



VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

Chipping Norton

Social History III: Social Welfare

Late medieval social provision included an almshouse and distributions to the poor by the Holy Trinity guild and others, and from the mid 16th century numerous endowed charities were established by Chipping Norton's better-off inhabitants, variously administered by the vicar, churchwardens, and overseers, or after 1607 by the borough corporation. Amongst them were Henry Cornish's new (and still surviving) almshouse foundation of 1640, while others provided bread, fuel, clothing, or money. Parish poor rates were administered by the vestry, providing the vast bulk of the town's poor relief by the 18th century, and in 1740 a parish workhouse was opened on Church Street; that was replaced in 1836 by a much larger Union workhouse off Banbury Road, reorganized in 1948 as a hospital for the mentally handicapped. Additional help came from voluntary friendly societies, which played a significant role from the 18th century to the early 20th. Total public expenditure exceeded £1,000 by the early 1800s, although Chipping Norton's rates and poor costs were never especially high compared with some neighbouring towns.

Almshouses and Charitable Housing

The Guild of the Holy Trinity (established in 1450) ran an almshouse accommodating six people by 1535, sited next to the guild's grammar school in Church Street.¹ Like the school it survived the guild's dissolution in 1548, and continued to attract occasional small bequests, including some from Over Norton and one of 6s. 8d. (in 1585) from the rector of Great Rollright.² Edmund Hopkins (d. 1588) of Over Norton left bread for 12 almspeople then living there, and Thomas Carrick (d. 1590) endowed a charity to provide wood at Christmas,³ while other income included 20s. a year from a charitable bequest of Edmund Hutchins (d. 1602) of Dumbleton (Glos.), and 6s. annual rent from a house in Chipping Norton.⁴ Three almswomen were buried in 1604, and almsmen in 1625, 1628, and 1636.⁵ Nothing further is known of how the almshouse was funded or administered after 1548, though like the

¹ *Valor Eccl.* II, 180; for location, TNA, C 93/4/1; OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 97. For guild, below, relig. hist. (Middle Ages: chantries).

² OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 186.6; 153/3/24; 49/1/5.

³ *Ibid.* 131/4/34; 10/5/35.

⁴ TNA, C 93/4/1. For later bequests (in 1627), *ibid.* PROB 11/151/508; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 153/4/3.

⁵ OHC, par. reg. transcript.

guildhall and grammar school it was possibly vested in a group of town feoffees, the guildhall buildings providing additional pauper accommodation after their recovery for the town in 1562.⁶ Despite the foundation of the new Cornish almshouses in 1640 (below), the earlier almshouse remained in use in 1685, when it was called the 'old almshouses' and contained six rooms.⁷ It may have continued in 1738 when the vicar reported two or three almshouses in the town, the unendowed ones administered by the overseers,⁸ but if so it apparently closed soon after.

The leading townsman Henry Cornish built an entirely separate row of eight almshouses for poor widows in Church Street in 1640, the occupants (who were to live there rent-free) to be chosen by the corporation, of which Cornish was a founder member. By his will (dated 1650) he left 20s. a year for the building's maintenance, and 2s. a week to provide 3d.-worth of bread for each almswoman on Mondays.⁹ Later bequests augmented the endowment, the weaver Richard Miller (d. 1658 or 1659), of Little Wolford (Warws.), bequeathing the surplus rent from $\frac{1}{4}$ yardland in Sibford Gower after payment of a Chipping Norton bread charity worth 10s. a year, while the London bricklayer Thomas Fowler (d. 1672) vested lands in the Bricklayers' Company to provide £2 a year for the almshouse, and



The Henry Cornish almshouses on Church Street, built in 1640

a further £2 for apprenticeships.¹⁰ In 1767 William Busby gave the corporation (which continued to choose tenants) a £100 endowment to supply the almswomen with coal every year, while Groves Wheeler (d. 1784), Michael Day of Woodstock (d. 1798), and Martha

⁶ TNA, C 93/4/1; above, local govt (town property).

⁷ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 97.

⁸ *Secker's Visit.* 44--5; the third was presumably the Cock's Town's End almshouse (below).

⁹ TNA, PROB 11/214/314; Eddershaw, *Story*, 59--60; Rosen and Cliffe, *Making*, 54--6, 192--5; above, town bldgs.

¹⁰ TNA, PROB 11/287/468; PROB 11/340/492; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 259, 268.

Wallington and Sukey West (both d. 1812) made additional financial bequests.¹¹ In 1762 a woman was allowed to succeed her deceased mother-in-law in the almshouse, although tenants could be expelled for bad behaviour, and rival nominations sometimes required a vote, while in 1869 a vacancy arose after the occupant was moved to the Union workhouse.¹² In 1901 seven of the eight cottages were occupied by widows aged 68--80 (one of them with a live-in nurse),¹³ but after the Second World War the buildings fell into disrepair, and in 1957 they were refurbished by the borough council, which converted them into four larger houses. Responsibility passed in 1989 to the newly established Chipping Norton Welfare Charities, which administered them through the linked Chipping Norton Almshouse Charity.¹⁴

A third almshouse comprised four small cottages at Cock's Town's End or Horse Fair, which were presumably the four 'newly erected' almshouses mentioned in 1685. In the 1820s (when their origin was unknown) they were maintained by the overseers but administered by the corporation, which chose the occupiers and in 1773 granted them joint use of a water pump in a neighbouring yard.¹⁵ In 1871 the cottages were said to have been granted 'time out of mind' to 'old decayed tradesmen and others for life', but were then in poor repair, and were exchanged for a new row of four across the road, built by John Ward of Hill Lodge the previous year.¹⁶ The corporation continued to maintain them and to vet applicants, who paid a nominal rent and were to keep them in good repair.¹⁷ They were administered from 1989 by Chipping Norton Welfare Charities, which in 2022 let them to local people at subsidized rents.¹⁸

