



VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

GREAT ROLLRIGHT

Social History

Social Character and Communal Life

The Middle Ages

Rollright's medieval lords held estates elsewhere and were probably only intermittently resident, being chiefly influential as monastic patrons, grantors of parish land, and (in the case of the Despensers and their successors) patrons of the parish church.¹ Some were prone to violence. Around 1188 Baldwin de Parles reportedly lost a duel (*duello*) with William of Warwick, who thereby acquired a yardland at Rollright which he gave to St Frideswide's priory, Oxford, while during a tenorial dispute c.1240 Baldwin's grandson John de Parles alleged that Thurstan Despenser and his followers came to the village bearing arms, and forcibly removed John from his property.² John's son William de Parles and Thurstan's son Adam both forfeited estates (in William's case at Handsworth in Staffs.) for their involvement in the Barons' revolt, and in 1278 William was hanged for an unspecified felony.³ Adam's wife Joan was accompanied on her travels between Rollright and the family's manor at Ewelme by an armed escort (*armiger*), endowed with land at Ludwell.⁴

The Parleses' and Despensers' successors, respectively the Brabazons and Burnells, also visited infrequently. Roger Brabazon's manor was let in 1299 to Joan Despenser's second husband John Lovel of Snorscomb (Northants.),⁵ while the local landholder John Dimmock served as royal custodian of the Despenser manor during Edward Burnell's minority, receiving timber and wood from Wychwood forest to repair the manor's buildings in 1314.⁶ Edward's brother-in-law and successor John de Hadlow was presumably absent in 1322 when the manor was attacked by the Oxfordshire landholder Walter Poure and his followers.⁷

¹ Above, landownership; below, relig. hist.

² *St Frideswide's Cart.* II, p. 237; *Cur. Reg.* XVI, pp. 452–3.

³ P.R. Coss, *Lordship, Knighthood and Locality* (1991), 277–80; above, landownership.

⁴ *Rot. Hund.* II, 876; *VCH Oxon.* XI, 266.

⁵ Jeffery, *Rollright*, 62–3.

⁶ *Cal. Close* 1313–18, 59.

⁷ *Cal. Pat.* 1321–4, 162, 169, 319.

Large-scale freeholders like the Dimmocks and Westons may have had a more direct local presence, although the bulk of the population in the 1270s comprised unfree villeins and cottagers heavily burdened by labour services.⁸ Bynames suggest that several were incomers from nearby parishes including Adlestrop (Glos.), Great or Little Tew, Whichford, Bloxham, Sibford, and Shutford. The apparent transience of those and other 13th- and 14th-century bynames implies a relatively rapid turnover,⁹ although some families (such as the freeholding Vassalls and Franklins) proved more long-lasting,¹⁰ while the Veneurs (meaning ‘huntsman’) were conceivably associated with a manorial custom first mentioned under the Burnells in the 1290s, whereby a buck worth 5s. (taken presumably from Wychwood forest) was sent each year to the abbot of Winchcombe (Glos.) on St Kenelm’s Day (17 July).¹¹ Taxation records show a broad range of prosperity within the village, payments in 1316 varying from 10*d.* to 13*s.*, and in 1327 from 12*d.* to 29*s.*, in part reflecting families’ fluctuating fortunes.¹² Occasional incidents included a stranger seeking sanctuary in Rollright church after being caught stealing horses, while c.1260 a six-month-old baby, left unattended in the churchyard, died after being bitten by a stray piglet.¹³

Most labour services may have been commuted as early as the 1340s,¹⁴ while population decline after the Black Death probably contributed to the contraction of farming and decay of buildings reported at Nicholas Burnell’s death in 1383 and on Cold Norton priory’s estate in 1450.¹⁵ Consolidation of holdings and conversion to sheep pasture led to further small-scale depopulation in the early 16th century, while also providing opportunities.¹⁶ Likely wool producers included John Freeman (d. 1491), the first known of a long-standing Rollright family, who left twenty sheep towards repair of the church and employed at least three servants. Two of them (presumably both young) were to have six sheep each when they married, while the third (Thomas Kytlett) was left the substantial sum of £6 13*s.* 4*d.* in cash, and cattle worth a similar sum, provided he served Freeman’s wife for the first three years of her widowhood.¹⁷

1500–1800

⁸ Above, landownership (other estates); econ. hist. (medieval).

⁹ *Rot. Hund.* II, 727–8; TNA, E 179/161/8–10; E 199/36/1.

¹⁰ Jeffery, *Rollright*, 6–9.

¹¹ *Cal. Inq. p.m.* III, p. 120; TNA, E 199/36/1. For Winchcombe abbey’s apparent landed interest, above, landownership (other estates).

