

The Rural Manor in South-West Devon in the Nineteenth Century

Brad Scott, B.Sc., M.Sc.

ABSTRACT

Many overviews of the Victorian rural economy ignore the manor, yet it continued in existence in some areas and under some landowners down to the early twentieth century. The activities of the Maristow estate manors are described, and the role of the courts in the locality is assessed. In addition, manorial records are reviewed as a source for rural history.

The literature on the medieval manor is enormous. In stark contrast, when reading a range of recent books on the nineteenth-century countryside or on the rural economy and society, one could be forgiven for thinking that the manor had long since disappeared.¹ In fact, many manors continued their activities well into the nineteenth century, even though many of their functions had been eroded by statute or by custom. This paper focusses on some of the manors of south-west Devon, and Shaugh in particular, though it includes material from other areas for illustration. It describes the business of the manor and its relation to the management of landed estates; it further explores what the activities of the manor can tell us about the concerns and problems of Victorian society in the countryside, how it affected people's lives, and it illustrates the value of the surviving records as a source for rural history. This paper has not attempted to address how the continuing presence of the manor informed the social structure and relationships of a locality or the worldview of its inhabitants; in addition, it does not consider the factors that might lead to the survival of a manorial jurisdiction.²

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY MANOR

By the nineteenth century, more and more of the local administrative and regulatory functions of the manor had been taken over by the parish and some private bodies, such as turnpike trusts. Often this meant that many manors had ceased to have any local significance by around 1800. Conversely, some, such as Manchester, Brighton or Stoke Damerel, had developed into highly complex urban administrative machines. However, the majority of manors that remained were small rural ones whose courts generally met only once a year to preserve the last vestiges of their rights and privileges.

Considering its relative unimportance in the nineteenth century, why should we be interested in the manor at all? Just as in earlier periods, the business of the manorial court can show us some of the popular grievances and problems of a small community. They may not reveal all such disputes, since many would never have got to the court, and others were beyond its jurisdiction, but the records do reveal local initiatives in solving problems and can suggest some of the acceptable norms of conduct in local society. Though the business of the manorial court may rarely move away from grazing rights and tenure, it does illustrate the role of the local community in policing itself in an era of increasing administrative centralisation and specialisation. Whether it was effective is another matter.

In their work on the history of English local government, Sidney and Beatrice Webb (1908) noted that in general a manor theoretically had two courts. The first, the *court baron*, was a private jurisdiction, the forum for settling differences and maintaining the rights of the lord and the privileges of the tenants and was presided over by the estate steward or the lord. Notionally, all tenants of the manor had to attend, whether they were freeholders or copyholders. The second, the *court leet*, was a public court before a jury which administered the law of the land in its locality and where the steward was empowered to fine or even imprison. Such courts had powers only over petty crimes and the suppression of nuisances, since the court's rights to try more serious offences had been lost in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In practice, the rights of a manor were determined by custom and varied from place to place. These even included such things as deodand, the right of the lord to claim any article that has caused the death of a human being, which the Webbs (1908, 75) illustrate was claimed by the St Aubyns in *The Plymouth Dock Guide*, published around 1800. Even this historical curiosity was sometimes evoked, as when famously following a railway accident in 1841 a Great Western Railway carriage was taken as deodand in Sonning in Berkshire. However, despite the theoretical differences in

roles, by the nineteenth century there was generally little distinction between the courts leet and baron; if they functioned at all, they may only have met once a year, with considerable local variation in the way their business was run.

NINETEENTH CENTURY MANORS IN SOUTH-WEST DEVON

That there was still a trade in manors in the nineteenth century can be seen from the advertisements in local newspapers, such as when H. M. Bayly offered the court baron and courts leet of Sheepstor for sale in 1825.³ In the absence of any existing records for these courts, though, we cannot assume that they were necessarily active at the time. Even so, enough archival material does survive to suggest that many manors continued to operate. Of about thirty nineteenth-century manorial collections in the West Devon Record Office, nearly half indicate continuous business at least up to the end of the century.

