

DOWN HOUSE BROMLEY, KENT

*Notes on the Trellis Attached to the Walls of Down
House Shown in Photographs and Watercolours Dating
from Charles Darwin's Residency*

by

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1 Introduction

The following notes were written in response to a request for advice on the trellis from English Heritage, Major Projects. As part of the current programme of repair and restoration to both house and garden, it is intended that the trellis is restored, and both creepers and ivy are grown to recreate the appearance of the house towards the end of Darwin's lifetime.

No physical evidence for the trellis was recorded during the recent works to the house.¹ Much of the historic stucco, which might have revealed traces of trellis fixing points, has been replaced and such evidence is likely to have been insubstantial.

Consequently, the primary sources for the restoration of the trellis, climbers and creepers around the house are undated photographs taken during Darwin's lifetime, photographs taken after his death in 1882, the watercolours by Goodwin from 1880 and J Wedgwood 1886 and engravings from water colours by Alfred Parsons from 1882. The study of these sources in relation to the development of the trellis, has led to some suggestions for revisions to the accepted dating scheme for the undated photographs.

An examination of the pictorial evidence shows that Darwin's trellis was not uniform in its construction and that, in his later years, it was the product of several stages of development. The following chronology clearly shows, perhaps not surprisingly, that during his forty years at Down, Darwin maintained the trellis and creepers throughout several phases of alterations to the house.

Two volumes on gardening known to have been in Darwin's library were consulted but neither offered any practical assistance in establishing the detailing of the trellis.²

Note: this report is concerned with the structure of the trellis, not with the identification of plant species. The author has no knowledge of botany. The Down House gardens curator Nick Biddle is currently researching the historic planting around the house.

¹ Some fixing nails, pierced for the attachment of wire, survive *in-situ* on the wall under the verandah. However, the late photograph of Darwin sitting on the wicker chair in verandah does not show these, so they are presumed to be post-Darwin.

² Advice provided by Randall Keynes. The books were Thomson D, *Handy Book of the Flower Garden*, 1868 and Loudon J C, *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening*, 1835

2 The pictorial evidence for the trellis applied to the walls of the house

2.1 The house before Darwin's arrival, c 1830

Two pencil drawings of the house (Figure 1 and Figure 2) and a watercolour (Figure 3) probably by Lieut. Colonel John Johnson, who owned the house from 1819 to 1835, show the house before alterations to the main roof by the local architect Cresy c 1835. The house appears to have been free from ivy on the east and north walls at least.

2.2 The house after the addition of the drawing room extension, c 1860 and before the addition of the verandah

A photograph inscribed 'Henrietta' (Figure 4) shows Darwin's daughter, born in 1843, reading in the centre window of the new drawing room, with the fireplace in the gloom behind her. The drawing room was built in 1858. From Henrietta's appearance, it seems the photograph was probably taken soon after that date. The photograph shows neither trellis or any sign of a sunblind visible in the next photograph (Figure 7) suggesting it is the earliest in the sequence.

The earliest photograph showing the whole of the house (Figure 5) shows three members of the family in the garden, after the addition of the drawing room extension in 1858 and before the addition of the verandah in 1872. In the centre bay of both the dining room and the drawing room, is an external sunblind. The photograph shows trellis applied to the bay and to the drawing room extension. The diagonal spacing of c 18" between the laths for the upper floors of the bay is consistent with that on the drawing room extension. However, on the ground floor of the bay, a smaller grid was employed, apparently c 12". An ivy or creeper is shown growing on the west wall of the hall attached to a timber trellis, probably a 12" grid. The ivy on this wall appears to be growing from a point in the ground in the return with the drawing room. Later, it appears, it was trained to grow up the drawing room return wall. On the south side of the bay, a well established ivy is shown growing from a point near the return with the kitchen.

In the photograph, although, the male figure is standing in front of a window or door into the hall, a horizontal line is visible at the same level as the meeting rail of the sash window to the right. This suggests that, at this date, it had not been converted to a door and that the sliding vertical sashes were still in position.

A watercolour presumably by one of the younger members of the Darwin family (Figure 6) (Francis b. 1848, Horace b. 1851 or Leonard b. 1850) although clearly not wholly accurate, appears shows the house after the addition of the drawing room extension in 1858, and before the verandah was added in 1872. A date of c 1860 therefore seems reasonable. The ivy and creepers are shown reaching up to first floor level.

2.3 Three photographs of members of the Darwin family, from about 1865

The photograph of the family sitting around the centre window in the dining room (Figure 7) on the basis of the apparent ages of the various members, dates from about 1865. On the left hand side of the window is a well established ivy with large leaves. On the right hand side is a smaller leafed climber. The trellis is the same as that in the earlier photograph (Figure 5). It appears to have been constructed using framing battens 2" wide, with 1" wide laths spaced at diagonal intervals of c 12". By this date, it appears to have deteriorated, with the loss of some sections of the latticework. A reconstruction of the lattice pattern is shown in Figure 27.

The photograph inscribed 'Bessy Taken by LD' (Figure 8) of Darwin's daughter Elizabeth, born in 1847, reading in the centre window in the dining room, shows similar sprigs of ivy or creeper on the right hand side of the window as in the previous photograph and she is wearing the same dress. The two photographs are therefore probably contemporary. The laths, in this photograph, clearly stand proud of the wall face, probably at a distance of c 3/4".

The photograph of 'Etty,' shows Darwin's daughter Henrietta, born 1843, sitting in one of the dining room windows. From the pattern of the lattice in the trellis on the right hand side, this is not the centre window shown in Figure 7 and Figure 8. The window shown does not have a sunblind. However, the growth on the left hand side of the window is probably the same as that shown on the left hand side of the southern window in Figure 7.

The trellis is shown here in much greater detail than in the other two photographs. The framing battens appear to be moulded with a quirked bead on both sides. The detail is typical of window mullions commonly used in greenhouses. The joint between the vertical and horizontal appears to be pegged, suggesting a mortice and tenon. The bottom edge of the vertical was not moulded. A reconstruction of the detailing of the framing batten is shown in Figure 26.

The appearance of the ivy on the bay suggests that these three photographs are relatively close in date to the next photograph of the garden front (Figure 11) taken after the addition of the verandah in 1872.

2.4 The photograph of Darwin on his horse, c 1868

The photograph of Darwin on his horse Tommy (Figure 10) shows the area around the front door. Darwin fell from his horse in 1869 and reputedly never rode again. The door is not the one which survives today and the columns were not mounted on pedestals. The present arrangement first appears in 1909 (see Figure 20) and probably dates from alterations made by the Down House School from 1906. Ivy is shown growing against the wall on both sides of the door but there are no signs of a timber trellis. Either the ivy was supported by wire or it clung to the walls directly.

2.5 The house after the addition of the verandah, c 1873

The photograph of the house from the garden looking north-east (Figure 11) shows the house probably soon after the addition of the verandah in 1872. There is some established growth of ivy or creeper under the verandah and on the wall above, which suggests that at least a year had elapsed since the verandah had been built. Above the verandah, the trellis had been altered from its appearance in the earlier photograph (Figure 5). In this photograph, the diagonal grid appears to be smaller, with a diagonal spacing of c 11". The sunblind is still in position in the centre window of the dining room and the growth around the bay is well established and very luxuriant.

The growth in the return between the drawing room and the hall is also well established. The west wall of the hall is now clearly shown with timber trellis attached to it. The spacing of the diagonal laths appears to be consistent with that on the wall above the verandah. The trellis on this wall also features curving battens above the window heads. Although it is not clear from this photograph, similar battens are shown in later photographs above the bay windows and on the main east facade. This slightly unusual feature suggests contemporaneity.

The window into the hall is shown converted to a double door, although the window, to the closet on the right, remains as a full length sash, glazed nine over nine. Also, the second floor windows above the hall are clearly glazed two over two, although the other upper floor windows are still six over six.

2.6 The house, c 1875

A photograph of the house from the west (Figure 12) shows the growth across the bay and hall very well established but less around the verandah than in the previous photograph. It clearly dates from after the addition of the verandah. It shows the sunblind in the dining room centre window seen in the previous photograph (Figure 11) but now there is a similar sunblind in the first floor window above, Darwin's bedroom. On the basis of the extra growth, a date of c 1875 is suggested for this photograph.

2.7 The watercolours by Albert Goodwin, 1880

Two watercolours by Albert Goodwin, show the house two years before Darwin died. The view from the north-west is dated '80' (Figure 13) and shows some reduction in the growth around the bay and on the hall wall. There is growth on the verandah along the eaves, but little on the wall above it. The older trellis, which predated the construction of the verandah, shown surviving on the bay with the larger 18" grid, was apparently painted blue. The trellis with the smaller grid, post dating the construction of the verandah, is shown dark brown or black. It might or might not have been painted. The painting of trellis is not at all unusual in the Victorian period, contemporary watercolours of gardens often show green, blue, black and brown trellis. The use of two paint colours is consistent with the two major phases of trellis identified so far.

The view from the south-west (Figure 14) again shows the trellis at the north end of the garden front in strong contrast with the wall surface, suggesting it was painted dark brown or black. Blue is not used to pick out the trellis on the bay, but much of this part of the picture is obscured by the overhanging tree in the foreground.

2.8 The two views of the house by Alfred Parsons, August 1882, and two contemporary photographs

Two engravings, published in the Century Magazine in January 1883, after watercolours by Alfred Parsons dating from August 1882, show the house in the summer after Darwin's death on April 19.

The view from the east (Figure 15) shows the east front clearly well covered by this date. Ivy or creepers covered the whole of the gable wall of the service wing at the south end of the house and rose to the tops of the first floor windows on the main facade. The drawing does not detail any trellis but, at this scale, this is not a significant omission.

The view of the garden front from the north-west (Figure 16) shows the bay and the hall wall in some detail. From this, it is clear that the bulk of the growth around the bay had been cut down and that the diagonal laths had been removed.

This is confirmed in a photograph (Figure 17) which must date from the same year, although clearly not mid-summer. Members of the family appear sitting in the verandah viewed from the north-west. The detail of the trellis corresponds closely with that shown in the Parsons view (Figure 16). This photograph also clearly shows well established growth on the north wall of the drawing room and on the kitchen wall. In neither area was the ivy necessarily supported by trellis.