¹² TNA, E 179/161/8–9.

¹³ *Ibid.* JUST 1/701, m. 24d.

¹⁴ Above, econ. hist. (medieval).

¹⁵ TNA, C 136/24/19; Jeffery, *Rollright*, 115–16.

¹⁶ I.S. Leadam (ed.), *Domesday of Inclosures 1517–18* (1897), I, 335, 383; above, econ. hist.

¹⁷ *Oxon. Wills*, 46–7; C. Dyer, *A Country Merchant, 1495–1520* (2012), 42.

By the mid 16th century Rollright was dominated by seven or eight leading tenant families including the Baughans, Freemans, Horsemans, and Prews,¹⁸ occupying (as later) moderately sized copyhold, leasehold, or freehold estates under one or other of the main manors.¹⁹ One such prosperous farmer was Richard Hands (d. 1557), who held 4 yardlands and 4 closes from Brasenose College and was taxed on goods worth £13 in 1543, when most inhabitants (19 out of 30) were taxed on only £1- or £2-worth.²⁰ Contemporary probate valuations similarly ranged from under £2 to £68, with an average of £25 and a median of £19.²¹ A smaller Brasenose tenant was Joan Kerry (d. 1569), who took out a 30-year lease with a close and 2½ a. of arable for 4s. a year,²² and around that time the college appears to have made several reversionary or concurrent leases with non-resident outsiders, who effectively became the resident tenants' landlords.²³ The demesne farm and manor house were leased by the college in 1536 to Humphrey Ashfield (d. 1570) of Heythrop, an occasional visitor to Rollright and an overseer of inhabitants' wills. His sons Richard and Anthony (styled gentlemen) both later moved there, and were the parish's wealthiest taxpayers in 1581.²⁴

In 1583 the larger Rollright manor passed from the non-resident Hungerfords (of Down Ampney, Glos.) to William Sheppard (d. 1624) and his descendants, who occupied the manor house in the village continuously until 1742.²⁵ The family was the wealthiest in the parish, and lived in considerable comfort,²⁶ though few of its members were of great renown. The most notable was Sir Fleetwood Sheppard (1634–98), a royal courtier and poet, who as a younger son was rarely at Rollright.²⁷ Nevertheless he was buried in the church, presumably in the chancel beside his mother Mary (d. 1648) and brother William (d. 1686), who requested that his own burial be 'without pomp'.²⁸ A lease of Brasenose College's Rollright demesne, granted to William Sheppard of Barford St Michael in 1651, passed to his Rollright relatives in the late 17th century,²⁹ and the college maintained an intermittent presence, periodically sending college officers to lodge at Courthouse Farm to hold manor courts.³⁰

¹⁸ TNA, E 179/161/198; E 179/162/227; OHC, MSS Wills Oxon., Gt Rollright; *ibid.* par. reg. transcript.

¹⁹ Cf. Jeffery, *Rollright*, 93–6, 120–3.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 37; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 182, f. 50v.; TNA, E 179/162/227.

²¹ Based on 17 Gt Rollright inventories from 1545–84 in OHC.

²² BNC, Rollright 73; Jeffery, *Rollright*, 38 (mistakenly giving 45s.); OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 184, f. 399v.

²³ Jeffery, *Rollright*, 37–8, 123.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 35, 117–18, 120; OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 179, f. 129v.; 181, f. 97a; *Oxon. Visit.* 220; TNA, E 179/162/345.

²⁵ Above, landownership.

²⁶ e.g. TNA, E 179/163/435; *ibid.* PROB 11/143/359; PROB 11/203/281.

²⁷ *ODNB*, s.v. Fleetwood Sheppard.

²⁸ OHC, par. reg. transcript; TNA, PROB 11/203/281; PROB 11/383/114.

²⁹ Jeffery, *Rollright*, 126–7; *VCH Oxon.* XI, 47.

³⁰ Jeffery, *Rollright*, 120–30.

By the mid 17th century long-standing families such as the Baughans and Horsemans had been joined by prominent newcomers including the Berrys and Endalls.³¹ Most inhabitants occupied relatively modest houses, 24 (71 per cent) of those assessed in 1662 having only one or two hearths, and just three houses (9 per cent) having five or more.³² Even among the better-off luxuries were rare, with wealth generally tied up in mundane household goods, farm stock, and debts to fellow inhabitants (suggesting widespread credit), while in an era of rising prices inequality may have increased, probate valuations ranging from under £2 to £310, with an average of £55 and a median of £30.³³ Church court records reveal the occasional conflict typical of a close-knit community: an accusation of 'lewd behaviour' in 1584 led to fighting in the church belfry,³⁴ while later cases dealt with inheritance and tithe disputes, and a charge of defamation alleging illicit sex between a householder's wife and lodger.³⁵ During the Civil War the parish was almost certainly affected by armies using its main routes, and several soldiers were buried in the parish, amongst them two Royalists killed by Parliamentarians (in 1644), and a Lieutenant Farwell of Somerset (in 1646). The resident lord William Sheppard (d. 1644) was also 'slain by one of the king's soldiers', though possibly by accident or in a brawl rather than in battle.³⁶ His sympathies are unknown, although his wife's brother (John Dormer MP) was a 'passive Parliamentarian'.³⁷

