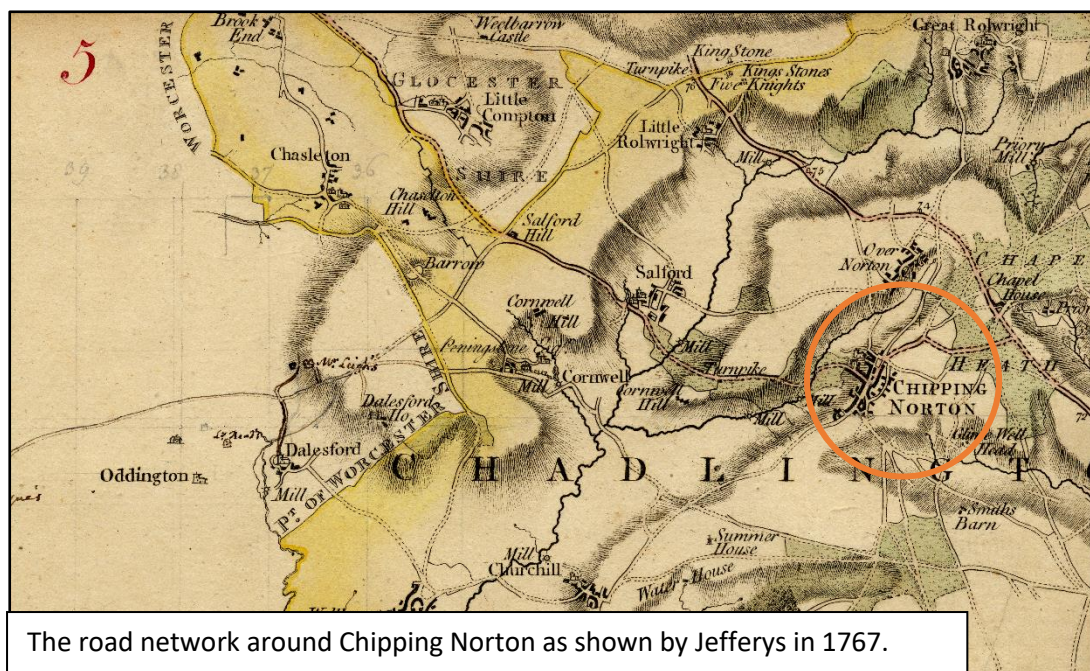




VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress
Chipping Norton
 Communications

Roads



The road network around Chipping Norton as shown by Jefferys in 1767.

Early Roads

Medieval Chipping Norton was well connected by long-distance and more local routes, some of which almost certainly predated the planned town.¹ To the west and north-west were roads to Stow-on-the-Wold, Evesham, and Worcester, which converged on Moreton-in-Marsh (Glos.). Of those the most important was probably the modern A44, which formed a route towards Salford across the Common, crossing the Common Brook by ‘oxen bridge’ at ‘Smith Mead’.² To the north and north-east were roads to Shipston-on-Stour and Stratford-upon-Avon (both Warws.), and Banbury. Other roads led southwards to Shipton-under-Wychwood (including the ‘wood way’)³ and on to Burford and the Thames crossing at

¹ Cliffe and Rosen, *Making*, 18–23; *Oxon. Atlas*, 50–1; Eddershaw, *Story*, 11, 13–14; Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797).

² OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 178.140 (Thos. Tanty, 1542), and cf. 178.131 (Isabel Tanty, 1538).

³ *Cat. Anct. Deeds*, II, C 2903 (n.d., ?13th cent.). For a northerly continuation of the ‘wood way’ below, Swerford (communic).

Lechlade, and south-eastwards to Charlbury,⁴ Woodstock, Oxford, and ultimately London.⁵ The 'high street' through West End going south-west towards Churchill was mentioned in 1265.⁶ Over time individual routes changed in significance or were diverted from their earlier course, while the town's establishment in the 12th century concentrated traffic along a smaller number of roads.

