

VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

Churchill

Introduction: Landscape, Settlement, and Buildings



Churchill parish church (built 1825–6) from the north-east.

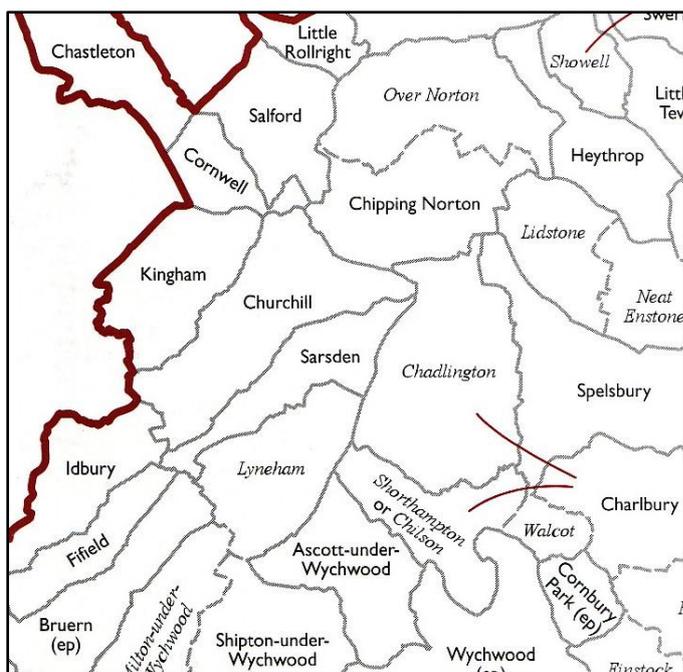
Churchill is a thriving rural parish c.2¾ miles south-west of Chipping Norton,¹ and has long been amongst the area's more populous settlements, briefly acquiring a medieval market and fair, and developing a range of rural trades alongside its formerly dominant agricultural economy. From the Middle Ages it was also closely connected with the neighbouring parish of Sarsden, with which it was effectively merged for most practical purposes by the 1970s. The village's layout was affected by a serious fire in 1684, which (starting in a baker's cottage) destroyed up to 20 houses around the medieval parish church, leaving it isolated on the village's north-western edge. Most later building was on higher ground near the Chipping Norton road, the village's reorientation being completed in 1825–6 when the lord James Langston built a new parish church on open ground on the road's east side, its soaring west tower modelled on that of Magdalen College, Oxford. Parliamentary enclosure in 1788 prompted the building of several new isolated farmhouses, while more recent development increased the overall number of dwellings from 150-odd in 1981 to c.240 by the 2020s. The parish's growth was facilitated by the opening of the Oxford–Worcester railway in 1853 and of a branch to Chipping Norton in 1855, served by Kingham station on the parish's south-

¹ This account was written in 2023–4.

western edge, and by a halt further north. The branch (and halt) closed in the 1960s, though Kingham station (on the main line to London) remained open in 2024.²

LANDSCAPE, SETTLEMENT, AND BUILDINGS

Parish Boundaries



Churchill parish c. 1850.
 Source: K. Tiller and G. Darkes (eds), *An Historical Atlas of Oxfordshire* (ORS 67, 2010).

In 1881 the ancient parish covered 2,848 a.,³ its boundaries (following fields, roads, and watercourses) derived presumably from those of the 20-hide Churchill estate created before the Norman Conquest.⁴ The south-western boundary with Idbury and Bledington (Glos.) mostly followed the river Evenlode, save for a projection into Idbury which brought in 27 a. of meadow on the river's west bank, with another 6½ a. lying detached nearby. The long north-western boundary with Kingham followed Swail brook (a tributary of the Evenlode) as far as Swailsford bridge, where the short northern boundary with Cornwell diverted east along the Cleeves brook or Common brook (which flows south-westwards through Chipping Norton). The north-eastern boundary with Chipping Norton and Chadlington followed another short stream, and stretches of the Old London Road and of the main Burford–Chipping Norton road, while the long south-eastern boundary with Sarsden followed the Sars brook back to the Evenlode. The detached 6½ a. were transferred to Idbury in 1884 under the Divided

² Below (railway; medieval and later settlement); social hist.; relig. hist.; Sarsden.

³ OS *Area Bk* (1881); cf. *Census*, 1831–71, estimating 2,850 a.

⁴ OS Maps 6", Oxon. XIV, XIX–XX (1885 edn); below, landownership.

Parishes Act, bringing the area to 2,842 a. (1,150 ha.); otherwise the civil parish remained unaltered in 2024,⁵ although for ecclesiastical purposes the parish was united with Sarsden in 1992.⁶

Landscape

The parish is hilly, the ground rising sometimes quite steeply from the river Evenlode in the south-west (at c.105 m.), and from the tributaries which form other stretches of parish boundary. Churchill Heath and Rynehill farms (not far north of the Evenlode) are at 115–125 m., while Churchill village lies roughly centrally at 140–165 m., rising to a plateau which commands extensive views south-eastwards towards Sarsden, and on which the 19th-century replacement church was built. The highest ground lies to the north-east, reaching 185 m. at Boulter's Barn, 210 m. at the Bronze-Age barrow on Besbury Lane, and 219 m. on the Old London Road.⁷

The alluvium of the low-lying river and stream valleys gives way further north to Charmouth Mudstone, partly overlain by patches of sand, gravel, and other superficial deposits. At Churchill heath in particular the heavy clay soils remained largely uncultivated until enclosure in 1788, and briefly supported brick-making. On the rising ground on either side of Churchill village thin belts of Dyrham Siltstone, Marlstone Rock, and Whitby Mudstone give way to Clypeus Grit (on which the new church and surrounding houses were built), whilst the higher ground to the north-east lies mostly on Chipping Norton limestone. Oolitic stonebrash soils were well suited to Cotswold sheep-and-corn farming, while limestone quarries provided building stone for local use. Small woodland plantations are scattered throughout the parish, and in the north-east a larger tract (Sarsgrove wood) extends into Sarsden. Former woodland at Churchill heath was cleared by the 1950s, however.⁸

Water came chiefly from streams, springs, and wells, and by the 18th century was piped downhill to the village from Water or Conduit House, built by the lord of the manor and since replaced by Conduit Farm.⁹ In the 20th century public standpipes, taps, and a prominent fountain (built in 1870 as a memorial to the lord James Langston) remained the village's principal sources of supply, which by 1962 were reckoned to be 'so bad' and

⁵ VCH Oxon. XIX, 340; *Census*, 1891–2001; <http://my.westoxon.gov.uk/> (accessed Feb. 2023).

