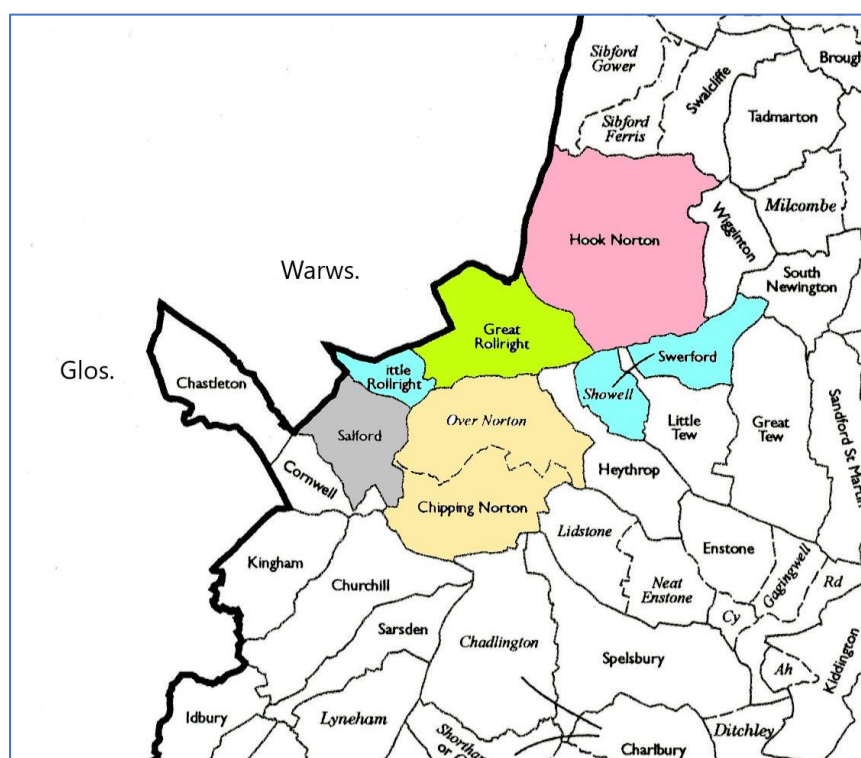




VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

Chipping Norton and Area: An Overview

This volume covers the west Oxfordshire market town of Chipping Norton and half a dozen neighbouring rural parishes, all of which occupy a typically undulating Cotswold landscape adjoining the Gloucestershire and Warwickshire borders.¹ Chipping Norton itself was laid out as a planned town probably in the mid 12th century, preceded by a church, castle, and small rural settlement in the stream valley further down the hillside. During the Middle Ages it thrived as a centre of the Cotswold wool trade, and it continued as a successful market town and service centre in the 19th and 20th centuries, when it was probably best known as the home of Bliss's tweed mill. Even so it never expanded on the scale of nearby Witney or Banbury, its 2011 population still numbering well under 7,000. Amongst the other parishes, Hook Norton was a royal estate centre by the early 10th century, when it probably had a large dependent territory stretching far beyond its later parish. It remained amongst the



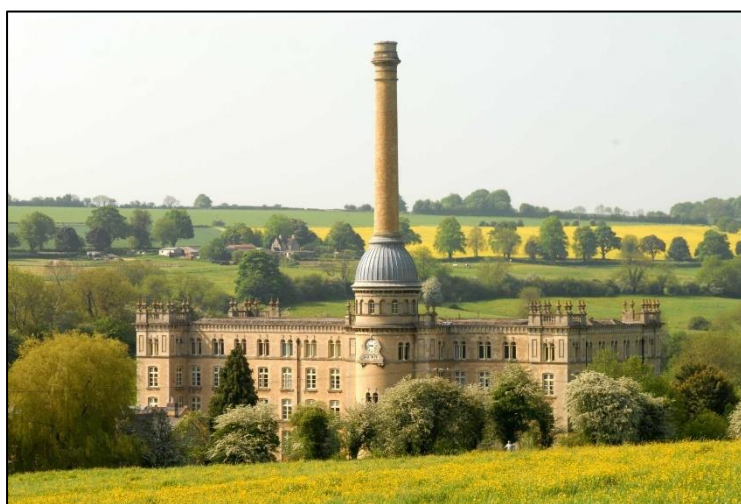
Parishes (shaded) to be included in VCH Oxfordshire XXI.

(Base map: *An Historical Atlas of Oxfordshire*, ed. K. Tiller and G. Darkes (Oxon. Record Soc. 67, 2010; © Oxfordshire Record Society)

¹ Covering c.16,902 a. in all. References are to ancient parishes as they existed c.1850 (see Fig. 1); Over Norton (a township in Chipping Norton parish) became a separate civil parish in 1866, while in 1932 Gt and Little Rollright parishes were merged, and Showell (a detached part of Swerford parish) was transferred to Little Tew.

area's most populous rural settlements into modern times, acquiring a market, developing a range of trades, and (aided by the railway) becoming for several decades a centre for local ironstone extraction, as well as the site of Hook Norton Brewery. Like its neighbours it nevertheless remained predominantly agricultural into the 20th century. From the Second World War the general decline in agricultural employment, combined with rising car ownership, attracted middle-class incomers and commuters to most local villages, leading to pronounced gentrification. Even so both the town and the area as a whole remain socially mixed, with some pockets of deprivation.²

Most of the parishes (Hook Norton and Swerford excepted) lie just within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty created in 1966, and benefit to a limited extent from the Cotswold tourist industry, attractions outside Chipping Norton itself including Hook Norton Brewery and museum and the prehistoric Rollright Stones.³ The area's attractive vernacular buildings are typical of the Cotswolds, dominated by limestone, ironstone, and stone slate, with very little timber framing. Brick and more modern materials are largely confined to the town and to the edges of larger settlements such as Hook Norton, the cores of most villages being protected by conservation areas introduced in the 1970s–90s.⁴ Middling country houses were erected at Salford (now demolished), Swerford park, and Over Norton, while Chipping Norton retains a range of high-quality 18th- and 19th-century frontages particularly around the market area, a prominent 19th-century town hall, and one of the finest medieval 'wool' churches in the region.⁵ Historically, the parishes belonged to Chadlington hundred.⁶



The former Bliss tweed mill on the edge of Chipping Norton, built in 1872-3, closed in 1980, and since converted into luxury apartments.

² Below (society); partic. parishes.

³ *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 158–9, 167; below, partic. parishes.

⁴ Chipping Norton (1970), Hook Norton and Swerford (1988), Gt Rollright (1990), Over Norton (1992): www.westoxon.gov.uk and www.cherwell.gov.uk (accessed Nov. 2022). None noted for Salford or Little Rollright.

⁵ Below, partic. parishes.

⁶ Below, govt; the sole exception was Showell (in Swerford parish), which formed a detached part of Wootton hundred.

Landscape

The area occupies a typically hilly Cotswold landscape dissected by stream and river valleys,⁷ amongst them those of the nascent river Stour (flowing west into Warwickshire and to the river Avon), the river Swere (flowing east into the Cherwell), the rivers Dorn and Glyme (flowing south-east into the Evenlode), and Salford brook (flowing south-westwards also into the Evenlode). All rise from springs within the immediate area, and most formed stretches of early parish boundary, as well as powering early corn mills.⁸ Except where such valleys cut through it, the landscape as a whole climbs chiefly from south-east to north-west, producing a band of hills above 240 m. which run south-westwards from near Hook Norton down to Chipping Norton and beyond. The town itself is laid out along a hillside, the lower side of its long market place lying markedly below the level of the upper side. A parallel band of high ground runs along the Gloucestershire and Warwickshire border, traced by an ancient ridgeway with spectacular views and reaching 248 m. at its highest point. The descents to the stream and river valleys (at c.120–160 m.) are sometimes steep, giving rise to such names as Cleeves brook (denoting a steep slope or 'cliff') and Danes Bottom (from the medieval *Debedene*, 'deep valley').⁹ Even so much of the landscape is gently rolling rather than dramatic.

The underlying geology is chiefly Jurassic limestone of the Chipping Norton, Sharp's Hill, and White Limestone Formations, interspersed with areas of mudstones and siltstones (Whitby and Dyrham Formations), and merging around Hook Norton and Swerford with the north Oxfordshire Marlstone Redlands and with areas of Ferruginous Limestone and Ironstone. Superficial deposits of sand, gravel, clay, and alluvium feature along some of the streams and rivers, and provided small areas of stream-side meadow. The limestone has long been quarried for building stone, road stone, and stone slates, while the ironstone was intensively quarried at Hook Norton from the 1880s to 1940s. The soils (mostly light and free-draining but of variable quality) produced a typical Cotswolds mix of arable and grazing, supporting traditional sheep-corn farming: both Little Rollright and Showell (and to a lesser extent Salford) saw early enclosure for sheep, prompting marked settlement shrinkage in the former two places, although arable remained dominant overall, most of it lying in open fields until the parliamentary enclosures of the late 18th and early 19th century.¹⁰ Woodland was

⁷ For following, OS Maps 1:25000, sheets 45 and 191 (1997–9 edns); *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 6–7.

⁸ Below, partic. parishes; none are large enough to be navigable, however.

⁹ In Chipping Norton and Gt Rollright parishes: *PN Oxon.* II, 368, 372, 435.

¹⁰ www.bgs.ac.uk (geol. maps) and www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes (both accessed Nov. 2022); Orr, *Oxon. Agric.* 64–5, 187–90 (contrasting the high-quality ironstone soils with the sandy stonebrash E of Chipping Norton); *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 8–9, 76–7, 110–11; below, partic. parishes.

relatively scarce despite the creation of medieval parks at Hook Norton and Swerford, and of a 19th-century park at Over Norton.¹¹

The numerous springs and streams, reflected in the place name Showell ('seven springs') and other local names,¹² meant that water was rarely in short supply, feeding fishponds, mill leats, and sheep-washes as well as public water sources, and providing a vital resource for tanning. Provision of a clean supply in the growing town of Chipping Norton became a significant issue in the late 19th century, however, leading to the opening of spring-fed corporation waterworks at Glyme Farm and (later) at Old Chalford in Enstone parish, while supply problems in Over Norton prompted the local Dawkins family to provide a water pump on the green before 1864. Hydraulic rams and pipes were introduced at Great Rollright in the 1920s, and mains water arrived in most villages in the 1940s–60s.¹³ The hilly landscape and predominantly free-draining soils mostly prevented serious flooding, although Salford suffered some limited damage during the widespread floods of 2007, prompting recommendations for improved drainage.¹⁴

Communications

Roads and Road Transport

The area is crossed by several long-distance routes,¹⁵ two of the earliest of which are the ridgeway forming part of the Oxfordshire county boundary, and the former salt way which gave Salford its name. The ridgeway, which here survives as a metalled road, runs past the Rollright Stones and is presumably of prehistoric origin;¹⁶ late Anglo-Saxon charters referred to its Adlestrop and Daylesford stretch (just over the Gloucestershire boundary) as the 'royal road (*regia strata*) from Northampton' and the 'king's army road (*straet*)', suggesting that it had been Romanised and paved,¹⁷ and in the 17th century it formed part of a route between

¹¹ The Rollright area seems to have had little woodland by the Bronze Age: G. Lambrick, *The Rollright Stones: Megaliths, Monuments, and Settlement in the Prehistoric Landscape* (English Heritage Archaeol. Rep. 6, 1988), 125, 131.

¹² e.g. the 'Tite' or 'Tyte' Ends (denoting springs) in Chipping Norton, Hook Norton, and Gt Rollright, and 'well' (or stream) fieldnames in Salford: *PN Oxon.* II, 291, 372, 469; below, partic. parishes.

¹³ Below, partic. parishes.

¹⁴ WODC, *Parish Flood Report: Salford* (June 2008): accessed at www.westoxon.gov.uk (March 2021). For soil drainage, www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes.

¹⁵ For early roads: *Oxon. Atlas*, p. 51; Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797); Bryant, *Oxon. Map* (1824): OS Map 1", sheet 45 (1833). For possible Roman roads, below, settlement.

¹⁶ Lambrick, *Rollright Stones*, 3, 25, 120 (the Jurassic Way); cf. Grundy, *Saxon Oxon.* 94–5 (seeing it as part of a separate 'Great Cotswold ridgeway' from Bath to Warwick).

¹⁷ Sawyer S.1340; S.1548; D. Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: the Kingdom of the Hwicce* (2009 edn), 147, 208–10. For other early evidence, below, Hook Norton.