This includes such places as Aveton Gifford, Down Thomas (Wembury), Dunstone (Yealmpton), Stoddiscombe, Stoke Damerel, Woodhouse, Worthill and Yealmpton, as well as the six Maristow manors. Many of these formed part of a large landholding, such as the Kitley estate of Baldwin John Pollexfen Bastard or the Earls of Morley and were instrumental in the annual administration of estate business. These often had only the right to hold a court baron, though courts leet met regularly in Aveton Gifford and the Maristow estate.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE MARISTOW ESTATE MANORS

The Maristow estate was bought by Massey Lopes in 1798 after the death of James Modyford Heywood, which event was not recorded in the court books of any of the estate's manors. The estate comprised roughly 10,000 acres in south-west Devon, including land in the parishes of Shaugh Prior, Walkhampton, Meavy, Bickleigh and Buckland Monachorum. Its properties were bounded on the west by the river Tavy and on the east by the open moorland of Dartmoor. Created Baronet in 1805, Massey Lopes steadily acquired other land and interests in the area and was succeeded by his nephew Ralph Lopes in 1831. Throughout this period, the family resided at Maristow and held the manors of Shaugh, Maristow, Meavy and Knowle, Bickleigh, Walkhampton and Buckland Monachorum. The archives suggest that the new owners of the estate may have partly revived the activity of the courts, since presentments for nuisances, encroachments and the mending of fences and hedges are much more noticeable than had been the case under the Heywoods.

Looking at Shaugh more closely, the Lopes family owned two-thirds of the agricultural land in the parish. However, only half of this land was itself in the manor of Shaugh; the remainder, in the southern part of the parish, being in the manor of Bickleigh, which is a useful reminder that manor and parish were far from being co-terminous. The manor of Shaugh comprised the most populous part of the parish. It included the village of Shaugh itself and was made up of nearly 300 people in about fifty households in the 1841 census. Farms of over twenty acres comprised about a dozen of these households.

As indicated above, most manors technically had two jurisdictions, the court baron and the court leet. In the Lopes manors in the nineteenth century, these two courts had merged. Manorial business was conducted at a single annual court in October, generally before the estate steward and thirteen jurymen, though Massey Lopes himself attended in 1801 and 1810.⁴ In Shaugh it usually took place at the White Thorn Inn.

(a) Procedure

The manorial court records are certainly an incomplete guide to local minor offences and misdemeanours. This is borne out by the letter books of the estate steward. If infringements of manorial rights were detected, the steward sent off a sharp note to the trespasser to desist from such activities, otherwise they would 'hear of it in a different way'. Many of these transgressions never went any further. They were only followed up at the manorial court if no attempt was made to make good the damage, as was the case when Walter Northmore of Sheepstor was forced to appear before the court at Shaugh in 1840 for illegally cutting peat,⁵ which illustrates how the courts could function as a regulatory adjunct to estate management.

When the time came for the courts to meet, the steward notified the reeve of each manor to summon the court, the jury and those to be presented to the court. By the late nineteenth century these notes were on printed sheets, such as the following, sent in 1873 to Joseph Rowe, reeve of the manor of Meavy and Knowle, from Copleston Lopes Radcliffe, steward, to call the court leet:

You are hereby requested to Summon the Court Leet of the Manor aforesaid, to be holden at the Royal Oak Inn within the said Manor, on Thursday the Sixteenth of October next by Eleven of the clock in the forenoon precisely. And also to warn all Officers, Free Tenants, Conventiary Tenants, Suitors and Resiants of the said Manor, to be then and there present and perform their several suits and services, and the said Tenants to pay their respective Rents which are in arrear. And likewise to warn an able and

sufficient Jury of the said Manor, whose names are hereunder written, to attend at the time and place aforesaid, and make presentments of all such matters and things as then and there shall be given them in charge touching offences committed within the said Manor. And you are likewise to give notice to the several persons hereunder named, to appear at the time and place aforesaid, and discharge or answer to the several presentments against them, and you are also then and there to make return of the due execution of this precept, and hereof fail not.⁶

Once the court had gathered, proclamations were made to open the proceedings, such as this written inside the cover of one of the Bickleigh court books, which shows the formal ceremonial adopted even for a rural court conducting relatively little business:

