

VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

## GREAT ROLLRIGHT

Landscape, Settlement, and Buildings



*The Green, Great Rollright, site of the former village cross.*

Great Rollright is a secluded rural parish adjoining the Warwickshire border, c.2¾ miles north of Chipping Norton and the same south-west of Hook Norton.<sup>1</sup> The village, comprising several distinct ‘ends’ now partly linked by modern infill, developed on a south-facing slope close to an ancient ridgeway from Stow-on-the Wold (Glos.) to Banbury. Little outlying settlement existed until enclosure in 1776, which prompted the building of a few isolated farmhouses, while more recent development increased the overall number of dwellings from 80-odd in the 1930s to over 200 in 2011. The economy was predominantly agricultural until the 20th century, benefiting briefly from the Cheltenham to Banbury railway (1887–1962), and in the 19th century the presence of a large body of poorly paid farm workers probably contributed to increased Nonconformity. Significant landowners included Brasenose College, Oxford (also church patron), and the resident Sheppards (1583–1742). The prefix ‘Great’,

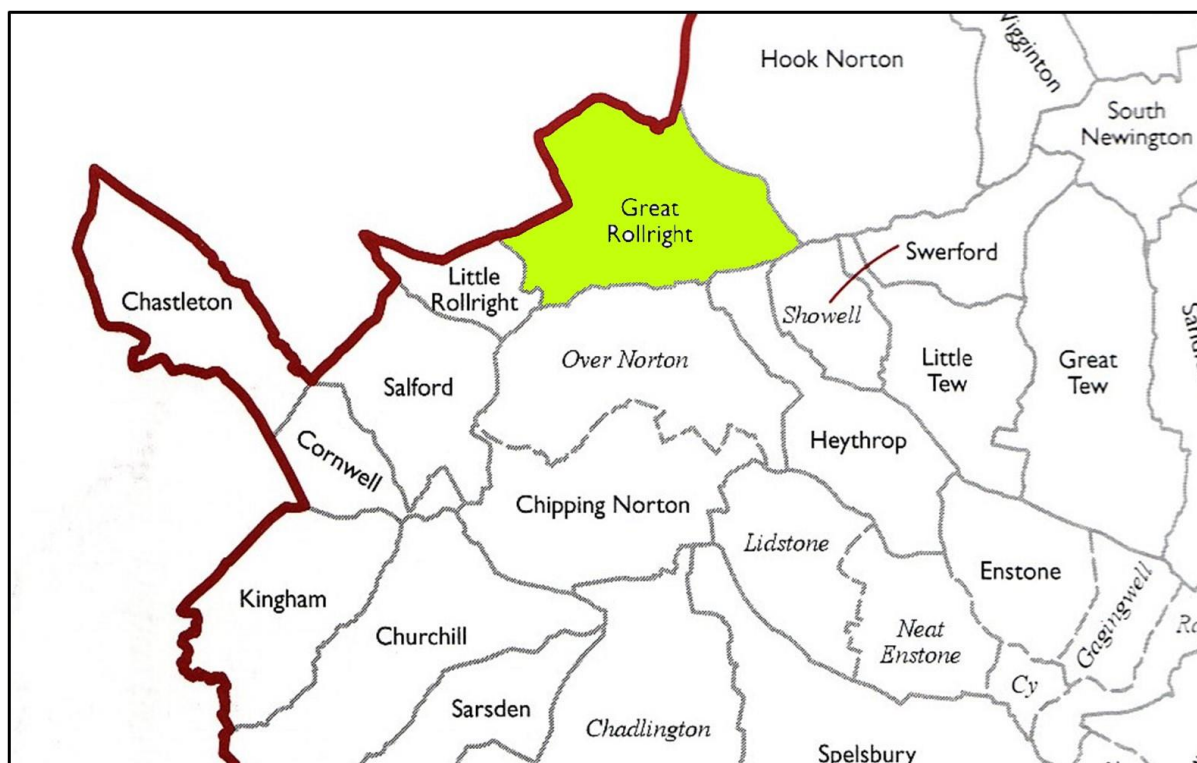
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<sup>1</sup> This account was written in 2019–20 and revised in 2021.

established by 1086, distinguishes the parish from its smaller neighbour Little Rollright, site of the prehistoric Rollright Stones.<sup>2</sup> The two became a single parish in 1932.<sup>3</sup>

## LANDSCAPE, SETTLEMENT, AND BUILDINGS

### Parish Boundaries



*Great Rollright parish before its unification with Little Rollright in 1932. Source: K. Tiller and G. Darkes (eds), An Historical Atlas of Oxfordshire (ORS 67, 2010).*

In 1881 the ancient parish covered 2,414 a.,<sup>4</sup> its boundaries derived presumably from those of Great Rollright's three 11th-century manors and of the single 15-hide estate which probably preceded them.<sup>5</sup> The unification with Little Rollright increased the area to 3,041 a. (1,230 ha.), but otherwise the ancient boundaries remained unaltered in 2021.<sup>6</sup> The north-western boundary with Whichford and Long Compton (both in Warwickshire) follows that of

<sup>2</sup> *PN Oxon.* II, 371–2; below, Little Rollright.

<sup>3</sup> Below (boundaries).

<sup>4</sup> *OS Area Bk* (1881); cf. *Census*, 1831–71, estimating 2,360 a. For boundaries, *OS Maps* 6", Oxon. VIII, XIV (1884–5 edn).

<sup>5</sup> Below, landownership.

