

Manorial Language



Ad censum - Status of villeins who pay a cash rent in lieu of labor services.

Ad opus - Status of villeins owing labor services.

Amercement - Fine.

Assart - Tract of wasteland cleared or drained to be added to village arable. If the land belonged to a monastic manor, special provisions were made for payment of tithe-corn. From a deed of 1346, it would seem that the overlord could decide which church or religious house was to receive the tithe.

Assize of bread and ale - Royal law fixing prices and standards. The statutory regulation of settling of the price of bread and of ale, with reference to that of grain, in accordance with the ordinance of 51 Henry III.

Bailiff - The lord's chief official on the manor.

Balk - Turf left unplowed to provide separation between strips. A ridge left between two furrows, or a strip of ground left unploughed as a boundary line between two ploughed portions.

Beadle - Manorial official, usually assistant to reeve.

Bondman - Serf, q.v., villein.

Bond men - In transfers of land it is usual to mention the serfs or neifs, not infrequently by name, as handed over with their families, their lands, and all their property, to the new owner. Thus, at King's Clere in Hampshire, "for 8 shillings of sterlynges yerly" Godstow abbey transferred to Nicholas of Clere "John i-called Aylmer, sumtyme her bondeman, with all hys goodys and catall and londis."

Boon-work - Obligation of tenants for special work services, notably the lord's harvest. A day's work given gratuitously to a lord by his men on a special occasion.

Bovates - An ox-gang, or as much land as an ox could plough in a year; varying in amount from 10 to 18 acres according to the system of tillage.

Bylaws - Rules made by open-field villagers governing cultivation and grazing.

Cellarer - Official of a monastery responsible for food supplies.

Censuarius - Tenant ad censum.

Charter - Official document, usually deed or grant of privilege.

Chevage - Payment, typically in kind, owed annually by villein living outside the manor.

Church-Scot - An offering of threshed corn at Martinmas (November 11, often assigned to the vicar as part of his stipend. The ceremony of presenting gifts by laying the gift, or the deed conferring it, on the altar is often referred to. In one place the writer notes that the object of the ceremony was to ensure the undisputed possession of it to the church by bringing its violation under the provisions of greater excommunication.

Corrody - Old age pension, usually purchasable from a monastery, consisting of lodging, food, and incidentals.

Coterells - These were bondmen who held a small portion of land, a coteland or cotland.

Cotter - Tenant of a cottage, usually holding little or no land.

Court-leet - A court held periodically (at least once a year, on a day in Eastertide or Whitsuntide, according to the custom of the manor) in a lordship or manor, before the lord or his steward, having jurisdiction over petty offences and the civil affairs of the district. The Court Leet represented a measure of the king's authority, delegated to the lord of the manor. It controlled brewers, bakers, butchers, shoemakers, and other tradesmen; judged and punished cases of larceny, assault, and breach of the peace; punished persons who obstructed roads or blocked rights of way, or neglected to repair roads or bridges.

Croft - Garden plot of a village house.

Curia - Courtyard.

Curtilage - A small court, yard, or piece of ground attached to a dwelling-house, and forming one enclosure with it.

Customs - These were very numerous. Lands and houses in villeinage, or held by any tenure which approached to what is afterward called copyhold, were strictly subjected to obligation to keep in good repair. Neglect of repairs was one of the breaches of manorial law which justified recall of the grant and re-entry of the lord into possession of the holding, however small the quit-rent which he held over it.

Custumal - Document listing obligations and rights of tenants.

Demesne - The part of the lord's manorial lands reserved for his own use and not allocated to his serfs or freeholders. Serfs work the demesne for a specified number of days per week. The demesne may either be scattered among the serfs land, or a separate area, the latter being more common for meadow and orchard lands.

Distrain - Summons or arrest.

Dooms - Judgments or decisions made formally by the suitors or the jury of the Manor Court.