Until the 12th century the area later occupied by the town was probably crossed by long-distance roads or trackways,⁷ those running broadly north–south perhaps comprising parallel hillside tracks preserved in the lines of modern High Street and Albion Street, and in nearby field boundaries. North-westerly connections with the Anglo-Saxon salt distribution network, fanning out from Droitwich (Worcs.), are signalled by the place name Salford, a rural settlement just west of Chipping Norton.⁸ The 'salt ford' itself may have been accessed from the south-east along a hollow way north of Bliss Mill (preserved as a footpath), which crosses Chipping Norton Common to join the modern A44, and from the north-east by a putative lost continuation of the Banbury road (the A361). The latter would have passed close to the castle and church and joined up with the Worcester road at the point where that now bends south-east to become New Street.⁹

The laying out of the town and the probable re-routing of some roads was clearly intended to funnel traffic through the newly established High Street and market place, what is now Albion Street becoming a back lane.¹⁰ The Worcester and Moreton-in-Marsh road may have been diverted into the market along New Street not long after the town's creation (and certainly by the 13th century).¹¹ Despite the diversion, however, in the 17th century and probably earlier the preferred route from London to Worcester was the Islip–Glympton–Enstone–Little Compton road, which passed east and north of the town (joining the modern A44 at Over Kiddington and branching north-west along the now minor road past Choicehill Farm).¹² An alternative route westwards was from the far south of the

⁴ Charlbury bridge is mentioned in Brasenose Archive, Cold Norton 20.

⁵ Connections with Oxford, Woodstock, Evesham and Worcester are reflected in royal itineraries: C. Shenton, *The Itinerary of Edward III and his Household 1327–45* (List & Index Soc. 318, 2007), 32, 53, 91; J.L Kirby (ed.), *Calendar of Signet Letters of Henry IV and Henry V (1399–1422)* (1978), 79.

⁶ Brasenose Archive, Chipping Norton 3.

⁷ Minor routes mentioned in 13th-cent. deeds may have been of considerable antiquity, e.g. Brasenose Archive, Cold Norton 7 ('old way'); Magdalen Archive, Chipping Norton 3 ('le drove', in east field).

⁸ *VCH Oxon.* X, 127; Blair, *A-S Oxon.* 86; *Oxon. Atlas*, 28--9; below, Salford, landscape etc. (communic).s).

⁹ HER, PRN 13064; Rosen and Cliffe, *Making*, 19; suggestions from James Bond.

¹⁰ Rosen and Cliffe, *Making*, 18–19. Albion Street was actually called Back Lane until the late 19th cent.: below, devpt. of town.

¹¹ Below, devpt of the town.

¹² J. Ogilby, *Britannia* (1675), London–Aberystwyth road; Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); A. Rosevear, *Turnpike Roads to Banbury* (Banbury Historical Society, 31, 2010), 12; below, Over Norton, landscape etc. (communic).s).

town along West Street, joining the route called Old London Road from Enstone to Moreton-in-Marsh via Lidstone and Cornwell.¹³ The significance of that route is suggested by local 16th-century bequests towards mending the bridge at Cornwell.¹⁴

Turnpikes and Later Changes

Major through-routes were turnpiked in the 18th century, beginning with the Oxford--Woodstock--Little Rollright--Stratford-upon-Avon road in 1730, and followed in 1731 by the branch which passed through Chipping Norton town and New Street to Salford and Bourton-on-the-Hill as part of the Worcester road. The Burford--Banbury road through the town (the modern A361) was turnpiked in 1770, improving access southwards to the trunk road between London and Northleach (the modern A40).¹⁵ Toll gates were set up on the Common west of the town, on the Burford road to the south, on the London Road at Rock Hill, on the Banbury road north of Chapel House, and on the Enstone road near Chalford Farm.¹⁶ Improvements were made to the steep stretch of the Worcester road at Salford c.1791, but by 1821 the road was again in a 'very bad state' despite an increase in traffic.¹⁷ In 1860 and 1873 the town and parish agreed to pay the Stow and Moreton Turnpike Trust first £20 a year and later £70 to prevent the erection of a new toll bar between the town and the railway station, off the Worcester road beyond New Street.¹⁸ Disturnpiking was carried out in 1877-8.¹⁹

