

VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

CROWMARSH GIFFORD

Introduction



The Institute of Hydrology (opened 1972 and extended 1978), Howbery park. Photographed from the west, from the Berkshire bank of the river Thames.

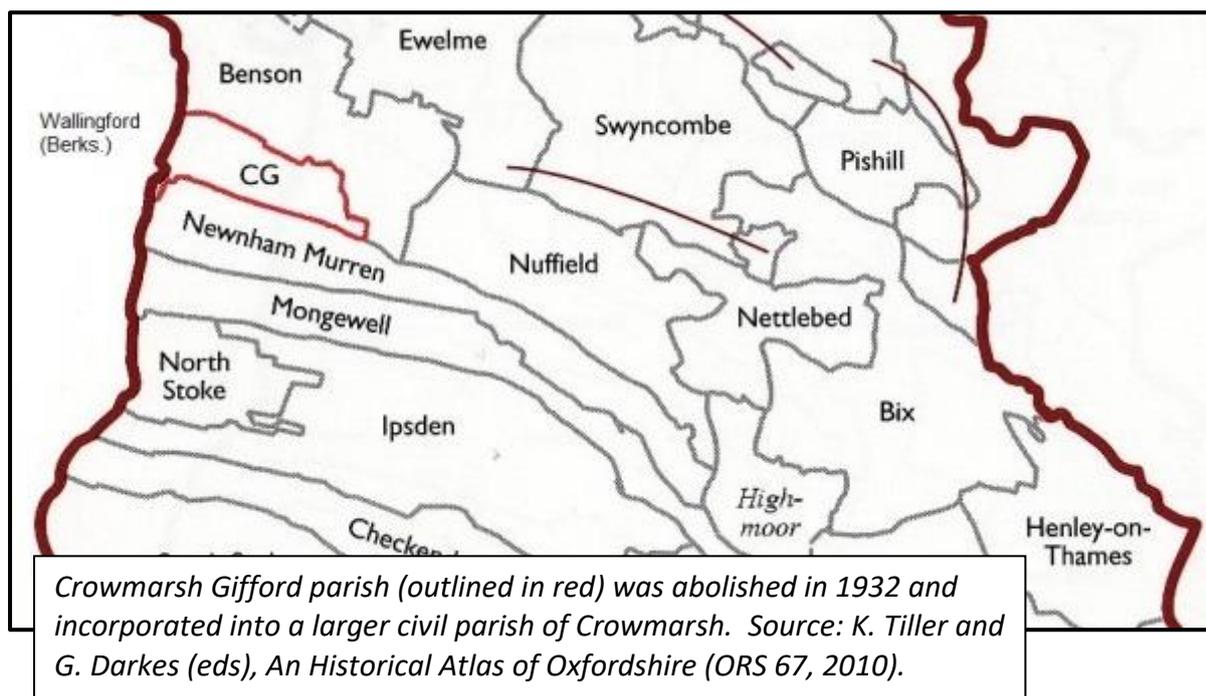
Until 20th-century boundary changes Crowmarsh Gifford was a small rural parish of 661 a. between the river Thames and the Chiltern hills.¹ The village grew up on the east side of Wallingford bridge where the west–east road from Wallingford to Henley-on-Thames crosses a north–south route from Oxford to Reading, and though the parish remained predominantly agricultural its proximity to Wallingford lent it some suburban characteristics. A market and fair were established in the Middle Ages, and the village remained a focus for roadside trades and crafts, while a small leper hospital founded in the 12th century attracted the patronage of the Empress Matilda. The Empress’s occupation of Wallingford during the Anarchy led to the building of siege castles in Crowmarsh by King Stephen, and during the 17th-century Civil War the village was similarly occupied by Royalist forces besieged in Wallingford.

The place name (‘marsh frequented by crows’) described a formerly extensive area of riverside pasture and meadow,² while the suffix (distinguishing the parish from neighbouring Preston Crowmarsh) recalls the prominent Norman baron Walter Giffard, who acquired the manor following the Norman Conquest. Howbery park (on the parish’s western edge) was established by later lords in the 18th century, the rebuilt house there being taken over after the Second World War by the government-owned Hydraulics Research Station and its privatized successor. Notable inhabitants included (for a short period) the agricultural innovator Jethro Tull (1674–1741), whose family briefly owned Crowmarsh manor and who began his agricultural experiments there.

¹ This account was written in 2015–16.

² Below (settlement).

