

## VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

### HOOK NORTON

#### Religious History

Hook Norton had its own church by the 11th century and probably earlier. The rectory was given to Osney abbey, and from the 13th century to the early 16th the cure was served by vicars. Thereafter it was served by poorly paid (and often non-resident) curates or their assistants, until a rectory was re-established in the 19th century, and absorbed into a team ministry in the 20th. Protestant Nonconformity flourished from an early date, with a particularly strong Baptist and Methodist presence.

### Church Origins and Parochial Organization

The present-day church incorporates early to mid 11th-century fabric,<sup>1</sup> and may have been preceded by an earlier structure serving the late Anglo-Saxon royal estate, located either on the same site or (perhaps less likely) on higher ground outside the modern village.<sup>2</sup> The surviving Norman font suggests that the church had baptismal rights from the outset, and presumably also burial rights, as the churchyard was mentioned c.1205.<sup>3</sup> Robert d'Oilly gave the church to Osney abbey at the latter's foundation c.1129, and its tithes and substantial landed endowment became a separate manor, which passed in the 1540s to the bishop of Oxford.<sup>4</sup> A vicarage was ordained in 1224, but was re-united with the rectory in 1513.<sup>5</sup>

The living, subsequently an unendowed curacy, was converted to a rectory in 1866, with the advowson vested in the bishop.<sup>6</sup> The benefice was combined with that of Swerford in 1963, with Wigginton added in 1974 and Great Rollright in 1980–1, when Hook Norton,

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<sup>1</sup> Below (church archit.).

<sup>2</sup> Above, landscape etc. (settlement); J. Blair, 'Hook Norton, *Regia Villa*', *Oxoniensia* 51 (1986), 66–7, suggesting that it may have stood near Tadmarton Camp close to 'Chapel Field'; although cf. M. Biddle and J. Blair, 'The Hook Norton Hoard of 1848: A Viking Burial from Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 52 (1987), 195. Wall foundations uncovered in the present churchyard pre-date the present church: 'Archaeological Watching Brief at St Peter's Church, Hook Norton' (unpubl. John Moore Heritage Services report, Feb. 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Below (church archit.); *Oseney Cart.* IV, 257.

<sup>4</sup> Above, landownership (Osney abbey estate).

<sup>5</sup> *Rot. Welles*, I, 180; Gibbons (ed.), *Liber Antiquus*, 6; *Cal. Papal Regs.* XX, 9, 74–5; *L&P Hen.* VIII, I, 631, 1526; *Oseney Cart.* III, 356–8.

<sup>6</sup> *London Gaz.* 4 Dec. 1866, p. 6767.

Rollright, and Swerford parishes were combined, the cure being served by a team ministry.<sup>7</sup> The medieval dedication (recorded in 1495) was to St Mary,<sup>8</sup> following that of Osney abbey. The present dedication to St Peter is recorded only from the 18th century.<sup>9</sup>

### **Advowson, Glebe, and Tithes**

From the early 13th century until the early 16th Osney abbey presented Hook Norton's vicars,<sup>10</sup> who under the vicarage ordination were entitled to 2 marks a year, food, fees, and oblations, the canons also supplying a clerk and a groom.<sup>11</sup> In 1336 the abbey granted the vicar Thomas de Banbury (as an assignment of a portion of his vicarage) the house and land (including 2 a. of meadow) which his predecessor John de Chelworth had held, along with offerings, small tithes, and (for 20s. a year) the tithes of hay.<sup>12</sup> After the vicarage and rectory were united in 1513 Osney and, after the Dissolution, the rectory estate lessee (as lay rector) hired a curate,<sup>13</sup> who was never formally presented, and who in the mid 17th century received £30 a year.<sup>14</sup>

At enclosure in 1774 the curate's stipend (then £50) was exchanged for 132 a., including 128 a. in the south of the parish known later as Duckpool farm.<sup>15</sup> Total income in 1808 was £141, comprising farm rent and surplice fees of £3–£5.<sup>16</sup> A £200 augmentation by Queen Anne's Bounty in 1874 matched £200 from John Marshall's national parsonages charity and £100 in local subscriptions, but the living was still worth only £227 net in 1877, £208 of it from rent.<sup>17</sup> Subsequent falls in rent were therefore serious, and despite further grants net income in 1914 was only £193, rising to £387 in 1932.<sup>18</sup> In 1937 the glebe farm was sold to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for £1,250, followed in 1944 by 4 a. of allotment land to Banbury Rural District Council for £500.<sup>19</sup> In 1952 the net income was £480.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 1863/2–4, Orders in Council etc.; *ibid.* PAR137/10/N/1; 'Benefice of Hook Norton ... Profile' [2018] (pdf accessed online Apr. 2020). Wigginton remained part of the joint benefice, but a separate parish.

<sup>8</sup> *Cal. Papal Regs.* XVI, 275.

<sup>9</sup> Ecton, *Liber Valorum* (1742), 473.

<sup>10</sup> e.g. *Rot. Grosseteste*, 445, 485, 494, 501; *Rot. Gravesend*, 222, 226; OHC, PAR137/17/MS/2.

<sup>11</sup> *Rot. Welles*, I, 180.

<sup>12</sup> Bodl. MS Ch. Oxon. 374, printed in *Oseney Cart.* IV, 289–90.

<sup>13</sup> *Valor Eccl.* II, 224; Peel, *Register*, II, 134; Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 166–7.

<sup>14</sup> OHC, Clayton 1/14. For intervention by Bp Fell in 1682–3, below (Reformn to 1840).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* QS/D/A/book99 (F15); *ibid.* PAR137/10/E/1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 446, f. 107; b 30, f. 32 (for the fees).

