

VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

LITTLE ROLLRIGHT

Landownership

A 5-hide manor almost certainly covering the whole parish existed by 1086, having probably been separated by the Crown from a larger 20-hide Rollright estate in the late Anglo-Saxon period.¹ It belonged throughout the Middle Ages to Eynsham abbey, followed by a succession of owners which included (in the 17th century) the resident Throckmortons, Blowers, and Dixons. In 1848 the only land not held of the lord was the churchyard and rectory house grounds ($\frac{3}{4}$ a.),² and the estate still covered over 500 a. in 2014, excluding only the Rollright Stones, quarries and neighbouring land in the parish's north-west corner, and two cottages by the ridgeway.³

Little Rollright Manor

In 1086 Little Rollright was held from the bishop of Lincoln by Columban, abbot of Eynsham, a statement that it 'belongs to the church' suggesting that it was a long-standing ecclesiastical possession.⁴ Eynsham abbey retained the manor until the abbey's dissolution in 1539, when the king granted it to Sir George Darcy,⁵ and in 1543 it passed to Sir Edward North, who sold it in 1546 to Sir John Williams of Rycote.⁶ He may have held it until his death in 1559, when it belonged to Anthony Throckmorton (d. 1587) of Chastleton, who that year presented to Little Rollright church.⁷ Throckmorton's son John was resident in the early 17th century, but in 1611 sold the manor to William Blower (d. 1618), a wealthy London citizen who also moved to Little Rollright, and remodelled the church.⁸ His successor was his sister Mary (d. 1646), wife of Henry Dixon (d. 1644), based near Tonbridge (Kent), though from the 1630s their son Edward (d. 1660) lived at Little Rollright with other family members.⁹ The manor descended to Edward's son Henry (d. 1669), to his daughters Jane

¹ DB, f. 155.

² OHC, tithe award and map; below, relig. hist.

³ *Oxf. Mail*, 2 June 2014; OCC Register of Landowner Statements, no. 1784 (map); below.

⁴ DB, f. 155; *VCH Oxon.* I, 379; II, 65; *Eynsham Cart.* I, p. x; II, p. lxiv.

⁵ *VCH Oxon.* II, 67; *L&P Hen.* VIII, XIV (1), p. 417.

⁶ *L&P Hen.* VIII, XVIII (1), pp. 446, 540; XXI (2), pp. 168, 419; OHC, E36/4/5/D/1.

⁷ A. Rosen, 'Two Monuments at Little Rollright, Oxfordshire: William Blower and the Dixon Family', *Oxoniensia* 70 (2005), 52; below, relig. hist. (advowson).

⁸ Rosen, 'Little Rollright', 53–7; below, social hist. (1500–1800); relig. hist. (church archit.).

⁹ Rosen, 'Little Rollright', 61–5, 68–9; below, social hist. (1500–1800).

and Sarah, and to Sarah's daughter Anne Dyke (d. 1763), none of whom were resident, and in 1767 Anne's son John sold it to Sir John Reade (d. 1773), 5th Bt, of Shipton Court in Shipton-under-Wychwood.¹⁰

The Reades, too, were non-resident, Little Rollright passing with Shipton to Sir John Reade (d. 1789), 6th Bt, to his son Sir John Chandos Reade (d. 1868), 7th Bt, and to his butler Joseph Wakefield, later Reade, on whose death in 1893 the manor was sold to the farm's sitting tenant James Bliss.¹¹ In 1898 it was inherited by his daughter Lizetta, wife of Charles Williams (d. 1922), who continued to farm there,¹² and in 1929 (following attempted sales in 1927–8) she sold it to Percy Flick, managing director of the Hook Norton Brewery Company.¹³ He gave up farming in 1941, and the following year the estate was taken over by the Oxfordshire War Agricultural Executive Committee, which installed Frederic Gregory as lessee.¹⁴ He left in 1949 when the estate was bought by J.H. Hughes of Great Rollright and later South Newington, who farmed there until 1969 but let the house to tenants.¹⁵ His successor the 10th duke of Marlborough let the estate to the farmers Peter and Geoffrey Green, who continued there following its sale in 1975 to Lincoln College, Oxford.¹⁶ It was bought in 2003 by Peter Fowler of Jacob & Johnson (Farms) Ltd, a newspaper proprietor who extended the house,¹⁷ and in 2014 (when it covered 509 a.) by Alasdair Macleod and his wife Prudence, the eldest daughter of media proprietor Rupert Murdoch.¹⁸