Parish Boundaries



The parish almost certainly emerged as a distinct territorial unit during the break up of the large royal estate of Benson in the 10th and 11th centuries.³ On topographical grounds it would appear to have originally belonged to a larger Benson estate with a southern boundary following the Wallingford–Henley road,⁴ while the place name, too, suggests that it formed part of a wider territory subsequently divided into Preston Crowmarsh (which remained in Benson) and Crowmarsh Gifford. Possibly the latter’s close proximity to the royal *burh* at Wallingford undermined its connections with Benson.⁵

An independent manor of Crowmarsh Gifford was created before 1066,⁶ its separation from Benson emphasized by its subsequent inclusion in Langtree (rather than Benson) hundred.⁷ Presumably the parish boundaries derived at least in part from those of the 11th-century manor, although the latter’s Domesday assessment of 10 hides suggests that it may have originally extended beyond the later parish, which in 1878 covered only 661 acres. Indentations along the boundary with Benson suggest that it partly followed open-field furlongs, while the southern boundary with Newnham Murren ran along the middle of the Wallingford–Henley road as far west as the parish church, where it diverted southwards to include an area of riverside meadow and a few houses south of the street, on the site of the

³ *VCH Oxon.* XVIII, 8, 21, 36.

⁴ Mentioned in 966 as the N. boundary of an estate at Newnham Murren: Sawyer S.738.

⁵ *VCH Oxon.* XVIII, 8–9, 22; below (settlement); manor.

⁶ *VCH Oxon.* I, 410.

⁷ Above, vol. intro. (govt); cf. F.R. Thorn, *The Oxfordshire Domesday* (Alecto edn, 1990), 25.

former leper hospital. Otherwise houses on the road's south side remained in Newnham Murren, facing those opposite in Crowmarsh Gifford. The western boundary with Wallingford followed that of the shire, running along the river Thames except immediately north and south of Wallingford bridge. There it diverted eastwards, leaving the eastern approach to the town (the 'bridgehead') both in Berkshire and in Wallingford parish.⁸

In 1932 Crowmarsh Gifford was incorporated into the new civil parish of Crowmarsh (4,873 a.), along with Newnham Murren and North Stoke parishes and most of Mongewell. That was reduced to 4,070 a. in 1952 and to 2,970 a. (1,202 ha.) in 1992, when part of the former ancient parish was transferred to Benson, and land further south to Nuffield and Ipsden.⁹ In 2014 a proposal to incorporate those parts of Wallingford on the eastern bank of the Thames was rejected.¹⁰

Landscape



Looking north across Crowmarsh's cultivated ground towards Benson airfield.

The ancient parish stretched some 3 km from the river Thames to mid-way up the Chiltern scarp, rising eastwards (in some places quite steeply) from 45 m. at Wallingford bridge to 75 m. at Coldharbour Farm, and to 100 m. near Oakley wood.¹¹ The village and Howbery park rest on riverside gravel rising onto chalk, while the higher ground in the east is overlain by superficial deposits of chalky mud with flints.¹² Both chalk and gravel were formerly dug on Crowmarsh hill.¹³

Land use largely reflected the parish's terrain, with meadow confined to the Thames floodplain, and pasture (called the 'marsh') watered by a stream along the northern boundary with Benson. East of Howbery park the lowest chalk slopes produced a fertile loam suitable for cereal crops, while the thinner soils of the higher ground were better suited to sheep-

⁸ OS *Area Bk* (1878); OS Maps 6", Oxon. XLIX.SE and NE (1883 and later edns); OHC, tithe map; cf. *Census*, 1831–41, estimating the acreage at 480 a.

⁹ *Census*, 1951–2011; South Oxon. (Parishes) Order 1992; OS Map 1:25000, sheet 171 (2009 edn); *VCH Oxon.* XVIII, 23, 342.

¹⁰ www.southoxon.gov.uk (accessed May 2016): SODC Community Governance Review.

¹¹ OS Map 1:25000, sheet 171 (2009 edn).

¹² Geol. Surv. Map 1:50000 (solid and drift), sheet 254 (1980 edn).

¹³ OS Map 6", Oxon. XLIX.SE (1883 edn); below, econ. hist. (quarrying).

grazing. Open fields (mostly inclosed by the mid 18th century) seem nevertheless to have extended from near the village as far east as the parish boundary. Woodland was scarce, the bulk of the manor's medieval woodland possibly lying detached from the parish on the Chiltern uplands, around Nuffield. Field names such as 'Crabb tree' and 'Newfoundland' may recall some small-scale woodland clearance on the highest slopes towards Oakley wood (in Benson), however, and a small plantation at Marsh wood (on lower ground towards the Thames) existed by the 1840s.¹⁴

Lower-lying areas remained at risk of flooding, and from the Middle Ages ditches were regularly ordered to be kept clear.¹⁵ Water was supplied from wells until the early 20th century,¹⁶ when pipes were laid by the Goring & Streatley District Gas & Water Company. Mains drainage was introduced in 1967.¹⁷

