

VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

Spelsbury parish

Introduction: Landscape, Settlement, and Buildings



A view along Spelsbury's main street.

Spelsbury is a large rural parish bordered by Charlbury, Chadlington, Chipping Norton and Enstone, and incorporates the scattered settlements of Spelsbury (itself little more than a hamlet), Dean, Fulwell, Taston, and the western part of Ditchley.¹ From an early date most of it belonged to Spelsbury manor, held for much of the Middle Ages by the Beauchamp earls of Warwick. Their successors the Lee family (earls of Lichfield from 1674) lived at Ditchley, where in the 1720s they replaced a substantial existing house with a lavish mansion called Ditchley House and (later) Ditchley Park. The house and its estate, which extended into Enstone and Charlbury, passed by marriage to the Dillon family, which retained possession until the 1930s, and during the Second World War (when owned by the MP Ronald Tree) Ditchley Park hosted weekend visits by Winston Churchill. It later became a centre for promoting Anglo-American relations, the still substantial estate being subsequently divided between the charitable Ditchley Foundation and the separate H.D.H.

¹ This article was researched and written in 2023–4.

Wills 1965 Charitable Trust, the owners in 2024. A separate smaller manor at Dean belonged to Oriel College, Oxford, from the 15th to the early 20th century. The parish's economy remained largely agrarian, focused on traditional sheep-corn farming and (at Ditchley) on woodland and wood pasture, and modern development is limited.

LANDSCAPE, SETTLEMENT, AND BUILDINGS

Parish Boundaries

The irregular and elongated parish extends north-westwards from near Stonesfield up onto higher ground on the borders of Chipping Norton, and in 1881 measured 4,304 acres. Its boundaries were based on the early estates of Spelsbury and Dean, the former probably originating in a royal grant of c.840–1.² A southwards protrusion as far as Ruddy Lane (close to Stonesfield village) gave Spelsbury a share in the wood-pasture at Ditchley, a township which lay partly in Enstone parish and which formerly included land attached to Bloxham manor.³ From there the parish (and hundred) boundary with Charlbury follows an ancient route towards Chipping Norton (the Wychwood Way)⁴ as far as Norman's Grove, where it runs west along field boundaries and an embanked track formerly known as the 'Hulwerk' past Coathouse Farm to Taston brook.⁵ South of Spelsbury village it takes in streamside meadow before joining Coldron brook and following a short stretch of the River Evenlode. A feeder stream rising near Butts Green forms the western boundary nearly as far as Chadlington East End, but the greater part of the western and northern boundary follows field boundaries, long stretches of which incorporate sharp right-angles marking former open-field furlongs. The only modern boundary changes came in 1985 when Fulwell was transferred to Enstone in exchange for the Enstone part of Ditchley, enlarging the parish to 4,604 a.⁶

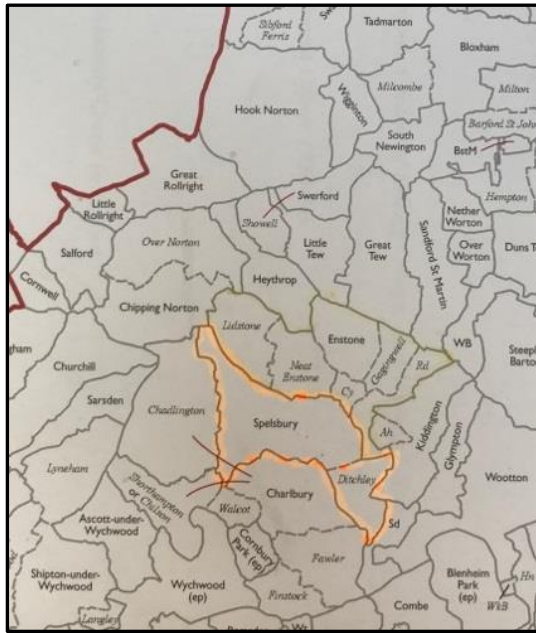
² OS *Area Bk* (1881); below, landownership; and for Spelsbury manor's bdiies in 1575, OHC, E36/2/1/E/3. Neighbouring Enstone may have also been defined in outline by the 9th century: below, Enstone, landscape.

³ OS Maps 1:2500, Oxon. XXI.14 and XXVI.2 (1881); above, Enstone, landscape etc. (boundaries); below, landownership.