O Yes! O Yes! O Yes! All persons that owe Suit and Service, or that have any thing to do, at the Court Leet of our Sovereign Lady the Queen, together with the Court Baron of Sir Ralph Lopes Baronet, now to be holden for the manor of Bickleigh, let them draw near, answer to their names and save their Fines. Let all others keep silence—and suffer the Court to proceed.⁷

The precise wording of these proclamations differed from place to place depending on the manor's customs, though there were clear similarities even between these small rural manors and manorial boroughs such as Ashburton, which still met in the 1880s (Windeatt, 1882). The court at Modbury also continued to meet at this date, whereat the steward detailed a large list of offences that could be tried at the court, and enumerated the rights of the lord (Windeatt, 1884).

(b) The jury

Before considering the business of the court, it is instructive to examine the composition of the jury. Over the forty-eight year period from 1811 to 1858, 75 men served on the Shaugh jury. Of these, 38 (50 per cent) served five times or less, and 17 of these served for only a single year. At the other extreme, 12 (16 per cent) served more than fifteen times. Some, such as John Lillicrap, sat on the jury for at least 24 consecutive years. The jury was predominantly made up of the same men every year, so that no one year's jury differed in its composition by more than seven from the previous year's. Sometimes, as in 1811 and 1829, for example, there may have been only three new faces, though these men may themselves have been jurymen before.

Those men who sat on the jury for only a few years were not necessarily transient tenants of the manor; new resident tenants, freeholders within

the manor, or farmers from elsewhere who took up new leases on fields in the manor often appear to have taken part in the proceedings of the court for just a couple of years shortly after their tenancy began. However, the men who were on the jury year in year out were overwhelmingly those copyhold tenant farmers who resided on the manor.

If we look at the sixteen men who sat on the jury in the years 1840 and 1841, we can assess their social position within the parish by examining the tithe assessment and the census. Of the twelve who can be identified in the census, nine were farmers, one a shoemaker, one the publican of the White Thorn Inn, and the other possibly the incumbent at Sheepstor, some three and a half miles away. Fourteen can be identified in the tithe assessment; eight had farms of between 20 and 50 acres, one held 128 acres, and the rest farmed under 20 acres. Though their holdings were not large, these were generally the most substantial copyhold tenants in the manor. From the available evidence, women do not appear to have sat on the jury, even when they were themselves copyholders.

(c) The officers of the court

The number of officers mentioned in the court books varies in each manor. In the manor of Meavy and Knowle, for instance, a reeve, tithingman, constable, bread weigher and ale conner are all recorded.⁸ In contrast, though a bread weigher and ale taster were appointed in Shaugh in the eighteenth century, in the later records only two posts are noted; the reeve and the tithingman, jobs which were sometimes undertaken by the same person, as Thomas Lillicrap did in 1814.⁹ The court records themselves show that many of the other jobs specifically mentioned in Meavy were certainly carried out in Shaugh, but do not indicate by whom. In the nineteenth century, there is little evidence that any of these tasks were particularly onerous, which contrasts with James St Aubyn's urban manor of Stoke Damerel. At the court held on 5 October 1861, Stoke Damerel's officers included ten weighers of bread, seven constables and two searchers and sealers of leather.¹⁰ Even the borough of Modbury had a portreeve, two treasurers, two aletasters, two pig drovers, a scavenger and a crier (Windeatt, 1884).

One extra post was created at the Shaugh court of 1821. In that year straying animals had been causing a great deal of nuisance and everyone who had turned their pigs onto the commons was fined one shilling per pig. At the same meeting, Massey Lopes himself was called to task for not keeping the manor pound in repair, and John Willcocks was called upon to take up the responsibility of bringing any stray pigs to the pound. Of all the manorial duties, this was perhaps the most hard work.

The problem did not go away, since the duty was regularly brought to the attention of the court for the next forty years. Indeed, in 1828 William Hurrell was appointed as 'a fit man' so that 'if he see any pighogs without rings on the commons of the manor to give a notice to owners of said pigs and if not then ringed the said William Hurrell is to put the said pigs to pound and fine the owner 1/- for each pig'. Oddly, pigs are the only animals specifically mentioned in the Shaugh court records, though it is impossible to estimate their numbers, or to get any idea of who owned them. None of the Lopes manors show any evidence of crop rotations organised at the manorial level, unlike the case in other areas, such as were in practice in Great Tew in Oxfordshire in the mid-eighteenth century (Harvey, 1984, 56).