Disparities of wealth increased still further in the later 17th century, probate valuations ranging from £3 (the blacksmith Robert Green, d. 1699) to £690 (Courthouse Farm's wealthy lessee Richard Rollright, d. 1700).³⁸ Social tensions and pressure on resources are suggested by the agricultural injunctions issued by the manor courts,³⁹ and by some occasionally violent disputes over grazing or wages reported to the quarter sessions.⁴⁰ Poor relief remained contentious despite the existence of a Poor's Estate.⁴¹ A man refused work by parishioners, and whom the overseers housed in an 'open hovel' with his wife and children, sought a settlement order in 1699, and in the 1720s–30s attempts were made to restrict gleaning and to control squatters building cottages on the waste.⁴² Loss of common

³¹ e.g. *Prot. Retns*, 96.

³² TNA, E 179/255/3: the remaining 7 hos (20%) were assessed on 3–4 hearths.

³³ Based on 35 Gt Rollright inventories from 1589–1641 in OHC.

³⁴ E.R. Brinkworth (ed.), *Archdeacon's Court Liber Actorum, 1584*, II (ORS 24, 1946), 185–6, 191, 197, 218.

³⁵ *Oxf. Ch. Ct Deposns 1592–6*, pp. 33–4; 1603–6, p. 15; 1634–9, p. 44.

³⁶ OHC, par. reg. transcript; D. Eddershaw, *The Civil War in Oxfordshire* (1995), 73–4, 87.

³⁷ *Hist. Parl.* s.v. John Dormer.

³⁸ Above, landownership (Courthouse Fm). Based on 23 Gt Rollright inventories from 1658–1707 in OHC (average £169, median £132).

³⁹ Jeffery, *Rollright*, 23–9; above, econ. hist. (16th cent. to parl. encl.).

⁴⁰ OHC, Cal. QS, I, 107, 126, 127b, 257b, 274; IX, 404.

⁴¹ Below (welfare).

⁴² OHC, Cal. QS, III, 358, 430; Jeffery, *Rollright*, 27, 29.

rights at enclosure (when inhabitants were described as ‘farmers or labourers’) presumably exacerbated the difficulties, prompting petty theft and apparently causing some men to abscond leaving families chargeable to the parish.⁴³ Meanwhile elaborate tombs in the churchyard commemorated the better-off.⁴⁴



17th-century village houses include Brasenose Cottage (left) with its datestone of 1656, and several 17th-century monuments survive in the churchyard (right).

Social life focused presumably on the parish’s pubs, of which the Unicorn (so called by 1779) was the longest-lasting, and was possibly that mentioned in 1738. Four (later three) victuallers were licensed in the 1750s, while the outlying Lime Kiln inn operated for c.15 years until 1794, and the Swan for a few years in the 1780s.⁴⁵ An unusual document among the parish records may date from this period, and though almost certainly a hoax purports to describe the initiation ceremony of a ‘communal association’ allegedly established in 1187, during which those seeking admission were flogged three times ‘by the master’ and charged 300 pence. The supposed signatories are unknown.⁴⁶

Since 1800

In 1830, according to census enumerators, 67 people emigrated from Rollright to the United States, suggesting ongoing difficulties for the poor.⁴⁷ Poor relief costs in 1829, though falling, were fifth highest in the hundred at £1 4s. per head,⁴⁸ and occasional thefts (possibly indicating distress) continued to be reported.⁴⁹ Farmers remained the dominant employers,

⁴³ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 37, f. 173; *ibid.* Cal. QS, II, 6; Oxf. Jnl Syn. 13 Oct. 1770, 23 Aug. 1783.

⁴⁴ NHLE, nos. 1052794, 1200616, 1300677, 1368056.

⁴⁵ *Secker’s Visit.* 125; OHC, Cal. QS, I, 323b; *ibid.* QSD/V/1–3; *ibid.* P/VI/i/10; P/VI/i/14; *ibid.* MS Wills Oxon. 302/2/11 (incl. ale and liquor cellars); Oxf. Jnl, 18 Dec. 1790.