⁴ Bodl. MS C.17:49 (1) (Charlbury map 1761); R.A. Chambers, 'The Archaeology of the Charlbury to Arncott Gas Pipeline, Oxon., 1972', *Oxoniensia* 43 (1978), 43 (no. 12); below, communics.

⁵ OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XX.12 (1881); T. Copeland, 'The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch: a Fieldwork Survey', *Oxoniensia* 53 (1988), 291 (giving inaccurate co-ordinates); *PN Oxon.* II, 370; below, communics.

⁶ West Oxfordshire (Parishes) Order 1985; *Census* 2011. For earlier local opposition to the transfer of Fulwell: OHC, PC246/A1/2–3.



Spelsbury parish (highlighted), from Tiller and Darkes (eds.), *Oxon. Atlas*.

Landscape

The parish encompasses open countryside in the north (with a high point of c.203 m. near Dean Buildings), hills and minor valleys overlooking the River Evenlode in the south, and undulating wood-pasture at Ditchley in the south-east. Spelsbury ‘village’, really no more than a hamlet, is located on a narrow hill at c.115 m., while neighbouring Dean and (especially) Taston mainly occupy secluded valleys, at c.124 m. and c.140 m. respectively.⁷ Limestone, overlain by stonebrash soils which were formerly worked as large open fields, gives way to alluvium and river gravels in the Evenlode valley and its feeder valleys, providing waterside meadow.⁸ Spring-fed streams include the Taston and Coldron brooks and streams at Ditchley, one of which was dammed to create a lake probably in the late 17th century, followed by more extensive landscaping from c.1720.⁹ A worked-out 19-a. sand quarry north-west of Dean Grove was turned into a nature reserve in 1997, and partly planted with trees.¹⁰

⁷ OS Map, 1:25000, sheets 180 (1999 edn) and 191 (2015 edn); *Spelsbury, Taston & Dean: Conservation Area Character Appraisal* (2017).

⁸ Geol. Surv. Map 1:50000 (solid and drift), sheet 218 (2007 edn).

⁹ Below, landownership (manor houses).

¹⁰ *The Post*, 30 May 1997; *Cotswold Life*, 39:1 (Jan. 2006), 199; www.wychwoodforesttrust.co.uk/reserves (accessed May 2024).



Communications

The parish is crossed by minor routes, the main Chipping Norton to Burford and Chipping Norton to Enstone roads lying just outside its bounds. The Charlbury–Chipping Norton road (the B4026) passes through Spelsbury village and joins the Wychwood Way, an ancient route between Chipping Norton and Akeman Street which was probably part of an Anglo-Saxon salt way.¹¹ Other roads most likely of medieval or earlier origin include those from Dean to Chalford Green, and from Chadlington and Charlbury to Tew (via Enstone); the Dean to Chalford road passes close to the prehistoric Hawk Stone, which later became a hundredal meeting place.¹² Later through-passage across the parish is indicated by the several poor travellers buried at Spelsbury in the 17th century.¹³ Some rerouting took place around Ditchley House in the mid to later 18th century,¹⁴ while pre-existing main routes in Dean and Spelsbury were confirmed at enclosure in 1779 and 1803.¹⁵ The Charlbury road

¹¹ A. Mudd, 'Fieldwalking on Spelsburydown and in the Chadlington Area', *Oxoniensia* 52 (1987), 11 and Fig. 1; *Oxon. Atlas*, 29; *VCH Oxon.* X, 127; XI, 183; XXI, 3, 4 and n.; above (boundaries).

¹² Above, vol. overview. For 18th-cent. roads: OHC, E36/1/10/M/1 (Ditchley, 1726); J.L.G. Mowat, *Sixteen Old Maps of Properties in Oxon.* (1888), Dean map (1743); Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797); for a possible medieval hollow way just north of Sheer's Copse: HER, PRN 13254.

¹³ OHC, par. reg. transcript.

¹⁴ TNA, C 202/135/1; C 202/138/1; M. Cousins, 'Ditchley Park – a Follower of Fashion', *Garden History*, 39:2 (2011), 159, 162–4; idem, 'Ditchley Park – from Park to Pleasure Ground', *Garden History*, 41:1 (2013), 44, 58. Changes proposed c.1703–5 were apparently not carried out: TNA, C 202/90/1; ibid. SP 44/241, pp. 114–16; *Cal SP Dom.* 1704–5, 290, 352; 1705–6, 12.

