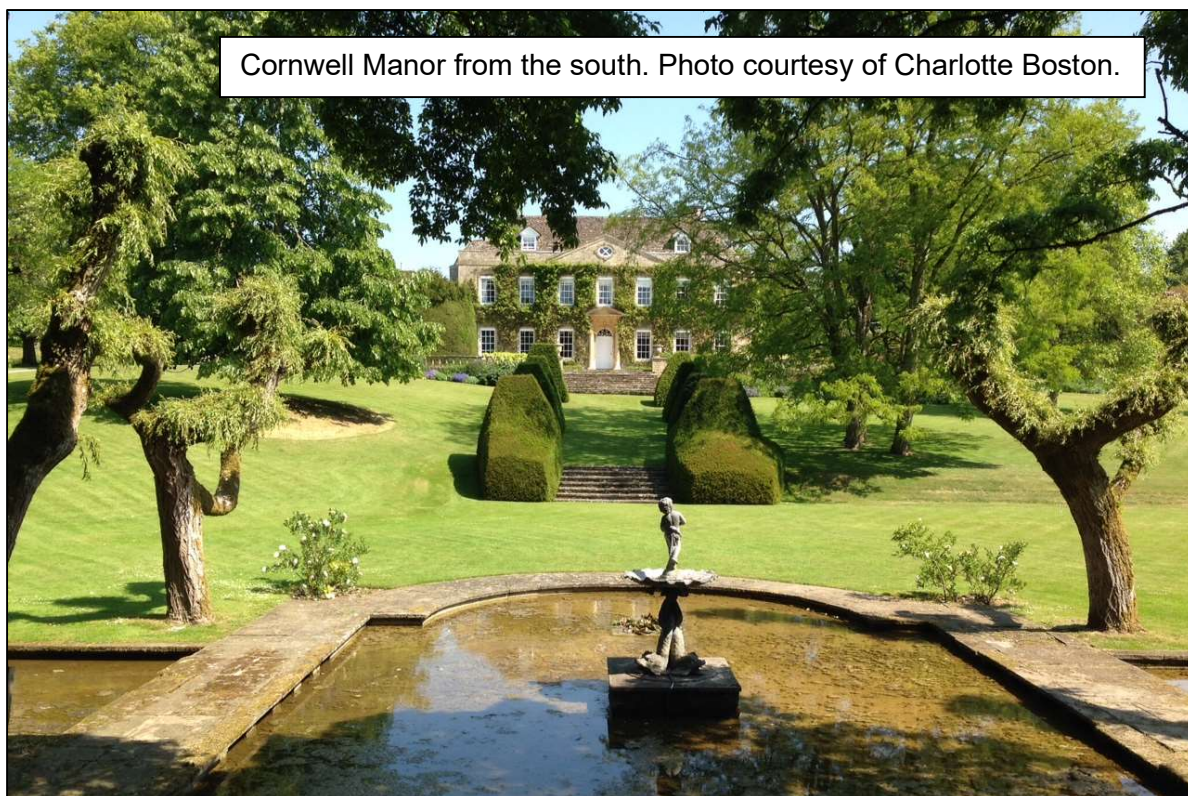




VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

Cornwell

Introduction: Landscape, Settlement, and Buildings



Cornwell Manor from the south. Photo courtesy of Charlotte Boston.

Cornwell is a small and secluded rural parish c.2½ miles west of Chipping Norton, lying in the Cotswold hills and bordering Gloucestershire (and formerly Worcestershire) on the south-west.¹ By 1700 (and still in 2023) much of the parish belonged to a single estate, which encompassed the picturesque Cornwell Manor and its gardens and the tiny adjoining village, all set beside a stream within a valley. The village itself was remodelled ‘more or less as a stage set’ by the celebrated architect Clough Williams-Ellis in the 1930s.² Resident lords included several generations of the Penyston family, although rectors often lived elsewhere until a new rectory house was built in 1877. Most inhabitants worked in agriculture or service, either directly or indirectly for the estate, while the parish also had a long-lived watermill, a 17th- to 19th-century roadside inn, and (briefly) a village school and a shop.