Several routes were realigned and widened at enclosure in 1770, notably the London, Banbury, and Over Norton roads, which were straightened as they left the north-east end of town at Horsefair. Other routes were suppressed, notably at Over Norton and Chapel Heath, including the route from Great Rollright to Chipping Norton through Over Norton Park. So too most of the (presumably medieval) 'wool way' which crossed the parish from Great Rollright to Chadlington via Walk Farm and Chapel House.²⁰ In 1825 the 1730 Stratford turnpike was locally supplemented (and partly superseded) by a new more easterly stretch of turnpike following the course of the modern A3400 to Long Compton.²¹

¹³ Bryant, *Oxon. Map* (1823).

¹⁴ e.g. OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 178.46; 178.131; 178.140; 179.3.

¹⁵ *Oxon. Atlas*, 102-3; Rosevear, *Turnpike Roads to Banbury*, 22-5.

¹⁶ Bryant, *Oxon. Map* (1824); OS Map, 1:63360, Sheet 45 (1833).

¹⁷ Rosevear, *Turnpike Roads to Banbury*, 77-8; OHC, BOR1/17/A2/1, 15 Nov. 1821.

¹⁸ OHC, BOR1/17/A2/1, 24 Jan. 1856, 21 June 1860; BOR1/5/A1/4, 13 Feb., 11 Apr., 9 and 21 May 1873; below (railway). Half of the £20 was recouped from the railway co.

¹⁹ Annual Turnpike Acts Continuance Acts: 34 & 35 Vic. c. 115; 40 & 41 Vic. c. lxxiv; 41 & 42 Vic. c. lxxii; *VCH Oxon.* XIX,

²⁰ Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797); OHC, Chipping Norton enclosure award and map; C. Kirtland, *Brief Memorials of... Chipping Norton* (1871), 25-6.

²¹ Long Compton to Woodstock Turnpike Act, 6 Geo. IV, c. clv; below, Gt Rollright, comms.

Later changes included the widening of New Street's lower end in 1863 to accommodate increased traffic to the railway station, built just west of the town in 1855,²² while a tenement at the market place's south-east corner was demolished in 1892 to create a street (later called Cattle Market) linking the High Street and Albion Street.²³ Finally and most significantly, in 1969 a row of houses in Market Place was removed to widen the narrow top end of New Street and prevent lorries mounting the pavement at the sharp turn into it. The demolition caused considerable local controversy, and increased heavy traffic through the town.²⁴

Coaching, Carriers, and Buses

A stagecoach service stopped in the town as early as 1654, and access for coaches, waggons and carts was mentioned in 1672.²⁵ By the late 18th and early 19th century the town was a main stop for daily London to Worcester coaches, the White Hart and Crown and Cushion inns supplying accommodation in 1823.²⁶ By 1839 Chipping Norton's inns serviced coaches to London (stopping at the White Hart and Royal Oak), Cheltenham (the White Hart), Northampton (the White Hart), and Worcester (the Crown), while Birmingham coaches stopped outside the town at Chapel House, which also received Cheltenham, London and Northampton coaches.²⁷ In addition three goods waggons were sent to London each week in the 1790s, and three to Birmingham,²⁸ the number increasing by the 1820s when waggons also went to Banbury, Blockley (formerly Worcs.), Leamington (Warws.), Stow (Glos.), and Oxford.²⁹

Coaching traffic declined after the arrival of the railway in 1855, but inn- and pub-based carrier services to Banbury and numerous surrounding villages continued.³⁰ By the early 1920s daily motor omnibuses served surrounding towns and villages from the market place, and at that time the Great Western Railway (GWR) had its own buses based at the

²² *Oxf. Jnl*, 14 Feb 1863; below this section (railway).

²³ *Oxf. Jnl*, 16 April 1892; 20 Aug. 1892; 16 Dec. 1893.

