

The Origin and Evolution of English Manors

By A P M Wright

During that period, the poor state of communications made it difficult to transport what small surplus the primitive and inefficient agricultural techniques in use produced, and made it self-sufficiency in each locality necessary. The same difficulty obliged rulers to delegate their powers to local potentates who found it only too easy to convert such authority into hereditary, private possession. Money was in use, but it was rather a measure of value than a regular means of exchange. The silver penny introduced by the Carolingians was of great high value in terms of corn and livestock. The manor therefore, provided the most convenient institution for obtaining from the peasantry the resources needed to maintain the higher orders of clergy and warriors. Just as men of the warrior order held land in return for fighting for their king or lord, so the peasants paid for the land which the wealthy and powerful gave them, or allowed them to keep, with their labor and cultivating the fields or carrying the produce to palace or monastery. Some of the men subject to such obligations were probably descended from bondmen whom their masters had settled on small holdings, to make them self-supporting in food, while retaining their services. Others, legally free, had surrendered their holdings to a powerful neighbor, to receive them back burdened with services, in return for assistance in times of scarcity and protection from oppression by others than himself.

Although England during the Anglo-Saxon period is poorly documented for economic history, glimpses can be obtained of the development of manors there also. It has been suggested that the medieval English manor was directly derived from the Romano-British villa, English chieftains taking over ownership, as Frankish and Gothic invaders did from Roman landowners elsewhere, while their serfs were thought to descend from a subjugated British peasantry. Such a transfer of lordship could have occurred in regions where Romano-British society survived relatively intact at the moment when the English overran it. In other parts, where the population consisted mainly of English settlers, a social hierarchy existed which could involve dependent landholding on a manorial system.

Apart from slaves and surviving Welshmen, free men were differentiated *eorls* of noble rank, and *ceorls*, or peasant husbandmen. Many village names, in which an Anglo-Saxon personal name is combined with "tun" or "ham," probably indicate places where leaders of tribes settled, surrounded by followers whose subjugation to them, expressed through yielding produce or services, could be made progressively more burdensome. By 700, thegns in Wessex, who had settled men on newly cultivated land, could make them in return work on the donors land. If the thegn provided a house as well, the recipient was bound for life to his service.

Manorialism also spread through the alienation of the English King's rights over land and its inhabitants. Scattered over the various kingdoms were "king's tuns," to which the men of the surrounding district customarily delivered amounts of bread and ale, meat and poultry, butter, cheese, and honey, sufficient to provision the king for a day and a night as he journeyed around his realm. They might also come in for a few days each year to plough and harvest any farmland that the king had there. His Reeve might also collect there the sums due to him upon breaches of the law.

From the 7th century, for the safety of their souls and their kingdoms, kings steadily gave away such estates, or fractions of them, often comprising whole villages, to their bishops, abbots, and nobles in

perpetuity. Each such grant implied the right to draw revenues and services from the husbandmen there and often to exercise jurisdiction over them for the grantee's profit. By the 10th century a great mass of the peasantry, even apart from the numerous serfs, was mostly still tied. On many estates their obligations included, besides various renders in kind and the ploughing of a portion of the lord's lands, working for him every week, as villeins, did later, in whatever way they were commanded. In much of eastern England, however, where Danish invasion and settlement had disrupted the old English social structure, the cultivators were less subject to manorial lordship. Those regions contained until after 1066 many sokemen, whose main duty to their Lord was to "seek" the jurisdiction of his court, and free men, who could take themselves and their land to what lord they chose. In many villages there, no substantial landowner had any large area in hand, the land being divided among the resident peasants.