A second photograph (Figure 18) showing the house from the south-west is clearly contemporary. It has the same configuration of the trellis stripped of laths and growth around the bay.

This group of views and photographs from c 1882 is very useful for the reconstruction of the trellis. They reveal the fixing points for the framing battens on the bay. They also show the framing battens on the angles of the bay were approximately the same thickness as those around the windows. This indicates that the trellis was assembled *in-situ* not in a workshop as prefabricated panels. A reconstructed section through the framing battens at the angles of the bay is included in Figure 26. A reconstruction of the trellis arrangement, before the removal of the lattice from the bay, is illustrated in Figure 22 to Figure 25.

2.9 The watercolour by Julia Wedgwood, June 1886

A watercolour by Julia Wedgwood (Figure 19) inscribed 'DOWN JUNE 8 1886' shows the north end of the house and verandah viewed from the south-west.

There is little growth on the actual trellis above the verandah, it appears to concentrate on the eaves.

2.10 Down House School, photographed c 1909

A photograph of the house after its conversion to a school (Figure 20) and published in 1909, shows the east front of the house with growth in much the same areas as in the view of 1882 (Figure 15). However, the top of the gable wall at the south end has been cleared. At the north end, a climber is beginning to cover the wall of the New Study.

2.11 Down House Museum, photographed c 1930

A photograph taken after the conversion of the house to the Down House Museum (Figure 21), shows that the east front had changed very little since the school photograph of 1909 (Figure 20). The New Study wall had by now become almost covered with creeper. It also shows some trellis between the southern three ground floor windows of the main facade and above the window heads. The detailing of the trellis, especially the curved battens above the window heads suggests that it is contemporary with the trellis introduced on the garden front of the house after the construction of the verandah.

3 A summary of the development of the trellis at Down

3.1 The house before Darwin's arrival in 1842

The Johnson drawings and watercolours are the only views which show the house before Darwin arrived in September 1842. It suggests that the trellis and creepers shown in the later views of the house were Darwin's. His initial impressions of the house were that it was 'ugly, looks neither old nor new.'

3.2 Trellis applied to the dining room bay and west wall of the hall, possibly in the 1850s

On the basis of the pictorial evidence, the earliest trellis was probably that around the dining room bay window and along the west wall of the hall, shown in the earliest photograph of the house (Figure 5). The battens used to frame the trellis were apparently moulded on both the leading edges with a bead and quirk (Figure 26). The grid size appears to have been about 14". The later watercolour view by Goodwin (Figure 13) suggests that it was painted blue. It is shown in some detail in the photographs of the family around the centre dining room window (Figure 7) of Bessy sitting in the same window probably taken at the same time, c 1870 (Figure 8) and in the photograph of Henrietta in the southern dining room window (Figure 9). The photograph from the north-west (Figure 17) of the house after the foliage had been cut down, shows the spacing of the fixing nails or screws in the framing battens, at c 2' intervals,

3.3 Trellis applied to the upper floors of the bay and the drawing room extension, after 1858 and before 1872

The addition of the drawing room block on the north-west corner of the house in 1858 was hung with trellis with a large grid size of about 18" (Figure 5). The upper floors of the dining room bay were also hung with the same size lattice. The difference in the grid size suggest two phases of work. Although it is possible that both sizes date from the same phase, it seems more likely that the trellis added to the upper floors after the growth had become established at the lower level. The Goodwin watercolour of 1880 (Figure 13) shows the trellis on the upper part of the bay was also painted blue.

3.4 Replacement trellis applied to the drawing room extension and hall, after 1872

In 1872 the verandah was added and the trellis with the large grid shown on the drawing room extension in the earliest photograph (Figure 5) was taken down. Trellis panels were subsequently hung above the roof of the verandah with a smaller c 11" grid (Figure 11) but it seems these were never successfully covered with growth. The same size grid was used to replace the earlier trellis on the hall wall and, from later views (Figure 13, Figure 16 and Figure 17) on the north side of the projecting bay. Although it is not shown clearly in any of the photographs, it seems reasonable to suppose that the south wall of the bay was similarly hung with trellis.

The 11" grid trellis appears darker in the photographs than the earlier, apparently blue, trellis on the bay. This distinction is confirmed in the Goodwin watercolour of 1880 (Figure 13). The newer trellis was therefore probably painted black or brown. This was possibly intended to match the use of a dark paint, most probably brown or wood graining on the windows to the drawing room. Later, by 1880, from the Goodwin watercolours (Figure 13 and Figure 14) and the Wedgwood watercolour (Figure 19) it seems all the window sashes were painted brown or woodgrained.

One of the distinguishing features of the post-1872, 11" trellis appears to be the use of curved battens shaped to fit the segmental heads of the windows. They do not appear in the early trellis on the bay although, some were added there by 1882 (Figure 17). Curving battens were also used on the east front (Figure 20 and Figure 21) in the trellis around the centre three windows of the main facade up to the level of the first floor window sills. The grid size also appears to be c 11" suggesting that this too was contemporary with the post 1872 trellis above the verandah. None of the views of the west front show this phase of trellis in any detail. However, from the 1930 photograph of the east front (Figure 21) it appears that the framing battens were simply rectangular in section, not moulded. This is especially evident in the curved battens above the window heads.

3.5 The cutting down of the growth around the bay and alterations to the trellis, c 1882

The view of the bay by Alfred Parsons from August 1882 (Figure 16) and the apparently contemporary photographs (Figure 17 and Figure 18) clearly show the bulk of the growth around the bay had been cut down. The framing battens around the bay were left *in-situ* but the lattice had been removed.

4 The importance of the trellis at Down

Darwin probably started growing the ivy and creepers around the house in the 1840s or 1850s. By 1880, when Albert Goodwin painted his watercolour views (Figure 13 and Figure 14) the growth had peaked. Two years later, Darwin had died and the foliage around the bay was cut down.

The garden and the immediate surroundings became Darwin's primary study area for both observation and experimentation. The wall trellises and climbers around the house were clearly a significant feature in this environment. During his residency, the house became overrun with foliage, reflecting both his dislike of the appearance of the house, which he found 'ugly' and his fascination with the living world.

It attracted comment from visitors; Dr Charles V Ridley wrote of a visit in 1871 '... A noticeable feature is a bow window extending through three storeys and covered with trellis and creepers..'³ and Professor Haeckel of Jena wrote '....Darwin's pleasant country house, clad in a vesture of ivy'⁴ The ivy covered trellis therefore featured significantly in the visitor's experience of Down in Darwin's day.

The publication of the Parsons' views in the *Century Magazine* in January 1883, presented the public with an image of Darwin's quiet rural seclusion, in a comfortable ivy covered retreat.

5 Recommendations for the restoration of the trellis

It therefore seems appropriate to restore the trellis to its appearance in the photographs of the 1870s and the Goodwin watercolours of 1880. This is also in accordance with the decision to restore the principal rooms to the later years of Darwin's life. Its recreation will aid the visitor of today to appreciate the quality of life at Down in the Darwin era.

³ Holder 1891, p 238

⁴ Holder, 1891 p 131

However, the restoration of the trellis has implications for the planned maintenance of the stucco, especially for access and the painting of the exterior. These need to be considered and a maintenance programme devised accordingly.

The Darwins, from the photographic evidence, did not maintain the trellis to a very high standard. Frequent maintenance, especially repainting, is not possible if the ivy and creepers are allowed to grow. Allowance should therefore be made for the inevitable deterioration which will occur. This, after all, is perhaps an important element in attempting to recreate the atmosphere of a family home.

The trellis on the walls at Down in the 1870s appears to belong to two phases, if the overall pattern of battens and latticework is recreated, then the original colours should be adopted, blue for the earlier work, brown or black for the later work. The difference in the two phases could be further emphasised by the use of the moulded battens for the earlier work, plain rectangular section for the later.

If the trellis is to be restored, then for consistency, the sunblinds on the ground and first floor of the bay should also be restored.

Bibliography and acknowledgments

In writing this report, I have discussed details of the construction of the trellis with various colleagues in English Heritage, principally John Adams, Nick Biddle, Helen Hughes, Sarita Robson, Chris Sumner and Andrew Tiffin. Randall Keynes and Clive Wainwright also made some helpful comments on a visit to Down. Nick Gill at the Darwin Archive, Cambridge University, also kindly discussed constructional details on the telephone and supplied a copy of a particularly useful photograph at short notice. The bulk of the photographs were taken from the album compiled by Keystone, Historic Building Consultants for the main Down House project.

The following is a select bibliography only. Randall Keynes has listed the major sources for the garden in the report cited below.

