

VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

Sarsden

Landownership

In the late Anglo-Saxon period Sarsden almost certainly formed part of the Shipton royal estate.¹ A separate 20-hide manor was created before the Norman Conquest, extending beyond the later parish to incorporate parts of Chadlington, Chilson, and Pudlicote.² Detached woodland at Chilson still formed part of Sarsden manor in 1609,³ but the other outliers were separated by the 12th or 13th century,⁴ leaving the manor largely conterminous with the modern parish.⁵ The manor was held from the Middle Ages by mostly resident lay lords, descending by marriage from the medieval Golafres to the Brownings and Hornes, and passing from 1602 to the Walters and Rolles. At its sale to the Langstons in 1791–2 it still covered the whole parish apart from the glebe (expanded to 191 a. at enclosure),⁶ and by then formed part of a combined 4,693-a. estate which included neighbouring Churchill and Lyneham.⁷ It remained in single ownership until 1922, when the estate was broken up and the mansion house and park were separated from the farmland. The glebe was sold the following year.⁸

Sarsden Manor

In 1086 Sarsden was held by the Norman baron Richard de Courcy, probably from the king,⁹ and passed with his other English estates to his younger son William (d. c.1114), Henry I's steward.¹⁰ William was succeeded by his son William (d. by 1130) and grandson William (d. 1171), whose tenant at Sarsden was Hugh Golafre;¹¹ Hugh's descendants continued thereafter as resident lords, while the overlordship passed to William's son William de

¹ *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 8–9, 42–3; above, vol. overview (Anglo-Saxon settlement). Chadlington and Shorthampton or Chilson (later associated with Sarsden) were still called 'members' of Shipton in 1279: *Rot. Hund.* II, 736–7.

² Schumer, *Wychwood*, 22, 24, 45; above, Chadlington, landownership; Chilson, landownership.

³ Schumer, *Oxon. Forests*, 215; below, econ. hist. (agric. landscape).

⁴ Above, Chadlington; Chilson; below, relig. hist. (Pudlicote tithes).

⁵ The only exceptions were a few medieval freeholds (later reabsorbed), and an initially small glebe: below (other estates); relig. hist. (glebe and tithes).

⁶ Below, econ. hist. (parl. enclo. and later); social hist.; relig. hist. (glebe).

⁷ OHC, Fi. I/35; *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 171; above, Churchill, landownership.

⁸ OHC, DV/X/41; *Country Life*, 2 Sept. 1922, 288; 9 Sept. 1922, 326; below (other estates); relig. hist.

⁹ DB, f. 159. De Courcy held Nuneham Courtenay from the king: *VCH Oxon.* V, 239.

¹⁰ Farrer, *Honors*, I, 103–4; Keats-Rohan, *Domesday People*, II, 428.

¹¹ Farrer, *Honors*, I, 105–6; Keats-Rohan, *Domesday People*, II, 428.

Courcy (d. 1194) and daughter Alice (d. 1218), wife of Warin Fitzgerald (d. 1215/16).¹² They were succeeded by their daughter Margaret de Redvers (d. 1252), whose son Baldwin (d. 1245) and grandson Baldwin (d. 1262) were the 6th and 7th earls of Devon, and by the younger Baldwin's sister Isabel de Forz (d. 1293).¹³ From her the overlordship passed to Warin de Lisle (d. 1296), and was amongst 86 knights' fees which his great-grandson Robert de Lisle surrendered to the king in 1368.¹⁴ The overlords in the late 14th and 15th centuries were the Montagu earls of Salisbury and their successors the earls of Warwick.¹⁵

By 1166 Hugh Golafre held three knights' fees from William de Courcy, one of them at Sarsden.¹⁶ Hugh's son Roger was lord by 1201 (when he confirmed his parents' grant of the advowson of Sarsden church to Eynsham abbey),¹⁷ and was succeeded before 1241 by his son Roger.¹⁸ By 1279 Roger's son Sir John Golafre (d. 1297) held Sarsden as a knight's fee from Isabel de Forz's steward Adam de Stratton,¹⁹ and the manor subsequently passed to John's son Sir Thomas (d. 1332) and grandson Sir John (d. 1363), who was granted free warren there in 1335.²⁰ His son Sir John Golafre (d. 1379) was succeeded by his illegitimate son Sir John (d. 1396), one of Richard II's favourites, and nephew John Golafre (d. 1442) of Fifield (Berks.), a sheriff and MP.²¹ He died childless, and Sarsden passed to William Browning (d. by 1470), whose first wife Agnes was a great-granddaughter of Sir John Golafre (d. 1363).²² Browning's second wife and widow Elizabeth married first John Hals (d. 1485), on whom Sarsden and Brize Norton were settled in 1470,²³ and later John Horne (d. 1526), who was in possession by 1501 and who served as a sheriff of Oxfordshire.²⁴

Horne's son Edmund (d. 1553) lived at Sarsden with his mother, John's second wife Elizabeth Blount (d. 1554), and in the late 1540s added neighbouring Merriscourt (in Lyneham) to the estate, the two manors mostly descending together thereafter.²⁵ Edmund's widow Amy (who married Sir James Marvyn) had custody during the minority of their

¹² Farrer, *Honors*, I, 107–8; *ODNB*, s.v. Hen. Fitzgerald.