<sup>6</sup> *Census*, 1931–2011; <http://my.westoxon.gov.uk/> (accessed July 2021).

the county along Traitor's Ford Lane (part of the ridgeway to Stow-on-the-Wold),<sup>7</sup> diverting westwards (with the shire boundary) to follow a stream feeding a tributary of the river Stour, then returning to the ridgeway. The short western boundary with Little Rollright abutted the Neolithic portal dolmen known as the Whispering Knights,<sup>8</sup> running south to a tributary of the river Evenlode which separates Great Rollright from Over Norton. Further east the boundary with Heythrop and Showell follows the river Swere, while the eastern boundary with Hook Norton (called the 'boundary of the people of Rollright' in the 13th century)<sup>9</sup> runs along field boundaries and a field track back to Traitor's Ford Lane. Indentations along several stretches of boundary suggest that they originally followed open-field furlongs, while much of the north-westwards projection beyond the ridgeway (around Coombe Farm) was formerly common pasture.<sup>10</sup> The ecclesiastical boundaries were altered in 1980.<sup>11</sup>

## Landscape

The parish straddles the watershed between the stream- and river valleys which mark its north-western and southern boundaries, the village (at 200–220 m.) occupying gently rising ground on the south-facing slope. The parish's highest point (at 235 m.) lies on the ridgeway (Traitor's Ford Lane) where it enters the parish from the north, before following the watershed south-westwards along a gently descending plateau to 215 m. near the Rollright Stones. North-west of the ridgeway the land falls steeply down the scarp to 120–130 m. in the valley bottom, its slopes comprising thin bands of mudstone which give way at the summit to a broader swathe of Chipping Norton Limestone, extending as far as the village. Whitby Mudstone re-emerges along a spring line running parallel to the ridgeway, from which emerge several southward-flowing streams: one forms a narrow depression called Danes (formerly Deans) Bottom, a corruption of the medieval *Debedene* ('deep valley'). From the village the ground falls to 150–170 m. along the southern boundary, where a band of White Limestone was formerly dug for lime burning.<sup>12</sup>

The loamy soils on the limestone are mostly free-draining stonebrash, with heavier clays in the valleys, and from the Middle Ages both supported the mixed sheep, corn, and

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<sup>7</sup> Below (communics). For Traitor's Ford (in Whichford), e.g. H.A. Evans, *Highways and Byways in Oxford and the Cotswolds* (1927 edn), 134, 136; J.E.B. Gover et al., *The Place-Names of Warwickshire* (English Place-Name Soc. 13, 1936), 302.

<sup>8</sup> Below, Little Rollright, landscape etc. (prehist. settlement).

<sup>9</sup> 'Rolheme Mere': *Oseney Cart.* IV, pp. 275–6; *PN Oxon.* II, 356.

<sup>10</sup> Below, econ. hist. (agric. landscape).

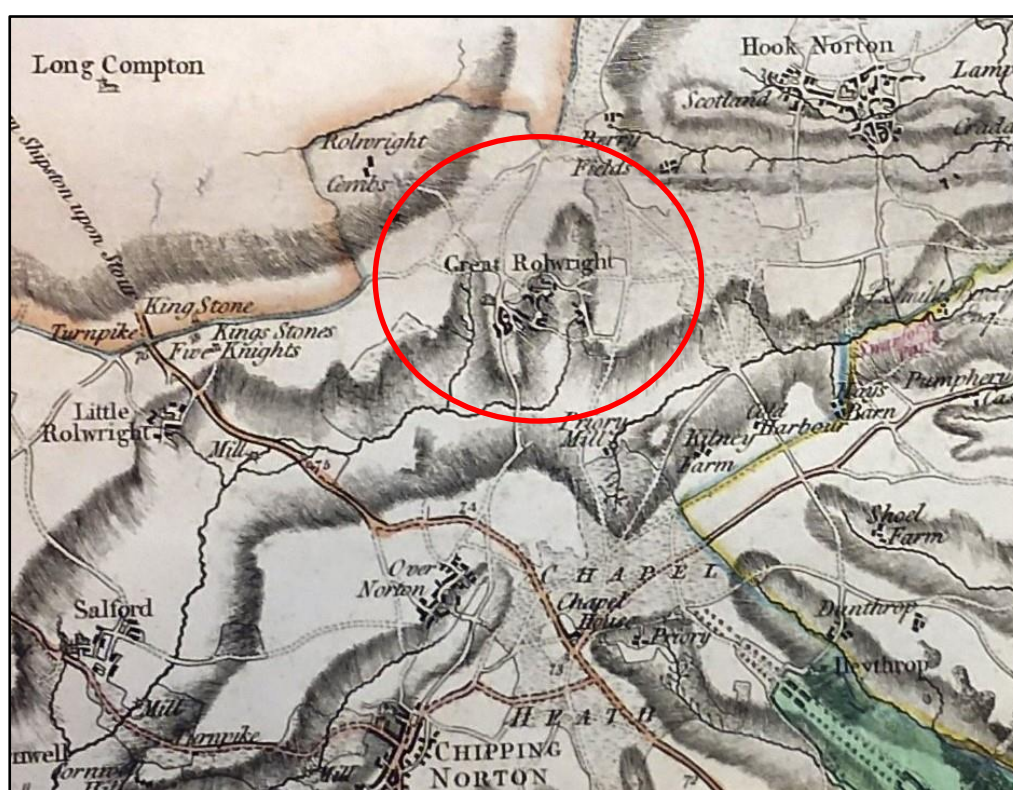
<sup>11</sup> Below, relig. hist. (paroch. organizn).