Handy D, *Handy Book of the Flower Garden*, 1868

Holder C F, *Charles Darwin, His Life and Work*, 1891

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Loudon J C, *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening*, 1835

Figure 1 The house viewed from the north c 1830, a pencil drawing probably by Lt. Col. Johnson, showing the house before the alterations by Cresy c 1835 (Down House Museum Collection)

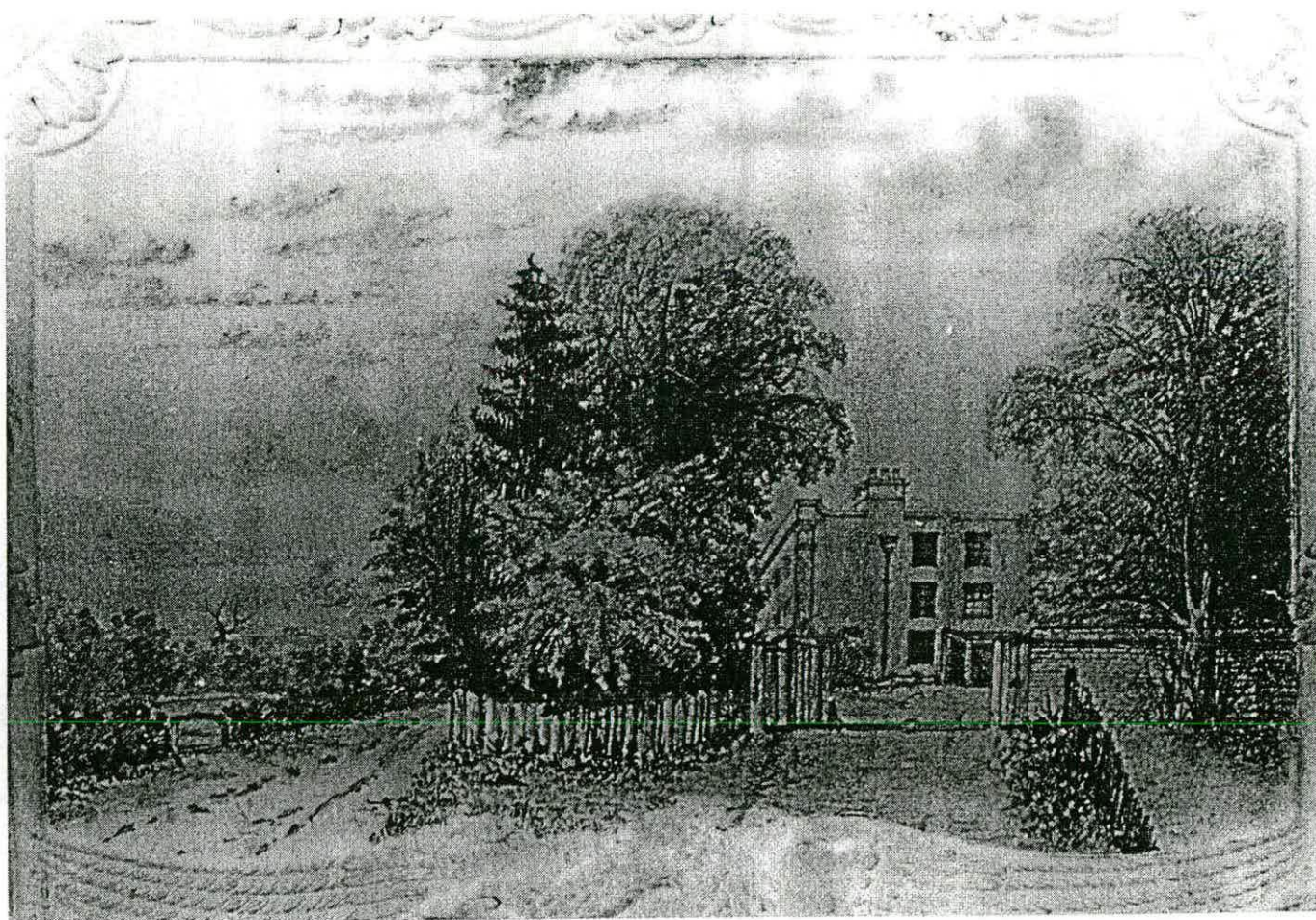


Figure 2 The house viewed from the east c 1835 by the same hand (Down House Museum Collection)

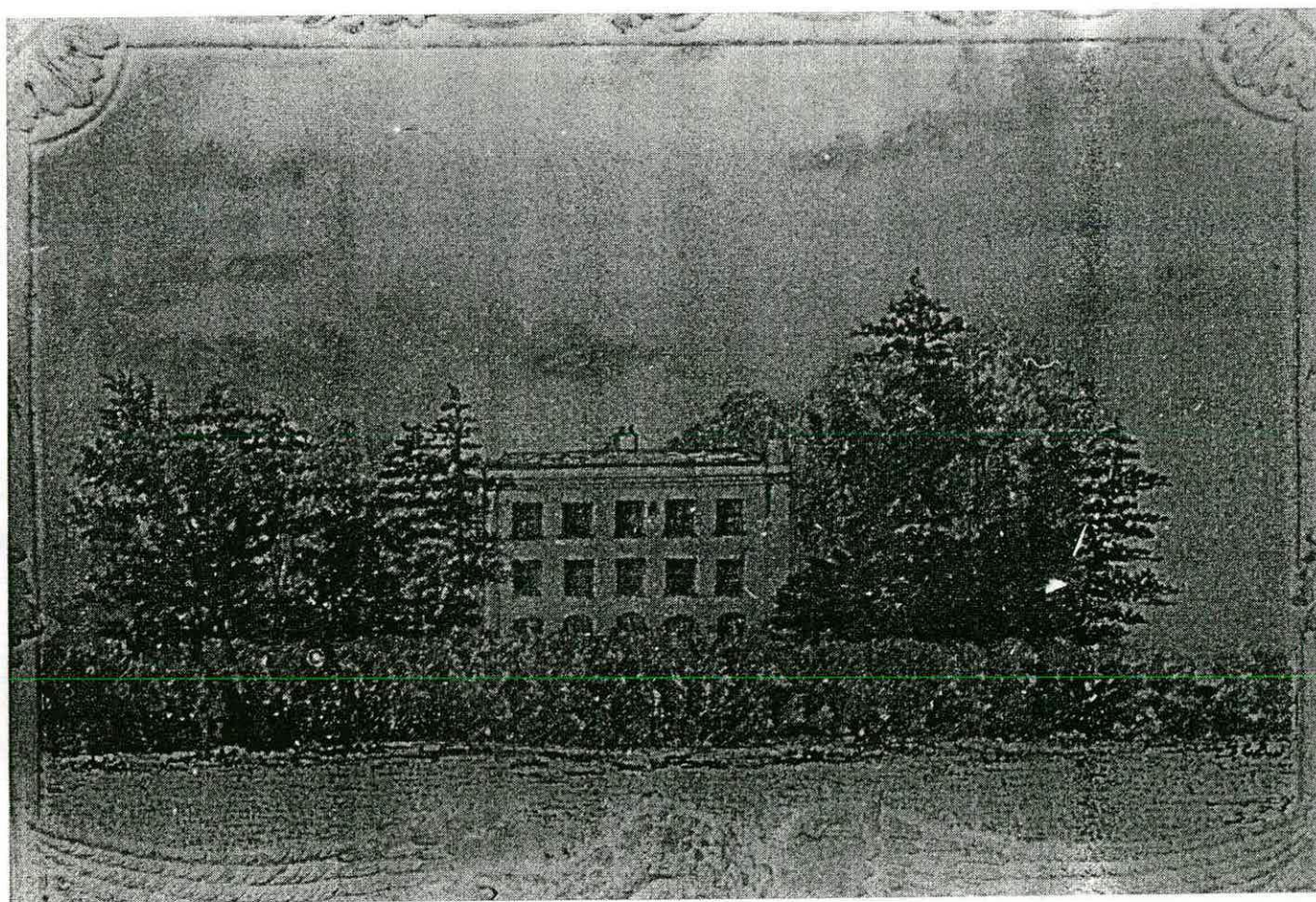


Figure 3 A watercolour of the house viewed from the east c 1830 probably by Johnson, very similar to Figure 1 (Down House Museum Collection)



Figure 4 Darwin's daughter Henrietta sitting in the centre bay window of the drawing room, c 1860 (CUL DAR 219.12.10)

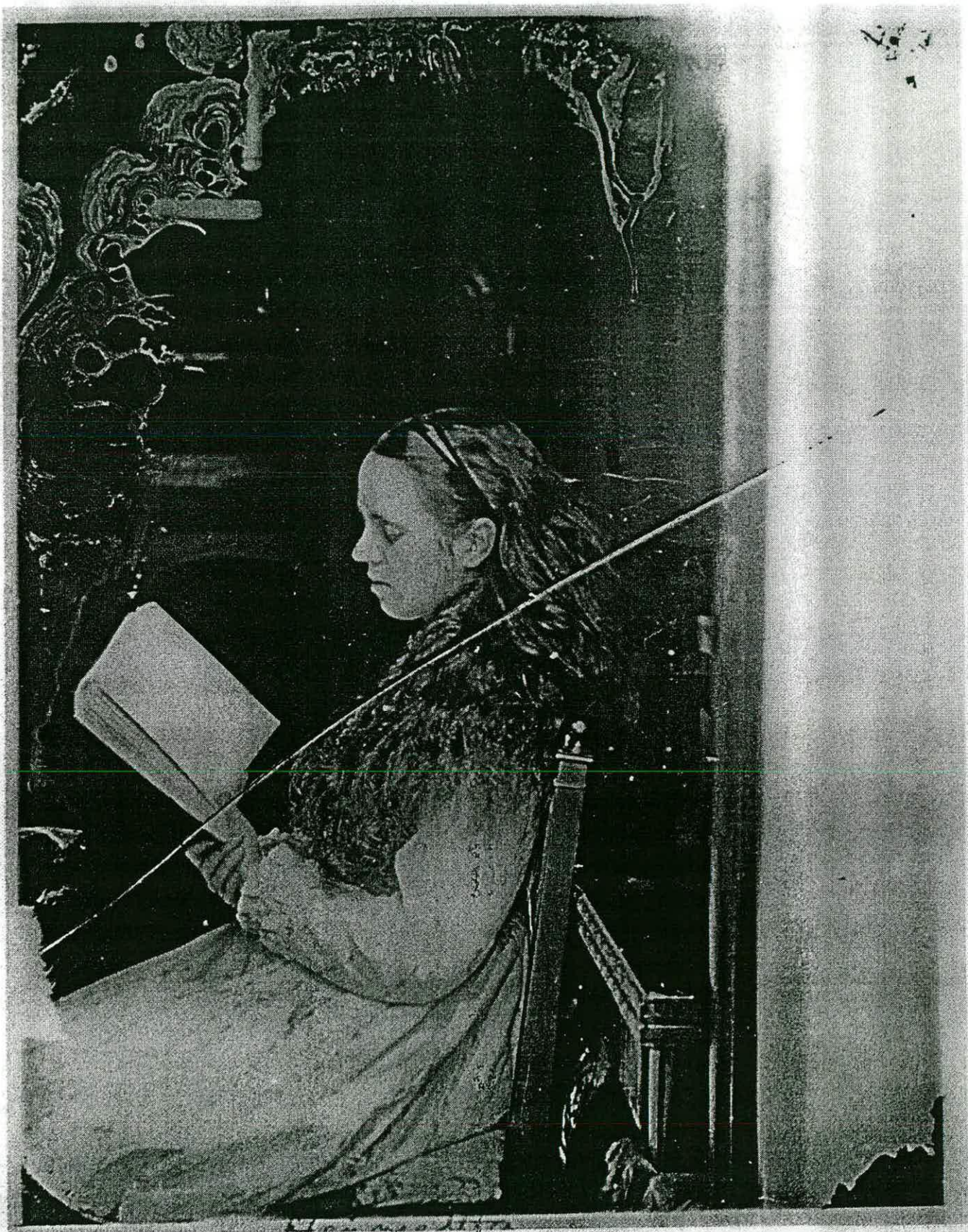


Figure 6 A child's watercolour view of the garden front of the house, probably c 1865
(Down House Museum Collection)

