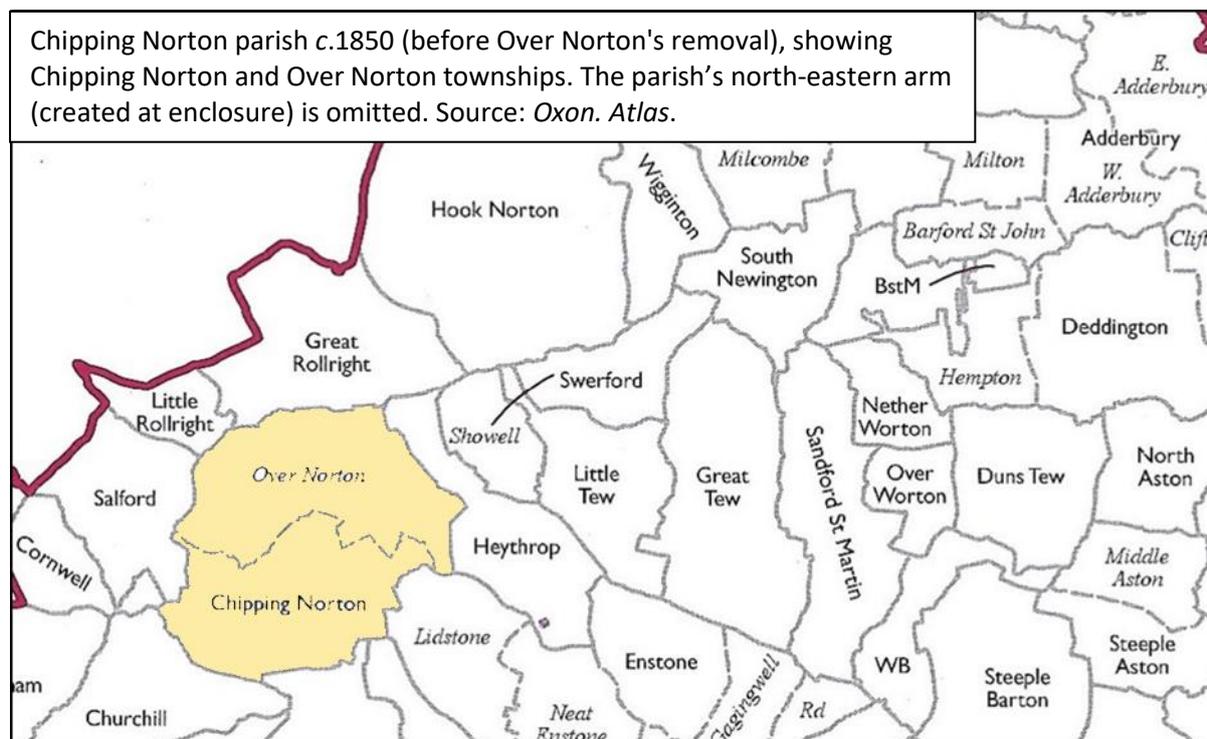**VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY**

Oxfordshire

VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

Chipping Norton

Boundaries, Landscape, Population

Parish and Borough Boundaries

Until the mid 19th century Chipping Norton parish comprised 4,874 a., divided almost equally between Chipping Norton borough or township in the south (2,455½ a.) and Over Norton township in the north (2,418½ a.). The latter, which is treated in a separate chapter, became an independent civil parish in 1866 under the Poor Law Amendment Act, leaving the rest as Chipping Norton civil parish and (until 1974) municipal borough.[1]

Chipping Norton parish *c.*1850 (before Over Norton's removal), showing Chipping Norton and Over Norton townships. The parish's north-eastern arm (created at enclosure) is omitted. Source: *Oxon. Atlas*.

The parish boundaries derived presumably from those of the 11th-century Chipping Norton manor, and were largely defined in the Middle Ages.[2] The ancient south-western boundary with Churchill followed a stretch of the Cornwell road, before branching north-west along field boundaries to a stream (the 'Common brook' or the Cleeves brook)[3] marking the

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[1] *OS Area Bk* (1881), still listing Chipping and Over Norton as 'townships'; Youngs, *Admin. Units*, I, 402; below (borough boundary).