Stow-on-the-Wold (Glos.) and Banbury, running through Hook Norton and Wigginton.¹⁸ The salt way formed part of a pre-Conquest route from Droitwich and Worcester via Moreton-in-Marsh (Glos.), which continued south-eastwards across Oxfordshire, and at Salford is broadly preserved in the line of the A44.¹⁹ Great Rollright's possession of salt rights in 1086 suggests an early branch road,²⁰ and another probably ran southwards through Shipton-under-Wychwood to Bampton and Widford (by the Thames).²¹ That and other river intersections outside the immediate area presumably increased the main routeways' significance, the local waterways being too small for navigation.²²

Along with some other early routes, the salt way was probably diverted to run through Chipping Norton at or soon after the town's creation around the mid 12th century, the realignments leaving the new urban settlement well served by routes north-westwards to Worcester and to Stratford-on-Avon (Warws.), north-eastwards to Banbury and Northampton, southwards to Burford and to the Thames crossing at Lechlade (Glos.), and south-eastwards to Charlbury, Woodstock, Oxford, and ultimately London.²³ An alternative Worcester and Stratford route (mentioned in 1675 as part of the Great London Road) ran north-east of the town through Over Norton township, passing close to Little Rollright,²⁴ while south of the town a road through Cornwell, Chalford Green, and Enstone, known in 1823 as the Old London Road, provided an alternative west-east route from Moreton-in-Marsh and Stow-on-the Wold, linking south-eastwards with the ancient Woodstock Way.²⁵ Some other now-minor routes were probably once also of greater significance, amongst them the various west-east and north-south roads through Hook Norton and Swerford,²⁶ while some lesser 'wood ways' and (possibly) 'wool ways' were probably also ancient, some of the former

¹⁸ Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); J. Ogilby, *Britannia* (1675 edn), Plate II; below, Hook Norton; Gt Rollright; Salford.

¹⁹ *Oxon. Atlas*, p. 29; Blair, *A-S Oxon.* 85–6; F.T.S. Houghton, 'Salt-Ways', *Trans. and Proc. of the Birmingham Archaeol. Soc.* 54 (1929–30), 15 and plate IV; below, Salford.

²⁰ Possibly the ridgeway or a surviving track through Over Norton, although an alternative route could have followed the valley contours from near the present-day Chipping Norton cemetery, passing close to the site of the 11th-century Chipping Norton church and castle. For the salt rights, DB, f. 160v.

²¹ *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 4–5, 33, 164.

²² For the importance of early medieval road/river connections, *Oxon. Atlas*, p. 28; J. Blair, *Waterways and Canal-Building in Medieval England* (2007), esp. 254–94.

²³ *Oxon. Atlas*, p. 51; Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); below, Chipping Norton, communics; devpt; urban econ. (incl. medieval links with Stratford's guild). The salt way may have formerly continued along the line of the present B4026 and Woodstock Way, passing through Stonesfield and ultimately on to Princes Risborough (Bucks.): *VCH Oxon.* X, 127; XI, 183.

²⁴ J. Ogilby, *Britannia* (1675 edn), London–Aberystwyth continuation road (Plate II); Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); below, Over Norton; Little Rollright.

²⁵ Bryant, *Oxon. Map* (1824); cf. *VCH Oxon.* X, 127. The more northerly Worcester road through Salford was London Way in 1686 and London Road in 1709: OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 41, f. 89; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2289, no. 1.

²⁶ Below, partic. parishes.

perhaps linking with Wychwood forest to the south.²⁷ Local bridges (all relatively small) include those which replaced the fords at Salford and Swerford probably in the Middle Ages, the narrow Swerford crossing overseen in the 12th century by a motte-and-bailey castle.²⁸ The Cornwell–Enstone (Old London) road crosses a bridge at Cornwell, whose upkeep was supported in the 16th century by bequests from Chipping Norton townspeople.²⁹



Roads in the Chipping Norton area in 1767, as depicted in Thomas Jefferys' Map of Oxfordshire.

Some of those routes were turnpiked relatively early: the Stratford road through Over Norton in 1730, the branch through Chipping Norton and Salford to Bourton-on-the-Hill (part of the Worcester road) in 1731, and a branch from the Worcester road to Stow-on-the-Wold (part of the ancient ridgeway) in 1755. The Banbury–Burford road through Chipping Norton (the modern A361) was turnpiked in 1770, its route bypassing Great Rollright, Hook Norton, and Swerford,³⁰ and a new Stratford turnpike was laid out through Great Rollright parish and Over Norton township in 1825, reducing the importance of the broadly parallel 1730 turnpike.³¹ Other changes (realignments, straightenings, and some suppressions)

²⁷ Below, Chipping Norton, communics (roads); Over Norton; Swerford.

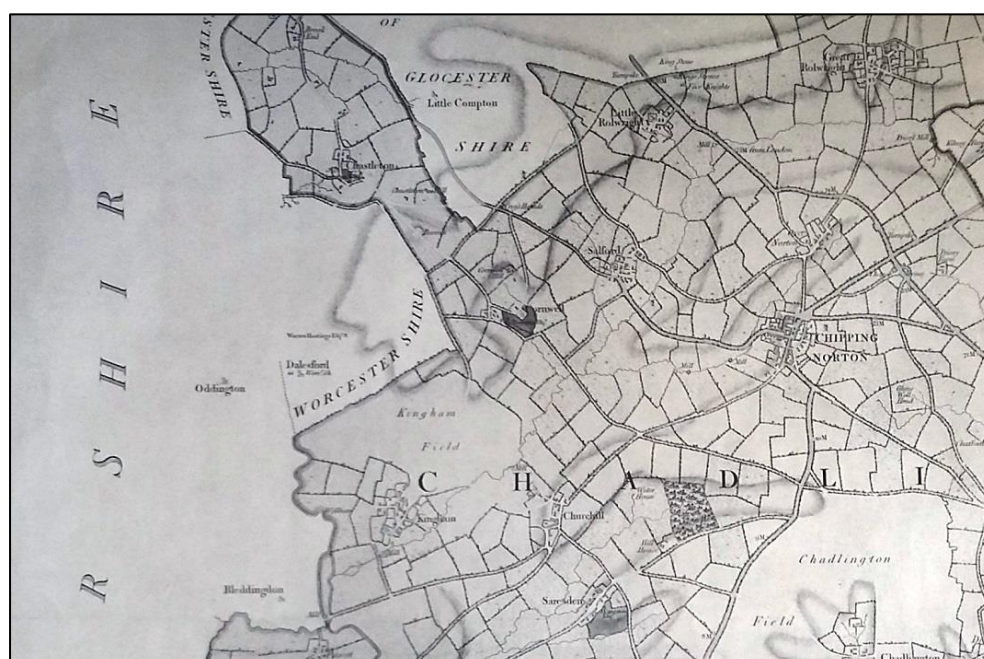
²⁸ Below, partic. parishes (incl. some footbridges and fords on minor tracks).

²⁹ Below, Chipping Norton, communics (roads).

³⁰ *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 102–3; Turnpike Acts 3 Geo. II, c. 21; 4 Geo. II, c. 23; 28 Geo. II, c. 47; 10 Geo. III, c. 101.

³¹ Long Compton to Woodstock Turnpike Act, 6 Geo. IV, c. 155; *Warwick & Warwickshire Advertiser*, 5 Mar. 1825; OS Map 1", sheet XLV (1833 edn).

accompanied parliamentary enclosures between 1770 and 1803,³² although despite the improvements Chipping Norton vestry complained of the 'very bad state' of part of the Worcester road in 1821.³³ All of the roads were disturnpiked in 1877–8,³⁴ leaving the Burford–Banbury, Oxford–Worcester, and Oxford–Stratford roads (all passing through or close to Chipping Norton) as the most important through-routes in the early 21st century. A network of lesser roads links the villages, while a long-distance recreational footpath (the d'Arcy Dalton Way) was established across several of the parishes covered here in 1986, named after a prominent founder member of the Oxford Fieldpaths Society.³⁵ The nearest motorway (c.15 miles to the east) is the Oxford–Banbury stretch of the M40, opened in 1991.³⁶



Roads in the Chipping Norton area in 1794, as depicted in Richard Davis's New Map of Oxfordshire.

A London stagecoach ran to Chipping Norton as early as 1654 (with another mentioned in 1726),³⁷ and by the 1790s two London–Worcester coaches stopped there daily, served by the town's major inns and by an outlying inn at Chapel Heath near Over Norton, which won praise from Samuel Johnson. By 1839 the town had regular (mostly daily)

³² Below, partic. parishes. Creation of the Burford–Banbury turnpike coincided with Chipping Norton's enclosure, facilitating the road's straightening and realignment on the town's NE edge.

³³ OHC, BOR1/17/A2/1, 15 Nov. 1821; cf. *ibid.* 29 Aug. 1822.

³⁴ Turnpike Acts, 34 & 35 Vic. c. 115; 40 & 41 Vic. c. 64; 41 & 42 Vic. c. 62.

³⁵ OS Map 1:25000, sheets 45 and 191 (1999 and later edns); www ofs.org.uk/home/dArcyDaltonWay.php (accessed Nov. 2022).

³⁶ OS Maps 1:25000, sheets 45 and 191 (1999 and later edns); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M40_motorway (accessed Nov. 2022). For the problem of heavy goods traffic passing through Chipping Norton town centre (and associated pollution), *Chipping Norton Neighbourhood Plan 2015–2031* (Chipping Norton Town Council 2015), p. 30.

³⁷ D. Gerhold, *Carriers and Coachmasters: Trade and Travel before the Turnpikes* (2005), 197, 213.

services from London, Cheltenham, Northampton, Worcester, and Birmingham, supplemented by far-flung waggon services several days a week. Daily Worcester, Oxford, and London coaches continued until the railway's arrival in 1855,³⁸ and carrier services from Chipping Norton and some larger villages continued much longer: most were tied to local market days including Chipping Norton's, and still ran to Banbury in the 1930s.³⁹ Mail coaches served Chipping Norton by 1683,⁴⁰ and most surrounding villages acquired their own sub-post offices during the late 19th or early 20th century, with Swerford's served from Enstone. Most closed in the 1960s–2000s, however, leaving only Chipping Norton and Hook Norton post offices in 2022, and a mobile service in Great Rollright.⁴¹

Motorised buses served the town and some villages from the early 1920s, run by the Birmingham & Midland Motor Omnibus Co. (better known as Midland Red), and by The City of Oxford Motor Services Ltd. Midland Red opened a Banbury depot in 1919, introducing a service to Hook Norton and another to Chipping Norton via Great Rollright, while the Oxford company ran to Chipping Norton by 1922, adding links to Witney and Burford by 1928, and a continuation to Moreton-in-Marsh (via Salford) by 1931. A separate Banbury/Hook Norton/Kingham bus was briefly introduced by the Great Western Railway (which ran the Banbury–Chipping Norton railway line), and in the 1920s–40s Hook Norton had a small locally based bus company. The two main companies were nationalized from 1969 to 1988 and saw various restructurings, their county parts eventually becoming part of Stagecoach Oxfordshire, which in 2022 ran the main Oxford and Banbury routes with stops in Chipping Norton, Over Norton, Great Rollright, and Hook Norton. A community service provided less frequent west Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire connections (some through Salford), although by then Swerford and Little Rollright had no bus services, and reductions elsewhere sometimes prompted complaints.⁴² Car ownership in 2011 averaged 1.6 per household, with the highest ratios in Swerford and Hook Norton, and the lowest in Chipping Norton, where 19 per cent of households had no car.⁴³

³⁸ *Univ. Brit. Dir.* (1793–8), II, 557; *Robson's Dir. Oxon.* (1839), 63; *Gardner's Dir. Oxon.* (1852), 521; below (railway); Chipping Norton (communic); Over Norton (communic). Hook Norton had a waggoner in 1690: A. Rosevear, *Turnpike Roads to Banbury* (Banbury Hist. Soc. 31, 2010), 99.

³⁹ *Harrod's Dir. Oxon.* (1876); *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883 and later edns).

⁴⁰ *London Gaz.* 6 Aug. 1683; *Univ. Brit. Dir.* (1793–8), II, 557.

⁴¹ Below, partic. parishes; www.postoffice.co.uk/branch-finder (accessed Nov. 2022). High speed internet broadband was available in all the villages: <https://digitalinfrastructureoxfordshire.co.uk> (Nov. 2022).

⁴² *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1924 and later edns); *City of Oxford and District Motor Bus Services: Motor Bus Timetables* (1922–31 edns): copies in OHC; Hook Norton Local History Group, 'Scenes of Village Life 1920–70', 4–5 (pdf at <https://hook-norton.org.uk>); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxford_Bus_Company; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midland_Red; www.midlandred.net (archive timetables); <https://bustimes.org>; www.villagerbus.co.uk; below, partic. parishes. Websites accessed Nov. 2022.

⁴³ *Census*, 2011 (online datasets).