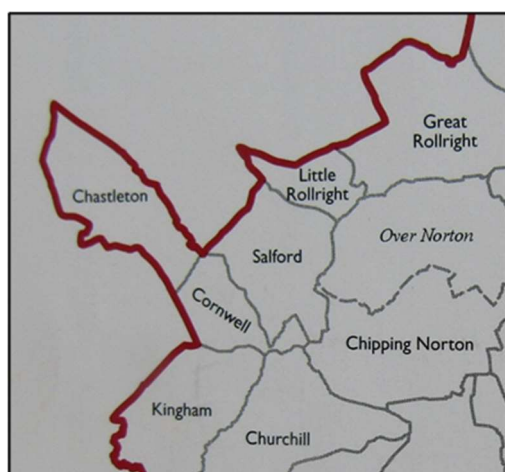
¹ This account was written in 2022--3.

² Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 282.

LANDSCAPE, SETTLEMENT, AND BUILDINGS

Parish Boundaries

Cornwell's parish boundaries were perhaps only finally defined in the 13th century, early estates in Cornwell, Chastleton, and Salford being apparently much more intermixed, and some manorial overlaps continuing beyond the Middle Ages.³ The 19th-century parish (unaltered in 2023) covered only 849 a. (343 ha),⁴ and forms a compact block with the village almost central, save for a south-eastern projection around Cornwell Hill Farm which probably reflects a medieval division of common pasture between Cornwell, Salford, and Chipping Norton.⁵ The north-western boundary with Chastleton follows an ancient ridgeway (which elsewhere forms the county boundary), while the eastern boundary with Salford follows field divisions and a section of Salford brook. The long southern boundary with Chipping Norton, Churchill, and Kingham mainly follows streams, before passing through fields uphill to Kingham Hill. From there the boundary (described in 718 and 979) returns to the ridgeway along a presumably ancient lane heading north from Kingham village. That stretch also forms the county boundary, neighbouring Daylesford having been transferred from Worcestershire to Gloucestershire in 1931, and absorbed into Adlestrop parish in 1935.⁶



The parish of Cornwell c.1850.
Source: *Oxon. Atlas*.

³ Below, landownership (Salford manor estate; other estates); above, vol. overview (landownership). For title purposes the remaining estate outliers (including Salford manor's holdings in Cornwell) seem to have become fully absorbed into their surrounding parishes from an early date.

⁴ *OS Area Bk* (1881); estimated earlier at 820 a. (*Census*, 1831–71). For boundaries, *OS Maps* 6", *Oxon.* XIII and XIV (1885 edn); 1:25,000, sheet 45 (2005 edn).

⁵ *VCH Oxon.* XXI (forthcoming).

⁶ Sawyer S.84; S.1340; G.B. Grundy, *Saxon Charters and Field Names of Gloucestershire* (1936), 102–6; Youngs, *Admin. Units*, II, 476.

Landscape

The parish (whose Anglo-Saxon place name denotes a spring visited by cranes)⁷ occupies hilly ground, descending from the north-western ridgeway at 219 m. into the valley of Salford brook (122 m.), then rising again to Cornwell Hill (142 m.) in the east. The highest land in the west is formed from Jurassic Chipping Norton limestone, which was long quarried for wall stones and roadstone. Springs break out towards the centre of the parish, where the porous limestone meets mudstones and siltstones of the Charmouth, Dyrham, and Whitby formations,⁸ and where a short, steep-sided valley known as ‘Cumba’ in the 13th century (from Old English *cumb* or ‘valley’)⁹ contains both the village (153 m.) and the spring-fed Cornwell brook, known as Combe brook in 1614.¹⁰ Rising in the parish, that flows south and east through a series of probably medieval fishponds and past the site of a watermill, meeting Salford brook (a tributary of the river Evenlode) near Swailsford Bridge, where a second tributary stream flows in from the east, forming the southern parish boundary.¹¹ Springs provided Cornwell’s domestic water supply until the arrival of mains water in 2022, the spring water being piped from 1939.¹² Enclosure came early (in 1669), replacing the earlier landscape of open fields, meadows, and commons, while woodland seems to have always been relatively scarce.¹³

Communications

The prehistoric ridgeway marking Cornwell’s north-west boundary forms part of a long-established route between Stow-on-the-Wold (Glos.) and Banbury.¹⁴ In 1755 it was turnpiked as far north as its junction with the Worcester–London road (just over the parish boundary in Salford), and it remained a main road (the modern A436) after it was disturnpiked in 1877.¹⁵ A surviving branch road running south-eastwards towards Kingham (and forming a stretch of parish boundary) was possibly the Kingham Way mentioned c.1210,¹⁶ while a near-parallel branch running to Cornwell village formerly continued north-westwards past Chastleton

⁷ V. Watts (ed.), *Cambridge Dict. of English Place-Names* (2004), 158; cf. *PN Oxon.* II, 346.