[2] Below, landownership.

[3] Both names documented in the 17th cent.: BNC, BO522, no. 3; Bodl. MS dd Dawkins C3/IA6/7.

Cornwell boundary. Northwards it cut across the downs towards Salford, meeting the stream (a tributary of the river Evenlode) which fed Salford Mill, and which formed Over Norton's western and northern boundary with Salford, Little Rollright and Great Rollright. Beyond the Great Rollright road the boundary again followed field boundaries, turning south and then south-west to divide the parish from Heythrop, Enstone, Spelsbury, and Chadlington, and preserving in places the outline of open-field furlongs.[4] The division between Chipping Norton and Over Norton was also early, reflecting the emergence of separate field systems for Chipping and Over Norton. From the 16th century, Over Norton also administered its own poor relief.[5]

Significant adjustments at enclosure in 1770 included division of the formerly shared Over Norton common in the north-east, leaving Chipping Norton township with a straight-sided north-eastern arm adjoining Heythrop parish, and separating Over Norton's land at Hide Wood from the rest of the township.[6] The ill-defined western boundary with Salford was also rationalized, leaving 'Bartletts hamlet' (until then a detached part of Chipping Norton parish) wholly within Salford parish.[7] Later rationalizations began with the transfer of Over Norton's detached portion to Heythrop in 1884, leaving it with 2,345 a.,[8] and in 1932 Over Norton gained 76 a. from Chipping Norton, absorbing the latter's north-eastern arm. A further 72 a. was transferred from Heythrop in 1985, leaving Over Norton with 2,493 a. in 2021.[9] The boundaries of Chipping Norton itself were otherwise unaltered, although its borough status was abolished in 1974 when it became an ordinary civil parish of 2,380 acres.[10]

Borough Boundaries

Chipping Norton borough, as constituted in 1607, was conterminous with the wider township, encompassing not only the town itself but surrounding agricultural land, outlying farmsteads, and (from the 19th century) suburban housing. That probably reflected its origins as a medieval seignorial borough, which had no formal independence from the manor, and so (apparently) no formal independent boundaries. The corporation acquired the manor itself in

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[4] OS Map 6", Oxon. XIV (1885 edn); below, Over Norton; Gt Rollright; Little Rollright; Salford.
[5] Below, Over Norton, landownership; econ. hist.; local govt.
[6] BNC, B 14.1/24a, b (map of Cold Norton enclosures, 1759); Jefferys', *Oxon. Map* (1767); OHC, QSD/AF9, pp. 41−2 and map.
[7] Below, Salford, landscape; landownership.
[8] *Census*, 1891.
[9] *Census*, 1931 (45 a. transferred to Chipping Norton, 121 a. to Over Norton); West Oxon. (Parishes) Order 1985, with map; below, Over Norton, landscape etc. (boundaries).
[10] Below, local govt; *Census*, 2011; http://my.westoxon.gov.uk/ (accessed July 2021).

1667, thus combining its governance of the town with jurisdiction over the township's wider agricultural affairs.[11]

Medieval manorial surveys nevertheless distinguished between the burgesses (who held by burgage tenure) and the customary tenants living outside the town in the 'overland',[12] a distinction which presumably coincided in large part with the town's physical limits. The town's south-west fringe was called 'the West End' by 1265,[13] although on New Street the built-up area was extended a little further west from the 17th century, as suburban expansion there (begun in the late Middle Ages) gained momentum.[14] Cocks Townsend ('Coxe townsend') at the town's north-eastern end was mentioned in 1587,[15] while the 'green ditch at the townsend' (1608) may have run along the road in the south now called The Green (perhaps marking one side of an in-filled green).[16] Government proposals in 1835−8 to reduce the borough to a small area around the built-up core were abandoned, following a petition by the mayor and corporation and local inhabitants.[17]

Landscape

The ancient parish was characterised by an undulating Cotswold-edge landscape, cut by the steep-sided valley of the Cleeves stream (or Common brook) and other small side-valleys,[18] one of which carried the nascent River Glyme from its source east of the town.[19] The town itself lies along a steep hillside above the stream, falling from 210 m. in the east at Albion Street to 190 m. in Spring Street and 175 m. by the church. There and elsewhere were pockets of meadow, but until its enclosure in 1770 the parish mostly comprised open-field