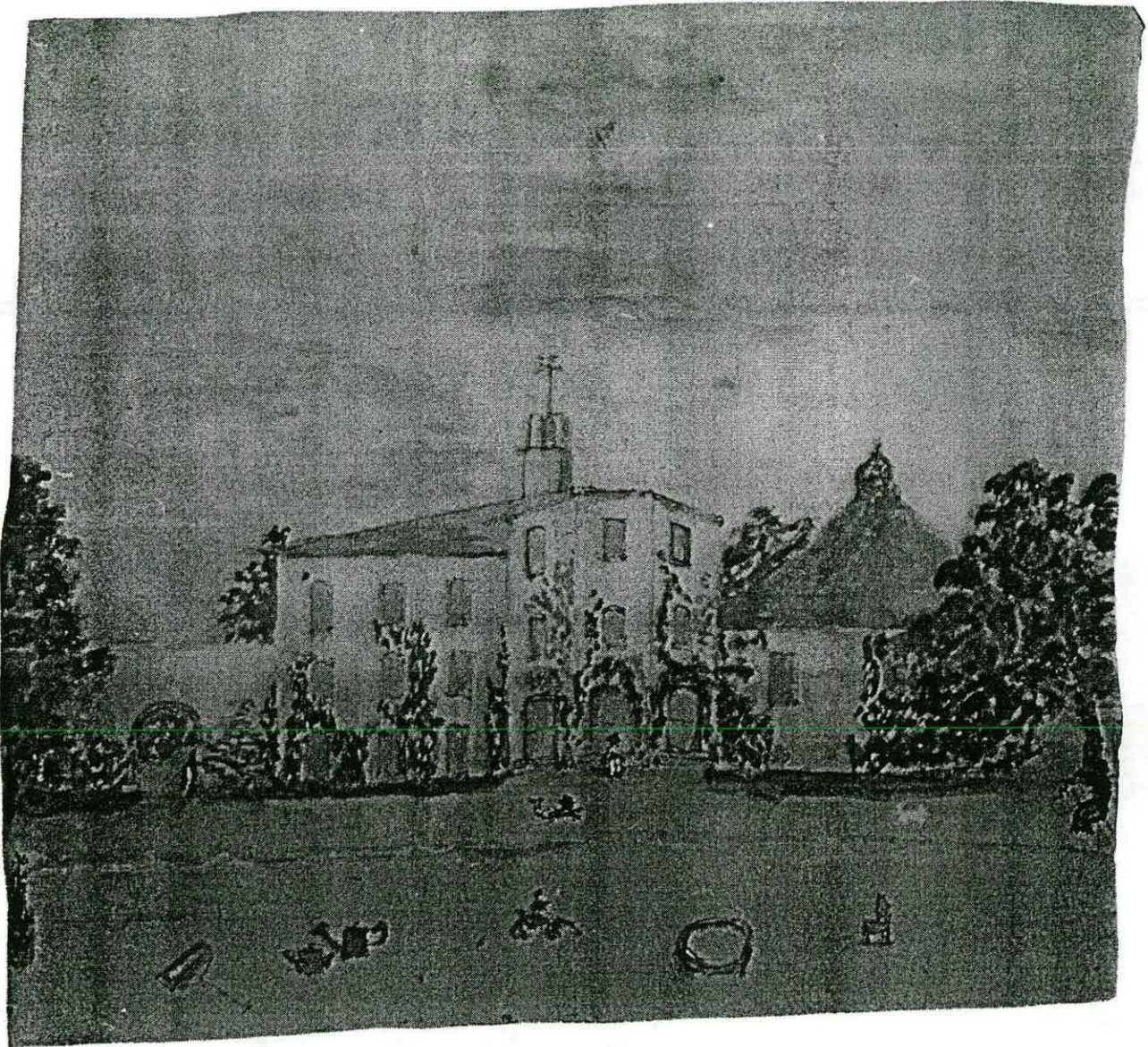


Figure 5 Members of the Darwin family in the garden, with the house in the background, before the construction of the verandah, c 1860 (CUL DAR 225:17, 18 or 19)

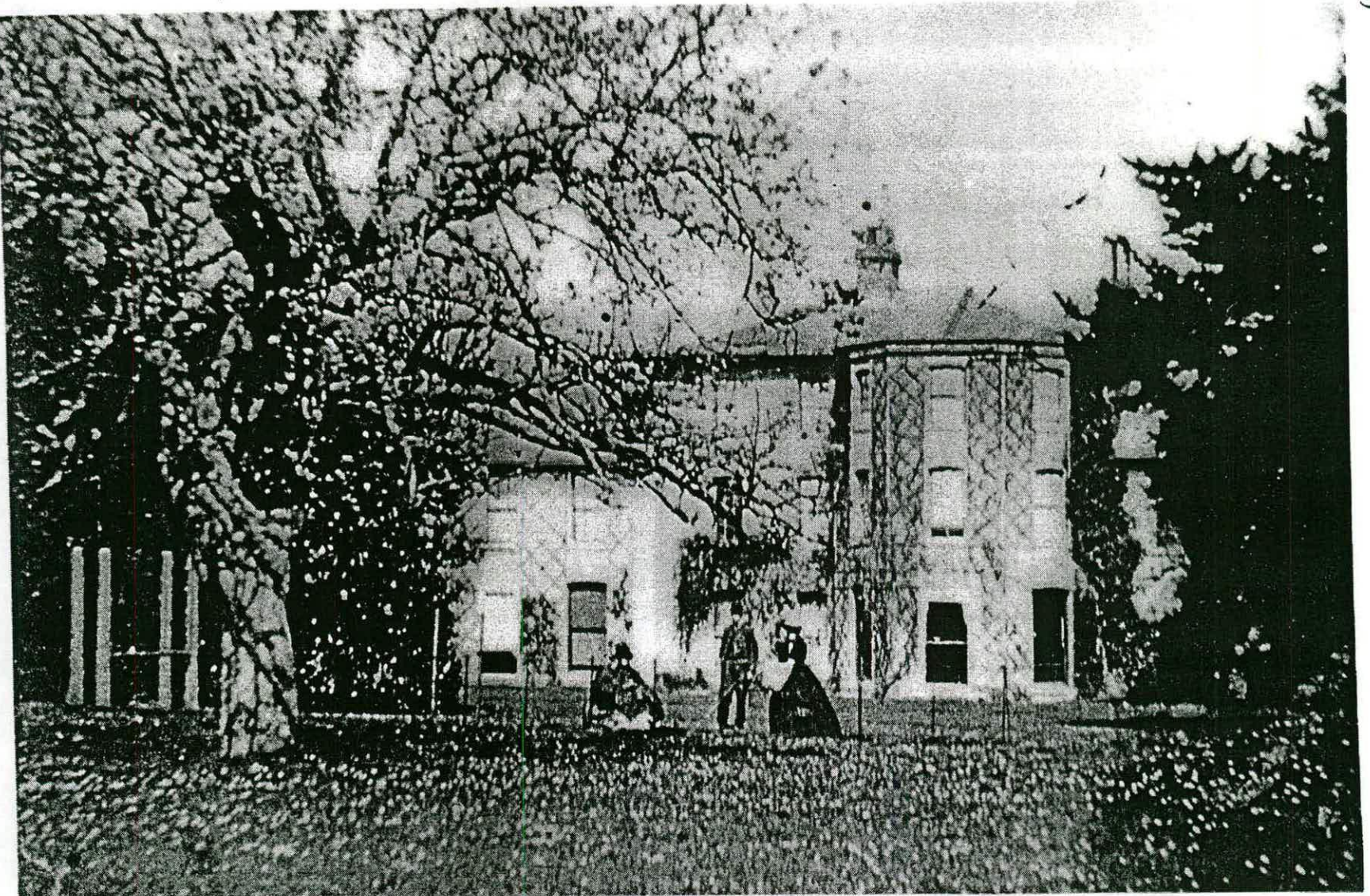


Figure 7 Darwin's family around the centre window in the Dining Room c 1865 (CUL DAR 219.12:9 and alternative neg. 225/photo 156)



Figure 8 A photograph inscribed 'Bessy Taken by LD' showing Darwin's daughter Elizabeth in the centre window of the dining room, contemporary with Figure 7, therefore c 1865 (CUL DAR 219.12:11)



Figure 9 A photograph of 'Etty,' Darwin's daughter Henrietta sitting in the southern dining room window, c 1865 (CUL DAR 225:73)

