



VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

LITTLE ROLLRIGHT

Religious History



*Little Rollright parish church
from the north-west.*

Little Rollright had its own church by the late 12th century, which despite the village's depopulation remained fully independent until the 20th. The living (a rectory) was poorly endowed, and by the 18th century was often held by absentees who employed non-resident curates, the small 17th-century rectory house being rarely occupied by clergy. Between the 17th and 19th centuries a single Sunday service was attended by around half the parish's tiny population, with Protestant Dissent confined to one or two families. The church was remodelled by the resident lord in 1617 and was periodically restored thereafter, remaining open in 2020.

Church Origins and Parochial Organization

Little Rollright church was confirmed to Eynsham abbey in the late 12th century, when it was called *ecclesia* and was apparently fully independent.¹ Its former dedication to St Mary the Virgin (recorded in the 1870s) was that of the abbey, and was probably medieval, but by the following decade it had been changed to St Philip.² Parish registers survive only from 1754.³

In 1930 the benefice was united with that of Salford, formalizing the earlier holding of the two churches in plurality.⁴ In 1980 the combined benefice was united with that of Little Compton, Chastleton, and Cornwell, which in turn was united in 2001 with those of Chipping Norton and of Kingham, Churchill, Daylesford, and Sarsden. The unification of the ecclesiastical parishes of Little Rollright, Salford, Little Compton, Chastleton, and Cornwell followed in 2002.⁵ The parish belonged to Chipping Norton rural deanery from the Middle Ages.⁶

Advowson and Endowment

The advowson belonged to Eynsham abbey presumably from the church's foundation.⁷ In 1536 the abbey granted a single turn to Henry Annesley of Mapledurham, and in 1559 (following the Dissolution) the patronage passed to Anthony Throckmorton with the manor,⁸ successive lords presenting until the union with Salford in 1930, when the lord Percy Flick became joint patron.⁹ In 1956, following Flick's death, his share of the advowson (one turn in three) was vested in the diocesan board of patronage, joint patron in 2020.¹⁰

The rectory was valued at 2 marks (£1 6s. 8d.) in 1254, £2 in 1291, and £1 10s. in 1341, making it one of the poorest in the deanery.¹¹ From that Eynsham abbey received a 10s. annual pension, and also kept a portion of the parish's contribution to the papal tax known as Peter's pence.¹² By 1526 the rectory was worth £5 6s. 8d., rising to £6 by 1535, its

¹ *Eynsham Cart.* I, pp. 45–6; for 13th-cent. fabric, below (church archit.).

² *Harrod's Dir. Oxon.* (1876); *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1877); *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883); OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.2 (1886–1905 edns).

³ OHC, par. reg. transcript.

⁴ *Lond. Gaz.* 28 Feb. 1930, p. 1291; below (relig. life).

⁵ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1782/3; *ibid.* DIOC/1/C/6/23/1.

⁶ Lunt (ed.), *Val. Norw.* 311; Youngs, *Admin. Units*, I, 404.

⁷ *Rot. Welles*, II, 12; above, landownership.

⁸ Lincs. Arch. REG/27, f. 194; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 105, p. 194.

⁹ <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk> (accessed Mar. 2020); OHC, Cal. Presentation Deeds, ser. 1, pp. 72–3; ser. 2, p. 71; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1986; *Lond. Gaz.* 28 Feb. 1930, p. 1291.

¹⁰ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 1992; above, Chipping Norton, relig. hist. (advowson).

¹¹ Lunt (ed.), *Val. Norw.* 311; *Tax. Eccl.* 32 (and online version: www.dhi.ac.uk/taxatio, accessed Mar. 2020); *Nonarum Inquisitiones*, 140.