Percy Flick (d. 1954) retained the lordship of the manor, which after the death of his daughter Pauline in 2000 was sold to Peter Green. In 2003 it passed to Peter Fowler, who retained it in 2021.¹⁹ The Flicks also retained ownership of the Rollright Stones, which were sold in 1997 to the City traders Nat Le Roux and Nick Cavalla,²⁰ and in 2001 to the Rollright Stones Trust, the owner in 2021.²¹ Quarries in the parish's north-west corner belonged in 2021 to the Johnston Quarry Group of Great Tew, and to Smith & Sons (Bletchington) Ltd of Kidlington.²²

¹⁰ Rosen, 'Little Rollright', 69–70; for Reade, *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 45.

¹¹ *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 44–5; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 25 Oct. 1893.

¹² *Oxon. Weekly News*, 19 Jan. 1898; *The Times*, 27 Feb. 1922; OHC, DV/X/82.

¹³ *Banbury Guardian*, 26 May 1927, 31 May 1928; *Banbury Advertiser*, 14 Feb. 1929; *Sale Cat., Little Rollright Manor Estate* (1927): copy in OHC, Marshall XVIII/i/6. In 1906 the estate was mortgaged: OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1992 (conveyance 10 June 1929).

¹⁴ OHC, P153/D/42; TNA, MAF 32/913/88, no. 7.

¹⁵ *Banbury Guardian*, 25 Sept. 1947 (announcing Gregory's forthcoming departure), 3 Aug. 1950; OHC, B28/1/F1/345, p. 2; B28/1/F1/378; B28/1/F1/406; B28/1/F1/438; B28/1/F1/450; *ibid.* RDC9/3/F7/2; *Oxon. Dir.* (1958–9); *Blair's Dir. Oxon.* (1967).

¹⁶ OHC, B28/1/F1/450; *ibid.* EL1/1990/4, etc.; Linc. Coll., LC/EL/SOU/S/13.

¹⁷ OCC Register of Landowner Statements, no. 1784; below (manor ho.).

¹⁸ *Country Life*, 12 June 2014; WODC online planning docs, 15/04451/LBC, etc.

¹⁹ Information from Joy Timms (Apr. 2020; Mar. 2021).

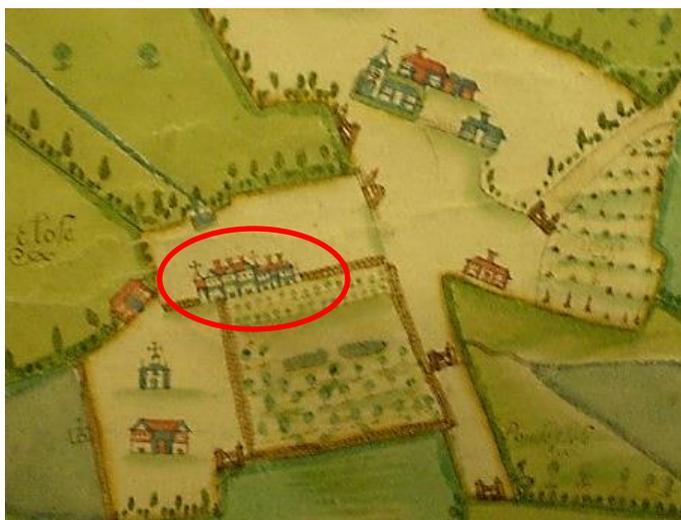
²⁰ *The Times*, 13 May, 23 Aug. 1997; *Country Life*, 2 Oct. 1997.

