



Oxfordshire

VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

IDBURY



*Church Street, Idbury, looking westwards towards the manor house. The buildings in the foreground include the former forge and smithy.*

Idbury is a remote rural parish adjoining the Gloucestershire border, mid-way between Burford and Stow-on-the-Wold (Glos.).<sup>1</sup> The village, now mostly limestone-built, developed close to an Iron-Age hillfort crowning a spur of high ground on the edge of the Cotswolds, while two smaller hamlets – Bould and Foscot – lie on lower ground in the Evenlode valley. Despite some small-scale crafts and manufacturing (including a 19th-century brickworks) the parish remained predominantly agricultural, and was never very populous. Probably only in the 19th century were there more than 200 people.<sup>2</sup>

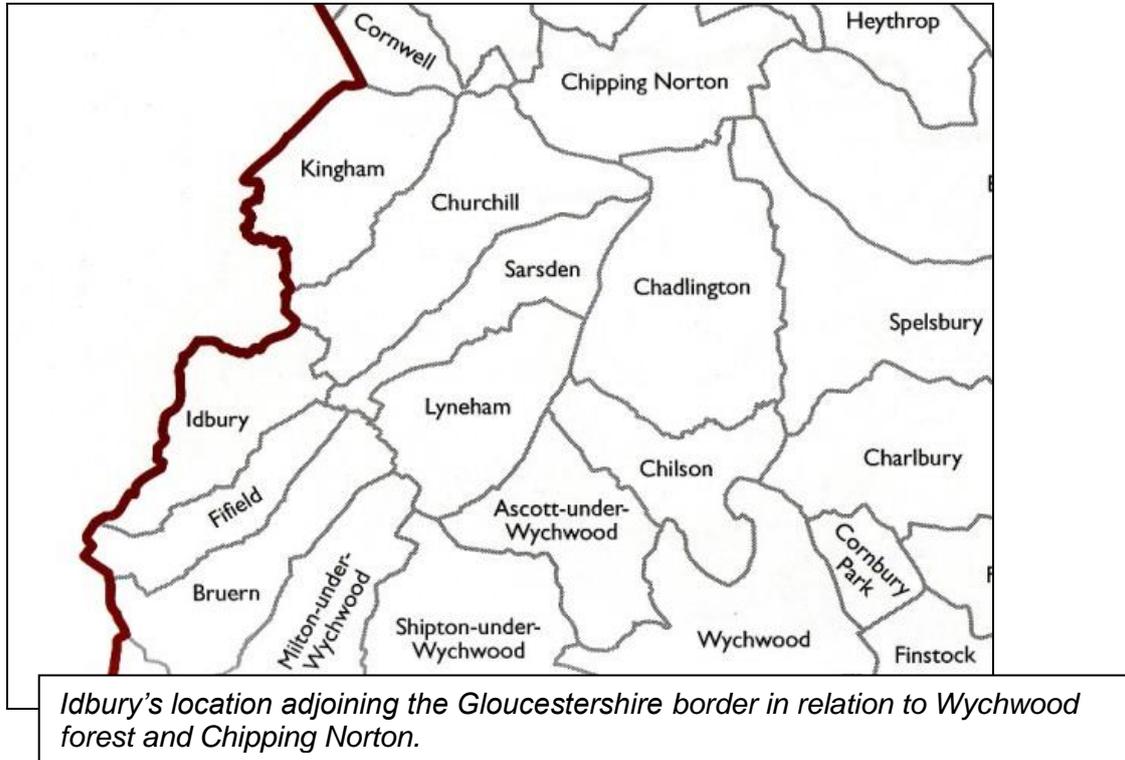
The 12th-century church was a chapel of Swinbrook, and until 1856 the living belonged to Salisbury cathedral. Idbury's stipendiary curates often held the benefice in plurality with neighbouring churches, and from the late 16th century faced competition from a private Roman Catholic chapel at the manor house. Recusancy

<sup>1</sup> This account was written in 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Below (settlement and population); econ. hist.

declined after the Catholic lords moved away, and the chapel became disused. The lord owned most of the parish until the estate's break-up in the 1920s, when the manor house was bought by the founding editor of *The Countryman* magazine.<sup>3</sup>