¹⁵ OHC, Dean and Spelsbury enclo. awards.

was turnpiked from 1800 to 1877, served by a toll gate at Henley Knapp.¹⁶ In Spelsbury village, alterations c.1864 included a straightening of the main road south-east of the school and a widening of what had been a narrow track between the Chequers inn and the church.¹⁷

A Dean shopkeeper supplied a carrier service to Chipping Norton in the 1850s–60s,¹⁸ but otherwise inhabitants probably relied mainly on carriers in nearby parishes. Local motorised bus services (run by City of Oxford and District Motor Bus Services) were established by the early 1920s, and c.1960 there were eight daily buses to Oxford.¹⁹ Despite some later reductions, in 2024 a mainly hourly Witney–Chipping Norton bus stopped in Spelsbury village and a slightly more frequent and later-running Oxford bus in neighbouring Enstone.²⁰ Charlbury railway station (c.2 miles south of Spelsbury village) opened in 1853, and in 2024 was still served by hourly trains to London and Worcester, with more frequent trains to London in rush hour.²¹ Letters were delivered from Enstone and Charlbury until a sub-post office was established in Spelsbury in 1893. That closed temporarily between 1914 and 1930 and in the mid 1970s, and then finally in 1999. Money order and telegraph services were available in Enstone, Charlbury and Chadlington.²²

Population

In 1086 Spelsbury manor's recorded population comprised 37 tenants and five slaves, while perhaps around half of the Dean and Chalford estate's 17 tenants and four slaves also lived in the parish.²³ Most presumably represented a household. By 1279 Spelsbury manor (which by then included Fulwell, Taston and part of Ditchley) had 54 tenants, and Dean manor 14.²⁴ Taston was apparently the largest settlement by 1306, and ten years later had 17 taxpayers compared with Spelsbury's 13, Ditchley's 10, Fulwell's 9, and Dean's share of the 19 individuals assessed in Dean and Chalford.²⁵ In 1377 poll tax was paid by 174 Spelsbury

¹⁶ *Oxon. Atlas*, 102–3; *VCH Oxon. X*, 128; H.J. Tollit, *Report upon County Bridges* (1878), 23; HER, PRN 10206.

¹⁷ Ch. Ch. Arch., Spelsbury maps 4–5; cf. OS Map 1", sheet XLV (1833 edn).

¹⁸ TNA, HO107/1732; *Dutton, Allen, & Co.'s Dir. Oxon.* (1863); *Melville & Co.'s Dir. Oxon.* (1867).

¹⁹ *City of Oxford and District Motor Bus Services: Motor Bus Timetables* (1922–31 edns) and Worth's timetable (1976): copies in OHC; E. Corbett, *A History of Spelsbury* (1962 edn), 276.

²⁰ OHC, PC246/A1/3–5; www.oxfordbus.co.uk/services/PULH/X9; https://tiscon-maps-stagecoachbus.s3.amazonaws.com/Timetables/Oxford_Timetables/S3_current.pdf (accessed June 2024).

²¹ *VCH Oxon. X*, 128; www.thetrainline.com (accessed June 2024).

²² *Gardner's Dir. Oxon.* (1852); *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1847 and later edns); *Dutton, Allen, & Co.'s Dir. Oxon.* (1863); *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883 and later edns); Smith, 'Post Offices'.

²³ DB, ff. 157v., 238v.

²⁴ *Rot. Hund.* II, 741, 746–7.

²⁵ TNA, E 179/161/10; E 179/161/8.

inhabitants aged over 14, presumably including those in Ditchley, Fulwell and Taston: the figure was the third highest in the hundred, and suggests considerable resilience after the Black Death. Another 41 poll-taxpayers recorded under Dean presumably included those living outside the parish in Chalford, and apparently also in Lidstone and Heythrop, which were both taxed with Dean in 1334.²⁶ By 1446 Taston had 25 tenants, Spelsbury 21, and Fulwell 11, although 40 years later numbers in Taston and Fulwell had fallen to 17 and seven respectively.²⁷ Ditchley had at least six cottagers in 1446, but by c.1500 perhaps just two or three.²⁸