¹³ *Complete Peerage*, IV, 316–23; Farrer, *Honors*, I, 122–3.

¹⁴ *Complete Peerage*, VIII, 71–7; *Cal. Close* 1364–8, 496.

¹⁵ *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XVII, p. 323; XX, p. 71; *Cal. Close* 1396–9, 190; *Cal. Inq. p.m. Hen. VII*, I, p. 56.

¹⁶ *Red Book Exch.* I, 224; Farrer, *Honors*, I, 121.

¹⁷ *Eynsham Cart.* I, pp. 122–3, 134; *Cur. Reg.* I, pp. 327, 450; below, relig. hist.

¹⁸ *Oxon. Eyre*, 1241, p. 87; *Book of Fees*, I, 607; II, 828, 834. Several generations of the family were buried at Bruern abbey, to which they granted land in Sarsden: Leland, *Itin.* ed. Toulmin Smith, II, 2; *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 313; below (other estates).

¹⁹ *Rot. Hund.* II, 729; *Cal. Inq. p.m.* III, p. 261.

²⁰ *Cal. Inq. p.m.* VII, p. 308; *Cal. Chart.* 1327–41, 322; *Feudal Aids*, IV, 161, 165, 184.

²¹ *Abbrev. Rot. Orig.* II, 299; *Feudal Aids*, IV, 188; *Hist. Parl.* s.v. John Golafre; Brunner and Lunt, *Sheriffs*, 52–3.

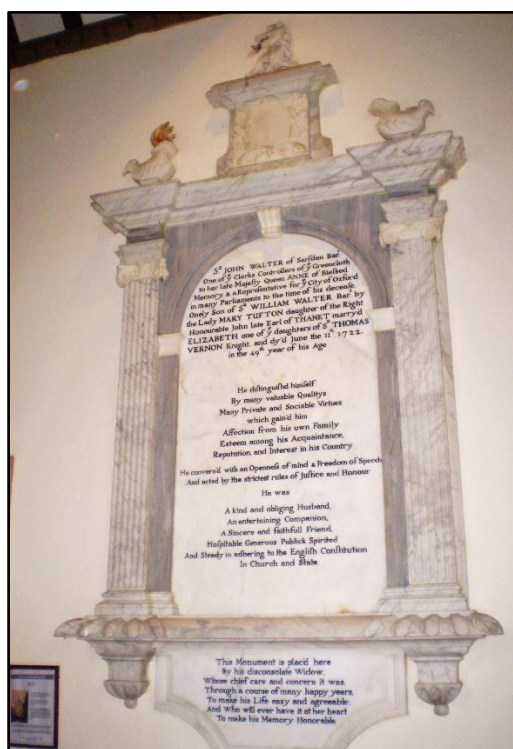
²² *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XXVI, pp. 87, 180; Leland, *Itin.* ed. Toulmin Smith, II, 3; TNA, C 1/28/422.

²³ TNA, CP 25/1/294/74, no. 75; *ibid.* REQ 2/5/308; *Cal. Inq. p.m. Hen. VII*, I, p. 56; *VCH Oxon.* XV, 221.

²⁴ TNA, CP 25/1/191/31, no. 44; *ibid.* C 142/45, no. 12; *ibid.* PROB 11/22/188; Brunner and Lunt, *Sheriffs*, 68.