### Parish Boundaries



The ancient parish (1,559 a. in 1882)<sup>4</sup> included the separate 11th-century manors of Idbury and Foscot. The manors' boundaries are not known, but Foscot (rated at only 1 hide) may have been largely confined to the parish's north-eastern corner.<sup>5</sup> The parish's eastern boundary with Churchill and Sarsden mostly followed the river Evenlode, although 27 a. of meadow on the river's west bank belonged to Churchill, together with 6½ a. of detached ground in Foscot hamlet.<sup>6</sup> The long southern boundary with Fifield passed through woods and fields to a minor road to Little Rissington (Glos.), which it followed to the county boundary; the latter continued north-eastwards along a tributary of the Evenlode, which it joined close to the site of Bledington mill (Glos.). Regular indentations near Idbury village suggest that the

<sup>3</sup> Below, manors; social hist.; relig. hist.

<sup>4</sup> OS *Area Bk* (1882); cf. *Census*, 1831–71, estimating the acreage at 1,370 a.

<sup>5</sup> Below, manors. The 18th-cent. Foscot farm was almost certainly larger than the medieval manor: below, econ. hist (16th to 18th cents).

<sup>6</sup> For the parish's 19th-cent. boundaries, OS Map 1:10560, Oxon. XIX (1885 edn).

boundaries followed open-field furlongs.<sup>7</sup> The detached part of Churchill was incorporated in 1884 under the Divided Parishes Act, bringing the area to 1,565 a. (633 ha.). The boundaries were otherwise unaltered in 2011.<sup>8</sup>

## Landscape

The parish slopes north-eastwards from the steep-sided hills of the Cotswolds in the south-west to low-lying meadows in the Evenlode valley. One of the highest points is at Idbury Camp (195–200 m.); from there the ground descends quite rapidly to c.175 m. in Idbury village and 122 m. at Bould, before falling more gently to 112 m. at Foscot and 105 m. along the Evenlode.<sup>9</sup> The alluvium of the river and stream valleys is replaced by sand and gravel at Foscot and Charmouth Mudstone at Bould, where the heavy clay soils are more suited to grass than arable, and briefly supported brick-making. On the rising ground on either side of Idbury village thin belts of Dyrham Siltstone, Marlstone Rock, and Whitby Mudstone give way to Salperton Limestone, which produces Oolitic stonebrash soils capable of supporting the sheep-and-corn husbandry typical of the Cotswolds.<sup>10</sup> The rough clay mixed with stones was reflected in field names such as 'Catsbrain'.<sup>11</sup> Woodland has mostly been confined to the parish's southern boundary, and was carefully managed from the 18th century.<sup>12</sup>

Small quarries on the limestone ridge next to the Iron-Age hillfort provided building stone for local houses.<sup>13</sup> The ridge offers fine views of the Evenlode valley and Wychwood forest, and the parish was reportedly a stopping-place for drovers from Wales to Smithfield (London).<sup>14</sup> Streams and springs provided water until the introduction of a mains supply c.1958,<sup>15</sup> although at Idbury supplies from the village well (mentioned from the 17th century) were sometimes intermittent.<sup>16</sup> At Bould, an

---

<sup>7</sup> Below, econ. hist. (agric. landscape; milling).

<sup>8</sup> *Census*, 1891–2011; OS Map 1:25000, sheet 45 (2005 edn).

<sup>9</sup> OS Map 1:25000, sheet 45 (2005 edn).

<sup>10</sup> Geol. Surv. Maps 1:50000 (solid and drift), sheets 218 and 235 (2007 and 1998 edns); *Oxon. Atlas*, 8–9; Orr, *Oxon. Agric.* 179–80, 184–6; below, econ. hist. (agric. landscape; rural crafts).

<sup>11</sup> ROLLR, DG39/520; *PN Oxon.* II, 454; cf. *VCH Oxon.* XVII, 148.

<sup>12</sup> Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797); OS Maps 1:10560, Oxon. XIX (1885 edn); 1:25000, sheet 45 (2005 edn); below, econ. hist. (agric. landscape).

<sup>13</sup> OS Map 1:10560, Oxon. XIX (1955 edn); below (built character).