<sup>17</sup> CERC, QAB/7/3/F2820; *ibid.* CC/OF/NB27/258C. For the Marshall charity, [www.marshalls.org.uk](http://www.marshalls.org.uk).

<sup>18</sup> CERC, ECE/7/1/50964; *ibid.* CC/OF/NB27/258C.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* ECE/7/1/50964; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1863/1.

<sup>20</sup> OHC, PAR137/10/C1/2.

## **Vicarage House**

The medieval vicarage house (*mansum*) stood probably on the site of its 19th-century successor at the eastern end of High Street.<sup>21</sup> By the later 16th century the lessees of the rectory manor sublet it to tenants, however, and thereafter Hook Norton's curates or their assistants rented alternative accommodation or lived outside the parish.<sup>22</sup> At enclosure in 1774 the curate was allowed £100 to purchase the house from the bishop,<sup>23</sup> but as it was held by copyhold tenants successive incumbents proved unable or unwilling to buy them out, and by 1796 it was falling into ruin.<sup>24</sup> In 1834 it was finally purchased and demolished, to be replaced by a new five-bedroomed house renamed The Rectory in 1866, featuring a long eight-bayed front with a central pediment.<sup>25</sup> In 1838 it lacked sufficient outhouses,<sup>26</sup> and in 1922 the rector complained that the study was 'impossibly small', improvement works being carried out in 1932 and later.<sup>27</sup> The house was sold in the 1970s and a modern house bought instead, still occupied by the team rector in 2018.<sup>28</sup>

## **Religious Life**

### ***The Middle Ages***

In the late 12th and early 13th century the church was apparently served by resident stipendiary chaplains, the first known vicar (Hugh) being presented in 1225.<sup>29</sup> Maurice 'the canon' (perhaps of St George's chapel in Oxford) may have served the cure in the early 12th century, as he held a yardland in Hook Norton.<sup>30</sup> Most vicars were non-graduates instituted in minor orders, and the majority served only short terms before moving to other livings or, in at least two instances, becoming friars.<sup>31</sup> In the 1330s (and probably earlier) the vicar was

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<sup>21</sup> Bodl. MS Ch. Oxon. 374; for location, *ibid.* (R) MS Dep C17:49 (160), no. 131; OHC, Shrew. VII/i/1 (related reference book).

<sup>22</sup> e.g. TNA, E 133/9/1339 (dated 1597); OHC, Clayton 1/14; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. b 38, f. 116v.; *Secker's Visit.* 83–4 (claiming it was used as a Baptist meeting house); Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 150, 183.

<sup>23</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 2116, no. 23; c 327, p. 106.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* c 327, p. 106; c 656, f. 199; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 229, ff. 58v., 64-v., 70v.; Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 136–7.

<sup>25</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 39, f. 189v.; b 41, f. 125; c 1863/1 (mortgages 1946–56, for improvements); Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 361 (Old Rectory, misdating it to 1840–1); *Old Rectory, Hook Norton* (sale particulars 2014, accessed online Apr. 2021).

<sup>26</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 41, f. 125.

<sup>27</sup> CERC, CC/OF/NB27/258C; OHC, PAR137/10/A1/1–5; *ibid.* c 1863/1, mortgages etc.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1863/3; Hook Norton Benefice Profile (2018), accessed online (Apr. 2020).

<sup>29</sup> *Oseney Cart.* IV, pp. 259, 274; VI, 90; *Rot. Welles*, II, 18.

<sup>30</sup> *Oseney Cart.* I, pp. 1–2.

<sup>31</sup> e.g. *Rot. Welles*, II, 18, 47; *Rot. Grosseteste*, 445, 485, 494, 501; *Rot. Gravesend*, 222, 226; Bodl. MS Ch. Oxon. 373; *Reg. Fleming*, II, 128. Dickins, *Hook Norton* is unreliable for vicars' dates.

assisted by a deacon, and also by a servant boy.<sup>32</sup> Extensive 13th- and earlier 14th-century work on the church may reflect investment by parishioners as well as lords,<sup>33</sup> and a 12th-century anchorite at the church (who died before 1185) held 2 a. in alms from William Heronville, holder of what became Dimmocks fee.<sup>34</sup>

After the Black Death clergy were more often instituted in full orders and some were graduates, although many resigned the living in pursuit of preferment elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> Fifteenth-century investment in the fabric, notably the erection of a lofty tower, came probably (at least in part) from local people; certainly, they put money towards new fittings including a rood loft and screen,<sup>36</sup> and parishioners' gifts continued until the Reformation. Robert Calcott (d. 1499) and John Parr (d. 1501) each made bequests in support of torches, bells, and a light before an image of the Virgin, while Parr also left a sheep towards an image of John the Baptist.<sup>37</sup> John Hall (d. 1520) gave a silver pyx and land for an obit, paid a priest £5 6s. 8d. a year for seven years to celebrate masses on his behalf, and left £6 13s. 4d. towards building a church house,<sup>38</sup> intended presumably for church ales. By contrast the chancel, which was Osney abbey's responsibility, was said to be 'ruinous' c.1520, the churchyard was 'disfigured' by horses, and there was no almsgiving, although the chancel was presumably repaired by 1530 when the churchwardens reported that all was well.<sup>39</sup> The cure was then served by a stipendiary priest and curate (both non-graduates), who each received £5 6s. 8d. a year.<sup>40</sup>

### ***The Reformation to 1840***

The Reformation presumably brought the suppression of lights and images, including (in 1549) confiscation of the land supporting John Hall's obit.<sup>41</sup> Catholic practices revived under Mary I (1553–8) included devotions to the rood<sup>42</sup> and possibly St John,<sup>43</sup> but the curate Edward Goodman (c.1558–76) subscribed to the Elizabethan religious settlement, serving

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<sup>32</sup> Bodl. MS Ch. Oxon. 374.