<sup>12</sup> OS Map 1:25000, sheet 191 (2015 edn); Geol. Surv. Map 1:50000 (solid and drift), sheet 218 (2007 edn); *PN Oxon.* II, 372; below, econ. hist. (trades).



cattle farming typical of the area.<sup>13</sup> The novelist and agricultural reformer Henry Rider Haggard, visiting in the early 20th century, contrasted the light brashy uplands with the lower-lying alluvial grass, in places rendered ‘almost marshy by springs’.<sup>14</sup> From the ridgeway long views are possible of the surrounding hill and vale, though some visitors considered the high ground ‘sombre’ or ‘bleak’.<sup>15</sup> The village itself is screened by thin strips of woodland mostly planted in the 20th century, which give it a secluded feel.<sup>16</sup> Water came from streams, springs, and wells,<sup>17</sup> assisted latterly by pumps and (from the 1920s) by hydraulic rams and pipes, until mains water was introduced in the 1940s.<sup>18</sup>

## Communications



Great Rollright village in 1767, its roads and neighbouring settlements: detail from Thomas Jefferys' map of Oxfordshire.

<sup>13</sup> Sale Cat., *Gt Rollright Manor* (1991): copy in OHC; below, econ. hist.

<sup>14</sup> H. Rider Haggard, *Rural England*, II (1906), 108–9.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 110; H.J. Massingham, *Cotswold Country* (1937), 83; R.W. Jeffery, *The Manors and Advowson of Great Rollright* (ORS 9, 1927), 44, 50, 169.

<sup>16</sup> Google Earth images (accessed Nov. 2019); cf. OS Maps 1:2500, Oxon. VIII.15, XIV.3 (1900 edn).

<sup>17</sup> For the medieval byname ‘at well’, *Cal. Close* 1296–1302, 314; TNA, E 179/161/8.

<sup>18</sup> OS Maps 1:2500, Oxon. VIII.15, XIV.3 (1900–22 edns); OHC, B28/1/D1/58/1; B28/1/D4/1; TNA, MAF 32/913/88; below (medieval and later settlement).

**Roads** Great Rollright village lies near the intersection of several early long-distance routes. The main road through the village, running northwards from Chipping Norton, forms the county boundary for c.5½ miles, continuing towards Southam (Warws.). Known probably as Norton or Brailes Way (and continuing as Traitor's Ford Lane), it presumably pre-dates Oxfordshire's formation c.1007, and may have originated as an ancient ridgeway running roughly parallel to the Roman Foss Way c.7 miles to the west.<sup>19</sup> The old Cotswold ridgeway, another probably prehistoric route running north-eastwards from Stow-on-the-Wold towards Banbury and Northampton, formerly intersected it on the parish's northern edge, passing the Neolithic Rollright Stones; that too formed a stretch of county boundary, although its original course through the parish's north-west corner was partially re-routed at enclosure in 1776.<sup>20</sup> Both roads retain local significance, although their use as long-distance routes (especially north of the village) diminished in the 20th century.<sup>21</sup> The only turnpike route was the modern A3400 across the parish's south-west corner, newly laid out by Act of Parliament in 1825 as an alternative to the existing, more westerly route through Little Rollright (turnpiked in 1730). Both formed part of a long-distance route from Oxford to Stratford-upon-Avon (Warws.).<sup>22</sup>

Other roads were of only local importance. One ran from the village eastwards to Swerford, and was straightened at enclosure, surviving as a metalled road. It was crossed by a road running southwards past Priory Mill (in Over Norton), though by the 1830s that was apparently no longer a through-route. Further east the Swerford road was crossed by a pair of roads which converged at a ford over the river Swere; the eastern branch continues as a through-route to Hook Norton, though use of the western branch (realigned following the building of the railway) declined in the 20th century, with the reduction to a field track of a formerly connecting road running from Traitor's Ford Lane along the north-eastern parish boundary.<sup>23</sup> A suggested Roman road through the parish was perhaps the 'stonstret' mentioned in the 12th century, though if so no trace of it survives.<sup>24</sup>

At enclosure in 1776 the surveyors of highways were allowed three stone and gravel pits, and in 1811 spent £100 repairing the roads to Hook Norton.<sup>25</sup> By 1890 the pits yielded little usable stone, however, and the following decade the parish's roads were reportedly in bad condition.<sup>26</sup> The Stratford road, meanwhile, was disturnpiked in 1878, and its isolated

<sup>19</sup> OS Maps 6", Oxon. VIII, XIV (1884–5 edn); OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 41, f. 63.

<sup>20</sup> Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); VCH *Glos.* VI, 8, 142; Grundy, *Saxon Oxon.* 94.

<sup>21</sup> OS Map 1:50000, sheet 151 (1984 edn).

<sup>22</sup> Long Compton to Woodstock Turnpike Act, 6 Geo. IV, c. clv; OHC, P/VI/iii/8; *Warwick & Warwickshire Advertiser*, 5 Mar. 1825; OS Map 1", sheet XLV (1833 edn); below, Little Rollright.

<sup>23</sup> Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); OS Maps 1", sheet XLV (1833 edn); 6", Oxon. VIII.SE, XIV.NE (1900 edn).

<sup>24</sup> *PN Oxon.* II, 373; M. Allen et al., 'The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain: An Online Resource' (2018): <https://doi.org/10.5284/1030449> (accessed Dec. 2019).

<sup>25</sup> OHC, enclo. award; *ibid.* Cal. QS, VIII, 658–9, 666, 671.