²⁵ TNA, PROB 11/36/241; *Cal. Pat.* 1549–51, p. 246; *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 170.

daughter Elizabeth (c.1549–99), wife from 1565 of Anthony Bourne, a violent philanderer whose indebtedness led in 1578 to his imprisonment in the Tower of London and to the dispersal of his estates.²⁶ Sarsden passed from his trustees to Sir Herbert Croft (d. 1629) and his wife Mary, the Bournes' daughter and coheiress, and in 1602 the Crofts sold it to the lawyer John (from 1619 Sir John) Walter (d. 1630), who also acquired the reunited Lyneham manor and probably Churchill.²⁷ He was succeeded by his son Sir William Walter (d. 1675), a baronet from 1641, and by William's son Sir William (d. 1694) and grandson Sir John (d. 1722), the 3rd baronet, who served as MP for Oxford.²⁸ His half-brother and successor Sir Robert Walter died in 1731, when Sarsden passed (with Churchill and Lyneham) to the 2nd baronet's grandson, the Devon MP John Rolle Walter (d. 1779), who was succeeded by his brother Denys Rolle (d. 1797).²⁹ In 1791–2 Rolle sold the manor (again with Churchill and Lyneham) to the London banker James Langston (d. 1795), who was succeeded by his son John (d. 1812) and grandson James (d. 1863).³⁰



Memorials to Elizabeth Bourne (d. 1599) (left) and Sir John Walter (d. 1722) (right) in Churchill's former parish church (now Heritage Centre).

²⁶ *Cal. Pat.* 1554–5, p. 182; TNA, E 178/3017; ODNB, s.v. Eliz. Bourne; below, social. hist. (1500–1800).

²⁷ *Cal. Pat.* 1592–3, pp. 40–1; 1595–6, p. 42; 1601–2, p. 224; ODNB, s.v. Herb. Croft; *Hist. Parl.* s.v. Herb. Croft; VCH Oxon. XIX, 170–1; above, Churchill, landownership.

²⁸ *Complete Baronetage*, II, 142; *Hist. Parl.* s.v. Wm Walter, John Walter.

²⁹ *Hist. Parl.* s.v. John Walter, Denys Rolle.

³⁰ OHC, Fi. I/35–6; Fi. I/38; *Hist. Parl.* s.v. John Langston, Jas Langston.

James's daughter and heir Julia married her cousin Henry Reynolds-Moreton, 3rd earl of Ducie, whose death in 1921 prompted the estate's break-up the following year,³¹ the bulk being sold to Alfred Treweek of Sarsden Lodge (260 a.) and to the absentee landowners James French (309 a.) and E.P. Sturch (52 a.).³² The mansion house (Sarsden House) was sold with 250 a. to Lt Col. Roland Hermon-Hodge (d. 1942), 2nd Baron Wyfold from 1937, and his wife Dorothy (d. 1976),³³ who was followed by their son Hermon (d. 1999), the 3rd Baron. His nephew Adam Fleming sold it in 1990 (with 460 a.) to Christopher Stockwell, a reproduction furniture maker,³⁴ followed by sales in 1992 to Friedrich ('Mick') Flick (b. 1944), heir to the Mercedes-Benz fortune, in 1994 to Shaun Woodward (b. 1958), later a Conservative and Labour MP, and his wife Camilla Sainsbury, and in 2006 to the property developer Sir Anthony (Tony) Gallagher (b. 1951), the owner in 2023.³⁵

Manor House (Sarsden House) and Sarsden Park

Sarsden's lords were mostly resident, and the site of the existing Sarsden House has been continuously occupied since the Middle Ages. The medieval dwelling (set within a garden and including a dovecot) was rebuilt as a 'fair house ... of squared stone' by Edmund Horne, probably in the 1530s,³⁶ and that or a successor was assessed on 24 hearths in the 1660s.³⁷ In 1689 it was destroyed by fire, and was rebuilt for Sir William Walter in 1693.³⁸ Several features of that house survive, although under the Langstons it was extensively remodelled by Humphry Repton in 1795–6 and by George Repton in 1823–5.³⁹

The late 17th-century house had two storeys with attics, and was built of limestone ashlar with rusticated quoins under hipped slate roofs. It had a double courtyard plan with extensive outbuildings to the east, and was surrounded by formal gardens separated by walls and railings with elaborate gateposts and corner turrets.⁴⁰ The symmetrical seven-

³¹ *Complete Peerage*, IV, 477; *Sale Cat., Sarsden Est.* (1922): copy in OHC, Fi. XIV/ii/2; *The Times*, 28 Aug. 1922.

³² OHC, RDC9/3/F6/1; below, econ. hist. (parl. enclo. and later).

³³ *Complete Peerage*, XIII, 304–5; *Country Life*, 2 Sept. 1922, 288; 9 Sept. 1922, 326. By 1929 the estate incl. Home fm covered 487 a.: OHC, RDC9/3/F6/1.

³⁴ *Sunday Telegraph*, 3 June, 17 Nov. 1990; OHC, P409/10/D/1.

³⁵ *Sunday Times*, 18 Oct. 1992, 26 Feb. 2006; *Country Life*, 19 Nov. 1992, 66.