¹² *Eynsham Cart.* I, pp. 46–7; II, pp. lxii, lxiv.

income derived entirely from tithes and oblations:¹³ no early glebe is recorded, a yardland occupied by the rector in 1363 being apparently held in a private capacity.¹⁴ Income in 1685 was £40 a year, the rector having agreed a tithe composition with the lord as sole landowner, and in 1765 the living was augmented by Queen Anne's Bounty, matching a £200 benefaction by Thomas Nelson (rector 1743–71).¹⁵ The money was used to buy c.7 a. of land at Kingham, and in 1815 the living was valued at £134 a year.¹⁶ The tithes were commuted in 1848 for a rent charge of £148 9s., increasing the rector's annual income to £190 in the 1860s,¹⁷ and by the 1890s the glebe was worth £17 and the rent charge £113. The revenues were transferred to Salford in 1930.¹⁸

Rectory House The medieval rectory house stood probably on the site of its 17th-century successor immediately south-east of the church. The surviving building's main part (dated 1640) is a small three-bayed two-storeyed house of coursed limestone rubble with ashlar dressings and rubble gable stacks, lit by small stone-mullioned windows (the ground-floor ones with hoodmoulds) flanking a central doorway, and roofed with Stonesfield slate.¹⁹ In 1665 it was taxed probably on three hearths,²⁰ and before 1681 acquired a short north-west rear wing lit by two larger four-light ovolo-moulded windows, the upper one extending across the eaves into a prominent gabled dormer. An internal stone sill to that window bears a rough inscription (dated 1681) by the curate Edward Jennings.²¹

By the early 19th century the house (then thatched) was judged unsuitable and was regularly let, in the 1850s as divided cottages.²² It returned to single occupancy in the late 19th century and was reordered internally, presumably by the lord, who sold it with the rest of the estate in 1929.²³ Single-storey lean-tos were added to the rear in the mid 20th century, followed by a major refurbishment from c.2009, when the lean-tos were replaced by a single-

¹³ *Subsidy 1526*, 265; *Valor Eccl.* II, 182.

¹⁴ *Eynsham Cart.* II, p. 61.

¹⁵ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 41, f. 64; Hodgson, *QAB*, p. clxv; cf. OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 155, f. 38b (valuation not exceeding £43 p.a. in 1707).

¹⁶ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 449, f. 27; b 33, f. 133.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* tithe award; *Crockford's Clerical Dir.* (1860), 581; *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1864).

¹⁸ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 359, f. 352; below, Salford, relig. hist. (endowment).

¹⁹ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 402; NHLE, no. 1251363; Witcher Crawford Architects, 'Design and Access Statement' [2009], accessed at WODC online planning docs, 09/0580/P/LB; cf. OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 41, f. 64 (3 bays in 1685).

²⁰ *Hearth Tax Oxon.* 166 (occ. Ric. Bickerstaffe).

²¹ Illust. in 'Design and Access Statement'; mentioned (1855) in OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 70, f. 648.

²² OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 327, p. 109; c 449, f. 27; b 33, f. 133; b 70, f. 648; below (relig. life).

²³ 'Design and Access Statement'; *Sale Cat., Little Rollright Manor Estate* (1927): copy in OHC, Marshall XVIII/i/6.

storey gabled range parallel to the main house, and a gabled open porch was added at the front.²⁴



Little Rollright rectory house in the 1980s (Oxfordshire History Centre, POX0412065).

Religious Life

The Middle Ages

Thirteenth-century rectors included at least two in minor orders, of whom Walter de Clere (given custody of the living in 1223) was ordained subdeacon and then deacon before his institution the following year, having meanwhile been examined in singing.²⁵ His successors (both called ‘chaplain’) were presumably already priests, of whom Richard (instituted 1245) stayed probably until his death in 1275.²⁶ He was succeeded by another subdeacon, William de Hottot, whose title of *magister* nevertheless implies a university education.²⁷ Adam de Shareshull (rector 1328–39) was probably a member of the Oxfordshire gentry family with interests at Lyneham, and a relative of the justice William de Shareshull (d. 1370), into whose service Adam’s successor Ralph de Grendon entered soon after his institution.²⁸

Stephen de Mentmore (rector 1340–8), who died during the Black Death,²⁹ came possibly from Mentmore (Bucks.), while John Hobbes (rector 1354–5) was from Claydon (Bucks. or Oxon.), and Walter de Bledington (1355–70) was named from a Gloucestershire

²⁴ ‘Design and Access Statement’ (incl. photos); *Daily Mail*, 30 May 2014 (photo); Google Earth images (accessed Mar. 2020).