Communications

Roads

The Wallingford–Henley road (which formed both Crowmarsh's southern boundary and the main village street)¹⁸ may have originated as a prehistoric trackway from the Thames to the Chilterns, running roughly parallel to the Iron-Age Grim's Ditch further south.¹⁹ The creation of a *burh* at Wallingford in the 9th century added to the road's importance, which increased further in the 12th or 13th century when a stone bridge (replacing an earlier timber structure) was built across the Thames.²⁰ In 1290 (when the road was heavily eroded) a Wallingford inhabitant petitioned unsuccessfully for a toll on carts using it,²¹ and in 1385 (when it was reportedly 'rotten and dangerous') the king ordered stone for its repair to be taken to Crowmarsh.²² Several 16th-century inhabitants left money towards its upkeep, but by 1736 it

¹⁴ Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); OHC, tithe award and map; Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 22. For detached woodland, below, econ. hist. (agric. landscape).

¹⁵ C.T. Flower (ed.), *Public Works in Medieval Law*, II (Selden Soc. 40), 129; Berks RO, D/P 161/8/1, s.a. 1894; J. & S. Dewey and D. Beasley, *Window on Wallingford 1837–1914* (1989), 39–40; D. Beasley and A. Russell, *Wallingford at War* (2010), 80.

¹⁶ OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XLIX.11 (1899 edn).

¹⁷ *Lond. Gaz.* 21 Nov. 1902, pp. 7717–18; Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 101–2.

¹⁸ Called the 'boundary way' in 966: Sawyer S.738.

¹⁹ Cf. below (settlement); Mongewell, intro. (settlement).

²⁰ N. Christie, O. Creighton, et al., *Transforming Townscapes: From Burh to Borough: the Archaeology of Wallingford, AD 800–1400* (Soc. for Medieval Archaeol. Monograph 35, 2013), 1, 67, 219–23, 229, 375.

²¹ *Parl. Rolls*, I, 300; cf. P.D.A. Harvey, *A Medieval Oxfordshire Village. Cuxham, 1240–1400* (1965), 104.

²² *Cal. Close* 1381–5, 517.

was again in disrepair;²³ in 1765 it was turnpiked,²⁴ and in the 1820s the turnpike route was diverted north-eastwards along a newly built link road (the modern A4130), branching off close to the junction with the north–south Icknield Way.²⁵ The road was disturnpiked in 1873,²⁶ the original route having also remained in use.²⁷ The stretch of road through the village (usually called The Street by the 17th century)²⁸ still prompted complaint c.1890.²⁹

A possible Roman road from Benson to Pangbourne may have passed close to Coldharbour Farm,³⁰ running parallel to the ancient Icknield Way (which formed a short stretch of parish boundary) a little further east. Another north–south route (called Stockbridge Lane in the 14th century and later Benson Lane) subsequently formed the eastern boundary of Howbery park, but was often waterlogged because drainage ditches were not maintained.³¹ An alternative route along the Thames was also liable to flood, and in 1740 was suppressed by Robert Nedham (as lord of Crowmarsh manor) prior to his creation of Howbery park. Instead Nedham provided a footpath (adjusted in 1909) from Benson Lane across Crowmarsh’s open fields, joining the Wallingford–Henley road by the parish church.³² The present-day Clack’s Lane, branching south-westwards from Icknield Way, may have once extended across the parish to Wallingford bridge, but by the 18th century stopped at the park’s eastern edge. Its main course branched instead to the eastern edge of Crowmarsh village, crossing the Wallingford–Henley road at Crowmarsh Farm and continuing to North Stoke and beyond.³³ The branch towards the bridge (now known as Marsh Lane) was called Swyncombe way c.1300,³⁴ while Clack’s Lane itself was called Watlington Way in 1638.³⁵

A village bypass (the modern A4074) was built in 1987, crossing the Wallingford–Henley road at a new roundabout on the village’s eastern edge. Clack’s Lane (then a metalled road) was diverted eastwards to meet it. The only other 20th-century changes were

²³ OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 181, ff. 108v.–109; 184, ff. 40 and v., 55v.; *ibid.* Cal. QS, VIII, 591; cf. M. Sturge Gretton (ed.), *Oxon. Justices of the Peace in the 17th Cent.* (ORS 16, 1934), 8.

²⁴ Turnpike Act, 5 Geo. III, c. 55; *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 102–3.

²⁵ *Oxf. Jnl.*, 12 Nov. 1825; *VCH Oxon.* XVIII, 5–6, 22, 24, 343–4.

²⁶ 36 & 37 Vic. c. 90.

²⁷ OHC, SL183/2/D/1 (calling it the former London turnpike).

²⁸ e.g. Berks RO, D/EH T67/1, T67/3; OHC, B21/7/78/D1/6; *ibid.* MS Wills Oxon. 114/2/15.

²⁹ Berks RO, D/P 161/8/2, pp. 18, 23.

