

Glossary of Manorial Terms and Definitions



The following list aims to cover some of the most common manorial terms that may aid researchers. A list of further reading suggestions on the topic of manorial documents is also listed below.

Term	Definition
Abstract of title	Summary of earlier documents showing previous owners of land or property.
Account	Contains manorial income and expenditure, usually kept by the steward or bailiff.
Admission	Admittance of new tenant into a manor. See Surrender.
Affeeror	Official appointed to moderate and assess fines and amercements for offences, sometimes called an Assessor.
Ale Taster	Official appointed to check quality and measurement of ale for sale on a manor.
Alienation	A transfer of tenancy.
Amercement	Penalty paid for in court which then went to the Lord.
Bailiffs	Manorial official and Lord's representative often in charge of one or more manors and usually a tenant.
Beadles	Under-bailiff with less authority.
Call Book	Attendance register for a manor court, listing the tenants who were required to attend.
Capon	Payment to the Lord at Michaelmas or Christmas, as per conditions of their lease in the form of castrated cocks.
Chief Rent	Also known as 'High Rent', payable for a property to the lord of the manor by freeholder tenants.
Common Land	The lord of the manor was the owner of the common and much of common land that survives today was known as common or manorial waste, described as the open, uncultivated and unimproved lands of a manor and usually areas of farmland which was less productive. It is a popular misconception that common land is owned by the general public, which everyone has unrestricted right of access. All common land is private property, whether owned by an individual or a corporation. Today many commons are owned by local authorities, the National Trust and other bodies for the public benefit, but not all commons offer total access to all comers. Common land is subject to rights and those entitled to exercise these rights were called commoners. Historical rights of common included of pasture, the right to graze livestock; of estovers, the right to cut and take wood (not timber); of turbary, the right to dig turf or peat for fuel; in the soil, the right to take sand, gravel, stone, coal and other minerals and of piscary, the right to take fish from ponds and streams.
Copyhold	A manorial tenancy agreement. Smaller landholdings within manors were held by copyhold tenure and it is the proof of title to copyhold land that protects manorial documents by law. This type of land was owned by the Lord or Lady of the Manor but tenanted out to people who lived on manorial lands. Copyhold land could be bought and sold, inherited, left in a will, mortgaged, and settled, but every transfer of land was

	surrendered back to the Lord or Lady of the Manor before admitting new tenants. The Lord or Lady of the manor had the right to take fees from new tenants and receive payment on the death of one of their tenants. The record of the transfer of land was written up in the manorial court rolls and a copy was given to the tenant, this is where the term 'copyhold' comes from.
Conventional Rent	An annual rent agreed with the tenant in the case of a tenant at will.
Customs	Laws in which the tenants lived by on a manor.
Customary tenant	Another term for a copyholder tenant or a tenant who held land by the customs of the manor.
Custumal	A survey which contains details of tenants with the manor customs they held land by, rents and services they owed the lord.
Court Baron	A manorial court which usually met every 3-4 weeks and dealt with the day to day running of the manor including customs, admission and surrender of new tenants, copyhold, payments of rents and heriots to the Lord, all tenants were summoned to attend.
Court Leet	A manorial court which usually met twice a year and had the right to deal with minor criminal offences and hold view of Frankpledge.
Court Roll / Book	Minutes of the court and usually in a distinct format listing tenants, followed by the names of jury, presentments, general matters, death of tenants and surrenders of land.
Demesne	Land kept by the lord for his own use compared to that which was leased to tenants distinguished from land granted to tenants.
Deodand	A term for item or animal which had been the cause of death of a person, which was then forfeited to the crown.
Easement	The right to use someone else's land, the most common of these is right of way.
Enclosure	Also known as 'inclosure', it was the legal process of enclosing or fencing off of small landholdings and open fields into larger areas of land. Once this process was completed, the land was restricted to those allowed to farm it and stopped being of common use.
Enfranchisement	Converting copyhold land into freehold land.
Escheat	Land returned back to the crown or lord usually if a tenant died without any heirs, the heir was a minor or had committed a crime, where he had to forfeit land.
Essoins	Excuses for not attending court.
Estreat	A list from a court roll, detailing the fines and amercements imposed by the court.
Estate	Total lands and property that belonging to one person.
Extent	A financial survey of a manor listing the valuation of every element of the land and services where the lord collections income.
Fealty	Taking of an oath to adhere to the customs of the manor, similar to Homage but fealty could be sworn to different lords where tenants held property. Homage was swearing loyalty to one lord.

Feudal System	A political, economic and social landholding system where land was held by structured around land held by a Vassal from a Lord in return for services and homage.
Fee	Land capable of being inherited on death of tenant. Also known as Fief.
Fine	Payment to lord for being admitted to manor.
Franchises	Crowns ancient privileges, nor always relating to manors but were granted or acquired by lords of the manor.
Frankpledge	Group of ten free men who pledged mutual responsibility for the maintenance of law and order of courts derived from system of tithings.
Free Bench	Custom where a widow could hold her late husband's tenancy for her life or until she remarried under the understanding that she remained chaste.
Free Hold	Land held outright and not subject to customs of the manor.
Heriot	A payment to lord on death of tenant usually in the form of best beast.
Homage	1) Jury sworn in at the beginning of courts. 2) Oath by tenant acknowledging his loyalty to Lord.
Hayward	Official responsible for woods, corns and meadows.
Honour Court	Alongside the two usual manorial courts there were honour courts. An honour consisted of a group of manors and smaller non-court holding units usually called fees or fiefs, which may also of be known as lordships. Not all manors were part of honours, but tenants of these manors were bound by the honour court in addition to the normal manorial court. Honour courts were held by chief tenants and dealt with receiving the money raised by individual manors, appointing officers and occasionally smaller court issues. Honour courts fell into disuse after 15th and few existed beyond the Tudor period. Not all manors were part of honours and could also be known as lordships.
Inquisition Post-Mortem	When a significant landowner died, a jury was summoned to ascertain his landholdings; if he owed anything to the crown and who would succeed him.
Knights Service	Military service owed to the Lord of the manor, abolished in 1660.
Law of Property Act	1922 Law of Property Act abolished the form of land tenure known as copyhold and brought to an end the last meaningful function of manorial courts.
Leasehold	Land let which was not governed by the customs of the manor.
Lord of the Manor	Title given to a person holding the lordship of a manor from the crown, mense lord or tenant in chief.
Manor	A manor was an administrative unit rather than a geographic area of land and known as a manor if it was owned by a lord or lady and held a court for tenants.
Manorial Documents Register	Manorial documents were generated by the internal administration of a manor. "The Manorial Documents Register (MDR) is maintained by The National Archives, on behalf of the Master of the Rolls, as a record of the whereabouts of manorial documents. The MDR was set up as a consequence of the 1922