In organization of lordship, as in other fields, the Norman conquest produced, despite the forcible dispossession of the English aristocracy, not so much a cataclysmic transformation, but a sharper and more systematic development of existing institutions. The name of the manor, from the lord's *manoir*, or residence, was indeed an innovation. The parceling out of the land into manors, where they did not already exist, was moreover required by the enforcement of feudal tenure, as the Conqueror and his barons distributed land to their vassals, to be held by providing knights. The manor became the economic unit supplying the knight with the income to maintain him and to pay for his arms and horse. Since manors varied in size and value there was no correlation between them and the knight's fee, the amount of land theoretically sufficient for the support of a knight. The new Norman lords did perhaps make use of the villagers on their manners somewhat more than their predecessors had done: Domesday Book sometimes indicates that the amount of income obtained was higher than those paying it could comfortably yield. Manorialization was extended in areas, as in the east, where it had been weak in 1066. Many free men and the sokemen were degraded from their previous partial independence to the status of the *villani*, ordinary villagers, and may have incurred more obligations as a result.

It is in the records from the early 12th century, after those changes, that the classic type of English manor becomes clearly visible. The land within it fell into two proportions; The lord's demesne under his immediate control, whose produce was for the support of him and his household: and the tenanted land, from which services were provided to cultivate the demesne. In 1086, many manors had their serfs who probably worked continuously on the demesne, but chattel slavery died out soon. Thereafter, the lords drew the necessary labor, partly from their tenants, partly from a small group of permanently hired men, some specifically skilled as ploughmen or shepherds. Such farm workers received, besides a small money wage, yearly payments in corn. The demesne usually included a manor house or farmstead, where some permanent agent, if not the lord himself, lived, surrounded by enclosures of meadow and pasture larger than those of other landholders of the manor. In the arable open fields too the Lord had much of his land lying together in largish blocks, saving him the trouble of moving his ploughs about the field as frequently as the peasants had to, with their small strips of an acre or less.

The tenanted land was usually held partly freely, partly in villeinage. The freeholders paid their duties to the lord mainly in money rents, but might owe some labor services at special times of year, often of a more honourable kind, such as supervising other workers in harvest. The villein tenements were less secure and more heavily burdened. Legally they were held entirely at the lord's will. In practice, they passed from father to son, for such land was unprofitable without men to farm it. But a villein tenant ejected or denied succession by the lord had no legal redress. Most of the villein holdings owed some

money rents, perhaps a commutation of ancient renders in kind, or a continuation of a yearly levy, called before the Conquest *gafol*, perhaps once due to the king. Each holding sent a man to work on the demesne for two or three days a week, and at the relevant seasons to plough and harrow so many acres of it, and to mow the lord's meadows. The tenant also had to use his cart and draught beasts to carry the lord's crops to his house or to neighboring markets. During the harvest, villein tenants had to come once or twice with several men, or with their whole households, to reap and carry the lord's crops, to get them while favorable weather lasted. The name *precariat*, or harvest boon, given to that service, probably recalls a long distant past when men had voluntarily given their lords and neighbors such assistance from goodwill. Such tenants also had to send their sheep to the lord's fold, giving him the advantage of their manure, and to grind his corn at the lord's mill: the toll went to the lord through the miller's rent. The lord in his turn in times of bad harvest, would subsidize the poor from his barn.

The distinction between free and villein holdings was not based on the tenant's personal status. Free men could hold land in villeinage, performing the labors due from it, without necessarily forfeiting their freedom, although a family once free whose members did so for several generations risked losing its free status. A freeman's children born on such a holding to a villein woman, perhaps it's heiress, were moreover reckoned as unfree. Over those who were villeins by birth, also styled *nativi*, the lord had even greater authority. He might and sometimes did, sell or give away a villein and his offspring, though usually only with the land they occupied. Villeins might not depart from the manor without their lord's leave. If at a price, he allowed them to live elsewhere, they must still pay each year "chevage," head money, as evidence of their continuing in bondage. Villeins had to pay the lord "merchet" on giving their daughters in marriage. Their personal goods were supposed to be his and at his will he might exact from them as much as he chose, as "tallage." In practice however, *tallage* was often taken from villeins as a group as an annual payment, not varying greatly in amount. Whenever villeins died, the Lord took his best beast as a heriot. The term was once referred to a thegn's arms returning at his death to the lord who had given them. Its use among the peasantry perhaps recalls a period at which a lord, when giving land, had also supplied the livestock to work it.