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COURT

What sort of business was conducted at the courts? The greatest proportion of the surviving records deals with changes in copyhold tenure, often recording the entry fine of (usually) 2s.6d. paid to the reeve when the new tenant was announced. However, as Harvey (1984) points out, even for such core parts of the court's business, the records have their limitations since they do not give us any information about sub-tenancies. The death of some of the tenants are also noted, as are the penalties paid when people failed to attend the court or sit on the jury. With a good excuse the fine for non-attendance could be waived, as it was in 1851 when James Gray was 'called off on a case of farriery' when he should otherwise have been on the jury. To interrupt the activities of the court could likewise incur displeasure, as when in 1837 Ed Perkins, a member of the jury, was fined a shilling 'for leaving the room without leave'. Important, too, is the fact that the court was run ostensibly by and for men. Women rarely appear in its business. When they do so, it is generally to be presented as a new tenant in succession to their late husband or as non-attenders at a previous court. There is no evidence in the Maristow manors at least of married women holding tenancies independently, as was certainly the case in Hampshire at this time (Seelinger, 1996).

Intermittently, cases were presented where people had been cutting peat (vags) on the commons. The fines varied enormously from one to five shillings, but also reveal a degree of leniency on the part of the court. Some fines were only paid in part, while others were waived, such as that of Philip Clements, who was fined 2s.6d. in 1820 but was 'very poor and unable to pay'. It was not just tenants of the manor who were fined. In 1853, William Brock had to pay a shilling 'for taking vags from the common and drawing them to Ham in the parish of Bickleigh'.

Similarly, Edward Annis, the farmer of Whittaborough, and John Abbott of Harscombe, both tenants of Ralph Lopes in the parish of Shaugh, but in the manor of Bickleigh, were presented for selling dung and ashes taken off the manor. Such cases reveal both the fiercely defended rights of the manor and some aspects of the subsistence and economic activity of the locality.

Though some of the rights and privileges were keenly defended, in some cases it could take several years before the court actively did so. For instance, in 1830 the court presented that:

time out of mind until within a few years past thare used to be paid by the tenants of this manor in respect of each Tenement then Occupied to the Parker family & the present Earl of Morley the sum of four pence yearly as an acknowledgement for command of pasture and turbary on Lee Moor but in consequence of the failure or neglect of certain tenants in not paying regularly no such sums have been demanded or paid for the last five or six years which we presume may be injurious to the Rights of this manor.

A note appended to the court book indicates that some of the properties in the manor had not paid such fees for a very long time; the tenants of Upper Shaugh and Billister had not paid for twelve years, and the occupier of Undershaugh had not paid for fourteen years. The following year the court again requested the lord of the manor to sort this out; thereafter there is no mention of it in the records of the court. Cases like this can reveal ancient rights, evidence for which may not survive elsewhere. Alternatively, this also illustrates the uncertainties of the manor in the nineteenth century; as neighbouring manors ceased to function, the practicalities of collecting small sums of money, unchanged for centuries, could easily be forgotten.

(a) Dangerous encroachments

Throughout the nineteenth century, the courts regularly reported dangerous pits or encroachments on the commons of the manors. These presentments can show us the extent of quarrying activity in the area, such as when the Plymouth and Tavistock Turnpike Trust were presented to the Bickleigh court in 1842 for leaving open a quarry. Many of these cases show the courts' concern for the safety of both people and livestock. This was evident in 1821 when Henry Palmer was charged with 'diging of Dangers trunch on Shaugh Down. If not leveled to his Expense we shall find him ten shilling'.

