

## SELECT GLOSSARY

The following technical terms may require explanation. Fuller information on these and other topics is available in D. Hey, *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (1996), or online at VCH Explore ([www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore](http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore)).

**advowson:** the right to nominate a candidate to the bishop for appointment as rector or vicar of a church. Though often attached to a manor, advowsons could be bought and sold.

**ancient royal demesne:** land belonging to the Crown by the Norman Conquest, as recorded in Domesday Book (1086). Tenants of such land enjoyed special legal privileges throughout the Middle Ages, and sometimes beyond.

**appropriation:** the grant of a church's property (glebe and tithes) to a religious house or other institution, and sometimes (after the Reformation) to a layman, who was known as the impropiator or lay rector. Such churches were usually served by a vicar (q.v.).

**assarting:** clearance of woodland or waste for cultivation, particularly during the Middle Ages

**assize of bread and ale:** statutory regulation (from the 13th century) of the price of bread and ale, enforced by manor courts which imposed fines for over-pricing or short measures.

**Board school:** see National school.

**bordars (*bordarii*):** Anglo-Norman term for smallholding peasants, used extensively in Domesday Book. *Villani* had larger holdings.

**British school:** see National school.

**burh:** (a) one of several fortified places (including Wallingford and Oxford) established in the 9th and 10th centuries as a defence against Danish invasions; (b) more generally, a fortified enclosure surrounded by an earthwork.

**cert (certainty) money:** customary annual payment to the lord of a manor or hundred for the right to hold a court leet (*pro certo letae*).

**chantry:** in the Middle Ages, an endowment for a priest to say regular masses for the donor's soul, sometimes in perpetuity. Some of the most elaborate arrangements provided for a purpose-built side-chapel in the church. Chantries were suppressed at the Reformation. (Cf. obit.)

**chapel:** (a) a subsidiary church within a parish, which was subject to the parish church, usually lacked its own endowment or priest, and often fulfilled only limited parochial functions (e.g. occasional services, baptism); (b) an addition to a church, containing a side-altar; (c) from the late 17th century, a Nonconformist or Dissenting meeting house outside the Anglican structure.

**'closed' villages:** modern term for villages dominated by a single (usually resident) lord or squire with control over farm tenancies, agricultural employment, housing stock, and sometimes religious and social life. Such places tended to experience

relatively small-scale immigration, lower poor rates, and limited religious Nonconformity. (See 'open' villages.)

**copyhold:** common form of land tenure granted in a manor court, so called because the tenant received a 'copy' of the land grant as noted in the court records. Copyhold tenure continued until 1922. Such grants were sometimes for several lives (e.g. those of the tenant, his wife, and their eldest child), and usually owed low rents dictated by local custom. At renewal, the tenant paid the lord a large **entry fine**.

**court baron:** manor court dealing with tenants' services, agricultural regulation, and transfer of copyhold land (q.v.). Additional powers were sometimes exercised by the **court leet** (see view of frankpledge).

**cruck-framing:** form of timber-framing using large curved timbers or 'cruck blades', which extend to the apex of the roof from ground-level or from a side wall.

**curia:** Latin term for 'court', sometimes used of a manor house and its associated buildings.

**customary tenure:** unfree or copyhold tenure (q.v.) regulated by local manorial custom. Villeins (q.v.) held by customary tenure, and in some places forms of customary holdings survived into the 17th or 18th century.

**demesne:** in the Middle Ages, land farmed directly by a lord of the manor, rather than granted to tenants. Though usually leased out from the later Middle Ages, demesne lands often remained distinct from the rest of a parish's land. (See also ancient royal demesne.)

**entry fine:** see copyhold.

**fee farm rent:** perpetual fixed rent charged on an estate which is otherwise freehold, payable to the Crown or to some other recipient.

**free warren:** in the Middle Ages, a lord's exclusive right (granted by the Crown) to hunt small game such as hares, foxes, and game-birds on his own land.

**furlong:** a block of strips in the open fields (q.v.).

**hearth tax:** royal tax imposed in 1662 and 1665, assessed on the number of hearths or fireplaces in each taxpayer's house.

**heriot:** customary payment to the lord of the manor on a tenant's succession to a family holding, often comprising the tenant's best beast. Free tenants paid a fixed financial equivalent called **relief**.