⁸ OS Maps 1:25000, sheets 45 and 191 (2005 and 2015 edns); Geol. Surv. Map 1:50000 (solid and drift), sheet 218 (2007 edn). For quarrying, below, econ. hist. (trades).

⁹ *Oseney Cart.* IV, p. 333; *PN Oxon.* II, 346.

¹⁰ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 102; *PN Oxon.* II, 346.

¹¹ Below, econ. hist. (agric. landscape; milling).

¹² *Country Life*, 17 May 1941, 435; info. from Joy Timms.

¹³ Below, econ. hist. (agric. landscape).

¹⁴ Above, vol. overview (communications); *VCH Glos.* VI, 8; *VCH Oxon.* XXI (forthcoming).

¹⁵ Glos. and Warws. Roads Act, 28 Geo. II, c. 47; Annual Turnpike Acts Continuance Act, 1871, 34 & 35 Vic. c. 115; *Oxon. Atlas*, 102–3.

¹⁶ *Oseney Cart.* IV, p. 333.

barrow, and may also be early.¹⁷ A separate west-east road (also linking with the ridgeway) heads past the village towards Enstone and Woodstock, and was called a royal way (*regiam viam*) in 1549 when a parishioner was required to cart stones for its repair.¹⁸ In 1614 that was known as Woodstock Way, and in 1823 as the Old London Road,¹⁹ and by 1671 it had attracted a roadside inn in Cornwell.²⁰ Further on it crosses Salford brook over Swailsford Bridge (so called by 1549),²¹ whose upkeep was supported with bequests from Chipping Norton townspeople by the 1530s, underscoring the route's significance.²² The bridge presumably replaced a much older ford,²³ and was rebuilt in 1767.²⁴



The pattern of roads around Cornwell, showing principally the former turnpike road from Worcester to London via Salford and Chipping Norton and the ancient ridgeway route from Stow to Banbury which crosses it on Salford hill. The road passing Cornwell village to its south was the Old London Road crossing Salford brook at Swailsford Bridge. Source: Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767).

Footpaths to Chipping Norton and Salford were mentioned in 1614,²⁵ and at enclosure in 1669 the lord was granted a royal licence to enclose three footpaths and a highway and to lay out others 'as convenient'.²⁶ In 1682 the rector nevertheless complained that a church way recently established by a Chancery decree had been 'quite walled up', causing villagers to trespass through his yard whenever they came to church.²⁷ A lane (now

¹⁷ Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797). The narrow stretch to Cornwell is now metalled, but the stretch past Chastleton barrow survives only as a footpath.

¹⁸ TNA, SC 2/197/21.

¹⁹ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 102; Bryant, *Oxon. Map* (1824); cf. *Oxf. Jnl*, 2 June 1827.

²⁰ Below (settlement); econ. hist. (trades).

²¹ TNA, SC 2/197/21 ('Swayllysforde brige').

²² OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 178.46; 178.131; 178.140; 179.3, all calling it 'Cornwell bridge'.

²³ Etymology uncertain, but presumably incorporating Old English *ford*: *PN Oxon.* II, 344.

²⁴ Date carved into keystone: HER, PRN 1703–4.

²⁵ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 102 ('way that leadeth from Cornwell to Chipping Norton', 'way that leadeth from Cornwell to Salford'). Cf. Salford estate map, 1771, in private possession.

²⁶ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1670, 53.

²⁷ *Bp Fell and Nonconf.* 13.

metalled) heading north from Swailsford Bridge to Salford and the Worcester–London road was a green lane by 1770,²⁸ and was mapped in 1797 along with the narrow metalled track which still runs north from Cornwell past Park Farm.²⁹ Letters were delivered through Chipping Norton by the 1840s,³⁰ but Cornwell had no post office, resident carriers, or bus services.