³⁶ TNA, C 133/78/15; C 135/31/27; Leland, *Itin.* ed. Toulmin Smith, II, 4; V, 74; below, social hist.

³⁷ TNA, E 179/255/4; *Hearth Tax Oxon.* 160. For furnished rooms in 1675 (incl. a great and little parlour, great hall, and dining room), TNA, PROB 4/6288; and for armorial glass, *Par. Colln*, III, 251–3 (also mentioning the arms of Elizabeth I).

³⁸ *Wood's Life*, III, 313. The architect is unknown.

³⁹ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 453; below.

⁴⁰ NHLE, no. 1367832 (accessed June 2022); N and W fronts illust. in 1695 by White Kennett (N. Temple, 'Sarsden, Oxfordshire', *Jnl of Garden Hist.* 6 (1986), 90; OHC, POX0078616–17), and the W front in 1795 by Repton (Yale Center for Brit. Art, accession no. B1975.2.386, available online at <https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:11987>). For site layout (1795), OHC, Lo. VII/2.

bayed north front followed the emerging pattern of grand Baroque mansions, and was broadly similar to nearby Bruern Abbey's somewhat later south front of c.1710–20.⁴¹ As at Bruern, the three central bays break forward slightly under a massive pediment, which at Sarsden was decorated with foliage carved in high relief flanked by *œils de bœuf* (since removed), while the central doorway, too, was enriched with carvings of fruit and flowers and a bearded head as keystone. A modillion eaves cornice and horizontal platband separating rows of sash windows in moulded surrounds continued along the west and east fronts, which projected beyond the main square block creating a U-plan. The imposing 14-bay west (or garden) front was approached by a straight avenue leading to an off-centre, full-height gabled entrance block projecting forward from the main range. The attics were lit by gabled dormers, and the roofs bristled with tall stone stacks.



*Sarsden House in the early 20th century:
Oxfordshire History Centre, POX0196086.*

In 1795–6 Humphry Repton filled in the inner courtyard of the north range, creating a new domed hall supported on eight Ionic columns, and removed the west entrance block, altering the façade and inserting a pediment with a single oculus above the central four bays.⁴² His main contribution, however, was to sweep away the earlier formal gardens and to landscape the grounds (see below). His son George Repton undertook a more extensive remodelling of the house. The north front was reduced to five bays, to which a central balustraded portico on four pairs of Ionic columns was added, and the pediment's decoration

⁴¹ *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 301 (built possibly by Wm Townesend).

⁴² Temple, 'Sarsden', 99, 106; OHC, P409/10/D/1 (rotunda); www.ribapix.com, RIBA65415, RIBA65417 (accessed July 2022).

was removed.⁴³ Repton also transformed the west front, demolishing the rear five bays and replacing them with a single-storey, nine-bay conservatory with wide corner pilasters and a double-span glass roof concealed by a balustraded parapet. Flush with the conservatory was a new six-bay balustraded loggia on coupled Ionic columns, and a three-bay canted bay window at the north-west end.⁴⁴ A balustraded terrace probably enclosed a formal parterre.⁴⁵ Inside, Repton's work included the insertion of white marble fireplaces, one with a frieze of Vesuvius erupting by moonlight, and egg-and-dart plaster coving.⁴⁶ The house has been handsomely redecorated and refurbished by its present owners, Tony and Rita Gallagher.⁴⁷

Amongst the estate's outbuildings the so-called Monastery lies south-east of the house, and was erected after 1693 using fabric including door arches and window frames probably reclaimed from the 1689 fire.⁴⁸ Built of roughly coursed limestone rubble under slate roofs, it is single-storeyed with attics, the main west-facing range originally incorporating five gabled dormers above three doorways and five mullioned windows.⁴⁹ The gables were later removed, and only the central doorway and four windows – all in 16th-century style – survive. Projecting north and south wings were rebuilt in the 19th century (when the north wing was used as a laundry), while further remodelling in the late 20th century included removal of a wide inserted entrance.⁵⁰ A 'polite' mid 18th-century stable block north-east of the house forms a U-plan around a courtyard, and incorporates an octagonal cupola above a central pediment. An attached coach house to the rear was decorated with murals of 'glamour girls' by American troops billeted there during the Second World War.⁵¹ A separate 19th-century walled garden grew organic fruit and vegetables c.2000.⁵²

By the late 17th or early 18th century the house and gardens were approached from the south along an ornamental avenue starting in Lyneham parish, flanked by a pair of limestone ashlar gatepiers resembling those at Sarsden House.⁵³ The avenue ran through to the Churchill road, where a similar gatepier survives at its northern end opposite the wayside

⁴³ Illust. in HE Arch., England's Places 4970_021 (photo of 1961).