Cases which complain of infringements of manorial rights can also give detail of other industrial developments in the area. In 1835 John

Pulliblack of Coleland in Shaugh was charged with the 'carriage of stones from the seaid mannor for the use of the china clay'. The china clay business generated a series of charges; in the following two years, Captain Hitchins of the Bottle Hill Mining Co. (a tin mine) and Mr Philips of the China Clay Co. were presented for 'Incroaching on the water that belongeth to the manor mills'. Also in 1837, the Earl of Morley 'or his lessees the proprietors of the China Clay works' were charged with 'making a dangerous seat on Leemoor'. Here, the manorial records provide early evidence of the environmental impact of the industry.

The impact of the tin industry and the dates of the working of some mines can also be assessed through the business of the courts. In 1811 and 1812 the Bickleigh court presented the 'Adventurers in the Mine lately working on Ringmore Down . . . for not fencing out the Tin Pits . . . the Mine not being now in work, and the said Pits being very dangerous to Cattle depastured on the said Down'. Other infringements by tin miners included the presentment of the 'Venturers' of Wheal Lopes and Wheal Virgeon mines for not building a bridge over a 'new leat' on Roborough Down in 1819, or James Deacon for general encroachments on the commons near Ailsborough in 1824.¹¹

By the 1870s and 1880s, often the only business of the courts other than presenting new tenants is to try and make good any dangerous pits, fences and hazards in their jurisdiction. This is borne out particularly vividly when, in 1873, all the Lopes courts presented the War Department for trespass and damage after the autumn manoeuvres.¹²

(b) The limits of manorial jurisdiction

The courts also kept an eye on weights and measures and that at Shaugh requested news ones from Massey Lopes in 1827 after the Imperial standard was established some three years earlier (Hoppit, 1993). Ten years later, James Mumford and Philip Luscombe were presented to the court for selling bread short of weight. This was not something over which the court technically had jurisdiction, but the estate steward noted the details of the case before it was passed to the petty sessions. The bread consisted of three quartern and four half quartern loaves sold by Luscombe and Mumford, but which had actually been baked 'by Mr Anderson of Ridgway', information which furnishes us with useful detail on the service economy of the area. As the court records detail, a quartern loaf should have weighed eight pounds. One of Luscombe's quartern loaves was 2 oz 3 gr under weight, and one of the half quarterns was also 2 oz 3 gr under. The margin of error of Mumford's was much the same, no more than four per cent on the half quartern loaves and two per cent on the quarterns. George Giles, the

estate steward, then noted that 'The bread was seized and ordered to be given away to such of the poor as do not receive relief from the Union by Mr Thomas Damerell [foreman of the jury] and Mr Edward Hurrell'. This case is a useful reminder of the limits of the manor's jurisdiction. From its records alone we would get a skewed picture of life in Shaugh, not least because many aspects of local administration such as poor relief and the maintenance of the roads were the responsibility of the parish. Obviously, for a fuller account of any locality in this period we also need to consult various local and national records.

Though the parish had considerable responsibilities during the nineteenth century and the business of parish and manor are very distinct, in these sparsely populated rural communities we can occasionally see a little blurring of duties. For example, at the 1840 Bickleigh court it was presented that the parish boundary stone needed replacing.¹³ Generally though, the parish and manor remained separate, even when the same people served as officials for the two bodies. The parish rarely makes an appearance in the court records. One of the few instances when it did so was in 1824 when the Meavy overseer had to pay a fine due to pauper encroachments on the commons.¹⁴

(c) Sanctions and enforcement

We have seen how the court had power to fine people, but this was much easier if the person involved was a tenant of the manor. Calling non-tenants to account was much more difficult. In Shaugh, Richard Sluggard, a stone cutter and mason, was first called to the court in 1804 for illegally enclosing part of West Down. He did not appear at the court for four years, despite repeated requests. Finally, all the court could do was to record that he had been 'left in mercy to the lord of the manor'.