<sup>33</sup> Below (church archit.).

<sup>34</sup> *Oseney Cart.* IV, 260; Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 27, 109.

<sup>35</sup> For a (partial) list of institutions, OHC, PAR137/17/MS/2.

<sup>36</sup> Below (church archit.).

<sup>37</sup> TNA, PROB 11/11/659; PROB 11/13/25; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 183.353.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, PROB 11/19/356. In 1551 the churchwardens held the church house from Hook Norton manor for 5s. a year (TNA, LR 2/189, f. 25); cf. Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 138, suggesting that it may have been the old house near the church mentioned in 1850.

<sup>39</sup> *Visit. Dioc. Linc.* I, 136; *ibid.* II, 43.

<sup>40</sup> *Subsidy 1526*, 263.

<sup>41</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1548–9, 315, 317.

<sup>42</sup> OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 182.90; 183.76. The rood loft itself survived until the mid 19th century: below (church archit.).

<sup>43</sup> In 1559 William Newman left his brother silk hangings and altar cloths which his father had given to the altar of St John: OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 183.353.

also as rector of Swerford,<sup>44</sup> and Catholic invocations largely disappeared from local wills by 1566.<sup>45</sup> Goodman's successor Ralph Allen (1576–90) was 'no preacher', and John Pittam (c.1590–1605) 'weak in learning',<sup>46</sup> although Pittam's family were well established in the village, and both men regularly witnessed parishioners' wills,<sup>47</sup> while Allen bequeathed four seats which he had supplied in the church to the parish's young men.<sup>48</sup> Many parishioners made small bequests to the church bells (two of which were replaced in 1599–1600),<sup>49</sup> and in 1598 John Ingram left 12*d.* towards putting up the Ten Commandments.<sup>50</sup>

By then the poverty of the living and the lack of accommodation was affecting recruitment, and though most 17th-century curates were graduates short terms were common, with some apparently employing poorly paid substitutes.<sup>51</sup> In 1649 the 'minister' Thomas Browne secured an augmentation of £30 to help him serve the 'spacious and populous' parish, but the money remained unpaid in 1651.<sup>52</sup> Low-status Catholic recusants were noted occasionally,<sup>53</sup> but by the 1650s the Church's main challenge came from strongly emerging Protestant Nonconformity.<sup>54</sup> In 1682–3 Bishop Fell responded to the perceived link between Dissent and pluralism by intervening to replace the curate Edward Jennings, who had served since 1670 and was latterly also curate at Little Rollright.<sup>55</sup> By then the church's pavements, seats, pulpit, and windows were out of repair,<sup>56</sup> and 17th-century bequests to the fabric were mainly small, the widow Elizabeth Lucas giving 3*s.* 4*d.* for a pulpit hour glass in 1617.<sup>57</sup>

In the early 18th century the long-serving curate Thomas Godwin (1717–41) supplied two Sunday services with sermons, and prayers on holy days, a level of provision more characteristic of market towns.<sup>58</sup> By 1738 there were c.60 communicants, and Godwin claimed excellent relations with local Dissenters, some of whom attended church.<sup>59</sup> His

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<sup>44</sup> S. Spencer Pearce, 'Clergy of the Deaneries of Chipping Norton and Deddington', *OAS Rep.* (1916), 22–3.

<sup>45</sup> OHC, MSS Wills Oxon., Hook Norton wills.

<sup>46</sup> Peel, *Register*, II, 134; Pearce, 'Cert. 1593', 160, mentioning uncertainty about his dates.

<sup>47</sup> Spencer Pearce, 'Clergy', 23; OHC, Hook Norton wills.

<sup>48</sup> OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 1/1/34.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Hook Norton wills, *passim*; *Ch. Bells Oxon.* II, 168–71.

<sup>50</sup> OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 37/2/9 ('towards the maintenance of the ten commandments, to be set up in the church').

<sup>51</sup> <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk> (accessed 2020).

<sup>52</sup> *Cal. Cttee for Compounding*, III, 1640.

<sup>53</sup> e.g. H.E. Salter, 'Recusants in Oxfordshire 1603–33', *OAS Rep.* (1924), 20, 40, 46; *Bp. Fell and Nonconf.* 62 n.

<sup>54</sup> *Below* (Nonconf).

<sup>55</sup> *Bp. Fell and Nonconf.* pp. xxviii, 62 (n. 217).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 38–9.

<sup>57</sup> OHC, MS Wills Oxon 41/2/47.

<sup>58</sup> *Secker's Visit.* 84; D. McClatchey, *Oxfordshire Clergy 1777–1869* (1960), 82.

<sup>59</sup> *Secker's Visit.* 83–4.

successors were mainly non-resident, however,<sup>60</sup> and employed low-waged assistants to perform part or all of the cure, some of them also serving elsewhere.<sup>61</sup> Lack of regular provision in the late 1750s and 1760s is suggested by the clergy's absence from vestry meetings, and in 1767 parishioners petitioned the bishop at Cuddesdon 'about a minister'.<sup>62</sup> The 1774 Enclosure Act acknowledged that inhabitants had 'laboured under great inconveniences' because of the curate's inadequate stipend and lack of accommodation,<sup>63</sup> but no house was supplied even though the endowment was increased.<sup>64</sup> Further petitions to procure a resident minister in 1787 and 1796 had no effect,<sup>65</sup> and George Turner (curate 1783–1840) seldom visited Hook Norton throughout his long incumbency, living in Spelsbury where he was vicar from 1792.<sup>66</sup>