⁴⁴ Temple, 'Sarsden', 100, 106; www.ribapix.com, RIBA65416; HE Arch., England's Places 4970_023 and 027 (photos of c.1920).

⁴⁵ NHLE, nos. 1000503; 1200331.

⁴⁶ OHC, P409/10/D/1 (photos); cf. *Sale Cat., Sarsden Est.* (1922), pp. 3–5 (listing the rooms).

⁴⁷ J. Musson, *Secret Houses of the Cotswolds* (2018), 100–7 (incl. photos).

⁴⁸ N. Turner, 'The Monastery Building, Sarsden Estate, Oxfordshire' (Cotswold Archaeol. Rep. 95279, 1995).

⁴⁹ OHC, POX0078616 (by Kennett).

⁵⁰ NHLE, no. 1053277; illust. in HE Arch., England's Places 4970_025 (photo of 1959).

⁵¹ NHLE, no. 1053278; below, social hist. (since 1800); illust. in A. Watkins, *Churchill and Sarsden: A Portrait in Old Photographs* (1988), 17; Temple, 'Sarsden', 93.

⁵² *Cotswold Life*, 33.7 (July 2000), 49, 51.

⁵³ NHLE, nos. 1200125; 1367812; VCH Oxon. XIX, 163, 172; OHC, POX0078617.

cross,⁵⁴ whilst two slightly later gatepiers surmounted by ball finials flank the entrance to a former eastern carriage drive from the Burford–Chipping Norton road.⁵⁵ Those southern and eastern entrances were superseded following enclosure in 1788 and the park's landscaping in 1795–6 by Humphry Repton, who created a new eastern entrance marked by a small rustic lodge called Greengates, in place of the originally proposed grand gated screen.⁵⁶ Repton disliked Sarsden's post-enclosure landscape of ploughed fields and stone walls, and screened the house by extensive tree planting in the park ('The Belt') and along the new carriage drive ('Kennels Belt').⁵⁷ More ambitiously he also united two of the estate's angular fishponds to create a serpentine lake, with a single-arched limestone ashlar bridge in the south-west corner, and at the east end a boathouse in the style of a pedimented Doric temple, built mostly of timber rather than the intended stone.⁵⁸ Later modifications included the removal and restoration of the fishpond on the lake's east side, construction of a new drive similar to one planned (but not implemented) by Repton, and new formal gardens.⁵⁹ Public paths still traverse the park, preserving earlier routes and passing by the lakes.⁶⁰

Other Estates

By 1279 several freeholds had emerged, of which the largest was 12 yardlands held in free alms by Bruern abbey, following a gift by Roger Golafre (fl. 1201).⁶¹ The abbey acquired free warren there in 1366 and retained the estate until the Dissolution.⁶² Also in 1279 the heirs of Walter of Sarsden held six yardlands from the Golafres as ¼ knight's fee, Walter's other estates lying at Balscott (in Wroxton) and Brize Norton.⁶³ The medieval freeholds were later reabsorbed into Sarsden manor, Bruern abbey's in 1542.⁶⁴ The manor's break-up in 1922 created several smaller farms or estates, while the rectory estate (then 135 a.) was sold in 1923.⁶⁵

⁵⁴ NHLE, no. 1300820; illust. (in 1825) in Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a 68, no. 453. For the cross, above, landscape etc. (built character).

⁵⁵ NHLE, nos. 1200340; 1367797; OHC, POX0170884; POX0196069; *ibid.* Lo. VII/2, no. 21.

⁵⁶ Temple, 'Sarsden', 91–2, 94, 96–7; above, landscape etc. (built character).

⁵⁷ Temple, 'Sarsden', 89, 92, 96, 103; Bryant, *Oxon. Map* (1824); OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XX.6 (1881 edn).

⁵⁸ Temple, 'Sarsden', 96–101, 104; NHLE, nos. 1200336; 1367833.

⁵⁹ NHLE, no. 1000503; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XX.6 (1881–1922 edns); Google Earth images (accessed Nov. 2022).

⁶⁰ <https://publicrightsofway.oxfordshire.gov.uk/standardmap.aspx> (accessed June 2023).

⁶¹ *Rot. Hund.* II, 730; *Oxon. Fines*, p. 121.

⁶² *Cal. Chart.* 1341–1417, 196; *Valor Eccl.* II, 201, 266.

⁶³ *Rot. Hund.* II, 730; VCH *Oxon.* IX, 177; XV, 226.

⁶⁴ *L&P Hen.* VIII, XVII, p. 165; above (Sarsden manor).

⁶⁵ Above (Sarsden manor); below, relig. hist. (glebe).