The divergence in standing which thus gave the manorial lord far more power over some of his men than over others was probably in some cases caused by some families retaining an ancestral freedom from before 1066. Elsewhere, descendants of some of the undifferentiated *villani* of 1086 had acquired by prescription a freedom of tenure and status in time to be protected by the developing common law; while many others, of similar origins, saw themselves subjected more firmly to their lords, as the king's judges established clearer definitions of freedom and serfdom, and declined to extend to more than a minority of the peasantry that protection from arbitrary treatment by their lords which the common law offered to acknowledged freeholders. In doing so, the courts were influenced partly by Roman law doctrines about slavery, partly perhaps by unwillingness to determine every petty dispute between lord and tenant throughout England. The tests adopted for deciding whether a peasant held freely or in villeinage were not clear cut. Liability to *merchet* and *tallage* were considered strong evidence of villeinage, although free men also occasionally owed them. The most important criterion was not simply the type of render due to the lord, money or labor. Although most freeholders paid the money rents, considered more honourable, some owed not inconsiderable works. The issue turned rather on the certainty or otherwise the services rendered. To hold freely a man must only have to do yearly a fixed amount of work. If a lord were entitled to demand as much of the holding as he chose, the courts reckoned that it was villein land. In practice, indeed, the level of labour services imposed was regulated

by tradition on each manor; but the courts would not protect admitted villein tenants from attempts by their lord to increase it.

Some villeins sought to escape their disabilities by buying from their lords charters of enfranchisement. Such purchases were not very frequent, for the line between freedom and villeinage was one of legal status, not material well-being. Some freeholders owned more land than most villeins, but many others had only minute holdings: free land was often divisible between heirs. The lords usually insisted that the villeins' holdings, typically full, half and quarter yardlands, of 30, 15 or 7/12 customary acres, be preserved as units, so that the services due from them in proportion to their size could be more easily exacted. Many free men, therefore, were no better off than at lowest stratum of manorial tenants, the cottagers. They probably derived from the bordars and cottagers, holding 5 acres or less each, recorded in 1086. Mostly unfree personally, they usually owned only their cottage and the croft around it, sometimes a few open-field acres. Being hardly able to live by cultivating their own land, they furnished a reserve of labour for hiring by those more prosperous peasants who had holdings too large to be worked solely by their family, and in particular by the lord. He had naturally an advantage in bargaining over wages with men who could not easily seek work elsewhere without his leave.

Such was the organization of the manor, as it was recorded on the estates of the large Benedictine monasteries and some other great landowners. But it was not typical of all manors, the extent to which that model prevailed varying in space and time. There were parts of England where villeinage was of little importance. In Kent, the peasantry were almost all personally free, and owed only money rents and some seasonal services. Over much of East Angles, besides a class of full freeholders already flourishing in the 12th century, there were many *molmen*, who although personally free, held their land for permanently fixed rents. In the pastoral uplands of the North, much peasant tenure involved mainly renders of cattle and a form of military service to repel raids across the Scottish border. In Cornwall, by 1300, much land was held on a purely contractual basis: men took it up from the lord for terms of years at rents partly determined by market forces. Even in the Midlands and the South of England, the heartland of the "model" manor, there were exceptions to its dominance. Many villagers contained several manors so that no single lord had exclusive control of the peasants. The smaller manors belonging to knights and franklins often also differed from the model just described. On many of them *weekwork* was not customary, and their villein tenants performed only the seasonal tasks of ploughing, haymaking, and harvesting. Some manors had, besides their demesne, only free tenants, others only a few villeins, whose services would not be sufficient to work the demesne. A few manors contained no demesne at all, but only rights of lordship over freeholders and villeins, so that their revenue could only be received in cash.