⁴⁶ OHC, PAR222/17/X1/1–2.

⁴⁷ *Census*, 1831; cf. Jeffery, *Rollright*, 48–50.

⁴⁸ *Poor Rate Rtns, 1830–1*, p. 159; below (welfare).

⁴⁹ OHC, Cal. QS, II, 429, 456b; IX, 255; *ibid.* QS1832/2/L3/1–2, etc.

with 70-odd men and boys aged 10 and over (around three fifths of inhabitants with a named occupation) styled 'agricultural labourer' in 1841. Most were probably locally born: three fifths of inhabitants were native to the parish ten years later, although the proportion dwindled to two fifths by 1901, when the total population (having fallen by c.30 per cent over the previous 50 years) was barely above 300.⁵⁰ Henry Rider Haggard was told that three quarters of young men and all the women left the parish aged 19 or 20, 'only the dullest staying at home', but that a rise in agricultural wages by 3s. a week to 18s. would 'greatly diminish the exodus'.⁵¹ Low wages prompted the formation of a branch of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, though in 1875 it was advised not to press for a weekly wage of more than 15s.⁵² One of its members, John Tidmarsh, served as a Nonconformist preacher, and the foothold established by Primitive Methodism in the 1850s–90s may have owed something to working-class discontent.⁵³

Until Alexander Hall moved to the manor house in the 1890s Rollright attracted few resident gentry, leaving the parish's better-off farmers and tradesmen (among them the long-standing Baughans, Berrys, and Hugheses) as its leading inhabitants.⁵⁴ Social life focused on the Anglican church and school, Nonconformist chapels, and Unicorn pub, supplemented by a beerhouse or off-licence at South End.⁵⁵ The long-serving rector Henry Rendall (incumbent 1855–93) encouraged village-based events and activities. A Band of Hope mentioned in the 1860s was followed by a Temperance Society by the 1890s, when a reading room opened during winter months.⁵⁶ A cricket club established by the 1860s held an annual club supper, which in 1885 was preceded by an athletic sports day hosted by the rector, throwing the village into an 'unusual state of excitement'.⁵⁷ Following Hall's arrival the cricket pitch moved to the manor house grounds,⁵⁸ where other activities included an annual flower and vegetable show,⁵⁹ and in 1918 Mrs Hall was elected founding president of the village branch of the Women's Institute.⁶⁰ The Heythrop Hunt passed regularly through the

⁵⁰ TNA, HO 107/879; HO 107/1732; *ibid.* RG 13/1400.

⁵¹ H. Rider Haggard, *Rural England*, II (1906), 114.

⁵² P. Horn (ed.), *Agric. Trade Unionism in Oxon. 1872–81* (ORS 48, 1974), 53, 85.

⁵³ Below, *relig. hist. (relig. life)*; cf. K. Tiller, "'The Desert begins to Blossom': Oxfordshire and Primitive Methodism, 1824–60", *Oxoniensia* 71 (2006), 85–109.

⁵⁴ *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1847–77 edns); *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883–95 edns); OHC, par. reg. transcript.

⁵⁵ Below (*educ.*); *relig. hist.*; for pubs and beerho., above, *econ. hist. (trades)*; above (1500–1800).

⁵⁶ *Oxf. Times*, 30 May 1863; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 29 Oct. 1890, 11 Nov. 1891, 19 Oct. 1892; OHC, PAR222/9/A1/1; Gt Rollright Hist. Group, *Rollright Past and Present* (2001), 183–93 (*reading rm*); below, *relig. hist. (relig. life)*.

⁵⁷ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 11 Aug. 1869, 14 Oct. 1885.

⁵⁸ *Oxf. Times*, 5 May 1900; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 3 May 1911.

⁵⁹ *Banbury Guardian*, 7 Sept. 1916; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 8 Oct. 1919.

⁶⁰ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 13 Nov. 1918; *Banbury Guardian*, 5 July 1923.

parish,⁶¹ May Day was marked by a children's parade,⁶² and football was played from the 1920s.⁶³



The memorial to Great Rollright's resident lord Alexander Hall (d. 1920) in the parish church.

Nine inhabitants were killed during the First World War, out of 54 who served.⁶⁴ The Second World War brought a few London evacuees, land girls, and German and Italian prisoners of war, while the village was narrowly missed by a German bombing raid in 1940, and by several plane crashes including that of a USAAF Flying Fortress in 1944.⁶⁵ The German-born Soviet agent Ursula Beurton (former handler of the nuclear physicist and spy Klaus Fuchs) lived at The Firs on High Street from 1945 to 1950, ostensibly as an ordinary wife and mother, and celebrated her second Christmas there in the company of two German PoWs and the village handbell ringers. She nevertheless remained distant from the 'agricultural workers or smallholders who did not think much of a "foreigner"', and also from

⁶¹ *Banbury Guardian*, 13 Apr. 1911; *The Bystander*, 3 Jan. 1912 (advertising lease of manor ho. for hunting season).