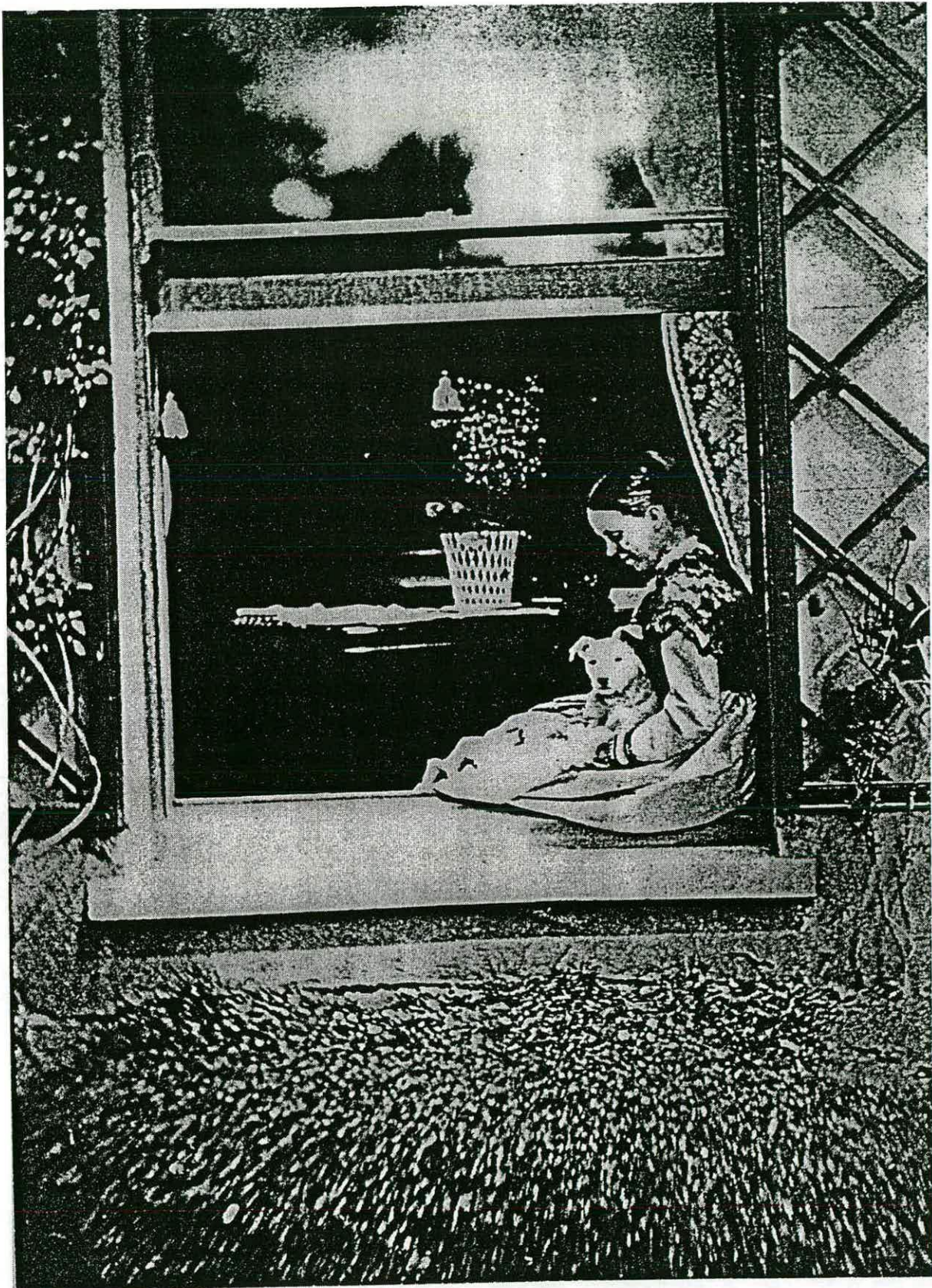


Figure 10 Charles Darwin on his horse Tommy, probably taken c 1868 (CUL DAR 225/photo 116)



Figure 11 A photograph of the house and garden with some growth of climbers above and inside the verandah, therefore c 1873 (CUL DAR 219.12:172 or 173)



Figure 12 A photograph of the house from the garden probably c 1875, since it shows more developed growth around the bay than in Figure 11 (CUL DAR 225/photo 27)



Figure 13 A watercolour of the house viewed from the north-west by Goodwin dated 1880 (Down Museum Collection 88202056)



Figure 14 A watercolour of the garden front viewed from the south-west by A Goodwin not dated but apparently a companion to Figure 13, therefore probably 1880 (Down Museum Collection 88202055)

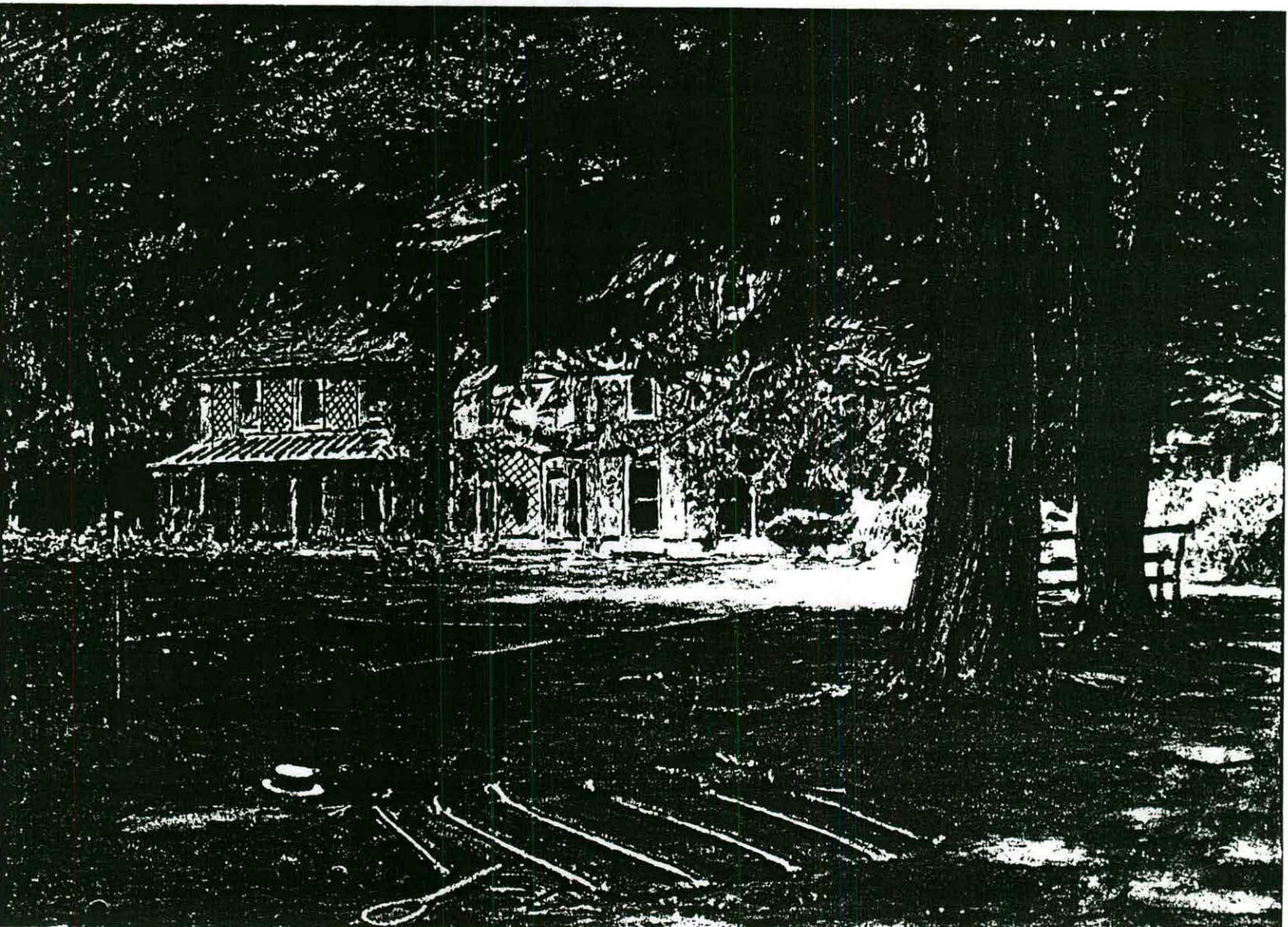


Figure 15 Down House from the east by Alfred Parsons, dated 1882, published in the Century magazine in January 1883.