Railways

The Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway (first mooted in 1845) was opened in 1853, broadly following the river Evenlode just south of the area covered here, and initially bypassing Chipping Norton. A 4½-mile branch line to the town from Kingham station (then called Chipping Norton Junction) was opened in 1855, thanks to concerted pressure from the textile manufacturer William Bliss and other leading townspeople; in all a third of the capital was raised through local subscriptions, the contractor (Samuel Morton Peto) supplying the rest. A branch from Kingham to Cheltenham was opened in 1881, and in 1887 the Chipping Norton branch was extended to Banbury as part of the Banbury and Cheltenham Direct Railway, with a station at Hook Norton and (from 1906) a halt on the Great Rollright parish boundary, which acquired a freight siding in 1909. The Great Western Railway took over the line in 1897, having already absorbed the OWR in 1863.⁴⁴

The new connections brought in cheap coal and played a crucial economic role, William Bliss (who used it to import raw wool) claiming in 1858 that without its branch line Chipping Norton would have lost its market shares and 'descended to a mere village'.⁴⁵ The later Cheltenham–Banbury extensions opened up important new links with the south-west, the Midlands, and the north, allowing export of Hook Norton iron ore to south Staffordshire and north Wales, and facilitating distribution of farm produce and of beer from the Chipping Norton and Hook Norton breweries.⁴⁶ Passenger services, though probably always secondary, provided local and long-distance links including (from 1906) an express service from South Wales to Newcastle-on-Tyne, and allowed for day trips and excursions;⁴⁷ an hotel was opened next to Hook Norton station before 1899,⁴⁸ and in the early 1900s Chipping Norton corporation pressed for marketing of tourist tickets and commissioned promotional photographs of the town to go in GWR railway carriages.⁴⁹ Even so passenger numbers fell from the 1920s, partly reflecting competition from motor buses, and with the end of Hook Norton's ironstone production after the Second World War freight traffic, too, saw some decline. Passenger services from Chipping Norton to Banbury (via King's Sutton)

⁴⁴ *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 108–9; *Oxf Jnl* 18 Aug. 1855; below, Chipping Norton, Hook Norton, and Gt Rollright (communic, with sources there cited). The Cheltenham branch was preceded by one to Bourton-on-the-Water (Glos.), opened 1862.

⁴⁵ *Oxf Jnl* 2 Oct. 1858.

⁴⁶ Below, Chipping Norton, communic; urban econ.; Hook Norton and Gt Rollright (communic, econ. hist); OHC, BOR1/5/A1/3, 10 Mar. 1865 (pressing for a Banbury link).

⁴⁷ Below, Chipping Norton, communic (with refs).

⁴⁸ *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1899 edn).

⁴⁹ OHC, BOR1/5/A1/7, pp. 206, 507 (late-night Oxford service), 562–3.

ended in 1951, and those to Kingham and Cheltenham in 1962, followed by freight services in 1963–4.⁵⁰ Kingham station itself remained open in 2022, with hourly passenger trains to and from London and Worcester, and a limited peak-hours weekday bus service from Chipping Norton.⁵¹

Settlement

*Prehistoric to Roman*⁵²

The area's most important prehistoric site is the Rollright Stones complex near Little Rollright, on high ground straddling the ridgeway. The early Neolithic burial chamber known as the Whispering Knights (dated to c.3800–3000 BC) was followed a millennium or so later by the King's Men ceremonial stone circle ¼ mile to the west, and c.1880–1550 BC by the solitary King Stone just over the road and the county boundary. Several Bronze-Age round barrows lie adjacent, and evidence of Iron-Age fields and settlement has been identified close by and further east in Great Rollright. Other Bronze-Age barrows have been identified in Over Norton and near Hook Norton, where a pentagonal enclosure on the parish's north-east boundary produced Bronze-Age and Iron-Age worked flints. The Iron-Age hillfort at Tadmarton Camp (also on the ridgeway) lies nearby just over the Hook Norton parish boundary, and Hook Norton parish itself has yielded further evidence of Iron-Age settlement and fields.⁵³

Roman activity is well attested across the area, including probable villa sites near Chipping Norton (Glyme Farm), Great Rollright, and Hook Norton. Most settlement probably comprised lower-status farmsteads, but appears to have been particularly dense east of Chipping Norton, where numerous 1st- to 4th-century finds include high-status colour-coated ware, and in Hook Norton, where Iron-Age boundaries north of the village were reorganised during the 1st and early 2nd century, and where coin finds extend into the AD 360s. Further coins and pottery have been found in Salford, Over Norton, and Swerford.⁵⁴ No firmly

⁵⁰ C.R. Clinker, *Reg. of Closed Passenger Stns and Goods Depots 1830–1977* (1978 edn), 28, 56, 64, 70–1; below, Chipping Norton, communics; Hook Norton, econ. hist. The lines were subsequently dismantled.

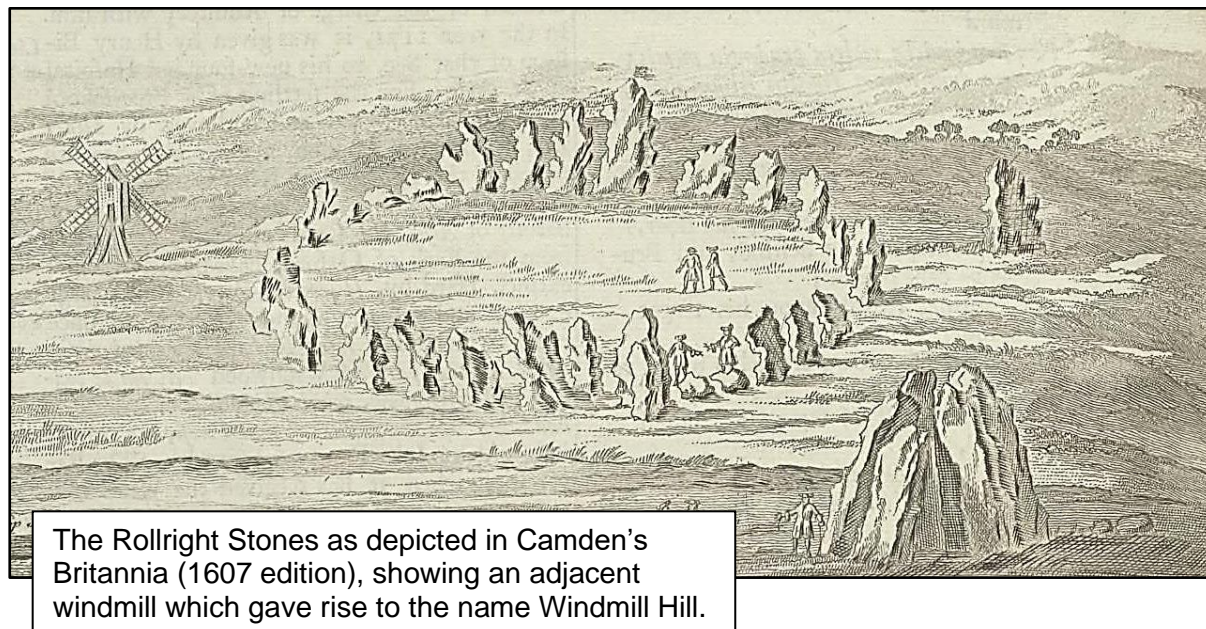
⁵¹ www.gwr.com/travel-information/train-times; www.pulhamscoaches.com (accessed Nov. 2022).

⁵² For regional context, *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 10–17; G. Lambrick, *The Rollright Stones: Megaliths, Monuments, and Settlement in the Prehistoric Landscape* (English Heritage Archaeol. Rep. 6, 1988), 2, 111–29.

⁵³ Below, partic. parishes (with sources); Lambrick, *Rollright Stones*, passim; Brooks, *Pevsner N&W*, 12, 403; NHLE, no. 1018400 (giving slightly different date-ranges).

⁵⁴ Below, partic. parishes. Recent geophysics and trial trenching point to substantial Roman settlement E of Chipping Norton, but details remained publicly unavailable in 2023.

identified Roman roads are known within the immediate area,⁵⁵ although medieval names incorporating 'street' (a common indicator of Romanised roads) are known in Hook Norton and Great Rollright, the latter referring possibly to the ridgeway.⁵⁶



Anglo-Saxon and Medieval

The Rollright Stones complex saw further re-use as a cemetery in the 6th and 7th centuries, the burials displaying Anglian influences, and culminating in a high-status 7th-century female burial with accompanying grave goods close to the King Stone. The site's prominence and deliberate re-appropriation, combined with its location at a former crossroads where three later parishes meet, has prompted speculation that it may have marked a territorial boundary and perhaps an open-air meeting place.⁵⁷ Little else is known of early-to-mid Anglo-Saxon settlement in the area,⁵⁸ which came under Mercian control, and which by the 9th or 10th century had been partly absorbed into a large royal territory focused probably on Shipton-

⁵⁵ For nearby roads (incl. Fosse Way and Akeman Street), I.D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain* (1973 edn), 128–30, 153. No evidence has been found for a suggested route from Over Norton to Swalcliffe and Warmington via Hook Norton (proposed in V. Wickham-Steed, 'Roman Roads of the Banbury District', *Cake and Cockhorse*, 2.7 (1964), 119; <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/romangl/map.html>, accessed Nov. 2022).

⁵⁶ Below, Gt Rollright ('stonstret'); Hook Norton (names in W and E fields); above (commons).

⁵⁷ Lambrick, *Rollright Stones*, 129–30; H. Hamerow, 'A Conversion-Period Burial in an Ancient Landscape: A High-Status Female Grave near the Rollright Stones, Oxfordshire/Warwickshire', in A. Langlands and R. Lavelle (eds), *The Land of the English Kin: Studies in Wessex and Anglo-Saxon England in Honour of Professor Barbara Yorke* (2020), 231–44; S. Semple, 'Locations of Assembly in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in A. Pantos and S. Semple (eds), *Assembly Places and Practices in Medieval Europe* (2004), 148–50; below, Little Rollright.

⁵⁸ For some very slight evidence, below, Chipping Norton; Salford.

under-Wychwood to the south, as implied by the place name [Chipping] Norton (i.e. the north *tūn*).⁵⁹ Hook Norton, whose place name has a different etymology,⁶⁰ may have lain outside that complex, since by the late 9th or early 10th century it was a significant Mercian royal vill in its own right, which saw a Viking attack in 913 and had its own large dependent territory. The Iron-Age hillfort at Tadmarton Camp has been suggested as an early nucleus, although a more likely site for the putative royal hall is the well-watered valley around the modern village: two probable Viking burials there were associated with a late 9th-century coin hoard, and the present-day church retains some late 10th- to mid 11th-century fabric.⁶¹ The wider mid 11th-century pattern is discernible in Domesday Book, which records one or more estates with dependent populations in all of the parishes covered here. The shape of settlement on the ground remains obscure, although estate centres were presumably focused (as later) in the stream and river valleys, close to good water sources. 'Hide' place-names on Over Norton's eastern edge (bordering Heythrop) may recall a lost pre-Conquest farmstead.⁶²

By the 13th century rural settlement was concentrated on present-day villages with their surrounding open fields. Several (notably Hook Norton, Great Rollright, and Swerford) have complex polyfocal plans incorporating separate 'ends', partly reflecting division of manors and development of sizeable medieval freeholds, each with their own centres. The more compact settlement at Salford similarly seems to have had separate zones associated with its three main landholdings, all focused around a large central green, and small greens and road junctions (together with springs) provided foci elsewhere, the greens now often encroached upon. Late medieval settlement shrinkage and abandonment of early manorial centres has sometimes obscured the earlier layout, leaving the church at Great Rollright on the far north-east fringe of the scattered modern village.⁶³ Other outlying sites were mostly confined to watermills, an exception being Cold Norton priory, founded south-east of Over Norton village in the mid 12th century with an associated roadside hospital a little further west. Both Swerford and Hook Norton parks may have included outlying medieval lodges,

⁵⁹ *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 8–9, 29, 42; *PN Oxon.* II, 368; the 'Chipping' prefix (denoting a market) was added after the town's creation. Norton could alternatively have been named in relation to the early ecclesiastical centre at Charlbury (Blair, *A-S Oxon.* refs at 223), acquired later by the bishop of Dorchester; in this area only Little Rollright was associated with the bishop's estates in 1086, however, and the large royal Shipton estate seems a more likely focus. For a possible 8th-cent. royal grant of Salford to Evesham abbey (Worcs.), below, Salford, landownership.

⁶⁰ The '*tūn*' of the people at Hocca's *ora*': for discussion, below, Hook Norton, landscape etc. (roads).

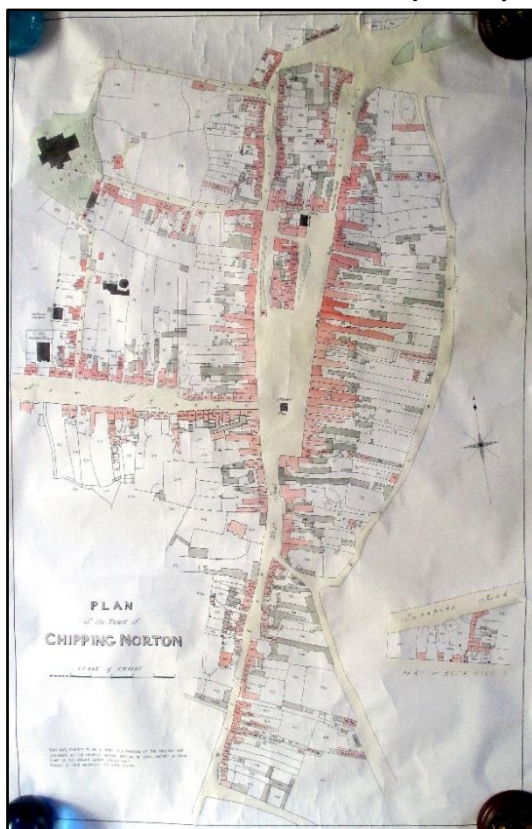
⁶¹ Below, Hook Norton, landscape etc. (settlement); landownership; relig. hist. Its estate (though much reduced) still covered 30 hides in 1086.