<sup>26</sup> *Oxon. Weekly News*, 29 Oct. 1890, 20 Jan. 1904, 21 June 1905.

tollhouse removed.<sup>27</sup> A footpath from Hook Norton to Little Rollright (running through the village) was designated part of the long-distance D'Arcy Dalton Way in 1986, named from a prominent founder member of the Oxford Fieldpaths Society.<sup>28</sup>

**Railway, Carriers, and Post** The Banbury and Cheltenham Direct Railway opened in 1887, following the completion of a single line from Chipping Norton to King's Sutton (Northants.).<sup>29</sup> The Rollright stretch was built beside the river Swere in the parish's south-eastern part, carried by bridges across the north–south roads from the village and Hook Norton.<sup>30</sup> In 1897 the line was bought by the Great Western Railway, which opened a halt at Great Rollright in 1906; four to six trains ran each way daily, with most passengers travelling to Chipping Norton to work or shop. A siding was constructed east of the halt in 1909, used mainly for delivery of coal and for transport of farm produce.<sup>31</sup> Passenger services were withdrawn in 1951 and freight services in 1962, after which the line was dismantled.<sup>32</sup>

A village carrier ('ignorant and purse-proud' according to the rector) was mentioned in 1820, and ten years later a carrier ran to Great Rollright on Wednesdays from Chipping Norton's Blue Boar pub.<sup>33</sup> From the 1840s to 1870s Benjamin Robinson (d. 1882) made a return journey to Chipping Norton on Wednesdays and Banbury on Thursdays (the towns' market days), the services continuing under various successors until the 1930s.<sup>34</sup> By then motorized buses (operated by Midland Red Bus Co.) ran several times a day between Banbury and Chipping Norton, and an hourly service through the village continued in 2021.<sup>35</sup> All but 8 per cent of Rollright's households then also had access to at least one private vehicle.<sup>36</sup>

Letters were received through Chipping Norton by the 1840s, when one Rollright inhabitant was a postman.<sup>37</sup> In 1852 the Unicorn pub served as a post house, and a wall letter box existed by 1864.<sup>38</sup> A sub-post office near the forge opened by 1887, becoming a

<sup>27</sup> 40 & 41 Vic. c. lxiv; 41 & 42 Vic. c. lxii; TNA, RG 10/1458, no. 94; not shown on OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.2 (1886 edn). In 1839 the keeper was convicted of taking an illegal toll: OHC, QS1839/3/L1/1.

<sup>28</sup> [www ofs.org.uk/home/dArcyDaltonWay.php](http://www ofs.org.uk/home/dArcyDaltonWay.php) (accessed May 2021); OS Map 1:25000, sheet 191 (2015 edn).

<sup>29</sup> E.T. MacDermot and C.R. Clinker, *Hist. Gt Western Railway* (1982 repr.), II, 192.

<sup>30</sup> OS Maps 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.3 and XIV.4 (1900 edn).

<sup>31</sup> C. Maggs, *Branch Lines of Oxfordshire* (1995), 76; W. Hemmings, P. Karau and C. Turner, *The Banbury and Cheltenham Railway* (2004), II, 304–6; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.3 (1922 edn).

<sup>32</sup> Maggs, *Branch Lines*, 76; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rollright\\_Halt\\_railway\\_station](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rollright_Halt_railway_station) (accessed Oct. 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Jeffery, *Rollright*, 165; *Pigot's Nat. & Comm. Dir.* (1830).

<sup>34</sup> TNA, HO 107/879; *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1847–77 edns); *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883–1931 edns).

<sup>35</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1931–9 edns); online bus timetables (July 2021).

<sup>36</sup> *Census*, 2011 (online datasets).

<sup>37</sup> *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1847); TNA, HO 107/879.

<sup>38</sup> *Gardner's Dir. Oxon.* (1852); *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1864).

telegraph office by 1907; telephone calls could be made from there by 1911, though Chipping Norton remained the nearest money order office.<sup>39</sup> Under the long-serving Clara Smith the post office moved (by the 1920s) to the village's southern edge, relocating by the 1970s to the old forge.<sup>40</sup> It closed in 2007 and was replaced by a mobile service.<sup>41</sup>

## Population

In 1086 Rollright's three manors had 37 recorded households, in all perhaps 160 people,<sup>42</sup> and by 1279 the number of tenants had increased to 64, most of them probably resident householders.<sup>43</sup> Thereafter tenancies on the larger Despenser manor fell from 48 in 1279 to 41 in 1294, mostly among customary yardlanders,<sup>44</sup> while in the parish as a whole 38 inhabitants paid tax in 1306, 44 in 1316, and only 22 in 1327.<sup>45</sup> The Black Death reduced numbers further, rents on the Despenser manor falling by 35 per cent between 1346 and 1383.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless by the early 16th century Rollright was one of the hundred's more populous places, with 22 taxpayers in 1524 and 30 in 1543.<sup>47</sup>

Parish registers (extant from 1560) suggest a growing population in the late 16th and 17th centuries.<sup>48</sup> In 1642 the obligatory protestation oath was sworn by 74 men aged 18 or over, 34 householders were assessed for hearth tax in 1662, and in 1676 there were an estimated 140 adults in the parish,<sup>49</sup> while the rector reported 44 houses in 1738 and 50 later in the century, rising by 1781 to 55 houses accommodating 67 families.<sup>50</sup> By 1801 Rollright had 75 houses and 403 inhabitants, its population peaking in 1841 (despite overseas emigration) at 459 in 94 houses. Thereafter it generally declined, falling to 289 (in 79 houses) by 1931, after which the Rollright parishes were united. In 1951 the combined population was 303 (97 houses), rising by 1981 to 517 (168 houses). In 2011 it was 502 (218 occupied houses), and in 2018 an estimated 527.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1887–1939 edns).

<sup>40</sup> OS Maps 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.3 (1922 edn); 1:2500, SP 3231 (1974 edn).

<sup>41</sup> WODC online planning docs, 12/1497/P/FP; *Oxf. Mail*, 29 July 2008.

<sup>42</sup> DB, ff. 158, 160v. (incl. 7 slaves or *servi*).

<sup>43</sup> *Rot. Hund.* II, 727–8.

<sup>44</sup> TNA, E 199/36/1; cf. *ibid.* C 133/63/32; C 133/68/10.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* E 179/161/8–10.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* C 135/82/1; C 136/24/19. The number paying poll tax in 1377 is unknown: *Poll Taxes 1377–81*, ed. Fenwick, II, 291.