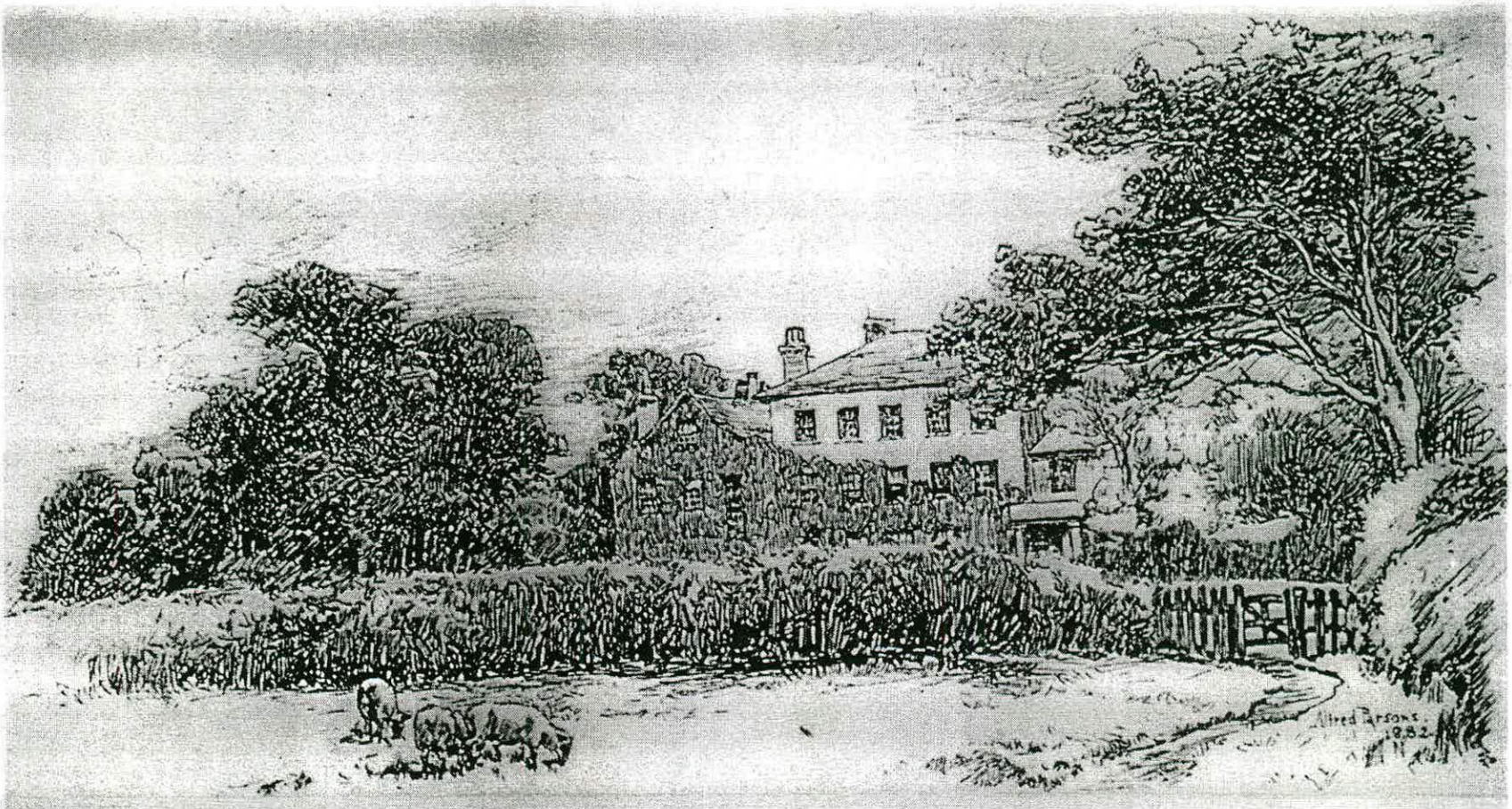


Figure 16 Engraving, inscribed 'Alfred Parsons, Down Kent Aug 1882,' showing the garden front from the north-west, published in the Century Magazine in January 1883.

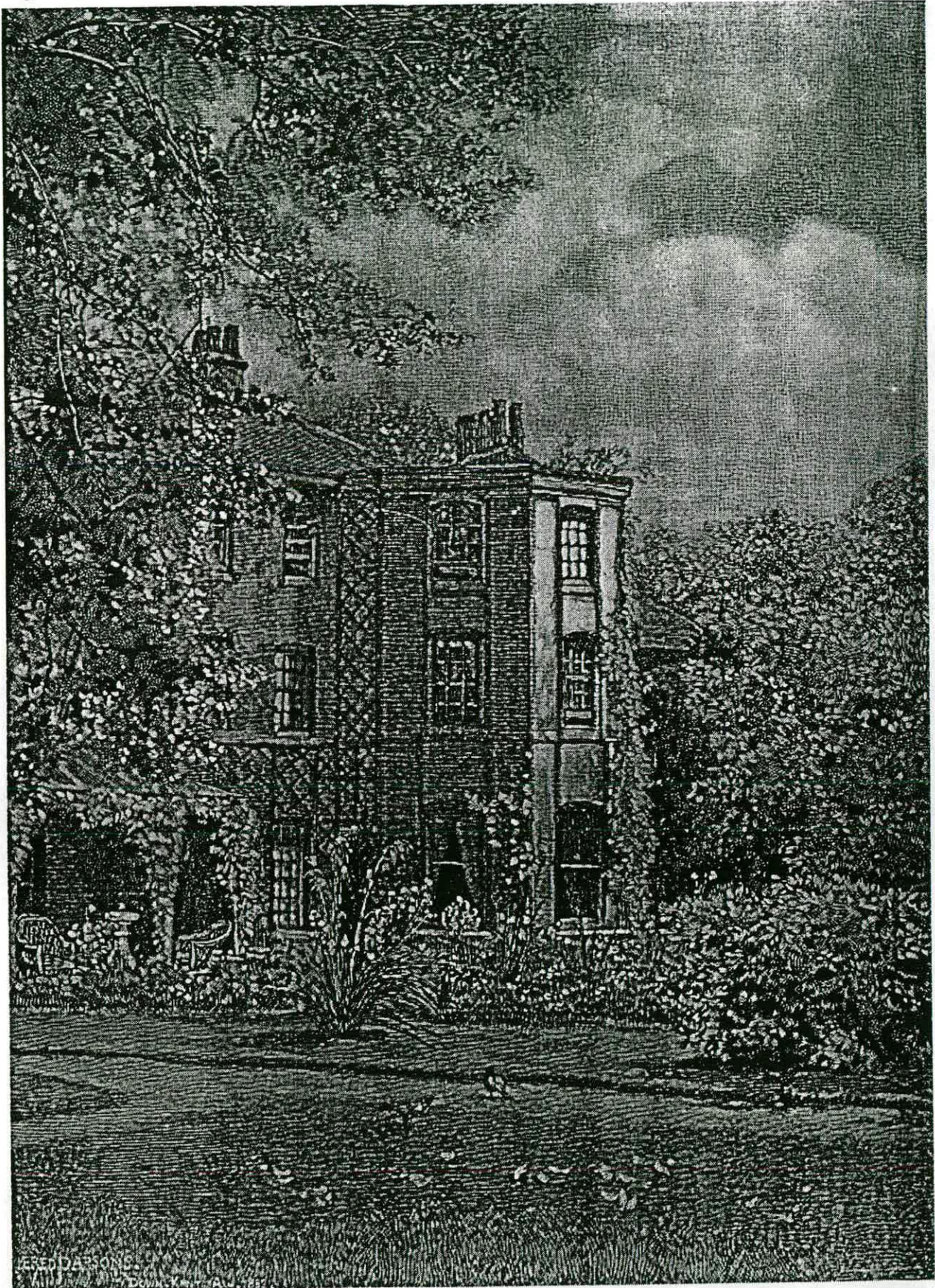


Figure 17 A photograph of the garden front viewed from the north-west, c 1882 (CUL DAR 225/photo 29a)



Figure 18 A photograph of the garden front viewed from the south-west, c 1882
(Down House Museum Collection)



Figure 19 A watercolour by J Wedgwood inscribed 'Down June 8 1886' (Down House Museum Collection)

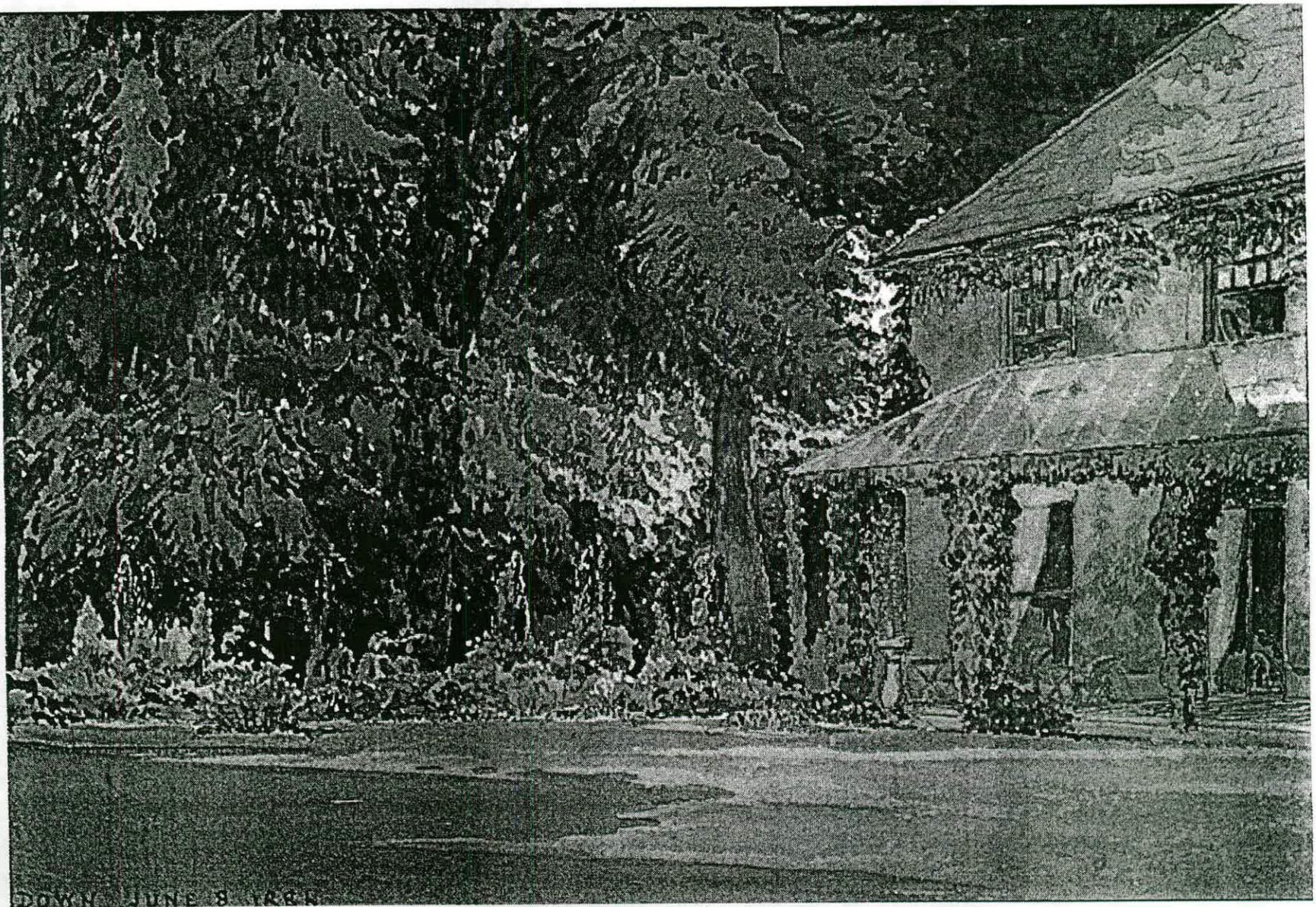


Figure 20 A photograph of the east front of the house reproduced in *Darwin, The Bookman*, February 1909 (CUL DAR 233.1:7)



Figure 21 A photograph of the east front of the house after its conversion to a museum, c 1930 (CUL DAR 233.1:6)



Figure 22 A sketch reconstruction drawing of the trellis on the garden front at Down as it might have appeared c 1880