Unsurprisingly in these circumstances Nonconformity flourished at the Church's expense.<sup>67</sup> The 30–40 communicants of 1771 fell to 20 by 1805, and an increase to 50 by 1831 was not sustained.<sup>68</sup> In 1771 it was reported that 'too many of the lower rank...absent [them]selves from all public worship...from levity and inattention', and a congregation of c.400 (morning and afternoon) in 1831 represented only 27 per cent of the population.<sup>69</sup> By the early 19th century the church building was also in disrepair,<sup>70</sup> prompting the churchwardens to take legal action against Nonconformists for payment of church rates.<sup>71</sup>

**Protestant Nonconformity** The early strength of Nonconformity probably reflected not only the weak Anglican presence, but also divided landownership and the absence of a dominant resident landlord, within a populous and relatively independent community.<sup>72</sup> The 'Ranter' Abiezer Coppe preached in the neighbourhood in the 1640s, including (allegedly) at Hook Norton Lodge,<sup>73</sup> and local Baptist tradition holds that a Baptist meeting was established c.1644.<sup>74</sup> In 1655 Hook Norton's Baptists joined a fellowship of seven chapels,

<sup>60</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 556, f. 28v.; d 559, ff. 49v. –52; d 562, f. 58v; d 566, f. 179; d 568, f. 187; b 30, f. 32.

<sup>61</sup> In 1767 the assistant curate was paid just £40 a year: Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 229, f. 27.

<sup>62</sup> OHC, PAR137/4/F1/1, f. 96v.; Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 116, 135.

<sup>63</sup> Copy in OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2116, no. 23.

<sup>64</sup> Above (endowment).

<sup>65</sup> OHC, PAR137/4/F1/1, f. 126v.; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 654, ff. 142–3.

<sup>66</sup> McClatchey, *Oxfordshire Clergy*, 55; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 33, f. 33v.

<sup>67</sup> Below.

<sup>68</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 562, f. 59; d 568, f. 186v.; b 38, f. 116v.; b 39, f. 190.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* d 562, f. 58v.; b 38, f. 116v. The morning congregation was 'not above 60'.

<sup>70</sup> OHC, MS Archd. Oxon. c 76, ff. 286, 294–5, 331–2; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. b 39, f. 189v.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. b 11, f. 144; T. Marshall, *The Quaker Clockmakers of North Oxfordshire* (2013), 174.

<sup>72</sup> *Bp Fell and Nonconf.* p. xli; above, landownership; econ. hist.; social hist.

<sup>73</sup> W. Fiennes, *Folly and Madnesse Made Manifest...* (1659), 2; *Bp Fell and Nonconf.* 56–7 (n. 135).

<sup>74</sup> J. Thomas, 'A Short History of the Baptist Church at Hook Norton' (1786): copy in Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 551.

their representatives being Mathew Wyton and the maltster James Wilmot (d. 1682).<sup>75</sup> By 1669 Wilmot was co-teacher of a monthly conventicle of c.60, the leaders being ‘persons such as were soldiers under [the Parliamentarian military leader John] Lambert’.<sup>76</sup> Initially the group had strong connections with Anabaptists in neighbouring Swalcliffe, whose teacher Charles Archer acted as joint pastor at Hook Norton, and eventually succeeded Wilmot.<sup>77</sup>

In 1676 a total of 90 Nonconformists was reported,<sup>78</sup> most of them probably Baptists, who in 1706 had a congregation of 85.<sup>79</sup> The group was long served by James Wilmot’s son Daniel (d. 1741),<sup>80</sup> who was licensed to preach in 1700 when he oversaw the erection of a meeting house, replaced in 1718 by a successor on Netting Street. That was paid for by William Harwood of Broad Marston (Glos.), who also supplied three cottages and a house for the minister.<sup>81</sup> The attached burial ground was in use by 1819.<sup>82</sup> By 1738 the Baptist following in Hook Norton had declined to c.18 families ‘of mean rank’,<sup>83</sup> although the chapel also served surrounding villages, notably Bloxham.<sup>84</sup> In 1743 the regular congregation of 45 included 18 from the village,<sup>85</sup> increased to c.30 families by 1768 thanks partly to the ‘bad supply... of proper [Anglican] curates’.<sup>86</sup> The chapel was rebuilt in 1787,<sup>87</sup> and in 1799 the congregation was reportedly 174.<sup>88</sup> By 1811, however, there were just 33 members, and though that rose to 66 by 1823 and stood at 56 in 1839, by then the group was in ‘a very low state’ thanks to internal disputes.<sup>89</sup>

A Hook Norton Quaker meeting existed by 1668,<sup>90</sup> closely associated with Sibford, and with c.18 members in 1683.<sup>91</sup> A meeting house in Southrop, built in 1704 (though without a burial ground), was supported by 14 Hook Norton families in 1738,<sup>92</sup> although

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, also reported in J. Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, II (1814), 518.

<sup>76</sup> *Bp Fell and Nonconf.* pp. xiv, 44–5; *ODNB*, s.v. John Lambert.

<sup>77</sup> *VCH Oxon.* X, 257; Ivimey, *Hist. English Baptists*, II, 519–20.

<sup>78</sup> *Compton Census*, ed. Whiteman, 421.

<sup>79</sup> OHC, NB1/1/A3/1.

<sup>80</sup> *Secker’s Visit.* 84 n.

<sup>81</sup> OHC, Cal. QS, VIII, 803, 805; Ivimey, *Hist. English Baptists*, II, 520; plaque in chapel and external datestone. For Wilmot’s preaching, *VCH Oxon.* IX, 80–1.

