



## VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

### OVER NORTON

#### Landownership

In the 11th century Over Norton formed part of Chipping Norton manor and parish.<sup>1</sup> A separate manor of Cold Norton was created after 1148 for the newly founded Cold Norton priory, and covered 348 a. in 1201; in 1513 (after the priory was dissolved through poverty) that passed to Brasenose College, Oxford, which retained it until the 19th century when it covered 382 a. focused on Priory Farm, mostly in the south-east.<sup>2</sup> The rest of Over Norton remained part of Chipping Norton manor until the 1680s, when landholdings belonging to the Busbys emerged as a separate Over Norton manor. In 1726 that was sold to James Dawkins, whose family retained it in the 21st century; in 1770 it covered 1,052 a., and in 1910 (following sales) 504 a., focused on the centre of the parish around Over Norton House.<sup>3</sup> Several other sizeable estates contributed to a fragmented pattern of landownership in the 20th century.<sup>4</sup>

#### Cold Norton Manor

Avelina (d. by 1158), daughter and heiress of Ernulf de Hesdin, Chipping Norton's Domesday lord, founded the Augustinian priory of Cold Norton between 1148 and 1158, endowing it with demesne tithes and lands from Chipping Norton manor. In 1201 the priory's estate, covering 348 a., was confirmed by Avelina's successors, and the priory retained it until its seizure by the Crown in 1496.<sup>5</sup> In 1507 the king granted the priory's estate to the royal free chapel of St Stephen, Westminster, and in 1513 the dean and canons sold it to William Smyth, bishop of Lincoln. He used it the same year to endow his foundation of Brasenose College, Oxford,<sup>6</sup> which in 1649–50 held 8½ yardlands in the open fields, the

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<sup>1</sup> Above, Chipping Norton, landownership.

<sup>2</sup> BNC, B14.1/24c and d; cf. *Sale Cat., Heythrop Park Est.* (1870): copies in OHC (incl. plan).

<sup>3</sup> Arthur, *Over Norton*, 123–5 and plates (1770 map in private possession); OHC, DV/X/80 (and maps).

<sup>4</sup> Below (other estates).

<sup>5</sup> *VCH Oxon.* II, 95–6; Dugdale, *Mon.* VI (1), 420–1; *Cal. Inq. p.m. Hen. VII*, III, pp. 536, 539; above, Chipping Norton, landownership. The priory secured its Over Norton tithes in 1376: below, relig. hist.

<sup>6</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1494–1509, 544; F. Madan (ed.), *Brasenose College Quatercentenary Monographs*, I (OHS 52, 1909), no. VI, 6–7; II.1 (OHS 53, 1909), no. IX, 57–9.

equivalent presumably of the 287 a. mapped in 1759.<sup>7</sup> At parliamentary enclosure in 1770 it was awarded 283 a. including 203 a. at Priory farm and 27 a. at Priory mill.<sup>8</sup> The college let its estate, by the 19th century to the Talbots, earls of Shrewsbury, who sublet it and in 1870 sold their neighbouring Heythrop estate to the railway engineer Thomas Brassey. He gave Heythrop that year to his son Albert Brassey (d. 1918),<sup>9</sup> to whom Brasenose College sold its Cold Norton estate in 1872.<sup>10</sup> Brassey added Hull farm in 1897, and in 1910 held 712 a. in the east of the parish.<sup>11</sup> In 1921–3 the Heythrop estate was broken up, however, Priory farm and Priory mill entering into separate ownership.<sup>12</sup>

### **Manor House (Priory Farm)**

The monastic buildings belonging to Cold Norton priory overlooked a stream running into the river Glyme, and were next to a spring feeding the monastery's fishponds.<sup>13</sup> Following the priory's dissolution a farmhouse constructed on the site may have been remodelled from an existing building, or built anew incorporating some possibly late medieval fabric.<sup>14</sup> In the 1540s it was probably occupied by Brasenose College's lessee John Pate,<sup>15</sup> and the college retained it until the estate's sale in 1872. In 1670 the farmhouse contained 4½ bays, and both it and an adjoining lean-to were slated; thatched farm buildings included a barn, two stables, a pigsty, and a carthouse, set around a walled rickyard and cow pen.<sup>16</sup> The former monastic buildings fell into ruin and were wholly removed by 1800,<sup>17</sup> though in 1729, when Samuel and Nathaniel Buck illustrated the farmhouse and its outbuildings, the gabled walls of a roofless stone structure (of unknown date) stood opposite the house on ground later occupied by a barn.<sup>18</sup> The Bucks showed the farmhouse with two ranges forming an L-plan, the north-west wing having probably been added in the 17th century when Thomas Chamberlain (as lessee) was assessed on four hearths.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> OHC, PAR64/6/L1/2; BNC, B14.1/24a and b; B14.1/40. In 1535 the manor was worth £36 6s. 7¼d. gross and £31 5s. 1¾d. net, including £22 6s. 11d. from tithes: *Valor Eccl.* II, 182, 271.