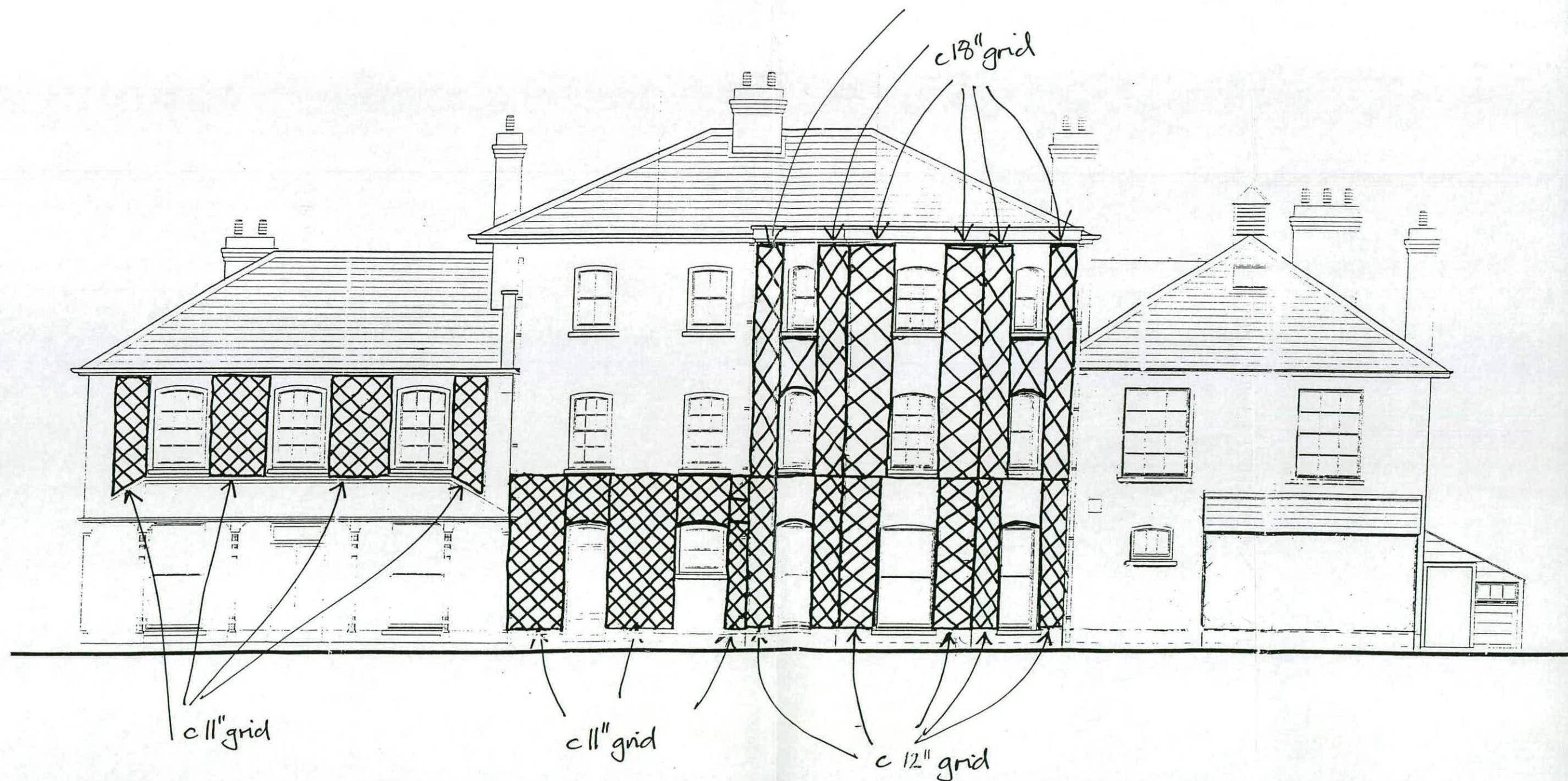


Figure 23 A sketch reconstruction drawing of the trellis on the north side of the bay at Down as it might have appeared c 1880

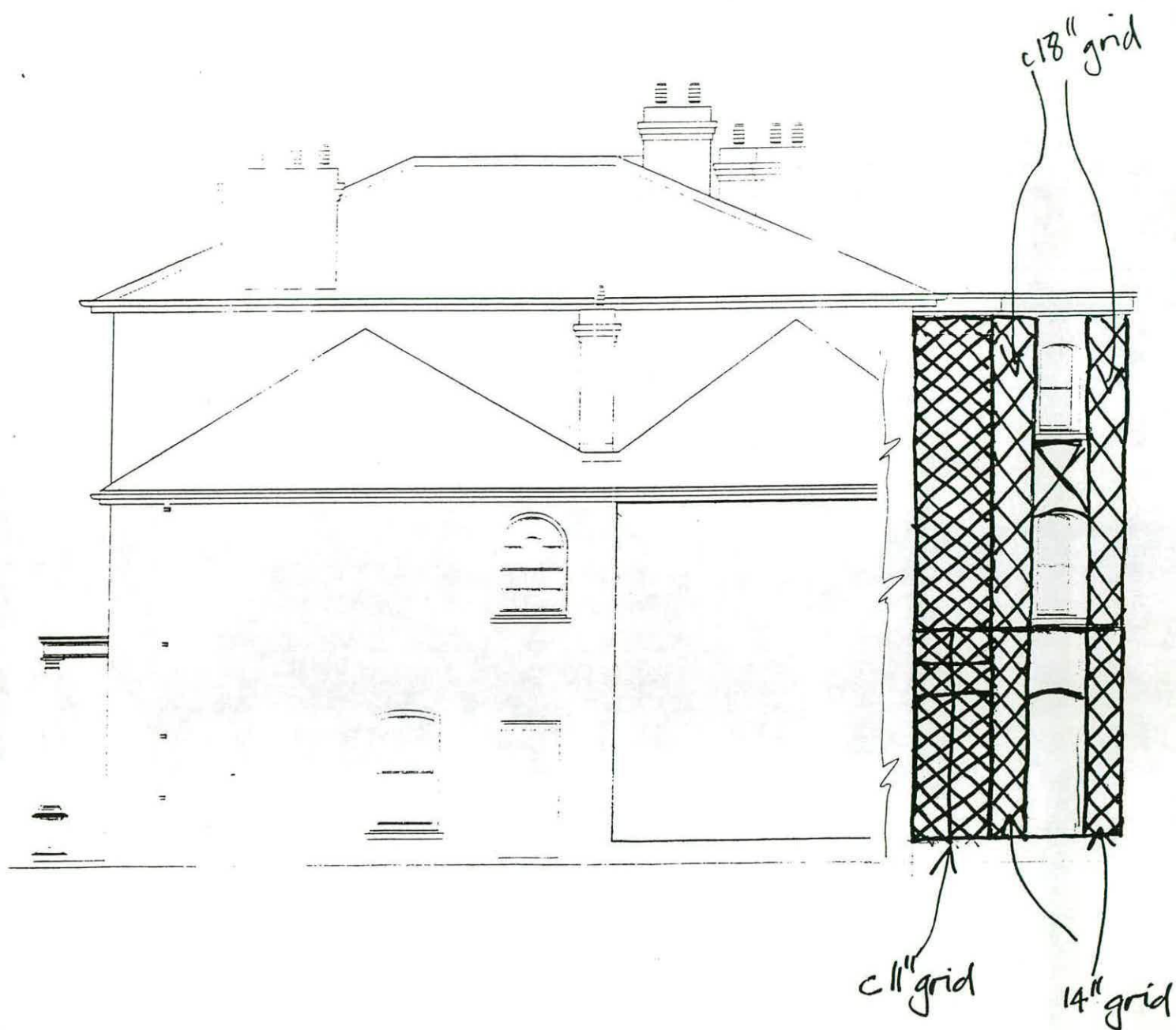


Figure 24 A sketch reconstruction drawing of the trellis on the south side of the bay at Down as it might have appeared c 1880

