



VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

Cornwell

Economic History

Cornwell's economy was dominated by mixed farming typical of the Cotswolds, sheep-and-corn husbandry on the hills being combined with dairying and cattle-rearing in streamside meadows. Medieval manorial assets included fishponds and a rabbit warren, and a small park existed by the 17th century. Non-agricultural activities were few, although a roadside inn (established by 1671) continued for over 150 years, and there was a short-lived 20th-century village shop. A watermill operated from the 11th to the 18th century.



The Agricultural Landscape

Cornwell's landscape was typical of the area, with its mix of arable fields, meadow, pasture, and a few pockets of woodland. Two open fields existed c.1210,¹ and various furlongs were named in 1614 and 1635, when the rector's arable (and presumably that of the manor's tenants) lay dispersed in strips.² Meadows (reckoned at 20 a. in 1086) presumably fringed the streams in the south and east of the parish:³ a common meadow called Sunderham was mentioned c.1210, and others named Thetcham and Mearemead in 1614, when the latter was allocated annually by lots.⁴ Pasture (two furlongs square in 1086) lay probably on the highest ground in the west,⁵ commons named in 1614 (when one open-field yardland carried

¹ *Oseney Cart.* IV, p. 333.

² OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, ff. 102–3.

³ DB, f. 161; above, landscape etc. (landscape).

⁴ *Oseney Cart.* IV, p. 333; OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 102; cf. *PN Oxon.* II, 346.

⁵ DB, f. 161.

commons for three cattle and 50 sheep) including Henhills and the Fern, where furze was also cut.⁶ All of the open fields, common meadows, and common pastures were enclosed by private agreement in 1669,⁷ two fifths of the enclosed farmland being worked as arable in 1870 and 1900.⁸

Fishponds mentioned in the 1320s lay south-east of the manor house within the present-day park, which existed by 1677 and which, following 19th-century enlargement, covered c.80 a. in the 20th century.⁹ A medieval rabbit warren (recalled in the 17th-century fieldname conygree) lay probably in the west of the parish.¹⁰ Woodland was seemingly scarce before the 18th or 19th century, when new plantations were established,¹¹ and by 1910 the manor estate included 23 a. of woods. Further woodland was planted in the park c.1997.¹²

Medieval Farming

In 1086 Cornwell was under-stocked, its single ploughteam (on land sufficient for two) being held in demesne and worked by six bordars and one slave (*servus*). No other tenants were listed on the manor, whose 30s. annual value was unchanged from 1066, and which included a mill, meadows, and pasture.¹³ Some additional Cornwell tenants may have held land of Anketil de Grey's Salford manor,¹⁴ and in 1241 (when the open fields followed a three-course rotation) Cornwell's lady Hawise de Grey negotiated with Salford's lords to permit mutual intercommoning after the hay and corn harvests.¹⁵

By 1279 Cornwell's two-ploughland demesne was worth £4 a year, and eight customary tenants (successors of the 11th-century bordars and slave) held a total of 7½ yardlands in return for labour services (ploughing, reaping, and haymaking), an annual corn payment, and tallage, the whole valued at 9s. 9½d. each. Two freeholders held larger farms, one paying 38s. rent for a hide (or four yardlands) and the other representing the lord at the hundred court in return for two yardlands, while an additional freeholder held a yardland of Salford manor for 5s. rent.¹⁶ The scale of demesne farming was hinted at in the 1320s when,

⁶ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 102; cf. *PN Oxon.* II, 346.

⁷ Below (1500–1800).

⁸ TNA, MAF 68/255; MAF 68/1851; below (since 1800).

⁹ Above, landownership (manor ho.); NHLE, no. 1001093 (accessed Nov. 2022); conveyance 10 June 1959, in private possession.

¹⁰ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 102; TNA, C 5/537/41; *PN Oxon.* II, 346.

¹¹ cf. OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.9 (1881–1922 edns).

¹² OHC, DV/X/37; NHLE, no. 1001093.

¹³ DB, f. 161; above (agric. landscape); below (milling).

¹⁴ Above, landownership (Salford manor estate).

¹⁵ *Oxon. Fines*, pp. 108–9.