⁶ Below, relig. hist. (paroch. organizn).

⁷ OS Maps 1:25000, sheets 45 and 191 (2005–6 edns).

⁸ Geol. Surv. Map 1:50000 (solid and drift), sheet 218 (2007 edn); Orr, *Oxon. Agric.* 187–90; below, econ. hist. (agric. landscape; non-agric.).

⁹ Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); *Sale Cat., Sarsden Est.* (1922), p. 14: copy in OHC, Fi. XIV/ii/2; below (medieval and later settlement).

‘shocking’ that they impeded the building of new houses. Water was also piped to the parish’s farms, which remained subject to seasonal shortages.¹⁰ Mains water was available by 1958, although most houses were apparently not connected until the 1960s.¹¹ Water-related field names reflected the parish’s wet low-lying ground,¹² and in 1818 the Churchill-born geologist William Smith (1769–1839) undertook drainage works to irrigate the meadows along Sars brook.¹³ New sewage pipes laid in 1904 by the rural district council drained into field ditches and replaced earlier cesspools, and by the 1950s–70s the council provided more modern sewage beds east of Sarsgrove wood and north-west of the old church.¹⁴

Communications

Roads and Bridges

Several early routes converge on the village from neighbouring parishes. The road from Chipping Norton, entering the village’s north-east corner, was called Norton way by the 1780s, while its south-westwards continuation towards Idbury, Fifield, and Bruern (which formerly crossed Churchill heath) was known as Heath way.¹⁵ Until enclosure that continued across the Evenlode at Standbow (i.e. ‘stone arch’) bridge, which provided access to the parish’s land on the river’s west bank, and was the site of a medieval mill.¹⁶ The surviving branch to Bledington (Glos.) crossed the river at Longford bridge, which was built or rebuilt in 1421, and was later known as Shuttenham bridge.¹⁷ The Kingham–Sarsden road, running west–east through the village, crosses the Swail and Sars brooks by further small bridges which are probably also of early origin, while the Old London Road from Cornwell (forming a stretch of parish boundary) enters Churchill at Swailsford bridge, which was established by the 16th century.¹⁸ Besbury Lane, now a footpath running north-east from the village, formerly continued to the Burford–Chipping Norton turnpike along the parish’s north-eastern

¹⁰ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 31 Jan. 1906; *Oxf. Times*, 17 Aug. 1962; TNA, MAF 32/911/82; plaque at village fountain.

¹¹ OHC, RDC9/3/F6/2; RDC9/3/F7/2; R. Mann, *The History of Churchill and Sarsden* (2013), 120.

¹² *PN Oxon.* II, 344–5 (e.g. Flood Leys, Water Furrows); below, econ. hist. (agric. landscape).

¹³ G. Walton, ‘A Note on William Smith’s Drainage Works near Churchill’, *Earth Sciences Hist.* 35.1 (2016), 221–6; Mann, *Hist. of Churchill and Sarsden*, 78–80; below, Sarsden, landscape etc. (landscape).

¹⁴ *Oxf. Jnl.*, 22 Feb. 1902, 18 Feb. 1905, 3 Feb. 1906; *Banbury Guardian*, 5 May 1977; OHC, RDC9/3/F7/2; OS Maps 6”, SP 32 SW (1955 edn); 1:2500, SP 2724 (1979 edn).

¹⁵ OHC, Lo. VI/4, p. 14; *ibid.* QSD/A book 110, p. 2.