<sup>47</sup> TNA, E 179/161/198; E 179/162/227.

<sup>48</sup> OHC, par. reg. transcript.

<sup>49</sup> *Prot. Retns*, 96; TNA, E 179/255/3; *Compton Census*, ed. Whiteman, 421.

<sup>50</sup> *Secker's Visit.* 125; OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 556, f. 195; b 37, f. 173.

<sup>51</sup> *Census*, 1801–2011; <https://www.citypopulation.de/> (accessed Nov. 2019). Another 16 houses in 2011 were not permanently occupied.

## Settlement

### *Prehistoric, Roman, and Anglo-Saxon Settlement*

Little evidence of Neolithic or earlier activity has been found despite the proximity of the Rollright Stones.<sup>52</sup> Bronze-Age activity is reflected in several round barrows erected on the limestone east of the later village,<sup>53</sup> the Old English name *trembergh* (meaning ‘three barrows’) suggesting that they long remained a prominent feature, although by the 1190s they were incorporated in the open fields.<sup>54</sup> An Iron-Age banjo enclosure in the same area may have been associated with other enclosures and fields, suggesting widespread clearance and introduction of mixed farming.<sup>55</sup> Settlement and cultivation continued in the Roman period: a villa south-east of the later village may have functioned alongside lower-status homesteads,<sup>56</sup> and 3rd- and 4th-century coins have been discovered at Church End.<sup>57</sup>

Sixth- and 7th-century burials near the Rollright Stones demonstrate an Anglo-Saxon presence,<sup>58</sup> although the pattern of settlement in Great Rollright is unclear. The place name may derive from Old English ‘Hrolla’s *landriht*’, meaning the ‘privileges belonging to Hrolla as landowner’; a more likely alternative, however, is a Brittonic phrase ‘rodland rīcc’, meaning the ‘narrow gorge by the wheel enclosure’, a reference presumably to Danes Bottom and the King’s Men stone circle.<sup>59</sup> Whatever the case 7th-century Rollright lay within Mercian territory, and in the 11th century one of its manors claimed an annual right to three pack-loads (*summae*) of salt from the Mercian salt works at Droitwich (Worcs.), brought to the parish along the salt way running through Salford.<sup>60</sup> By then the formerly 20-hide Rollright estate had been divided into Little Rollright (5 hides) and Great Rollright (15 hides), which was itself divided among three separate landholders each with their own agricultural tenants and resources.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Below, Little Rollright, landscape etc. (prehist. settlement).

<sup>53</sup> HER, PRN 13464; 15961; 28082–3; *VCH Oxon.* II, 348.

<sup>54</sup> *PN Oxon.* II, 373; Dugdale, *Mon.* VI (1), 421.

<sup>55</sup> HER, PRN 15877; 16172–4; 28081; M. Henig and P.M. Booth, *Roman Oxon.* (2000), 7.

<sup>56</sup> HER, PRN 9790; 16019; 28085; Henig and Booth, *Roman Oxon.* 95.

<sup>57</sup> *VCH Oxon.* I, 337.

<sup>58</sup> Below, Little Rollright, landscape etc. (prehist. settlement).

<sup>59</sup> *PN Oxon.* II, 372; A.D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place Names* (revised edn, 2011), 393; R. Coates and A. Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places: Studies of the Celtic Impact on Place-Names in England* (2000), 199–212.

<sup>60</sup> DB, f. 160v.; above, vol. overview (communics; Anglo-Saxon settlement).

<sup>61</sup> Below, landownership; econ. hist.



## Medieval and Later Settlement

Great Rollright subsequently developed as a loose-knit village comprising several distinct 'ends', separated by open spaces perhaps originally forming a green or common pasture which was gradually encroached upon.<sup>62</sup> The church stands at the village's extreme north-eastern edge, at Church End. The sprawling layout, modified by late 20th-century expansion and infilling, may reflect the early division into three manors and the later emergence of some sizeable freeholds,<sup>63</sup> combined, perhaps, with a more general regional tendency towards polyfocal plans.<sup>64</sup> Several 13th- and 14th-century inhabitants were named from the locations of their houses (by a spring, on the corner, at the gate, beyond the brook, by the oven, at the cross),<sup>65</sup> while the building up of the 'forbury' (near Tyte End) by the 1330s implies encroachment on an open space within the built-up area, used possibly for the gathering of livestock.<sup>66</sup> The village cross lay on a triangular piece of ground at the intersection of High Street and The Green, and was perhaps the site of the weekly market and annual fair licensed in 1253,<sup>67</sup> while by the 19th century it was also the location of the village pound and stocks.<sup>68</sup> Some contraction of the settled area in the wake of the Black Death is suggested by derelict buildings reported to the manor court in 1450, and uninhabited houses were mentioned in the early 16th century.<sup>69</sup> Even in the early 18th a visitor noted 'several ruins' as evidence that the village was once larger.<sup>70</sup>

Surviving 17th-century buildings demonstrate occupation at each of the village's four 'ends'.<sup>71</sup> At Church End houses lay mostly south and west of the church, amongst them Brasenose Cottage (built 1656), Rectory Cottage (c.1675), and the rectory house, while Church End House (built 1723) belonged to a substantial freehold then owned by the Berry family. To the south a stream separated Church End from Tyte End, whose name derives from a dialect word meaning 'artificial hollow from which people collected water';<sup>72</sup> that was the location of Brasenose College's manor house (Courthouse Farm) and its associated cottages, and included the remaining open ground of the 'forbury'. Further south and west

<sup>62</sup> OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.3 (1881 edn).

<sup>63</sup> Below, landownership.

<sup>64</sup> C.J. Bond, 'Medieval Oxfordshire Villages and their Topography: a Preliminary Discussion', in D. Hooke (ed.), *Medieval Villages* (1985), 115; for 'detached' churches, *ibid.* 117.