¹⁶ *Rot. Hund.* II, 728, 740–1.

after it was plundered, Thomas Blaket claimed damages of up to 300 marks (£200) for stolen livestock including 200 sheep, 40 pigs, 10 cows, 16 oxen (for ploughing), and 7 horses, as well as for trees felled for timber and fish taken from his fishponds.¹⁷ The manor as a whole was then worth almost £13 10s. a year,¹⁸ and in 1341 Blaket's son Roger (then 'of Cornwell') was one of several local suppliers of wool to the king's commissioners.¹⁹ Otherwise few details of late medieval farming are known, although John of Adderbury (either the lord or demesne farmer) had 13 wether sheep stolen in 1382,²⁰ and Salford manor's Cornwell estate was worth £3 11s. 8d. in 1446, when its three customary farms there (two each comprising a ploughland and one a yardland) were held for cash rents totalling £2 15s. 8d.²¹

Farms and Farming 1500–1800

Sheep-and-corn husbandry continued alongside dairying into the 16th and 17th centuries, when testators typically left wheat, barley, oats, and hay, as well as sheep, cattle, pigs, poultry, bacon, wool, butter, and cheeses. Some also grew hemp (for rope) and kept bees,²² a 'bee garden' in the village being mentioned c.1603.²³ Shepherds were employed to manage larger flocks, James Spier owning 89 sheep at his death in 1618.²⁴ Other wealthy farmers included Richard Halifax (d. 1635/6), who had 80 sheep, 10 cattle, 26 poultry, 4 horses, and 8 stocks of bees, as well as quantities of wool, hemp, apples, lard, butter, and cheeses, stored crops of wheat, barley, malt, and pulses, and sown crops including 40 ridges of winter corn.²⁵ Sainfoin was grown extensively by 1681.²⁶

Spier, Halifax, and Edmund Weston all held their farms as copyholds of Cornwell manor in 1614, whilst Thomas Young (d. 1625) rented his from Anthony Freeman,²⁷ who had acquired the former Salford manor land but who later broke it up.²⁸ A part may have been sold to the Cornwell yeoman John Norgrove (d. 1690), who later farmed at Great Rollright,²⁹ and by the 1660s Cornwell's lord Sir Thomas Penyston owned virtually the entire parish

¹⁷ TNA, SC 8/34/1679; *Cal. Pat.* 1327–30, 149, 282; for context, above, landownership; below, social hist. (Middle Ages).

¹⁸ *Cal. Close* 1323–7, 628.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 1341–3, 334; D. Royce, 'Icomb Place', *Trans. Bristol & Glos. Archaeol. Soc.* 7 (1882–3), 177.

²⁰ E.G. Kimball (ed.), *Oxon. Sessions of the Peace* (ORS 53, 1983), 126; above, landownership (Cornwell manor).

²¹ TNA, SC 2/197/61.

²² OHC and TNA, Cornwell wills and inventories (transcribed by Salford Probate Group).

²³ Corpus Christi Coll. (Oxf.), Fb 14/17, f. 6.

²⁴ OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 69/5/1; 196.226 (shepherds); 59/3/34 (Spier).

²⁵ *Ibid.* 132/1/21.

²⁶ TNA, C 5/537/41, mentioning a 10-a. 'new saintfoyne close' and 100 a. 'late sown' with sainfoin. For Sir Thos Penyston's soil experiments, below, social hist. (1500–1800).

²⁷ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 102; *ibid.* MS Wills Oxon. 300/7/7.

²⁸ Above, landownership (Salford).

²⁹ OHC, E477/D/14; *VCH Oxon.* XXI (forthcoming).

apart from the glebe, following purchases from Freeman, Norgrove, and others.³⁰ In 1669 he and the rector Thomas Waring agreed to enclose all 24 yardlands in the open fields together with the common meadows and pasture, and to extinguish Cornwell's tithes, for which the rector received 67 a. along with 33 a. for his existing glebe.³¹ In 1681 several of the new closes on the Penystons' estate covered 50–150 a. each, and in 1685 the 100-a. glebe farm was surrounded with 'a good quickset hedge'.³²



No. 1 Cornwell: a substantial medieval and later farmhouse which by 1671 doubled as a roadside inn (see below).