From the 19th century the Cock's Town's End cottages were frequently associated (apparently in error) with the quite distinct King's Hold or King's Holt cottages. Those originated as a scattered group of 12 dwellings bequeathed by Henry Cornish to his relative Thomas Diston, with the stipulation that they should be let at unchanging 17th-century rents to 'persons of the poorer sort' who had been resident for at least seven years, and who were

¹¹ TNA, PROB 11/1123/63; PROB 11/1317/79; PROB 11/1534/296; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 221.20; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 259--60. For corporation admissions, OHC, BOR1/5/A1/1, ff. 9, 29 etc.

¹² OHC, BOR1/5/A1/1, f. 150v.; BOR1/5/A1/3, 10 May 1842, 10 Feb. 1865; BOR1/5/A1/4, 28 Jan. 1868, 12 Feb. 1869.

¹³ TNA, RG 12/1179.

¹⁴ *Birmingham Post*, 9 May 1957; Rosen and Cliffe, *Making*, 192--5; *Chipping Norton News*, no. 426 (Apr. 2020), 24; Char. Com. website (Feb. 2022), no. 238991.

¹⁵ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. c 141, p. 528; *ibid.* BOR1/5/A1/1, ff. 110, 173; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 271.

¹⁶ OHC, BOR1/24/4A/5 (mistakenly associating them with the separate King's Hold cottages discussed below); BOR1/5/A1/4, 9 Aug., 9 Nov. 1867, 9 Nov. 1868, 9 Nov. 1869, Aug. 1870; Rosen and Cliffe, *Making*, 119.

¹⁷ OHC, BOR1/24/4A/6--7 ('King's Hold house at Horse Fair'); *Oxon. Weekly News*, 14 Oct. 1874, 19 June 1889, 14 Nov. 1900, 9 June 1915.

¹⁸ Rosen and Cliffe, *Making*, 119; Char. Com. website (Feb. 2022), no. 238991.

to be chosen by the corporation. Though they remained in private ownership the corporation continued to appoint the tenants, who were to maintain the properties at their own expense and give sureties for both the rent and repairs.¹⁹ By the 1820s the corporation had lost its rights over six of the cottages, but still nominated to the remaining six, of which one was in West Street, two in Tite End or Spring Street, and three in New Street. By the 1840s, however, two of the New Street cottages were unfit for habitation and were rebuilt at their owners' expense, the corporation's subsequent attempts to re-assert its rights prompting local complaints and a Charity Commission enquiry in 1857.²⁰ One of the Spring Street cottages was still let by the corporation at the ancient rent in the 1890s--1920s, with the tenant liable for basic upkeep;²¹ most later references to King's Hold premises seem, however, to have related solely to the rebuilt Cock's Town's End cottages.²²



The Cock's Town's End cottages at Horsefair, as rebuilt by John Ward in 1870 (datestone JW 1870).

Parish Charities

Medieval to c.1700 Late medieval charities suppressed at the Reformation included an annual distribution of £1 2s. 9½*d.* by the Holy Trinity guild, and another £1 1s. derived from land in Burdrop (in Sibford Gower), which additionally supported an obit.²³ A clothing charity which Gloucester abbey charged on lessees of the rectory estate in 1531 was stopped by Michael Chadwell in the 1580s, but had resumed by 1685 when it provided six coats on St

¹⁹ TNA, PROB 11/214/314 (Cornish's will); *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 260--1; OHC, BOR1/5/A1/1, f. 27; BOR1/5/A1/3, 22 Feb. 1836, 22 Mar. 1842; for owners, e.g. TNA, PROB 11/456/317 (mentioning 15 cottages probably in error); PROB 11/520/101; PROB 11/1332/130; OHC, CH/CN/IV/3; *Oxf. Jnl*, 22 Aug 1857. The name King's Hold derived from their former ownership by the Crown: above, landownership (guild and chantry estates); cf. Rosen and Cliffe, *Making*, 49, 122, 176.

²⁰ *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 261; *Oxf. Jnl*, 22 Aug., 12 Sept. 1857; OHC, BOR1/5/A1/3, 8 Apr. 1856; *ibid.* CH/CN/IV/6--7.

²¹ Rosen and Cliffe, *Making*, 176; OHC, BOR1/24/4A/6; cf. *Banbury Advertiser*, 14 Sept. 1922 (roof repairs by corporation).

²² Above. For a New St cottage occupied by parish paupers in 1824: *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 265; above, local govt (par. property).

²³ *Chant. Cert.* 20, 39.

Thomas's Day, and continued into the 18th century.²⁴ More casual post-Reformation almsgiving is reflected in a poor men's box mentioned in 1572,²⁵ and one-off bequests to the poor were noted in several early 16th-century wills, usually in money but also in bread, herrings, or wood.²⁶ Sums were generally small (up to 40s.), although larger amounts included £13 6s. 8d. left to his native town by the London grocer Edmund Nicholson (d. 1607).²⁷ At a rather higher social level, two sisters deprived of their inheritance claimed in 1624 (probably with much exaggeration) that they would have starved had not 'well-disposed people' left 'alms at their door'.²⁸