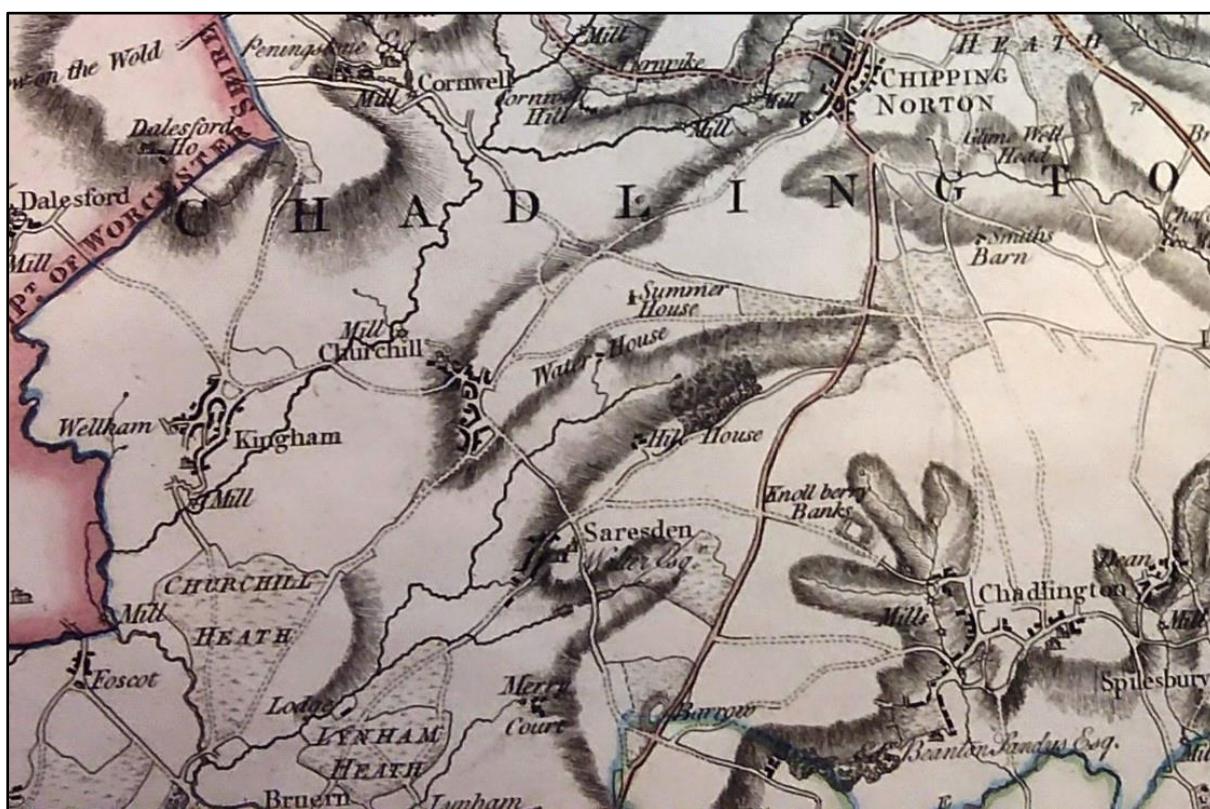
¹⁶ *PN Oxon.* II, 343–4; Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); OS Map 6”, Oxon. XIX (1885 edn); below, econ. hist. (milling).

¹⁷ *VCH Glos.* VI, 27; OHC, QSD/A book 110, p. 2.

¹⁸ Below, Cornwell, landscape etc. (communications); cf. HER, PRN 1702–3; 2537; OHC, Fi. III/xxxiv/1 (Churchill bridge).

boundary, and is named from the Bronze-Age round barrow which sits alongside it.¹⁹ An unidentified ‘further highway’ was mentioned amongst parishioners’ bequests for road repairs in the 1540s–50s.²⁰

At enclosure in 1788 the roads across Churchill heath were straightened and partially re-routed, and a new south-easterly road was built to Lyneham. Churchill’s surveyors of highways also received six small allotments totalling 2¼ a. for road-mending.²¹ Periodic road repairs were undertaken thereafter,²² and in the 20th century the Churchill–Bledington road (which from 1855 also led to Kingham railway station) was reclassified as part of the B4450 from Chipping Norton to Stow-on-the-Wold (Glos.).²³ Village traffic levels, though reportedly low in 1962, were causing concern amongst residents by 2018.²⁴



Churchill village in 1767, its roads and neighbouring settlements: detail from Thomas Jefferys' map of Oxfordshire. Water House supplied the village's water.

¹⁹ Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); *PN Oxon.* II, 344; below (prehist. settlement).

²⁰ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 179.3; TNA, PROB 11/36/256.

²¹ OHC, QSD/A book 110, p. 2, 11; *ibid.* Lo. VII/1–2 (maps); Bryant, *Oxon. Map* (1824).

²² e.g. OHC, Cal. QS, VIII, 659; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 15 Mar. 1882.

²³ OS Maps 1:25000, sheets 45 and 191 (2005–6 edns); below (railway).

²⁴ *Oxf. Times*, 17 Aug. 1962; 'Conserve Churchill Summer Survey' (2018): accessed at <https://conservechurchill.org> (Sept. 2022).

Carriers and Post

In the 1840s–50s a carrier ran to Chipping Norton on Wednesdays and to Banbury on Thursdays, the towns' respective market days.²⁵ No other village-based carrier is known until 1891, inhabitants presumably relying on those in Chipping Norton, Kingham, and elsewhere,²⁶ although by the 1910s–20s Churchill had two or three carriers. By 1928 the village was also served four days a week by motorized buses operating between Oxford and Stow-on-the-Wold,²⁷ with services increasing to three times a day by the 1930s. Additional buses ran to and from Kingham railway station on the parish's south-western fringe, operated in the 1930s by the Great Western Railway,²⁸ and in 1962 (from Chipping Norton) by the Oxford City Bus Company, which declined to increase the service.²⁹ Week-day community bus services between Churchill village and Chipping Norton (and less frequently Witney) continued in 2024, though the station was then mainly served by buses from Stow-on-the-Wold, Bourton-on-the-Water, and the Rissingtons, all in Gloucestershire.³⁰

Post was delivered through Chipping Norton by the 1840s.³¹ A sub-post office was opened in the 1850s, run by the grocers Thomas and Emily Jennings from a shop on High Street near the forge and pub.³² By the early 1890s (when run by Alfred Epps) it was also a savings bank and a money order, annuity, and insurance office, and telegraph facilities (already available at the railway station) were installed a few years later. Telephone calls over a limited distance could be made from there by 1915, and the first private telephones were installed in the 1920s.³³ The post office continued at the High Street grocer's shop until the 1950s, when it moved to a former council house on Hastings Hill.³⁴ By 1979 it had moved again, and in 1994 it closed,³⁵ a mobile post office visiting the village hall weekly in 2024.³⁶

²⁵ *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1847); TNA, HO 107/1732, no. 2.

²⁶ TNA, RG 12/1178, no. 57; cf. *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1895), pp. 71, 124; *Kelly's Dir. Glos.* (1897), p. 44 (Bledington).

²⁷ *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1915–28 edns); *Oxford and District Motor Bus Services Timetable* (1931 edn): copy in OHC, OXFO 388.3 (CIT).

²⁸ *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1931–9 edns); *Oxford and District Motor Bus Services Timetable* (1939 edn).