⁶² *Oxon. Weekly News*, 3 May 1911, 7 May 1913; Gt Rollright Hist. Group, *Rollright Past and Present*, 59.

⁶³ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 21 Apr. 1920; *Banbury Advertiser*, 11 Aug. 1932.

⁶⁴ Jeffery, *Rollright*, 185–6; memorial in ch.

⁶⁵ Gt Rollright Hist. Group, *Rollright Past and Present*, 132–4, 138–42, 152; <https://www.rollrightreview.co.uk/812> (accessed Feb. 2020); memorial in village.

the squire Cdr Heywood-Lonsdale, who reportedly entertained Prince Philip and Princess Elizabeth at the manor house.⁶⁶ Other newcomers in the 1920s–40s included the parish’s historian Reginald Jeffery and (as lessee of the manor house) Lawrence Austen Impey, a descendant of Jane Austen, while among later arrivals were the political scientist Jack Lively (d. 1998) and his wife, the writer Penelope Lively,⁶⁷ and the art dealer, writer, and broadcaster Philip Mould, who with his wife Catherine restored Duck End House.⁶⁸ The village remained socially mixed, however, 35 of the council houses built since the 1930s remaining under local authority control in 2011, when just under half of inhabitants worked in manufacturing, construction, agriculture, and trade, and the other half in managerial, professional, and technical occupations.⁶⁹



The memorial to the 8 American airmen killed in 1944 (left) was installed in 2017 in the grounds of the village hall (right).

A village hall (paid for by subscription) opened at High Street’s northern end in 1956, on a site donated by Heywood-Lonsdale. Run by a charity from 1961, it was extended and refurbished in 2000, and in 2020 accommodated various groups and activities including the Women’s Institute, a dance club, and a monthly food and craft market.⁷⁰ The Unicorn pub closed in 1989 and has since remained vacant, despite a community campaign to restore and reopen it and a 2018 proposal to convert it into a private house.⁷¹

⁶⁶ R. Werner, *Sonya’s Report* (1991), 267–8, 270–1; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursula_Kuczynski (accessed Feb. 2020); B. Macintyre, *Agent Sonya* (2020). She left for East Germany in 1950.

⁶⁷ Jeffery, *Rollright*, p. vii; *Kelly’s Dir. Oxon.* (1920–39 edns); *ODNB*, s.v. John Frederick Lively.

⁶⁸ *Country Life*, 2 May 2018.

⁶⁹ *Census*, 2011; above, landscape etc. (medieval and later settlement).

⁷⁰ OHC, O41/1/C6/45; *ibid.* PAR222/17/L1/1; Gt Rollright Hist. Group, *Rollright Past and Present*, 194–200; <https://www.rollrightreview.co.uk/village-hall> (accessed Feb. 2020).

⁷¹ WODC online planning docs, 18/02834/FUL; <https://www.rollright-unicorn.co.uk> (accessed Feb. 2020).

Education

A schoolmaster mentioned in 1695 taught Latin in the parish,⁷² while James Parker (rector 1740–80) taught the catechism, and left a £100 endowment for teaching poor children nominated by his successors to read.⁷³ By 1800 nine or ten children learned both reading and writing, and the girls sewing and knitting, and attendances rose to 12–14 by 1808, when a similar number was taught at a privately run day school supported by parents' contributions.⁷⁴ A third day school opened before 1815, and a fourth (for girls only) in 1830, teaching 44 children in all in 1833.⁷⁵ Thereafter the non-endowed schools may have closed, and in 1852 the school funded by Parker's endowment (then held in the rectory house) was re-established as a National school in new premises, having reportedly attracted 'both church people and dissenters' in large numbers.⁷⁶ A separate Anglican Sunday school supported by voluntary contributions was left £5 by William Hobbs (d. 1810) of Hook Norton,⁷⁷ and though the bequest generated little revenue⁷⁸ the school attracted more than 60 children by the 1830s, and continued to flourish.⁷⁹ A Baptist Sunday school teaching c.30 children by the 1850s also continued.⁸⁰

Great Rollright National (later Church of England Primary) School A site for the new National school (next to the church) was provided by Brasenose College in 1852, and the building (designed by the diocesan architect G.E. Street) opened the following year, the £800 cost met by local fundraising.⁸¹ Running costs came from Parker's endowment (producing £5 7s. 8d. a year), the Poor's Estate (£40 in 1860), and from fees, donations, and parliamentary grants.⁸² At its opening a superintendent and her assistant taught 50–60 children,⁸³ rising to 86 (28 boys, 40 girls, and 18 infants) by the 1860s,⁸⁴ and in 1863 a treat organized by the rector for the National and Sunday schools combined was attended by 105

⁷² OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. e 22, p. 79.