<sup>8</sup> OHC, encl. award.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Shrew/III/1–2; Shrew/V/1; BNC, B14.1/24d; *VCH Oxon.* XI, 134.

<sup>10</sup> Madan (ed.), *Brasenose College Monographs*, I, no. VI, 8.

<sup>11</sup> OHC, DV/X/80; for the 1897 purchase, below (Over Norton manor).

<sup>12</sup> *The Times*, 21 May 1921, 28 May 1923; OHC, RDC9/3/F6/2.

<sup>13</sup> OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.12 (1881 edn); HER, PRN 4862; *Gent. Mag.* n.s. 24 (1845), 589–90; BNC, Cold Norton 34 (lease of fishpond 1459).

<sup>14</sup> NHLE, no. 1052779; below.

<sup>15</sup> *Oxf. Ch. Ct Deposns 1542–50*, pp. 19–20; below, social hist. (1500–1800).

<sup>16</sup> BNC, B568.

<sup>17</sup> Ralph Churton, *The Lives of William Smyth Bishop of Lincoln ... Founders of Brasenose College* (1800), 308.

<sup>18</sup> OHC, POX0076789; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.12 (1881 edn); Arthur, *Over Norton*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> NHLE, no. 1052779; TNA, E 179/255/3, m. 41; *VCH Oxon.* XI, 138.



*Priory Farm in the early 20th century, showing the entrance front (right) and rear (left): Oxfordshire History Centre, POX0195294; POX0195304.*

The present house, although altered in the 19th to 21st centuries, remains broadly as the Bucks depicted it.<sup>20</sup> Two-storeyed with attics, and built of limestone rubble (partly squared and coursed) with ashlar dressings, it has a Stonesfield slate roof and four ashlar stacks with moulded caps and plinths. The three-bayed entrance front (facing south-west) has small two-light mullioned windows in the middle bay and similar larger windows to each side, although a drawing of the 1830s suggests that all are insertions. Also depicted was an external plain stone stair (since removed) to the wing's first floor at its gable end, suggesting non-domestic use.<sup>21</sup> Twentieth-century changes included addition of gabled stone porches to the front and rear, addition (by 1953) of a semi-circular porch in the angle between the ranges, and insertion of attic dormer windows in 1988,<sup>22</sup> while an inserted doorway in the south-east gable has been removed. Heavy chamfered cross-beams in the main range may be late medieval, while two Tudor-arched fireplaces have recessed spandrels and ogee mouldings.

### **Over Norton Manor**

Chipping Norton manor, which still included much of Over Norton, was bought in 1667 by the town's corporation, which in 1685 sold (for £83) the Over Norton and Bartletts (or Salford) parts to a group of nine local yeomen as a separate manor.<sup>23</sup> One of the purchasers was a

<sup>20</sup> Following based on: NHLE, no. 1052779; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 436; WODC online planning docs, 14/0348/P/LB; Knight Frank sale cat. (2015, incl. plans), accessed online June 2020; illust. in OHC, POX0195294; POX0195303–4; POX0068344; POX0076789.

<sup>21</sup> OHC, POX0068344.

<sup>22</sup> *Country Life*, 27 Aug. 1953; WODC online planning docs, W98/0103.

<sup>23</sup> OHC, BOR1/2/3D/2–3; Bodl. MS dd Dawkins C8/IB2/1; above, Chipping Norton, landownership; below, Salford, landownership.

member of the long-standing Busby family, who were resident in Over Norton by the 16th century and included regular buyers of land.<sup>24</sup> Nicholas Busby (d. 1694) and his son William (d. 1717) later owned shares in the lordship,<sup>25</sup> and in 1723 a court baron and view of frankpledge were held in William Busby's name,<sup>26</sup> although when James Dawkins bought Busby's estate in 1726 he nonetheless had to buy the lordship separately from several people claiming a share in it.<sup>27</sup> The estate (covering c.740 a.) was also heavily mortgaged, and its purchase involved several separate transactions.<sup>28</sup>

Dawkins (d. 1766), the son of a wealthy Jamaican slave owner, moved to Over Norton from Russley Park in Bishopstone (Wilts.).<sup>29</sup> His nephew and heir Henry (d. 1814), MP for Southampton, lived at Standlynch (Wilts.), but in 1796 added the neighbouring Salford estate to his Over Norton property.<sup>30</sup> He was followed by his sons James (d. 1843) and Henry (d. 1852), both also MPs, from whom the manor descended to Henry's son Henry (d. 1864), formerly MP for Boroughbridge (Yorks.), and grandson William Gregory Dawkins (d. 1914).<sup>31</sup> Family members were intermittently resident until 1897<sup>32</sup> when William sold around three fifths of the estate, while further sales after his death left only Over Norton House and park and the lordship, all held by trustees.<sup>33</sup>