²⁹ *Tewkesbury Reg.* 12 Jan. 1962; *VCH Oxon.* XXI, 5–6, 31; below (railway).

³⁰ Bus timetables, accessed online Mar. 2024.

³¹ *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1847).

³² *Lascelles' Dir. Oxon.* (1853); *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1864); TNA, RG 9/910, no. 62; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XX.1 (1881 edn).

³³ *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883–1939 edns).

³⁴ OHC, RDC9/3/F6/2; RDC9/3/F7/2; *Oxf. Times*, 17 Aug. 1962; OS Map 6", SP 22 SE (1955 edn).

³⁵ OS Map 1:2500, SP 2824 (1979 edn); *Roundabout* [Churchill and Sarsden par. newsletter] (Mar. 1994): copy in OHC, SZ CHURb/052; Smith, 'Post Offices'.

³⁶ www.postoffice.co.uk/branch-finder/2944715/churchill (accessed May 2023).

Railway and Stations

The Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway (opened in 1853) skimmed the parish's south-western edge, becoming part of the Great Western Railway in 1863, and continuing as part of the main London–Worcester line in 2024. A station two miles south-west of Churchill village, located just within the parish, was opened in 1855, serving not only the main line but a new branch to Chipping Norton, which ran north-eastwards through the parish, and was extended through to Banbury in 1887. The station, initially called Chipping Norton Junction, was renamed Kingham station in 1909, and a separate siding on the branch line, ½ mile north-west of the village at Churchill mill, was upgraded for passengers as Sarsden Halt in 1906. The branch was closed to passengers in 1962 and to freight in 1964, followed by the line's dismantling. A separate branch from Kingham station to Bourton-on-the-Water (Glos.), opened in 1862 and extended through to Cheltenham in 1881, was closed at the same time, the station thereafter serving only the main line.³⁷

By 1881 the railway covered c.33 a. of land in the parish, most of it purchased from the lord James Langston of Sarsden.³⁸ New bridges carried the chief roads over both lines, with additional level crossings at Churchill mill and on the Kingham road, where a keeper's cottage was built in the 1850s. New buildings at Chipping Norton Junction included a ticket office and (by 1871) a station master's house, while the Langston Arms Hotel opened on an adjoining plot in 1880. New cattle pens allowed regular monthly livestock sales by the 1880s.³⁹ The original wooden ticket office was replaced in 1883, and passenger facilities (including a footbridge and waiting rooms) were periodically updated, a new ticket office being built in 1975, and a new footbridge and additional car parking in 2015. Other buildings (all since removed) included signal boxes, engine sheds, and a water tower.⁴⁰ In 2024 the station was served by hourly passenger trains to and from London and Worcester, though there were only infrequent bus links from there to Chipping Norton or Churchill village.⁴¹

The goods siding opposite Churchill mill operated throughout the branch line's existence, handling coal for local use, and sending milk, sugar beet, and other agricultural produce to market. A timber platform for passenger use was added in 1906, equipped with a corrugated-iron pagoda-style waiting shelter, and by 1917 the halt was served by six trains a

³⁷ VCH Oxon. XIX, 7, 343; XXI, 6, 32–3; above, vol. overview (communications).

³⁸ OS Area Bk (1881); OHC, Fi. XIV/iii/5; *ibid.* Lo. II/1–3.

³⁹ OS Maps 1:2500, Oxon. XIX.8 and 12 (1881–1922 edns); P. Karau, 'Lost Termini: Chipping Norton', *British Railway Journal* 6 (Winter 1985), 193; TNA, RG 10/1456, no. 124; *Oxf. Chron.* 30 Oct. 1880; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 12 Apr. 1882, 14 Oct. 1885; *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883–1939 edns).

⁴⁰ S.C. Jenkins, B. Brown and N. Parkhouse, *The Banbury & Cheltenham Direct Railway* (2004), 209, 212–13, 229; J.H. Russell, *The Banbury and Cheltenham Direct Railway 1887–1962* (1977), 65–80; WODC online planning docs, 14/02392/FUL; 14/0998/P/PART 11.

⁴¹ www.gwr.com/travel-information/train-times (accessed June 2023); above (carriers).

day, being regularly used both by Churchill residents and by staff and students from Kingham Hill school until services ceased in 1962. A keeper's house for the nearby level crossing was provided in 1930.⁴²



Chipping Norton Junction (from 1909 Kingham) railway station with the Langston Arms Hotel and adjoining cattle pens to its east. From OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIX.8 (1899 edn).

Population

By 1086 there were at least 38 tenant households in the parish, headed by 24 *villani* and 14 *bordars*, a total of perhaps 170 people.⁴³ By 1279 the number of unfree tenants (27 villeins and 16 cottagers) seems hardly to have changed, although an additional 33 free tenants held 45½ yardlands and 39 a. between them, making 76 tenants in all (double the Domesday total).⁴⁴ Most of the free tenants were probably resident in the parish, though only 55 inhabitants paid tax in 1316 and 44 in 1327, suggesting declining prosperity and possibly

⁴² Karau, 'Lost Termini: Chipping Norton', 200–3; Jenkins et al., *Banbury & Cheltenham Direct Railway*, 231–7; Russell, *Banbury and Cheltenham Direct Railway*, 62–4; W. Hemmings, P. Karau and C. Turner, *The Banbury and Cheltenham Direct Railway* (2 vols, 2004), II, 354–62; *Banbury Guardian*, 12 Apr. 1917; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XX.1 (1881–1922 edns).

⁴³ DB, f. 157.