From the mid 16th century increasing numbers of endowed charities were established by prosperous inhabitants or others with town connections, some for distribution in bread, fuel, or clothing, or to support apprenticeships or short-term loans to poor tradesmen. Amongst the earliest, Jane Ansley (d. 1590) left £20 to be lent in equal portions to 10 poor tradesmen for three-year terms, the recipients giving 12d. in the pound each year to the poor, while the mercer Thomas Carrick (d. 1590) left £4 to be lent at 8s. annual interest, half of which provided for the almshouse's Christmas fuel, and half for the town's most aged and needy poor.²⁹ Henry Cornish (d. 1650) supplemented his almshouse foundation with a £20 endowment to set the poor to work, an annual distribution of 4d. each to 40 poor widows, and a clothing charity providing coats and gowns to two poor men and two poor women on All Saints' Day (1 November),³⁰ while before 1655 the London citizen John Smart left £66 13s. 4d. as a fund for apprenticing poor children (producing £6 13s. 4d. a year).³¹ Edmund Vade (d. 1677) endowed a £10 bread charity for 48 poor churchgoers at Whitsun, and the maltster and town clerk William Thomas (d. 1674) left £5 to benefit 18 poor widows (later reduced to 12) in August.³² Other money bequests included £20 from Sir John Walter (d. 1630) of Sarsden, and £5 each from the yeoman Robert Rose (d. 1633), the gentleman Thomas Berry (d. 1639), and the woollen-draper Thomas Fawler (d. 1647), while Thomas Hyatt (d. 1634) left £20 from property at Stow-on-the-Wold (Glos.).³³ Richard

²⁴ TNA, C 93/4/1; OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 97; *ibid.* BOR1/5/A1/1, ff. 20, 25 ('private charity'). Not listed in *12th Rep. Com. Char.*

²⁵ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 185.134.

²⁶ e.g. TNA, PROB 11/24/251; OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 178.26; 178.118; 179.3; 179.88; 179.90; 179.137; 179.264; 179.314 (all pre-1550).

²⁷ TNA, PROB 11/110/17; *ibid.* C 93/4/1.

²⁸ *Ibid.* C 3/385/10.

²⁹ *Ibid.* C 93/4/1; *ibid.* PROB 11/76/181; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 10/5/35.

³⁰ TNA, PROB 11/214/314; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 261--2; above (almshos). For distributions, e.g. OHC, BOR1/5/A1/1, ff. 9, 14, 25 etc.

³¹ OHC, BOR1/2/2D/1; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 263.

³² OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 155/4/12; 66/4/10; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 263--4; above, urban econ. (1500-1800).

³³ TNA, PROB 11/214/314; PROB 11/158/448; PROB 11/164/87; PROB 11/166/334; OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 115/3/9; 23/1/4; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 97; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 262.

Hutchins (d. 1644) left £60, half the interest to support the schoolmaster and the other half the poor.³⁴

The charities were variously administered by the churchwardens and overseers or (increasingly after 1607) by the corporation,³⁵ with many of them combined into a 'town poor stock' which in 1590 was overseen by unnamed 'governors', presumably leading townsmen.³⁶ By 1667 the stock amounted to £331 13s. 4d. made up of 22 separate bequests, which was invested at 6 per cent interest and used as intended. That year, however, it was put towards the corporation's purchase of the manor, leaving a shortfall in annual charitable payments and prompting an enquiry by the charity commissioners in 1686, when the corporation owed £12 11s. interest from the poor stock, and a further £11 2s. 4d. from town rents or rent-charges meant for the poor, including £7 6s. 8d. from a lease of part of the guildhall. To guarantee future payments the commissioners ordered the corporation to pay the overseers a total of £19 17s. 10d. a year from its cattle tolls, stallage, and 'sheepgrounds', which were vested in trustees; of that, £6 13s. 10d. represented the Smart, Hutchins, Wade, and Thomas charities.³⁷

Several other charities (not mentioned in 1686) may already have been lost. Margaret Abirrye (d. 1550 or 1551) left 6s. 8d. to be distributed to the poor every Good Friday, charged on a house later identified as the Crown and Cushion inn, while Walter Calcott (d. 1582) of Williamscoth (in Wardington), a merchant of the staple, left 13s. 4d. a year from his estate to 40 Chipping Norton poor.³⁸ William Busby (d. 1604) of Over Norton left poor inhabitants of Church Street and Tite End 3s. 4d. every Good Friday, and Edmund Hutchins (d. 1602) of Dumbleton added £10 to his sister Jane Ansley's charity, along with endowments for fuel, the schoolmaster, and the poor. Margaret Everett (d. 1609) left £2 to be lent to poor young townspeople for three-year terms, each paying 18d. in the pound.³⁹ Apparently also lost were £2 added to the poor's stock by the gentleman Richard Elsing (d. 1659), and annual distributions from land left by Alice Collett (d. 1657) of Stow-on-the-Wold and the widow Elizabeth Wing (d. 1683).⁴⁰ Conversely, there were some new 17th-century bequests. Bread charities were established by the butcher Thomas Brayne (d. 1694), by Humphrey Hall (d. 1695) of Great Rollright, and by the mercer Henry Fawler (d. 1699),⁴¹

³⁴ *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 263; above (educ.). Cf. OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. c 141, p. 522 (reporting £45 held by the corporation).

³⁵ Above, local govt.

³⁶ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 10/5/35.

³⁷ *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 262--4; OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 40, f. 97; *ibid.* BOR1/13/2D/1--2; above, local govt (borough property).

³⁸ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 185.35; TNA, PROB 11/64/279; *ibid.* C 93/4/1 (where Abirrye was probably the widow Berry); *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 271 (calling it Mrs Weston's charity).

³⁹ TNA, PROB 11/104/493; PROB 11/104/622; PROB 11/114/130; *ibid.* C 93/4/1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* PROB 11/303/9; PROB 11/271/305; PROB 11/375/140; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 268, 271.