³⁰ J. Sharpe and P. Carter, ‘A “New” Roman Road East of the Thames from Benson to Pangbourne’, *SOAG Bulletin* 62 (2008), 7–12.

³¹ C.T. Flower (ed.), *Public Works in Medieval Law*, II (Selden Soc. 40), 129.

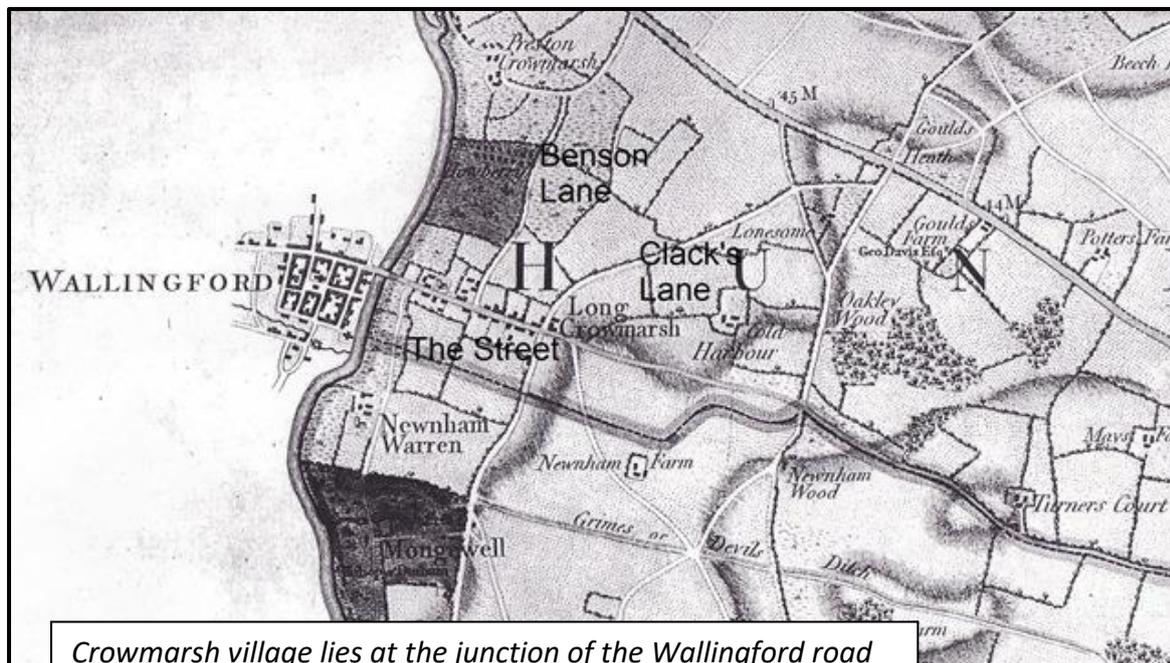
³² Bodl. MS Maps Oxon. a 1; TNA, C 202/128/2; OHC, PC80/A1/1, pp. 263 sqq; PC80/M1/1; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XLIX.11 (1878–1912 edns).

³³ Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797); Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 61–4.

³⁴ *HMC 6th Rep.* (1877), 591.

³⁵ Claydon House (Bucks.), 12/1/35 (map of Preston Crowmarsh).

minor alterations to footpaths, one of which was lost through the post-war development of Howbery park.³⁶



Carriers and Post

A carrier was mentioned in 1817, and by 1847 William Watters ran a service to Abingdon and places further west three days a week. A resident carrier probably continued until the 1870s, but thereafter inhabitants may have relied on services from Wallingford and Benson.³⁷ Motorized buses ran daily to Oxford and Henley by the 1920s, supplemented by a twice-weekly carrier to nearby villages, and during the summer river boats operating between Oxford and Kingston upon Thames stopped daily at Wallingford bridge.³⁸ Regular buses to Oxford, Henley, and Reading continued in 2016.

Post was delivered by the 1840s through Wallingford.³⁹ A sub-post office on The Street, opened in the 1860s, was run by the Dearlove family of bakers and grocers until the 1930s, and by 1903 had been upgraded to a money order office, although Wallingford

³⁶ OS Map 1:25000, sheet 171 (2009 edn); Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 64.

³⁷ OHC, par. reg. transcript, s.a. 1817, 1852–62, 1872 (baptisms); *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1847); TNA, RG 9/741, no. 38; Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 99–100; VCH Oxon. XVIII, 25.

³⁸ *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1920 and later edns).