⁷³ Ibid. d 556, f. 197; *ibid.* MS Wills Oxon. 54/2/13.

⁷⁴ Ibid. MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 15, f. 22; d 567, f. 69v.; d 707, f. 138.

⁷⁵ Ibid. c 433, f. 162; *Educ. of Poor Digest*, p. 728; *Educ. Enq. Abstract* (Parl. Papers 1835 (62), xlii), p. 753.

⁷⁶ TNA, ED 103/86/6; below.

⁷⁷ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 707, f. 138; *ibid.* MS Wills Oxon. 263/1/62.

⁷⁸ *Educ. of Poor Digest*, p. 728; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 276.

⁷⁹ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 38, f. 159; b 39, f. 222.

⁸⁰ *Wilb. Visit.* 120; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 338, f. 341v.

⁸¹ Jeffery, *Rollright*, 167; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 336; *Wilb. Dioc. Bks*, 263–4; above, landscape etc. (built character); cf. TNA, ED 21/14452, mentioning building grant of £55 15s. and £221 5s. in subscriptions.

⁸² *Schs in Receipt of Subscriptions and Donations* (Parl. Papers 1862 (186), xliii), p. 79; below (welfare).

⁸³ *Lascelles' Dir. Oxon.* (1853), 373; *Wilb. Visit.* 120; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 179, f. 326v.

⁸⁴ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 332, f. 362v.; c 335, f. 323v.

children in all.⁸⁵ A detached teacher's house was added in 1860 and a separate infants' classroom in 1866, increasing the accommodation to 98 by the 1870s, though by then attendances were falling in line with population.⁸⁶ Even so Brasenose College provided additional land in 1895, and the building was further extended in 1904.⁸⁷ Staff turnover was high until the arrival in 1893 of 30-year old Frank Dormer (d. 1926) and his wife Lizzie, who remained until 1922.⁸⁸ In 1905, when 60 children attended regularly, the school was 'admirably conducted', inspectors giving Dormer 'great credit' for encouraging children to be 'intelligent as well as good'.⁸⁹



The village school, built next to the church in 1852, and later extended.

By the 1920s standards had fallen, and in 1928 the school was reorganized for juniors and infants, the older children going to Chipping Norton.⁹⁰ Rapid staff changes hindered improvement, although inspectors reported a 'happy atmosphere', and in 1955 the juniors' class (though not the infants') was judged satisfactory. By then there were 45 pupils,

⁸⁵ *Oxf. Times*, 1 Aug. 1863.

⁸⁶ Jeffery, *Rollright*, 167; OHC, S222/1/Y1/1–6; *Retn Public Elem. Schs* (Parl. Papers 1877 [C 1882], lxvii), p. 216; above, landscape etc. (popn).

⁸⁷ OHC, CC4/96; BNC, Estate Ledger 1892–1905, pp. 107–8.

⁸⁸ *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1854–77 edns); *Dutton, Allen & Co. Dir. Oxon.* (1863); *Mercer & Crocker's Dir. Oxon.* (1874); *Harrod's Dir. Oxon.* (1876); *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883–1920 edns).

⁸⁹ OHC, CC4/96; cf. TNA, ED 21/14452 (1913 inspector's rep.).

⁹⁰ OHC, PAR222/14/A1/1; *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1928).

two thirds of whom stayed for a hot lunch brought from Chipping Norton. The school lacked running water (drinking water being carried from the teacher's house), and both drainage and electric lighting were inadequate;⁹¹ nonetheless proposals to close or rebuild it were withdrawn,⁹² and in 1960 the school's grounds were extended, with new temporary buildings added by the 1970s.⁹³ Further additions and alterations followed in the 1980s–90s,⁹⁴ and in the 2000s those buildings were replaced by a double-depth extension south and west of the Victorian core. In 2012 the school taught 94 children aged 4–11 in four classes, of whom 17 per cent lived in the village, 39 per cent in surrounding rural areas, and 44 per cent in Chipping Norton. A new classroom and head teacher's study were added to the 21st-century range, and the school continued in 2021.⁹⁵