Dove-houses - The right to have a dove-house, or culver-house (from culver, an old word for pigeon) was a manorial right, very oppressive to the lord's neighbors, from damage done to their crops. In *An Alphabet of Tales* [ed. M. M. Banks, E.E.T.S. 1904) there is a quaint tale illustrative of the feeling against pigeon-houses. The passion for hawking largely explains their existence. Accordingly, the dove-house is often separately mentioned in the conveyance of an estate.

Dreng - The name given to a free peasant in Northumbria and sometimes in Yorkshire and Lancashire. The name usually implies that land is held in return for military services.

"Dyches, Watirs, Pondis, Stewes, Ryvers or Riparies" - Every right to the fish in a stream or pond was carefully guarded by the landholder entitled to it. Under pre-Reformation regime, freshwater fish were of great value. An indication of this significance may be attested: when a water-mill is mentioned, express notice is taken of its fishing rights. Even meadows have their fishing rights reckoned into their value.

Escheats - The right of a feudal lord to the return of lands held by his vassal, or the holding of a serf, should either die without lawful heirs or suffer outlawry.

Essoin - Excuse for non-attendance in court, or delay permitted a defendant. Essoins might even be granted for dead people. In *The White Book of London*, 1419, we read "And they must cause the names of such as are deceased to be distinctly and openly briefed, that so they may be safely essoined at the gate of the Tower of London. . . ."

Extents - The formal recitation and valuation of the various lands of a manor, and also of the services, rents, profits, etc. of the same.

Eyre - Royal circuit court ("justices in eyre" [Lat. in itinere, on a journey]).

Fair - A market held at regular intervals, usually once or twice a year. Fairs tend to offer a wider range of goods than normal markets. They are generally licensed by either the king, the local lord, or a chartered town.

Farm - A fixed sum, usually paid annually, for the right to collect all revenues from land; in effect, rent. Lords may farm land to vassals, receiving a fixed annual rent in place of the

normal feudal obligation. Many sheriffs farmed out their shires, contracting in advance to pay a fixed annual sum to the crown, thus obtaining the right to collect any additional royal revenues for their own profit.

Fee, Fief - Land granted by a lord in return for services. Habitable lands held under feudal tenure. Often called a Holding.

Feudalism - Medieval social and political system by which the lord-vassal relationship was defined.

Fines - The commonest fine on land was a sum exacted by the lord from the person who was about to enter on tenancy of a serf-holding, lands held in "villeinage." Its amount was generally settled by bargain between lord and serf. Such holding afterwards became copyholds.

Fire-bote - The wood granted to the tenants by a lord for the purpose of fuel.

Forfeiture - The right of a feudal lord to recover a fief when a vassal failed to honor his obligations under the feudal contract.

Formariage - Also called Merchet. The sum commonly paid by a serf to his lord when the serf's daughter marries a man from another manor.

Frankpledge - Police system by which every member of a tithing over the age of twelve was responsible for the conduct of every other member.

Free tenants - Free tenants were not only personally free, but their lands were held by money quit-rents, without obligation to do regular work on the demesne land of the lord. In these deeds, transfers of property generally mention the number of freeholds and the amount of their quit-rents.

Furlong - Plot of arable land, subdivision of a field.

Gavelkind - The name of a form of land-tenure whereby a man's property was divisible among his sons.

Gersuma - Entry fee for taking possession of a tenancy.

Gestum - A guest's portion: an allowance of meat and drink.

Glebe - Land assigned to support the parish church.

Gore - Wedge of arable land created by irregularity of terrain and plowing in strips.

Gules of August - The first day of August.

Hallmote - Manorial court.

Hamsoken - Assault in the victim's own house.

Harbourage - This privilege is mentioned with regard to monastic manors. It was probably house-room and entertainment for the superior or his representative when they made a tour of the estates. In some cases the grantor of property reserves to himself house-room in it when he needs it but promises to pay for his use of it.