⁴¹ TNA, PROB 11/426/226; PROB 11/425/287; PROB 11/452/253; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 265--7.

while the linen-draper John Stone (d. 1684) left £50 to maintain one poor tradesman a year. A £30 bequest by the London pewterer Thomas Leach (d. 1693) provided three such tradesmen with 10s. a year each, although £40 intended to fund bread and shoe distributions was lost.⁴² Besides administering many such charities, in times of scarcity the corporation sometimes also intervened directly to help ensure that grain remained available,⁴³ although even so food shortages in 1693 provoked disorder.⁴⁴

Since 1700 Several additional eleemosynary charities were established during the 18th century, four of them providing bread. Of those, £10 left by the Bristol merchant Arthur Grant (d. 1702) was appropriated in 1744 to help set up a pest house, although a trustee arrangement ensured that the vicar and churchwardens continued to distribute 10s.-worth of bread to churchgoers on Christmas day.⁴⁵ John Crisp (d. 1701) arranged for bread worth 52s. a year to be distributed in church on Sundays with priority to widows and orphans living in New Street, along with an annual provision of coats worth 48s., while Thomas West (d. 1796) established a further bread charity, with the surplus paid to three widows.⁴⁶ Humphrey Hyatt (d. 1704) added £4 to the poor's stock, while Edward Redrobe (vicar 1683--1721) and Martha Nedham (d. 1740) established clothing charities, and in 1751 Richard Groves doubled his grandfather John Stone's endowment to maintain poor tradesmen.⁴⁷ An inscribed summary of the town's charities in the parish church (since removed) was paid for by a £20 bequest from the scrivener and sometime town clerk John Wakefield.⁴⁸ Several charities (including one bequeathed by the glover Thomas Hough in 1705) exclusively benefited the town's Quakers,⁴⁹ testators' stipulations and church distributions effectively excluding Nonconformists from much of the town's charitable provision.

Charities continued to be administered by the corporation or by the vicar, churchwardens, and overseers, often acting in tandem. By the 1820s, however, the corporation's management was attracting criticism, several long-established payments having been lost, reduced, or misapplied, and its borough and charitable income becoming

⁴² TNA, PROB 11/379/200; PROB 11/414/345; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 268--9.

⁴³ *Cal. SP Dom.* 1629--31, 402, 416, 491, 495, 499; TNA, SP 16/184/17.

⁴⁴ *Wood's Life*, III, 434; *Cal. SP Dom.* 1693, 397; above (town and soc. 1540--1700).

⁴⁵ TNA, PROB 11/464/155; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 267--8; OHC, PAR64/2/A1/1, s.a. 1744, 1752.

⁴⁶ TNA, PROB 11/462/298; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 265--7. Crisp's was augmented by his son John (d. 1708), and another bread charity was established by John Paty (d. 1720): TNA, PROB 11/500/387; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 145/2/38.

⁴⁷ TNA, PROB 11/474/493; PROB 11/579/106; PROB 11/704/91; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 268--71; *Char. Digest*, 122--3. For Redrobe's, see also OHC, PAR64/13/F1/1 (distributions); below (poor relief).

⁴⁸ TNA, PROB 11/1091/111; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 566, f. 77v.; Brewer, *Oxon.* 495; Eddershaw, *Story*, 102. For a separate table of West charities, TNA, PROB 11/1534/296.

⁴⁹ TNA, PROB 11/480/242 (also benefiting Banbury and Witney Quakers); PROB 11/788/121; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 128/3/7; below, relig. hist. (Nonconf. 1660--1800).

confused, so that in 1828, while it paid out over £45 in charitable relief, charitable endowments raised only £16 6s. 2d., forcing it to make up the difference from corporation funds.⁵⁰ Nonetheless charitable bequests continued. Sukey West (d. 1812) augmented Thomas Leach's existing provision for poor tradesmen, although her further endowments of £185 8s. were lost reportedly through the fraud of the town clerk.⁵¹ Coal charities were established by the innkeeper John Hood (d. 1854), by George Anstice (d. 1866), and by Charles Phillips (d. 1889) of Banbury,⁵² while Maria Kingdon (d. 1874) of Reading left £300 to provide blankets, and Harriet Hitchman (d. 1902) £500 for the same purpose.⁵³ By 1870 around half the town's total charitable income of £98 was distributed in kind, with over a fifth paid to the almshouses and most of the rest devoted to education and apprenticeships.⁵⁴

The first poor's allotments were established north-east of the town at Southcombe, where a 20-a. poor's ground was awarded to the corporation at enclosure in 1770 in lieu of the poor's right to the furze there.⁵⁵ In 1848 that was divided into 81 mostly ¼-a. plots each let at 5s. a year, falling to 2s. 6d. by c.1900;⁵⁶ even so many were then untenanted, and in 1905 Albert Brassey (of Heythrop Park) agreed to rent the whole of the Southcombe allotments at £20 a year, the proceeds (as earlier) being added to the town's coal fund.⁵⁷ Allotments elsewhere in the town proved more popular. In 1892 William Fowler, then living in Australia, paid for the corporation's purchase of 23½ a. of allotments off Burford Road, also let at 5s. per ¼-a. plot,⁵⁸ while from 1889 another 43 a. off Burford Road was rented as allotments from the vicar of Hailey.⁵⁹ The tenants (backed by William Bliss) subsequently pressed for continuation of the arrangement, and both sets of allotments remained well cultivated, despite occasional pressure for rent reductions, and concerns in 1922 that the Fowler allotments were being monopolized by ex-servicemen.⁶⁰

A charity commission enquiry in 1857 found most charities well run,⁶¹ and though another in 1912 recommended a new scheme of administration, that was rejected by the

⁵⁰ *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 264--9; *1st Rep. Commissioners ... into Municipal Corpns: App. pt 1* (Parl. Papers 1835 (116), xxiii), pp. 171--2.

