



Inclosure Glossary

Acre - a unit of land (equal to 4046 square metres).

Allotment – a piece of land awarded by the Inclosure Commissioners. Land was given in exchange for rights to common land and wastes, which were lost when they were taken into private ownership.

Assizes – Courts presided over by judges appointed by the Crown. They primarily tried capital and other criminal offences that were deemed too serious to be tried by the local courts. However they also tried a variety of civil cases. Gloucestershire was part of the Oxford assize circuit. See Quarter sessions.

Award – the final legal document produced by the Inclosure Commissioner. The document ran into pages of detail about who owned what and where.

Chain - a linear unit of length 66 feet (20m) long used to survey land. Later longer chains of 100 feet (30m) were introduced. The original unit is still used today on railways and in cricket, as a chain is the length of the wicket on a cricket pitch.

Churchwarden – an officer of a Church of England parish. Each parish usually had two churchwardens who were responsible for the maintenance of the church and the income and expenditure of the parish.

Claim – a written document declaring ownership of a piece of land and/or rights to the common land and wastes.

Commissioner – one of the persons in charge of organising the inclosure of an area; they were also responsible for writing the award and employing the surveyor.

Common – a piece of land available for everyone in the parish or manor to use, subject to conditions and regulations imposed by the local manorial court.

Common rights – rights of the inhabitants of the manor and parish over common land and waste lands. These included rights of pasture (to graze cattle, sheep and horses), pannage (to graze pigs), piscary (fish), common in the soil (to take stone, sand and gravel), estovers (wood for firewood) and bote (timber for construction). Inhabitants could also gather food, i.e. berries and mushrooms, but not always nuts or honey, which were frequently the preserve of the Lord of the Manor. The local manorial court could restrict commoner's rights.

Cottager – the tenant of a cottage.

Encroachment – this was the term used to describe the often long-standing occupation of common land by cottagers or other persons. Most encroachments held dwellings and gardens built on them.



Field – before inclosure a field was a wide-open space divided into strips that was farmed communally. After inclosure, fields were subdivided by hedges and fences to create the smaller, modern fields that we are familiar with today and which are farmed individually.

Freehold – land or property belonging to an individual outright with no rent to pay to the Lord of the Manor.

Gaol – equivalent to a modern prison, though far more harsh and unpleasant.

Hedge – a boundary in a field, usually dividing one person's land from another's.

Inclosure – the act of dividing and inclosing land.

Inclosure Map – a map showing who owned what after inclosure.

Lease - a grant of property to a tenant over a specific number of years for an annual fee or rent.

Leasehold – lands held under lease.

Lord of the Manor - the head of a manor, owner of estate.

Manor - an ancient unit of land that was at the heart of the feudal system. A manor was held by the Lord of the Manor who was usually a tenant of the Crown. A manor consisted of land farmed by the Lord (the demesne) and land farmed by the tenants of the manor (who gave service to the Lord in return for occupying the land). A typical manor was a more-or-less self-contained community, which contained a village, a mill, a church and agricultural land. They varied in size and shape enormously. Each manor was regulated by its own manorial court, presided over by the Lord's steward and with an elected jury of manorial tenants.

Open fields – the system of organisation of agricultural land prior to inclosure. In the open field system, the land of the manor or parish was farmed communally in large fields divided into strips, with each villager or tenant having responsibility for a number of strips (and its produce) around the manor or parish. Most open fields would grow the same crop and the local manorial court regulated their operation.

Overseer of the poor – an officer of a Church of England parish responsible for the poor of the parish. They could levy rates on parishioners and hand out money to persons deemed needy. They also investigated whether parishioners were entitled to receive parish support and could physically order the removal of people from the parish. They also pursued fathers of illegitimate children to obtain financial support for the upkeep of such children.

Parish – the basic unit of land administered by the Church of England. Each parish had its own church and the parishioners were expected to help pay for its upkeep. The size and shape of parishes varied greatly and might contain one or more manors.



Quarter Sessions – the system of quarterly meetings of county Justices of the Peace. The quarter sessions were responsible for law enforcement (including trying less serious non-capital criminal cases) and local government (including maintenance of roads and bridges and trade regulation such as licensing). They met at Easter, Whitsun, Michaelmas and Trinity.

Surveyor – a surveyor of land appointed by the Inclosure Commissioners to measure the open fields and draw a map of their re-distribution

Waste – uncultivated land, usually on the boundaries of the manor and subject to rights of common.