In 1950, following the death of the house's and park's long-standing lessee Rose Daly, Clinton John Dawkins (d. 2010) returned to Over Norton and took over the running of the estate, he and his wife Jean (d. 2019) both farming there. They were succeeded by their son Richard Dawkins (the University of Oxford's former Professor for Public Understanding of Science) and their daughter Sarah Kettlewell, who retained joint ownership in 2021.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Below, social hist. (1500–1800).

<sup>25</sup> Bodl. MSS dd Dawkins C8/IB3/2; C8/IB3/5; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 8/1/32; TNA, PROB 11/556/199.

<sup>26</sup> Bodl. MS dd Dawkins C7/IA16/3. Wm was the elder Wm's son and heir.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. C8/IB2/3–4 (1–2 Oct. 1727).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. C6/IA14/6; C7/IA15/1; C7/IA15/3–5; C8/IB1/1–2 (mentioning 450 a. land, 150 a. furze and heath, 100 a. pasture, 30 a. meadow, and 10 a. wood).

<sup>29</sup> ODNB, s.v. Hen. Dawkins; *Hist. Parl.* s.v. Jas Dawkins; www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs, s.v. Jas Dawkins the elder.

<sup>30</sup> TNA, PROB 11/918/292; ODNB, s.v. Hen. Dawkins; below, Salford, landownership.

<sup>31</sup> ODNB, s.v. Hen. Dawkins; *Hist. Parl.* s.v. Jas Dawkins (1760–1843); Hen. Dawkins (1765–1852); Hen. Dawkins (1788–1864).

<sup>32</sup> e.g. OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 580, f. 67; TNA, HO 107/879; RG 9/911; RG 10/1457; RG 12/1179; below, social hist. (since 1800).

<sup>33</sup> *Evesham Standard & West Midland Observer*, 11 Sept. 1897; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 10 July 1918; Arthur, *Over Norton*, 58, 241–3; *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1915–39 edns). For the estate's new owners, below (other estates); econ. hist. (since 1770).

<sup>34</sup> Arthur, *Over Norton*, 270–1; *The Independent*, 11 Dec. 2010 (obit.); OCC Register of Landowner Statements, no. 1330 (accessed online). Clinton John Dawkins was great-grandson of Hen. Dawkins' (d. 1852) younger son Clinton.

### **Manor House (Over Norton House)**

In 1662 William Busby was taxed on eight hearths, the highest assessment in the township.<sup>35</sup> The Busbys' 'capital message' passed with the manor to James Dawkins,<sup>36</sup> who apparently replaced it with a mansion house in 'Georgian' or '18th-century' style.<sup>37</sup> An illustration of c.1864 shows a three-storeyed and seven-bayed main range set over a semi-basement, its central doorway approached by a balustraded flight of steps. To the right a two-bayed cross-wing projects slightly forward, while a separate building to the left is partly obscured by trees.<sup>38</sup> By 1770 the house lay in formal gardens on the village's northern edge,<sup>39</sup> and when let in the 1760s–80s it included a hall, three parlours, six bedrooms, a kitchen, and extensive servants' accommodation.<sup>40</sup>



*Over Norton House, as rebuilt in 1875-9: Oxfordshire History Centre, POX0195319.*

In the early 19th century the grounds were transformed by the creation of Over Norton park.<sup>41</sup> Work probably began c.1810 when the adjoining road was re-routed, and the park wall reportedly incorporates datestones of 1816–17.<sup>42</sup> Covering c.140 a., by 1881 the park included a ha-ha, several statues, fishponds, and a fountain amidst undulating wood-pasture.<sup>43</sup> In 1875–9 the mansion house itself was demolished and replaced by William Gregory Dawkins, possibly to his own designs. 'Rambling and irregular', and built of squared

<sup>35</sup> TNA, E 179/255/3, m. 41.

<sup>36</sup> Bodl. MSS dd Dawkins C7/IA15/1; C7/IA16/4.

<sup>37</sup> Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 436; R. Dawkins, *An Appetite for Wonder* (2013), 78.

<sup>38</sup> By Emma Dawkins (d. 1864), in private possession; reproduced in Arthur, *Over Norton*, plate between pp. 272–3; J.M.A. Cliffe, *The Husbandmen of Over Norton* (2011), 156.

<sup>39</sup> Arthur, *Over Norton*, 123 and plates (1770 map in private possession).