Population

In 1086 the manor had seven recorded tenants (perhaps each representing a household), and by 1279 there were at least 11 households, with probably one or two more on an estate attached to Alan of Crawley's Salford manor.³¹ The number of taxpayers fell from 16 in 1306 to 12 in 1316 and only nine in 1327, perhaps reflecting declining prosperity rather than population.³² Only 21 people aged 14 or over paid poll tax in 1377, however, almost certainly reflecting population decline through mid 14th-century plagues;³³ and in 1524 there were only five listed taxpayers, falling to four in 1577.³⁴

In 1642 the obligatory protestation oath was sworn by 23 men aged 18 or over (suggesting an adult population of over 40),³⁵ and eight householders were assessed for hearth tax in 1662.³⁶ Only 30 adults were noted in 1676,³⁷ although estimates of 15 families in 1738 and 15–16 houses in 1768 suggest moderate growth in the century before 1801,³⁸ when 87 people occupied 18 houses. From 1811 to 1881 numbers fluctuated between 93 and 113 (in up to 24 houses), but agricultural depression contributed to a sharp decline to 67 people (in 19 houses) by 1901, and a brief recovery to 84 people by 1921 was followed by another fall to 64 people a decade later. After the Second World War Cornwell's population recovered to 97 people in 22 houses by 1951, but then fell steadily to 59 (in 27 houses) by 1991, the last year for which separate census figures were given.³⁹ A parish headcount in 2001 found 66 people living in 25 households.⁴⁰

²⁸ OHC, par. reg. transcript, miscellanea. Cf. Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Salford map, 1771.

²⁹ Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797).

³⁰ *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1847).

³¹ DB, f. 161; *Rot. Hund.* II, 728, 740–1; below, landownership (Salford manor est.).

³² TNA, E 179/161/8–10.

³³ *Poll Taxes 1377–81*, ed. Fenwick, II, 291.

³⁴ TNA, E 179/161/170; E 179/162/341.

³⁵ *Prot. Retns*, 86.

³⁶ TNA, E 179/255/3.

³⁷ *Compton Census*, ed. Whiteman, 422.

³⁸ *Secker's Visit.* 47; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 558, f. 164.

³⁹ *Census*, 1801–1991; below, econ. hist. (since 1800). From 2001 Cornwell and Chastleton were enumerated together: *ibid.* 2001–11.

⁴⁰ West Oxon. parish headcounts 2001, archived at <https://web.archive.org> (accessed Jan. 2023).

Settlement

Some prehistoric activity is known beyond the ridgeway in Chastleton parish,⁴¹ but a possible Neolithic long barrow south-west of Top Farm is doubtful,⁴² despite its location close to the 'nuns' barrows' on the Daylesford boundary mentioned in 718.⁴³ Overall no clear occupation evidence exists for Cornwell before the Anglo-Saxon period, when the place name (denoting a spring rather than a settlement) originated.⁴⁴ The small agricultural community noted in 1086 may have already been focused in the well-watered stream valley where the modern village now stands, although no details are known, while the watermill stood presumably on the site of the later Cornwell mill to the south-east.⁴⁵

By the 13th century most villeins lived probably within the village, one family taking its name from an unidentified spring either there or elsewhere, while the miller inhabited a cottage at the watermill.⁴⁶ The manor house, documented from the 1320s and successively rebuilt from c.1600, probably already occupied its later site on the village's eastern edge, while the church, established in or before the 12th century, lies further east again, in what is now an isolated site on the edge of Cornwell Manor's parkland. The separation of village, manor house, and church may partly reflect medieval planning, and perhaps also some undocumented removal of dwellings around the church for the park's creation or expansion in the late 16th or 17th century.⁴⁷ Two sizeable medieval freeholders possibly occupied outlying farms, but evidence is lacking.⁴⁸

By c.1700 the village had assumed its later linear form along the roads west of the manor house, with several surviving houses already present.⁴⁹ The rector had recently exchanged a decayed rectory house (since demolished) near the churchyard for one in the village,⁵⁰ while the large farmhouse at No. 1 Cornwell doubled as a roadside inn;⁵¹ even so, one 18th-century rector claimed that there was no real village at all.⁵² Twelve families lived

⁴¹ D. Benson and P. Fasham, 'Field Work at Chastleton', *Oxoniensia* 37 (1972), 1–9; above, Chastleton, landscape etc.

⁴² HER, PRN 3403; L. Brown, 'A Survey of the Condition of Oxfordshire Long Barrows', *Oxoniensia* 43 (1978), 241.

⁴³ Sawyer S.84 (*nunnena beorgas*); Grundy, *Saxon Charters*, 104; Glos. HER, PRN 6291.

⁴⁴ Above (landscape).

