

Dorset History Centre – Guide to Sources

Manorial Records

The manor was a mainstay of estate administration from 1066 through to the early twentieth century. The Dorset History Centre holds thousands of manorial records and has some documents for manors within almost every parish in the county. Most of our manorial documents are to be found in the collections of private estates such as the Pitt-Rivers and Weld collections, but others may be found in parish and borough collections

The transactions of the manorial courts, held by the lords of the manors, were recorded in the court rolls and books and include:

- Judicial and legislative issues for their manors, with names of individuals mentioned in disputes regarding trespass, rights to pasture, debts and repairs to property
- Conveyances of land, with the names of the incoming and outgoing tenants and descriptions of properties. Our earliest records of this type are from the thirteenth century. They survive in large numbers from the sixteenth through to the twentieth centuries
- Lists of jurors and officers of the court

The steward of each manor maintained his own working papers, minutes and notes as well as other administrative records such as:

- Rentals (names of tenants and descriptions of their holdings)
- Surveys, terriers and maps of the manor
- Accounts of rents paid and profits of farms
- Customs (traditional by-laws and conventions adhered to on the manor and enforced through the manor court)

Official records of the manor court are in Latin until 1733, steward's papers and administrative records are often in English from the mid-sixteenth century

Where to find manorial documents:

Manorial documents were mostly kept in private hands until the mid-twentieth century. Some found their way to the National Archives and the British Library, others were given to the libraries of Oxford and Cambridge Colleges, most remained with the lords of the manor

Today many lords of the manor have deposited their archives in county archives like the Dorset History Centre. many of the records held here can be searched through the online catalogue access to archives <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/>

Others can be found listed in the catalogues in our search-rooms

Additionally, you may wish to consult the Manorial Documents Register which will provide you with locations (e.g. Record Offices) for the manorial documents of a particular manor or the manors within a parish. Their contact details are:

The National Archives: Historical Manuscripts Commission
Kew
Richmond
Surrey TW9 4DU
Tel 020 8876 3444
Web site: www.hmc.gov.uk
Email enquiry@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Help with using manorial documents:

- Bailey, Mark, *The English Manor c.1200-c1500*, Manchester University Press, 2002 [excellent introductions to medieval manor court records with selected examples of these sources translated and annotated]
- Mary Ellis, *Using manorial records* P.R.O. guide no.6 (London, 1994; rev'd 1997). [An introduction aimed at family and local historians].

- Harvey, P D A, *Manorial Records*. British Records Association, Archives and the User No. 5, revised edition, 1999 [the best introduction to medieval manorial records, with a chapter on early-modern manor court records]
- Stuart, Denis, *Manorial Records: An introduction to their transcription and translation*, Chichester: Phillimore, 1992. [Good for getting started with original documents and includes some later records as well as medieval]