



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Great Rollright

What are Conservation Areas?

Conservation Areas are places of special architectural or historic interest, which have a particular character or appearance worthy of preservation or enhancement. Groups of buildings, walls, trees and hedges, open spaces, views, and the historic settlement patterns all combine to create an individual sense of place. It is this character, rather than individual buildings, that Conservation Area status seeks to protect. The first Conservation Areas in the District were identified in the late 1960s. Since then, there has been a rolling programme of designations. Recent Conservation Areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Great Rollright Conservation Area was designated in 1990, following a process of public consultation.

The purpose of this document

This Conservation Area Character Appraisal describes the main aspects of character or appearance which contribute to the special interest and quality of the area. This document is intended to complement the approved policies for Conservation Areas contained in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan. In Conservation Areas there are controls over the demolition and minor alterations of unlisted buildings, and on works to trees. Full details can be obtained from the Planning Service. The Preservation and Enhancement document for Great Rollright accompanies this Character Appraisal and describes strategies for the future maintenance and improvement of Great Rollright, as well as providing development advice and guidance on conversions, extensions and the design of new buildings within the Conservation Area.



Location and setting

Great Rollright lies in the north of the District, close to the Oxfordshire-Warwickshire border. It is served by a network of lanes and minor roads, one of which connects it to Chipping Norton three miles to the south. Like this town, Great Rollright is situated in an unusually elevated situation: most of the village lies above the 200m contour, on a ridge of high ground which slopes away to the east, south and west. In spite of Great Rollright's size and elevated situation, varied topography and high numbers of trees ensure that the village remains surprisingly well-hidden.

Great Rollright has an attractive loose-knit form, and its overall character is significantly enhanced by the variety of open spaces found within the village. These range from private gardens to paddocks and fields, and allow for an array of appealing internal views and vistas.

Great Rollright's landscape setting is one of semi-enclosed valleys and ridges, adjacent to a region of open limestone wolds to the north. The parish is underlain by a mixed geology, which comprises oolitic limestone together with lias clays (this latter underlying the south-east of the village in particular).



Historical development

Evidence of a settlement at Great Rollright previous to, or during, Roman occupation is sketchy. Remains have been found, but nothing as substantial as those surviving at nearby Great Tew, Steeple Aston or Wigginton. Although there are no adjacent Roman roads, the trackway running past the Rollright Stones and the northern edge of the village is of great antiquity. The first Dark Age settlers were almost certainly the *Hwicca* people. The forest of Wychwood (literally 'the wood of the Hwicca') originally covered a vast area to the south of the village, and much of the land on which the village is sited may have been reclaimed from the forest.

The village appears in the Domesday Book as *Rollendri* or *Rollandri*. At this time the village had a population of perhaps 185 people and was held by three Norman lords: Robert de Statford, or Stafford; and the King's ministers, Robert, son of Turstin, and William. The village was thus divided into three distinct manors.

From Anglo-Saxon times up until the Enclosure Award of 1776 the land adjacent to the village was farmed by the two- or three-field system, with all of the land outside the manorial demesne lands divided up annually. The village's current asymmetry and loose-knit form echoes the unusually scattered character of these land holdings in and around Great Rollright prior to Enclosure.

The 17th and 18th centuries saw the village beginning to take on the shape recognisable today. Local limestone was used in the building of new properties and the replacement of existing timber structures. Quicklime was also produced at Great Rollright. One kiln, "where gentlemen, ladies and others may be supplied with good quality lime as any in the parish" was opened by John Bradley in June 1774.

Originally, many of the village buildings would have been modest structures reflecting the poverty of those inhabiting them. In this environment large families were often raised. The first school was established in the village in 1851, and in 1906 Rollright Halt opened nearby, a small railway station linking the village to the Kingham to Chipping Norton branch line.

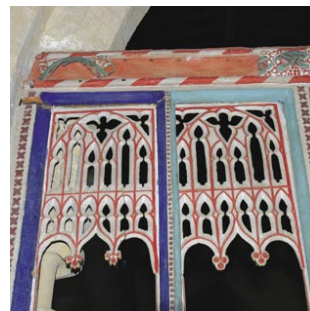
Settlement pattern

Great Rollright grew up adjacent to the ancient ridgeway that runs on an east-west axis past the church. A north-south route has for some time also passed close to, or through, the village. In the 17th century the main route to Oxford – the Oxford Way – ran to the east of the village. The present road to Oxford now enters the village to the west.

