short term leasing. (see Appendix B)

Andrew’s mother, Elizabeth Brandram, died in 1855. Andrew purchased the house from his aunt, Mary Ann Brandram, in 1858. It appears that he was already in possession (renting?) of the house at that time.

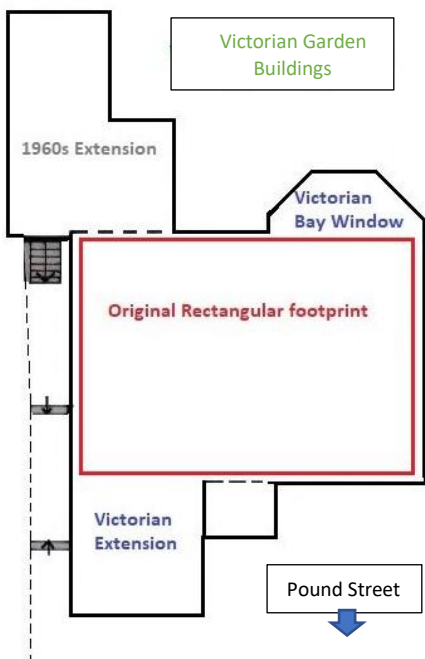
Andrew Babbs Brandram had great affection for Lyme Regis. Not only did he buy Mount Nebo, but was involved in local affairs, was a benefactor to the poor, retired to live in the town, and chose to be buried in the town’s cemetery. The town’s respect was shown in a newspaper report of July 6th 1858: *In the evening, the band played and the bells rang to welcome the arrival of A Brandram Esq, from London - driving his four-in-hand to his residence here.*

Following his purchase of Mount Nebo, the authors believe that it was Andrew Brandram’s further investment that led to the Victorian changes (see plan), perhaps as early as 1859 when the name had already been changed to St Michael’s.

This 1932 photo probably shows the original garden buildings which were demolished before the building of the present rear extension in the late 1960s.



Refer to appendix A

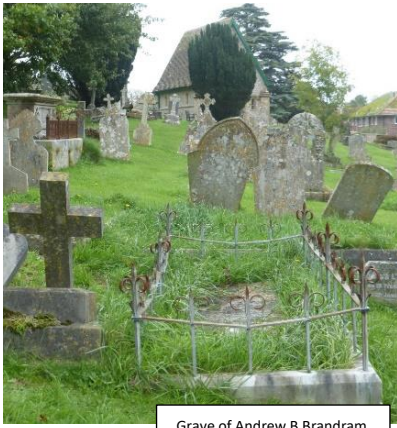


The extension at the front of the house is characterised by vertical sliding sash shutters at the windows. These are the only example seen by the authors during their researches in Lyme Regis.



Vertical Sliding Sash Shutters

The first Bishop of Victoria, Hong Kong, George Smith DD, resided in the house in 1861. Married to Andrew Brandram’s sister, Lydia, this was probably a recuperation break from his role in China (1849-1865).



Grave of Andrew B Brandram


Andrew Brandram's wife, Maria, died in 1872. He married Ellen Rodd from Budleigh Salterton in 1875. He had now retired to Lyme Regis. Andrew died in 1887, aged 72, and was buried in Lyme Regis cemetery. His personal estate was worth a minimum of £2 million at today's values.

His widow Ellen only remained in the house for a short time before it was rented out, first to architect Thomas Garner (1891). The house was inherited in 1913 by Andrew Brandram's granddaughter, Ina Dorothy Hopkins, nee Brandram, who lived in Manaccan, Cornwall.

In October 1913 she sold the house to Isaac Minchinton of Bow House, Lyme Regis for £700. This sale marked the end of the Babbs-Brandram's 95 year-old ownership of St Michael's.

At the time of the sale, the building was being used as an annexe to the nearby Alexandra Hotel, and needed modernisation and decorating throughout.


1936



S. MICHAEL'S
Private Hotel
LYME REGIS

PHONE 74
TELEGRAMS ST. MICHAEL'S

ALL BEDROOMS FITTED WITH HOT & COLD WATER
Highly Recommended for Cuisine. Moderate Terms.
Lock-up Garage.