⁶² Below, partic. parishes. Over Norton (and Bartletts in Salford) are subsumed under the Domesday entry for Chipping Norton.

⁶³ Below, partic. parishes. Other foci included a probable mkt area near Hook Norton church, and another possibly in Gt Rollright (by the village cross).

and a warrener's lodge on Over Norton heath was rebuilt in the 16th century, before its final demolition in the 17th.⁶⁴

The pre-urban settlement at Chipping Norton fitted the local pattern, focused probably partway down the hillside close to natural springs. The church there was established by 1096 and possibly much earlier, and an adjacent motte-and-bailey castle, whose earthworks survive, was built by the manor's Norman lords after the Conquest, some nearby housing continuing into the 13th century. The town was laid out higher up the hillside probably in the mid 12th century, its burgage plots grouped around a long, roughly north–south market place with a back lane (now Albion Street) on the town's higher or eastern side; the founder was presumably one of the manor's contemporary FitzAlan lords, most likely William (d. 1160), acting possibly with his mother Avelina. Subsequent market-place encroachment (under way by the early 14th century) narrowed the market place's southern end and created three large islands of buildings further north, one of which separates modern Horse Fair from Spring Street or Tite End. The latter is named from a natural spring which presumably partly determined the town's location. The castle was extended in the late 12th or early 13th century but was effectively abandoned by the late 15th, to be replaced by a manor house on New Street just beyond the town's historic core.⁶⁵



Chipping Norton c.1840, from a map in Chipping Norton Museum. The large market place, adjoining burgage plots, and areas of market infill still broadly preserve the medieval layout.

⁶⁴ Below, partic. parishes.

⁶⁵ Below, Chipping Norton, devpt of town; landownership (castle; manor ho). New St (where the diverted Worcester road enters the town) was so called by 1359, when its top end was already built up.

Late medieval population decline in the rural parishes mostly led to thinning out of settlement rather than desertion, although Showell was substantially shrunken by 1316 and had only a single farmhouse by the 16th century, while enclosure and forced evictions at Little Rollright (under way by the 1490s) left only four taxpayers by 1543. At Over Norton, Cold Norton priory (suppressed in 1507) was eventually succeeded by Priory Farm, and the associated hospital by a cottage and (later) by Chapel House.⁶⁶

Since the 16th Century

The overall shape of the area's rural settlement changed little between c.1600 and the late 18th or early 19th century, despite considerable rebuilding and some infilling in most villages. A few outlying 17th- and 18th-century farmsteads (some of which may have had late medieval predecessors) were established before parliamentary enclosure, particularly in Hook Norton,⁶⁷ while outlying roadside inns were built in Over Norton (Chapel House) and Salford (the Cross Hands), and lime kilns were erected on Great Rollright's southern boundary by the 1710s. A few other outlying farmhouses appeared in the 1770s–1800s after enclosure. New mansion houses included Great Rollright Manor (probably newly established off High Street c.1600), Salford House (built in parkland west of the church c.1695 and demolished in 1810), and Over Norton House (built in the 18th century and replaced in 1875–9), for which new parkland was created c.1810–17, altering the village's layout. Swerford Park was built in the 1770s within the existing medieval park, which was re-landscaped in the early 19th century.⁶⁸

Further infilling in the 19th and early 20th centuries was followed by larger-scale expansion particularly after the Second World War, driven by both council and private development, and accompanied by installation of mains water and drainage. Fringe development was especially marked at Hook Norton (which remained by far the largest rural settlement), and at Great Rollright too the number of houses roughly doubled between 1961 and 2011. Even so all of the villages remained self-contained in 2022, with clear edges and open countryside between. New outlying sites included some substantial private dwellings as well as farmhouses, built between the 19th century and the early 21st.⁶⁹

Like the villages, Chipping Norton saw relatively little change in its settled area before the 19th century, save for some suburban expansion along New Street from the 17th century

⁶⁶ Below, partic. parishes. The priory church and hospital chapel were initially maintained by Brasenose College, Oxford, the owner from 1513.

⁶⁷ For others see Gt Rollright; Salford; Swerford

⁶⁸ Below, partic. parishes.

⁶⁹ Ibid. Council-house building in Great Rollright, and Salford began in the 1930s.

onwards, and some piecemeal development around West End (in the south-west). Settlement within the town itself became denser, however, while the market area in particular was transformed by refronting and rebuilding, particularly after 1700. Outside the historic core, a substantial union workhouse was built to the north-east (on London Road) in 1836, followed by other buildings, and from 1855 the opening of the railway station on the town's western fringe (beyond New Street) prompted substantial redevelopment of William Bliss's adjacent tweed mill, relocation of the town gasworks, and some limited south-westwards expansion. Fringe development accelerated from the 1920s partly through council-house building, particularly on the town's south side, where more substantial growth followed in the 1950s–70s, swallowing up former allotments. Further expansion (including small business and industrial parks) took place on the north-west, on the north between the Over Norton and Banbury roads, on London road (where the Parker Knoll furniture factory opened in 1962, later replaced by housing), and east of Albion Street, where Hitchman's brewery (now demolished) was established c.1850. Local District Plans adopted in 2006 and 2018 marked the town for further development, with over 1,000 new houses planned for the area east of the town in the early 21st century. As with the villages, however, the town retained a reasonably clear edge in 2022, when its expansion beyond its ancient core (compared with nearby Witney) remained relatively limited.⁷⁰ Outside the town, a new waterworks was established to the south-east at Glyme Farm in 1878, followed in 1900–2 by a sewage treatment works (still operational in 2022) just over the parish boundary in Salford.⁷¹

Landownership

Before 1066 the large royal estates to which most local settlements probably belonged saw the usual fragmentation into smaller units, creating a framework for the later parish structure.⁷² Domesday Book noted 11 estates in the area, ranging from a single hide at Showell to 30 hides at Hook Norton, which later became the *caput* or administrative centre of the d'Oilly family's medieval honor of Hook Norton.⁷³ Most other estates comprised either the typical five hides of a thegn or multiples of five hides, suggesting an orderly disposal of royal land: the Norton estate (including Chipping and Over Norton and land in Salford) was 15¼

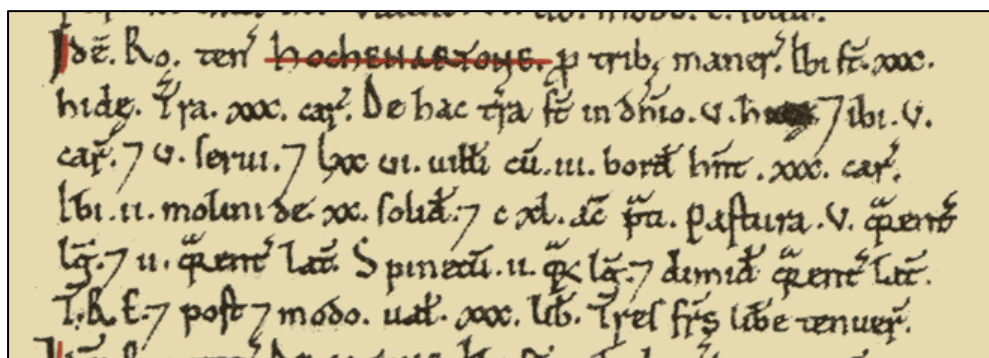
⁷⁰ Below, Chipping Norton, devpt; town bldgs; urban econ.; Jeffreys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); OS Maps 1:10560, SP 32 NW (1885 and later edns); 1:25000, sheet 191 (1999 and later edns).

⁷¹ Below, Chipping Norton, town govt (utilities).

⁷² Above (settlement); DB, ff. 155–161; below, partic. parishes. For the wider context, Blair, *A-S Oxon.* 124–44; J. Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England* (2018), 311–17, 354 sqq; *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 8–9.

⁷³ Below, Hook Norton; Swerford. Showell as a whole contained 5 hides in 3 parcels and (apparently) one additional hide.

hides, while four roughly 5-hide manors in the Rollrights may have once formed a single 20-hide unit. Some estates were held by prominent Norman tenants-in-chief such as Robert d'Oilly, Ernulf de Hesdin, and Anketil de Grey, but two Rollright manors were held by royal servants (one by serjeanty of acting as the king's dispenser), and another (under the bishop of Lincoln) by a monk of Eynsham abbey. Two small Swerford holdings still had English tenants under Odo of Bayeux, with another (probably) at Great Rollright, and in three cases the estates' pre-Conquest English owners were also named.⁷⁴



The Domesday Book entry for Hook Norton, describing the large 30-hide estate held by the leading Norman magnate Robert d'Oilly (d. c.1091/2)

Those Domesday estates formed the basis of the area's manorial structure throughout the Middle Ages, although the picture was modified by grants to religious houses and by the emergence of some sizeable medieval freeholds, a couple of which became reputed manors.⁷⁵ Cold Norton priory, founded in Over Norton in the mid 12th century, acquired significant estates in Over and Chipping Norton and (later) in Great Rollright, while Osney abbey acquired an estate in Hook Norton, and Osney, Bruern, and Reading abbeys estates in Showell. Gloucester abbey, granted Chipping Norton church in 1096, appropriated the church's wealthy rectory estate c.1403.⁷⁶ Medieval secular lords, who remained in the majority, encompassed both high-status (and mostly non-resident) nobility and more locally connected landowners such as the Dispensers at Great Rollright and (later) the Trillows and Wilcotes at Salford. Few if any villages had continuously resident lords, however, and few remained in the same family for more than two or three generations. Most manors were

⁷⁴ At Chipping Norton (2 named), Gt Rollright (the thegn Aluric), and Hook Norton (3 unnamed brothers). Eynsham abbey had been temporarily dispersed and relocated, but retained its estates following its return to Eynsham in 1094.

⁷⁵ Dimmocks in Hook Norton; Bartletts in Salford; cf. Lyons in Swerford. Some Domesday manors were also subsequently combined (e.g. in Gt Rollright and Salford).

⁷⁶ Below, partic. parishes. Eynsham abbey retained Little Rollright, while other religious houses with local interests included the hospital of St John the Baptist (Oxford), Studley priory, Godstow abbey (tithes only), Winchcombe abbey (Glos.), Grovebury priory (Beds.), and the French abbeys of Fontevraud (Maine-et-Loire), Noyon (Oise), and Longvilliers and Saint-Josse (both Pas-de-Calais).

confined to their respective parishes, only Chipping Norton, Salford, and Swerford manors (including the latter's park) spilling over into their neighbours.⁷⁷

Cold Norton priory's estates were acquired in 1513 by Brasenose College, Oxford (which retained them into the 20th century), and after the Dissolution Chipping Norton's rectory estate passed to Gloucester cathedral and Osney abbey's Hook Norton estate to the new bishopric of Oxford.⁷⁸ Other religious property passed into lay hands, Eynsham abbey's Little Rollright manor first to various royal officials and then to the resident Throckmortons, Blowers, and Dixons, of whom William Blower (d. 1618) was a wealthy incomer from London.⁷⁹ A notable later acquisition was the purchase of Chipping Norton manor by Chipping Norton corporation in 1667,⁸⁰ and in the 1680s the corporation's sale of the manor's Over Norton and Salford parts led to the creation of an independent Over Norton manor, acquired in 1726 by the slave-owning Dawkins family. Their incorporation of the neighbouring Salford manor in 1797 created a combined 2,500-a. estate centred on Over Norton House, other large estates including the bishop of Oxford's Hook Norton property (nearly 1,400 a. in 1808), Great Rollright manor (830 a. in 1910), and the enclosed Little Rollright estate (779 a.). Many much smaller estates and freeholds also continued, however, some of them of long-standing, and others reflecting 17th-century enfranchisement of copyholds. Hook Norton and Swerford manors were both considerably reduced by the later 18th century, owners of the latter (then largely confined to Swerford park) including the Chipping Norton woolstapler Edward Witts, until financial difficulties forced him to sell.⁸¹

Break-up of the remaining large estates began in the 1890s with the Dawkins' sale of much of their Over Norton and Salford land, followed by sales by other landowners in the 1920s and 1950s–60s.⁸² Christ Church and Lincoln College, Oxford, both briefly acquired local estates in the 19th and 20th centuries,⁸³ but no college estates remained in 2022 when landownership in general was fragmented. An exception was the small estate village of Little

⁷⁷ Below, partic. parishes. Swerford extended into Hook Norton, both of them d'Oilly manors in 1086.

⁷⁸ Below, Chipping Norton; Gt Rollright; Hook Norton; Over Norton. Magdalen College, Oxford, briefly held former St John's hospital land in Chipping Norton (c.1457–1520s).

⁷⁹ For the families and their impact on the village, A. Rosen, 'Two Monuments at Little Rollright, Oxfordshire: William Blower and the Dixon Family', *Oxoniensia* 70 (2005), 51–70; below, Little Rollright.

⁸⁰ For that and for property ownership within the town, below, Chipping Norton, landownership; town govt (borough property).

⁸¹ Below, partic. parishes (incl. Hook Norton and Swerford for copyhold enfranchisements). Earlier resident Salford lords included the Chamberlaynes and Blewitts.