As well as proximity to an important roadway, the area held other attractions for its earliest settlers. Many springs rise in the area. Those in Tyte End were still being used by drovers into the late 1960s. Interestingly, although Great Rollright has always been a farming community, the area's suitability for agriculture has not always been as pronounced as it might appear today. Much of the land adjacent to the village was for many years little more than scrubby heath and moorland.









The 12th-century church of St. Andrew was probably the site of the original settlement. Between this and the manor houses straggled the villagers' houses, with growth tending to stretch downhill to the south. As the village grew, topography began to play a greater role in the form it took, with steeper inclines avoided in favour of more level sites, and a number of larger detached properties built with situations taking advantage of views over the surrounding countryside.

Although its overall settlement pattern is radial and asymmetric, Great Rollright can usefully be broken down into three loose concentrations. Church End features a cluster of buildings close to the church itself. To the east of this on the hillside opposite is a small group of buildings which includes one of the former manor houses (now Duck End House). The church and manor house, centres of religious and feudal power respectively, stand close to the ancient ridgeway, divided only by a small valley. Both of these concentrations – Church End and Duck End – include significant numbers of farm buildings. To the south-west of Church End is the main portion of the village. The distribution of early buildings, particularly along High Street and Old Forge Road, is mainly linear, but later developments, particularly within the triangle formed by these two roads, appear more random.



Great Rollright Conservation Area



- Key**
-  Conservation Area Boundary
 -  Listed Buildings
 -  Locally Listed Buildings
 -  Significant Boundary Walls
 -  Significant Hedges
 -  Significant Trees and Tree Groups
 -  Tree Preservation Order
 -  Significant Views



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Listed Buildings

There are 21 Listed structures of architectural or historic interest within the Conservation Area. Listed Buildings are classified in grades of relative importance.

Grade I – Buildings of national importance and exceptional interest (2% of Listed Buildings)

12/120 Church of St. Andrew

Grade II – Buildings of special interest

12/121 CHURCH END Timms memorial approx. 10m SE of Church of St. Andrew

12/122 CHURCH END Headstone approx. 4m S of chancel of Church of St. Andrew

12/123 CHURCH END Harbiage memorial approx. 10m S of chancel of Church of St. Andrew

12/124 CHURCH END Churchyard cross and 2 tombs approx. 8m S of south aisle of Church of St. Andrew

12/125 CHURCH END Baughan memorials approx. 4m and 5m S of south aisle of Church of St. Andrew

12/126 CHURCH END Brasenose Cottage (Formerly listed as Wishart's Farm Cottages)

12/127 CHURCH END Church End House

12/128 CHURCH END Rectory Cottage

12/129 DUCK END Barn and farmbuilding approx. 70m NE of Duck End House

12/130 DUCK END Dovecote approx. 50m to E of Duck End House (formerly listed as Duck End House together with Dovecote)

12/131 DUCK END Cartshed and granary approx. 80m SE of Duck End House

12/132 (2/132) DUCK END Barns approx. 100m SE of Duck End House

12/133 DUCK END Duck End House (formerly listed as Duck End House together with Dovecote)

12/134 HIGH STREET (East side) The Unicorn Public House

12/135 HIGH STREET (East side) Rose Cottage

12/142 SOUTH END The House at Pooh Corner (Formerly listed as Pooh Corner, South End)

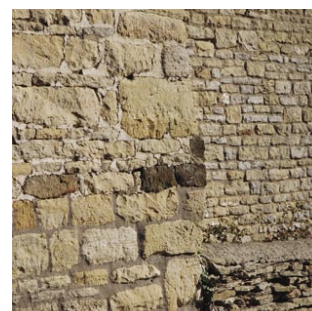
12/143 SOUTH END The Old Beer House and attached former chapel

12/144 SOUTH END House adjoining The Old Beer House

12/145 TYTE END (North side) Courthouse Farmhouse

12/146 TYTE END (North side) Courthouse Farm Cottage

Note: The numbers indicate the unique identification number by which Listed Buildings are referenced



Architectural character and quality of buildings

The houses and cottages of Great Rollright are, with few exceptions, small in scale and vernacular in form, detailing and materials. Variety is everywhere in evidence: in the range of rectilinear plan forms, in roofing materials (which include Welsh and Stonesfield slates, concrete and terracotta tiles, and thatch); and in window types, which include sash, casement, mullion, dormer and bay.