²⁵ *Rot. Welles*, II, 12, 15. He witnessed abbey charters: *Eynsham Cart.* I, pp. 152, 156.

²⁶ *Rot. Grosseteste*, 443, 485. Of 25 known rectors 1223–1536, 9 vacated by death, 8 by resignation, and 8 by cause unknown.

²⁷ *Rot. Gravesend*, 226.

²⁸ *Reg. Burghersh*, II, pp. 77, 94; III, p. 115; *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 170, 177, 182.

²⁹ *Lincs. Arch.* REG/9, f. 243.

village 7 miles south-west of Little Rollright.³⁰ William Piggesdon (instituted 1393) was probably educated at Oxford, later Oxford graduates including Robert Draper (rector 1454–5) and William Lumbard (1455–61), who was given papal permission to hold the living with that of Stretton-on-Fosse (Warws.).³¹ Thomas Gilbert (rector 1483–4), a future vicar general, was also a pluralist, and Robert Lawson (1500–15) held Oddington in plurality from 1508.³² Under John Reynold (rector 1515–36) the bishop's visitation found nothing amiss, however.³³ An unknown 14th-century cleric may be commemorated by a small surviving cross-slab in the chancel.³⁴

Popular religion is poorly documented, although improvements to the church in the 14th–15th centuries suggest investment by parishioners, and the 14th-century field name 'Howellesyche' may recall an unknown holy well.³⁵ Agnes Clotton of Chipping Norton, one of a family with grazing interests at Little Rollright, left money to the church in 1501.³⁶

The Reformation to 1797

Hamlet Malbone (rector 1536–59), described as 'well learned in grammar', served throughout the religious changes of the Reformation, and was also schoolmaster at Chipping Norton.³⁷ He probably sympathized with the new religion, as no wills from his incumbency contain Catholic invocations, including that of the former churchwarden John Ballard (d. 1557) which was written (and witnessed by Malbone) during Mary I's restoration of Catholicism.³⁸ Malbone's successor John Hudson (rector 1559–82) similarly accepted the Elizabethan settlement, despite having previously tolerated (and perhaps promoted) Catholic invocations while serving as curate of Great Rollright.³⁹ Inhabitants (including Ballard) continued to leave money to the church, while James Ingram (d. 1559) held sheep and wool belonging to the church stock, and was owed 8*d.* for making a key for the church door.⁴⁰ A surviving silver chalice and paten, of unusually small size, were made by a provincial goldsmith c.1571.⁴¹

³⁰ Ibid. ff. 264v., 266v.

³¹ Emden, *OU Reg. to 1500*, I, 592; II, 1177; III, 1483.

³² Ibid. II, 767, 1113; *Cal. Papal Regs* 1492–8, pp. 7, 82–3.

³³ *Visit. Dioc. Linc.* I, 136; II, 46.

³⁴ Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 402.

³⁵ Below (church archit.); *Eynsham Cart.* II, p. 58 (though cf. 'holeweye', *ibid.* p. 59).

³⁶ *Oxon. Wills*, 76–7; above, econ. hist. (medieval).

³⁷ Pearce, 'Clergy', 24, 52.

³⁸ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 181, f. 97a; *Visit. Dioc. Linc.* II, 46.

³⁹ Pearce, 'Clergy', 24; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 131/2/6; above, Great Rollright, relig. hist.

⁴⁰ OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 179, ff. 146v.–147; 180, f. 112 and v.; 181, f. 97a; 183, ff. 152, 171v.–172 (Ingram).

⁴¹ Evans, *Ch. Plate*, 147–8.