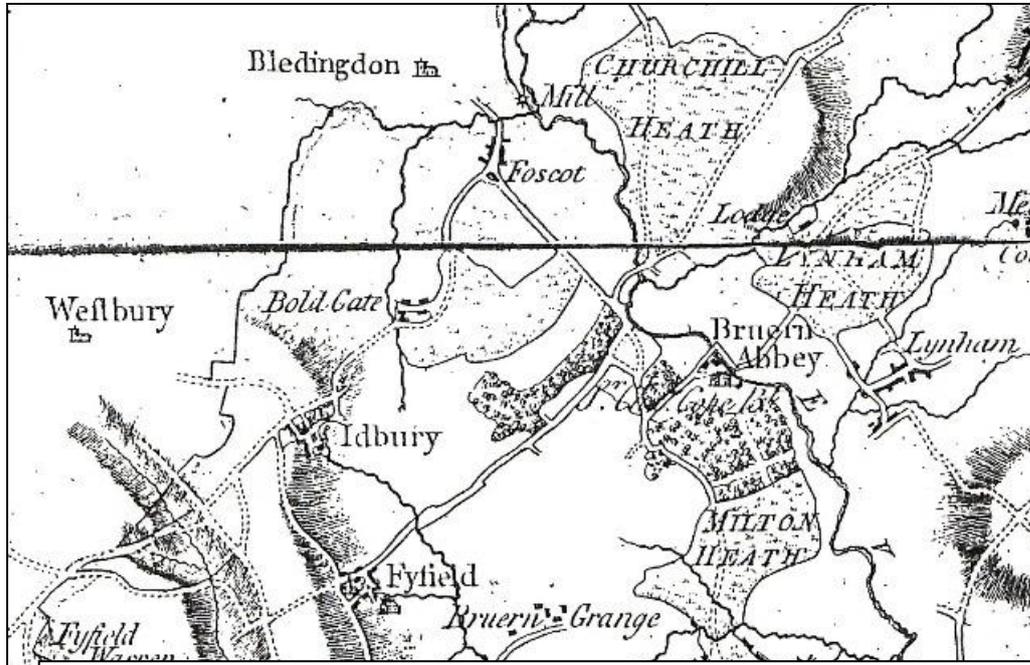
<sup>14</sup> E. Goshawk, *Idbury History* (1961), 1.

<sup>15</sup> OHC, RDC9/3/F6/2; OS Map 1:25000, sheet 45 (2005 edn). Piped water was available by 1941: TNA, MAF 32/914/91.

<sup>16</sup> ROLLR, DG39/698, m. 4; DG39/699, m. 4; 'Idbury Folklore': [www.idbury.com](http://www.idbury.com) (accessed Aug. 2013); cf. OHC, PAR 144/2/A1/1, s.a. 1923, 1925.

18th-century farmer complained that the water was sulphurous and gave his butter a bad taste.<sup>17</sup>

## Communications



Roads in the Idbury area in 1767, from Thomas Jefferys's map of Oxfordshire.

The road linking the settlements of Idbury, Bould, and Foscot runs the length of the parish, and formed part of a longer route from Bledington to Great Rissington (Glos.) until its southern part was blocked to make way for Little Rissington airfield.<sup>18</sup> It was confirmed as a 40-ft wide public highway at inclosure in 1779, when several north-south roads intersected it:<sup>19</sup> the most important was the main road from Burford to Stow-on-the-Wold (Glos.), which was turnpiked in 1770.<sup>20</sup> Lesser routes included roads from Idbury to Fifield and Westcote (Glos.), and another from Foscot to Bruern.<sup>21</sup>

From the 16th century and probably earlier the poor state of the parish's roads was a recurrent concern. Robert Day (d. 1545) left cash and grain for the repair of four named roads, and in 1642 inhabitants were ordered to mend the road

<sup>17</sup> ROLLR, DG39/760; DG39/783; R. Plot, *Natural Hist. Oxon.* (1705 edn), 26, 45.

<sup>18</sup> OS Maps 1:63360, sheet XLIV (1828 edn); 1:25000, sheet 45 (2005 edn); *VCH Glos.* VI, 106–7.

<sup>19</sup> Idbury Inclosure Act, 19 Geo. III, c. 78 (private), pp. 3–4.

<sup>20</sup> *Oxon. Atlas*, 102–3; *VCH Glos.* VI, 148.

