

Estate Records

Accounts

1. Receipts and Disbursements
2. Names of suppliers/Contractors
3. Build up a picture of agricultural practices over time

There is a certain amount of continuity between the estate records of the middle ages and the early modern period. Manorial accounts continued to be kept for some time and the old charge/discharge method of bookkeeping only started to give way to double entry bookkeeping after the Restoration.

Many estate records list items chronologically rather than by subject, under the headings of Receipts and Disbursements. This can make finding specific items time consuming. Sometimes separate receipt and disbursement books were kept, sometime a single ledger. Inventories of stock were mainly kept separately and there could be separate books for specific commodities.

In the mid-17th century, Francis Parker was auditing Lord Brook's accounts and wrote on the abstract that "it is extremely difficult if not impossible to make a just estimate of what hath been cleared out of the revenue this year". ¹

The records of arable cultivation may include details of the preparing of the land and the times of sowing and harvesting. Records can also include information on the care and management of animals. The views of the land agents or landowner can sometimes be found in the margins of the accounts or in letters and diaries.

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Pitfalls of looking at Estate Accounts

- Accounting procedure for animals is cumbersome e.g. when does a lamb become a sheep?

¹ Edwards, Peter. 1981. Farming Sources for Local Historians. Batsford. P. 33.

- Some of the entries were made for book-keeping purposes i.e. adjustments to straighten up the books.
- Cash entries often indicate the sums allowed by the auditor and were not necessarily the amount spent.
- It gets easier to interpret estate accounts from about the 1830s onwards. A combination of enhanced educational standards of agents and rationalised systems of accounts simplify them and make them more standardised.

Labour/Wage books

Sometimes separate from main accounts

Work done by labourers/ farm employees

If they were day labourers, then amount paid

If surviving labour/wage books exist for a long period then you will be able to track the working life of your ancestor.

Agricultural labouring was not a single trade. There were many different skill subsets within it which all attracted different wages. Mostly seasonal tasks such as hedge laying, would have been noted in the account books. For example, in Herefordshire in 1794, basic wages were a shilling a day, but hedge laying was paid at between 4d. and 6d. a perch (seven yards, or 6.5 metres) and an expert might lay three perches a day, thereby earning up to 18d. a day.² There were also other seasonal variations. According to an 1804 Report, Herefordshire agricultural wages averaged six shillings a week in winter, seven shillings in summer (for a longer day) but harvest wages were nearly double this.³

Labour books may also record women and children casual workers employed to do tasks such as gathering stubble, planting beans and binding sheaves. Boys were often used to pick stones, scare birds and helping the carter.

Manorial Documents

Rentals

- Names of tenants

² Lack, Katherine Joan (2012) Family dispersal in rural England: Herefordshire, 1700-1871. Thesis for University of Birmingham. P. 42.

³ Lack, Katherine Joan (2012) Family dispersal in rural England: Herefordshire, 1700-1871. Thesis for University of Birmingham. P. 43.

- Nature of tenure
- Amount of Rent paid
- Size of Property

Rentals are found much less frequently than manor court rolls because by their nature they were only compiled occasionally, perhaps on the occasion of a new lord of the manor taking over.⁴

Surrenders

- Copyhold tenure was not abolished until 1925
- Under copyhold tenure, the Lord of the Manor was recognised as the ultimate landowner
- When copyhold land was transferred, it went through the manorial courts

Surrendering the rod is the process where a copyhold lease is terminated and a fee is paid. The new tenant then has to pay an entry fee.

Manorial Surveys

- Indicate manor boundaries
- More common after the 1530s (after the dissolution of the monasteries) and from 1660s (after the Civil War)
- Extents contain similar information but also give a value to land.

Surveys are usually based upon the sworn testimony of a local jury rather than actual measurement. Names of jurors can also give their ages or the time they have lived in the parish. This was to prove that they had local knowledge.

Care should be taken when analysing the figures in surveys. Medieval terms such as virgate and yardland remained in use whilst customary acres were also used. Customary acres can vary widely from area to area.