<sup>40</sup> *Oxf. Jnl*, 26 Dec. 1767, 12 July 1783.

<sup>41</sup> Bryant, *Oxon. Map* (1824); OS Map 1", sheet XLV (1833 edn); above, landscape etc. (landscape).

<sup>42</sup> *Oxf. Jnl*, 3 Mar. 1810; Arthur, *Over Norton*, 36–7. A map of 1810 (in private possession) showed the plan of the proposed park.

<sup>43</sup> OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.7 (1881 edn); *SMA* 21 (1991), 82.

coursed limestone with ashlar dressings, the house (two-storeyed throughout) features plain-tile hipped roofs, tall stone stacks towering over decorative gables rising above the eaves, and varied sash windows with unusual glazing, while a small square turret occupies the south-western corner. In 1950 it was converted into eight self-contained flats,<sup>44</sup> the Dawkins family occupying a converted lodge at the entrance to the park.<sup>45</sup>

Outbuildings include a late 17th-century stable block now converted to residential use, its long 16-bay main range lit by two-light mullioned windows in the upper storey, and below by larger cross-windows alternating with stable doors with overlights in moulded stone surrounds. Three segmental-arched openings were inserted possibly in the 18th century.<sup>46</sup> Buildings mentioned in the 1760s–80s included a dovecot, icehouse, and hothouse, the latter probably replaced in 1852–3 by a greenhouse later called the Orangery. In 1961 that was converted into a residence, which was heightened and extended in 2008 to create an octagonal plan: only the stone-built east front was preserved, its four large sash windows flanked by another in each of its angled sides.<sup>47</sup>

## Other Estates

Despite the presence of the two manors, landownership at Over Norton was fragmented in the 16th century and probably from the Middle Ages. Consolidation by the Busbys and Dawkinses meant that Over Norton manor covered 45 per cent of the township by 1770,<sup>48</sup> when other prominent estates included the Huckvale family's Choicehill farm (137 a. in the 1780s), a holding which originated in the 16th century with a property called Frenches.<sup>49</sup> Chipping Norton's rectory estate was awarded 219 a. in Over Norton at enclosure in 1770,<sup>50</sup> while Thomas Kerby (d. 1790), allotted 52 a., ran the Shakespeare's Head inn at Chapel House,<sup>51</sup> and a 50-a. common was awarded to the poor.<sup>52</sup> The 170-a. Witts farm, owned by John Colbourn (d. 1840), was sold to the Dawkinses in 1861.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 436; J. Cliffe, *An Architectural Record of the Buildings in the Parish of Over Norton, Oxfordshire* (1999), 2; Arthur, *Over Norton*, 270–1; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIV.7 (1881 edn); OHC, POX0195316–19; cf. Google Earth images (accessed Nov. 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Arthur, *Over Norton*, 270; Dawkins, *Appetite for Wonder*, 80.

<sup>46</sup> Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 436; NHLE, no. 1300704; Cliffe, *Architectural Record*, 2; WODC online planning docs, 12/1236/P/FP; OHC, POX0412017.

<sup>47</sup> *Oxf. Jnl*, 26 Dec. 1767, 12 July 1783; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 436; Cliffe, *Architectural Record*, 3; Arthur, *Over Norton*, 85, 93; WODC online planning docs, 08/0890/P/FP.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur, *Over Norton*, 123–5 and plates (1770 map in private possession); for land purchases, Bodl. MSS dd Dawkins, *passim*.

<sup>49</sup> OHC, P20/1D/1–10 (Frenches); P20/4D/3 (survey).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* encl. award; above, Chipping Norton, landownership.

<sup>51</sup> OHC, encl. award; *Oxf. Jnl*, 4 June 1791 (sale notice).

<sup>52</sup> Below, social hist. (welfare).

<sup>53</sup> TNA, PROB 11/1929/36; *ibid.* TS 21/1479; *Oxf. Jnl*, 16 May 1835; Bodl. MSS dd Dawkins C19/IB16/43–9.

By 1910 the principal landowners apart from the Dawkinses and Brasseys included Wilmot P. Walford, a beneficiary of the 1897 break-up of Over Norton manor, whose 515-a. estate in the west of the parish was sold in 1925. Mary Ann Rainbow of Oddington (Glos.) owned Choicehill farm (203 a.), while Stephen Matthews was owner of Halt or Lime Kiln farm (70 a.) on the Great Rollright border. Eight other estates covered 4–34 a. each, and 109 a. in all.<sup>54</sup> Further sales followed, perpetuating the parish's earlier fragmented landownership.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> OHC, DV/X/80; *Banbury Guardian*, 17 Sept. 1925 (Walford est. sale notice).

<sup>55</sup> Arthur, *Over Norton*, 246–70 and map at rear showing landownership in 2000.