⁵¹ TNA, PROB 11/1534/296; *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 270.

⁵² TNA, PROB 11/2198/204; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 16 Apr. 1890, 15 June 1892.

⁵³ Bodl. GA Oxon. c 317 (6) (Char. Comm. inq. 30 Nov. 1912); *Oxon. Weekly News*, 1 Dec. 1915.

⁵⁴ *Char. Digest*, 122--3.

⁵⁵ OHC, enclo. award; above, agric. (agric. landscape; 1500--1770); for loss of commons, above (18th-cent.). The poor's right to the furze was confirmed in 1612 by royal charity commissioners, who made arrangements for its cutting and distribution: TNA, C 93/4/1.

⁵⁶ J. Grantham, *The Regulated Pasture: A History of Common Land in Chipping Norton* (1997), 14--22; above, agric. (1770--1900).

⁵⁷ OHC, BOR1/5/A1/7, pp. 218--19, 478--80, 491, 497.

⁵⁸ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 2 Nov. 1892, 25 Jan., 23 Aug. 1893.

⁵⁹ OHC, BOR1/24/2D/1--5; *ibid.* DV/X/40. For the land (part of the Hailey glebe), *VCH Oxon.* XIV, 250.

⁶⁰ OHC, BOR1/5/A2/1, p. 23; BOR1/5/A1/7, pp. 218--19, 542--3; *Oxon. Weekly News*, 19 Oct. 1898; *Banbury Advertiser*, 19 Jan. 1922.

⁶¹ *Oxf. Jnl.*, 22 Aug. 1857.

borough council and was abandoned in 1916, leaving the division between the municipal charities and those run by the vicar and churchwardens untouched.⁶² Reform came in 1989 when most of the town's remaining 20-odd ancient charities were incorporated into the Chipping Norton Welfare Charities, which in 2020--1 owned the Cornish almshouse and six other residential properties (all let at subsidized rents), and spent over £18,000 out of an income of £46,500.⁶³ The town council remained sole trustee of the Southcombe and William Fowler allotments, the income from which (£8,650 in 2020--1) was to help those in need; only the Fowler allotments were then so used, however, the Southcombe land being let as farmland,⁶⁴ and the Hailey allotments (bought by the corporation in the 1940s) having mostly been built on.⁶⁵ Non-eleemosynary charities founded in the late 20th and early 21st charities supported a wide range of social, community, and arts institutions including the War Memorial hospital, day centre, schools, parish church, theatre, and music and literary festivals, their combined income and expenditure totalling more than £1 million in 2020--1.⁶⁶

Parish Poor Relief

To 1835 Despite the large number of charities, as in most places the bulk of the town's poor relief was met increasingly through parish poor rates. Those were set and administered by the parish vestry, which appointed overseers for Chipping Norton presumably from the late 16th century, with a third overseer appointed for Over Norton (which administered its own poor relief).⁶⁷ Overall costs are unknown before the 18th century, but by 1775--6 annual expenditure was over £241, rising to an average of £382 in 1783--5 when it was the highest in the hundred: that was less than at nearby Burford or Witney, but more than at Stow-on-the-Wold, and substantially more than the c.£60 then raised from town charities.⁶⁸ The vestry oversaw both general policy and more detailed practical decisions, enforcing removals (in 1759 with legal help from the town clerk), and approving individual allowances (including some charitable payments and apprenticeships), while in 1760 it prohibited the relief of outsiders. Fairly typically, in 1771 a man with three young children received 2s. 6d. a week, and a midwife was paid 2 guineas (42s.) for a delivery, while medical costs were also met

⁶² Bodl. GA Oxon. c 317 (6) (Char. Comm. inq. 30 Nov. 1912); *Oxon. Weekly News*, 24 Nov., 1, 8 Dec. 1915, 14 June 1916; *Oxf. Chron.* 21 Jan. 1916.

⁶³ Char. Com. website (Feb. 2022), no. 238991; *Chipping Norton News*, no. 426 (Apr. 2020), 24.

⁶⁴ Char. Com. website, nos. 203329, 203353.

⁶⁵ *Borough of Chipping Norton: The Official Guide* (1951), p. 25: copy in OHC; Eddershaw, *Story*, 125; above, devpt of town (since 1914).

⁶⁶ Char. Com. website, s.v. Chipping Norton. For the hospital, below (medical provision).

⁶⁷ Above, local govt (vestry and par. govt).

⁶⁸ *Poor Abstract*, 1777, p. 437; 1787, pp. 598, 654--5; *Char. Don.* pp. 980--1.

during outbreaks of smallpox, with a pest house set up in the early 1740s.⁶⁹ Forty settlement certificates were issued between 1749 and 1781, and 49 removal orders from 1751--86.⁷⁰ In 1765 those with poor rates in arrears were summoned to pay them,⁷¹ and from the 1790s, as costs rose, the overseers carried some of the charitable income due them from the corporation's cattle tolls to the poor's rate account, for which they were reprimanded by the charity commissioners.⁷² Later initiatives included the creation in 1820 of an annually appointed select vestry to deal with poor relief, which continued into the 1830s.⁷³