³⁹ *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1847 and later edns).

remained the nearest telegraph office.⁴⁰ It later moved to different premises, and closed in 2008.⁴¹

Settlement and Population

Prehistoric, Roman, and Anglo-Saxon Settlement

Crowmarsh lies within an area of the Upper Thames valley for which there is extensive evidence of prehistoric activity, from the Palaeolithic onwards.⁴² Early Bronze-Age pottery found in association with a narrow droveway at Howbery park suggests stock-keeping alongside the Thames,⁴³ possibly by a settled population responsible for nearby monuments including a roughly contemporary round barrow.⁴⁴ The site was reoccupied during the Roman period, probably still connected with stock rearing between riverside pastures to the west and arable land to the east.⁴⁵ On higher ground near Coldharbour Farm, a late 4th-century Roman cemetery containing 25 high-status burials (one of them in a lead coffin) was probably associated with a nearby farmstead or villa set within a ditched enclosure. The only identifiable structure, however, was a corn-drying oven used to process cereal grains for brewing and storage.⁴⁶

Crowmarsh's Anglo-Saxon place name means the 'marsh frequented by crows', and until the creation of a separate manor with its own agricultural community in (probably) the 10th or 11th century, the area presumably formed an outlier of Benson's large royal estate, exploited for its pasture, meadow, and wood.⁴⁷ How early separate settlement developed is unclear, but by the 9th century the Thames crossing between Crowmarsh and Wallingford was well established,⁴⁸ and landmarks along Crowmarsh's southern boundary with Newnham Murren (described in 966) suggest a carefully managed landscape. Features

⁴⁰ *Dutton, Allen & Co.'s Dir. Oxon.* (1863); *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883–1931 edns); OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XLIX.11 (1878–1912 edns).

⁴¹ OS Map 1:2500, SU 6189 (1968 and 1991 edns); Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 96–7; *Oxf. Times*, 6 June 2008; below, Newnham Murren, intro. (post).

⁴² *VCH Oxon.* I, 239, 244, 263; *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 10–15; D.A. Roe, 'The Palaeolithic Archaeology of the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia* 59 (1994), 11.

⁴³ S. Ford, J. Lowe, et al., 'Early Bronze Age, Roman and Medieval Boundaries and Trackways at Howbery Park, Crowmarsh Gifford, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia* 71 (2006), 197–204, 206–7; HER, PRN 16568, 17105.

⁴⁴ HER, PRN 8581; *SMA* 39 (2009), 40.

⁴⁵ Ford et al., 'Howbery Park', 200–1, 204–9.

⁴⁶ HER, PRN 16009; *SMA* 26 (1996), 71–6; Henig and Booth, *Roman Oxon.* 105, 133; P. Booth, 'Late Roman Cemeteries in Oxfordshire: a Review', *Oxoniensia* 66 (2001), 17–18, 20–6, 30, 33–5; M. Vitolo, 'Cold Harbour Farm, Crowmarsh, Wallingford: Plant Remains from the Corn Drying Oven', *English Heritage Research Dept Rep. Ser.* 93 (2009).

⁴⁷ *PN Oxon.* I, 48; *VCH Oxon.* XVIII, 22–3, 44; below, econ. hist. (medieval farming).

⁴⁸ A.J. Grayson, 'Thames Crossings near Wallingford from Roman to Early Norman Times', *Oxoniensia* 75 (2010), 1–3, 9–11, 13.

included a 'heathen burial place' (possibly an execution cemetery), from which the boundary followed a ditch to the 'boundary way' or Wallingford–Henley road.⁴⁹ Later drainage or boundary ditches and cultivation layers, possibly of pre-Norman date, have been located alongside the same road c.300 m. from the river, while a 10th- or 11th-century Anglo-Saxon sword found in the east of the parish suggests high-status occupation somewhere in the vicinity.⁵⁰ The place name Howbery (though recorded only from the 16th century) is also Anglo-Saxon, and means 'a spur of land (*hōh*) by a defended enclosure (*burh*)'. The element *hōh* is found elsewhere in the Chilterns, and in Howbery's case presumably refers to the high ground overlooking the *burh* at Wallingford.⁵¹

Population from 1086

By 1086 there were at least 27 tenant households on Crowmarsh manor, headed by 12 *villani*, 11 bordars, and 4 *servi* or slaves.⁵² Population growth in the 12th and 13th centuries, broadly in line with national trends, is suggested by a survey of 1263, when manorial rents were due from 20 cottars, 9 unfree yardlands, and an unknown number of free tenants.⁵³ A survey of 1286 mentioned 45 sokemen,⁵⁴ though other sources suggest a smaller population: only 10 free tenants, 11 sokemen, and 13 cottars were listed in 1279 (including at least four with the same name), while several of the free tenants were probably non-resident.⁵⁵ Early 14th-century tax records similarly named just 9 Crowmarsh taxpayers in 1306, and 15 in 1327.⁵⁶ The conflicting evidence makes it difficult to determine the long-term impact of mid 14th-century plagues, but possibly it was limited, since 71 adults aged over 14 paid poll tax in 1377.⁵⁷ Even so some houses were abandoned, and population remained relatively low in the 16th century, with 28 taxpayers recorded in 1524–5, 16 in 1544, and 42 adult communicants in 1548.⁵⁸ Then as later all such figures omitted houses on the village street's south side, which belonged to Newnham Murren.⁵⁹

⁴⁹ Sawyer S.738; Grundy, *Saxon Oxon.* 39–41; Blair, *A-S Oxon.* 125–6; Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 12; A. Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (2009), 219–22.