²⁴ OHC, CC3/4/C11/141 (incl. cuttings); *Hansard*, HL Debate 4 Feb. 1969, vol. 299 cc 110--30; Chipping Norton Local History Society, *Around Chipping Norton in Old Photographs, A Second Selection* (1989), 26–7 (before and after photos); E. Meades, *The History of Chipping Norton* (1984 edn), 135; Eddershaw, *Story*, 126; below, town bldgs.

²⁵ OHC, BOR1/13/1D/12.

²⁶ *Univ. Brit. Dir.* II (c.1793), 557; *Pigot's Oxon. Dir.* (1823–4). For the town's numerous 17th-cent. inns, below, urban econ. hist. (1500–1800).

²⁷ *Robson's Oxon. Dir.* (1839).

²⁸ *Univ. Brit. Dir.* II (c.1793), 557.

²⁹ *Pigot's Oxon. Dir.* (1823–4).

³⁰ e.g. *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1891 edn), listing 24 villages and (1911 edn), listing 12.

railway station.³¹ By 1930 GWR had dropped its road transport service in favour of part-ownership of the flourishing Midland Red and City of Oxford Motor Services, but co-ordination between bus and train services remained limited.³² Thereafter improved bus services were sometimes the result of petitioning by the town council (including a better connection to Kingham for the main line London train).³³ By mid-century bus services were said to be 'regular and efficient',³⁴ although links to Kingham and some other villages were apparently cut.

Services to London and to Cotswold towns and villages and Worcester were improved in 1982,³⁵ and the discontinued Witney bus restored after a complaint by the town council.³⁶ Subsequent privatisation brought cuts to less well-used services,³⁷ and by 1985 Banbury buses stopped too early for hospital visits.³⁸ Local initiatives included a 'Chippy Hopper' mini-bus service launched by a taxi firm in 1992,³⁹ and a long-desired link to Kingham station established in 1999 as a result of campaigning was extended in 2004 to include Cornwell and Salford.⁴⁰ By 2008 there were calls for a round-town service to cover areas not on main routes (later paid for by local donations),⁴¹ and ongoing threats to services were deepened by withdrawal of county council funding in 2016.⁴² The following year the Kingham service was reduced.⁴³ In 2021 the town was connected by regular buses to Oxford, Banbury and Stratford, while villages off the main routes had more limited commercial and community bus services.⁴⁴

Postal Services

In 1683 Chipping Norton was served by the official postal service which carried letters three times a week between London, Worcester and the West Midlands.⁴⁵ By the 1790s the post office (then in New Street) opened daily until 6 pm; the London mail coach arrived at 6 am,

³¹ W. Hemmings, P. Karau and C. Turner, *The Banbury & Cheltenham Railway*, 2 vols. (2004), I, 175 (1921 photo); A. Watkins and B. Morris, *Chipping Norton Railway* (2014), 23; *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (various edns).

³² S.C. Jenkins, B. Brown and N. Parkhouse, *The Banbury & Cheltenham Direct Railway* (2004), 229.

³³ OHC, BOR1/34/C/6.

³⁴ *The Borough of Chipping Norton, the Official Guide* (various edns).

³⁵ *Chipping Norton News* Dec. 1982.

³⁶ *Ibid.* Nov. 1982, Feb. 1983.

³⁷ *Ibid.* May, July and Sept. 1983. For underuse: e.g. Dec. 1985, Feb. 2002.

³⁸ *Ibid.* Apr. 1985.

³⁹ *Ibid.* Feb. 1992.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* Dec. 1999 and Nov. 2004.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Dec. 2008 and June 2016.

⁴² *Ibid.* May 2016.

⁴³ *Ibid.* July and Sept. 2017.

⁴⁴ Bus timetables, accessed online Sept. 2021.