Richard Hudson (rector 1583–5) was probably a descendant of his predecessor's brother,⁴² and on his resignation was succeeded by Nicholas Bayley (1585–1622), who died in post and requested burial in the chancel.⁴³ During his incumbency the manor was bought by William Blower, a 'very religious man ... and very true and upright', who remodelled the church and was commemorated by a large canopied tomb chest in the chancel, followed c.1650 by an equally elaborate monument to his successor Edward Dixon (d. 1660) and his wives Cecilia (d. 1647) and Anne.⁴⁴ As patrons the Dixons presented a succession of Oxford graduates, of whom several stayed only a few years: Thomas Walker (rector 1622–30) resigned to take up the richer Oxfordshire livings of Mixbury, Somerton, and Hanborough,⁴⁵ while Thomas Weekes (1630–5) and Thomas Lloyd (1635–40) also gained promotion elsewhere.⁴⁶ The longer-serving Robert Cuffe (rector 1640–63) died in post, having evidently negotiated the religious challenges of the Civil War and Interregnum, though in his final years he lived probably at Kingston Bagpuize (Berks.), which he held in plurality from 1661.⁴⁷ David Bordall (rector 1664–1700) was criticized for negligence and may have also been non-resident.⁴⁸ A curate was mentioned in 1631,⁴⁹ and from 1678 to 1720 (under Bordall and his absentee successor Thomas Heyward, rector 1700–43) the church was served by the curate Edward Jennings, who occupied the recently extended rectory house. Until 1682 he also served Hook Norton and Great Rollright, but gave up both following complaints of 'fanatical' preaching (which he strongly denied).⁵⁰

Heyward's later curate James Martin (resident at Chipping Norton, and paid £16 a year) served Little Rollright with nearby Heythrop, in 1738 performing a single Sunday morning service and celebrating Holy Communion four times a year, attended by just four or five elderly communicants. He nevertheless insisted that the 'people of Little Rollright respect me for my service', and that they had 'lately adorned the pulpit for me in a handsome manner'.⁵¹ A similar pattern continued under the absent rectors Thomas Nelson (1743–71), who lived near Warwick, John Reade (1771–89), resident at Nettlebed, and William Baker

⁴² OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 185, f. 322 and v.; Pearce, 'Clergy', 25.

⁴³ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 5/1/2; Pearce, 'Clergy', 25; Pearce, 'Cert. 1593', 156; Peel, *Register*, II, 135 (naming Ric. Hudson in error, and a curate 'Mr Locke').

⁴⁴ Above, landownership; social hist.; below (church archit.). For Blower, Rosen, 'Little Rollright', 57, citing TNA, C 3/300/52.

⁴⁵ *Alum. Oxon. 1500–1714*, IV, 1558; *VCH Oxon.* VI, 259, 297; XII, 175.

⁴⁶ *Alum. Oxon. 1500–1714*, III, 930; IV, 1593.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* I, 361; *Walker Revised*, ed. Matthews, 33; <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk>. He witnessed Jane Dixon's will in 1655: TNA, PROB 11/278/227.

⁴⁸ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. e 3, ff. 23, 57v.; <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk>.

⁴⁹ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. e 9, f. 186v.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* e 22, p. 24; c 650, f. 31 and v.; *ibid.* MS Wills Oxon. 137/1/36; above (rectory ho.); above, Hook Norton and Great Rollright, relig. hist. For Heyward, *Secker's Visit.* 126; OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. e 4, f. 26; <https://theclergydatabase.org.uk>.

⁵¹ *Secker's Visit.* 82, 125–6; *Secker's Corresp.* 5–8; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. e 22, p. 124.

(1789–96), a former curate of Great Wolford (Warws.) who lived at Moreton-in-Marsh. Nelson's curate Samuel Horne served Little Rollright from Oxford, and another (paid £18 a year) from neighbouring Long Compton, while under Reade Communion declined to three times a year.⁵² The non-resident lady of the manor Jane Dixon donated a silver paten in 1730,⁵³ but by the 1750s the font required a new cover, and the communion table a new top and new rails. Two bells were to be recast and rehung, the walls re-whitewashed, and the Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer, and Sentences newly inscribed.⁵⁴



Little Rollright church: nave and chancel arch.