⁸² Below, Gt Rollright; Hook Norton; Swerford (for Showell). Brasenose College's Cold Norton manor was sold to Alb. Brassey of Heythrop in 1872, and part of the bishop of Oxford's Hook Norton estate to the tenant in 1868.

⁸³ In Swerford (1860–1950) and Little Rollright (1975–2003).

Rollright, bought in 2014 (with 509 a.) by a daughter and son-in-law of the media tycoon Rupert Murdoch.⁸⁴

Economy

*Chipping Norton borough*⁸⁵

The new town laid out probably in the mid 12th century seems to have thrived throughout the medieval period, its economy underpinned by the international trade in raw wool. Limited contraction after the Black Death proved short-lived, the wool trade peaking in the 15th century when Chipping Norton merchants traded through Southampton and Bristol and invested in the church and in a new religious guild. The town also supported the wide range of trades typical of any medieval small town, including provision of food and drink, leather- and metalworking, and innkeeping; insufficient water power for fulling seems, however, to have prevented the large-scale growth of cloth manufacture seen at nearby Witney and Burford, a problem which constrained the town's textile industry until mechanization in the 19th century. The town's Wednesday market and three-day annual fair (established by 1201) also prospered, with tolls in the early 14th century far exceeding those in Witney or Woodstock, while the market presumably benefited not only neighbouring villages but the town's own farming inhabitants.

The national decline of the raw wool trade from the 16th century was counterbalanced by the expansion of Chipping Norton's other trades, including food, drink, and hospitality, tanning and leatherworking, malting, and building trades. Innkeeping increased in importance with the development of coaching (innkeepers featuring amongst the town's élite), and by the 18th century the town's prosperity was attracting a wider range of services and retail and a small but significant group of professionals. The town's marketing functions were expanded through new fairs established during the 17th and 18th centuries (farming remaining the single largest employment sector throughout the period), and a modest revival of textile manufacture saw four manufacturers (including Thomas Bliss) in business by the 1790s. The broad pattern continued into the 1850s when the town's fortunes were transformed by the arrival of the railway, for which leading manufacturers such as William Bliss and the brewer and wine merchant William Hitchman had long campaigned. By 1876 fully mechanized clothmaking had become Chipping Norton's 'staple', and by 1881 Bliss's two mills employed over a quarter of the town's workforce, with some others drawn

⁸⁴ Below, Little Rollright.

⁸⁵ For following, below, Chipping Norton, urban econ.

from outside. Other important trades included retailing, hospitality, the brewery, and leatherworking (particularly gloving and shoemaking), alongside some small-scale coach-building, iron-founding, and printing.



Advertising poster (c.1885) for Hitchman's Albion Street brewery, from an original in Chipping Norton Museum.

The late 19th-century pattern continued in broad outline until the Second World War, save for the loss of the town's gloving and brewing industries in the 1920s–30s (through falling demand), and the fluctuating fortunes of the one remaining Bliss tweed mill, which the family sold in 1896 following recent difficulties. In the 1930s the mill still employed over 200 people, however, and in the 1970s it attracted a growing international export trade until economic recession forced its closure in 1980. Post-war fears that the town was becoming a dormitory for Oxford and Witney fuelled attempts to attract new industry (including the furniture manufacturer Parker Knoll Ltd from 1962 to 2004), and industrial estates and business parks were established from the 1980s–90s, attracting a variety of companies including some 'high-tech' providers of digital, media, scientific, and technical services. Even so over a third of those in employment worked outside the town in 2011, with another third employed in local businesses, and around a quarter working from home. By then the town had long been dwarfed by its west Oxfordshire neighbours Witney and Carterton, the latter a 20th-century creation; even so a district council Plan adopted in 2018 envisaged a significant future for the town, in which it would 'strengthen its role as a centre of enterprise' while continuing as 'an economically and socially strong market town serving the needs of a large rural area'.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ *West Oxon. Local Plan 2031* (WODC 2018): www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/feyjmpen/local-plan.pdf; below, Chipping Norton (popn). For Carterton, *VCH Oxon.* XV, 101–12.

Agriculture

Surrounding parishes remained predominantly agricultural into the 20th century, focused for the most part on the mixed sheep-corn farming typical of the Cotswolds, alongside some cattle-rearing and dairying. Arable was concentrated in open fields until the late 18th century, with most parliamentary enclosure carried out between 1770 and 1803; several parishes contained pockets of earlier enclosure, however,⁸⁷ and c.300 a. of poor-quality land in Salford was enclosed under a private Act in 1696. Showell and most of Little Rollright were enclosed for grazing in the late 15th and early 16th century, although the latter retained a small village and some reduced arable on the higher ground. Other grazing was available in common pastures (some of which attracted outsiders particularly for sheep),⁸⁸ and stream valleys provided meadow. Woodland was mostly confined to hedgerows and spinneys, although small wood sales were recorded occasionally, and Swerford park included small coppices in 1540. Pig pannage was mentioned at Salford and Swerford in the Middle Ages, and rabbit warrens were mentioned at Chipping and Over Norton, Hook Norton, and possibly Swerford.⁸⁹

Domesday Book suggests that arable-based mixed farming was well established by the late 11th century, and in the High Middle Ages large demesne flocks were recorded on both secular and monastic estates. Sizeable arable acreages grew mostly wheat, barley, oats, and peas, while lesser crops included flax and woad. Markets (besides Chipping Norton) included Banbury, Witney, and probably Stow-on-the-Wold,⁹⁰ although on Eynsham and Osney abbey's estates much of the arable produce was sent direct to their respective communities.⁹¹ Demesne leasing was introduced piecemeal between the 1380s and 1470s,⁹² and as elsewhere there was some late medieval amalgamation of holdings,⁹³ creating a typical mix of farm sizes (held by a variety of tenures) by the 16th and 17th centuries. Otherwise mixed farming continued as before, with sheep still prominent alongside arable and dairying,⁹⁴ and a celebrated breeder of beef cattle numbering amongst the late 18th-century tenants of the enclosed Little Rollright estate. Agricultural innovations

⁸⁷ e.g. Chipping Norton (c.150 a. in 1769), Gt Rollright (Coombe fm), Hook Norton (medieval and 17th/18th-cent.), Swerford (Pomfret, Buttercombe, 'between towns').

⁸⁸ e.g. Over Norton; Little Rollright.

⁸⁹ Below, partic. parishes.

⁹⁰ Below, Hook Norton; Over Norton; Little Rollright; Swerford; *Oxf. Ch. Ct Deposns 1542–50*, p. 9 (also mentioning Stratford-upon-Avon fair). For medieval mkts at Hook Norton and Gt Rollright, below.

⁹¹ Below, Hook Norton; Little Rollright.

⁹² Below, Gt Rollright (1380); Hook Norton (post-1477); most were let during the 15th cent.

⁹³ e.g. Salford.

⁹⁴ John Croker of Hook Norton (d. 1569) had 1,000 sheep, although few flocks exceeded 300 and many were much smaller.

included use of hitchings (temporary cultivation of fallow or grassland) and introduction of sainfoin, cinquefoil, and turnips, and by the 18th century the area's open fields had apparently all been reorganized into quarters run on four-course rotations, replacing the earlier two- and three-course systems.⁹⁵ Reductions in grazing stints in some parishes nevertheless suggest over-pasturing and mounting pressure on resources.⁹⁶



The landscape around Little Rollright, photographed from the south-east in 2020.

Parliamentary enclosures created larger ring-fenced farms and some new outlying farmsteads, simultaneously depriving cottagers and smallholders of their commons and furze-cutting rights: in Chipping Norton the corporation successfully fought to preserve a part of its commons for the townspeople, although much was lost in a later enclosure in 1849. Mid 19th-century farms typically ranged from c.130 a. to 400 a., with some others under 100 a. and, exceptionally, one or two of 800–1,000 acres.⁹⁷ Most remained focused on cereal production, sheep, and dairy cattle, while the railway's arrival in 1855 (and its extension to Hook Norton and Banbury in 1887) facilitated distribution, a successful livestock market being established at Hook Norton station. As elsewhere, the late 19th-century agricultural depression saw a shift towards dairying, reflected in rising cattle numbers and an increased proportion of grassland; nonetheless most parishes remained at least half arable, and in some places sheep numbers declined as wool prices fell. The railway also aided diversification, reflected in the later development of commercial pheasant-rearing and sugar-beet production in Great Rollright.⁹⁸ Twentieth-century farming overall followed a common pattern, with mixed farming continuing in mid-century despite some arable increase for the war effort, followed by a widespread shift to arable from the 1960s–70s. Early 21st-century crops included wheat, barley, oilseed rape, and linseed, while livestock still included beef and dairy cattle, sheep (in smaller numbers than earlier), pigs, and commercially raised poultry. Some farming was through contractors, and some villages lost their working farms, the land being predominantly farmed from outside.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Below, partic. parishes.

⁹⁶ e.g. Over Norton; Gt Rollright.

⁹⁷ For the largest, below Hook Norton; Gt Rollright; Little Rollright.

⁹⁸ Below, partic. parishes; above (communics); Orr, *Oxon. Agric.* 69–72 and statistical plates.

⁹⁹ Below, partic. parishes.

Rural Markets, Crafts, and Industry

Rural weekly markets were established at Great Rollright in 1253, at Churchill (near Salford) in 1327, and at Hook Norton in 1438, all at the initiative of their respective lords. Great Rollright's market, with an accompanying three-day fair, was not mentioned later, but Hook Norton's (which in the 1590s dealt chiefly in agricultural produce) continued into the 17th century, its eventual disappearance associated perhaps with the revival of Charlbury's market in 1678. Hook Norton's June and November fairs, also granted in 1438, continued into the later 19th century as livestock fairs dealing in horses and cattle.¹⁰⁰

The usual rural trades- and craftsmen (including blacksmiths, bakers, shoemakers, and wheelwrights) were found in most villages by the 17th or 18th centuries and sometimes earlier, with Hook Norton in particular (and to a lesser extent Over Norton and Great Rollright) emerging early on as significant local service centres with a wide range of crafts and retail. Building craftsmen included masons and carpenters, and leather work (presumably using local hides) included tanning at Hook Norton and Salford, while a fellmonger was mentioned at Great Rollright. Gloving (mostly domestic) expanded during the 19th century, when the Bowen family opened a 'factory' in Over Norton. Pubs or alehouses existed in most parishes by the 18th century, and by the 19th century grocery and other shops were common even in smaller villages such as Swerford, while Hook Norton had a mercer's shop as early as 1668.¹⁰¹ Occasional references to weavers and a couple to fullers point to small-scale involvement in local textile manufacture,¹⁰² while tailors and drapers were mentioned in several parishes. Most village crafts, shops, and pubs disappeared during the 20th century, with just a few surviving into the early 21st, notably in Hook Norton. Other late 20th- and early 21st-century businesses included a building firm, garden centre, farm shop, tea room, skip-hire firm, and (in the 1970s) a violin workshop, along with petrol stations and car dealerships.¹⁰³

Lime kilns were established on Great Rollright's southern edge by 1710, their successors continuing into the 1920s–30s when the site of one (by the railway halt) became a coal wharf. Small-scale brick- and tile-making was carried out in Over Norton, Chipping Norton, and Salford in the 19th century, and small-scale quarrying occurred in many parishes from an early date, commercial quarrying for building stone continuing near Little

¹⁰⁰ *Oxon. Atlas*, p. 39; below, partic. parishes. Hook Norton's June fair was switched to May in 1793.

¹⁰¹ Below, partic. parishes. A Swerford mercer was mentioned in 1425: *Cal. Pat.* 1422–9, 305.

¹⁰² For the fullers (both 16th-cent.), below, Gt Rollright; Swerford. Presumably they fullled manually, as no fulling mills are known.

¹⁰³ Below, partic. parishes.

Rollright in 2022.¹⁰⁴ Water-powered corn-grist mills existed in virtually every parish by 1086 (with a couple of others added by the 13th century), and though some disappeared most continued into the 19th or early 20th century. Windmills were mentioned intermittently from the 14th century (at Hook Norton) to the late 18th, the last (in Salford) continuing until 1878. Salford may have also had a water-powered fulling mill in 1319, but if so it was short-lived, and no others are known.¹⁰⁵

By far the largest industrial developments outside the town were Hook Norton's ironstone quarries and brewery. Ironstone extraction began in 1889 soon after the opening of the railway (which allowed ore to be exported to south Staffordshire and north Wales), and by the First World War Brymbo Steel employed 100 men there and had its own railway system and calcining kilns. Demand fell between the wars, however, and following a short-lived wartime boost production ended in 1946. Hook Norton brewery had its origins in a farm and maltings bought in 1846 by John Harris (d.1887), who by 1852 was brewing commercially. The railway allowed the firm to export across a wide area including the West Midlands and Coventry, and it continued in 2023, having become a limited company in 1900.¹⁰⁶



Hook Norton ironstone works: one of the calcining kilns in operation.

Society

The Middle Ages

The bulk of the 13th-century rural population comprised a typical Midland mix of unfree peasant farmers owing rent and labour services (mostly for whole yardlands); unfree

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.; www.smithsbletchington.co.uk/rollright-quarry (accessed Nov. 2022).