<sup>21</sup> Shown on Jefferys, *Oxon. Map* (1767); Davis, *Oxon. Map* (1797); Bryant, *Oxon. Map* (1824).

from Idbury to Bould.<sup>22</sup> In the late 18th century wet weather made the roads so treacherous as to hinder sales of timber,<sup>23</sup> and though road maintenance improved in the 1820s complaints were still being made a century later.<sup>24</sup> Heavy snow falls in 1814 prevented public carriers using the turnpike and other roads, and travel generally in winter was troublesome.<sup>25</sup> A dense network of footpaths may provide an indication of the difficulties of travel; most of them survived in the early 21st century, including a crossing of the Evenlode at Standbow bridge.<sup>26</sup>

No resident carriers are recorded, though inhabitants presumably used those passing through the parish from Fifield and nearby towns.<sup>27</sup> The Oxford, Worcester, and Wolverhampton Railway, opened in 1853, crossed the parish's eastern edge, and from 1863 formed part of the Great Western Railway. A station in Churchill parish (called Chipping Norton Junction until renamed Kingham in 1909) was built in 1855,<sup>28</sup> and in the early 20th century Idbury's farmers transported milk and other produce by train to markets at Oxford and elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> From the 1920s motorized buses also served the parish,<sup>30</sup> and a regular service to Kingham station and the Wychwood villages continued in 2013.

Post was delivered through Chipping Norton, site of the nearest money order office until others opened at Shipton and (later) at Milton and Fifield. From the late 19th century telegraph facilities were available at Kingham station, and wall letter boxes were provided at Idbury and Bould.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 179, ff. 65 and v.; ROLLR, DG39/699, m. 3v.

<sup>23</sup> ROLLR, DG39/702; DG39/755.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. DG39/803; OHC, PAR 144/2/A1/1, s.a. 1923.

<sup>25</sup> ROLLR, DG39/792, letter 27 Jan. 1814; OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. b 39, f. 233v.

<sup>26</sup> OS Maps 1:10560, Oxon. XIX (1885 edn); 1:25000, sheet 45 (2005 edn).

<sup>27</sup> Above, Fifield, par. intro. (communic).s).

<sup>28</sup> OHC, Fi. VIII/1–4; OS Map 1:10560, Oxon. XIX (1885 edn); *Oxon. Atlas*, 108–9.

<sup>29</sup> C.V. Butler and C.A. Simpson, *Village Survey-Making: An Oxfordshire Experiment* (Board of Education Pamphlet 61, 1931), 25, and the rural survey by J.K. Jones on which it was based: OHC, SF IDBU/372.8; V. Mitchell and K. Smith, *Oxford to Moreton-in-Marsh* (2003), no. 80; below, econ. hist. (19th and 20th cents).

<sup>30</sup> OHC, SF IDBU/372.8 (rural survey); B. Simpson, *A History of the Railways of Oxfordshire, Part 1: The North* (1997), 139–40.

<sup>31</sup> *PO Dir. Oxon.* (1847 and later edns); *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1883 and later edns); OS Maps 1:2500, Oxon. XIX.15 (1899 edn); 1:2500, Oxon. XIX.12 (1922 edn); above, Fifield, par. intro. (communic).s).

## Settlement and Population

### Early Settlement



The Iron-Age hillfort at Idbury Camp, shown on OS Map 1:10560, Oxon. XIX (1885 edn), alongside the Burford to Stow-on-the-Wold road and about 800 m. south-west of the later village.

The small early Iron-Age hillfort at Idbury Camp is located on high ground beside the Burford–Stow road, with good all-round views over the surrounding countryside. A roughly oval rampart revetted with limestone dry walling enclosed an area of about 3.5 ha., although from the 1940s the site was heavily ploughed and largely flattened. The fort seems to have been entered from the north-west, and finds of Iron-Age pottery, metalwork, and bone suggest that it was occupied at least occasionally, possibly as a temporary place of refuge for local farmers and their herds in times of crisis.<sup>32</sup> Flint arrowheads may indicate earlier prehistoric activity there.<sup>33</sup>

The site continued in use in the Romano-British period, as attested by finds of coins and other materials, and in the Anglo-Saxon period it remained an important landmark, reflected in the Anglo-Saxon place name Idbury (meaning Ida's *burh* or fort). An Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemetery, discovered in a quarry just outside the fort, was probably consciously sited in relation to it.<sup>34</sup> The names Bould (meaning a

<sup>32</sup> HER, PRN 1448; *VCH Oxon.* II, 315, 349; J.E.G. Sutton, 'Iron Age Hill-Forts and Some Other Earthworks in Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia* 31 (1966), 33; N. Bayne, 'Excavations at Lyneham Camp, Lyneham, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia* 22 (1957), 9–10; CBA Group 9 *Newsletter* 11 (1981), 79; *Oxon. Atlas*, 14–15.