Dissent was largely confined to the Lambs of Little Rollright mill, members of the Sibford Quaker meeting from the 1670s until their departure in the 1760s–70s,⁵⁵ and the farmer Richard Fowler, who in the late 18th century occasionally entertained the Charlbury Quaker William Jones.⁵⁶ A meeting house (probably just an outbuilding) was licensed in 1773, continuing apparently until the 1790s.⁵⁷

Since 1797

Samuel Mister (rector 1797–1836) lived 6 miles away at Tidmington (Warws.), but for several years served Little Rollright in person, continuing the single Sunday morning service

⁵² OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 556, ff. 199–202; d 560, ff. 5–8; d 563, ff. 5–8; d 565, ff. 97–100; b 37, ff. 169–72, 219–20; c 327, p. 109; *ibid.* Cal. Presentation Deeds, ser. 1, p. 73.

⁵³ Evans, *Ch. Plate*, 148.

⁵⁴ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. d 13, f. 14; below (church archit.).

⁵⁵ *VCH Oxon.* X, 256; OHC, NQ3/1/D4/1–4 and 6; *ibid.* MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 708, f. 123 (also mentioning Mary Walker); d 556, f. 200; d 560, f. 6; c 327, p. 109. Cf. *ibid.* MSS Wills Oxon. 42/2/36; 211, f. 302.

⁵⁶ H. Jones (ed.), *The Life and Times of a Charlbury Quaker: The Journals of William Jones, 1784–1818* (ORS 69, 2014), 139, 163, 165.

⁵⁷ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. c 123, f. 57v.; *ibid.* MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 37, f. 219v.; b 15, f. 29.

and celebrating Communion 3–4 times a year.⁵⁸ He justified his non-residence by the smallness and ‘unfitness’ of the rectory house, despite the bishop’s disapproval.⁵⁹ Even so the difficulties of winter travel eventually obliged him to employ a curate, paid £35 a year and based usually at Salford, Long Compton, or Chastleton,⁶⁰ who by the 1820s performed most services.⁶¹ In the 1830s the congregation numbered around twelve and there were four communicants, a surviving pewter almsdish dating probably from Mister’s incumbency. Dissent was confined to a family of Baptists (rising to two by 1820), who were the only inhabitants not to attend church regularly.⁶²

William Stevens (rector 1836–70) held Little Rollright with Salford, prompting regular changes to Sunday services between morning and afternoon. Though resident at Salford he served in person for three decades, attracting a congregation of 15–20, and witnessing the church’s restoration (at the lord’s expense) in 1847.⁶³ In 1863, however, his ‘intemperance’ (apparently alcoholism) and some resulting ‘sad scandals’ caused the bishop to threaten his removal, and thereafter both parishes were served by the curate De Lisle de Beauvoir Dobrée.⁶⁴ Stevens’s successor John Hill (rector 1871–88) was an energetic former vicar of Bledington (Glos.), who by 1875 lived at Chipping Norton and continued the single Sunday service, establishing a flourishing Sunday school (run by his wife), and instituting cottage lectures. Attendance was good save for a single Dissenter’s family mentioned in 1871, the only other occasional absences resulting from farm workers’ need to tend to livestock.⁶⁵ A few other people (for whom the church happened to be conveniently situated) may have attended from outside the parish.⁶⁶ By the 1880s, when Hill suffered pelvic rheumatism from an old injury, he employed a non-resident curate,⁶⁷ and Albert Baines (rector 1889–96), who introduced monthly communion attended by six people, latterly also employed neighbouring clergy because of ill health.⁶⁸

In 1903 the bishop sequestered the living, claiming that Philip Neale (rector 1897–1907) had failed to officiate for more than a year, leaving the vicar of Little Compton in temporary charge. Neale had earlier (in 1899) been appointed a sub-postmaster in St John’s

⁵⁸ Ibid. MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 327, p. 278; b 30, f. 133v.; b 33, f. 132v.; b 36, f. 60v.

⁵⁹ Ibid. c 659, f. 121; above (rectory ho.). It was nonetheless in ‘good and proper repair’ in 1808: OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 111, no. 53.