⁴⁴ *Rot. Hund.* II, 745–6. Not incl. a yardland granted to St Frideswide's priory: below, landownership (other estates).

population.⁴⁵ Whilst the Black Death may have reduced numbers further Churchill was nevertheless among the more populous of the hundred's parishes in 1377, when 111 inhabitants paid poll tax,⁴⁶ and in the 16th century the number of taxpayers remained relatively high, rising from 19 in 1524 to 31 in 1525 and 47 by 1543.⁴⁷

In 1642 the obligatory protestation oath was sworn by 101 men, implying an adult population of c.200, and 133 adults were noted in 1676.⁴⁸ A total of 58 houses was assessed for hearth tax in 1662, and 88 were reported in 1738, their number increasing slowly during the 18th century.⁴⁹ By 1801 Churchill had c.97 houses and a population of 491,⁵⁰ which rose to a peak of 665 (in 123 houses) in 1821. Numbers fluctuated between 633 and 651 (in 121–132 houses) until the 1860s, when the onset of agricultural depression set population on a downward trend: numbers fell from 548 in 1891 to 431 by 1931, although the number of households (114 in both years) was unchanged. An increase to 475 by 1961 was followed by a fall to 421 (in 151 houses) 20 years later, but thereafter population rose to 563 (in 216 houses) by 2001. In 2021 the combined population of Churchill and Sarsden (the bulk of it in Churchill) was 647 in 269 houses.⁵¹

Settlement

Prehistoric, Roman, and Anglo-Saxon Settlement

Two Bronze-Age round barrows occupy high ground in separate parts of the parish, 'The Mount' lying south-west of the village on a ridge with wide views to the west, south, and east, while the Besbury Lane barrow overlooks the village from rising ground to the north-east. Both barrows stand over 2 m. high and are surrounded by infilled quarry ditches, and at The Mount there are also traces of an outer bank. The possible remains of two smaller barrows near Besbury Lane are no longer visible.⁵² A Bronze-Age axe was found south-west of The Mount at Rynehill Farm, and elsewhere undated scatters of stone and flint tools and weapons suggest prehistoric activity and possibly occupation. Iron-Age finds include a gold coin, and storage pits have been identified in the parish's north-east corner, while Roman

⁴⁵ TNA, E 179/161/8–9. The 1306 tax list (E 179/161/10) is damaged and only 29 names are legible.

⁴⁶ *Poll Taxes 1377–81*, ed. Fenwick, II, 291.

⁴⁷ TNA, E 179/161/170; E 179/161/177; E 179/162/227; cf. Sheail (ed.), *1524/5 Subs.* II, 259–60.

⁴⁸ *Prot. Retns.*, 85; *Compton Census*, ed. Whiteman, 421.

⁴⁹ TNA, E 179/255/4; *Secker's Visit.* 45; OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 555, f. 137; d 561, f. 145; d 564, f. 120.

⁵⁰ *Census*, 1801 (mistakenly giving 27 houses).

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 1811–2021. Another 38 houses in 2011 (presumably representing second homes) were not permanently occupied.

⁵² NHLE, nos. 1009413; 1015324 (accessed May 2023); HER, PRN 2291; 3180; 5574.

occupation is demonstrated by finds of 1st- to 4th-century pottery and coins, and by the burial of a young adult male in a limestone coffin c.100 m. south-west of a small continuously occupied villa near Churchill Grounds Farm, which had plastered walls and underfloor heating. A spring c.300 m. south of the building may have also attracted settlement.⁵³

An early Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured building, used probably for weaving, has been discovered on the edge of the modern village.⁵⁴ Churchill later formed part of the large Anglo-Saxon royal estate focused on Shipton-under-Wychwood, emerging by the 11th century as a separate 20-hide manor with a settled agricultural community.⁵⁵ The Bronze-Age round barrows evidently remained prominent features in the Anglo-Saxon landscape, the medieval field name 'Huruardesberewe' (combining the personal name Heoruward with Old English 'beorg') raising the possibility that some were re-used for Anglo-Saxon burials.⁵⁶ Churchill itself is probably also named from them, early forms (including the 11th-century *Cercelle*) most likely meaning 'hill with a tumulus'. Later spellings incorporate Old English 'cirice', changing the meaning to 'hill with or near a church', a development possibly reflecting the foundation (by the 12th century) of a parish church on rising ground above Swail brook.⁵⁷ The church's site lies towards a ridge overlooking Sarsden, over which Churchill exercised burial rights from the Middle Ages, and whose place name may have a common derivation.⁵⁸

Medieval and Later Settlement

The layout of the medieval village was altered by the fire of 1684, shifting its focus further south-east.⁵⁹ Earthworks including house platforms, fishponds, and hollow ways indicate that earlier settlement surrounded the medieval church, extending east–west along a road leading to Churchill mill. Some house plots abutting the street were separated by walls, and the foundations of a medieval house have been identified beside the road south-east of the church, along with an iron key and other metal objects, and a 12th- or 13th-century ceramic

⁵³ HER, PRN 1487–8; 3298; 5242; 12877; 13035–6; 14335; 29087; *VCH Oxon.* I, 239, 263, 334; D. Miles and M. Harman, 'Churchill Grounds Farm', *SMA* 12 (1982), 141–2.

⁵⁴ HER, PRN 16758; E. Hindmarch, 'Churchill Farm', *SMA* 33 (2003), 83.

⁵⁵ *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 8–9, 42–3; above (popn); below, landownership.

⁵⁶ *PN Oxon.* II, 345; HER, PRN 2291; 3180; *VCH Oxon.* I, 365, 367.

⁵⁷ *PN Oxon.* II, 343; V. Watts, *Cambridge Dict. of English Place-Names* (2004), 139; A.D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place Names* (revised edn, 2011), 115; M. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (1984), 139; below, relig. hist. (church origins). The 11th-cent. form combines the British word 'crouco' (for 'barrow') with the Old English 'hyll'.

⁵⁸ Below, Sarsden, landscape etc. (prehist. settlement); possibly 'valley of the church', though the etymology of the 'church' element is doubtful.

