

Manorial Records

The manor was the essential unit of local government for 500 years after the Conquest. It might contain a number of townships or villages, part of a parish or spread over a number of parishes. A manor was held of the king by a lord of the manor and consisted of the lord's demesne lands and the common ploughland, meadowland and waste. The inhabitants held scattered strips of land in the open fields whilst the lord received the profits of the manor from the demesne, rents and dues and fines exacted at the manorial court.

Manorial records fall into three main types:

Court Rolls and Court books

The manor was governed by a manor court. This was a meeting of tenants presided over by the lord of the manor and his steward. The court considered matters both judicial and administrative. Court rolls and from c.1500 Court books record court proceedings. They provide information about minor offences and changes in landholding. They are useful in tracing the history of copyhold property, land and buildings rented by tenants. They may be written in abbreviated Latin before 1733!

Business Accounts

Manorial accounts kept by the lord's reeve or bailiff cover income and expenditure, crop and livestock yields, also building maintenance, local industry and the weather. They are less informative after c.1700.

Surveys, Extents and Rentals

The main types are: surveys, often with maps from c.1700; extents, combining a survey and valuation; rentals, listing tenants and annual rents.

Customals, recording by-laws and rents paid in labour, farm produce and money; terriers, listing land and assets; particulars and valuations were also made.

Interesting examples

The oldest manorial record is a Glympton court roll, 1277-78. Chalgrove parish has the most manorial records, c.300 in 5 archives. Papers about the abolition of Headington manor in 1947 are the latest manorial records.

Where are these records?

Manorial records for Bloxham, Chalgrove, Charlbury, Eynsham, Glympton, Headington, Horley & Hornton and Studley are the larger collections at Oxfordshire History Centre.

Where is the catalogue?

Some but not all manorial catalogues are available online. Enter the name of the manor into our [Heritage Search](#) catalogue and choose the "Archive Catalogue" collection to see if the catalogue you want is there. You may also find it helpful to search for the name of the family who were Lords of the Manor.

If the manor you are interested in does not appear you will need to visit the History Centre to look at the catalogue in printed form.

An index to all Oxfordshire manorial documents held at Oxfordshire History Centre and elsewhere is available on The National Archives' online [Manorial Documents Register](#)

[Visiting the Oxfordshire History Centre](#)