¹⁰⁵ Below, partic. parishes. Only Little Rollright lacked a mill in 1086.

¹⁰⁶ Below, Hook Norton.

cottagers reliant on gardens or a few acres; and smaller numbers of freeholders paying low or nominal rents, alongside a handful of free or unfree craftsmen.¹⁰⁷ Landholding was sometimes complex, with several parishes split amongst different lordships, and occasionally amongst different family branches, while some freeholders also occupied substantial holdings. In many instances they and the larger unfree tenants probably exerted more day-to-day influence in their villages than the lords themselves, who often had estates elsewhere and resided only occasionally.¹⁰⁸ That said, manor houses were maintained in most parishes throughout the 13th and 14th centuries (including on several monastic estates), and were presumably occupied by manorial officials when the lords' families were absent. Additional symbols of lordship included the parks at Hook Norton and Swerford, the castle at Chipping Norton with its fishponds and vineyard, and the smaller motte-and-bailey castle at Swerford (abandoned by 1200).¹⁰⁹ Topographical bynames suggest some limited population movement between villages in west Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, and Warwickshire, incomers to Hook Norton including a Jew named Isaac (fl. 1210).¹¹⁰

Manorial authority weakened following the plagues and population decline of the mid to late 14th century, which as elsewhere saw amalgamation of holdings, neglect of redundant buildings, and some illegal migration from manors.¹¹¹ Such changes, along with leasing of demesnes and of other vacant land, produced a class of prosperous late medieval farmers who were often involved in the wool trade and who had wide connections, some leading free tenants at Hook Norton having links in Banbury, Oxford, and Stratford-on-Avon, while the wealthy manorial lessee John Croker occupied the manor house. Agrarian change sometimes led to conflict. An early enclosure at Showell in 1391, presumably for sheep farming, prompted violence and hedge-breaking, and some of the occasional raids on manor houses by supporters of rival lords may have similarly involved disputes over grazing or other agrarian rights. Rural social life is ill documented, but ale houses presumably existed, and church houses noted in Hook Norton and Swerford in the early 16th century may have hosted late medieval church ales.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ *Rot. Hund.* II, 725 sqq; below, partic. parishes. No freemen were expressly noted in Domesday Book, although some pre-Conquest Showell tenants could 'go as they wished' (DB, f. 157).

¹⁰⁸ Above (landownership); and for particularly complex 13th- to 14th-cent. landholding, below, Gt Rollright; Salford; Swerford (landownership; econ. hist.; social hist.).

¹⁰⁹ Below, partic. parishes. Over Norton lacked a manor house as part of Chipping Norton manor, but many parishes had more than one, and at Hook Norton Osney abbey maintained a resident canon-warden.

¹¹⁰ Below, partic. parishes. Another Jew held land at Hook Norton later in the century.

¹¹¹ e.g. at Little Rollright and Salford.

¹¹² Below, partic. parishes; for raids on houses, Chipping Norton (attack on rectory ho.); Gt Rollright; Hook Norton.

Chipping Norton's high-status lords were seldom resident until the late 15th century, and though the town remained a seignorial borough administered through manorial institutions and officers, in reality its daily life must have been dominated by its wealthy and well-connected wool merchants and other burgesses. Between 1302 and 1305 the borough sent representatives to parliament, and a religious guild founded by prominent townsmen in 1450 created a new forum for collective action, accumulating substantial property, founding and running a grammar school and almshouse, erecting a guildhall, and probably overseeing the contemporary remodelling of the church, where some of its leading members were commemorated by brasses. Women were included in the guild, and played an active role in town life particularly in widowhood, founding chantries, supporting the guild, and in at least one instance participating directly in the international wool trade.¹¹³ The arrival of the Croft family by the 1490s saw establishment of a new urban manor house and an increased gentry presence into the 16th century, although well-connected merchants, innkeepers, and others remained prominent, and relations between lords, gentry, and townspeople seem generally to have remained good. The town's late-medieval social life focused presumably on the guild, on religious festivals and processions, and on the regular markets and fairs, as well as on the various inns and alehouses.¹¹⁴

1500–1800

Resident lords in the 16th to 18th centuries included the Sheppards in Great Rollright, the Chamberlaynes and Blewitts in Salford, the Throckmortons, Blowers, and Dixons at Little Rollright, the Dawkinses in Over Norton, and (briefly) the Wittses at Swerford, all of whom built grand houses and exerted local influence. Some successful farming families such as the Busbys at Over Norton and the Crokers at Hook Norton also acquired gentry or lordly status, and manor courts continued in most parishes until at least the late 18th century. Even so many rural places were dominated for long stretches not by their lords but by their more prosperous yeoman farmers (who generally held the key parish offices), with Hook Norton in particular emerging as a classic open village with its large population, lively craft sector, and burgeoning religious Nonconformity. Migration was common at all social levels despite the presence of some long-established families, and like the gentry many yeoman farmers had widespread social and business ties extending into Gloucestershire and Warwickshire. The sizeable labouring and servant classes, though less visible, are discernible through tax lists,

¹¹³ e.g. Juliana Breton (fl. 1279, wool trade); Mgt Gerveys and Mgt Pynner (1481 and 1497, chantries); Joan Mitton (1530, guild).

¹¹⁴ Below, Chipping Norton, landownership; urban econ.; social hist.; relig. hist.

wills, and parish records, and by the 19th century (following the late 18th-century parliamentary enclosures) landless labourers made up the bulk of the rural population.¹¹⁵

Social welfare was provided by a smattering of parish charities and (increasingly) by parish poor relief. Chipping Norton and Hook Norton both established parish workhouses, and several poor's allotments laid out at enclosure funded small fuel charities. Overseers paid for limited medical care including parish-wide inoculations in Great Rollright and Salford, and early Friendly Societies were established in Chipping Norton (1765) and Hook Norton (1780). A few places also acquired small parish schools.¹¹⁶ Recorded conflict mostly involved the usual petty disputes over property, tithes, and slander, although more serious opposition to parliamentary enclosure arose at Hook Norton and possibly elsewhere.¹¹⁷ The worst disruption came during the Civil War, which brought Royalist and Parliamentary armies, billeting, disease, financial loss, and some civilian deaths across the social spectrum.¹¹⁸ Rural social life throughout focused presumably on the area's numerous pubs.

Chipping Norton retained close links with the countryside through farming, family ties, and entertainment, as with the popular Chipping Norton races held by the 1680s on Over Norton heath. Its urban character nevertheless set it apart, its social and political life still dominated by the leading tradesmen, craftsmen, and manufacturers who from the 16th century replaced the earlier merchant class, and who were joined from the 18th century by a small but socially significant group of lawyers, surgeons, and bankers. The manor's purchase by the resident Chadwells in 1596 led to protracted conflict with the townspeople, culminating in the town's acquisition of a borough charter in 1607 and the corporation's purchase of the manor in 1667, putting the town on a new footing. Its aspirations are reflected in the smart new buildings erected around the market area during the 18th century, although it retained many poorer parts, including (by the early 19th century) emerging cottage yards behind the street frontage. The town's social tone was further affected, as in some rural parishes, by burgeoning Protestant Nonconformity, supported by some prosperous and influential townspeople.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Below, partic. parishes. Migration is well testified in *Oxf Ch. Ct Deposns 1542–1639* as well as in wills.

¹¹⁶ Hook Norton, Gt Rollright, Swerford (by 1819), Chipping Norton.

¹¹⁷ Below, partic. parishes.

¹¹⁸ Including Cecilia Dixon at Little Rollright and Gt Rollright's lord Wm Sheppard.

¹¹⁹ Below, Chipping Norton, passim; below (relig.).

Since 1800

Social change in the rural parishes followed a broadly common pattern in the 19th and 20th centuries, with most places characterized until the First World War by predominantly landless labourers working for a few prominent farmers, many of whom were incomers. There followed a sharp decline in agricultural work, loss of local crafts, sporadic council-house building, and (from the 1960s especially) a growing influx of commuters and retirees, resulting in widespread gentrification. Even so there were some marked differences between places. Hook Norton remained a classic 'open' village throughout the 19th century, with its large population, high poor-relief costs, strong Nonconformity, and marked labour surplus, a problem mitigated after 1889 by employment in the ironstone quarries. Following further intermittent difficulties, employment in Banbury and elsewhere attracted newcomers from the 1960s, and by the 1990s the village was dominated by people in professional and management roles, developing a strong communal identity and varied services and amenities. By contrast Over Norton (and to a lesser extent Salford) remained essentially estate villages during the 19th century, the Dawkinses exerting a strong influence as landowners, and playing a mostly philanthropic role in village life until the estate's break-up from 1896. At Great Rollright, too, the incoming Halls took some interest in village life in the 1890s–1920s, as did the Davises at Swerford in the 19th century, while the Little Rollright estate, exceptionally, retained its integrity in the 2010s, when virtually the entire parish (including its tiny village) was sold for £18 million. Resident Anglican clergy, too, played a significant role in most parishes into the early 20th century, their social conservatism counterbalanced by their paternalistic support for parish amenities, while expanding Nonconformity provided an alternative focus in many villages.¹²⁰

Poverty and low wages led in the 1870s to support for agricultural trade unionism (including a bitter strike in Salford), the poverty only marginally mitigated by soup funds, clothing clubs, and a few new parish charities. Friendly Societies (playing a social as well as practical role) existed in Salford, Hook Norton, and Swerford by the late 19th century,¹²¹ and clubs, sports, and amenities were supported by clergy and landowners, sometimes expressly as an alternative to the beer house. Village halls appeared from the 1920s and a few Women's Institute branches from 1918, while village schools (either National or privately owned) existed in every parish except Little Rollright. Of those, Hook Norton's and Great Rollright's continued as county primary schools in 2022, serving wide catchments. Church and chapel (along with village pubs) provided further foci in many villages well into the 20th

¹²⁰ Below, partic. parishes; below (relig.).

¹²¹ Below, partic. parishes; Gt Rollright had a Provident Soc.

century,¹²² and most places retained a variety of clubs in the early 21st century, despite an average commuting distance in 2011 of nearly 25 km. Over 77 per cent of houses were then owner-occupied, with under ten per cent social housing and ten per cent privately rented, while the median age (as in much of west Oxfordshire) was relatively high. The population was overwhelmingly White British.¹²³

Chipping Norton was transformed from the mid 19th century by the arrival of the railway, which allowed the Bliss mills to mechanize fully and to become the town's single largest employer.¹²⁴ Industrial relations were initially good, and William Bliss (d. 1883) played a major philanthropic role within the town; economic downturn in the 1880s–90s prompted the firm's sale to less sympathetic owners, however, ultimately contributing to a bitter and divisive strike in 1913–14. Earlier disturbances (though rare) followed the notorious 'Ascott Martyrs' trial at Chipping Norton police station, a death in police custody, and (in the 1880s) orchestrated opposition to Salvation Army activity. Social amenities (some provided by Bliss) increased exponentially during the later 19th century, and sanitation was substantially improved from the 1870s, greatly reducing the incidence of major epidemics.



Bliss mill strikers, 1913-14

The first half of the 20th century saw much continuity in the town, with a substantial proportion of residents still employed by local firms, and post-war fears that it might become a dormitory town largely averted. Between 1931 and 2019 the population almost doubled, although the rate of growth remained only a fraction of that of some other west Oxfordshire towns, preserving a 'thriving community spirit' and something of its small-town flavour. Even so changing social attitudes, population turnover, more diverse employment, increased car ownership, and (in 1974) loss of the town's self-governing corporation all contributed to the emergence of a less tight-knit and less hierarchical town society by the early 21st century.

¹²² Below, partic. parishes; the earliest village hall was at Hook Norton (1922), and the earliest WI at Gt Rollright.

¹²³ *Census*, 2011 (online datasets); *Census 2011: Summary for West Oxon.* (WODC c.2011). Median age was 48.9; White British ethnicity 96%, plus 2.3% Irish/Irish Traveller.

¹²⁴ For following, below, Chipping Norton, urban econ.; town govt (utilities); social hist.

The town as a whole remained prosperous, with a high proportion of residents in professional, managerial, and skilled jobs; nevertheless there were areas of deprivation and an above-average proportion of elderly people (some of them not well-off), while inadequate affordable housing, inadequate public transport, and town-centre traffic and pollution were recurring concerns. Non-white ethnic representation remained low, comprising only 3.6 per cent of the population (227 people) in 2011, half of them Asian British.¹²⁵ Some hostility to ethnic minorities surfaced briefly in the 1980s and 2010s, but was untypical and was widely condemned.¹²⁶ The so-called 'Chipping Norton set', a high-profile group of influential media, political, and show-business acquaintances identified in the 2010s, lived mostly in scattered outlying parishes, and had no real connection with the town.¹²⁷

Religion

In the 9th and 10th centuries much of the area was probably included in the large minster *parochiae* of either Charlbury or Shipton-under-Wychwood.¹²⁸ An exception was Hook Norton, which as a significant royal estate centre probably acquired a separate early church with wide jurisdiction: the surviving building incorporates late 10th- or 11th-century fragments, and may have had a predecessor either there or nearby, perhaps within the Iron-Age hillfort at Tadmarton Camp.¹²⁹ As elsewhere the foundation of churches on newly created estates, probably mostly by resident lords and freemen, was breaking up that pattern by the late 11th century and probably much earlier. Chipping Norton church existed by 1096 when its Norman lord gave it to Gloucester abbey, and with the exception of Over Norton (which remained part of Chipping Norton manor and parish) all of the remaining places had their own apparently independent churches by the late 12th century, many of them probably long-established. A parochial chapel existed at Showell (in Swerford parish) by c.1210, and though Over Norton never acquired a parochial church the outlying Cold Norton priory was founded there in the mid 12th century, along with a nearby wayside hospital and hospital chapel. Hook Norton church may have retained a small college of

¹²⁵ *Census*, 2011 (online datasets); *Chipping Norton Community Profile of Health and Wellbeing Evidence* (Oxfordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Aug. 2021): accessed (Nov. 2022) at <https://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/joint-strategic-needs-assessment>.