<sup>82</sup> K. Tiller, ‘Village Dissenters: Hook Norton Baptist Chapel and its Chapelyard’, *Cake & Cockhorse*, 9:1 (1982), 29–31; Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 145.

<sup>83</sup> *Secker’s Visit.* 83–4.

<sup>84</sup> OHC, NB1/1/A3/1, listing 69 members in 1728 incl. 18 from Hook Norton.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. d 559, f. 49v.

<sup>87</sup> C. Stell, *Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels in Central England* (1986), 176. Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 360 incorrectly states 1781.

<sup>88</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 11, f. 143v.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* NB1/1/R/1; notes by Daniel Warmington in Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 551, pp. 148–9.

<sup>90</sup> J.V. Wood, *Some Rural Quakers: a History of Quakers ... [in] the Four Shires of Oxford, Warwick, Worcester, and Gloucester* (1991), 49.

<sup>91</sup> *VCH Oxon.* X, 256; *Bp Fell and Nonconf.* 62 n.

<sup>92</sup> Stell, *Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels*, 177; *Secker’s Visit.* 84.

growth was short lived. By 1759 there were only five Quaker families, albeit meeting twice a week, and in 1768 (when they 'generally [paid] their tithes etc. without compulsion') it was claimed that 'the wealthiest of them being dead, they begin to fall off'.<sup>93</sup> In 1781 they joined with the South Newington meeting,<sup>94</sup> and in 1790 had c.36 members, a Sunday school, and a minister soon to be resident.<sup>95</sup> Numbers remained small, however, and in 1810 the meetings were combined with Sibford's.<sup>96</sup> By then there was also a Wesleyan Methodist meeting (licensed in 1794), which expanded and moved into a purpose-built chapel at Down End in 1829, on land later part of an Anglican cemetery.<sup>97</sup> A separate Primitive Methodist chapel was built in 1826.<sup>98</sup>



The Baptist chapel,  
built in 1718.

### **Since 1841**

The institution as curate of the energetic and popular Low Churchman John Rushton in 1841 marked a new era in Anglican religious life.<sup>99</sup> As resident incumbent, Rushton set about reordering parish finances and restoring the church.<sup>100</sup> By 1854 there were c.70 regular communicants, and the Sunday afternoon congregation was c.400–450, including 100

<sup>93</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 556, f. 38; d 559, f. 49v.

<sup>94</sup> Wood, *Some Rural Quakers*, 130.

<sup>95</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 327, p. 106.

<sup>96</sup> E.D. Paul, 'The Records of the Banbury Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends', *Oxoniensia*, 31 (1966), 163–4.

<sup>97</sup> OHC, Cal. QS, VIII, 811; Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 147, citing deed of 1829; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. IX.9 (1881 and later edns), 'burial ground'; cf. *Ch. and Chapel*, 1851, no. 225, wrongly saying 1813.

<sup>98</sup> *Ch. and Chapel*, 1851, no. 224. P. Ashbridge, *Children of Dissent* (2008), 161–2, cites a broadsheet poem in the village museum suggesting they arrived in 1845, but poss. this was a revival.

<sup>99</sup> *Wilb. Dioc. Bks*, 10; *Banbury Guardian*, 3 Feb. 1881. New stained glass in the chancel's east window was dedicated to him by parishioners.

<sup>100</sup> OHC, PAR137/4/F1/2, ff. 52v.–72; Lambeth Palace Library, ICBS 3383; Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 151; below (church archit.).

Sunday school pupils.<sup>101</sup> The congregation declined in the 1870s, however, despite the introduction of an organ, extra services, and an assistant curate, for which Rushton partly blamed the hostile attitude of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union.<sup>102</sup> Rushton's successor Alfred Cox (rector 1881–94) introduced daily services and an annual parochial tea, although his High Church tone – reflected in the introduction of surplices for the choir (which was moved into the chancel) and chanting of the psalms – aroused some opposition, causing the school headmaster to resign.<sup>103</sup> Alfred Russell (1894–1907) continued in similar vein.<sup>104</sup>

By the 1920s collaboration with other denominations was more evident, despite the rector Earnest Freeman (1907–24) allegedly denying public presentation of school attendance prizes to Baptist children.<sup>105</sup> Anglicans, Baptists, and Methodists took part in the foundation-stone laying of the Memorial Hall in 1922,<sup>106</sup> and church services later took on a more Low-Church tone, reflected in the removal of the choir stalls from the chancel to below the chancel steps (in front of the organ) in 1946.<sup>107</sup> By 1952 an ecumenical holy week united service was held in the Methodist church,<sup>108</sup> and in 1975 it was claimed that 'the different Christian denominations in the village enjoy very happy ecumenical relations'.<sup>109</sup> Responses to the usual late 20th-century decline in regular attendance included opening the church for a wide range of concerts and other events, facilitated by the removal of pews and other seats in 2007–8.<sup>110</sup> By 2014 the regular Sunday congregation stood at c.30–60,<sup>111</sup> and in 2018 the parish sought as rector a 'Spirit-led communicator' who would support varied forms of worship and engage all ages and social groups.<sup>112</sup>

**Non-Anglican Worship from 1841** By the mid 19th century the Methodists were the strongest non-Anglican denomination. On Census Sunday in 1851 the Wesleyan Methodist evening congregation numbered 160 and the Primitive Methodist one 100, while the Baptists had 140 (in the afternoon), and the Quakers just 11 (in the morning). Both Methodist groups

<sup>101</sup> *Wilb. Visit. 76; Ch. and Chapel, 1851*, no. 223. The morning congregation was c.300.