By the 1750s there were five farmhouses (two of them then outlying),³³ while the principal tenant farmers included the grazier Francis West, whose 17 dairy cows were offered for sale following his death in 1778.³⁴ The glebe was farmed by William Gibbard (d. 1772), a new Glebe Farm being built in the east of the parish c.1770, following which the lord Fairmeadow Penyston paid Gibbard a guinea towards the cost of transplanting the parsonage orchard.³⁵ The Penyston tenant John Dunn (d. 1805) worked the glebe as well by 1790, when four other Penyston tenants paid land tax.³⁶

Farms and Farming Since 1800

By 1800 the manor's two largest farms were Cornwell Hill and Park farm (both then known as Cornwell Hill), worked respectively by members of the Dunn and Wells families.³⁷ John Dunn (d. 1816) owned a threshing machine and kept 370 sheep, while in 1834 Joseph Wells

³⁰ TNA, PROB 11/345/311; above, landownership.

³¹ TNA, C 5/59/45, mentioning an indenture of 1 July 1669; *ibid.* C 5/537/39; OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 111, no. 30; c 2088, p. 88.

³² TNA, C 5/537/41; OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 104.

³³ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 555, f. 149; above, landscape etc. (settlement).

³⁴ Oxf. Jnl Syn. 11 Feb. 1769, 21 Nov. 1778; *Oxf. Jnl*, 25 Sept. 1779.

³⁵ *Oxon. Poll 1754*, 55; OHC, par. reg. transcript, burial 1772, miscellanea; below, relig. hist. (rectory ho.).

³⁶ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 258/1/9; *ibid.* par. reg. transcript, burial 1805; *ibid.* QSD/L/86.

³⁷ *Ibid.* QSD/L/86. Park farm was so called by 1870.

had 27 longhorn cattle including 15 dairy cows.³⁸ By 1851 the farms covered 240 a. and 233 a. and were run by George Fawdry and John Barnes, each of whom employed eight labourers. The only other farm was the rector's 90-a. Glebe farm, let to John Checkley and employing two labourers,³⁹ and which in 1863 (when its later tenant Isaac Baylis gave it up) supported 106 sheep, 40 pigs, and 17 cattle.⁴⁰

Fawdry (d. 1871) was succeeded at Cornwell Hill farm (still 240 a.) by his eldest son George (d. 1898), whose 1874 lease (at £450 a year) required him to cultivate his arable on a four-course rotation, to carry coal to Cornwell Manor on three days a year, and to provide the lord J.F. Penyston with 5 tons of straw annually.⁴¹ John Barnes died in 1876,⁴² and from c.1885 Fawdry (who lived in Salford on a different farm) worked Cornwell Hill and Park farms together, employing a dairyman and a cheesemaker.⁴³ Penyston also kept some farmland in hand, his 115 Oxford Down sheep and 40 shorthorn cattle being auctioned after his death in 1893.⁴⁴ Debt forced George Bowles to give up Glebe farm in 1895,⁴⁵ presumably reflecting the worsening agricultural depression, although between 1870 and 1920 the overall acreage of cereals (wheat, barley, and oats) and the overall head of cattle (some for dairying) changed little. Sheep numbers fell by almost 90 per cent, however, to a large extent reflecting the falling price of wool.⁴⁶

Fawdry's son George gave up Cornwell Hill farm in 1904, prompting the sale of his stock of 200 Oxford Down sheep, 46 shorthorn cattle, and 33 pigs,⁴⁷ and in 1910 his successor Alfred Dix farmed 245 a. there. Park farm (230 a.) was run by Fawdry until 1919, and Manor farm (162 a.) by William Preston from a farmhouse in the village.⁴⁸ The 97-a. Glebe farm (held by George Thornton in 1910) became part of the Cornwell estate in 1939,⁴⁹ although in 1942 its new wartime tenant was accused of 'complete ignorance concerning farming, despite his assertion to the contrary'. By then all the parish's farms were held of the Cornwell estate, and most were mixed, with significant numbers of cattle still kept, and a milk round run from Cornwell Hill farm (then 119 a.). The other farms were Park farm (234 a.),

³⁸ *Oxf. Jnl*, 22 Mar. 1817, 4 Jan. 1834.