Large Airy Comfortable Rooms. Smoke Room. Lounge.
Conservatory Lounge. Central Heating in Public Rooms
for early and late season visitors.
Dining Room seating 60 (separate tables).
Redecorated and Refurnished throughout for comfort.
Central Position near Sea and Langmoor Gardens.

Full descriptive Brochure (with town plan shewing situation)
on application. Mr. & Mrs. Dickenson.
Personal Supervision.

1916

S. MICHAEL'S
Private Hotel and
Boarding Establishment.

This Hotel has been entirely redecorated and brought up to date. Perfect Modern Sanitation, Baths and Electric Light have been installed. Situate in a quiet road, yet within a few minutes of Sea, Post Office, and Shops, it will be found a quiet and select Hotel with moderate charges.

LARGE AIRY ROOMS.
SPECIAL WINTER TERMS.
CLOSE TO LANGMOOR GARDENS.

For Terms apply: MRS. MINCHINTON, Proprietress.



Many proprietors ran the hotel during the 20th century, some of whom are recorded here with known dates of occupation:

- 1916-19 Mrs Minchinton.
- 1920 Mrs Sarah Lloyd.
- 1922-32 Walter & Annie Hardy.
- 1934-35 Harold & Muriel Dickenson.
- 1939 Mrs M Dickenson.

- 1943-44 Companies A, B, C, D of the 16th Infantry Regiment of the 1st US Army Division were stationed In Lyme prior to D-Day. St Michael's was the officers' mess.

- 1949-50 Arthur & Doris Yarnley.
- 1954-63 Frederick & Gertrude Bettles.
- 1967-81 Dudley & Beryl Bryant.



The hotel was converted into nine apartments in 2004

Appendix A

At the rear of St Michael's house, the 1932 photo shows the original **Victorian conservatory** and probable orangery/vinery, which, as an extension to the main house, was used to display garden statuary and tender or exotic plants and, if large enough, to afford a place of exercise in inclement weather; it was a place to entertain and show off one's latest acquisition. These became popular in the 1860s when glass and window tax were repealed and the cost of glass also reduced; prior to that they had been the preserve of the rich. They are shown on the 1888 OS map. It is most likely that at the time these were erected the splayed bay window was also built. These polygonal 'splayed' bays became popular at the same time and for the same reason, these became more prolific as the period progressed.

In the Victorian extension at the front of the house there were examples of **vertical sliding sash shutters**, one fully operational, the presence of a second one confirmed. These were used when a thin wall did not allow sufficient space for conventional hinged leaf shutters to fold back into the reveals. This type of shutter is quite a rare find, examples of these have been found in buildings dating back as early as the 16th century, but by the ascendancy of Queen Victoria in 1837, curtains had become more fashionable. Shutters of all forms were no longer used in the grander houses, although they continued to be used in smaller houses with front gardens through the 1840s, and they remained popular in street-fronting terraced houses until well into the 1860s.

Appendix B

Timeline for occupants of St Michael's House 1818-1913 (heads of household only)

Based on known dates of occupancy

1818	William Hooke, tenant of Rev Michael Babbs
1823-31	Rev Michael Babbs
1831-35	Miss Mary Ann Babbs
1851-53	Charles Joseph Thrupp
1861	George Smith DD, Bishop of Hong Kong.
1859-71	Andrew B Brandram
1871	Mary Dunster, Housekeeper in charge
1875-85	Andrew B Brandram
1889	Mrs E Brandram.
1891	Thomas Garner, architect
1895	Mrs Cooper

References

Ancestry.co.uk
British Newspaper Archive
Correspondence and meetings with Tony Rachwal
Hillman & Bond, solicitors, Copy Letter books, 1913 & 1915, Dorset Heritage Centre
Invitation to visit part of the house in 2017
John Drayton Survey 1924, Museum archives
Plan of the House & Gardens, the property of the late Dowager Countess Poulett, situated in Pound Street, 1835, Alexandra Hotel's lounge
Selection of Electoral Registers for Lyme Regis from 1922 to 1981, Dorset Heritage Centre
Sunny Lyme Regis, Official Guides, 1916-19, Museum archives
Tithe Map for Lyme Regis, 1841
Trade directories for Lyme Regis, 1823-1939, Research Team's Digital Archive
US Army information from Museum colleague Ken Gollop