A parish workhouse in Church Street (on the site of the present-day Redrobe House) was built in 1740, funded by the loan of £100 left by the former vicar Edward Redrobe (d. 1721) for the establishment of a clothing charity.⁷⁴ Soon afterwards the vestry farmed the maintenance and clothing of the poor to local contractors for terms of 4--7 years, in 1741 for £100 a year, and by 1758 for £120, although additional allowances for clothes and other goods were periodically paid by the overseers with the vestry's agreement. By 1748 workhouse accommodation was increased to 20 beds in 10 sparsely furnished rooms, with other facilities including spinning wheels, a garden planted in spring, and a kitchen with cooking facilities. Inmates were admitted by the vestry, which appointed inspectors from amongst its own number to monitor the contractors.⁷⁵ By 1776 the building accommodated 40 people, although in 1802 there were only 16 inmates excluding children. Even so poor relief costs were then over £1,200 (levied at a rate of 6s. 3d. in the pound), of which £240 was spent in the workhouse and £930 on the out-relief of 191 adults and children (c.11 per cent of the population).⁷⁶ Offertory money collected at the parish church was also distributed amongst the poor,⁷⁷ to whom one-off bequests continued to be made.⁷⁸

Expenditure peaked at £1,881 in 1813, when 168 people received permanent or occasional out-relief and there were 26 adults in the workhouse.⁷⁹ It was still £1,817 in 1818, but fluctuated at lower levels thereafter, totalling £1,531 in 1821, £970 in 1824, and £1,243 in 1827.⁸⁰ A salaried assistant overseer was appointed from 1818, charged with overseeing

⁶⁹ OHC, PAR64/2/A1/1; Meades, *Hist.* 72--3; Eddershaw, *Story*, 75; below (medical provision).

⁷⁰ OHC, PAR64/5/A1/1, pp. 10--13, 24--6, 60. For an illegal removal in 1784, *ibid.* Cal. QS. II, 6b; below, Little Rollright, social hist. (1500--1800).

⁷¹ OHC, PAR64/2/A1/1, 27 Jan. 1765.

⁷² *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 264; above (charities to 1700).

⁷³ Above, local govt (vestry and par. govt). Its records do not survive.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*; OHC, PAR64/2/A1/1, 5 May 1740. Charitable distributions nonetheless continued (e.g. *ibid.* PAR64/13/F1/1).

⁷⁵ OHC, PAR64/2/A1/1 (incl. inventories); Eddershaw, *Story*, 75--6; Rosen and Cliffe, *Making*, 192.

⁷⁶ *Poor Abstract*, 1777, p. 437; 1804, pp. 402--3. Burford's and Witney's rates were 15s. and 13s. 6d. in the pound respectively (expenditure £1,171 and £1,904).

⁷⁷ *Secker's Visit.* 45; OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 558, f. 151; d 561, f. 144; d 564, f. 119.

⁷⁸ e.g. OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 116/2/14; 43/3/25; 9/2/36.

⁷⁹ *Poor Abstract*, 1818, pp. 354--5.

⁸⁰ *Poor Rate Retns*, 1822, p. 136; 1825, p. 171; 1830--1, p. 159.

paupers seeking work as roundsmen and with ensuring that in- and out-relief met 'real wants', while a newly appointed workhouse contractor received 4s. a week for the food, fuel, and clothes-washing of each inmate, who were each allowed to keep 1d. out of every 1s. earned. A separate agreement with a local surgeon covered the poor's medical and midwifery costs. Revised orders for supervision of roundsmen and the workhouse, relief of vagrants, collection of poor rates, and removals under the settlement laws were issued in 1831, when a newly appointed assistant overseer was cleared by the vestry of any responsibility for a pauper's death.⁸¹ Poor relief costs, said in 1833 to 'show a singular and unaccountable variation', were then £1,442, falling to £1,251 by 1834, but were not particularly high by Oxfordshire standards, rates per capita (12s. 9d. in 1831) being similar to Witney's, and below those of Banbury and Burford.⁸² By comparison, expenditure by the town's charities remained under £100.⁸³

From 1835 A new poor-law union encompassing 35 Oxfordshire parishes and 3 in Warwickshire, all centred on Chipping Norton, was established in 1835 under the Poor Law Amendment Act, with overall responsibility vested in a newly elected board of guardians.⁸⁴ Its first chairman was J.H. Langston of Sarsden, assisted by the Chipping Norton attorneys A.L. Rawlinson as clerk and Weston Aplin as auditor.⁸⁵ A new union workhouse was built off Banbury Road in 1836 by the Witney architect George Wilkinson, prompting the sale in 1838 of the earlier workhouse in Church Street and of the pest house.⁸⁶ Originally intended to accommodate 350, the new workhouse generally housed smaller numbers, which fluctuated from week to week: at one count in 1844 there were 164 inmates (74 male and 90 female), of whom 73 were children aged 16 or under.⁸⁷ The guardians appointed a married couple (at a joint salary of £100) as master and matron, along with a live-in nurse, schoolmistress, and porter, and by 1861 there were 63 inmates, most of the men former farm workers from outside the town, and the women former domestic servants or craft workers.⁸⁸ Boys were taught gardening, and girls cleaning, cooking, sewing, and laundry work (in preparation for domestic service), while some older residents were put to stone breaking.⁸⁹ Occasional entertainments included a treat for the children hosted by Great Rollright's rector Henry

⁸¹ OHC, BOR1/17/A2/1, s.a. 1817--18, 1831; below (medical provision).

⁸² *1st Rep. Commissioners ... into Municipal Corpns*, p. 172; *Poor Rate Retns*, 1835, p. 154; *Census*, 1831.

⁸³ *12th Rep. Com. Char.* 258--71; above (charities).