³⁹ TNA, HO 107/1732; *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1847–77 edns); *Oxon. Weekly News*, 14 Sept. 1870.

⁴⁰ *Oxf. Jnl*, 26 Sept. 1863; TNA, RG 9/912.

⁴¹ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 12 Apr. 1871, 10 Apr. 1901; draft lease in private possession.

⁴² *Oxon. Weekly News*, 6 Dec. 1876, 31 Mar., 2 June 1877.

⁴³ *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883–95 edns); TNA, RG 12/1179; *VCH Oxon.* XXI (forthcoming).

⁴⁴ *Oxf Jnl*, 26 Aug. 1893; above, landownership.

⁴⁵ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 18, 25 Sept., 4 Dec. 1895; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 362, f. 115.

⁴⁶ TNA, MAF 68/255; MAF 68/1851; MAF 68/2985.

⁴⁷ *Banbury Guardian*, 22 Sept. 1904; *Sale Cat., Stock on Cornwell Hill Farm* (1904): copy in private possession.

⁴⁸ OHC, DV/X/37; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 24 Sept. 1919; *Sale Cat., Stock on Park Farm* (1919): copy in private possession.

⁴⁹ OHC, DV/X/37; below, relig. hist. (endowment).

Glebe farm (96 a.), and Richard Dancer's Manor farm (297 a.), while Mrs Gillson kept 46 a. in hand as a model farm, employing one worker assisted by her gardeners.⁵⁰

After the Second World War Mrs Gillson's small herd of Guernsey cows was taken over by her successor at Cornwell Manor Lady Janet Crichton-Stuart, who established a larger herd of pedigree Devon beef cattle in 1954.⁵¹ In the 1960s the Wards acquired additional farmland in neighbouring parishes,⁵² and in the 1980s a third of economically active parishioners still worked in agriculture.⁵³ Glebe and Cornwell Hill farmhouses were sold as private dwellings in 1982 and 1984 respectively,⁵⁴ and in 2023 Manor farm (still leased from the estate by the Dancers) was the only working farm still based within the parish, growing cereals, and rearing cattle from a secondary farmstead called Top Farm.⁵⁵

Non-Agricultural Activities

Trades, Crafts, and Retail

No record of trades, crafts, or retailing has been found before the 17th century, Cornwell's small agricultural community presumably relying on Chipping Norton and neighbouring villages for goods and services. A mason resident in 1609 perhaps worked a quarry mentioned a few years later,⁵⁶ and a roadside inn on the manor estate, called the King's Arms in 1671, the Hare and Hounds in 1779 and 1796, and the Cornwell inn in 1797 and 1807, remained open as the King's Arms in 1824,⁵⁷ but closed soon after. By 1831 none of Cornwell's families worked in trade.⁵⁸

Agriculture and domestic service (both at Cornwell Manor and in the farmhouses) still accounted for all parish employment ten years later, when a gardener and a groom both worked for the estate,⁵⁹ and by 1855 it also engaged a carpenter.⁶⁰ In the 1870s–80s members of the Lainchbury family made a living operating their steam-powered threshing

⁵⁰ TNA, MAF 32/911/83.

⁵¹ *Country Life*, 25 July 1957, 194; *Illust. Sporting & Dramatic News*, 22 Nov. 1961; OHC, B28/1/F1/325.

⁵² Above, landownership; info. from Joy Timms. Cf. TNA, MAF 68/5189; MAF 68/6123, where the Cornwell returns are evidently for the whole estate rather than just the parish.

⁵³ *Census*, 1981–91.

⁵⁴ *Country Life*, 14 May 1981, 1364; info. from Alexander Ward.

⁵⁵ Local info.

⁵⁶ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 69/4/62; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 102 ('Quarre furlong'). For a slightly later quarry, R. Plot, *Natural History of Oxfordshire* (1677), 131–2.

⁵⁷ TNA, C 5/537/39 (King's Arms 1671); OHC, QSD/V 2–3; Bryant, *Oxon. Map* (1824); *Oxf. Jnl*, 20 Mar. 1824. For its location on a formerly important road, above, landscape etc. (communicis; settlement).

⁵⁸ *Census*, 1831.

⁵⁹ TNA, HO 107/878.