Haye-bote - The right to take wood or thorns for the repair of fences granted to the peasant by the lord. The hedges are growing-hedges, which were lopped at interval to provide faggots. The right to them constituted one of the woodland-rights attached to a manor, or to land held of it. Timber-trees growing in such hedges on serfs'-holdings belonged to the manor, and were jealously watched.

Hayward or Messor - Lessor manorial official; assistant to reeve.

Headland - Segment of land left at the end of plow strips for turning plow around.

Helps - Certain ancient customary charges, by which, the lord of a manor asked contributions from his tenants to meet the expense of making his eldest son a knight, and of providing a marriage portion for his daughter.

Heriot - Death duty, usually "best beast" or other chattel, paid to lord. This was the lord's claim to the best beast owned by a deceased serf. In lieu of it, land was sometimes subjected to a money-payment, the heriotable fine. Generally, if a tenant dies in battle the heriot is forgiven.

Heushire - House rent.

Hide - Tax assessment unit of land area, varying in size, theoretically 120 acres, although it may vary between 60 and 240 acres. It is by custom the land that can be cultivated by one eight-ox plow in one year.

Hock Day - The second Tuesday after Easter Sunday; in former times an important term-day, on which rents were paid, Hock-day and Michaelmas dividing the rural year into its summer and winter halves.

Homage and Fealty - A body of persons owning allegiance, and attending a manorial court. Homage was the formal recognition by a tenant on entering the fee that he held the land of the lord and owed him service and submission for it. Fealty was the oath taken by a tenant on entering the fee that he would be true to the lord. Homage was rendered by the tenant holding "his hands together between the hands of his Lord," fealty by the tenant "holding his right hand upon a booke," but practically there seems little difference between the two. On doing fealty, a fee had to be paid to the steward of the manor.

House-bote - The right of a tenant to take wood from his lord's estate for the repair of his house.

Housesteads - Forts strategically placed on a craggy precipice.

Hue-and-cry - Criminal apprehension system by which all within earshot were required to give chase to the malefactor.

Hundred - Administrative division of English shire. Subdivision of a Shire. Theoretically equaled one hundred hides but hardly ever does. Generally had its own court which met monthly to handle civil and criminal cases. In Danish it was called a wapentake.

Infangenethef - Right to prosecute thieves caught in the act within the territory and to confiscate their goods.

Jus Primae Noctis - The right by which a lord might sleep the first night with the bride of a newly married serf, although the custom might be avoided by the payment of a fine.

Lease for Three Lives - A term of lease of land, usually for the life of its holder, his son or wife, and a grandson.

Leirwite - Fine levied against an unmarried woman for sexual misconduct.

Love-day (Dies amoris) - Opportunity given litigants to reconcile differences.

Manor - A small holding, typically 1200-1800 acres, with its own court and probably its own hall, but not necessarily having a manor house. The manor as a unit of land was generally held by a knight (knight's fee) or managed by a bailiff for some other holder.

Manorial Privileges - One of the fullest recitals of the formula concerning manorial privileges granted to Godstow Abbey may illustrate these formulae. At Broad Blunsdon Roger of Writele conveys "all his londes and tenementis . . . with mansions, bildyngis, gardens, culverhowses, mylles, fre tenauntes, bondemen (villenagis or bonde holdes), with ther sequelis and catallis, coterellis, rentis, workyngis, helpis, wardis, relefis, eschetis, al maner fynes of londes, redempcions or ayene-biyngis of progenitours or fadirs-afore, medis, fedyngis, pastures, pondis, suits of courtis, with all other liberties or fredoms and fre customes longyng to the forsaid tenementis."