From the 11th century, moreover, the manor was placed in a changed economic environment. Coinage was becoming relatively plentiful, witness the thousands of silver pennies extracted from England as Danegeld, a fraction of which has been discovered in buried hoards in Scandinavia. The lords thus had the option of drawing their income from the peasantry, not in kind or labour, but mainly in cash. In Domesday Book, most manors have a money value set on them, which probably represents the sum obtainable by renting them out. On many estates, lay and ecclesiastical, they were by 1100 leased to middlemen as *firmarii*, farmers, who undertook their management, for a fixed or "farm" rent. Such leases then usually included the stock and seed needed to cultivate the demesne, with the right to call on the tenants' labour services, but lords often reserved their money rents to themselves. The convenience of farming out manors was balanced by risks. Leases were usually made for life and, if

allowed to pass in the same family, might easily become *de facto* hereditary, making it hard for the lord to regain possession at their expiry. Farmers, too, were often willing to connive with a preference from the peasantry for paying their dues in money rather than by labour, and thus achieving a tenure that could be claimed as freehold; and for those remaining in villeinage, knowledge of what works they owed might be obscured.

The practice of farming manors was eventually abandoned when in the late 12th century, England was afflicted with its first serious recorded inflation. The farmers could take the profit from rising prices, while the unchanged rents which they paid yielded many lords too small an income to meet the increasing expense of a noble or knightly lifestyle. By 1200, many lords were responding by taking their manors back under their personal control. They were then run, sometimes by reeves drawn from the unfree tenants, sometimes by salaried bailiffs, who might have professional experience of farm management. The monasteries, whose exemption from military pursuits gave their rulers more leisure for supervising their estates, were especially prominent in undertaking such direct management of their demesnes. For almost 200 years, landlords continued to develop their manors intensively themselves, aiming no longer simply at subsistence, although some produce was often delivered to their households, but at financial profit by selling corn, wool and cattle on the market. Their seignorial rights over their tenants were revived for the purpose. Freeholders, whose rents were fixed, escaped the heaviest pressure, but villeins were often faced with demands for their performing anew traditional labour-services, which their lords might try to increase, under the guise of defining them. The peasants naturally resisted, sometimes by passive noncooperation, sometimes by lawsuits. Before the king's judges, they often claimed to belong to the ancient demesne of the Crown; the privileged villein tenants on it were entitled to royal protection in holding their land securely and in rendering only fixed customary services. The courts, however, decided that only those manors named as the King's in Domesday Book could claim those privileges, and the villeins' lawsuits usually failed, leaving them in the uncertain protection of a manorial custom that the lord might well override.

Some lords met peasant resistance with open force, exercising their admitted right to imprison their villeins, confiscating their land, or fining them to the uttermost of for their defiance. Such repression was assisted by the economic situation. Until the early 14th century, the population was steadily rising, and even land on the margin of profitable cultivation had to be brought under the plough to feed the growing numbers. There was, therefore, a strong demand for villein land, even on burdensome terms, while the competition of many labourers, landless or nearly so, kept down agricultural wage rates. A man who, finding his lord's demands too heavy, fled from the manor without leave, must leave behind the land and cattle which had been his livelihood; and even if he escaped recapture, and in some distant borough or village achieved a *de facto* freedom, he was likely, lacking some training in a craft, to be reduced to penury. So it did not matter too much to lords that the legal burden of proving that a man, ostensibly free, was really their villein, came to rest on them. Most villeins perforce stayed on their holdings, though no doubt grumbling and sometimes, at the risk of occasional fines, shirking as much of the labour imposed on them as they could.

The lords did not, in any case, invariably demand that such services be performed in full. Besides being perhaps aware of the relative inefficiency of forced labour, they might find that the value of a particular work was less than the return customarily expected for it in food or other perquisites; especially the hearty meals due to harvesters. Lords were often therefore ready to "sell" or commute works for cash payments, usually ½ d. to 2d. for ordinary weekwork, double for the especially useful harvest works. The

figure chosen was probably originally equivalent to the cost of hiring substitute labour. Lord and villein might agree to commute a whole year's work in advance, making the villein temporarily a near rent payer. More often, perhaps, only those individual works not required on the demesne were commuted one by one. The choice whether to commute rested with the lord and the process was not entirely to the villein's advantage. Although spared the indignity of compulsory labour and able to devote more time to his own land, he had to raise the necessary cash by selling a larger portion of the crops of a holding that might even in good years be barely sufficient to support himself and his family.