⁶⁰ *Oxf. Jnl*, 22 Dec. 1855.

machine, and two or three Cornwell women were by then employed at the Chipping Norton tweed mills,⁶¹ while various small quarries were still worked around the parish, although perhaps not commercially.⁶² A shop opened next to the village hall in 1939 (as part of Clough Williams-Ellis's remodelling) became a branch of the Chipping Norton Co-operative Society, and with its added bow window was voted 'the most picturesque co-operative store in England and Wales' in 1956.⁶³ That closed soon after 1966, however, leaving Cornwell with no shops or trades.⁶⁴



(Left) Plaque being fixed to the wall of Cornwell shop in recognition of its selection as 'the most picturesque co-operative store in England and Wales' in 1956: OHC, POX0188912.
(Below) King's Arms inn marked on Bryant, Oxon. Map (1824).



Milling

Cornwell mill (established by 1086) stood on the stream below the manor house and its fishponds, immediately west of Mill Copse, and continued as a water-powered corn-grist mill until the 18th century.⁶⁵ Domesday Book valued it at 2s. a year, and in 1279 it was held of the manor with a cottage for 16s. annual rent.⁶⁶ By 1446 the lords of Salford had a share as owners of a small estate in Cornwell, paying the lord 11d. a year for its use.⁶⁷ Millers

⁶¹ TNA, RG 10/1458; RG 11/1521.

⁶² OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.9 (1881 edn).

⁶³ *Country Life*, 17 May 1941, 436; M. Bee and P. Tyrrell, *The Chipping Norton Co-Operative Society 1866–1968* (2000), 22–3: copy in OHC, B36/PR1/1; above, landscape etc. (built character).

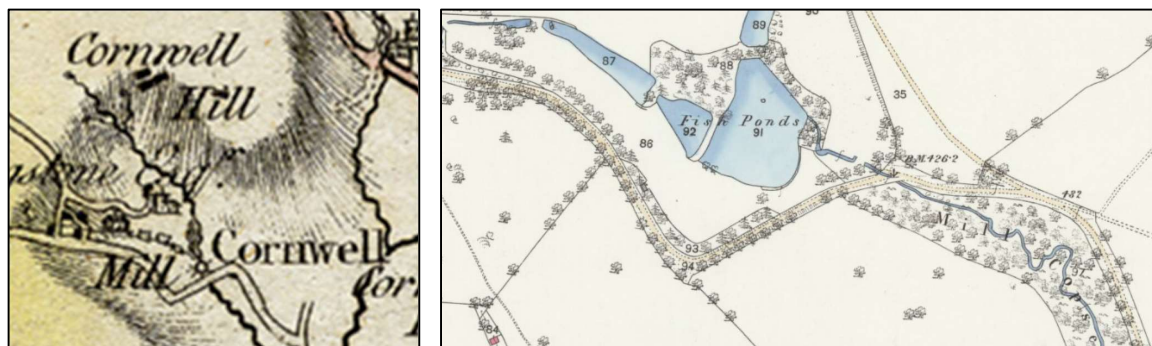
⁶⁴ *Oxf. Mail*, 18 Sept. 1966.

⁶⁵ DB, f. 161; Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); OS Map, 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.9 (1881 edn) (Mill Copse); Foreman, *Oxon. Mills*, 105.

⁶⁶ DB, f. 161; *Rot. Hund.* II, 741.

⁶⁷ TNA, SC 2/197/61; above, landownership (Salford manor estate).

included Robert Saunders in the 1540s,⁶⁸ William Dudley in 1667,⁶⁹ and John Bosley in 1681 (still as a tenant of Cornwell manor),⁷⁰ and a miller was resident in 1738.⁷¹ The mill was still mapped in 1767, but no later record has been found, and by 1880 all trace had gone.⁷²



(Left) Cornwell mill marked on Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767). (Right) Mill Copse and the site of Cornwell mill (just below the fishponds) mapped in 1880: OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.9 (1881 edn).

⁶⁸ TNA, SC 2/197/20; SC 2/197/21.

⁶⁹ Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (Warws.), DR 18/1/1442–3.

⁷⁰ TNA, C 5/537/41.

⁷¹ *Secker's Visit*. 47.

⁷² Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.9 (1881 edn).