⁵⁰ G. Laban, 'Evidence for a Stephanic Siege Castle at the Lister Wilder Site, The Street, Crowmarsh Gifford', *Oxoniensia* 78 (2013), 193; A. MacGregor, 'A Late Saxon Sword from Crowmarsh', *Oxoniensia* 50 (1985), 281–2.

⁵¹ *PN Oxon.* I, 48; M. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (1984), 122, 167.

⁵² *VCH Oxon.* I, 410.

⁵³ TNA, C 132/31/1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* C 133/47/13; below, social hist. (Middle Ages).

⁵⁵ e.g. Walter de Huntercombe and Thos Park: *Rot. Hund.* II, 774; *VCH Oxon.* XVIII, 95, 348, 356.

⁵⁶ TNA, E 179/161/9–10. Crowmarsh's list of 8 taxpayers in 1316 is incomplete: *ibid.* E 179/161/8.

⁵⁷ *Poll Taxes 1377–81*, ed. Fenwick, II, 295.

⁵⁸ Sheail (ed.), *1524/5 Subsidy*, II, 262; *Chant. Cert.* 38; below (medieval settlement).

⁵⁹ Above (boundaries).

In 1662 hearth tax was paid by 20 households, and 82 adults were mentioned in 1676.⁶⁰ Eighteenth-century rectors reported 28 houses in 1738 and 30 in 1771, and by 1801 there were 41 houses and a population of 204.⁶¹ A fall to 184 by 1811 was soon reversed, and numbers peaked in 1851 at 373 in 71 houses. Thereafter a steady decline began, the population falling to 300 (in 65 houses) by 1891, and to just 248 (71 houses) by 1931. In 1951 the new enlarged parish of Crowmarsh accommodated 1,101 people in 272 houses, rising to 1,509 (460 houses) in 1971. Following some modest falls, by 2011 the population was 1,569 in 636 houses.⁶²

Medieval and Later Settlement

Crowmarsh village developed mostly along the north side of the Wallingford–Henley road, opposite houses belonging to Newnham Murren manor and parish. The 12th-century church lies towards the village’s western end c.450 m. from the Thames,⁶³ while closer to the river is the site of one of King Stephen’s siege castles, raised in the years 1139–53 to besiege Matilda’s garrisons at Wallingford. A second siege castle was probably erected on the parish’s riverside meadow 200 m. to the south-west, but following the end of the conflict the fortifications were quickly removed and the land reverted to agricultural use.⁶⁴ Opposite the castle on the south side of the Wallingford–Henley road Matilda endowed a leper hospital which survived until the Reformation,⁶⁵ and which was included in Crowmarsh parish by a southwards deviation of the boundary.⁶⁶ Development of a built-up area presumably along the village street is suggested by a late 12th-century grant of three houses to Thame abbey,⁶⁷ and by the 13th century a street-side manor house may have been built between the church and the castle site.⁶⁸ Tenants’ houses were also mentioned, although their location is unclear.⁶⁹

Late medieval population decline probably led to some thinning out of the settled area: John James held twelve houses and six tofts (abandoned house plots) in 1396, while

⁶⁰ TNA, E 179/164/504; *Hearth Tax Oxon.* 1 (listing 14 households in 1665); *Compton Census*, ed. Whiteman, 424.

⁶¹ *Secker’s Visit.* 48; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 561, f. 177; *Census*, 1801.

⁶² *Census*, 1811–2011.

⁶³ For Newnham’s church (near the river some distance from the village), below, Newnham Murren.

⁶⁴ Laban, ‘Stephanic Siege Castle’, 189–92, 194–6, 198; Christie et al., *Transforming Townscapes*, 202–4, 206–7, 235–6.

⁶⁵ *Book of Fees*, I, 104; *VCH Oxon.* II, 155–6; below, relig. hist. (pastoral care).

⁶⁶ Above (boundaries).

⁶⁷ H.E. Salter (ed.), *Thame Cartulary*, II (ORS 26, 1948), p. 120; below, manor (other estates).

Although said to be ‘in Crowmarsh’ the houses were held in free burgage, and possibly were those in Wallingford belonging to Crowmarsh manor in 1086: *VCH Berks.* I, 326.

⁶⁸ Below, manor (manor hos).