<sup>33</sup> *VCH Oxon.* I, 264; Butler and Simpson, *Village Survey-Making*, 9.

<sup>34</sup> HER, PRN 1448–9; *VCH Oxon.* I, 339, 360, 371; E. Goshawk, *Idbury History* (1961), 1; OS Map 1:10560, Oxon. XIX (1955 edn).

building) and Foscot (foxes' earth) are also of Anglo-Saxon origin,<sup>35</sup> although the extent to which they were settled before the Norman Conquest is uncertain.

### *Population from 1086*

By 1086 there were at least 23 tenant households in the parish, headed by 13 *villani*, 5 bordars, and 5 *servi* or slaves; most probably lived at Idbury, and Foscot was without recorded population.<sup>36</sup> By 1279 numbers of unfree tenants hardly seem to have changed: only 24 villeins held yardlands, although the parish's six free tenants (holding 15½ yardlands between them) may have sublet land to an unknown number of unrecorded inhabitants, including some at Bould and Foscot.<sup>37</sup> Between 1306 and 1327 the number of taxpayers doubled from 20 to 40, suggesting rapid expansion perhaps associated with the manor's subdivision; however, it is unclear whether growth was evenly spread or concentrated in particular settlements.<sup>38</sup>

Plague almost certainly reduced the population by 1381, when 76 inhabitants aged over 14 (including 12 servants) paid poll tax. In all there were c.34 households.<sup>39</sup> Only 12–15 taxpayers were listed in 1524–5, rising to 19 in 1543 when 10 lived at Idbury, 7 at Foscot, and 2 at Bould.<sup>40</sup> Hearth tax was paid by 25 households in 1662, and in 1676 there were an estimated 123 adults in the parish.<sup>41</sup> In 1768 the curate reported that Idbury comprised 2 farms and 10 cottages, Foscot a farm and 4–5 cottages, and Bould a farm and 2–3 cottages. Three years later he revised his estimate to 30 households, and in 1801 the parish's 31 houses accommodated 188 people.<sup>42</sup>

In the 1830s population increased, reaching 207 in 1841 when 99 lived at Idbury (in 18 houses), 59 at Bould (10 houses), and 49 at Foscot (9 houses). Numbers peaked in 1861 at 233 (in 46 houses), but declined fairly steadily to a low of 103 (in 33 houses) in 1931. By the 1990s there were 47 houses and 109 people, rising to 124 in 53 houses by 2011; by then modern development may have caused Foscot to outstrip Idbury.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> *PN Oxon.* II, 357; *Oxon. Atlas*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> *VCH Oxon.* I, 416–17.

<sup>37</sup> *Rot. Hund.* II, 733–4.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, E 179/161/8–10; below, manors.

<sup>39</sup> *Poll Taxes 1377–81*, ed. Fenwick, II, 298, 333–4.

<sup>40</sup> TNA, E 179/161/198; E 179/162/227; Sheail (ed.), *1524/5 Subsidy*, II, 260.

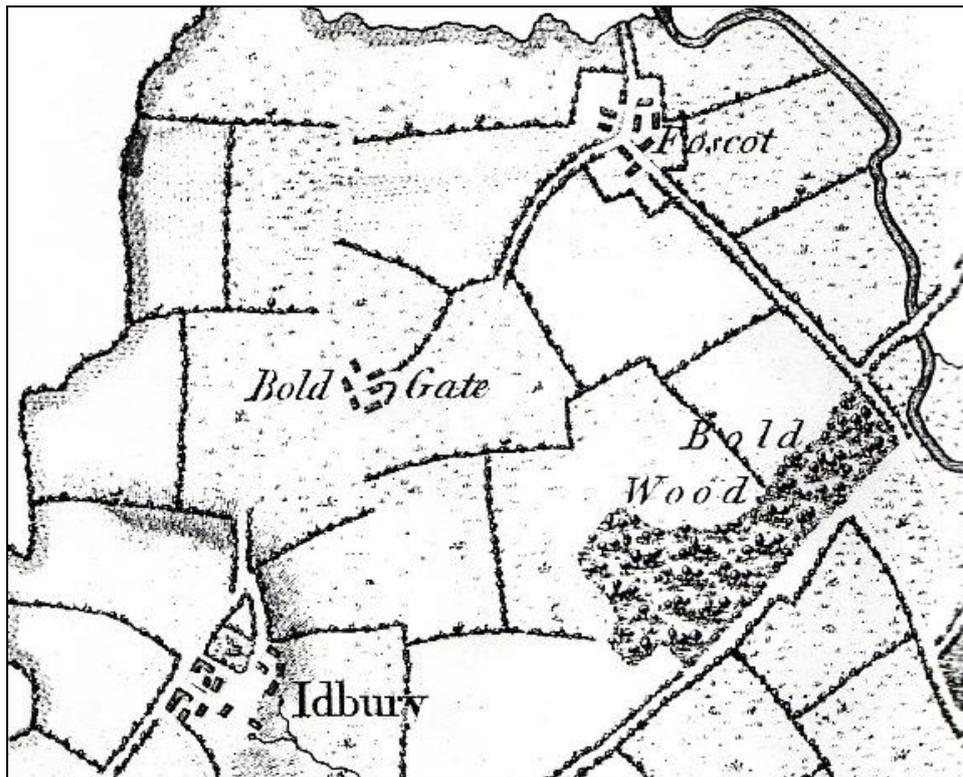
<sup>41</sup> TNA, E 179/164/504; E 179/255/4; *Compton Census*, ed. Whiteman, 422.