<sup>65</sup> *de Fonte, in Angulo, ad Portam, Biyoundebrok, ad Furnum, atte Croys: Rot. Hund.* II, 727–8; TNA, E 179/161/8–10.

<sup>66</sup> Jeffery, *Rollright*, 63–4; *PN Oxon.* II, 372.

<sup>67</sup> Jeffery, *Rollright*, 25, 104; *OAS Rep.* (1905), 15; *Cal. Chart.* 1226–57, 414.

<sup>68</sup> OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.3 (1881 edn); Jeffery, *Rollright*, 46.

<sup>69</sup> Jeffery, *Rollright*, 116; I.S. Leadam (ed.), *Domesday of Inclosures 1517–18* (1897), I, 335, 383.

<sup>70</sup> *Par. Colln*, III, 243.

<sup>71</sup> Except where stated, *para.* based on: Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797); below (built character); landownership; social hist. (1500–1800).

<sup>72</sup> Jeffery, *Rollright*, 177; *PN Oxon.* II, 469. Cf. above, Hook Norton.

was South End (where most inhabitants probably lived by the 18th century), bounded on the west by High Street, and on the north by The Green, opposite which (by c.1600) lay the entrance to the secluded grounds of the Sheppard family's manor house. Duck End lay on the village's eastern edge across a tributary of the Evenlode, the early 17th-century Duck End House being almost certainly built for another substantial freeholder.



*High Street, looking southwards past the thatched Rose Cottage.*

The four 'ends' remained distinct in the mid 20th century, the only significant additions to the village plan being the once-isolated Unicorn pub (built on High Street's northern stretch probably in the mid 18th century),<sup>73</sup> and Manor Farm, built west of High Street in the early 1900s immediately south of the newly remodelled manor house.<sup>74</sup> By then population was falling, and few new tenant houses were built, with only 79 households (rented mostly from private landlords) noted in 1931.<sup>75</sup> The earliest council houses (at Tyte End) were completed in 1935 on land bought from Brasenose College,<sup>76</sup> and six more were built on the 'forbury' there in 1947–8, responding to calls for additional accommodation specifically for farm workers. A further eight (on High Street south of the Unicorn) were

<sup>73</sup> OS Map 6", SP 33 SW (1955 edn); below (built character).

<sup>74</sup> OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.3 (1922 edn); below, landownership; econ. hist. (parl. enclo. and later).

<sup>75</sup> *Census*, 1901–31. For Alex. Hall's new estate cottages, below (built character).

<sup>76</sup> OHC, RDC9/3/F6/2.

completed in 1954, followed by six at Middle Row in 1957, and by the 1960s over fifty were built in all.<sup>77</sup>

By then speculative private building (including 22 houses at Hill Rise north of the Unicorn) was obscuring the village's earlier plan, the number of houses roughly doubling between 1961 and 2011.<sup>78</sup> Open ground at Tyte End and South End was filled in, uniting the formerly separate clusters, while limited development on the village's edges was accompanied in the 1990s by conversion of Manor Farm's outbuildings for housing.<sup>79</sup> Some sizeable gaps nonetheless remained in 2021, most notably the extensive open ground between Duck End, Church End, and the village's main part along High Street and the intersecting Old Forge Road.<sup>80</sup> Post-Second World War expansion was facilitated by the arrival in the 1940s of mains electricity and water,<sup>81</sup> both provided to new council houses, though only in the late 1960s was mains water laid on at the school and possibly some other older properties.<sup>82</sup> By then plans for mains drainage (fulfilling a long-felt need) were under discussion, and were completed in 1973, with a sewage works built alongside the disused railway.<sup>83</sup>



*South End, looking westwards at a typical mix of 20th-century and older housing.*

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. RDC9/2/A3/12; RDC9/2/A1/33; RDC9/3/F6/3.

<sup>78</sup> OS Map 1:2500, SP 3231 (1974 edn); *Census*, 1961–2011.

<sup>79</sup> Gt Rollright Hist. Group, *Rollright Past and Present* (2001), 4.

<sup>80</sup> Google Earth images (accessed July 2021).

<sup>81</sup> OHC, RDC9/3/F6/2; RDC9/2/A3/12; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. b 167, no. 4; above (landscape).

<sup>82</sup> OHC, PAR222/14/C1/2; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. b 167, no. 5.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* RDC9/2/A1/41; RDC9/2/A1/22 (par. council requesting sewerage scheme in 1945); OS Map 1:2500, SP 3230 (1974 edn).

The outlying Coombe Farm (in the north-west) existed by the 1720s and possibly earlier,<sup>84</sup> while lime kilns were operating on the parish's southern edge by the 1710s. One adjoining the Chipping Norton road was newly built in 1774, prompting the opening c.1779 of the short-lived Lime Kiln pub.<sup>85</sup> Lime Kiln Farm (renamed Halt Farm in the 20th century) was built just over the boundary in Over Norton after enclosure in 1776, other post-enclosure farms including Heath Farm on the parish's eastern edge (on the rectory estate), Hill Barn on the road to Stow-on-the-Wold, and Brighthill (built 1782) on the Little Rollright boundary.<sup>86</sup> An apothecary's house, used for smallpox inoculations, was built on an isolated site south-east of the village.<sup>87</sup> Later additions included (by the 1860s–70s) cottages at Coombe and Heath farms and on the turnpike road,<sup>88</sup> and Brasenose College's Buildings Farm, built west of the then-demolished inoculations house.<sup>89</sup> The opening of the railway halt in 1906 prompted construction of a meeting room (since removed) near Lime Kiln House, and later a pair of bungalows (both since rebuilt),<sup>90</sup> while in the 1950s–60s Pheasant Farm or Heath Farm Bungalow was built on the road east of the village, and Hutton Grange Farm on the road running north. A new Manor Farm was built in the valley at Danes Bottom in the 1990s.<sup>91</sup>