Marriage and Dower - In the manorial sense, the term is mentioned in various manorial formulae. A serf might not marry without licence of his lord, and he might not give his daughter in marriage without licenses; and for this license a fee was charged. The term marriage in early times denoted lands belonging to the wife in her own name, given to her by her kin. Dower more properly denoted her rights over her husband's property acquired at their marriage. These rights were of two kinds. In some cases, the amount of the jointure which the widow should enjoy was determined by a special gift, made by the husband

according to old custom at the door of the church on coming out from the wedding. In the absence of such special provision, the widow was entitled, for her widowhood, to a third part of her husband's lands.

Medale - A drinking festivity after the lord's meadows had been mowed.

Merchet - Fee paid by a villein to his lord for liberty to give his daughter in marriage.

Messor - An official appointed to oversee the manorial reapers and mowers.

Messuage - House and yard.

Mills - The obligation of tenants to have their grain ground at the lord's mill is universally known. It was enforced by fines imposed in the Court Baron of the land. Thus, in the Court Rolls of Great Waltham manor, Essex, belonging to the Earl of Essex in Edward I's reign, we have a fine of 6s. taken "de pluribus customariis ville quia non molaverunt ad molendinum comitis." We find that by old custom the miller was expected to grind corn for use of the lord's household free of charge.

Mortuary - Death duty paid by villein to parish priest from the estate of a deceased parishioner, usually second-best beast or chattel.

Multure - Portion of meal or flour kept by the miller in payment for his services.

Naifty - The state of being born in bondage or serfdom.

Nativi - Persons of servile birth.

Outfangenethef The lord's right to pursue a thief outside his own jurisdiction, bring him back to his own court for trial, and keep his forfeited chattels on conviction.

Pannage - The payment made to the lord for the privilege of feeding beasts in the woods about the village. This mainly refers to leave to pasture pigs in the woods during acorn season. For this a lord of a manor often exacted a payment for each pig turned out.

Pinfold (or Punfold) - The lord's pound for stray animals.

Pittancer - An officer of a religious house who had the duty of distributing charitable gifts or allowances of food.

Pledging - Legal institution by which one village served as guaranty for another's court appearance, veracity, good conduct, payment of debt, etc.

Pone - A writ, whereby an action could be removed from the county court into the royal court.

Pytel - A small field or enclosure; a close.

Quarter - Unit of volume, eight bushels.

Rebeck - A musical instrument, having three strings, and played with a bow; an early form of the fiddle.

Reeve - Principal manorial official under bailiff, always a villein.

Relief - This was a sum paid by a tenant entering possession of a freehold, whether by succession or purchase. At times it seems to have been fixed by bargain between lord and tenant. At Garsington, before taking over lands held by quit-rent of half-a-marc, the new tenants bargained that "it hit hapnit that relief sholde be gife therof, thei sholde not gife but 1 besaunde of golde for relefe." The gold bezant was perhaps worth a marc and a half (£1).

Rents - By this word is meant chiefly quit-rents, small fixed yearly payments in virtue of which freeholders held their lands of the manor, and similar payments in money or in kind exacted from those serfs' holdings which afterward became copyholds. At King's Clere, Hampshire, we have a rent of two fat hens at Martinmas and another rent of 4 horseshoes.

Reversions - Holdings returned to the lord after the death of a life-rentor.

Ring - Unit of volume, four bushels.

Sake or Soke - A right of jurisdiction claimed by some manorial lords.

Scutage - The claim by the lord that each piece of land held of him shall pay a contribution when this tax is asked. We find, in the same way, the lord of a manor subjecting all holdings under the manor to payments of their share when the king imposed tallage, and in legal formulae the land remained nominally subject to this burden long after the impost had ceased to be made.

Seisin - Legal possession of a property.

Selion - A ridge or narrow strip lying between two furrows formed in dividing an open field.

Serf - Peasant burdened with week-work, merchet, tallage, and other obligations; bondman, villein. A semi-free peasant who worked his lord's demesne and paid him certain dues in return for the use of land, the possession (not ownership) of which was heritable. These dues, usually called corevee, were almost all in the form of labor on the lord's land. Generally this averaged to three days a week. Generally subdivided into classes called cottagers, small holders, or villeins although the latter originally meant a free peasant who was burdened with additional rents and services.