²¹ www.rollrightstones.co.uk/trust (accessed Mar. 2021).

²² WODC online planning docs, 19/00028/CM; 20/01694/CM; <https://jqgroup.co.uk>; www.smithsbletchington.co.uk/rollright-quarry (accessed Mar. 2021); below, econ. hist. (non-agric.).

Manor House and Manor Farm

The medieval manor house stood probably within a moat identified c.125 m. south-west of the church,²³ and was presumably occupied by the abbey's late medieval tenants, followed perhaps by John Throckmorton in the early 17th century.²⁴ An undated 17th-century estate map shows a large gabled house immediately south of the moat (apparently then filled in), on the site of the present Manor Farm Cottages, with an enclosed orchard and fishponds to its south, and farm buildings (including a dovecot) to the south-west.²⁵ A surviving datestone suggests that the house was remodelled for Edward and Cecily Dixon in 1635, presumably incorporating the ovolo-moulded mullion windows which survive in the present structure, and in 1662 it was taxed on either six or seven hearths.²⁶ Later lords were non-resident, and by 1707 the manor house was 'very ordinary ... not fit for a gentleman but rather too big for a tenant'. Part of the 'old end' was 'in danger of falling if not taken down', although outbuildings still included barns, stables, and a dovecot.²⁷ The house appears to have been rebuilt as labourers' accommodation in or before the 19th century, and was subdivided into three separate dwellings.²⁸



The likely manor house (circled) as depicted on a 17th-century estate map (Oxfordshire History Centre, E321/M/1), occupying the site of present-day Manor Farm Cottages. The church is shown to its north-east.

By then the manorial rights were attached to Manor Farm south-east of the church, which in 1707 was perhaps the 'little farmhouse' with a 'new built barn by it'.²⁹ Its oldest part (dated 1633) is a symmetrical, west-facing three-bay range of two storeys with attics, built of coursed limestone rubble with a Stonesfield slate roof. A probably contemporary rear wing

²³ HER, PRN 5508.

²⁴ Below, econ. hist.; social. hist.

²⁵ OHC, E321/M/1 (catalogued as c.1690, but perhaps made earlier for the resident Dixons).

²⁶ NHLE, no. 1251365; TNA, E 179/255/3; below, social hist. (1500–1800).

²⁷ OHC, BOR4/4/C1/8.

²⁸ NHLE, no. 1251365; OHC, tithe map; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.2 (1886 and later edns).

²⁹ OHC, BOR4/4/C1/8; above (manor).

(now surmounted with a bellcote) formed an L-plan, which in the 19th century (when the house was still tenanted) was infilled with an abutting back wing lit by south-facing sashes. The main west front was refenestrated, receiving a round-headed central window and a ground-floor canted bay, while a detached stable and coach-house block to the north was connected to the house's north-east corner c.1886–1900, the stable itself incorporating a reset two-light 13th-century window under a semi-circular label, an ovolo-moulded timber-mullioned window in the gable, and a single-row dovecot beneath the eaves.³⁰ In 2006–8 Peter Fowler added a large double-pile extension south-east of the earlier house, designed by Robert Adam Architects in Georgian style. The five-bay east front has a central doorway beneath a shell-hood, and six-over-six sash windows set in keystone stone surrounds, while the link to the earlier house includes an oculus.³¹ The estate was also landscaped, and further improvements to the house proposed.³²



Manor Farm from the north-west in 2019, with the Georgian-style extension of 2006–8 visible on the right.

³⁰ NHLE, no. 1262812; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 402–3; OHC, POX0412066, POX0195734; HE Arch. 4967_069. For ground plan, OHC, tithe map; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.2 (1886–1905 edns).

³¹ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 403; <https://adamarchitecture.com/project/farm-restoration-extension-the-cotswolds/> (accessed Apr. 2020).

³² WODC online planning docs, 03/2350/P/FP; 12/0705/P/FP; 15/04451/LBC; 18/00093/LBC; Google Earth images (accessed Apr. 2020).