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[11] *First Report of the Commissioners… into Municipal Corporations: Appendices Part 1* (Parl Papers 1835 (116), xxiii), pp. 167–72; below, landownership; local govt. By contrast, seignorial boroughs such as Witney, Woodstock, and Henley had distinct boundaries from an early date, confined largely to the urban area: *VCH Oxon.* XII, 326; XIV, 8−10; XVI, 21.

[12] TNA, C 133/104/21; ibid. SC 11/33. Cf. the term 'upland' for Witney manor's rural parts outside the borough (*VCH Oxon.* XIV, 112, 200, 235), although here the term may relate specifically to tenants in Over Norton.

[13] BNC, Chipping Norton 3 (1265); OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 178.46 (Ric. Tanty, 1531); 58/1/82 (Thos. Simkins, 1587). Meadow and pasture at 'the Cokkeshampine' were mentioned in 1302: TNA, C 133/104/21, m. 14.

[14] Below, devpt of town.

[15] OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 58/1/82 (Thos. Simkins, 1587).

[16] TNA, C 21/C34/12, deposns.

[17] *Municipal Corporation Boundaries (England and Wales): Oxfordshire* [1831−4]: copy in OHC, 352 (BOU); OHC, BOR1/15/A1/2.

[18] EDINA Digimap Ordnance Survey Service, http://edina.ac.uk/digimap (accessed Nov. 2021). The name Cleeves denotes a steep-sided slope or river valley: *PN Oxon.* II, 368, 435.
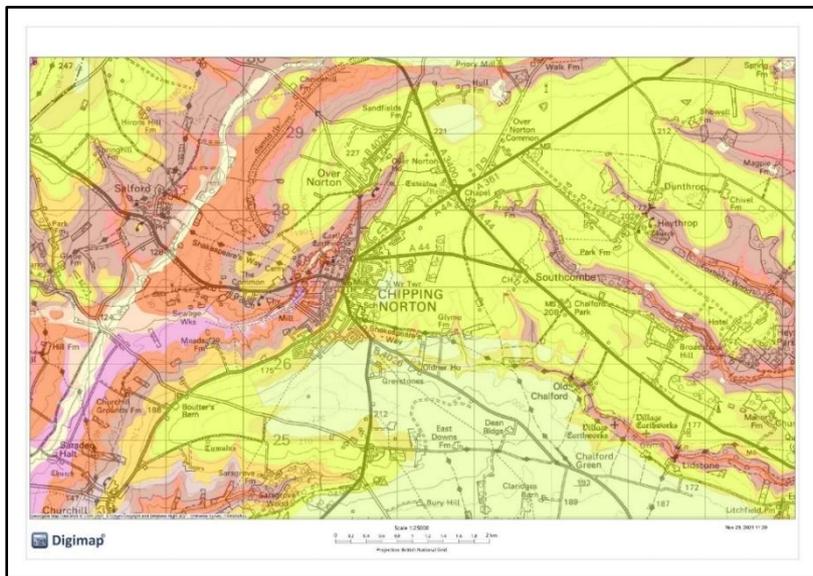
[19] Brasenose Archive, Chipping Norton 10 and 11 (pre-1230, contrary to Hurst, whose dates are unreliable), mentioning 'glimwelle' and 'glimbroc' in east field.

arable and pasture, including Over Norton common's *c*.300 a. of rough grazing in the north-east, and Chipping Norton's 125-a. 'great common' on the west.[20]

A view across the common from New Street towards the chimney of the former Bliss Mill (built in 1873).

Fields around the town lay on high ground overlying Chipping Norton Limestone, with older Mudstone, Marlstone, and Siltstone exposed in the Cleeves valley and smaller valleys.[21] Enclosure brought large-scale hedge laying and piecemeal tree plantation, including (in the early 19th-century) at Over Norton park,[22] although field layouts were much altered particularly in the mid to later 20th century.[23] Small roadside quarries were dug from an early date to extract stone for building and road repairs.[24]

Chipping Norton's geology, showing the prevailing Limestone (in yellow) and the valleys.
Copyright: EDINA, Digimap.