The parish as a whole had 180 'houceling people' (i.e. adults) c.1550,²⁹ and Spelsbury manor 67 tenants in 1635, presumably mostly householders.³⁰ Seven years later the obligatory protestation oath was sworn by 118 men, suggesting a total adult population of c.236.³¹ Around 62 houses were assessed for hearth tax in 1662,³² and in 1676 there were an estimated 147 adults in the parish;³³ both figures suggest mid-century decline, probably partly due to high mortality in 1645, although in the longer term growth was also restricted by limited opportunities to obtain land or work.³⁴ Spelsbury, Dean and Taston each had over 20 houses in 1738, but Fulwell only six, and Ditchley just the earl of Lichfield's mansion and its ancillary buildings, including a keeper's lodge demolished twenty years later.³⁵ By 1759 there were c.94 houses including 31 in Spelsbury, 28 in Taston and 25 in Dean, and in the 1770s the total remained the same or slightly lower.³⁶ Thereafter the population grew from 509 in 97 houses in 1801 to 610 in 1821, subsequently falling from 597 in 1841 to 442 in 1901 and 396 in 1931. From a low of 293 in 1961 it recovered to 329 ten years later, standing at 305 in 2011 and much the same in 2021.³⁷

Settlement

²⁶ *Poll Taxes 1377–81*, ed. Fenwick, 291.

²⁷ OHC, E36/2/2/F1/17; TNA, DL 43/8/19. Figs quoted exclude tenants of assarts listed in 1446.

²⁸ OHC, E36/2/2/F1/17; *ibid.* Mas. III/ii/1 (two houses mentioned, 1558); TNA, E 179/161/170 (one taxpayer, 1524).

²⁹ Ch. Ch. Arch., MS Estates 82, f. 6; cf. *Chant. Cert.* 36, claiming only 53.

³⁰ OHC, E36/2/2/CR/73 (excluding Dean).

³¹ *Prot. Retns.*, 98–9.

³² TNA, E 179/255/3, mm. 33–4, 42, 46.

³³ *Compton Census*, ed. Whiteman, 421.

³⁴ OHC, par. reg. transcripts (no burial records survive for 1646–9); A.G. Hann, 'Kinship and Exchange Relations within an Estate Economy: Ditchley, 1680–1750' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis, 1999), 94–104; below, econ. hist.

³⁵ *Secker's Visit.* 142 (also mentioning a farmho. which was probably that just over the parish boundary in Enstone); OHC, E36/1/10/M/1; Cousins, 'Ditchley Park – from Park to Pleasure Ground', 41; below (settlement).

³⁶ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 557, f. 53; d 563, f. 73; d 565, f. 141.

³⁷ Census 1801–2021. For the settlements' relative sizes, below (medieval and later settlement).

Prehistoric to Anglo-Saxon Settlement

Prehistoric activity is well attested. Fieldwalking finds in the north suggest Mesolithic occupation, while Neolithic remains include a long barrow in Shilcott Wood and widely distributed flint finds.³⁸ Standing stones called the Hawk Stone (north of Dean) and Taston's Thor Stone are of late Neolithic or Bronze Age date.³⁹ Other later prehistoric features include a trackway (visible in air photos) c.300 m. north-east of the Hawk Stone,⁴⁰ and several Bronze Age round barrows.⁴¹ Cropmarks suggest Iron-Age banjo enclosures at Ditchley and Fulwell,⁴² while a section of Grim's Ditch, perhaps created around the time of the Roman conquest, cuts across Ditchley.⁴³ A square enclosure made of packed stone, just over a kilometre to the south, has been interpreted as a Romano-Celtic temple.⁴⁴ Other thinly spread Roman finds include pottery sherds and burnt stone from south of Enstone Firs, perhaps indicating a kiln site.⁴⁵



The Hawk Stone
in Dean:
[darkoxfordshire.
co.uk](http://darkoxfordshire.co.uk)

Anglo-Saxon remains include a spearhead and knife found just north-east of Spelsbury, and a post-built structure uncovered by gravel extraction near Grove Lane.⁴⁶ A

³⁸ A. Mudd, 'Fieldwalking on Spelsburydown and in the Chadlington Area', *Oxoniensia* 52 (1987), 14, 20–1; HER, PRN 11861, 11327, 27553, 5212.

³⁹ HER, PRN 2259, 2234.

⁴⁰ Ibid. PRN 13886.