⁵⁹ Below (this section); below, social hist. (1500–1800).

cistern used for brewing ale.⁶⁰ The medieval manor house also lay near the church, although its exact site (and later history) are uncertain.⁶¹ At least 15 and possibly 20 houses (together with barns and other outbuildings) were destroyed in the 1684 fire, amounting to a quarter or a third of the entire housing stock,⁶² although a slightly later claim that ‘above half the town and the houses there standing’ were affected was probably exaggerated.⁶³

Most of the undamaged houses presumably lay further from the church, some of them probably around the junction of Hastings Hill with the Chipping Norton road, where there is a small green. Corner House (standing opposite) incorporates medieval building fragments of which some may be in situ,⁶⁴ and medieval settlement perhaps already continued southwards along the Chipping Norton road, the 12th-century name Long Churchill presumably referring either to settlement there or to the linear settlement along Hastings Hill.⁶⁵ Possibly the house plots around the church were inhabited by the 11th-century *villani* and bordars and their successors, whilst those further east were originally occupied by the manor’s numerous free tenants.⁶⁶ By the 13th and 14th centuries several inhabitants (both free and unfree) were named from the locations of their houses (by a pit, by a spring, at the gate, at the green),⁶⁷ and a house called ‘Hachus’ (meaning ‘gate’) was mentioned in 1299. In the 15th century one called ‘the Slate Place’ lay at ‘town’s end’.⁶⁸

By the mid 18th century the village extended from the church up Hastings Hill, and southwards along the Chipping Norton road’s west side, with some additional houses along the present-day Kingham Road (running parallel to Hastings Hill).⁶⁹ The Chipping Norton road’s east side (perhaps formerly a large green) remained mostly open until the new parish church was built there in 1825–6,⁷⁰ followed by the roughly contemporary Well End cottage and blacksmith’s forge to its north. The village hall and nearby Langston memorial fountain

⁶⁰ NHLE, no. 1006317 (accessed May 2023); HER, PRN 2280; 4182; 29058; D.A. Hinton, ‘A medieval cistern from Churchill’, *Oxoniansia* 33 (1968), 66–70; *SMA* 25 (1995), 50. *St Frideswide’s Cart.* II, pp. 269–70 (for walls).

⁶¹ Below, landownership (manor ho.).

⁶² OHC, Cal. QS, III, 315; ‘A full account of a bold and barbarous murder ... with the further account of a lamentable fire that happened in a town called Church-Hill ... the 30th July last’ (1684): copy in Bodl. Ashm. F 5 (113); cf. TNA, E 179/255/4 (58 hos in 1662).

⁶³ *N&Q*, 12th ser. IX, 132, citing TNA, C 5/165/65 (1693).

⁶⁴ Below (built character); a 14th-cent. arch re-used in nearby Hastings Hill House may, however, have come from the medieval church (*ibid.*).

⁶⁵ *PN Oxon.* II, 343.

⁶⁶ Above (popn); below, social hist. (Middle Ages).

⁶⁷ ‘ad Puteum’, ‘de Fonte’, ‘ad Portam’, ‘atte Grene’: *Rot. Hund.* II, 745–6; TNA, E 179/161/8.

⁶⁸ *Cal. Close* 1296–1302, 311; Northants. Archives, FH 358 (‘le Sclatplace at le Tonnysend’).

⁶⁹ Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797). The modern name Hastings Hill relates to the Hastings family and to Hastings House at its east end, birthplace of Warren Hastings (1732–1818): below, social hist. (1500–1800).

⁷⁰ Below, relig. hist. (relig. bldgs). An exception was the late 18th- or early 19th-cent. Corner House on the village’s N edge, incorporating 14th-cent. masonry: NHLE, no. 1367789; OHC, Lo. VII/1–2 (maps).

were added further north again in 1870, and the war memorial (by the roadside to their north-east) in 1923.⁷¹ A new rectory house was built south-east of the church in 1923–4.⁷²



Churchill village in 1788 (left) and 1899 (right). The medieval church is on the north-western edge of the village, next to no.196 on the 1788 map. Hastings Hill runs west–east to join the main north–south Chipping Norton road. Detail of 1788 map from OHC, Lo. VII/1; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XX.1 (1899 edn).

Later house-building was achieved largely through infill, little altering the village's overall size and shape.⁷³ Development was initially focused on the village's north-western and north-eastern edges, with nine pairs of council houses built on Sidings Road and Hastings Hill in the 1930s–40s (extending to the old church), and a row of five cottages erected opposite Grange Farm.⁷⁴ The area bounded by Hastings Hill, Sidings Road, and Kingham Road was largely built up by 1979,⁷⁵ and infilling continued on the village's south and south-west sides, where new housing on the sites of former farmyards, agricultural buildings, and other occupied ground incorporated several newly laid-out culs-de-sac.⁷⁶

Outlying settlement included the medieval watermills on Swail brook and at Standbow bridge.⁷⁷ Water or Conduit House (replaced later by Conduit Farm) existed by 1767, built next to a spring feeding the Sars brook as part of an estate scheme to pipe clean

⁷¹ NHLE, no. 1198370; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 265–6; below, social hist. (since 1800).

⁷² Below, relig. hist. (rectory and vicarage hos).

⁷³ OS Maps 1:2500, Oxon. XX.1 (1881–1922 edns); 1:25000, sheet 45 (2005 edn).

⁷⁴ OHC, RDC9/3/F6/2; RDC9/3/F7/2; OS Map 6", SP 22 SE (1955 edn). Sidings Road is named from the nearby former railway sidings at Churchill mill.

⁷⁵ OS Map 1:2500, SP 2824 (1979 edn).

⁷⁶ Including Langston Close, William Smith Close, and Eversley Lane.