⁶⁹ *Oxon. Eyre, 1241*, no. 455; *Rot. Hund.* II, 774; cf. *SMA* 24 (1994), 54 for 13th–14th cent. activity.

c.1510 a house formerly occupied by four people fell into ruin.⁷⁰ Even so in the 18th century the village still extended c.900 m. along the Wallingford–Henley road from the bridgehead to Cox’s Lane, its elongated form reflected in the contemporary name Long Crowmarsh. A few gaps in the street frontage may reflect earlier contraction, and the only isolated houses were the 18th-century Coldharbour Farm and Howbery Park.⁷¹ Nineteenth-century population growth was mostly accommodated on or just behind the main road, with 65 out of 73 inhabited houses in 1861 still located on The Street.⁷² A shepherd’s cottage on Marsh Lane was mentioned from the 1870s and a travellers’ camp in the 1880s–90s, while ten council houses were built on Benson Lane in the early 1920s, and a village hall and police station in the 1950s–60s. Even so the overall settlement pattern remained little altered until the 1970s–80s,⁷³ when new institutional buildings included the Institute of Hydrology (opened 1972) in Howbery park and South Oxfordshire District Council’s offices (1981) on Benson Lane, accompanied by replacement of some older housing by new residential developments.⁷⁴ Some further new housing was built before 2015 on the sites of Howbery Farm (Benson Lane) and Wilder’s iron foundry (near the church).⁷⁵

Electricity was available from the 1920s, although many houses remained unconnected until considerably later. Communal facilities in 2016 included the village hall, pub, recreation ground, and open-air swimming pool.⁷⁶

Built Character

Most of Crowmarsh’s surviving domestic buildings date probably from the 18th century or later, and (typically for the area) are mainly of brick and clay tile, with occasional use of timber-framing, flint, slate tile, and (formerly) thatch.⁷⁷ Bricks only became the dominant building material after 1700, when the establishment of local kilns made them more widely available;⁷⁸ before then timber-framing was presumably more common, the most striking survival being the six-bayed front range of Nos 17 and 19 The Street, one of the village’s few

⁷⁰ *Cal. Inq. p.m.* XVII, p. 312; I.S. Leadam (ed.), *Domesday of Inclosures* (1897), I, p. 376.

⁷¹ Bodl. MS Maps Oxon. a 1; Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797); OHC, tithe map; *ibid.* Cal. QS, I, 255; III, 231; below (built character); manor (manor hos).

⁷² TNA, RG 9/741 (2 others were at Howbery and 6 at the southern end of Benson Lane); cf. RG 10/1273 (7 hos ‘in the alley’ in 1871).

⁷³ *Ibid.* RG 10/1273, no. 87; RG 11/1295, no. 84; RG 12/986, nos. 67, 69; RG 13/1140, no. 62; OHC, RDC4/2/F4/9; OS Map 1:10000, SU 68 NW (1972 edn). For development south of the road, below, Newnham Murren.

⁷⁴ OS Map 1:10000, SU 68 NW (1993 edn); Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 21, 55–7; below (built character). For photos (1967) of houses since demolished, Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 485/2.

⁷⁵ OS Map 1:2500, SU 6189 (2015 edn): digimap.edina.ac.uk (accessed Jan. 2016).

⁷⁶ Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 102–3; Berks RO, Q/RUO/8/72 (8/15); below, social hist. (since 1800).

⁷⁷ Above, vol. intro. (bldgs). For the medieval church and 18th-cent. manor house, below, manor (manor hos); relig. hist. (church archit.). For bldgs on the street’s S. side, below, Newnham Murren.

⁷⁸ J. Bond et al., *Oxon. Brickmakers* (1980), 22; for Benson’s kilns, *VCH Oxon.* XVIII, 50–1.

surviving medieval buildings. Erected in 1435–8 as a box-framed house with a hall and an open arch-braced truss, the building may have served as the manor house before the construction of Howbery Park, but was later converted into cottages.⁷⁹ An 18th-century cottage row (brick and flint with brick dressings) survives between the church and Benson Lane, and like Nos 17 and 19 has sashes or casements directly beneath the eaves, although a narrow dentil cornice has apparently been inserted at Nos 49–53.⁸⁰ Red and grey bricks are used to decorative effect at Howbery Farm on Benson Lane (remodelled by John and Mary Allnatt in 1770),⁸¹ the old school (opened 1844),⁸² and No. 43, where a first-floor diaper pattern may reflect a 19th-century refronting when the house served as the village post office, bakery, and grocer's shop.⁸³ Several other houses have since been painted or rendered.



Nos 17 and 19 The Street, a medieval timber-framed house, with a plaque commemorating Jethro Tull.



A row of 18th-century cottages on The Street.



No. 43 The Street, the former post office, bakery, and grocer's shop.



The Bell Inn.