⁴⁵ *London Gaz.* 6 Aug. 1683.

and returned from Worcester at 7 pm. Parcels were also delivered from the Black Boy.⁴⁶ Before 1817 the post office had moved to No. 17 High Street, where saddler James Prestidge was post master from 1808 (following the resignation of Mr Ailton); he was succeeded in 1834 by his son of the same name.⁴⁷ By 1839 the White Hart and Chapel House served as posting houses;⁴⁸ letters from London, Worcester, and some other regions arrived at 5 am, and those from the west, parts of the north, and Scotland at 9 pm.⁴⁹ In 1850 letters from London and some other areas arrived twice a day.⁵⁰

By 1852 the post office was also a money order office,⁵¹ by 1864 a post office savings bank, and by 1869 a government annuity and insurance office.⁵² In 1876 it was also a telegraph office, having recently moved to No. 7 Market Place opposite the town hall.⁵³ By the late 1890s there were letter boxes in Horse Fair, West End, Burford Road, and at the railway station.⁵⁴ A purpose-built Neo-Georgian post office and telephone exchange (with an all-night telephone kiosk accessible from outside) opened at 13 West Street in 1931,⁵⁵ but closed after 1988 when the office moved back to High Street, its location in 2021.⁵⁶



The former post office at No. 13 West Street.

⁴⁶ *Univ. Brit. Dir.* II (c.1793), 557.

⁴⁷ British Postal Museum, POST 58/39 (available online); *Oxf. Jnl* 19 Apr. 1817.

⁴⁸ *Robson's Oxon. Dir.* (1839).

⁴⁹ *Pigot's Oxon. Dir.* (1830).

⁵⁰ *Slater's Oxon. Dir.* (1850).

⁵¹ *Gardner's Dir Oxon.* (1852), 519.

⁵² *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1864 and 1869).

⁵³ *Harrod's Dir. Oxon.* (1876); OS Map 1:2,500, XIV.11 (1881 edn).

⁵⁴ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 20 July 1898.

⁵⁵ TNA, WORK 13/1275, WORK 30/6195–6196; Chipping Norton Museum, unidentified cutting; *The Builder* (1 Dec. 1933), 853, 862.

⁵⁶ OS Map 1:2,500, SP 3126 (1988 edn); J. Howells et al., *Images of England: Around Chipping Norton* (1999), 56.

Railway

In 1845 the Great Western Railway (GWR) sought parliamentary consent for two northern branches from its London to Bristol main line, one of which, the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway (OWWR), would pass through Moreton-in-Marsh and supply a new link with the industrial Black Country.⁵⁷ The bill was well supported by townsmen including the tweed mill owner William Bliss II, who hoped that OWWR would build a branch connection to the town.⁵⁸ However, the new line experienced significant delays due to disagreements between the GWR and OWWR and when finally completed in 1853 bypassed Chipping Norton.⁵⁹ By then alternative rail links bypassing the town had been proposed, and townsmen led by Bliss and the brewer William Hitchman determined to finance the branch themselves, reaching an agreement with contractor Samuel Morton Peto to build and co-finance a 4½-mile railway line to the town from a new junction at Kingham (then called Chipping Norton junction, but renamed Kingham junction in 1909).⁶⁰

The rapidly completed £26,000 single-track branch and its two-storey station building were formally opened on 10 August 1855, with a dinner in the town hall and other celebrations.⁶¹ Bliss's strong promotion of the line, built as an OWWR branch but with separate shares,⁶² reflected his need for a ready supply of coal for steam power which he first introduced to his premises in 1851. Chipping Norton's single-platform station was accordingly located close to his lower mill (then being rebuilt for steam-powered machinery), accessed via a lane, now Station Road, which left the Worcester road a little beyond the end of New Street. The gas works was moved here from Diston's Lane in 1856.⁶³ The branch was purchased by OWWR in 1859, and along with the rest of the line became part of the new West Midland Railway the following year (after a merger), being absorbed into the GWR in 1863.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ For background: *Hist. GWR*; J.H. Russell, *The Banbury and Cheltenham Railway 1887–1962* (1977), 3–10; Jenkins et al., *The Banbury & Cheltenham Direct Railway*, 12–20; Hemmings et al., *The Banbury & Cheltenham Railway*, esp. I, ch. 1–2.

⁵⁸ e.g. TNA, RAIL 558/80, 119, 121, 139, 146; Watkins and Morris, *Chipping Norton Railway* (2014), 14–16.