¹²⁶ *Chipping Norton News* (Mar. 2013), 6, 34; below, social hist. (since 1945).

¹²⁷ *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 180; below, Chipping Norton, social hist. (since 1945); cf. *Daily Telegraph*, 7 June 2011, 5 Mar. 2012; *Guardian*, 7 Oct. 2011; *Witney Gaz.* 27 July 2013. The 'set' included relatives of the media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, whose daughter and son-in-law bought Little Rollright in 2014.

¹²⁸ *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 20–1, 73–4; *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 26–7; Blair, *A-S Oxon.* refs at 223 (Charlbury); cf. above (settlement: Anglo-Saxon).

¹²⁹ J. Blair, 'Hook Norton, *Regia Villa*', *Oxoniensia* 51 (1986), 66–7, revised in M. Biddle and J. Blair, 'The Hook Norton Hoard of 1848: A Viking Burial from Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 52 (1987), 195; below, Hook Norton.

secular clergy into the 1160s–80s when the building was lavishly remodelled, but by c.1200 it was apparently an ordinary parish church. Like Chipping Norton, Little Rollright, and (from 1217) Swerford it was by then under monastic patronage, leaving only Great Rollright and Salford still with lay patrons.¹³⁰



Hook Norton church, where fragments of high-quality pre-Conquest work have been discovered at the nave's NE corner.

The churches' endowments varied considerably, Hook Norton producing £20 a year gross in 1291, and Chipping Norton (the centre of the rural deanery) nearly £30, while Salford and Little Rollright yielded under £3 each.¹³¹ Actual clerical incomes were further reduced by pensions and appropriations, a quarter of Little Rollright's tiny endowment being payable to Eynsham abbey, and most of Hook Norton's (except for a 2-mark vicar's allowance) to Osney abbey, while Gloucester abbey appropriated Chipping Norton rectory c.1403, having previously received a £3 annual pension.¹³² Incumbents' incomes remained inadequate in several parishes into the modern period, Hook Norton becoming an impoverished curacy after the vicarage was reabsorbed into the rectory in 1513.¹³³ Even wealthier benefices were sometimes served by stipendiary assistants standing in for non-resident rectors, meaning that day-to-day contrasts on the ground were perhaps less marked than their endowments alone might imply. Late medieval lights and obits are recorded in several local churches, and Chipping Norton in particular acquired a sizeable clerical establishment through the founding of chantries and of a religious guild. Lay involvement

¹³⁰ Below, partic. parishes; for wider context, J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (2005), 368–74. Tenurial complexities in Salford meant that tenants holding of 'Bartletts' were counted as Chipping Norton parishioners, causing difficulties into the 18th century: below, Salford, relig. hist.

¹³¹ www.dhi.ac.uk/taxatio (accessed Dec. 2022); *Tax. Eccl.* 32 (excl. Hook Norton vicarage). Both Chipping Norton and Hook Norton had large glebes, and the former received tithes from Over Norton and part of Salford. Gt Rollright and Swerford yielded £11 and £6 13s. 4d.

¹³² Below, partic. parishes. The Rollrights, Salford, and Swerford remained rectories, despite two being under monastic patronage.

¹³³ Below, partic. parishes; cf. *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 132–3 (income in 1835, when the lowest included Chipping Norton vicarage).

both there and elsewhere is evidenced by investment in church buildings, bequests to lights, images, and bells, and occasional references to parish processions, church houses, and (possibly) holy wells.¹³⁴

The Reformation (which altered the pattern of church patronage)¹³⁵ seems to have been accepted with little overt opposition, save for the vicar of Chipping Norton's involvement in the Oxfordshire rising of 1549, for which he was sentenced to be hanged from the church tower. All of the area's local incumbents accepted the Elizabethan religious settlement, and recusancy remained sporadic and small-scale, despite the regional focus provided from the 18th century by the earl of Shrewsbury's Roman Catholic chapel at nearby Heythrop, which most recorded Catholics probably attended. The building of a Catholic church in Chipping Norton in 1835–6 was also a Heythrop initiative supported by wealthy outsiders, and then as later it catered chiefly for the wider area, the town itself having only a handful of Catholics in the 1820s–30s.¹³⁶

Protestant Nonconformity was evident from the mid 17th century, with Quakers, Baptists, and Independents or Congregationalists noted particularly in Hook Norton, Chipping Norton, and Swerford. Of those, the Hook Norton and Chipping Norton groups acquired purpose-built meeting houses and became permanently established, Chipping Norton's Independent church being taken over by Baptists from the 1770s. Wesleyan Methodists appeared from the late 18th century, eventually establishing meeting houses in Chipping Norton, Hook Norton, and Salford, and during the 19th century Dissent expanded further, with new Baptist chapels established in Great Rollright, and Primitive Methodists appearing in several parishes alongside some smaller groups such as Plymouth Brethren and the Salvation Army. Contributory factors, different in every parish, included Anglican neglect, support from leading farmers, and (in the 1870s) growing labouring-class hostility to the Anglican establishment.¹³⁷ Chipping Norton, where leading Baptists included the mill owner William Bliss (d. 1883), saw additional tensions between its High- and Low-Church Anglican factions, the latter including William Dawkins of Over Norton House, who briefly forbade use of the village schoolroom for what he dubbed 'Popish' Anglican services.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Below, partic. parishes; for possible wells, Gt Rollright; Little Rollright.

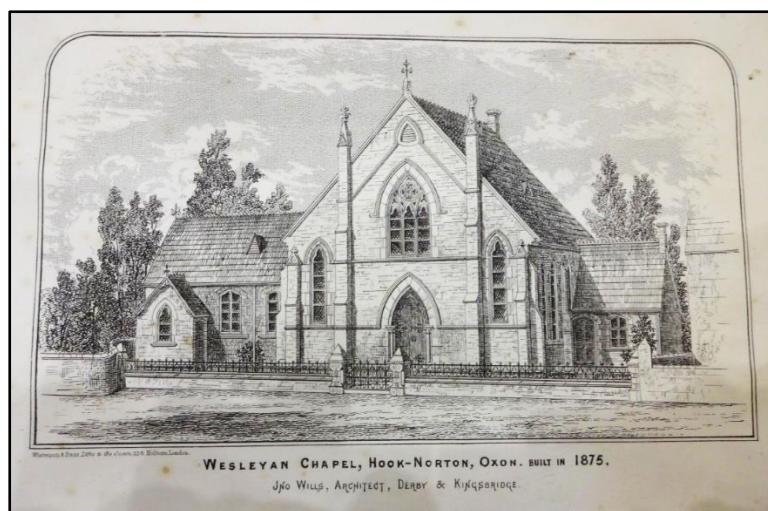
¹³⁵ Thereafter only Chipping Norton remained in ecclesiastical patronage, while two advowsons (Gt Rollright and Swerford) were later acquired by Oxford colleges.

¹³⁶ Below, partic. parishes; cf. *VCH Oxon.* XI, 142 (Heythrop, misdating the Chipping Norton church); *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 82–3, 171–2 (Oxon. uprising).

¹³⁷ Below, partic. parishes; cf. *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 86–7, 134–5 (incl. nearby Quaker and Baptist foci in Sibford Gower and Swalcliffe); P. Horn (ed.), *Agric. Trade Unionism in Oxon. 1872–81* (ORS 48, 1974), 133.

¹³⁸ Below, Chipping Norton; Over Norton; Dawkins instead allowed its use by Wesleyan Methodists. The schoolroom was formally dedicated as an Anglican chapel in 1943.

By then most Anglican churches were conscientiously served by resident clergy, and as elsewhere the 20th century saw increased cooperation and ecumenicalism. Even so the period from the Second World War saw the usual decline in attendance across all religious groups, and by 2022, amongst the main non-Anglican sects, only the Baptist, Methodist, and Roman Catholic churches in Chipping Norton and the Baptist church in Hook Norton remained open.¹³⁹ Anglican churches were increasingly held in plurality,¹⁴⁰ and in 1980 Hook Norton became part of a team ministry with Great Rollright, Swerford, and Wigginton. Chipping Norton was made the centre of a new ten-church team ministry in 2001, which included Salford and Little Rollright, and extended into Warwickshire and Gloucestershire.¹⁴¹ In 2018 Sunday attendance at Chipping Norton church still averaged c.160, but Great Rollright attracted only 15, and Salford and Little Rollright were served only monthly.¹⁴² Even so c.65 per cent of the area's population identified as Christian in 2011, with another 25 per cent of no religion, and 7.5 per cent not specifying. The largest non-Christian groups were Buddhists (61 people or 0.6 per cent), Muslims (0.4 per cent), and Jews (0.2 per cent), most of them concentrated in Chipping Norton, but with a small Buddhist group in Hook Norton also.¹⁴³



Hook Norton Wesleyan Methodist chapel (built 1875, demolished 1986)

¹³⁹ Below, partic. parishes; Chipping Norton also had Jehovah's Witnesses, and a few Hook Norton Quakers attended meetings in Sibford Gower.

¹⁴⁰ e.g. Little Rollright and Salford (from 1908), Chipping Norton and Heythrop (1924–64).

¹⁴¹ Below, partic. parishes; www.stmaryscnorton.com/around-the-benefice.php;

<https://kinghamchurches.com> (Dec. 2022); the other Chipping Norton team churches were Chastleton, Churchill (with Sarsden), Cornwell, Kingham, Little Compton (Warws.), and Daylesford (Glos.), plus Over Norton chapel (dedicated 1943, closed 2021). Salford, Chastleton, Cornwell, Little Compton, and Little Rollright (the 'five villages') became an eccl. parish within the benefice in 2002, while Daylesford church was taken over by a trust in 2017.

¹⁴² *Benefice of Hook Norton with Gt Rollright, Swerford and Wigginton: Profile* (2018); below, partic. parishes. Hook Norton's Sunday attendance averaged 40–50, though with over 200 at some special services.

¹⁴³ *Census*, 2011 (online datasets), also noting 6 Hindus, 2 Sikhs, and 43 'other religion'.

The Built Character

The area's vernacular buildings are typical of the Cotswolds and of the Banbury region, constructed mainly of locally quarried limestone or (in Hook Norton and Swerford) marlstone or ironstone.¹⁴⁴ That appears to have been the case from the Middle Ages, with timber framing confined to a handful of first floors and rear ranges in Chipping Norton,¹⁴⁵ and no structural evidence found so far in any of the rural parishes, where surviving houses date primarily from the 17th century and later. Roofs, too, are predominantly stone-slatted, although thatch remained common in the villages and in farm buildings in the 19th century. The apparent absence of a strong local carpentry tradition was reflected in local roof construction, with fully-framed roof structures (some of them 15th-century) found only in Chipping Norton with its concentration of commercial prosperity. In villages such as Hook Norton, simpler framing derived from the raised-cruck tradition persisted into the 18th century, with later forms not appearing until the late 17th.¹⁴⁶ Windows typically feature either stone mullions and hoodmoulds or casements under plain timber lintels, and in Hook Norton especially the darker marlstone was sometimes banded with lighter coloured limestone for decorative effect. Semi-circular stair turrets (found elsewhere in north Oxfordshire) are a further feature of the village, and some tall stair-towers elsewhere were clearly built to impress.¹⁴⁷



Duck End House, Great Rollright: west elevation, showing its tall stair tower.

¹⁴⁴ Section based partly on investigation of 73 Chipping Norton buildings by the Chipping Norton Buildings Record (part-summarized in Rosen and Cliffe, *Making*), and of 37 Hook Norton buildings by the OBR (reports in progress 2023). For a regional survey of the more northerly parishes, R.B. Wood-Jones, *Traditional Domestic Archit. in the Banbury Region* (1986 edn).

¹⁴⁵ Similar to nearby Witney, but in contrast to Burford, where stone co-existed with extensive timber-framing: VCH Oxon. XIV, 33–4; A Catchpole, D. Clark, R. Peberdy, *Burford: Buildings and People in a Cotswold Town* (2008), 61–7; below, Chipping Norton, bldgs.

¹⁴⁶ Pers. comm., Paul Clark (Chipping Norton Buildings Record and OBR), based on bldg surveys noted above; cf. Wood-Jones, *Banbury Regn.*, 14–15, 52, 65–6, 101, 225, 228–30. Carpenters are recorded from the 17th century, but only alongside masons and other building craftsmen (below, partic. parishes, incl. the 13th-cent. byname 'mason' in Showell).