⁶⁰ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 327, p. 278; c 659, f. 212; d 549, p. 152; d 705, f. 225; b 15, ff. 30v.–31.

⁶¹ Ibid. d 577, f. 62v.; d 579, f. 47v.; b 38, ff. 160–1.

⁶² Ibid. d 567, f. 71 and v.; d 575, f. 63v.; d 579, f. 47v.; b 39, ff. 223–4; Evans, *Ch. Plate*, 148.

⁶³ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. b 41, f. 185v.; d 179, f. 328v.; d 180, f. 960v.; c 332, f. 364v.; *Wilb. Visit.* 121; *Ch. and Chapel*, 1851, no. 273; below (church archit.).

⁶⁴ *Wilb. Letter Bks*, p. 392; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 335, f. 331 and v.; below, Salford, relig. hist.

⁶⁵ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 338, ff. 343–4; c 341, ff. 364–5; c 344, ff. 341–2.

⁶⁶ Ibid. par. reg. transcript; above, social hist. (since 1800).

⁶⁷ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 347, ff. 351–2; c 350, ff. 332–3; c 353, ff. 346–7; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 21 Dec. 1881, 19 Sept. 1888 (obit.).

⁶⁸ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 356, f. 342 and v.; c 359, f. 351 and v.; c 362, f. 344 and v.

Wood (London), concealing his clerical status, but was removed for alleged fraud.⁶⁹ Weekly services continued, and monthly communions ‘if there are a sufficient number’, though the Sunday school was abandoned. By 1906 several inhabitants attended Salford church,⁷⁰ which both Thomas Miller (rector 1908–14) and Arthur Callis (1914–28) held in plurality, Edwin Strand (1928–48) becoming first incumbent of the united benefice.⁷¹ Thomas Hyslop (rector 1948–75) undertook fundraising to restore the church, which reopened in 1952 following a gift by the playwright Christopher Fry.⁷² Further repairs prompted another closure in 1961, those supporting the work including the Historic Churches Preservation Trust and the Friends of Friendless Churches, who funded additional work in 1968.⁷³ Thereafter Little Rollright was incorporated into ever larger benefices, and in 2020 regular Sunday worship was held only monthly from Easter to Harvest.⁷⁴

Church Architecture

Little Rollright’s small, ‘informal and homely’ church is a medieval building partly remodelled in the 17th century, and comprises a two-bay chancel, a short aisleless nave with plain south porch, and a buttressed, battlemented, and pinnacled west tower of 1617, its squared coursed marlstone and limestone ashlar dressings contrasting with the lighter-coloured ashlar of the nave’s south wall and porch. The chancel (dominated internally by the Blowers’ and Dixons’ 17th-century canopied tomb chests) is now rendered, and the roofs are tiled, while the building’s exposed north wall is windowless.⁷⁵

The earliest dateable features are the chancel’s early 13th-century shallow buttresses and the broadly contemporary double-chamfered chancel arch, while the wide chamfered tower arch may be 14th-century, implying a medieval tower. Good-quality Perpendicular windows were installed in the 15th century, those in the chancel’s south wall with four-centred arched heads and hoodmoulds terminating in scrolls, and the tall three-light east window incorporating panel tracery and a hoodmould with lozenge stops, with two elaborate internal image brackets with crocketed canopies set within the jambs. The stump

⁶⁹ Ibid. c 1986 (pps 1900, 1903); *Oxon. Weekly News*, 11 Feb. 1903.

⁷⁰ OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 365, f. 337 and v.; c 368, f. 329 and v.; c 371, f. 115 and v.

⁷¹ *Crockford’s Clerical Dir.* (1920), 229, 1034; (1938), 1278.

⁷² *Banbury Advertiser*, 19 Apr. 1950, 21 Nov. 1951, 20 Aug. 1952; OHC, PAR227/1/R7/1; below (church archit.). Fry’s connection to the parish has not been established.

⁷³ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 18 May 1961; *Oxf. Mail*, 7 Feb. 1962; OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 1986; c 1992.