⁵⁹ *Hist. GWR*, ch. 10; Russell, *The Banbury and Cheltenham Railway*, 5.

⁶⁰ Russell, *The Banbury and Cheltenham Railway*, 5–6.

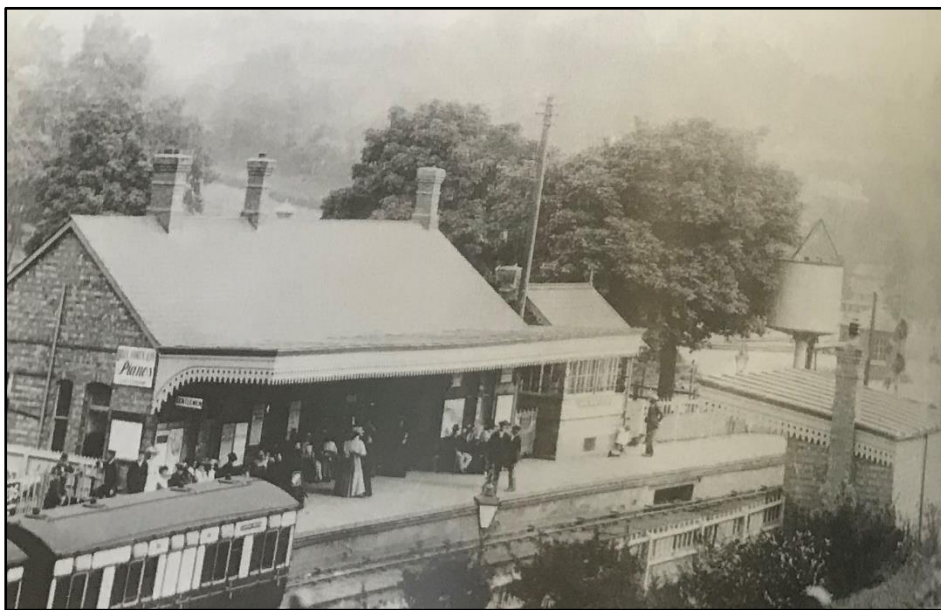
⁶¹ *Oxf. Jnl* 18 Aug. 1855; *Oxford University and City Herald* 18 Aug. 1855. For the station buildings, incl. later additions (almost all now demolished): e.g. Watkins and Morris, *Chipping Norton Railway* (2014), 21–7; Hemmings et al., *The Banbury & Cheltenham Railway*, II, 313–54; Mitchell and Smith, *Banbury to Cheltenham via Chipping Norton*.

⁶² TNA, RAIL 558/268–9 (OWWR agreement and contract with Peto and Betts, 1853–4); Act for Enabling the Oxford, Worcester, and Wolverhampton Railway Company to construct a Branch Line of Railway to the Town of Chipping Norton, Local and Personal Act, 17 & 18 Victoria, ccix (1854).

⁶³ Below, devpt of the town.

⁶⁴ *Oxon. Atlas*, 108; Russell, *The Banbury and Cheltenham Railway*, 7.

A locally supported branch line to Bourton-on-the-Water from Chipping Norton junction was added in 1862, and extended to Cheltenham in 1881.⁶⁵ At Chipping Norton itself a platform roof was supplied in 1865, and sidings for the Chipping Norton Gas Company were constructed in 1872.⁶⁶ The desirability of an extension to Banbury (and so to the north of England) was recognized by the town council in the 1860s,⁶⁷ and in 1887 the line was finally extended via Hook Norton and Kings Sutton (Northants.), where it joined the GWR's existing Oxford–Banbury line; the new stretch formed part of the Banbury and Cheltenham Direct Railway (taken over by the GWR in 1897). Chipping Norton station was moved a short distance north-west, the old site becoming a large goods yard with cattle pens, while north of the Worcester road the line passed through a new 600-m. tunnel.⁶⁸



An Edwardian photo of Chipping Norton railway station.