⁸⁴ *Oxon. Atlas*, p. 145. Board mins survive from 1837: OHC, PLU3/G/1A1/1.

⁸⁵ *Oxf. Univ. & City Herald*, 26 Sept. 1835.

⁸⁶ Above, town bldgs; *Oxf. Chron.* 11 Aug. 1838; OHC, BOR1/17/A2/1, s.a. 1838.

⁸⁷ *Warwick & Warws. Advertiser*, 12 Mar. 1836; *Oxf. Univ. & City Herald*, 20 Jan. 1844.

⁸⁸ *Oxf. Jnl*, 21 Dec. 1839; TNA, HO 107/879; *ibid.* RG 9/911; cf. Eddershaw, *Story*, 105.

⁸⁹ *Reports by Poor Law Inspectors on Workhouses* (Parl. Papers 1867--8 (35), lxi), pp. 482, 485--6; cf. *Witts Diary*, VII, 533.

Rendall in 1879, and an evening concert at the workhouse in 1902.⁹⁰ A purpose-built chapel was added in 1856--7.⁹¹

The workhouse continued under the management of the board of guardians until 1929, latterly providing temporary accommodation to large numbers of vagrants: in 1923 the master reported 471 during one fortnightly count.⁹² Thereafter it was transferred to the county council as a Public Assistance Institution, run along similar lines, and still admitting tramps and others, in one widely reported case along with a donkey.⁹³ The building passed to the National Health Service in 1948, when it was reorganized as Cotshill Hospital.⁹⁴

Friendly and Other Self-Help Societies⁹⁵

The earliest Chipping Norton friendly society was established in 1765 and met at the White Hart inn.⁹⁶ Its rules (revised in 1794) limited the society to 151 members admitted between the ages of 18 and 35, who received 7s. a week after seven days of ill health or incapacity.⁹⁷ By 1803 there were two societies with a total membership of 202 (falling to 190 by 1815),⁹⁸ and at least 18 more followed during the 19th century, most of them also meeting at the town's inns, or in the case of the Old Guildhall Club (1862--82) at the guildhall. One of the oldest, founded in 1807, was the Union Benefit Society, which provided 3s. a week to members aged 65 and over, rising to 4s. 6d. for those aged 70. Members of the Tradesmen's Union Society (1839--76) were required to have a minimum income of 15s. a week, from which they contributed 2s. a month up to the age of 40 and 2s. 6d. thereafter, while in the 1840s--50s a weekly wage of 12s. was needed to join the New Street Friendly Benefit Society and the New United Friendly Society, which admitted members up to the age of 40. A women-only benefit club at William Bliss's tweed mill had 300 members in 1887, and Bliss supported several additional sick and clothing clubs for his workers alongside a wide range of provisions intended to promote their health, leisure, and education.⁹⁹ Two other clubs were associated with Nonconformist chapels, of which the United Provident Society (based at the Baptist chapel) was established in 1851 and attracted a rapidly rising membership of 500 by 1885, falling to 138 by its closure in 1914. A juvenile branch for those

⁹⁰ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 24 Sept. 1879, 12 Feb. 1902.

⁹¹ Below, relig. hist. (relig. bldgs).

⁹² *Banbury Advertiser*, 5 Apr. 1923; *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1928).

⁹³ *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1939); *Daily Mirror*, 26 June 1933.

⁹⁴ *Banbury Advertiser*, 13 Oct. 1948; below (medical provision).

⁹⁵ For club days and social aspects, above (town and soc. 1800--1914).

⁹⁶ *Oxon. FS*, pp. 102--3. It closed in 1885.

⁹⁷ OHC, QSD/R/11.

⁹⁸ *Poor Abstract*, 1804, pp. 402--3; 1818, pp. 354--5.

⁹⁹ *Oxon. FS*, pp. 106--9; *Reports on the Paris Universal Exhibition, 1867 Volume VI* (Parl. Papers 1867--8 (3969), xxx), pp. 66, 68, 87--8; above (town and soc. 1800--1914).

aged up to 16 was started in 1885, remaining separate until 1902. The Wesleyan Methodist United Christian Benefit Society, opened in 1858, had 68 members by 1874 and 24 at its closure in 1898,¹⁰⁰ while Anglican initiatives included a sick and needy fund mentioned c.1900.¹⁰¹

From the 1870s exclusively town-based friendly societies were increasingly superseded by local branches of regional or national organizations. A lodge belonging to the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows had opened in 1844 but failed to attract support, while a London-based benefit and sick fund open to both men and women (started in 1863) was also unsuccessful. The Loyal Old Elm Tree Lodge of Oddfellows (started in 1871) flourished immediately, however, its membership of 190 in 1872 rising to more than 600 by 1895, and to 1,000 in 1913.¹⁰² Its success probably reflected recent migration to the town by workers familiar with the Oddfellows in their home communities, among them James Pontifract, a foreman at Bliss's tweed mill originally from Saddleworth near Manchester. Members were admitted up to the age of 50, their fixed monthly contributions determined by age of entry



Oddfellows' Hall on London Road, built in 1909-10.

and amount of benefit payable on sickness or death.¹⁰³ A juvenile branch opened in 1876, and a women's branch in 1899, also attracting considerable support, while a purpose-built hall was erected on London Road in 1909--10.¹⁰⁴ Other local initiatives included a soup kitchen, mentioned in 1903 when the corporation agreed to rebuild its furnace.¹⁰⁵

From 1911 the advent of National Insurance reduced the need for voluntary welfare provision, though the Elm Tree Lodge continued to provide supplementary benefits to a substantial membership of 765 in 1930. Further improvements in state welfare after the

¹⁰⁰ *Oxon. FS*, pp. 104, 109.