⁷⁷ Below, econ. hist. (milling).

water downhill to the village.⁷⁸ The Summer or Round House, ‘commanding a very pleasant and extensive prospect of upwards of 30 miles’, was built north of Besbury Lane also by the 1760s, and in 1788 was kept in hand by the lord, but was demolished during the 19th century.⁷⁹ An outlying cottage, barn, and stable on the site of the later Hill or Sarsgrove Farm was built very soon after enclosure in 1788,⁸⁰ while new late 18th- or early 19th-century farmhouses included Churchill Heath, Rynehill, Churchill Grounds, and East Churchill Grounds, all set within newly enclosed fields.⁸¹ Boulter’s Barn (near the parish’s northern edge) was built around the same time, and acquired a house by the 1860s.⁸² Other isolated roadside dwellings included Downs Hollow on the Burford–Chipping Norton road (built c.1830 as an entrance lodge to a house in Sarsden), a brickmaker’s cottage and kiln near Rynehill Farm (c.1840s), and buildings associated with the railway crossings and station, including the Langston Arms Hotel.⁸³ A few additional outlying houses were built in the 20th century, although most inhabitants continued to live in the village.⁸⁴

The Built Character

Churchill has a largely homogenous built character, with most pre-20th century houses constructed (as in neighbouring villages) from locally quarried limestone. Brick (although locally manufactured in the 19th century) is confined mostly to chimney stacks, while reconstituted stone was introduced in the 20th, along with render or pebbledash. Some roofs were originally thatched,⁸⁵ but local limestone slates predominated until superseded by more modern materials in the 20th and 21st centuries. Even so most modern houses employ styles and materials which reflect the local vernacular. Uniformity of style was probably encouraged by the concentration of most of the housing stock in the hands of a single landowner until the manor’s sale in 1922.⁸⁶

Apart from the medieval church’s surviving chancel, the only known medieval work which is possibly in situ is a two-light, 14th-century window discovered in the part-cellar of Corner House, its upper mouldings obscured by a barrel vault contemporary with the main

⁷⁸ Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797); OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 99; below, econ. hist. (parl. encl. and later).

⁷⁹ Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Bryant, *Oxon. Map* (1824); OHC, Lo. VI/4, p. 11; Lo. VII/1, calling it Bellview House.

⁸⁰ OHC, Lo. VI/4, p. 12; below, econ. hist. (parl. encl. and later).

⁸¹ OHC, Lo. VII/2–3; OS Maps 1”, sheets 44 and 45 (1828 and 1833 edns).

⁸² TNA, RG 9/910, no. 124; RG 10/1456, no. 117; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.14 (1881 edn).

⁸³ Above (railway); below (built character); econ. hist. (non-agric.).

⁸⁴ OHC, RDC9/3/F6/2; OS Maps 1:25000, sheets 45 and 191 (2005–6 edns).

⁸⁵ e.g. Northants. Archives, FH 366 (dated 1540); *Sale Cat., Sarsden Est.* (1922): copy in OHC, Fi. XIV/ii/2. Some thatch survives.

⁸⁶ OHC, DV/X/41; below, landownership.

(18th- or early 19th-century) building. Fragments of a 14th-century doorway survive reset in ground-floor fireplaces, and a total of 115 decorative medieval floor tiles were found in a floor underneath the current stairs. Like the remains of a 14th-century doorway re-used in nearby Hastings Hill House, some or all of those items could have come from the church upon its demolition in 1825, but nevertheless raise the possibility (along with the cellar window) of a high-status stone-built medieval dwelling on the site.⁸⁷



Corner House (18th- or 19th-century with medieval building fragments possibly in situ in the cellar).

Little else obviously survives from before the 17th century, when (some 20 years before the 1684 fire) more than two thirds of dwellings were modest cottages with just one or two hearths, while a quarter had between three and five. Only three houses had six or seven hearths, amongst them the appropriated rectory house and the Morecroft family's 'mansion house', neither of which survive.⁸⁸ Slightly later is the late 17th-century Warren Hastings House (birthplace in 1732 of the future governor-general of Bengal), which was probably owned by the freeholding Watts family, and features ashlar dressings and quoins, coped verges, and ashlar end stacks with moulded dripstones and capping. Inside is a dog-leg staircase of c.1700 with moulded handrail and balusters, and a chamfered stone fireplace, while decorative plasterwork above carries the initials RW, most likely recalling one of the Watts family rather than (as usually claimed) the lord Sir Robert Walter (d. 1731). The adjoining Hastings Hill House (added in the early 18th century) contains an oak winder staircase and barrel-vaulted cellars.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ HER, PRN 11855; 12795; SMA 10 (1980), 88; 11 (1981), 83; 21 (1991), 80, 82; below, relig. hist. (relig. bldgs). For a 15th-cent. ho. called 'the Slate Place', above (settlement).

⁸⁸ TNA, E 179/255/4; below, relig. hist. (rectory and vicarage hos). The Morecrofts' house may have been a successor of the medieval manor house: below, landownership (manor ho.).

⁸⁹ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 266; NHLE, no. 1367791 (accessed May 2023); L. Rose, *The History of Churchill* (1934), 28, 42–3; below, landownership (manor ho.). Penyston Hastings (Warren's

Other buildings with 17th-century phases include the L-shaped Hacker's House, its three-bayed and two-storeyed main range featuring keystone windows, coped verges, and integral end stacks. The more modest Old Woolman's House (dated 1694) is of two bays, with wooden lintels, visible tie-beam ends, and a gabled stair tower at the rear, while one pair of semi-detached houses retains its thatch, with casements set under wooden lintels directly beneath the eaves.⁹⁰ Building in a similar style continued into the early 18th century, 1–2 The Square and Gables Cottage both retaining rear stair towers and casements under wooden lintels, while the slightly grander Gables features sash windows, coped verges, and ashlar end stacks with moulded dripstones. Its datestone (B/RS/1715) refers probably to Robert and Sarah Brookes.⁹¹ Later 18th-century houses display little variation in style, although Ferrimans has canted bay windows and a round-headed doorway with semi-circular fanlight.⁹²