⁷⁴ <https://www.stmaryscnorton.com> (accessed Mar. 2020).

⁷⁵ For other accts: Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 402; Sherwood, *Oxon. Churches*, 113–14; NHLE, no. 1251364; Parker, *Eccl. Topog.* no. 81; W. Hobart Bird, *Old Oxon. Churches* [1932], 107–8; LPL, Clarke/1/16, f. 21. Illust. (19th cent.) in Bodl. MSS Top. Oxon. a 68, f. 426; c 852, f. 22.

of a limestone churchyard cross on an octagonal base, of unusual design, may be of similar date.⁷⁶

In 1617 Rollright's lord William Blower rebuilt the west tower and probably the nave's south wall with its gabled porch, inserting a wide south window comprising five arched lights under a square head and hoodmould. The three-stage tower has stepped diagonal buttresses and twin Tudor-arched bell-openings on each face, while its west wall has a similar ground-floor window and, above, a wall tablet framed by Ionic columns, incorporating a shield of arms, the date, and an inscription recording Blower's benefaction. The tall, chalice-like font, its small octagonal bowl supported on a panelled stem, may be contemporary,⁷⁷ and so too may traces of wall paintings above the tower arch.



*The monument to
William Blower
(d. 1618).*

The canopied monuments commemorating Blower (d. 1618) and his nephew Edward Dixon (d. 1660) occupy most of the chancel's north wall, that to Blower lying within the sanctuary. His life-size effigy, carved in smooth white stone, was originally brightly coloured, and depicts him in plate armour, lying stiffly on his right side and holding a sword. The tomb

⁷⁶ B.J. Marples, 'The Medieval Crosses of Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia* 38 (1973), 307; NHLE, no. 1262813; illust. in OHC, POX0412068.

⁷⁷ Illust. in Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. a 68, f. 425; *ibid.* MS Top. Eccles. b 14.

chest below is adorned with heraldic shields and an inscription, while the canopy is supported on Ionic columns and topped by a coloured crest and two obelisks, further decorated panels behind the effigy including strapwork, flowers, fruit, cherubs, skulls, and an hourglass. The memorial to Dixon (d. 1660) and his two wives is equally elaborate, the three figures (of white alabaster) kneeling around a prayer-desk set in a decorated arched recess flanked by Corinthian columns of black marble, the whole topped by a stone crest and two large stone balls. The chest is faintly incised with the outlines of Dixon’s ten children, whose mother Cecilia (d. 1647) is the subject of the monument’s dedication.⁷⁸

The communion rails, with slender barley-twist balusters, are late 17th-century, but needed repair in the 1750s when the chancel walls and roof also required attention.⁷⁹ A bell (replacing the earlier two) was recast in 1762 by Matthew Bagley of Chacombe (Northants.), and unspecified building repairs were undertaken in 1769 and 1826.⁸⁰ A more significant restoration in 1847 involved work to the walls, roof, and windows, replacement of high pews with open, lower-backed seating, and provision of a new wooden pulpit and reading desk.⁸¹ The current stone pulpit was installed in the 1860s, and a new communion table by 1881.⁸² In the 20th century the external walls were cleared of ivy and a tall heating flue removed,⁸³ probably during extensive restoration work in the 1950s–60s,⁸⁴ and in 1991 a new bell was installed after the 18th-century one cracked.⁸⁵ The building remained in good condition in 2020.



The font (left) and communion rails (right).

⁷⁸ Rosen, ‘Little Rollright’, 57–61, 65–8; above, landownership; social hist. (1500–1800).

⁷⁹ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. d 13, f. 14.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* c 95, ff. 151, 234; c 42, f. 44; *Ch. Bells Oxon.* IV, 362; cf. *Par. Colln*, III, 245.

⁸¹ *Oxf. Chronicle & Reading Gaz.* 8 May 1847.

⁸² OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 332, f. 365; c 347, f. 352.

⁸³ *Illust.* in *ibid.* POX0171873, POX0195580, POX0195730.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* MSS Oxf. Dioc. c 1986; c 1992, faculties.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* c 1782/3.