The railway supplied a significant new connection to the south-east and north-west. Initially the branch service comprised three trains a day, but that was increased to four in 1862 and by 1880 there were six passenger departures a day, increasing again from 1887.⁶⁹ People from the town and surrounding villages took the train for day trips to the seaside, and

⁶⁵ TNA, RAIL 558/526; Russell, *The Banbury and Cheltenham Railway*, 7–8.

⁶⁶ P. Karau, 'Lost Termini – Chipping Norton', *British Railway Journal* 6 (Winter 1985), 195; Jenkins et al., *The Banbury & Cheltenham Direct Railway*, 242–3; OHC, BOR1/28/L/3 (GWR agreement, 1883).

⁶⁷ OHC, BOR1/5/A1/3 (31 Jan. and 7, 10, and 31 Mar. 1865); BOR1/33/C/1–2 (1865 and 1873).

⁶⁸ OS Map 1,2500, Oxon. XIV.10 (1881 and later edns); Russell, *The Banbury and Cheltenham Railway*, 10; Hemmings et al., *The Banbury & Cheltenham Railway*, 1, ch. 5; below, Hook Norton, landscape.

⁶⁹ For timetables: V. Mitchell and K. Smith, *Banbury to Cheltenham via Chipping Norton* (2009), unpag., and Russell, *The Banbury and Cheltenham Railway*, 121–5; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 20 June 1883, reproduced in Watkins and Morris, *Chipping Norton Railway*, 31.

it was also used to transport members of the Heythrop hunt and their horses and dogs.⁷⁰ Goods were delivered from the station, GWR delivery horses being housed in a purpose-built stable block from 1904 to 1921 when the service was contracted out.⁷¹ Line improvements facilitated an express train to south Wales and Newcastle from 1906.⁷² The railway was also much used for transporting ironstone from the Hook Norton field to Wales, and by local farmers for distributing produce.⁷³ During the First World War troops mustered at the station (where Belgian refugees also arrived at the town), and in 1939 special services brought London evacuees to Chipping Norton.⁷⁴ The following year Oxford's town clerk appealed to people from surrounding districts including Chipping Norton to shop locally rather than cause congestion at Oxford station when returning home in the evenings.⁷⁵

Overall passenger numbers had been in decline since the late 1920s, however, with the railway facing strong competition from motor bus services. Passenger services were reduced, and after the war ironstone production and transport ceased.⁷⁶ The section of the line between Chipping Norton and Kings Sutton was closed to passengers in 1951, and that to Kingham in 1962 (notwithstanding opposition from the Chipping Norton trades council); freight services finished in 1964, despite the creation in 1948 of train-to-lorry loading bays at Chipping Norton station for local goods distribution.⁷⁷ Kingham itself survived as main line station, having long attracted passengers who travelled from Chipping Norton and elsewhere by road rather than on the Banbury and Cheltenham branch service.⁷⁸

⁷⁰ Watkins and Morris, *Chipping Norton Railway*, 28–36; Jenkins et al., *The Banbury & Cheltenham Direct Railway*, 224.

⁷¹ Watkins and Morris, *Chipping Norton Railway*, 23.

⁷² Mitchell and Smith, *Banbury to Cheltenham via Chipping Norton*.

⁷³ Below, Hook Norton and Swerford, econ. hist.

⁷⁴ Watkins and Morris, *Chipping Norton Railway*, 35–53.

⁷⁵ OHC, BOR1/34/C/6, letter of 30 Oct. 1940.

⁷⁶ Jenkins et al., *The Banbury & Cheltenham Direct Railway*, 108, 110, 255; Hemmings et al., *The Banbury & Cheltenham Railway*, I, 285; BOR1/34/C/6, Jan. 1937 GWR cut price ticket offer; below, Hook Norton, econ. hist.

⁷⁷ Watkins and Morris, *Chipping Norton Railway*, 59; Mitchell and Smith, *Banbury to Cheltenham via Chipping Norton*; *Banbury Guardian*, 11 Jan. 1962.

⁷⁸ Jenkins et al., *The Banbury & Cheltenham Direct Railway*, 229; above, this section.