⁷⁹ Below, manor (manor hos); for bldg, N. Alcock and D. Miles, *The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England* (2013), 19, 24, 277; Bldgs List, loE 247244; illust. (1969) before renovation in Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 485/2.

⁸⁰ Bldgs List, loE 247246–9; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 485/2.

⁸¹ Initialled datestone; below, econ. hist. (1500–1800). The house (not to be confused with the earlier Howbery Farm near the churchyard) existed by the 1740s: Bodl. MS Maps Oxon. a 1.

⁸² Bldgs List, loE 247225; below, social hist. (educ.).

⁸³ Bldgs List, loE 361498; Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 95; above (post).

A few larger houses survive beyond Benson Lane, amongst them No. 63 (The Giffords), whose central six-panel door with fanlight is flanked by eight-over-eight sash windows to ground and first floors. The neighbouring Chaise House is similarly double-fronted, its ground floor lit by 19th-century flat-roofed angled bay windows,⁸⁴ while the 17th-century Bell Inn has a rendered five-bayed front range with a half-hipped roof, and a gabled cross-wing added probably in the 18th century, with decorative timber-framing to the attic.⁸⁵ Crowmarsh Farm, on the village's eastern fringe, bears the initials IBA (worked in brick) and a datestone of 1692, although the house may actually be early 17th-century, the date perhaps recording addition of an extra bay. In its present form it is flint-built with red-brick dressings and a dentil cornice, while in the 19th century its outbuildings included a timber and thatched stable and a brick and thatched barn, both since replaced by housing.⁸⁶

The isolated Coldharbour Farm (outside the village) dates from the 18th century, and in the 1840s was transformed into a gentleman's residence by the Wallingford surgeon Robert Mayne Clarke.⁸⁷ At its sale in 1833 it was brick-built with four ground-floor rooms and five bedrooms, which Clarke extended and refronted in stone: by 1862 twin gables with decorative bargeboards, prominent quoins, and wrought-iron and glass canopies to the ground-floor rooms flanked a narrow entrance portico, supporting a first-floor balcony with pierced stone balustrade. Pairs of six-over-six sash windows lit the ground and first floors with single lights to the attics, and tall rounded chimneys rose above the slate-tiled roof.⁸⁸

Most of the village's 20th-century housing is unexceptional, save for the five pairs of 1920s brick-built council houses with prominent M-shaped gables. More notable are the buildings added at Howbery Park since the opening of the Hydraulics Research Station in 1951, in particular the Institute of Hydrology of 1972. Designed by the Architects Design Partnership of Henley, it consists of single- and two-storey flat-roofed concrete blocks arranged around a landscaped courtyard with an ornamental pool, and was extended in 1978. Despite some staining of its white concrete façade it retains a 'crisply modelled' and 'meticulously detailed' appearance, with projecting panels and recessed columns giving it a 'sculptured effect' and 'slightly crenellated roof line'.⁸⁹ More recent additions include two curved concrete-framed and glass-fronted office blocks designed by the architect Scott

⁸⁴ Bldgs List, IoE 24750–1; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 485/2; Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 58.

⁸⁵ Bldgs List, IoE 247252; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 485/2; below, social hist. (1500–1800).

⁸⁶ Bldgs List, IoE 247237; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 485/2; OHC, CH/E I/iii/4; Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 34–5.

⁸⁷ For its ownership, below, manor (other estates).

⁸⁸ Description based on OHC, CH/E I/iii/4; *Sale Cat., Coldharbour Farm* (1862): copy in *ibid.* PZ CROWb 333.3 (incl. illust.); *Sale Cat., Col d'Arbres Est.* (1901): copy in Bodl. GA Oxon. b 90 (28) (incl. photograph); Pedgley, *Crowmarsh*, 38–9. Not inspected by VCH.

⁸⁹ *Building*, 17 Nov. 1972, 96–8; *Architects' Jnl*, 7 Feb. 1973, 315–31; *Concrete Quarterly* 98 (July–Sept. 1973), 12–14; 169 (Summer 1991), 5–9; *The Architect* 121 (July 1975), 30–1; Pevsner, *Oxon.* 562.

Brownrigg, and an area of solar panels.⁹⁰ The more utilitarian brick-built offices of South Oxfordshire District Council, erected to the south in 1981, were largely destroyed by an arson attack in 2015.⁹¹



Crowmarsh Farm.



1920s council houses on Benson Lane.



Coldharbour Farm, illustrated in 1862.

⁹⁰ Red Kite House (2005) and Kestrel House (2010): *Ecotech* 11 (June 2005), 22–7; SODC planning docs, P03/W0024/RM; P03/W0220/RM; P07/W0849/RM; P11/W0040 (accessed online).

⁹¹ SODC planning docs, P79/W0083/O; P81/W0329/RM; *The Guardian*, 16 Jan. 2015.