By such exactions, the lords substantially increased their real incomes over the 13th century at the expense of the peasantry. On many manors, half or more of that income came not from the demesne farming, whether using villeins' works or hired labour, but immediately in money, from rents, including some for leasing out small pieces of demesne, commutation of works, mills, "sales" of the right to use the lord's grass and woodland, and the profits from his courts. The increasing intensity with which lords exploited their rights is reflected by changes in the type of records concerned with manorial management. In the 12th century, when economic change was slow and hardly noticed or expected, the lords had surveys made at long intervals, showing the extent of the demesne, the amount of stock employed on it, and the numbers and size of the tenants' holding with the service they owed. William the Conqueror had had Domesday Book compiled as a once-for-all record of the wealth and landholding in his new kingdom. By the 13th century, such surveys were supplemented by new kinds of document, the account and the court roll. The account, which enumerated in detail all receipts and expenditure, was designed less to help the lord estimate the profitability of his demesne farming, although some landowners came to use it for that purpose, than to ensure that his agent running the manor answered for every penny due. Court rolls enabled a lord to check the occasional income arising from his men's land dealings and law breaking, besides providing a record of proceedings in his court.

A manorial court was, in theory, held every three weeks, and usually met frequently until the 15th century when its business was often concentrated into two sittings in spring and autumn. Although it was held in the lord's name by his steward, he was not, formally at least, judge in his own cause. The court's judgements were made by the assembled body of tenants, styled the homage, or a jury drawn from them. Such juries also, when necessary, swore that the special customs of that manor were, whether over their obligations to the lord or the rules for inheritance of unfree holdings. The authority of those courts derived from several origins. Before the Conquest, kings had allowed landowners a wide jurisdiction over their peasants, reserving only serious cases of robbery and violence. Feudal custom gave any lord the right to try, in a court composed of his tenants, disputes arising between them. So the peasants regularly sued one another in the manor court in minor cases of debt and contract, assault and trespass. The court also enforced the lord's rights against those neglecting to render their dues to him or encroaching on his property, and recorded his admission of men to holdings and the "fines" exacted for their entry upon them. Lawyers later styled courts handling such business customary courts or courts baron: only the latter were supposed to have authority over freeholders. But such distinctions were not made in the medieval times.

Many manorial lords also had higher rights of jurisdiction, which became those of courts leet. The king's lawyers held that they were possessed by delegation of royal authority, but in practice were admittedly enjoyed by long established custom "from a time beyond human memory." The principal jurisdiction was view of frankpledge. It entitled a lord to check that his unfree tenants, freemen being exempt, all belonged to the groups, called tithings, into which the peasantry was divided to help maintain public

order: tithings were collectively liable for to be fined for their individual member's offences. Courts leet had, too, a form of police jurisdiction, with the power to punish bloodshed, scolding, and similar breaches of the peace. From the 14th century they usually named the constables responsible for leading the villagers in repressing crime. Most lords also had the right to enforce the assize of bread and of ale, by which the price, measure and quality of those basic foods, when produced for sale, were controlled. The courts regularly appointed ale-tasters to do so; in practice, the lords simply took the fines imposed on the villages alewives and bakers, as a kind of licensing fee, without trying to make them mend their ways. To some manors also belonged the right to take the forfeited goods of tenants convicted of felony, or that of *infangthief*. The latter entitled a lord to hang thieves caught red-handed on his land. The manorial gallows was, however, rather a token of its owner's standing rather than a frequently used instrument of justice.