## The Built Character

Most of Great Rollright's older buildings are of coursed limestone rubble with stone-slatted roofs, and date from the 17th century onwards.<sup>92</sup> Some thatch survives, and was probably more common until the 20th century,<sup>93</sup> while the parish's Welsh-slate roofs presumably post-date the opening of the railway in 1887. Brick in older buildings is confined mostly to chimney stacks, and windows are generally casements under wooden or stone lintels, although some are mullioned with labels.<sup>94</sup> A few larger houses display greater pretension, reflecting growing agricultural prosperity,<sup>95</sup> and feature sash windows, door hoods or porches, and increased use of ashlar. Nonetheless over 70 per cent of houses in 1662 were assessed on only one or two hearths, and only ten on three or more,<sup>96</sup> while many cottages

<sup>84</sup> Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); below, econ. hist. (16th cent. to parl. enclo.).

<sup>85</sup> Below (built character); econ. hist. (trades); social hist. (1500–1800).

<sup>86</sup> NHLE, no. 1368055; below, econ. hist. (parl. enclo. and later).

<sup>87</sup> Below, social hist. (welfare).

<sup>88</sup> TNA, RG 9/911; RG 10/1458; OS Maps 1:2500, Oxon. VIII.15 and 16 (1881 edn); above (roads).

<sup>89</sup> OS Maps 1", sheet XLV (1833 edn); 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.3 (1881 edn).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.3 (1922 edn); 6", SP 33 SW (1955 edn); 1:2500, SP 3231 (1974 edn).

<sup>91</sup> OHC, RDC9/3/F6/2–3; below, econ. hist. (parl. enclo. and later).

<sup>92</sup> For manor houses, below, landownership; for rectory houses and church, below, relig. hist.

<sup>93</sup> e.g. OHC, B28/1/D1/58/1 (1946).

<sup>94</sup> Casements at The Firs on High St are modern, replacing (modern) sashes: OHC, POX0195591.

<sup>95</sup> Below, econ. hist. (16th cent. to parl. enclo.); social hist. (1500–1800).

<sup>96</sup> TNA, E 179/255/3; below, social hist. (1500–1800).

remained small in the early 20th century.<sup>97</sup> Modern expansion introduced greater variety including wider use of brick, although attempts were made to blend in with existing buildings. The village was designated a conservation area in 1990.<sup>98</sup>

Amongst older dwellings, Duck End House was probably remodelled in 1628 for Dame Anne Cope (d. 1637) of Bruern, and is a remarkably little-altered example of a substantial Cotswold-style farmhouse or small gentry house.<sup>99</sup> Built on sloping ground, its three-storeyed rear elevation incorporates a tall, centrally-placed, projecting staircase tower, while its symmetrical three-bayed entrance front is two-storeyed with attics lit by gabled dormers. Typically for the area the house is of coursed limestone rubble with ashlar dressings, has a Stonesfield slate roof with matching gable-end stacks, two- and three-light stone-mullioned windows with labels, and a central chamfered stone doorway. Inside are stop-chamfered cross-beams, stone fireplaces with moulded four-centred arches, and 17th-century oak panelling reused as doors, while outbuildings include a 17th-century square dovecot, and 18th-century barns, granary, and cart shed.<sup>100</sup>

Broadly comparable 17th-century houses include the L-shaped Brasenose Cottage at Church End, its three-bayed main range dated 1656,<sup>101</sup> while the nearby Rectory Cottage of c.1675 has a lobby-entry plan with a central brick ridge stack, stone mullions and hoodmoulds, and a central doorway under a wooden lintel.<sup>102</sup> At Tyte End the slightly later Courthouse Farm lacks the mullions and labels of the earlier 17th century, being lit (like many Rollright houses of the 18th century and later) by two- and three-light casements under wooden lintels.<sup>103</sup> The nearby Courthouse Farm Cottage (formerly two dwellings) has a similarly plain façade of coursed limestone rubble, squared quoins, and casements.<sup>104</sup> Thatched houses include Rose Cottage on High Street, a small two-storeyed dwelling with an off-centre doorway flanked by three-light casements under stone flat arches (a feature repeated along the adjoining row and elsewhere in the village). A tiny reused lancet to the ground floor provides an unusual decorative touch.<sup>105</sup> Also thatched is the House at Pooh

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<sup>97</sup> Below, social hist. (welfare).

<sup>98</sup> WODC website (Dec. 2019).

<sup>99</sup> OHC, Ot.I/3–4 (for ownership); *Country Life*, 2 May 2018, suggesting it was built as a small dower ho. At her death, however, Dame Anne occupied the substantial manor ho. at Bruern: OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 13/1/38; *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 301.

<sup>100</sup> Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 336; *Country Life*, 2 May 2018; NHLE, nos. 1053577, 1251359–60, 1262810, 1300683.

<sup>101</sup> NHLE, no. 1200621; OHC, POX0195628, POX0412054; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 489, no. 4227 (mentioning datestone).

<sup>102</sup> NHLE, no. 1200626; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 336; OHC, POX0412056.

<sup>103</sup> For Courthouse Fm, below, landownership (Stafford manor).

<sup>104</sup> NHLE, no. 1251368; OHC, POX0412074.

<sup>105</sup> NHLE, no. 1262811; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 336; OHC, POX0412063.