¹⁰¹ OHC, PAR64/4/F4/2; PAR64/4/F4/4.

¹⁰² *Oxon. FS*, pp. 104--5.

¹⁰³ M. Bee, 'Within the Shelter of the Old Elm Tree: Oddfellowship and Community in North Oxfordshire, 1871--2002', *Family & Community Hist.* 6.2 (2003), 86--9.

¹⁰⁴ *Oxon. FS*, p. 106; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 258; above, town bldgs.

¹⁰⁵ OHC, BOR1/27/A1/2, p. 132.

Second World War prompted an ongoing decline in new admissions, however, and the Lodge ceased to meet from c.1997.¹⁰⁶ The town's Co-operative Society (established in 1866) also occupied a prominent position in the early 20th century, boasting a membership of 4,757 by 1939, but declining rapidly from the mid 1960s and merging with the Oxford and District Society in 1968.¹⁰⁷

Medical Provision

In the Middle Ages medical care was available at Cold Norton priory's outlying roadside hospital at Chapel House in Over Norton, though whether to ordinary townspeople is uncertain.¹⁰⁸ Medical professionals living in the town itself are known from the 16th century,¹⁰⁹ and by the 1740s (during an outbreak of smallpox) the vestry was paying for the medical care of poor inhabitants, and established a pest house south of the town.¹¹⁰ In 1817 the vestry appointed Charles Phillips as medical attendant to the poor at a salary of £35, and two years later reached a similar agreement with Charles Heynes; the contract covered Chipping Norton paupers living within a 6-mile radius, although midwifery calls required an additional fee.¹¹¹ From 1836 the poor-law union usually employed four medical officers in the district as a whole, and one or two at the workhouse,¹¹² and under the 1872 Public Health Act the borough corporation shared a non-resident medical officer with several neighbouring sanitary authorities, although his duties related more to general sanitation within the town rather than to individual medical care.¹¹³

By the 19th century several surgeons and physicians ran private practices in High Street and elsewhere,¹¹⁴ and by 1883 a dentist served Chipping Norton as part of a wider practice, with another operating there by 1891.¹¹⁵ A cottage hospital proposed in 1887 was never built,¹¹⁶ though a National Children's Home opened at Penhurst in New Street in 1904 incorporated a convalescent hospital,¹¹⁷ and from 1902 to 1931 an isolation hospital at Shipton-under-Wychwood (run jointly by Chipping Norton and Witney Urban and Rural

¹⁰⁶ Bee, 'Old Elm Tree', 91--4.

¹⁰⁷ M. Bee, 'Pro Bono Publico: The Chipping Norton Co-operative Society, 1866--1968', *Family & Community Hist.* 4.2 (2001), 111--23; above, urban econ.

¹⁰⁸ Below, Over Norton, social hist. (welfare); relig. hist.

¹⁰⁹ Above, urban econ. (1500--1800: service trades).

¹¹⁰ OHC, PAR64/2/A1/1; *ibid.* par. reg. transcript; Eddershaw, *Story*, 75.

¹¹¹ OHC, BOR1/17/A2/1, incl. renewals to 1833.

¹¹² *Gardner's Dir. Oxon.* (1852); *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1854--77 edns); *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883).

¹¹³ Above, local govt (1835--94).

¹¹⁴ e.g. *Robson's Dir. Oxon.* (1839); *Pigot's Nat. & Comm. Dir. Oxon.* (1842).

¹¹⁵ *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883 and 1891 edns); for later provision, *ibid.* (1895--1939 edns).

¹¹⁶ *Oxon. Weekly News*, 1 June 1887; OHC, BOR1/20/N/4.

¹¹⁷ Meades, *Hist.* 132--3; above (educ.).

District Councils) catered for smallpox patients.¹¹⁸ A Red Cross hospital run from a house in Spring Street during the First World War reopened in 1920 as the Chipping Norton War Memorial Hospital,¹¹⁹ with a matron originally in charge of 14 beds and two private wards; it was supported by voluntary donations and subscriptions, including a weekly contribution scheme. The building was extended in 1923 and 1930 (when a maternity ward was added), and rebuilt in 1939,¹²⁰ and following its transfer to the National Health Service in 1948 it was again enlarged in 1978. In 2011 it moved to a new site in Russell Way (off London Road), where it was reorganized as an out-patient and maternity hospital.¹²¹ Cotshill Hospital, opened at the former union workhouse in 1948, specialized in the treatment of the mentally handicapped, and closed in 1983.¹²² A long-standing doctor's surgery in West Street closed in 2015, when a new health centre in Russell Way combined that and another practice,¹²³ and in 2006 the town also retained two dentists and other health professionals.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ VCH Oxon. XIX, 71; OHC, H8; *ibid.* BOR1/5/A1/7, pp. 178--9; BOR1/20/C/6.

¹¹⁹ Above (town and soc. 1914--39).

¹²⁰ https://oxfordshirehealtharchives.nhs.uk/hospitals/chippingnorton_war_memorial (accessed Mar. 2022); *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1924--39 edns); *Banbury Advertiser*, 9 Mar. 1939.

¹²¹ *Chipping Norton News*, no. 22 (Dec. 1978), 3; no. 338 (June 2011), 5.

¹²² *Banbury Advertiser*, 9 Nov. 1949; <https://oxfordshirehealtharchives.nhs.uk/hospitals/cotshill> (accessed Mar. 2022).

¹²³ *Chipping Norton News*, no. 375 (Mar. 2015), 1--2.

¹²⁴ *Chipping Norton Town Guide* (2006), 25: copy in CNM.