Sheriff's tourn - The turn or circuit made by the sheriff of a county twice a year, in which he presided at the hundred-court in each hundred of the county.

Small Holder - A middle class peasant, farming more land than a cottager but less than a villein. A typical small holder would have 10-20 acres.

Sokeman - Another name for a free villager.

Steward or Seneschal - Chief official of an estate, supervisor of the lord's manor.

Suit - Attendance.

Suit of Mill - The obligation of tenants to resort to a special mill (usually that of their lord) to have their corn ground.

Suits of Court - Suit of Court meant that the tenant was bound to attend, and to serve as juryman, in the manorial courts, or to purchase exemption. Originally the court met every third week, and tenants were bound to attendance at all meetings. In time, the meetings became less regular, but tenants were bound to attend whenever summoned. Tenants often bargained for a minimum of attendance. Apart from the Court Baron was the Court Leet, which met at least once a year, on a day (fixed by the custom of the manor) in Eastertide or Whitsuntide. The Court Leet represented a measure of the king's authority, delegated to the lord of the manor. It controlled brewers, bakers, butchers, shoemakers, and other tradesmen; judged and punished cases of larceny, assault, and breach of the peace; punished persons who obstructed roads or blocked rights of way, or neglected to repair roads or bridges.

Tallage - Annual tax levied by lord on villeins.

Tally, Tally-stick - Reeve's method of accounting for manor's production, deliveries, receipts, and expenditures; notched stick on which it was kept. The stick was split in two, one half being kept by the seller and the other half by the receiver.

Tithe - Payment to church, consisting of a tenth of produce.

Tithing - Unit of ten or twelve village men mutually responsible for each other's conduct.

Toft - Yard of a village house.

Villein - The wealthiest class of peasant. Villeins usually cultivated 20-40 acres of land, often in isolated strips.

Virgate - Land unit theoretically sufficient to support a peasant family, varying between 18 and 32 acres.

Wardens of Autumn - Officials appointed by the villages to help supervise harvest work.

Wardship - The right of a feudal lord to the income of a fief during the minority of its heir. The lord was required to maintain the fief and to take care of the material needs of the ward. When the ward came of age, the lord was required to release the fief to him in the same condition that it was received.

Ways, Paths - Rights of way were of considerable importance. Records indicate that people had to buy such access. For example, at the manor at Cassington, Godstow Abbey purchased land to make a way. In an exchange of lands, part of the bargain was for land to get access to the rest of the holding.

Week-work - Principal labor obligation of a villein, comprising plowing and other work every week throughout the year.

Woodland rights - The only fuel was wood or charcoal; farm buildings and cottages were of wood; cattle were kept off the otherwise unprotected common fields and meadows by hurdles [dead hedges]: so much so, that in manorial deeds of the period the cattle-herd is most commonly styled the hayward, i.e., hedge-ward. Wood, of course, had other uses. In Essex Review, xiii, 219, we read, "A common material for filling in spaces between studs of wallings was stiff clay, mixed with dry cut grass, bedded on a foundation of hazel sticks, and faced with rough lime stucco on the outside, and floated with fine mortar inside."

Woodward - Manorial official in charge of the lord's woodland.

Workings - A large part of the work on the demesne land was done by the serf-tenants as part of their yearly payment for the lands they held of the manor, the tenant being in some grants required to provide the labor of one man, in other grants, of two men. About 1230, we find a piece of meadow near Oxford held by payment of quit-rent and by the ploughing of 1 acre. Such services were extremely common in hay-time and harvest. The Latin name for a day's work on these conditions was precaria. By old agreement or custom, the lord of the manor provided the laborer with his food on certain precariae, which were therefore called siccae. On other work-days, the lord provided both food and drink, and these were non siccae.