⁴¹ Ibid. PRN 1579, 2281, 2292, 1564, 13390, 13886; Mudd, 'Fieldwalking', 11.

⁴² HER, PRN 17206, 15968.

⁴³ Brooks, *Oxon. N&W*, 302; NHLE, nos. 1014708, 1012904 ('North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch', accessed June 2024); HER, PRN 17187–17188, 8913; *VCH Oxon.* II, 335 (now-lost rectangular 'camp' at Model Farm). For Iron Age pottery: PRN 27555, 27560, 27583, 27594.

⁴⁴ HER, PRN 1269.

⁴⁵ Ibid. PRN 11972.

⁴⁶ Ibid. PRN 1578, 1547.

probably 7th- or early 8th-century disc-brooch or hanging bowl escutcheon found in Court Close west of the church may indicate a high-status burial.⁴⁷ The close itself was the site of Spelsbury's medieval manor house (demolished in the 16th century), which was probably established by 1066 and which, given that an estate here was almost certainly granted to the bishop of Worcester c.840–1, may have been preceded by a much earlier high-status residence,⁴⁸ perhaps with its own church. If so that early centre may be commemorated in the name Spelsbury (meaning 'Spēol's *burh*'), which is documented from the early 11th century, although more likely the *burh* was an undated triangular earthwork enclosing c.24 a. 'on an eminence near the village' which was destroyed c.1840.⁴⁹ Dean ('denu', or winding valley) was well established as a separate manorial centre by 1066,⁵⁰ while a further indication of the area's importance is the apparent adoption of the Hawk Stone (earlier the Horestone) as an early medieval hundredal meeting place, set amongst early routeways close to the parish boundary.⁵¹

Medieval and Later Settlement

Spelsbury was the site of the parish church by 1200 if not long before, cementing its centrality.⁵² Ditchley ('wood or clearing by [Grim's] ditch') is documented from 1208, Fulwell ('dirty stream') from c.1250–60, and Taston (named from the prehistoric 'Thor's stone') from 1279:⁵³ like Spelsbury and Dean all three settlements may well, however, be of pre-Conquest origin, Taston's name suggesting that the stone then formed a landmark in mainly open surroundings. The hamlets' irregular and rather straggling roadside layouts were established probably by the later Middle Ages,⁵⁴ with focal points provided by the church, the Spelsbury and Dean manor sites, and medieval wayside crosses at Dean and Taston.⁵⁵ Ditchley's medieval manor house may have been established by the 14th century, and had at least two tenant houses close by, although by 1450 one had been abandoned leaving an empty toft.⁵⁶ Late medieval population decline presumably led to similar thinning out elsewhere, including at Dean, where a ruined house was mentioned in the early 16th

⁴⁷ Ibid. PRN 14131; Corbett, *Spelsbury*, 21–2 and plate; *SMA* 21 (1991), 85.

⁴⁸ Below, landownership.

⁴⁹ *PN Oxon.* II, 379; *VCH Oxon.* II, 335–6.

⁵⁰ *PN Oxon.* II, 379, 439; below, landownership.

⁵¹ Above, vol. overview.

⁵² Below, relig. hist. (church archit.).

⁵³ *PN Oxon.* II, 379–80; above, Enstone, landscape (settlement).

⁵⁴ OHC, E36/2/1/E/3 (describing roadside houses in 1575); *ibid.* E486/1/M/1 (sketch map of Spelsbury village c.1700); Mowat, *Sixteen Old Maps* (map of Dean in 1743, incl. greenside houses); OHC, P334/M/1 (Spelsbury, Taston and Fulwell in 1803); Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767).

⁵⁵ Below, landownership; relig. hist.

⁵⁶ OHC, Mas III/i/1; below, landownership.

century,⁵⁷ and where by 1743 the settlement's southern edge lay a little to the north of fields named Town's End Hill.⁵⁸