Welfare

A poor men's box (or chest) in the church was mentioned in the 1560s–80s,⁹⁶ and small bequests to the poor in cash and kind were common in 16th- and 17th-century wills.⁹⁷ The resident lord William Sheppard (d. 1624) left the larger sum of £3 6s. 8d., and a further £5 to provide a feast given by his children, kinsfolk, neighbours, and friends, while James Berry (d. 1703) left 6s. a year to the parish's poor widows until his son Freeman (born 1691) turned thirty.⁹⁸ In the 18th century offertory money was distributed among the sick and amongst poor parishioners attending communion, though collections later lapsed until revived around the 1830s.⁹⁹ No 19th-century friendly societies are known, but by 1901 a provident club distributed coal and clothing tickets to contributing members, its funds supplemented by donations from the parish's charities (below).¹⁰⁰ Henry Rider Haggard, visiting around that time, reckoned there were no really poor people in the parish despite the inferiority of some cottages, 'thirty of forty of them having less than five rooms all told'.¹⁰¹

In 1777 the Chipping Norton apothecary Thomas Mackarness built a house called Gilkes midway between Duck End and Priory Mill (in Over Norton), at which he administered inoculations against smallpox. At his death in 1790 his widow boasted that he had treated nearly 1,500 patients without loss, though several deaths from smallpox at the 'pest house'

⁹¹ OHC, PAR222/14/A1/1; PAR222/14/C1/2; PAR222/14/Y1/1.

⁹² *Ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. b 167, no. 4.

⁹³ BNC, Estate Ledger 1949–62, pp. 425–6; OS Map 1:2500, SP 3231 (1974 edn).

⁹⁴ WODC online planning docs, W80/0778; W96/1552, etc.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 12/1878/P/FP; <https://great-rollright.oxon.sch.uk> (accessed July 2021).

⁹⁶ OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 183, f. 376; 184, ff. 89, 219v., 399v.; 29/1/24; 49/1/5.

⁹⁷ e.g. *ibid.* 180, f. 117; 181, f. 202; 39/3/25; 27/1/9.

⁹⁸ TNA, PROB 11/143/359; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 8/3/26.

⁹⁹ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 556, f. 198; b 37, f. 176; b 38, f. 158v.

¹⁰⁰ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 9 Oct. 1901.

¹⁰¹ H. Rider Haggard, *Rural England*, II (1906), 114.

were recorded in the parish register until c.1801.¹⁰² A ‘monthly nurse’ was resident in 1871 and a ‘sick nurse’ in 1891, but no other medical professionals are known.¹⁰³

Parish Charities Rollright’s earliest and most considerable charity was the so-called Poor’s Estate, reportedly established in 1455 by the Rollright widow Margery Kench, who left two houses and two yardlands in the parish to trustees. By the 18th century her identity was forgotten and the charity was attributed to John Prew and John Baughan, its trustees in 1530.¹⁰⁴ By the 1730s the estate raised £15 a year which was distributed among the poor,¹⁰⁵ and at enclosure in 1776 the trustees received two separate allotments totalling 74 acres. A resulting £200 debt proved controversial, however, and by 1784 there were complaints that the rents (then £60 a year) were being diverted to fund the parish’s poor rates,¹⁰⁶ although twice-yearly distributions resumed by the early 1800s.¹⁰⁷ By the 1820s the larger allotment (56¾ a.) was let for £70 a year, while the smaller adjoined the 10-a. ‘fuel allotment’ awarded at enclosure in lieu of the customary right to cut furze, the two together producing furze and herbage for use by the poor and for sale. The charity also provided coal, cloth, and flax, and money for rents, and maintained eleven cottages (replacing the earlier two houses) to accommodate the poor rent-free.¹⁰⁸ In 1859 the Court of Chancery determined that the combined income of the Poor’s Estate and fuel allotment should be divided between the parish’s National school (£40–50 annually), Oxford Infirmary (£3 3s.), fuel (£20–40), and clothing (£20–30),¹⁰⁹ and in 1895, when they were known as the Great Rollright Charities, their administration passed to the newly formed parish council. A second Chancery decree in 1906 fixed the school’s share at half the charities’ net yearly income,¹¹⁰ and in 2016–17 (following further regulatory revisions in 1912 and 1954) total annual income and expenditure was c.£10,000.¹¹¹

A bread charity benefiting Rollright poor who ‘usually come to church’ was endowed by Humphrey Hall (d. 1695), who left a yardland in Chipping Norton to provide distributions of a dozen 3d. loaves at New Year and again at Whitsun.¹¹² The payment was still made c.1800, but later lapsed.¹¹³ Anne Hall, widow of the former lord Major Charles Hall (d. 1880),

¹⁰² Oxf. Jnl Syn. 27 Dec. 1777, 13 Nov. 1779, 12 June, 4 Dec. 1790; OHC, par. reg. transcript.

