

Manorial Records

Background

A manor is a large estate, which usually dates back to medieval times. The owner of the estate was known as lord of the manor. Some estates were broken into smaller units for administrative purposes. These were used to collect rents from tenants. The lord of the manor could hold a manorial court, which would preserve the rights of the lord and to regulate relations between tenants.

There were two types of court – the court baron and the court leet. Courts baron dealt with maintenance of property, changes of tenancy and other estate matters, and sat roughly once a month. Courts leet dealt with minor breaches of the peace and public order, sat twice a year and were similar to modern criminal courts. Some courts created local byelaws which still exist today in some form.

The 1922 Law of Property Act ended the last meaningful function of manorial courts through the abolition of that form of land tenure, known as 'copyhold'. As proof of title to land formerly held under copyhold can be found in manorial records, they are protected under statute law. For this reason, a register of manorial records is held by the National Archives (see 'How to Find the Records'). The digital version of this index is still being updated but the Gloucestershire section is complete.

What records are there and what information will they contain?

The most common types of records include the following:

Court Roll or Book:

- Formal record of the court.
- Usually in the form of a parchment or paper roll or in a volume.
- Lists all of the cases heard by the court.

Estreats

- Copy taken from the court roll
- Lists fines imposed on a particular individual.

Manorial Accounts

- Similar to estate accounts.
- Contain details of income and expenditure on specific manorial administration such as income from fines, expenditure on carrying out walks of the boundaries of the manor.
- Usually in Latin.
- Sometimes contain names of individual people or properties.

Rental:

- Gives the names of tenants and the amount of rent they are due to pay.
- Occasionally gives information about the property they are renting.

Survey:

- Written description of a manor, usually giving details of boundaries.
- Usually describes each parcel of land.
- Sometimes gives full field-by-field details of individual farms.
- May have been produced as part of a ruling of the court.
- The rental value of the land is usually also given.

Terrier:

- Survey arranged topographically, field by field.
- Gives the name of the tenant and a brief description of the land.

How to Find the Records

The quickest way to find out what records survive for an individual manor is to check the manorial documents register (MDR). This can be searched online at <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/manor-search>. This index includes records from across the country. This way you can find records held at Gloucestershire Archives and at other locations.

You can also make a search of records held at Gloucestershire Archives through our online catalogue. Enter the word(s) that you wish to search for into the search box. You can click on reference numbers of blue main titles of the results to call up a description of each of these items. The "Title", which is really a description, could be sufficient for you to assess whether the documents are of use to you but if not, click on the blue main title or reference number to the right of each entry and this will bring up a more detailed description of the item.

Note

Some records relating to manors in Gloucestershire may be held at other local Archives. This will be the case if the land was owned by a family which was based in another county and deposited their archives elsewhere. For this reason, it is best to search the MDR to make sure you find all of the relevant records. Some Counties have not yet been updated - a full list is available on the MDR webpage.

Further Reading

A good introduction to Manorial Courts and their records can be found at <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/projects/manorialrecords/index.htm>.

For more information see <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/manor-search>