In the glebe terrier of Stanton Lacy in 1608 the survey noted that “by the word acre we do not mean an acre by the King’s measure but such a quintet of ground as we

⁴ Manorial Record. Denis Stuart 1992 Philimore.

among ourselves do hold and account for an acre” It was also common practice to measure certain land by the amount of grain needed to sow it. ⁵

Where to find Manorial Records

- Not always where you may expect them
- Manorial Documents Register
 - Search by manor, parish or county name
 - Search by keywords in manorial documents

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/manor-search>

Enclosure Records

- Taking place in various forms since the Middle Ages
- Move from open field system and the use of common land/waste
- Increase from early 18th Century onwards

Informal enclosure has often very little written evidence unless people are prosecuted for illegal enclosure. Following revolts in the Midlands in 1607 and a subsequent enquiry, a number of enclosing landlords and farmers were brought before the Star Chamber.⁶

Formal enclosure

Most valuable sources for this type of enclosure are the agreements and awards drawn up for the parties involved in the scheme.

These agreements are usually between the Lord of the manor and perhaps the incumbent or other principal landowners. May be drawn up by a local solicitor. Sometimes these agreements were enrolled in the Court of Chancery or other courts but if they survive, they can mostly be found in local archives or the collections of one of the landowners involved.⁷

Parliamentary Enclosure

⁵ Edwards, Peter. 1981. *Farming Sources for Local Historians*. Batsford. P. 36.

⁶ Hollowell, Steven. (2000) *Enclosure Records for Historians*. Phillimore. P. 10

⁷ Hollowell, Steven. (2000) *Enclosure Records for Historians*. Phillimore. P. 14

Where can Enclosure records be found?

- County Archives
- National Archives at Kew
- Court of Star Chamber/Court of Requests
- Parliamentary archives

The Church

The income of the parish incumbent came from 4 sources:

1. Dues of passage. Fees obtained from baptisms, marriages and burials.
2. Proceeds from the Easter offering or collection
3. Tithe. A tax on other farmers in the village who paid the incumbent a tenth of their crop or a money equivalent.
4. Income from Glebe lands

Tithes

- Payable on a tenth of all agricultural produce
- Still relevant into the 20th century
- Great tithes and Small tithes

Initially just payable to the church, after the reformation, could be granted to lay rectors. Rectors could be an individual or an organisation such as a charity or an Oxbridge college. These Tithe rights could be bought and sold.

Great tithes were payable to the rector and usually consisted of crops and timber.

Small tithes were payable to the vicar and were things such as new-born animals and wool.

Numerous to the cases were heard in court. These were brought before Diocesan courts or taken to Chancery or Exchequer Courts. Disputes arose when tithe owners attempted to raise moduses (small customary payments in lieu of produce) or to impose payment on new crops or land newly improved.⁸

Tithe Commutation Records

There was continued secular resistance to tithes. People thought the system discouraged farmers from spending money on agricultural improvements since the tithe owners took 1/10 of the extra produce. Quakers and other non-conformists also

⁸ Edwards, Peter. 1981. Farming Sources for Local Historians. Batsford. P. 43.

objected to paying a tax to the church of England and farmers resented paying a tax that was not levied on most urban areas.

The 1836 Tithes Commutation Act converted the tithe into an annual rent charge. Commissioners were sent around the country to assess the value of all titheable land. Altogether they surveyed some 11,800 parishes in England and Wales. Most awards had been confirmed by the end of 1844 and a small number of areas still were not surveyed in the 1850s. Those parishes that had undergone enclosure prior to the 1836 Act usually aren't found in tithe records as tithe commutations are often included in any enclosure award. For example, 98% of Devon and Cornwall is covered by tithe surveys but only 35% of Bedfordshire is.⁹

- Maps
- Apportionments
- For each numbered field:
 - Owner
 - Occupier
 - Field name (not always)
 - Description (whether arable, meadow etc)
 - Acreage
 - Rent charge to the vicar or rector

Where to find Tithe Records

- For Welsh parishes – commutation records free to view at <https://places.library.wales/>
- The Genealogist: <https://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/tithe/>
- County Archives

Glebe Terriers

The records of the extent and location of the Glebe farm appear in parish records after the English Reformation of the 16th Century. The need arose from concern that the Church could become impoverished, Glebe terriers were specifically introduced by a canon of 1571 and repeated in 1604. The order directed bishops to see that ministers and churchwardens in each parish compiled a schedule of the endowments of the church. The bulk of terriers comprise a description of church

⁹ Herber, Mark. Ancestral Trails. P.298.

property but other possessions, privileges and sources of income were often recorded.¹⁰

In many places the Glebe had been land originally donated by the lord of the manor as an act of piety. If the parish was an open field then the glebe farm could have been scattered over 30, 40 or more plots each a half acre or acre in size. A Terrier was needed to keep track of this land.