<sup>42</sup> OHC, MSS Oxf. Dioc. d 559, f. 57; d 562, f. 69; *Census*, 1801.

<sup>43</sup> *Census*, 1811–2011; below.

### *Idbury and its Hamlets*

Idbury is a small village with a regular plan, lying about 800 m. north-east of the Iron-Age hillfort. In the middle of the village is a tiny green, where Church Street joins Spring Lane. The 12th-century parish church lies at the east end of Church Street, some 150 m. from the 16th-century manor house at its west end.<sup>44</sup> The date of the village's origin is not known, but it may have developed in the 9th or 10th century as a demesne farm for a lord (possibly Ida) and his tenants. A vestige of the Anglo-Saxon estate may be the 'piece of ground called inland' held by a free tenant in 1279.<sup>45</sup> In 1066 the manor was divided among three thegns,<sup>46</sup> whose shares may represent the three settlements of Idbury, Bould, and Foscot. For most of their history Bould and Foscot probably amounted to no more than a small cluster or row of roadside dwellings, however, each hamlet comprising a couple of farms and a few workers' cottages.<sup>47</sup>



*The settlements at Idbury, Bould, and Foscot in 1797, from Richard Davis's map of Oxfordshire.*

<sup>44</sup> OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIX.15 (1899 edn).

<sup>45</sup> *Rot. Hund.* II, 734; for inland, R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (1997), chs. 2–3 and passim.

<sup>46</sup> *VCH Oxon.* I, 416.

<sup>47</sup> For their plans in the 18th and 19th cents, OHC, SL8/22/M/1; ROLLR, DG39/904; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIX.8 and 12 (1899 edn).

An isolated farmhouse called Workham was built in the far south-west of the parish following inclosure in 1779.<sup>48</sup> In 1814 the lord's steward reported that tenants' cottages were in poor repair,<sup>49</sup> but the 19th century saw very little new building, despite the fact that almost all the houses in Idbury and Bould still belonged to the lord of the manor. Nine cottages at Foscot may have been built as speculations by landlords based in Oxford and neighbouring Bledington,<sup>50</sup> and in 1926, presumably in response to the continued poor state of the parish's housing,<sup>51</sup> the rural district council built four houses on the west side of Idbury village, on land donated by J.W. Robertson Scott of Idbury Manor. Two others were added in 1934, and the council built six further houses on the west side of Foscot.<sup>52</sup> In the later 20th century some older properties were demolished, and several new private houses built in Idbury and Foscot: by the 1970s the latter (with around two dozen houses) was probably the more populous, its development stimulated by proximity to Bledington and Kingham station.<sup>53</sup> At the more isolated Bould the number of cottages fell, their abandoned sites perhaps giving rise to unproven speculation about medieval settlement shrinkage.<sup>54</sup>

### The Built Character

The parish's older domestic buildings are vernacular farmhouses and cottages in characteristic Cotswold style, constructed of limestone rubble from local quarries. In several cases modern tiled roofs have replaced traditional stone slate or thatch. Most date from the 17th or 18th century, and most surviving farm buildings (principally barns) are in broadly similar style.<sup>55</sup> Several houses share common features including raised eaves, canted bay windows, and stacks with moulded dripstones and capping, perhaps reflecting landlordly influence or the work of local masons, or the imitative spread of fashion. Despite its homogenous appearance the parish's housing stock is not wholly uniform, however, and individual buildings have a distinct character.