Corner (probably formerly several dwellings) at South End, its thatch hanging low below the eaves.<sup>106</sup>



*The House at Pooh Corner (left) and Church End House (right).*

Polite classicism was introduced at Church End House, built in 1723 for Richard and Anne Berry and adopted 1932–80 as the rectory house, which has a five-bayed symmetrical front of squared coursed limestone with ashlar dressings, tall six-over-six sash windows, and a central doorway to which a Tuscan porch was added in the early 19th century, probably around the same time as a wider single-bay extension to the west.<sup>107</sup> The outlying Lime Kiln House was similarly designed to impress, its symmetrical three-bay front featuring rusticated quoins, ashlar plat bands, a central doorcase with a moulded stone canopy, and sash windows set in moulded stone architraves with projecting keystones.<sup>108</sup> Plainer and more ‘vernacular’ is the outlying Brighthill Farm built in 1782 for Elias Harris, its three-bay main range (two-storeyed with attics) lit by three-light casements under ashlar flat arches with projecting keystones. Interior spine beams and the bressumers of two large back-to-back fireplaces have bold ogee chamfer stops.<sup>109</sup>

Rollright’s two 19th-century Baptist chapels may have been converted from existing structures, the former Ebenezer chapel (dated 1833) forming part of a row of cottages on High Street, and distinguished by two tall sashes set well below the eaves, and a lower sash at ground level. The Bethel chapel (dated 1838) adjoins The Old Beerhouse at South End and is similarly plain, with two large street-front windows and a gable-end doorway.<sup>110</sup> G.E.

<sup>106</sup> NHLE, no. 1251366; OHC, POX0412070.

<sup>107</sup> Datestones B/RA 1723; Jeffery, *Rollright*, 45; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 336; NHLE, no. 1368057; below, relig. hist. (rectory ho.).

<sup>108</sup> NHLE, no. 1300673; OHC, POX0412047.

<sup>109</sup> NHLE, no. 1368055 (mentioning datestone); OHC, POX0412046; *ibid.* QSD/L/227.

<sup>110</sup> Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 336–7; C. Stell, *Inv. Nonconf. Chapels and Meeting Houses in Central Eng.* (1986), 180; NHLE, no. 1262814; datestones. For context, below, relig. hist.

Street's National school of 1852 is in local Vernacular style, with prominent windows (the western one mullioned and transomed and the east one Decorated), and tall stone stacks rising above a Stonesfield slate roof, which was formerly topped by a pyramid-roofed bellcote with arched openings.<sup>111</sup> The neighbouring teacher's house (added 1860) was, unusually for Rollright, built gable-end to the street, flanked by tall stone stacks rising from the eaves. The 18th-century Unicorn pub was remodelled by William Baughan (d. 1843) as a three-bayed and three-storeyed building of coursed limestone rubble with ashlar dressings, its central doorway and two- and three-light casements under segmental stone arches.<sup>112</sup>



*The teacher's house of 1860 (left) and council houses of 1947-8 (right).*

Alexander Hall's arrival at the manor house in the 1890s saw the replacement of some older housing at The Green with semi-detached estate cottages, all stone-built with prominent gables, and with massive, centrally-placed, shared stacks.<sup>113</sup> Manor Farm was built soon afterwards in similar style, the main part comprising two parallel ranges with a roof valley between.<sup>114</sup> The earliest council houses (completed 1935) were designed by Thomas Rayson and built by W.T. Hicks of Hook Norton: rendered or pebble-dashed, they comprise a single symmetrical block with a central gable flanked by through-passages to the rear, with two end gables projecting slightly forward.<sup>115</sup> Several later council houses were semi-detached, those of 1947–8 (by Messrs Hinkins & Frewin of Oxford) also pebble-dashed or

<sup>111</sup> Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 336; OHC, POX0164915–16, POX0164918–19 (dated 1906), POX0011771, POX0011782, POX0011804 (dated 1991); below, social hist. (educ.).

<sup>112</sup> NHLE, no. 1251361; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 252/2/24; *ibid.* POX0412062.

<sup>113</sup> OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.3 (1881–1900 edns); *Sale Cat.*, *Gt Rollright Manor* (1962): copies in OHC.

<sup>114</sup> OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.3 (1922 edn); *Sale Cats*, *Gt Rollright Manor* (1962 and 1991).

<sup>115</sup> OHC, RDC9/2/A3/6–7; *ibid.* POX0031245–7 (plans).

rendered, and with a dentil cornice beneath the eaves.<sup>116</sup> Houses and bungalows built south of the Unicorn and at Middle End use (respectively) pinkish and stone-coloured brick.<sup>117</sup>

Most of the council or private houses built since the 1950s are architecturally unremarkable, though with one or two exceptions. Tyte Tap House, completed in 2017 to designs by Undercover Architecture Ltd, comprises a long two-storeyed glass-sided gabled range, linked to a smaller block to the north by a short flat-roofed single-storeyed structure which is also glass fronted. The solid walling is of cream-coloured rough-dressed Cotswold stone, under Welsh-slate roofs.<sup>118</sup> On a more lavish scale the outlying Coombe Cottage was replaced c.2015 by a modern Georgian-style residence designed by Tyack Architects of Moreton-in-Marsh. The main house, built of honey-coloured Hornton stone, forms an H-plan, its central three-bayed range (with hipped roofs and gabled dormers) flanked by cross-wings with southward-facing canted bay windows topped by parapets. The main range is joined to single-storeyed converted barns, forming a U-plan and enclosing a courtyard garden on three sides.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid. RDC9/2/A3/12.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. RDC9/2/A3/17–18.

<sup>118</sup> [www.undercoverarchitecture.com/completed#/tyte-tap-house](http://www.undercoverarchitecture.com/completed#/tyte-tap-house) (accessed Feb. 2020); WODC online planning docs, 14/1288/P/FP.

<sup>119</sup> [www.tyackarchitects.com/housing/Rollright%2C-Oxfordshire](http://www.tyackarchitects.com/housing/Rollright%2C-Oxfordshire) (accessed Feb. 2020); WODC online planning docs, 13/1112/P/FP.