⁴⁵ DB, f. 161; above (landscape); below, econ. hist. (milling).

⁴⁶ *Rot. Hund.* II, 728, 740–1; TNA, E 179/161/10 ('de Fonte', 'ate Welle'); below, econ. hist. (milling).

⁴⁷ Below, landownership (manor ho.); relig. hist. (incl. demolition of a former rectory ho. near the church). For 18th- and 19th-century settlement, Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797); OS Maps 1", sheet XLIV (1828 edn); 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.9 (1881 edn). No earlier maps are known.

⁴⁸ Below, econ. hist. (medieval). A cottage and garden owned by the Knights Templar by 1297 lay in the village: below, landownership.

⁴⁹ Below (built character).

⁵⁰ Below, relig. hist. (rectory ho.).

⁵¹ Bryant, *Oxon. Map* (1824); below, econ. hist. (trades).

⁵² OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 555, f. 149.

there in 1738, and three more in the wider parish,⁵³ presumably at the mill, at the mid 17th-century Cornwell Hill Farm in the south-east, and at Park Farm near the Salford boundary, which existed by 1767 when it too was called Cornwell Hill Farm.⁵⁴ Probably those were established after enclosure in 1669, although earlier origins are possible. The mill seems to have disappeared soon after,⁵⁵ but Glebe Farm was built in fields east of the church c.1770, and a new rectory house (Cornwell Glebe) was erected a short distance to its south in 1877.⁵⁶ The few other Victorian additions included a 'newly erected' house in the village shortly before 1860, the village school in 1877, and cottages at Park Farm (c.1878),⁵⁷ while isolated farm buildings at Top Farm (south of the village) existed by 1880.⁵⁸



Cornwell village c.1900.
Photo courtesy of Joy Timms.

A new house (Cornwell Grove) was built next to Top Farm before 1922,⁵⁹ but otherwise Cornwell's settlement pattern changed very little in the 20th century, despite the extensive (but mainly cosmetic) remodelling of the village in the late 1930s.⁶⁰ The Second World War prevented the building of some planned additional houses,⁶¹ and little further development occurred by 2023, when the entire village and all but a few outlying dwellings still belonged to the estate.⁶²

⁵³ *Secker's Visit*. 47.

⁵⁴ NHLE, no. 1367777 (Hill Fmho., accessed Dec. 2022); Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767). Park Fm's later name may have followed from the park's expansion northwards in the 19th century (e.g. OS Map 6", Oxon. XIV (1885 edn)).

⁵⁵ Below, econ. hist. (1500–1800; milling).

⁵⁶ Below, relig. hist. (rectory ho.).

⁵⁷ *Oxf. Jnl*, 17 Mar. 1860, 23 Feb. 1878; below, social hist. (educ.).

⁵⁸ OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.9 (1881 edn); cf. *ibid.* 1", sheet XLIV (1828 edn), showing bldgs in the vicinity.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.9 (1900 and 1922 edns).

⁶⁰ Below (built character).

⁶¹ *Country Life*, 17 May 1941, 436.

⁶² Below, social hist. (since 1800). Cf. OS Maps 1:10560, Oxon. XIV.SW (1922 edn); 1:25000, sheet 45 (2005 edn).

The Built Character

Cornwell's vernacular buildings date chiefly from the 17th to 19th century, and are largely typical of the Cotswolds, constructed almost entirely from local limestone rubble with occasional ashlar dressings, and with mullioned or sash windows. Stone-slatted roofs have sometimes been replaced with concrete tiles,⁶³ and thatch (visible only at No. 1 Cornwell in 2023) was formerly more common, particularly on outbuildings.⁶⁴ The church apart, fragmentary medieval masonry survives at Cornwell Manor (where a reset 13th-century lancet window perhaps came from an earlier house on the site),⁶⁵ and at No. 1 Cornwell, where a 14th-century Gothic-arched doorway (chamfered with a hoodmould) apparently survives in situ. The rest of the building (a former farmhouse and sometime inn) is probably 16th-century and later, and retains an H plan with a central hall range and a cross passage.⁶⁶