¹⁰³ TNA, RG 10/1458, no. 15; RG 12/1179, no. 19.

¹⁰⁴ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 3 Apr. 1895; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 274.

¹⁰⁵ OHC, PAR222/15/T1/1; *Secker’s Visit.* 125.

¹⁰⁶ OHC, encl. award; Oxf. Jnl Syn. 3 Jan., 20 Nov. 1784.

¹⁰⁷ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 37, f. 175v.; b 15, ff. 21v.–22; d 567, f. 70; d 571, f. 59v.

¹⁰⁸ *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 274–5.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, ED 49/6149; OHC, QSD/C/100; *Char. Digest*, pp. 50–1.

¹¹⁰ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 27 Mar., 3 Apr. 1895; TNA, ED 49/6149; OHC, CC4/96.

¹¹¹ Char. Com. website (Dec. 2019), no. 242146.

¹¹² TNA, PROB 11/425/287.

¹¹³ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 567, f. 70v.; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 276; *Char. Digest*, pp. 50–1.

left £2,000 in 1895 to endow a memorial charity in his name, to support parish coal and clothing clubs (subsequently set up by the rector and churchwardens), and to meet poor inhabitants' medical expenses.¹¹⁴ The charity produced £60 16s. a year in the early 20th century, and continued in 2016–17 with annual income and expenditure of c.£710.¹¹⁵ Non-eleemosynary charities included Parker's and Hobbs's educational bequests,¹¹⁶ the former producing £4 18s. 8d. a year in 1890 and continuing until 1992, though the latter was worth only 3s. a year by the 1870s.¹¹⁷ A £200 endowment to fund apprenticeships, left by Elizabeth Sheppard (d. 1718), was apparently lost,¹¹⁸ along with rents for repair of church bells reported in the 1730s and 1890s.¹¹⁹

A village hall charity set up in 1961 had over £7,000 annual income in 2019, and a charity to support the village school (registered 2012) nearly £16,000.¹²⁰ Charities to support the Women's Institute (registered 1983), the village playgroup (1995), and the parish's natural environment (2001) were wound up in the early 2000s.¹²¹

Parish Poor Relief Despite income from the Poor's Estate, from the 1770s mounting poor relief costs fell increasingly on the parish rates. Expenditure in 1776 was £66, almost doubling to an average of £115 a year in 1783–5, and rising to £498 in 1803, when 114 people (including 60 children) received regular out-relief and 10 occasional relief, in all c.30 per cent of the population.¹²² In 1813 costs reached £797, supporting 40 people permanently and 10 occasionally, and though falling to £580 in 1816 they rose to £942 in 1820. Later expenditure continued to fluctuate, averaging £629 a year in the 1820s and standing at £502 in 1834.¹²³ No parish workhouse was built, although the Poor's Estate cottages were sometimes called 'workhouses'.¹²⁴ Under the 1834 Poor Law Act primary responsibility for Rollright's poor passed to the new Chipping Norton Poor Law Union,¹²⁵ and in the 20th century the Poor's Estate cottages were acquired and rebuilt by the rural district council.¹²⁶

¹¹⁴ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 29 May, 12 June 1895.

¹¹⁵ *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1911–39 edns); Char. Com. website, no. 268808.

¹¹⁶ Above (educ.).

¹¹⁷ *Char. Digest*, pp. 50–1; *ibid.* (Parl. Papers 1890 (247), iv), pp. 14–15; OHC, PAR222/13/C1/1; Char. Com. website, no. 309283.

¹¹⁸ TNA, PROB 11/562/390.

¹¹⁹ OHC, PAR222/15/T1/1; PAR222/13/C1/1.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* PAR222/17/L1/1; Char. Com. website, nos. 1037138, 1148710.

¹²¹ Char. Com. website, nos. 286910, 1047073, 1087081.

¹²² *Poor Abstract*, 1777, 141; 1787, 190; 1804, 402–3; *Census*, 1801.

¹²³ *Poor Abstract*, 1818, 354–5; *Poor Rate Rtns* (Parl. Papers 1822 (556), v), p. 136; (1825 (334), iv), p. 172; (1830–1 (83), xi), p. 159; (1835 (444), xlvii), p. 155.

¹²⁴ OHC, par. reg. transcript (burials 1780s–90s); TNA, RG 10/1458; RG 13/1400.

¹²⁵ Below, local govt.

¹²⁶ OHC, DV/X/80, nos. 188–98 (and map); *ibid.* RDC9/3/F6/2, nos. 24–5, 45–52; RDC9/3/F7/2; OS Map 1:2500, SP 3231 (1974 edn) (Prew Cottages).