

The Manors of Hook Norton

Land ownership patterns had become well established by the time of the Norman Conquest, and were often described in terms of manors. It can be difficult to define a manor: it may not, for example, match the area of the ecclesiastical parish or the later secular re-organisation of parishes. A parish may contain more than one manor. The lordship of the manor did not necessarily mean ownership of all the land and income encompassed within it. Nor did a manor necessarily require a manor house — and, as in Hook Norton, what became known as the Manor House might never have been occupied by the lord of the manor.

A manor was originally held by feudal tenure by a tenant of the king: the lord of the manor would farm part of it himself (the demesne), employing labourers; other land within the manor would be farmed by his tenants or by villeins. Free men (the tenants) paid rent; villeins owed services to the lord of the manor, usually labour, such as ploughing or harvesting. (All of them paid tithes to the Church.) Most villagers worked strips in common fields and might have the right to pasture a cow on common land, to let a pig forage for acorns in woodland, or to gather wood for building or firewood. As time went on, these traditions were subjected to economic and political changes, sometimes brought about by national disasters like the Black Death that reduced the labour force, or by the introduction of new farming methods or machinery that reduced the need for labour itself.

The lord of the manor was responsible for holding open courts for his tenants. Land did not pass automatically from father to son: approval had to be sought at the *court baron* and a "fine" or "heriot", a payment either of money or in kind would be made. Land transactions were witnessed by the homage or jury, a panel of villagers, and recorded by the lord of the manor's steward. The *court leet* dealt with petty crimes and the management of the common fields. Some manorial court records have survived, and can be consulted at the Oxfordshire History Centre in Cowley.¹

For example, from the court held by the Bishop of Oxford's steward in 1755:

¹ <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/oxfordshire-history-centre>

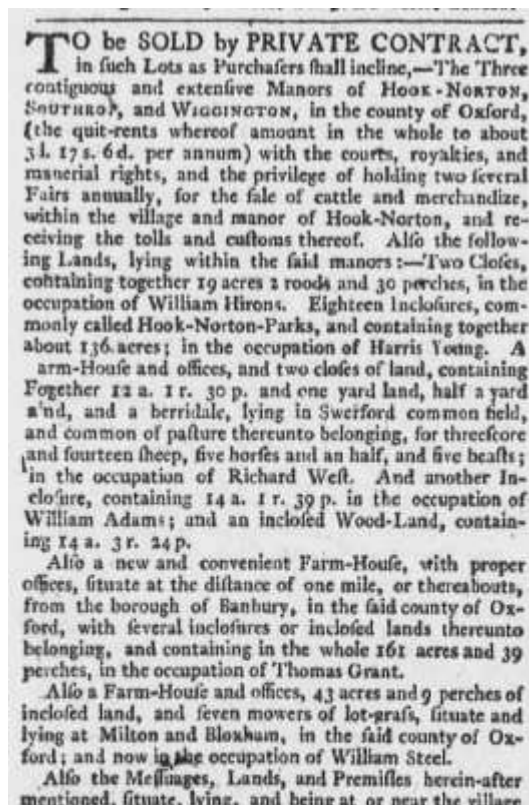
At the same Court came Sarah Goffe daughter of the said Sarah Goffe and was admitted Tenant in Reversion after the Decease of the said Charity Goffe to one other half yardland, the appurtenances, in Hooknorton called Colvorts lands in possession of John Goffe jun and the other half part of the Meadow called Parrans Meadow lying North of the Lower End and South of the Upper End and now in possession of Wm Cartors²

The king controlled the succession of the manor, occasionally confiscating the title and lands of a lord who had incurred his displeasure. There could be radical changes as a nobleman fell from grace; there were periods when there was no lord of the manor as the monarch found it profitable to retain the income for himself.

In Domesday Book³ Hook Norton is listed as having been owned by three brothers in 1066. The first Norman lord of the manor, Robert d'Oilly, inherited the manor from his Saxon father-in-law. His heirs ceded land and manorial rights to Oseney Abbey, creating a second manor in Hook Norton. With the dissolution of the monasteries, the Abbey's manor passed to the Diocese of Oxford.

By the eighteenth century, manors were being bought and sold on the open property market.

Advertisements were placed in the press, as here in *The Oxford Journal* of 22 July 1775:



TO be SOLD by PRIVATE CONTRACT, in such Lots as Purchasers shall incline,—The Three contiguous and extensive Manors of HOOK-NORTON, BOURNHOPE, and WIGGINGTON, in the county of Oxford, (the quit-rents whereof amount in the whole to about 3l. 17s. 6d. per annum) with the courts, royalties, and manorial rights, and the privilege of holding two several Fairs annually, for the sale of cattle and merchandize, within the village and manor of Hook-Norton, and receiving the tolls and customs thereof. Also the following Lands, lying within the said manors:—Two Closes, containing together 19 acres 2 roods and 30 perches, in the occupation of William Hiron. Eighteen Inclosures, commonly called Hook-Norton-Parks, and containing together about 136 acres; in the occupation of Harris Young. A Farm-House and offices, and two closes of land, containing Together 12 a. 1 r. 30 p. and one yard land, half a yard and, and a herridale, lying in Swerford common field, and common of pasture thereunto belonging, for threescore and fourteen sheep, five horses and an half, and five beasts; in the occupation of Richard West. And another Inclosure, containing 14 a. 1 r. 39 p. in the occupation of William Adams; and an inclosed Wood-Land, containing 14 a. 3 r. 24 p.

Also a new and convenient Farm-House, with proper offices, situate at the distance of one mile, or thereabouts, from the borough of Banbury, in the said county of Oxford, with several inclosures or inclosed lands thereunto belonging, and containing in the whole 161 acres and 39 perches, in the occupation of Thomas Grant.

Also a Farm-House and offices, 43 acres and 9 perches of inclosed land, and seven mowes of lot-grass, situate and lying at Milton and Bloxham, in the said county of Oxford; and now in the occupation of William Steel.

Also the Messuages, Lands, and Premises herein-after mentioned, situate, lying, and being at or near the village

² Hook Norton Court Book, 1 May 1755, MS Dioc. 2119, Oxfordshire History Centre

³ See the essay on " Domesday Book" in the [Middle Ages](#) section of this website

The following articles give an outline of what we know about Hook Norton's lords of the manor, many of whom were close to the monarch and to some of the major events in national history.

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29.09.2015