<sup>102</sup> CERC, QAB/7/3/F2820; Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 152; P. Horn (ed.), *Agric. Trade Unionism in Oxon. 1872–81* (ORS 48, 1974), 133.

<sup>103</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 353, f. 216v.; F. Beale, 'From our Own Correspondent', *Cake & Cockhorse*, 9:1 (1982), 25; Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 153–4; S. Callery, *The Story of Hook Norton* (2017), 23 (photo of tea).

<sup>104</sup> Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 154.

<sup>105</sup> Tiller, 'Village Dissenters', 28.

<sup>106</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 25 May 1922.

<sup>107</sup> Docs in OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1863/1.

<sup>108</sup> *Banbury Guardian*, 17 April 1952.

<sup>109</sup> 'Welcome to Hook Norton' (1975): festival programme in OHC.

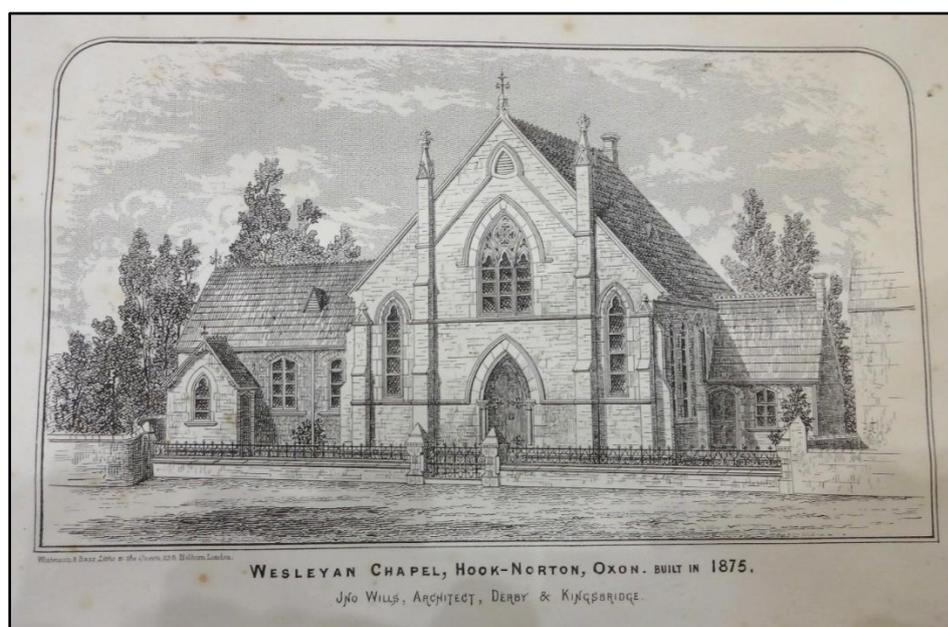
<sup>110</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c. 1863/5, faculties.

<sup>111</sup> Info. from village history website (2019).

<sup>112</sup> Hook Norton Benefice Profile (2018), accessed online (Apr. 2020).

had their own 'minister', and the Baptist and Quaker returns were signed by local farmers, while the Wesleyans and Baptists had their own Sunday schools.<sup>113</sup> Three years later the Anglican incumbent thought that Dissenters comprised about a third of the population (c.500 people), although some attended both church and chapel.<sup>114</sup>

In 1875 the flourishing Wesleyan Methodists erected a substantial new Gothic-style stone-built chapel on what became known as Chapel Street, designed by John Wills.<sup>115</sup> The building seated c.220, and double that number when partitions separating the accompanying vestry and schoolroom were moved.<sup>116</sup> The Baptists still had c.76 members in 1860, and built a Sunday school room by their chapel in 1873;<sup>117</sup> the Primitive Methodists, however, mainly labourers, closed their meeting room in or before 1881, and subsequently hired the Quaker meeting house until c.1898,<sup>118</sup> the small Quaker meeting itself being discontinued in 1888.<sup>119</sup> A Zion Chapel for Strict Baptists was built at the north end of Tite Lane in 1898 by Frank Lightfoot, a local inland revenue officer,<sup>120</sup> and around the turn of the century there was also a small Salvation Army initiative.<sup>121</sup>



The Wesleyan Methodist chapel of 1875 (demolished in 1986).

<sup>113</sup> *Ch. and Chapel*, 1851, nos. 224–7.

<sup>114</sup> *Wilb. Visit.* 76.

<sup>115</sup> OHC, NM1/10/P/1 (etching); OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. VIII.12 (1881 and later edns).

<sup>116</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883); Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 147.

<sup>117</sup> OHC, NB1/1/R1; NB1/1/A3/2; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 360.

<sup>118</sup> Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 147.

<sup>119</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883 and later edns); Wood, *Some Rural Quakers*, 130.

<sup>120</sup> Datestone in village museum, shown in Callery, *Story of Hook Norton*, 17; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. IX.9 (1881 and later edns).

<sup>121</sup> TNA, RG 12/1180; Tiller, 'Village Dissenters', 28; notes by Mr Minchin in possession of VCH.