Nineteenth-century buildings largely reflect the Langstons' patronage as lords of Churchill and Sarsden. James Langston (d. 1863) commissioned the new parish church (consecrated in 1827),⁹³ and provided the living's curates with the generously proportioned Haughton House (c.1830) on the village's south-eastern edge, the central bay of its main range breaking slightly forward beneath a hipped roof with boldly projecting eaves.⁹⁴ Langston's architect at Sarsden, George Repton, designed the outlying Downs Hollow on the Burford–Chipping Norton road, completed c.1830 (in Tudor Gothic style) as an entrance lodge to the Dower House in Sarsden, and Repton probably also built the double estate cottages (dated 1824) now called Repton House, the right-hand one with a projecting hipped roof.⁹⁵ Tudor Gothic motifs reappear in the gabled former primary school on Church Road (built in 1839 and enlarged in 1854),⁹⁶ and in more severe form in the Lower (or Boys') School designed by John Plowman junior in 1857, whilst the roughly contemporary Forge (north of the church) features a semi-circular tower lit by narrow openings.⁹⁷ Most of the parish's farmhouses were probably also remodelled under Langston, amongst them Grange

grandfather) probably rented the house from Thomas Watts (d. 1765), who was left it by James Butterworth (d. 1710), and by 1788 the site was divided between the freeholders Wm Watts and Chas Davis: R. Mann, *The History of Churchill and Sarsden* (2013), 39, 58–9; TNA, PROB 11/515/181; PROB 11/920/438; OHC, Lo. VII/1 (map). Suggestions that this was the manor ho. are unproven.

⁹⁰ NHLE, nos. 1198547; 1283847; 1198458; 1283765; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 266; OHC, Marshall XVIII/i/2 (Hacker's Ho. sale cat. suggesting a date of 1640).

⁹¹ NHLE, nos. 1053347; 1367792; 1198511; OHC, par. reg. transcript.

⁹² NHLE, nos. 1053344; 1053345; 1053346; 1053348; 1198470. For Ferrimans' later use as a pub or beerhouse, below, econ. hist. (non-agric.).

⁹³ Below, relig. hist. (relig. bldgs).

⁹⁴ NHLE, no. 1283862; OHC, POX0190328; below, relig. hist. (rectory and vicarage hos).

⁹⁵ NHLE, no. 1053343; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 266.

⁹⁶ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 70, p. 201 (for dates); cf. Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 265 (giving c.1845); below, social hist. (educ.).

⁹⁷ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 265–6; NHLE, no. 1367790 (sch.).

Farm on the village's north-eastern edge, its main two-storeyed range and gabled cross-wing creating an L-plan, with further ranges to the rear.⁹⁸

The gargantuan Gothic fountain commemorating Langston was commissioned by his daughter Julia in 1870, designed probably by Henry Woodyer. A crocketed spirelet carried on four flying buttresses sits atop a squat square tower with an embattled parapet and corner pinnacles, decorated with a band of armorial shields above a dedication in Gothic script. Woodyer may have also built the neighbouring reading room (now village hall), dated 1870, which retains an elaborate doorway beneath an ogee-crocketed hood and finials, although the gables with crocketed pinnacles which formerly adorned the building's large mullioned-and-transomed windows have since been removed.⁹⁹ A memorial to the geologist William Smith (d. 1839), comprising a large monolith of local oolite on two square steps, was erected on the nearby roadside by Julia's husband Henry Reynolds-Moreton, 3rd earl of Ducie, in 1891.¹⁰⁰ Village estate houses built for the earl include a nearby pair of cottages with tile-hung gables (dated 1885), a pair in Hackers Lane (completed the following year), and two pairs with timber-framed gables dated 1901. In 1879 Ducie also commissioned George Devey to build an 'elaborate railway inn' adjoining the station, the resulting Langston Arms Hotel (now a care home) featuring multiple gables, a jettied first floor, and tall red-brick diagonal chimneys as part of a complex design in free Tudor style.¹⁰¹



Village fountain of 1870 (left) and cottages dated 1885 (right).

⁹⁸ *Oxf. Jnl*, 5 Dec. 1863 (obit.); OHC, POX0190401 (photo).

⁹⁹ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 265–6; NHLE, no. 1283884; OHC, POX0190347.

¹⁰⁰ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 266; NHLE, no. 1053340; OHC, POX0190412.

¹⁰¹ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 266, 387–8; NHLE, no. 1283869; OHC, POX0170723; datestones.

In 1930–1 five pairs of stone-and-tiled council houses with alternating front and side entrances, different-sized gables, and segmental-arched windows were built on Hastings Hill, and were opened by Sir Stafford Cripps (then living at nearby Filkins). The builder was Oakley of Woodstock, who was bankrupted during their construction. A pair opposite was added by Groves of Milton-under-Wychwood in 1933, followed by three further pairs in plainer style, built probably of rendered or pebbledashed brick, and with a dentilled cornice beneath the eaves.¹⁰² Sporadic private development in the late 20th and 21st century generally adopted an imitative Cotswold style, the sleek modernism of Sunset (which replaced an existing building in 2002) contrasting with the more traditional design of its neighbours. At Dapplestones, a 1950s bungalow was remodelled and extended in 2018 in bold contemporary style, using non-traditional materials including rendered masonry, cedar cladding, and metal surrounds.¹⁰³

¹⁰² OHC, Lo. XI/10 (plans); *ibid.* RDC9/2/A3/2–3; RDC9/2/A3/5; above (settlement). For Cripps' interest in promoting vernacular styles, *VCH Oxon.* XVII, 63.

¹⁰³ WODC online planning docs, 16/03864/FUL; 17/02880/HHD; 18/00331/HHD (accessed May 2023).