**hidage:** tax or customary payment on land, assessed in relation to the number (or fraction) of hides held.

**hide:** conventional unit of land measurement with various meanings. In Bede's time it was nominally the amount required for a family to subsist on; in Domesday Book (1086), it is a taxation unit; and by the 13th century it nominally contained 4 yardlands or around 120 acres.

**honor:** a group of manors held or administered together by a major lord or by the Crown. Many estates in south-east Oxfordshire had connections with the large and important honor of Wallingford, which was often in royal hands.

**hundred:** a subdivision of the county or shire, established before the Norman Conquest and nominally containing 100 hides. Hundreds had their own courts, and continued for some local government purposes until the 19th century. In their original form the courts (attended by freemen from within the hundred) gathered regularly at a prominent outdoor **meeting place**, from which the hundred was often named.

**husbandman:** see yeoman.

**inclosure:** in an open-field parish (q.v.), the process whereby land was divided into privately owned fields which were then redistributed among the various tenants and landholders. From the 18th century this was usually by an Act of Parliament obtained by the dominant landowners; earlier, it was more commonly carried out by private agreement, or by a powerful lord acting on his own initiative. In the late Middle Ages it was often associated with depopulation and with creation of private sheep pastures.

**knight's fee:** under the medieval feudal system, an estate held for the obligation of providing an armed knight when required. Such obligations became increasingly theoretical, and by the 13th century some smaller estates were held as fractions of a knight's fee.

**lay rector:** see appropriation.

**lay subsidy:** from the Middle Ages to the 16th century, a periodic royal tax upon the laity, assessed on the value of their moveable goods.

**manor:** a landed estate originally held by feudal tenure (see knight's fee), and carrying with it certain rights such as that to hold a manor court. Depending on whether the lord was resident, it might or might not include a manor house.

**mark (monetary sum):** 13s. 4d. (two thirds of a £).

**minster:** in the late Anglo-Saxon period, a central church with jurisdiction over a wide area, often served by a group of clergy. Large minster parishes were mostly broken up between the 11th and 13th centuries, as manors and villages acquired local churches with smaller parishes.

**National school:** Church of England school of a type established in large numbers during the 19th century, affiliated to the National Society (established 1811). **British schools** (affiliated to the British and Foreign School Society) were the Nonconformist equivalent. **Board schools** (established under the 1870 Education Act) were non-denominational schools run by a local Board, which could raise funds from a rate and which were sometimes imposed where voluntary provision was inadequate. The Boards' powers passed to county councils under the 1902 Education Act.

**obit:** commemorative mass held on the anniversary of a person's death, often paid for under the deceased's will. The practice ended at the Reformation. (Cf. chantry.)

**open (common) fields:** a system of communal agrarian organization under which an individual's farmland was held in small strips scattered amongst two or more large fields, intermingled amongst the strips of other tenants. Crop rotations, fallows, and

grazing on the stubble were regulated through the manor court or some other communal assembly, which usually also regulated the common pastures and meadows. The system was widespread in Midland counties, where it generally seems to have been established around the 9th to 11th centuries. It continued until inclosure (q.v.), sometimes as late as the 19th century.

**'open' villages:** modern term for villages with a large proportion of freeholders and fragmented landownership, free from the domination of a single owner or estate (see 'closed' villages). Such places tended to experience relatively large-scale immigration, higher agricultural unemployment and poor rates, and social and religious diversity.

**overlord:** in the medieval feudal hierarchy, the lord of whom a lord in direct control of a manor held his land. The latter received the manor's income, and may sometimes have lived there; by contrast, most overlords were large-scale landowners with few local connections. Most overlordships lapsed by the later Middle Ages.

**pannage:** the right to pasture pigs in woodland.

**parish:** originally, the area attached to a parish church and owing tithes to it. From the Elizabethan period the parish was given various civil responsibilities, giving rise to the idea of a 'civil' as opposed to an 'ecclesiastical' parish. At first the two were usually identical, but from the 19th century their boundaries sometimes diverged. Many ancient parishes were derived from late Anglo-Saxon and early medieval estates, but since the 19th century most have been reorganized.

**peculiar:** an area subject to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of a body other than the local diocesan bishop. Oxfordshire peculiars included those of Banbury, Dorchester, and Thame, along with parishes such as Newington. They were abolished in 1846–7.

**ploughland:** originally, the amount of land that could be ploughed in a year by a full team of 8 oxen; by the 13th century a conventional unit of land measurement, nominally containing 4 yardlands or around 120 acres.