The 20th century was largely a period of decline, save for the erection of a wooden Roman Catholic chapel (dedicated to St Joseph) in 1932, served by visiting priests latterly from Chipping Norton.<sup>122</sup> The Quakers revived intermittently but finally ceased local meetings in 1932, the meeting house being demolished in 1950.<sup>123</sup> The Zion chapel ceased to be used around the Second World War, and was demolished in the 1960s.<sup>124</sup> Baptists, Methodists, and Catholics continued in 1975,<sup>125</sup> but the Wesleyan chapel was demolished in 1986 and the Catholic chapel in 1999.<sup>126</sup> In the early 21st century a handful of Quakers attended meetings in nearby Sibford Gower,<sup>127</sup> while 11 people were Buddhists, a Buddhist group having been established c.1989.<sup>128</sup> Baptist membership in 2013 totalled 31.<sup>129</sup>

## Church Architecture

Hook Norton's large and spacious church is chiefly 12th- to 15th-century, but incorporates 11th-century fragments, and was lightly restored in the 19th. Built of ironstone rubble and limestone, with leaded roofs, it comprises chancel, nave, north and south aisles (the latter wider than the nave), north and south transepts (the latter sharing the south aisle's roof), and a large west tower.<sup>130</sup> Removal of Victorian render in the late 1980s revealed long and short quoins at the eastern end of an early to mid 11th-century nave, incorporated into the present structure and now abutted by the later aisles and transepts.<sup>131</sup> The large Norman chancel retains round-headed windows in its north and south walls, and a blocked priest's doorway towards its south-western end. Inside, east of the present (15th-century) chancel arch, are the two-tier scalloped impostes of the earlier arch, and remains of a Norman two-seat sedilia and a twin-bowled piscina, while an arched recess in the centre of the east wall may have housed a relic. A north doorway (later converted into a recess which was perhaps used as an aumbry) led apparently to a small cell or annex, which possibly accommodated the

<sup>122</sup> Notes and photos in village museum; *The Official Catholic Directory of the Archdiocese of Birmingham* (1955 and later edns). *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1931 edn), claims that earlier (from 1921) a former Primitive Methodist chapel was used, dedicated to St Theresa.

<sup>123</sup> T. Marshall, *The Quaker Clockmakers of North Oxon.* (2013), 33, incl drawings; Stell, *Inv. Nonconf. Chapels in Central Eng.* 177.

<sup>124</sup> Information from village history website.

<sup>125</sup> 'Welcome to Hook Norton'.

<sup>126</sup> OHC, NM1/10/P/1 and 3; *Hook Norton 2000 AD: the Millennium Book* (2000).

<sup>127</sup> Local information.

<sup>128</sup> *Census*, 2011; J. Pickering, 'The Buddhists of Hook Norton' (notes in village museum).

<sup>129</sup> Information from village history website.

<sup>130</sup> Account based on: Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 359–60; OHC, PAR137/11/A1/1 (1892 report by B. Edmund Ferrey); J. Sherwood, *A Guide to the Churches of Oxfordshire* (1989), 98; C.E. Keyser, 'Notes on the Architecture of the Churches of Great Rollright, Hook Norton and Wigginton, Oxfordshire', *Jnl of the British Archaeological Assocn*, n.s. 25 (1919), 10–17, and plates; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a 67, nos. 334–5 (J.C. Buckler drawings, 1822).

<sup>131</sup> R.A. Chambers, 'Hook Norton', *SMA* 17 (1987), 90.

anchorite mentioned in the late 12th century.<sup>132</sup> All of those features are most likely early to mid 12th-century, and so too is the tub font in the nave, which incorporates lively rustic carvings including Adam and Eve, a tree of life, and Sagittarius.<sup>133</sup> That last figure appears also on the tympanum of Kencot church, another d'Oilly manor.<sup>134</sup>



Hook Norton's highly decorated Norman font.

The present nave and aisles appear to be largely of 13th- and earlier 14th-century date, as indicated by the Early English south doorway and the reset outer doorway of the porch. The three-bay north arcade, with octagonal piers and round capitals, may date to c.1300, and the south arcade (which has taller octagonal piers and capitals) could be roughly contemporary, its east end retaining a fragment of 14th-century wall painting. Both aisles were subsequently fitted with Decorated windows, the south aisle having been enlarged to match the width of the south transept.<sup>135</sup> The chancel was remodelled in the same period, insertion of a large Decorated east window apparently involving the raising of the chancel roof, since the external flat-stepped Norman buttresses do not reach the eaves. Archaeological investigation of the chancel's north side revealed a dump of fragments of

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid. (mentioning grave-shaped pit cut into floor of cell); idem, 'Hook Norton', *SMA* 13 (1983), 130–1; above (Middle Ages).

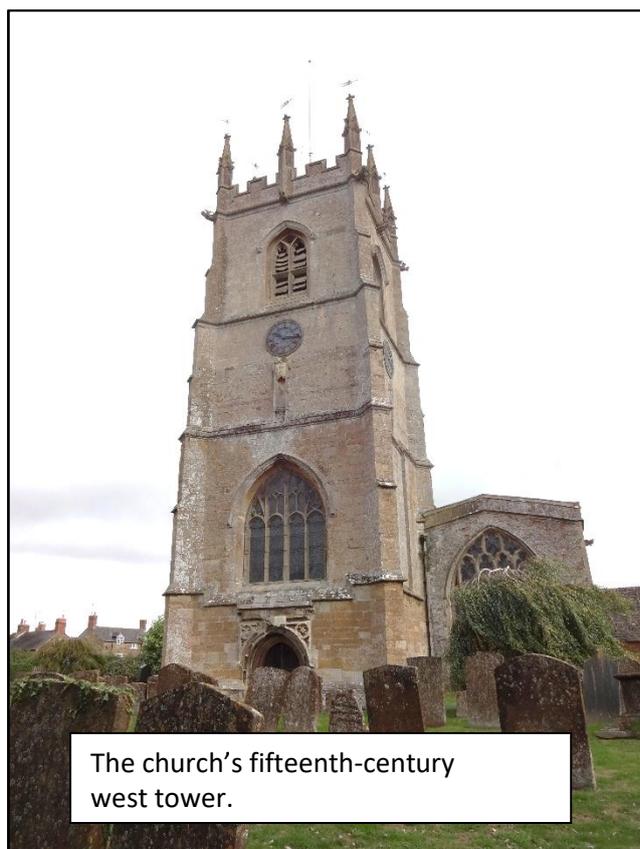
<sup>133</sup> For photo and description, C. Wigg, *St Peter's Church, Hook Norton* (c.1973), 8–9.