	Law of Property Act since proof of title to former copyhold land was in many cases contained within the books and rolls of manorial courts”.
Mesne Lord	A lord who was a vassal of another lord.
Merchet / Merchate	Fee or tax paid to lord levied on marriage to a tenant’s daughter.
Manorial Rights	Certain rights which were retained by lords of the manor when land became freehold in the early 20th century. Including rights to mines and some minerals, sporting rights like hunting, shooting and fishing, rights to hold fairs and markets, tenant’s rights of common and lord’s or tenant’s liability for the construction, maintenance and repair of dykes, ditches, canals.
Moiety	A part or share of a manor.
Open Field	Areas of land held communally by the manor and farmed in individual strips
Pain	Rule or regulation of the manor.
Parliamentary Survey	Survey of lands created by Oliver Cromwell to identify landholders of each manor, the valuation of the land and rent paid within it.
Peppercorn Rent	Token rent, when land was rented free of charge but specified in deeds, to signify it was rented land not gifted. Other examples could be a pair of white gloves, a rose or a grain of wheat.
Pinder	Official who impounded livestock in the pound.
Particular	A description of a manor, often written by a steward and accompanied by a valuation.
Precept	Notice issued by the Bailiff to hold a court.
Presentment	Statement by the jury or officer of the manor court of matters to be discussed in court.
Perambulation	A description of manor boundaries.
Plea	Action taken by a tenant against another.
Profit à prendre	The right to take something from someone else’s land. Divided into two categories, common and several (separate) rights.
Quia Emptores	Law passed in 1290, which changed how manors were granted preventing tenants to alienate (selling or transferring) their land by subinfeudation (sub-letting and new vassal owed duties to person who had alienated land). Instead alienating their land by substitution (paying lord duties and receiving alienation fee from new tenant but expected no duties or service from new tenant of that land). This was a way of controlling land ownership disputes.
Quit Rent	Payment to lord by a freeholder in lieu of services that he would otherwise owed to the lord of the manor.
Rack Rent	Negotiable rent for an annual tenancy.
Receiver	Treasurer to the lord of the manor's treasurer.
Reeve	A tenant responsible for the management of the manor.
Right of Wreck	Right to the wreck of ships washed up upon the shore belongs to the Crown but could be franchised to a lord of the manor.
Rental	A document listing tenants and the amount of rent due.
Seisin	Possession of land or property.
Sequestration	Confiscating of Royalist estates who fought against Parliamentarians.
Socage	Tenure of land in exchange for services usually by a fixed

	payment in cash or kind.
Steward	Official running the manor on behalf of the Lord, and presided at the manor courts if the Lord was absent
Suit of Court	Owed by free tenants as part of the condition of tenancy.
Surrender	Process by which transfers of copyhold land were made in the manorial courts. Property had to be surrendered by the old tenant before the new tenant was admitted. Process that made sure the entry fee of a tenant was paid and the new tenancy was recorded.
Survey	Description of a manor or manors, usually giving details of manorial boundaries and customs and detailing each holding of land. There are three types of manorial surveys, extents, rentals and terriers.
Tenant in Chief	Lord who held manors directly from the crown.
Terrier	Description of a manor which follows a topographical arrangement.
Valor	Valuation which sets out income and expenses of an estate, sometimes showing how much each manor could be expected to provide.
View of Frankpledge	Inspection at Court Leets of men who were or should be in Frankpledge.
Vassal	A person who agreed homage, allegiance and military service to the lord.
Villein	Peasant bound by feudal system to work Lord's land, mines, forests in return had some rights to land, farming, property and lord's protection. Could be bought, sold, or traded. Required the lord's permission to leave the manor or marry. Similar to Slavery, but slaves owned no land and worked solely for the lord and survived on donations from the Lord of the manor. Also known as Serfs.
Villeinage	Land tenure that later became copyhold in the 14th century.
Waste Land	Uncultivated, unoccupied land, often subject to rights of common.

Further Reading

The following publications are available in either the Kresen Kernow library or archive as reference, please email kresenkernow@cornwall.gov.uk to check availability.

Manorial Records by Denis Stuart, 1992

Manorial Records by P.D.A Harvey, 1999

The Law of the Manor, Christopher Jessel, 1998

Manorial Law by A.W & C. Barsby, 1996

Using Manorial Records by Mary Ellis, 1994

English Manor by Mark Bailey, 2002

Latin for Local Historians by Denis Stuart, 2012

The National Archives, Manorial Definitions: [Manorial definitions - The National Archives](#)

The National Archives, MDR: [Manorial documents and lordships and how to use the Manorial Documents Register - The National Archives](#)