Modest 16th- to 18th-century growth saw new cottages built in Spelsbury and Taston,⁵⁹ while expansion at Dean may have included the apparently 17th-century Spelsburydown Farm and an isolated farmstead belonging to the rectory estate, the latter possibly succeeding an earlier cottage.⁶⁰ At Ditchley, the isolated New Barn Farm and Lodge Farm were built in the 18th century.⁶¹ By 1851 there were 35 houses in Taston, 32 (one uninhabited) in Dean, 31 in Spelsbury, 13 in Fulwell, and nine in Ditchley.⁶² A model farm complex was built at Ditchley c.1855,⁶³ although c.1860 Charles Dillon (d. 1865) allegedly demolished up to 15 cottages, erecting only five in their place.⁶⁴ By 1871 Dean was the largest hamlet with a population of 174, followed by Taston (149), Spelsbury (127), Ditchley (92), and Fulwell (51). Later development was mainly limited to 16 council houses built at the north end of Spelsbury village in 1951, and a pair of semi-detached bungalows added in 1960.⁶⁵ Electricity was available from 1936, and the rural district council laid on piped water from 1955, although Fulwell and Ditchley continued to be supplied privately by the Ditchley estate.⁶⁶

The Built Character

The parish's older surviving houses (chiefly of 17th-century and later origin) are generally modest, mainly comprising two- to three-bay ranges.⁶⁷ That pattern was apparently well established by the 1660s when over four-fifths had only one or two hearths, and almost 60 per cent just a single hearth.⁶⁸ The chief exceptions are Ditchley Park and Dean House, which are separately described below.⁶⁹ Fifteenth-century documents mention houses constructed of stone, timber, and daub, with stone, tile or thatched roofs.⁷⁰ Surviving walling is mainly of coursed limestone rubble, and roofs of Welsh or stone slate or concrete tile;

⁵⁷ I.S. Leadam (ed.), *Domesday of Inclosures 1517–1518* (1897), I, 361.

⁵⁸ Lobel, *Dean and Chalford*, pp. 2, 10; Mowat, *Sixteen Old Maps*.

⁵⁹ TNA, LR 2/189, f. 72; OHC, E36/2/1/E/10; *ibid.* E486/1/M/1.

⁶⁰ NHLE, no. 1251480 (Spelsburydown, accessed June 2024); below, landownership (rectory estate).

⁶¹ Below, landownership (combined estate); econ. hist.

⁶² TNA, HO 107/1732.

⁶³ Below, econ. hist.

⁶⁴ Ch. Ch. Arch., MS Estates 82, f. 148v.; *ibid.* f. 146v. says only seven were demolished.

⁶⁵ OHC, PC246/A1/2–3; Corbett, *Spelsbury*, 276.

⁶⁶ Ch Ch Arch. T/xiv/c.5; OHC, PC246/A1/3. For water fountains provided at Spelsbury and Taston in the 19th cent., below (built character); social hist. (since 1800).

⁶⁷ WODC, 'Spelsbury, Taston & Dean Conservation Area Character Appraisal' (accessed at www.westoxon.gov.uk, Mar. 2024).

⁶⁸ TNA, E 179/255/3; below, social hist.

⁶⁹ Below, landownership.

⁷⁰ OHC, E36/2/2/F1/6, 8, 9, 15.

thatched roofs were once common but have largely been replaced, although a prominent example exists on Spelsbury's main street.⁷¹ All of the hamlets also feature drystone walls set behind grass verges. Spelsbury, Taston and Dean became a conservation area in 1991.⁷²

The L-plan Manor Farm House (earlier called Spelsbury Farm) in Spelsbury includes a long street frontage of limestone rubble and ashlar dressings.⁷³ Of two storeys with a steep-pitched roof, which accommodates an attic lit by gabled dormers, it appears to be chiefly of 17th- or 18th-century and later date, but possibly incorporates earlier stonework from the demolished medieval manor house.⁷⁴ It is probably to be identified with the nine-hearth house occupied by Edward Alderton in the 1660s,⁷⁵ although at that time the site apparently also included a separate three-bay house with a gatehouse and a cottage.⁷⁶ Rooms in 1710 included a hall, long parlour, shepherd's chamber, and cellar, the house's windows (many of which had recently been blocked) including one lighting the great staircase. There was also a pigeon house.⁷⁷



Manor Farm
House,
Spelsbury.

⁷¹ Ch. Ch. Arch., T/Maps/SPE/3 (c.1860 watercolour of thatched houses near church); VCH fieldwork (2024); NHLE, no. 1251411 (The Old Bakehouse).

⁷² WODC, 'Spelsbury, Taston & Dean Conservation Area Character Appraisal'.

⁷³ NHLE, no. 1251412 (Manor Farmhouse); OHC, Jo II/1; *ibid.* E36/2/11/D/2–12. This and following NHLE refs accessed June 2024.