¹⁴⁷ e.g. Duck End Ho. in Gt Rollright. See also F. Radcliffe, 'Note on Semi-Circular Staircases in the Oxford Region', in M. Biddle, 'The Deserted Medieval Village of Seacourt, Berkshire', *Oxoniensia*, 26–27 (1961), 125–8.

Surviving medieval houses in the town (combined with probate evidence elsewhere) suggest that traditional open halls and cross passages persisted into the 16th century, with chimneys and fully formed first floors becoming common (but not universal) by c.1600.¹⁴⁸ By then some larger town houses contained hall, parlour, dedicated kitchen, and shop, possibly all with rooms above,¹⁴⁹ while lobby-entrance plans were found in both town and countryside by the late 17th century.¹⁵⁰ Classical and Baroque styles appeared from the early 18th century, both in rural mansions such as Salford House (built c.1695 and remodelled c.1723), and in the wholesale remodelling and rebuilding of houses and inns within Chipping Norton's central area, some of them clearly influenced by the Baroque of Blenheim, Heythrop Park, and Ditchley Park, and involving extensive use of ashlar. Smaller classically influenced buildings followed in several rural parishes, alongside country mansions such as the 18th-century Over Norton House (replaced in the 1870s) and Swerford Park (built 1775–6 and remodelled 1824–9). Some older vernacular buildings also acquired classically influenced doorcases or sash windows through the 18th and early 19th century. Country-house landscaping included terraced gardens at Salford House and the remodelling of Swerford park, while Over Norton park was laid out around its pre-existing house in the early 19th century.¹⁵¹

Nineteenth- and early 20th-century building in the villages was largely confined to farm buildings and some new tenant housing, including semi-detached estate cottages at Great Rollright and one or two small cottage rows. In the town, development of cramped cottage yards behind the street frontage was accompanied by suburban expansion including new terraces and some new middle-class housing, still often in stone, but with a gradually increased use of brick and Welsh slate following arrival of the railway, while some striking new shopfronts included increased use of plate glass. New institutional or industrial premises in the town included the prison-like union workhouse of 1836, G.S. Repton's Palladian town hall of 1842 (superseding the part 16th-century guildhall), and William Bliss's iron-framed tweed mill of 1872 with its domed stair tower and tall chimney, while Hook Norton Brewery was rebuilt in striking form in 1898–1900. New rural schoolrooms, some by established architects, featured a mix of vernacular and gothic.¹⁵²

Council-house building began in both town and countryside in the 1920–30s, some early examples (also by well-known architects) incorporating decorative details. Later private

¹⁴⁸ Rosen and Cliffe, *Making*, 59–60; below, partic. parishes. A probably 15th-cent. first-floor fireplace survives at 8 Market St (*Making*, 159–65), and as in Burford and Henley at least some Chipping Norton halls were laid lengthways along the street.

¹⁴⁹ Rosen and Cliffe, *Making*, 59.

¹⁵⁰ e.g. 44 West End (Chipping Norton), Rectory Cottage (Gt Rollright).

¹⁵¹ Below, partic. parishes.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

and council building introduced more varied materials including brick, render, concrete, and reconstituted stone, although little post-war work is of any great architectural merit, despite attempts to blend in with the local vernacular particularly after the introduction of conservation areas in the 1970s–90s. Modern architect-designed houses in the countryside encompass both large-scale classical pastiche and more adventurous use of stone and glass,¹⁵³ while some older agricultural, industrial, and institutional buildings were converted to domestic use.¹⁵⁴



Hook Norton's former National school (now its library), built in 1854-5 to designs by E.G. Bruton.

The area's medieval churches vary in size and complexity, though most are aisled, and all have west (or at Swerford south-west) towers, that at Hook Norton possibly replacing an earlier central tower, and that at Little Rollright rebuilt by the lord in 1617. The most important churches are those at Hook Norton and Chipping Norton, the latter (with its complex three-aisled plan and chapels) incorporating a light-filled 15th-century nave and clerestory designed by the master mason John Smith, and reflecting the town's late medieval prosperity. Hook Norton church (which contains pre-Conquest fragments) was enlarged by Osney abbey c.1160–80 in a form which may indicate the late survival of a small community of secular priests, and as at Chipping Norton its large 15th-century clerestory incorporates a wide 'Cotswold' window over the chancel arch. Clerestories were also added at Great Rollright, Salford, and Swerford, and Great Rollright retains a fine Romanesque south doorway and a richly decorated 14th-century south aisle and two-storeyed porch. The post-Reformation period saw few structural changes until the 19th century, when the tower of Chipping Norton church was rebuilt (in 1821–5), and all of the churches underwent restorations of varying severity, Salford church being substantially rebuilt re-using much of the medieval fabric. Later work was chiefly restorative, or to improve facilities and cater for more varied uses. Medieval wall paintings survive in Hook Norton church and fragments of medieval glass at Great Rollright and Swerford, while all but Little Rollright church contain

¹⁵³ Below, Over Norton; Gt Rollright; Little Rollright; Salford; Swerford (mock Cotswold vernacular).

¹⁵⁴ e.g. Bliss's tweed mill and Chipping Norton workho.

some 19th- or 20th-century stained glass. Chipping Norton churchyard also contains several high-quality chest- and bale tombs.¹⁵⁵



Little Rollright church:
monument to
William Blower (d.
1618).

The most important non-Anglican religious buildings are in Chipping Norton, including the austere classical Roman Catholic church of 1835–6 (by J.M. Derick), the imposing Early-English Baptist church of 1862–3 with its rose window, triple porch, and pinnacles, and the Italianate Wesleyan church of 1867–8, the last two replacing earlier buildings. Nonconformist chapels in the villages were generally much humbler structures, although Hook Norton retains a purpose-built Baptist chapel of 1787 with a hipped roof and round-headed windows.¹⁵⁶

Government and Administration

Hundredal and Manorial Government

By the 13th century (and probably by the 11th) all but one of the places covered in this volume lay within the triple hundred of Chadlington, whose jurisdiction descended with Shipton-under-Wychwood manor and (later) with Shipton Court.¹⁵⁷ The hamlet of Showell (in Swerford parish) was included in Wootton hundred, probably because of its early association with part of neighbouring Dunthrop, with which it was held in 1086.¹⁵⁸ Annual views of

¹⁵⁵ Below, partic. parishes. Little Rollright retains fragments of 17th-cent. painting over the chancel arch.

¹⁵⁶ Below, partic. parishes. The Salvation Army hall in Chipping Norton (1888–9) is now a theatre.

¹⁵⁷ For a full account, *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 25–6; one of the hundred meeting places was Shipton barrow, but the others are unknown. Chadlington itself is reserved for a future volume.

¹⁵⁸ DB, ff. 156v.–157; *Rot. Hund.* II, 875; TNA, E 179/162/235; *VCH Oxon.* XI, 1–3, 136. It was included in Chadlington hundred (as part of Swerford) by the early 19th cent.: TNA, HO 107/879.

frankpledge for Chadlington hundred continued (along with three-weekly hundred courts) in the 16th century, the views, held in the various places which still owed suit, receiving payments of cert money, wardpenny, and hidage, and hearing tithingmen's presentments regarding brewing offences, excessive mill tolls, agricultural affairs, and assault. The Rollrights and Salford all fell into that category, but Hook Norton, Swerford, and Chipping Norton (which had their own views by the 13th century) were exempt, Chipping Norton's tithingman merely paying the hundredal bailiff 20s. ½d. cert money a year at the 'town's end'. The lords of Hook Norton and Swerford (both d'Oilly manors in 1086) additionally claimed assize of bread and ale, the right to exclude royal bailiffs, and the right to their own gallows, while in 1337–8 a later lord of Swerford was freed from payment of toll, murage, pavage, and pontage.¹⁵⁹ The hundredal views and courts lapsed probably by the mid 17th century, despite some sporadic attempts to collect fines for non-attendance from free suitors.¹⁶⁰

Ordinary manor courts are documented from the 1270s, the Swerford court attended by tenants from Southrop (in Hook Norton parish) as well as by its local tenants, and the Chipping Norton court by tenants from Bartletts (in Salford) and Over Norton.¹⁶¹ Eynsham abbey's Little Rollright court may have lapsed at the Dissolution, but most other courts continued until enclosure in the 18th century, and those at Hook Norton and Great Rollright (held respectively for the bishop of Oxford and Brasenose College, Oxford) as late as the 1890s and 1908. The private manorial views at Swerford, Hook Norton, and Chipping Norton also continued beyond the Middle Ages (Chipping Norton's until 1847), while the lords of Salford and Over Norton established new views for their manors in the early 18th century, that for Over Norton (where the manor was newly created) accompanying a newly established manor court.¹⁶²

Parish and Civil Government

Parish government developed on the usual pattern from the 16th century, including in Chipping Norton, where the vestry oversaw parish poor relief until 1834. Over Norton, though part of Chipping Norton parish until 1866, administered its own poor relief and

¹⁵⁹ TNA, SC 2/197/20; SC 2/197/21; *ibid.* LR 2/189, ff. 109–11; *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 26 (mistakenly implying that Chipping Norton owed suit to the hundredal view in the 16th cent.); below, partic. parishes.

¹⁶⁰ *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 26; Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. d 169, ff. 105v.–108v. For Showell and Wootton hundred, *VCH Oxon.* XI, 3–5; below, Swerford, local govt.

¹⁶¹ *Rot. Hund.* II, 725 sqq.; below, partic. parishes. No courts are known for Cold Norton priory's Over Norton manor (which may not have had customary tenants), while Salford's lords owed additional suit (for tenurial reasons) to the abp of York's ct of Churchdown (Glos.).

¹⁶² Below, partic. parishes.

appointed its own officers, while the hamlets of Southrop and Showell were administered with Hook Norton and Swerford respectively.¹⁶³

Nineteenth-century local government reorganization included the creation of Chipping Norton Poor-Law Union in 1835, of Chipping Norton Rural Sanitary District in 1872, and of Chipping Norton Rural District in 1894–5, the same 31 rural Oxfordshire parishes being included in all of them, and the poor-law union also encompassing Chipping Norton borough and three parishes outside the county. Hook Norton, on the northern edge of the area covered here, was included in Banbury Poor Law Union and Rural District.¹⁶⁴ As elsewhere, elected parish councils took over the rural vestries' remaining civil functions in 1894 and continued in the early 21st century, parish boundary changes in 1932 having by then united Little and Great Rollright and transferred Showell to Little Tew.¹⁶⁵ Chipping Norton Rural District was expanded eastwards into the former Woodstock Rural District in 1933, while local government reorganization in 1974 brought most of the area into the new West Oxfordshire District, and Hook Norton into Cherwell District.¹⁶⁶

Volunteer fire brigades established in Chipping Norton and Hook Norton in the late 19th century continued until their transfer to the National Fire Service in 1941 and to the county council in 1948, both places retaining county fire stations in 2023. Policing, long overseen by manorial and parish officers, became the responsibility of the new Oxfordshire Constabulary (and later of Thames Valley Constabulary) from 1857, superseding a short-lived voluntary scheme under which surrounding rural parishes contributed to the cost of Chipping Norton's small borough force in the 1830s–50s.¹⁶⁷

Chipping Norton Borough

During the Middle Ages Chipping Norton was administered chiefly through the lord's manor court and view of frankpledge and by the lord's manorial officials. Lords were generally non-resident, however, and in reality the town's leading merchants and tradespeople almost certainly enjoyed a fair degree of autonomy, exercised through parish institutions, the late medieval religious guild, and a possibly short-lived portmoot mentioned c.1450, as well as through a variety of more ad hoc arrangements. A borough charter acquired in 1607 (amidst

¹⁶³ Ibid. Little Rollright had churchwardens and overseers, but no formal vestry is known.

¹⁶⁴ Youngs, *Admin. Units*, I, 664–5; *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 144–5 (mistakenly giving the Oxon. total as 35), 150–1; *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883 edn). For Chadlington Highway District (incorporating much the same area), *London Gaz.* 27 Oct. 1863.

¹⁶⁵ Below, partic. parishes.

¹⁶⁶ *Oxon. Atlas*, pp. 150–1; www.cherwell.gov.uk; www.westoxon.gov.uk (both accessed Dec. 2022).

¹⁶⁷ Below, Chipping Norton (town govt); Hook Norton (local govt). Thames Valley Constabulary superseded the county constabulary in 1968.

acrimonious disputes with the town's new resident lords) established a self-perpetuating corporation which bought the manor in 1667, and which administered the town through regular council meetings, annual views of frankpledge, and borough quarter sessions authorized by the charter. The 1835 Municipal Corporations Act created a new municipal borough with an elected corporation headed by a mayor, which became an urban sanitary district in 1872, and an urban district in 1894. It retained its mayor and town status in 1974, though the town council's powers were otherwise reduced to those of an ordinary parish council within West Oxfordshire District.¹⁶⁸



Chipping Norton's
borough
seal as depicted in
1634 (OHC,
BOR1/1/D/2)

¹⁶⁸ Below, Chipping Norton, town govt.