The decline of the manor as an economic institution began with economic changes in the late 14th century. The slow fall in population resulting from the Black Death and the recurrent plagues that followed reduced the pressure that lords could exert upon their tenants. Prices fell, and wage-rates, despite attempts to hold them down by legislation, slowly but steadily increased, doubling by the end of the 14th century. There was reduced demand for villein holdings from a less numerous peasantry, who could more easily find land or employment elsewhere. The demands put forward during the Peasants' Revolt for personal freedom for all, and the right to hold land solely for rent, revealed the underlying resentment still felt against villeinage and compulsory labour. Lords found that men would not accept holdings liable to such burdens. If they were not to be left vacant, such tenements had to be let out at rent. At first, such leases were for short periods, the lords still hoping eventually to restore the old order. From the 15th century, however, the renting out of former villein land became permanent and its tenure hereditary; and the rents as fixed as those for freeholds had been since the 12th century. The class of customary tenants was gradually transformed into one of copyholders, so named from their receiving as title deeds copies of the court roll entries recording their admission. The inferior status of their tenure, the freehold of it remaining with the lord, was marked by the ceremony used in transferring it. Heirs or purchasers of copyhold must come into the court and receive possession from the steward "to hold at the will of the lord, according to the custom of the manor." Villein status as such, however, was never formally abolished. In 1381, the landowners when asked in Parliament, emphatically repudiated the proposal that they should free their bondmen. Even in the 16th century, wealthy townsmen of unfree ancestry might be coerced by a lord under colour of his right to confiscate or *tallage* their goods. The Crown, too, raised small sums by granting commissions for the compulsory enfranchisement, at a price, of bondmen on royal manors. But for the great majority of the peasantry, custom assisted by a more rapid turnover of village populations and the dying out of known villein families had lifted the ignominy of servitude by 1500.

Higher wages and the loss of villein works also helped to end the lord's farming their demesnes themselves. Between the 1380s and the 1420s most landlords, to stem the decline in farming profits, turned to leasing them out at rents which, fixed at least for a time, would protect their incomes. A few kept some demesnes as home farms to supply their households. Some demesnes were leased to the body of villagers who would probably share them out in proportion to their previous land holdings. Mostly, however, they were let as units, at first often to prosperous villagers, drawn from a class of men who had run them for the lord as reeve or bailiff. From the late 15th century, demesne leases were more often acquired by neighboring small gentry or merchants from nearby towns. Such men, by close

personal supervision or specialization, might make demesne farms pay, where more remote owners could not. The lord usually reserved to himself the cash income from the tenants' rents and his courts. So, the English aristocracy and gentry finally withdrew from the direct exploitation of its lands, becoming, as it remained later, primarily rentiers.

Manorial lordship still, however, gave a landowner certain advantages over his tenants. Copyholders were forbidden to impair the value of their holdings by letting buildings there fall into disrepair, to cut down trees, or to let their land for more than a year without their lord's leave. If they did, the tenement was formally forfeited, though usually restored on payment of a fine. More important was the copyholder's relatively precarious right of succession. By the late 15th century, the king's courts were indeed willing, if a copyholder could afford to appeal to them, to protect him against outright eviction by his lord, but a son was often vulnerable when his father died. In the West of England copyholds were commonly held for the lives of two or three named members of the tenant's family. In the East, they were usually heritable like freehold. In either case, the lord was entitled to an entry fine from the heirs seeking admission. On some manors that fine was fixed by custom, often a year's rent. On most its amount was arbitrary, at the lord's discretion, and was steadily increased throughout the 16th century. By setting it too high for the heir to afford to pay, the lord could in effect frustrate his claim to inherit. Many copyholders, especially those for lives, were thus compelled to renounce hereditary right in their ancestral lands, though sometimes they received leaseholds for lives instead. By 1600, however, the royal court had largely blocked that loophole. They decided that a fine must be "reasonable," which was defined as not being more than two years' real value of the property. Thereafter, copyhold tenure, though still subject to special rules and practices, was nearly as secure as freehold.