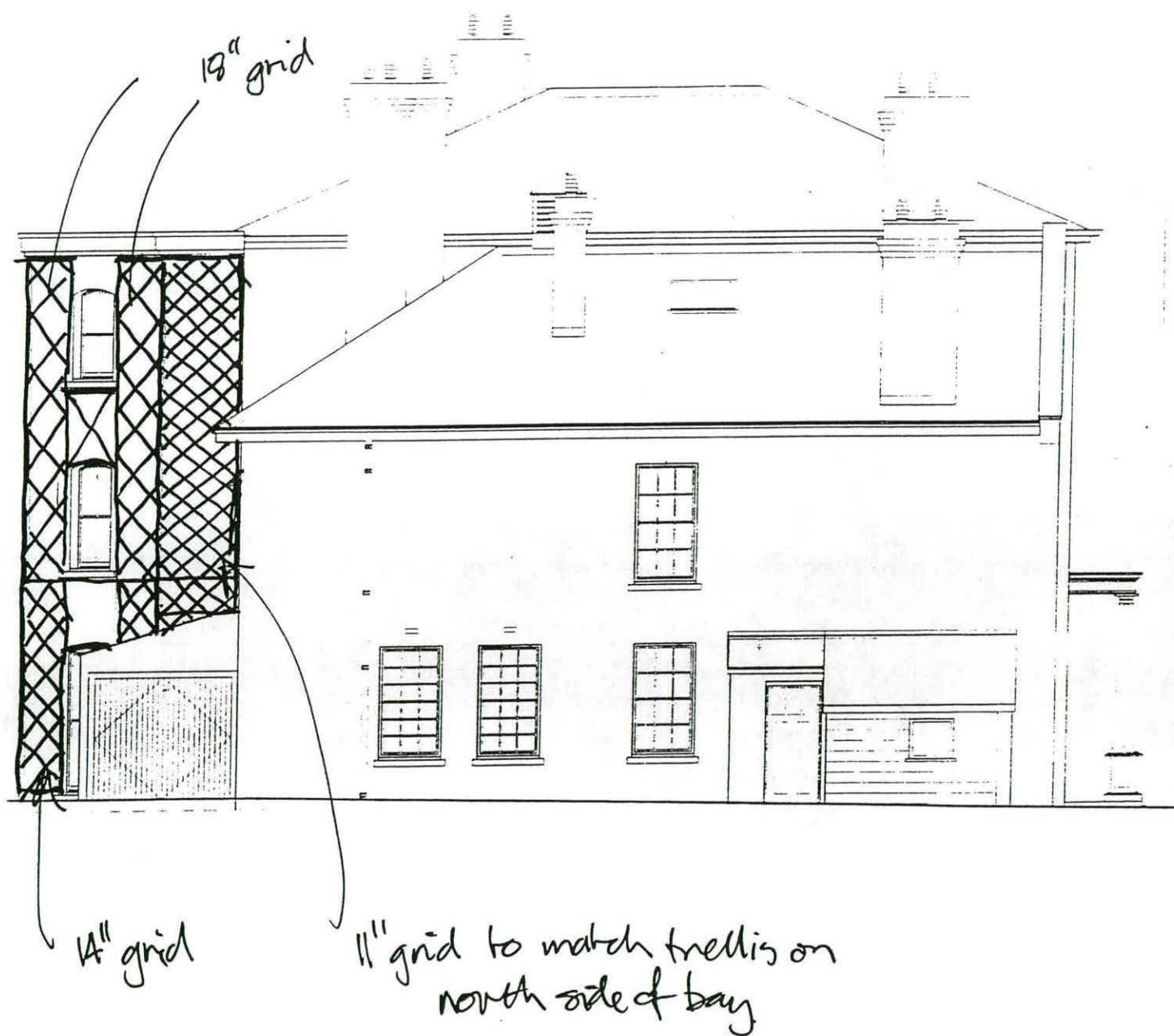


Figure 25 A sketch reconstruction drawing of the trellis on the east front at Down as it might have appeared c 1880

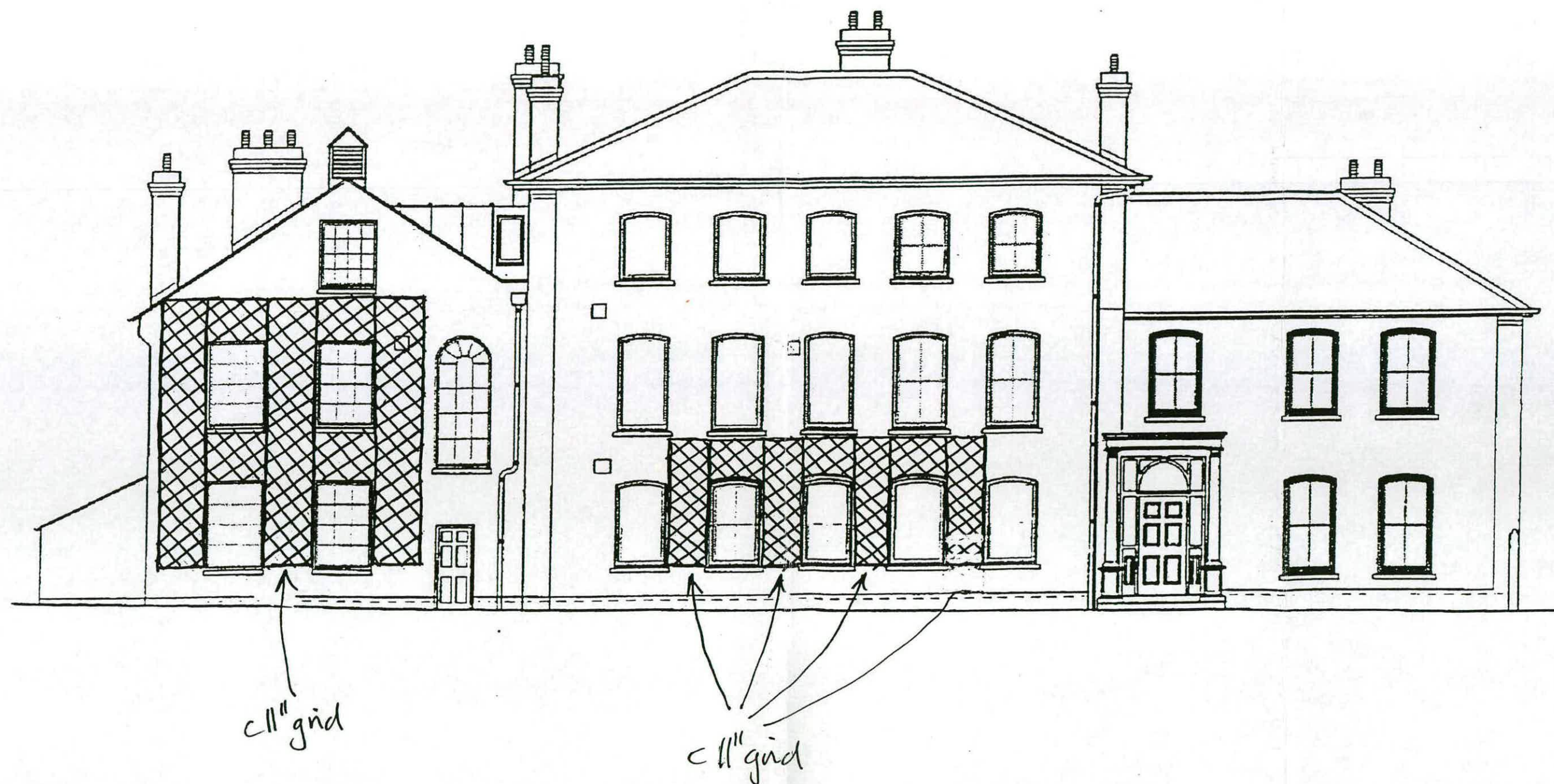
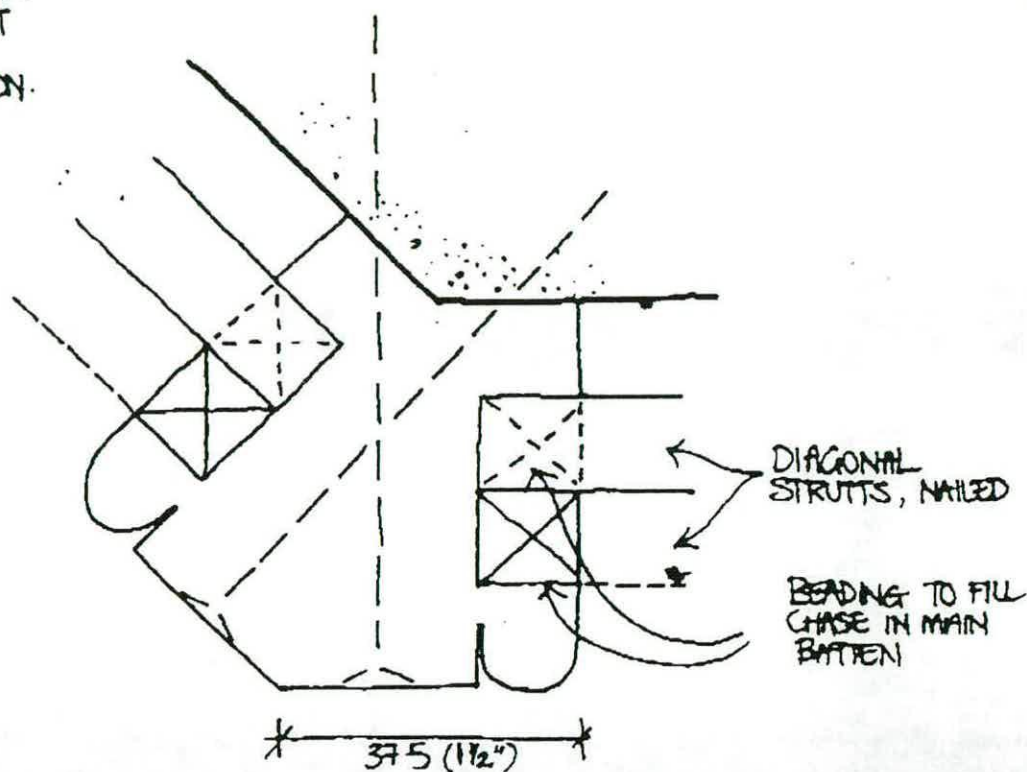


Figure 26 A reconstruction of the moulding profile used to frame the trellis on the bay, shown in the photographs from c 1865

SECTION A.

ANGLED BATTEN AT
BAY WINDOW,
GARDEN ELEVATION.
(EARLY PHASE).



SECTION B

TYPICAL MOULDED
BATTEN.
GARDEN ELEVATION
(EARLY PHASE).

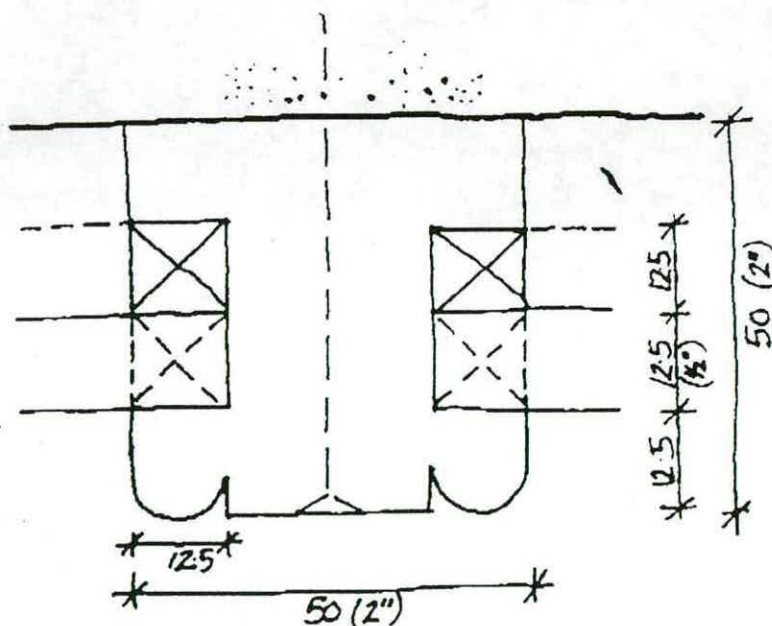


Figure 27 A reconstruction of the lattice shown in the family photograph, Figure 7.