---

<sup>48</sup> OS Map 1:63360, sheet XLIV (1828 edn); below, econ. hist. (16th to 18th cents).

<sup>49</sup> ROLLR, DG39/792, letter May 1814.

<sup>50</sup> *Census*, 1801–1911; OHC, DV X/52.

<sup>51</sup> OHC, PAR 144/2/A1/1, s.a. 1925.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* RDC9/3/F6/1–2; 'Idbury's Council Houses': [www.idbury.com](http://www.idbury.com) (accessed Aug. 2013).

<sup>53</sup> E. Goshawk, *Idbury History* (1961), 6; OHC, RDC9/3/F6/4; OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIX.8 and 15 (1980 edn).

<sup>54</sup> OS Map 1:2500, Oxon. XIX.12 (1980 edn); HER, PRN 10723; *Oxon. Atlas*, 57.

<sup>55</sup> Section based on Bldgs List, describing 17 vernacular buildings.

By far the grandest house is Idbury Manor (described below), rebuilt in 1570 for the lord of the manor Edward Gainsford.<sup>56</sup> Other larger houses include Idbury House Farm opposite the church, a T-shaped building of two storeys and attics dating possibly from the 16th century, but with much later remodelling. The eaves were raised to the front of the main range (facing the road), and an infilled ground-floor opening lies to the left of three-light leaded casements with wood lintels, on either side of a 19th-century canted bay window. Small 19th-century casements light the first floor, while in the left gable end narrow chamfered rectangular windows flank a central doorway surmounted by a flat stone hood with carved brackets.<sup>57</sup> The farm's outbuildings include two 18th-century barns (both with wide opposing doorways and collar and tie-beam roofs with double butt-purlins), and a 19th-century cowhouse and cart shelter.<sup>58</sup> Church, Foxcote, and Bould Farms are in broadly similar style and date apparently from the 17th or 18th century. Bould Farm has gabled dormers lighting the attics and integral end stacks with moulded dripstones and capping, while at Foxcote Farm the eaves of the 17th-century house were raised in brick, possibly when the original two bays were extended eastwards creating an L-plan.<sup>59</sup>



*Idbury House Farm (top left), cottages in Foscot (top right), the Forge (bottom left), and council houses in Idbury (bottom right).*



<sup>56</sup> Below, manors (manor ho.).

<sup>57</sup> Bldgs List, IoE 254004.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 254005–6; CERC, ECE/7/1/10657.

<sup>59</sup> Bldgs List, IoE 253994, 253999, 254007. For 19th-cent. alterations at Foxcote Fm, ROLLR, DG39/798–9; DG39/882.

Smaller houses include Idbury's former forge, a two-storey limestone-built cottage with chamfered-mullion windows and a prominent ridge stack. An attached barn has a 15th- or 16th-century raised cruck truss in one of its ranges. Nearby the 18th-century Church Farm Cottage is similar, while an outbuilding formerly used as a laundry retains a 19th-century circular cast-iron sink and furnace. Opposite the forge is the early 17th-century Thatched Cottage, which (unusually) retains its straw-thatched roof. One-storeyed with attics and originally three-bayed, it was extended in the late 17th century, and in its oldest part includes a chamfered beam with ogee stops cut into an earlier cross-beam, supporting an upper cruck truss. Several cottages at Bould and Foscot display broadly similar features, including (like Thatched Cottage) inglenook fireplaces with bread ovens, and winder stairs.<sup>60</sup>

Many surviving houses feature 20th-century additions and improvements, in part reflecting earlier neglect and the influx of new owners following the break-up of the manorial estate.<sup>61</sup> Some older properties were demolished, however, notably a thatched cottage (reportedly dated 1572) between the church and Church Farm.<sup>62</sup> The parish's council houses were built to standard designs, and confounded contemporary fears that they would be 'expensive and unsatisfactory'.<sup>63</sup> Other 20th-century buildings were generally unexceptional.

---

<sup>60</sup> Bldgs List, IoE 253995, 254000–1, 254003, 254008–11, 254014.

<sup>61</sup> Above (medieval and later settlement); below, manors.

<sup>62</sup> Goshawk, *Idbury Hist.* 6.

<sup>63</sup> 'Idbury's Council Houses': [www.idbury.com](http://www.idbury.com) (accessed Aug. 2013).