Cornwell Manor was by far the largest dwelling in 1665, when it was taxed on 25 hearths. Five houses assessed on between one and three hearths may have included Cornwell Hill Farm, Nos. 2–4, Nos. 7–8, and Nos. 9–10 Cornwell, all 17th-century and later; of those Nos. 9–10, a cottage pair built as a single house, retain Tudor-arched doorways and chamfered mullioned windows with hoodmoulds.⁶⁷ Eighteenth-century Georgian architecture was largely confined to Cornwell Manor, which was remodelled and enlarged c.1750 for Fairmeadow Penyston, creating grand classical south and east fronts.⁶⁸ Glebe Farm (built c.1770) has a symmetrical south-west front with a central hooded doorway, flanking cross wings, a hipped roof, and dormers.⁶⁹ The parish's few Victorian buildings were all traditional in style and materials, including the single-storeyed village school of 1877 (originally a Tudor-style building with latticed mullioned windows and a bellcote),⁷⁰ and the 'twin-gabled and rather dull' rectory house (Cornwell Glebe), built the same year to designs by Lewis Stride.⁷¹

Little further new building was carried out until 1938–9, when the Gillsons of Cornwell Manor engaged the celebrated London-based architect Clough Williams-Ellis to alter and enlarge the church and manor house,⁷² and to 'recondition' the whole village, introducing

⁶³ e.g. NHLE, no. 1367776 (Nos 7–8 Cornwell).

⁶⁴ Ibid. no. 1367814; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 448, f. 38.

⁶⁵ Below, landownership (manor ho.).

⁶⁶ NHLE, no. 1367814; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 282.

⁶⁷ *Hearth Tax Oxon.* 175; NHLE, nos 1053316–17, 1367776–7; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 282.

⁶⁸ Below, landownership (manor ho.).

⁶⁹ Below, relig. hist. (rectory ho.); Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 283; *Country Life*, 14 May 1981, 1364.

⁷⁰ NHLE, no. 1053316; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 282.

⁷¹ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 283; below, relig. hist. (rectory ho.).

⁷² Below, landownership (manor ho.); relig. hist. (church archit.).

modern facilities and amenities whilst preserving and enhancing its traditional appearance. The builders were the local firm Alfred Groves & Son Ltd, of Milton-under-Wychwood. The extent to which individual cottages and farmhouses were altered or rebuilt is not altogether clear, but external buttresses and flat door heads were evidently added to Nos. 9–10, and No. 3 became a village shop with a picturesque bow window. The most radical changes were to the former village school, which was remodelled in neo-Georgian style as a village hall, its new apsidal north end containing three slim windows and a projecting committee room with tall sash windows. The bellcote was reconceived as an Art Deco-style belfry housing both the existing bell and an air-raid siren. Williams-Ellis also paved the adjacent ford and streambed, felled a conifer plantation to create a village green with a children's playground, and enclosed the whole village within curving stone walls terminating in piers with ball-finials.⁷³ Remodelling outside the village core extended to Glebe Farm (which gained Tudorbethan interiors), and perhaps to Cornwell Glebe, which was evidently enlarged into a small country house with limestone rubble walls and stone-slatted roofs soon after the Gillsons acquired it in 1939.⁷⁴



Cornwell village as 'reconditioned' in 1938–9 by Clough Williams-Ellis: (left) the former shop and village hall (originally the school) with its Art Deco-style belfry; and (right) No. 1 Cornwell and the apsidal north end of the village hall (now the estate office).

⁷³ *Country Life*, 17 May 1941, 432–6; *Architects' Jnl*, 27 Nov. 1941, 355–60; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 282; NHLE, nos 1053316 (Nos 2–4), 1053317 (Nos 9–10); A. Macdonald, 'Glimpses of Cornwell Life' (2018): TS at Cornwell Manor. In 2023 the former village hall was used as the estate office.

⁷⁴ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 282–3; OHC, B117/F/1 (day bk of Thos Groves), which includes a loose drawing of the new (west) front door (by Williams-Ellis?) headed 'Cornwell Glebe, 1940'; WODC online planning docs, 08/0034/P/FP, mentioning '1930s additions' (accessed Dec. 2022); below, relig. hist. (rectory ho.). Cf. OS Maps 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.9 (1922 edn); SP2727 (1979 edn).

Later changes were few, although between 2008 and 2012 Cornwell Glebe was again remodelled to designs by Verity & Beverley Ltd of Tetbury (Glos.), acquiring a double-height glazed atrium.⁷⁵ Several agricultural buildings were converted to residential use in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, but almost no entirely new housing was erected.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 282–3; WODC online planning docs, 08/0034/P/FP.

⁷⁶ WODC online planning docs.