Until the 17th century, the manor also remained important in village life through the activity of its court. During the 15th century, its police jurisdiction and later its hearing of ordinary lawsuits over money gradually fell into disuse. But much business remained. Since the 14th century, the court had regularly noted and published breaches of the customary practices of open-field husbandry, especially those related to common pasturage. It appointed haywards and common herdsmen to enforce those rules. It also dealt with the many small nuisances, digging up roads for clay, not scouring watercourses, or fouling streams and streets with domestic refuse, with which villagers might incommode their neighbors. The frequent repetition of orders and punishments in such matters suggests that the court's efforts were more persistent than successful. By the 15th century, such rules were regularly recorded on the rolls as "by laws" or ordinances, made in legislative style "by the assent of the lord and the tenants, for the common weal of the township." In villages containing more than one manor, it was usually through the court of the largest, sometimes styled the chief manor, that the villagers thus managed their communal business.

From the mid-17th century, however, the courts mostly ceased to concern themselves with such matters. The country lawyers who ran them as stewards confined the recorded business mostly to reciting, in formalized detail, successions to, and transfers of, copyhold land: it was only in that that the lord had a financial interest. Agrarian bylaws were still occasionally repeated in stereotyped form, but any attempt to enforce them apparently ceased. Where once the whole body of tenants had been expected to attend, on pain of fines, one or two farmers represented them. Control of village business passed to other bodies, such as the parish vestry.

Such courts saw, however, their activity revived through special circumstances in certain of the new industrial towns which grew up in the 18th century, such as Birmingham and Manchester. Despite their increasing population, they had not obtained a chartered corporation, but remained legally mere townships. Their courts baron might provide a forum conveniently close at hand for litigation over small sums. The process of the court leet to repress public nuisances were the only ones available to preserve a minimum level of urban decency. So shopkeepers and manufacturers took up ancient offices as bailiffs, constables, and headboroughs to help manage their new cities. If, as often happened, the right to hold a weekly market belonged to the lord of a manor, the manor's court's appointment of searchers of food and other goods offered for sale provided a means to ensure trading standards.

Over most of rural England, however, the manor had declined by 1800. Its remaining rights of supervising open-field farming vanished with the steady enclosure of open-fields and commons in the 18th and early 19th centuries. In those wilder regions, where extensive common land survived, the court might still be occasionally called formally into action. The enfranchisement of copyhold into freehold, the lord taking a capital sum for renouncing his rights to rents and entry fines, proceeded steadily encouraged by a series of statutes, from the mid-19th century. From 1926, copyhold tenure itself was abolished. Thereafter, the only potentially profitable right attached to a manorial lordship was over minerals under remaining commons, and in some cases under former copyhold lands, and manorial waste. The name of the manor, in common usage, often came to refer to the complex belonging to a landed estate, so that appointing a gamekeeper over sporting rights was the lord's most obvious activity.

The surviving substance of the manor, the leased demesne farm, however, continued from the 16th century to the early 20th, as a principal support for the landed classes. Historians trying to discover the proportion of land owned by different sections of those classes, peerage, gentry and yeomanry, had found it convenient to count the number of manors held at different periods by such groups. The ties between landlord and lease, moreover, long remained not simply commercial. It retained traces of that seigniorial system, involving authority and protection on one side, respect and service on the other, which had been more clearly shown in the medieval manor. In the 16th century, landowners fully expected their dependents' backing in feuds with neighboring gentry, in the 18th and 19th their support at parliamentary elections. Just as customary tenements had in practice been heritable, so leasehold might remain for generations in the same family. Until the mid-17th century, most leases of demesne or former copyhold were made for two or three lives at relatively low rents, seldom changed, but subject to high "fines" when they fell due for renewal.

Within the village, too, the demesne, where it survived undivided, gave the lord who owned it the opportunity to dominate local life. Some lords might have descended from medieval knights, others the successors of merchants or lawyers or rising yeomen who had bought the manor in Tudor or Stuart times. In either case, they were well placed to buy up small landholdings. In those villages where, in the 18th century, most of the farmland of the medieval lords of the manor. It was not until after the First World War that the flood of land sales converted much of England to the regime of landlord and tenant to one of owner-occupation.

As Senior Assistant to the Editor of the "Victoria History of the Counties of England," Dr. Wright worked at length on the descents of particular manors. This article was first published by The Manorial Society of Great Britain in 1981.