**poll tax:** royal tax charged in 1377 and 1381 on all adults aged over 14, at a flat rate.

**prebend:** land or other property (including tithes) owned by a cathedral, and allocated in perpetuity to one of the cathedral's canonries, whose holders were known as 'prebendaries'. Many such prebends comprised the appropriated revenues of parish churches (see appropriation).

**quitclaim:** legal term for giving up all claim to a piece of property.

**quitrent:** small fixed rent paid in acknowledgement that a holding was quit of any other service, i.e. effectively freehold. Though of medieval origin, ancient quitrents of a few pence or shillings were sometimes still paid in the 19th and 20th centuries.

**rectory:** (a) a church living served by a rector, who generally received the church's whole income; (b) the church's actual property or endowment (the rectory estate), comprising tithes, offerings, and usually some land or glebe. In the Middle Ages, some or all of a church's property could be granted to a religious house (see appropriation), leaving the church to be served by a vicar (q.v.). In that case the living was known as a **vicarage**.

**relief:** see heriot.

**scutage:** medieval tax levied on knight's fees (q.v.), nominally in lieu of military service. Derived from the Latin *scuta*, a shield.

**serjeanty:** in the Middle Ages, a non-military service due to the king in return for land, e.g. falconry services, riding duties, or tasks in the royal household. Many such services probably originated before the Norman Conquest.

**servi:** in Domesday Book, Latin term (literally 'slave') denoting unfree estate workers tied to the lord's demesne (q.v.).

**sheep-corn husbandry:** traditional type of mixed farming common in midland England, whereby sheep were folded on the arable after harvest or during fallow years to help fertilize the soil.

**sokemen:** a class of pre-Conquest and medieval free tenant found particularly in eastern England, but rare in Oxfordshire. A concentration around Benson seems to be associated with its special status as ancient royal demesne (q.v.).

**stint:** the number of animals which a tenant was allowed to graze on the common pastures, dictated by local custom, and enforced usually through the manor court.

**suit of court:** a tenant's obligation to attend the lord's manor court.

**tithing:** a group of householders legally responsible for each other's good behaviour and for referring wrongdoers to the manor court. (See view of frankpledge.)

**toft:** enclosure containing a house and its outbuildings, or (more commonly) the vacant enclosure after the buildings had been removed.

**township:** a subdivision of the parish for civil and agrarian purposes, focused usually on an outlying settlement, and often possessing its own fields and parish officers. Where the township had a chapel (q.v.), it might also form a chapelry within the parish.

**vernacular architecture:** buildings built in traditional local styles by local craftsmen, using locally available materials. The early 20th-century Vernacular Revival sought to emulate such styles using similar materials, although the buildings were usually architect-designed.

**vestry:** (a) the part of a church where clerical vestments are stored; (b) an assembly of leading parishioners and ratepayers, commonly responsible for poor relief and other secular matters as well as church affairs. Usually it elected parish officers such as churchwardens and overseers. Vestries' powers were substantially curtailed by the Poor Law Act of 1834 and the Local Government Act of 1894.

**vicar:** priest serving a church whose endowment (in land or tithes) had been mostly given to a religious house or other body (see appropriation). The vicar received a proportion of the church's income or a stipend, laid down by the bishop in a 'vicarage ordination'.

**view of frankpledge:** (a) a term for a manorial court with jurisdiction over petty breaches of law and order, also known as a **court leet**; (b) more specifically, a special session of the court to ensure that all adults belonged to a tithing (q.v.). Not

all lords had the right to hold views of frankpledge, which were sometimes reserved to the hundred court.

**villein:** in the Middle Ages, a peasant tenant or serf who technically belonged to the lord, suffered various legal handicaps, and usually owed labour services on the lord's demesne as well as rent. The earlier *villani* mentioned in Domesday Book enjoyed freer status.

**yardland:** the conventional holding of a medieval peasant, variously between 15 and 40 acres depending on local custom. Most such holdings generated surplus crops for sale at market, although cottagers and those with fragments of yardlands lived closer to subsistence, and probably worked part-time for better-off neighbours. Before inclosure, the land was usually scattered in strips throughout the open fields (q.v.). On some estates tenants' farms were still reckoned in yardlands until the 18th or 19th century.

**yeoman:** from the 16th century, a term widely used for the more prosperous farmers, many of whom were socially aspirational. The term **husbandman** usually denoted slightly less well-off farmers.