⁷⁴ Notes in VCH possession.

⁷⁵ TNA, E 179/255/3, m. 46; *Hearth Tax Oxon.* 171.

⁷⁶ OHC, E36/2/14/D/1–7 (1645 and later).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* E36/2/11/D/5–6.

Other substantial farmhouses include Spelsburydown Farm, a 17th-century lobby-entry house refronted in the 18th century to create a symmetrical three-storeyed elevation with sash windows. A rear wing is of similar height, and the gable walls retain stone-mullioned windows.⁷⁸ Middle Farmhouse in Taston, likewise probably of 17th-century origin, also had a lobby-entry layout and now incorporates a two-storeyed former granary range.⁷⁹ At Spelsbury, a symmetrical row of four almshouses built at the village's north end in 1688 features attic gables, stone-mullioned windows, and chamfered stone doorways, with an original garden wall fronting the street.⁸⁰

Later buildings include Spelsbury House, built c.1855 for Fanny Dillon (d. 1896), the widow of Constantine Dillon (d. 1853), a younger son of the 13th viscount.⁸¹ The gabled house is mainly rather plain in stone and Welsh slate, but with some Gothic casement windows and an elaborate later porch. Also of Victorian date are two pairs of stone-built gabled L-plan cottages in Fulwell, and a semi-detached pair of bayed cottages with red brick detailing in Taston, built for Miss Etheldred Dillon (d. 1910), daughter of the 14th viscount.⁸² Spelsbury has two pairs of houses of similar date on the west side of the road, one pair gabled, while another gabled pair (later converted to a single residence) set back on the south-eastern fringe of the village were built in 1925, to designs by Kathleen Dillon.⁸³ Further additions in Spelsbury included the symmetrical former school of c.1839 with its tall central master's house and added clocktower, a prominent drinking fountain of c.1859 housed in a square pavilion with a pyramidal stone-slate roof and rusticated archway, and (next to it) the stone-built village hall of 1920–1, with a mock timber-framed gable.⁸⁴ A smaller and more secluded water fountain at Taston comprises a tower-like Gothic structure of limestone and pink sandstone, erected in 1862 in memory of Henrietta, Viscountess Dillon.⁸⁵

The 1950s council houses at the north end of Spelsbury village are plain, built of light brown brick with dark brown concrete tiled roofs, and the most striking modern addition is a single-storeyed quadrangular house close to the church, built by (and for) the architect Timothy Rendle c.1978 using Cotswold stone and featuring a flat timber roof.⁸⁶ Next door is

⁷⁸ NHLE, nos. 1251480 (Spelsburydown), 1262797 (barn c.1.1 km north).

⁷⁹ Ibid. no. 1262715 (Middle Farmhouse); and for a nearby early 18th-cent. barn: *ibid.* no. 1251433.

⁸⁰ Ibid. no. 1251415 (Almshouses); below, social hist. (welfare).

⁸¹ Corbett, *Spelsbury*, 250–1; *Burke's Peerage* (1935 edn).

⁸² OHC, E36/2/21/C/2; VCH fieldwork; Brooks, *Oxon. N&W*, 482 (suggesting they were by J.P. Seddon for the Ditchley estate, c.1868).

⁸³ VCH fieldwork; Corbett, *Spelsbury*, 276 and facing plate: 'Wigwell Cottages', now 'Wigwell House'.

⁸⁴ Below. social hist. (since 1800; educ.); VCH fieldwork. The drinking fountain (in memory of the 13th Viscount Dillon's 4th son) originally had a shallow-gabled Italianate roof: Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 481.

⁸⁵ NHLE, no. 1262769 (with photo); below, social hist. (since 1800).

⁸⁶ *The Architectural Review*, 1 Jan. 1978 (vol. 163, issue 971); now called 'Willow'.

a pyramid-roofed bungalow in stone and Welsh slate.⁸⁷ Several older houses saw the gentrification and enlargement typical of the area, including the conversion of some outbuildings.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ 'Pyramid House'.

⁸⁸ e.g. Lower Farmhouse and others in Taston (VCH fieldwork); Coldron Mill (*Witney Gaz.* 22 Jan. 1987); former prime minister David Cameron's house in Dean (*Oxf. Mail*, 5 Feb. 2019; *The Guardian*, 30 Apr. 2017).