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[20] TNA, C 133/104/21, m. 14 (mentioning 71 a. meadow); below, econ. hist.; Over Norton, landscape. For ridge and furrow remains: *SMA* 21 (1991), 80; HER, PRN 29215.
[21] Geol. Surv. Map 1:50000 (solid and drift), sheet 218 (2007 edn).
[22] OHC, QSD/AF9; below, Over Norton, manors, landscape.
[23] OS Maps, various edns.
[24] Below, devpt of town; OHC, QSD/AF9, pp. 38−9.

Population

Fifty-three peasant households including 15 slaves were recorded on Norton manor in 1086, a few living possibly in Over Norton, but most probably in the stream valley near the church.[25] The borough was founded probably in the 12th century, but no figures are available until 1316 when Chipping Norton township had 68 taxpayers, excluding an unknown number of inhabitants below the tax threshold.[26] Thereafter its population remained fairly typical of the broad category of 'small towns', its local ranking varying according to its own and its neighbours changing economic fortunes.[27] In 1377 (after the Black Death) there were 304 taxpayers aged over 14,[28] suggesting a total population of *c.*600, and putting the town almost on a par with Burford (343 taxpayers), but well below Witney (434 taxpayers) and Banbury (531).[29] In 1524 there were 65 taxpayers, of whom 14 men were 'servants' and the rest probably mostly householders.[30] In 1548 there were said to be variously 540 or 800 'houseling people' (adults).[31] By 1662 160 houses in the township were assessed for hearth tax compared with 142 in Burford and over 170 in Witney.[32] In 1738 there were *c.*370 houses in the parish as a whole,[33] the vast majority in the town, which contained 'upwards of 300 houses' in 1769.[34]

By 1801 the borough population stood at 1,812, placing it below Witney (2,584) and Banbury (2,755), but above Burford (1,516). Numbers grew to 2,266 in 1821 and to 2,629 (in 521 inhabited houses) in 1841, although the latter figure included 94 inmates in the recently-built union workhouse, and no marked increase was then anticipated.[35] Modest growth took numbers to 3,641 (in 764 occupied houses) in 1871 and to 4,222 in 1891, but ten years later the population had fallen to 3,780 (similar to Witney and well ahead of Burford), and despite a slight recovery to 3,972 by 1911 it fell to 3,499 by 1931. Post-war growth fell well below that of some other Oxfordshire towns which were specifically targeted for development, the population rising from 3,878 in 1951 to 4,245 ten years later, then from 4,767 in 1971 to

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[25] DB, f. 160; below, devpt of town.
[26] TNA, E 179/161/8, rot. 3, m. 1.
[27] Below, urban econ. hist.
[28] *Poll Taxes 1377−81*, ed. Fenwick, II, 291.
[29] K.A. Rodwell ed., *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire: A Survey of the New County* (1975), 201 (table).
[30] TNA, E 179/161/198, rot. 2.
[31] *Chantry Cert.* 20, 45.
[32] TNA, E 179/255/3, mm. 25−6 (main entry, also mentioning 5 empty houses) and 87 (listing three poor small houses, one of which, belonging to Wm Gubbins, is also listed in the main entry); ibid. E 179/255/4, f. 239 and v. (Burford); *VCH Oxon.* XIV, 11.
[33] *Secker's Visit*, 44.
[34] *Case of the Bailiffs and Burgesses of Chipping Norton, in the County of Oxford, and Others, relating to the intended Inclosure of the Common Fields, &c. there* (1769).
[35] *Census*, 1801−41; *Report of the Commissioners… into Municipal Corporations*, p. 172.

5,351 (in 2,163 dwellings) in 1991. The population in 2011 stood at 6,337 in 2,815 dwellings, far below that of Witney (27,522) or of the 20th-century west Oxfordshire town of Carterton (15,769), although by then there were local government plans for further expansion.[36]

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[36] *Census*, 1851−2011; *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 158–9; below, devpt of town.