A terrier lists every plot of land, together with size, location and information about neighbouring plots. If the incumbent did not farm themselves then it may list the current tenant. Information on tithes can be found in Glebe terriers

Where to find Glebe terriers:

- County Archives
- Wiltshire Glebe terriers up to 1827 available on Internet archive

Union Records

National Agricultural Labourers' Union 1872- 1895

The union aimed to limit working time to a nine-and-a-half hour day, and institute a minimum wage of 16 shillings a week. It supported workers who wished to emigrate, reasoning that this would reduce labour supply in Britain and drive up wages. By 1873, membership of NALU had reached 71,835 in 982 branches, with wages reportedly increasing by 20 to 25%. Membership peaked at 86,214 in 1874, but by now, farmers were organising in opposition to the union, employing only non-union labour and agreeing to offer standard terms of 2 shillings for a 12-hour day. More than 10,000 union members found themselves out of work; the union paid unemployment benefit, but this was unsustainable, and it gave in during July.

Despite the defeat, membership initially remained high, as workers were encouraged to secretly maintain union membership while working for anti-union farmers. However, a succession of poor harvests weakened the union's position, and membership fell below 10,000 in 1887, then halved again that year. Records at Nuffield College, Oxford, MERL and Kew.

National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers (NUAW). 1906-1982

In 1906 it was founded as the Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers & Small Holders Union. The organisation changed its name in 1912 to the National Agricultural Labourers and Rural Workers Union.

¹⁰ Edwards, Peter. 1981. Farming Sources for Local Historians. Batsford. P. 43.

In 1920, the Union became the National Union of Agricultural Workers, and in 1968 the "National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers". NUAW merged with the Transport and General union in 1982. produced a paper called The Landworker. Records found at the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick and at MERL

National Farmers Union 1908- Present

In 1904 a number of farmers in Lincolnshire paid one Sovereign each to form the Lincolnshire Farmers Union. This Union later became the parent branch of the N.F.U. (founded December 1908).

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) library at MERL

- Agricultural Market reports
- Marketing schemes
- Miscellaneous MAFF/ADAS publications

Reports

Poor Law Commissioners' Report of 1834

Medical officer Reports

1872 and 1875 Public Health Acts set up local sanitary authorities with medical officers of health to advise them 1888 county councils established with authority to appoint medical officers of health

County reports/Board of Agriculture reports (18th– 19thcenturies)

The Board of Agriculture was not a government department. The Old Board of Agriculture – initially known as the Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement – was established in 1793 by Sir John Sinclair. It aimed to inform farmers across the country of best farming practice, and encourage them to experiment with new techniques. The Board achieved this by publishing information on farming methods, and by assisting farming societies. It also conducted land surveys in order to record the agricultural performance of the nation.

Reading List

British Agricultural History Society <https://www.bahs.org.uk/>

Village Records by John West (Phillimore)

Rural Life: A Guide to Local Records- Peter Edwards (Batsford)

Farming Sources for Local Historians- Peter Edwards (Batsford)

My Ancestor was an Agricultural Labourer- Ian Waller (Society of Genealogists)

The Parish Chest – W.E. Tate

Brown, Jonathan (2011) Tracing Your Rural Ancestors: a guide for family historians (Pen & Sword).

Hammond, John & Barbara (2005) The Village Labourer 1760- 1832 (The History Press).

Reay, Barry (2004) Rural England (Palgrave MacMillan).

Fussell, G E (1949) The English Rural Labourer; his home, furniture, clothing & food, from Tudor to Victorian times (Batchworth Press).

Rowntree, Benjamin Seebohm. (1917) How the labourer lives, a study of the rural labour problem. Internet archive.