The underlying geology is reflected in the widespread use of a pale limestone that ranges from grey to a warmer, buff-coloured stone. Later buildings employ a wide variety of materials and treatments, including an assortment of brick and block types, and painted and non-painted finishes. In broad colour terms, however, most materials correspond to the precedent set by the village's early stone buildings. There are, for example, no red brick buildings in the village.

The oldest structure in Great Rollright is the church of St. Andrew, a small building with a number of fine details and fittings. It dates from the 12th century and was restored by G. E. Street in 1852. Externally, a great deal of applied decoration is evident: winged gargoyles on the tower, rosettes and grotesques on the corbel-table of the south aisle and porch, and elaborate detailing on a number of the windows. There is also a fine late-Norman tympanum over the south doorway.

Inside the church is an Early English (Gothic) three-bay nave arcade and chancel arch, and beneath the arch a small, finely-carved and traceried Perpendicular rood-screen, (repainted in 1862). Exceptionally, the original coving of the rood-loft survives intact overhead (where the celure would have been) possibly with traces of its original colouring.

Of the other village buildings, Duck End House is particularly noteworthy. It dates from the early-17th century and was probably a manor house. It has a symmetrical two-and-a-half storey front of three bays, and an unusual gabled projecting staircase tower to the rear. Close by stands a small 17th-century dovecote.

Boundary treatments

Great Rollright displays a wide range of boundary treatments. Most strikingly perhaps the village's early buildings tend to front directly onto the roadside, whilst later buildings stand either back from the road behind a verge or a front garden, or are grouped together in a close or along a parallel roadway.

Throughout the village run stretches of drystone walling of varying height, most notably along the road linking Tyte End with Church End. Verges of varying depth and banks of varying height are also apparent. Hedgerows are generally less conspicuous, but South End features perhaps the greatest concentration. Here, with its narrow, twisting lane weaving among packed small houses, the village is at its most intimate. Paving runs along Old Forge Road, through Tyte End and around to Church End.

Landscape, trees and views

Great Rollright is located on a broad, elevated and gently undulating plateau intersected by a network of dry valleys. The landscape is generally expansive and large-scale, with long views possible from the high ground to the north and south of the village.

Fields are predominantly of medium- or large-size, under arable cultivation, and bordered by a reasonably intact pattern of hedgerows. Often following the lines of collapsed walls, these hedgerows are intermittently punctuated by mature trees. Patches of scrubby vegetation can also be seen, particularly along the valley bottoms.

The landscape to the north and west of the village features small spinneys and blocks of woodland. High numbers of trees, varied topography, and the scattered, polyfocal nature of the villagescape, mean that Great Rollright remains well-hidden when viewed from the surrounding landscape. Views out of the village are limited by the same factors.

The Bells of Great Rollright

*Swing, bells of Rollright, on your lofty bed!
Oft have ye rung a chorus of delight,
when England shouted after a great fight;
oft tolled farewell to unrecorded dead.*

*To-day I bid you sound across the village
the simple annals of forgotten folk,
friends of the wind and rain, the elm and oak,
who had only two thoughts, God's Word and tillage.*

*Such were the men nine brothers sought to know:
we shared their worship in St. Andrew's Church,
stood at their doors and watched the robin perch
on the white jessamine seventy years ago.*

*To many labouring souls in that dim land
two ministering angels, man and wife,
had bought the boon of more abundant life,
with godliness and joy in either hand.*

*Scorn not simplicity: though but a wraith
fly from the past, cherish our boyhood's dreams:
Wonder and Worship were its constant themes:
the Rectory stood upon the rock of faith.*

*Within was wrought a very heaven on earth:
we praise our heritage with thankful lips.
Shall all that sunshine suffer an eclipse,
Or will you bless the home that gave us birth?*

Montagne Rendall, 1946.

West Oxfordshire District Council - Planning Service

Elmfield, New Yatt Road, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 1PB

General planning enquiries and application forms

List entries and grant enquiries

Trees and landscape enquiries

Architectural and technical enquiries

01993 861683

01993 861666

01993 861662

01993 861659