<sup>134</sup> *VCH Oxon.* XV, 174.

<sup>135</sup> Keyser, 'Notes', 11.

limestone roof tile, decorated clay ridge tile, and inlaid floor tile of 13th- or early 14th-century date, sourced apparently from east Oxfordshire or Buckinghamshire.<sup>136</sup>

Fifteenth-century alterations included insertion of Perpendicular windows in the north transept and in the south aisle's west wall; new tall arches between the nave and transepts, and between the north aisle and north transept; entrances and stairs to a now-lost rood screen and loft;<sup>137</sup> and addition of a clerestory incorporating a five-light 'Cotswold window' above a new chancel arch. The rood was accompanied by a painting (over the chancel arch) of Saints Peter and Paul, uncovered in 1939.<sup>138</sup> The most striking addition, and from a distance the church's most prominent feature, is the elegant limestone four-stage west tower, topped by an embattled parapet and pinnacles set above gargoyles.



Little major work followed until the 19th century, although a low, chancel side-window may have been added in the 16th, and is possibly the window mentioned in the curate Ralph Allen's will.<sup>139</sup> The hinges of the south door bear the names of the churchwardens and of their maker, William Goodwin, blacksmith (1739),<sup>140</sup> and a clock and chimes existed by

<sup>136</sup> Chambers, 'Hook Norton', *SMA* 17 (1987), 90.

<sup>137</sup> Skelton, *Antiq. Oxon.* 55. The rood loft ('with the wooden groining perfect') survived in the mid 19th century (Parker, *Eccl. Topog.* no. 76), but was later removed, probably during the 1845–9 restoration.

<sup>138</sup> OHC, PAR137/9/C1/2; E.T. Long, 'Recently Discovered Wall Paintings in England – II', *The Burlington Magazine*, 76:446 (1940), p. 162 and plate C.

<sup>139</sup> OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 1/1/34, requesting burial in the churchyard near 'the glass window where my seats are'.

<sup>140</sup> W. Hobart Bird, *Old Oxon. Churches* [1932], 93.

1732.<sup>141</sup> Pews were repaired and replaced in 1811 and 1828, the tower repaired in 1815, a three-decker pulpit installed in 1824 (replaced in 1882), and the porch rebuilt in 1825.<sup>142</sup> Much more substantial work was carried out in 1845–9 to plans by H.J. Underwood of Oxford, including repair of the south aisle, north aisle, and transept, re-roofing (retaining the medieval corbel heads), and re-pewing to increase accommodation, involving the erection in the north transept of a gallery for Sunday School children, removed in 1916.<sup>143</sup> The tiers of stained pine pews were subsequently condemned as uncomfortable, unsightly, and resembling ‘a football stand’.<sup>144</sup> Three bells (by Bond of Burford) were added in 1896–9, taking the total to eight, which were all recast and rehung in 1949.<sup>145</sup> In 1922 a war memorial window designed by J.H. Dearle was installed at the east end of the south aisle, which was converted in 1952 into a war memorial chapel to designs by F.E. Openshaw.<sup>146</sup>

The 20th century saw considerable internal rearrangement. In 1928, when electric light was installed, the altar was enlarged and supplied with riddle posts,<sup>147</sup> while in 1936 the ringer’s gallery was removed, the unpopular Victorian seating was adapted (reducing the sittings from c.400–500 to 350), and the flooring replaced, while the north transept was screened off to create a vestry.<sup>148</sup> A re-used oak rood screen from Long Eaton (Derbs.) was erected across the chancel arch in 1953, filling the space left by moving the choir stalls in 1946, but was itself removed in 1994. In 2001 the tower arch was glazed in, with a kitchen and toilets constructed at ground level, a meeting room built on a new first floor, and a lift installed. A few years later all the church’s seating was removed. Major repairs in the 1980s included restoration of the tower and its pinnacles, and repairs to the north transept, while the chancel and south aisle roofs were replaced in 2011–12.<sup>149</sup> The churchyard was closed for burials from 1899 when a new cemetery was opened at Down End.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> OHC, PAR137/4/F1/1, ff. 9, 10, 48v., 49v. The current quartz clock was installed c.2001: OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1863/5, faculties.

<sup>142</sup> OHC, PAR137/4/F1/2, ff. 16v., 20, 35, 38, 39v.; Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 149–50; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 360.

<sup>143</sup> OHC, PAR137/4/F1/2, ff. 62v.–72; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1863/1; Lambeth Palace Library, ICBS 3383, specifying total accomm. for 745; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 359–60.

<sup>144</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, ICBS 12230.

<sup>145</sup> *Par. Colln*, II, 179 (ring of 5 c.1700); *Ch. Bells Oxon*, II, 168–71 (mentioning earlier bells dated 1599, 1600, 1788, 1797); OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c.1863/1; *ibid.* PAR137/11/PR/1.

<sup>146</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1863/1; Dickins, *Hook Norton*, 154–5.

<sup>147</sup> OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1863/1, faculties.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* PAR137/11/A1/2; Lambeth Palace Library, ICBS 12230.

<sup>149</sup> Faculties in OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 1863/1; c 1863/4; c 1863/5; local information.

<sup>150</sup> Below, local govt; OHC, par. reg. transcript (noting occasional later churchyard burials presumably by prior agreement).



Interior of Hook Norton church, looking east towards the chancel.