Similarly, throughout the 1840s, the Meavy court continually presented Plymouth Corporation and the town councils of Plymouth and Devonport for doing nothing to prevent the overflow of the Plymouth and Devonport leats.¹⁵ That these presentments eventually stop could indicate that the matters had been set right. Alternatively, it could be that the calls to appear and mend the leats were quietly dropped by the court, or that measures were taken to mend the damage more because of the interests of the town councils than through any sanctions of the court. The repair of minor damage was a recurring problem with other bodies and companies, such as the Plymouth and Dartmoor Railway Company, who were accused of putting up insufficient fences near Frogmore in 1824. The presentments continue for another eight years with no suggestion that the court had been satisfied; if anything the problem had got worse.¹⁶

For more serious crime, the court could and would refer the accused to a higher court, as we have seen with the weights and measures case. In anticipation of having to deal with more serious offenders, in 1832 the Meavy court recorded that 'each constable hath been supplied with a pair of Hand Cuffs by the Lord of the Manor'.¹⁷ There is no indication that they were ever used.

THE DEMISE OF THE MANORIAL COURT

On the Maristow manors, the courts ceased to meet annually in 1873. Thereafter they only took place every three years, and appear to have been primarily concerned with rent collections and the transfer of copyhold tenure. The other presentments recorded decline in number and only deal with dangerous quarries, broken fences and other local nuisances; Meavy Clay Company was presented to the Shaugh court in 1876 in respect of a pit on Wigford Down, but sometimes no person or organisation responsible could be called and the nuisance itself was noted, presumably to be attended to by one or other of the officers, such as when the 'old workings in Outholme Moor' were cited at the Meavy court in 1887. Very often there were not even thirteen men to sit on the jury. The last court for which there is a formal record of its proceedings took place in 1887.

By the early years of the twentieth century, the court business of many of the manors had merged so that by 1913, the last year in which we know a court met, the business that had hitherto been conducted in six separate courts was dealt with in just three meetings (see Figure 1). Interestingly, even at this late stage in the manors' existence, when they performed little other than purely estate business, which itself was largely conducted from the steward's own office, the tenants were still called 'to do suit and service according to the custom' of the respective manors.

This gradual decline is also observable in other manors in south-west Devon. The Kitley manor courts of Aveton Gifford, Stoddiscombe, Down Thomas, Yealmpton, Dunstone and Worthill, for instance, appear marginally less active than the Maristow courts. All but Aveton Gifford were just courts baron and had ceased to operate by 1879. Judging from other published sources, Devon does not seem to be atypical in this respect (Harvey, 1984).

By the later years of the nineteenth century, the activities of the manor were viewed by contemporaries as antiquated. Their practical value had gradually diminished and, as P. D. A. Harvey (1984) has said, 'they ceased to meet or degenerated into mere jollifications'. Newspapers and local historians reported their business almost as a charade, as can

THE
COURTS-BARON
 AND
COURTS-LEET AND RENT AUDITS
 OF
SIR HENRY LOPES, BART.,
 FOR
 Services and Rents due at Michælmas, 1913,
 WILL BE HELD AT THE

Undermentioned Places and Times:

MANORS.	TIMES.	PLACES.
	1913.	
BUCKLAND MONACHORUM	Wednesday, 5th November, at Eleven o'clock.	THE ROBOROUGH MANOR HOTEL, Horrabridge.
MEAVY and KNOWLE	Thursday, 6th November, at Eleven o'clock.	THE MANOR HOTEL, Dousland.
LANDS in SHEEPSTOR, and SHEEPSTOR IMPROPRIATE Tithe Rent Charge . . .		
WALKHAMPTON and WALKHAMPTON IMPROPRIATE Tithe Rent Charge . . .		
SHAUGH PRIOR	Friday, 7th November, at Eleven o'clock.	THE LOPES ARMS INN, Roborough.
MARISTOW and LANDS in BEERFERRIS & BICKLEIGH and ABBOTS ROUGH . . .		

At which several Places and Times the Tenants of the respective Manors are requested personally to appear, and to pay their Rents and other dues, and to do suit and service according to the custom of the said Manors.

T. WOLFERSTAN,

STEWARD.

8th October, 1913.

be seen in the Devonshire Association's report (itself taken from the *Western Morning News*) concerning the beating of the bounds of the manor of Ermington to assert its fishing rights in 1878 (Windeatt, 1880):

the right of landing the fish on the west side of the river was, in a good-humoured way, denied by a representative of Lord Blachford. Here the inhabitants were treated with a little fun . . . in the shape of pulling two or three into the river.

This event was accompanied with flags, a band and hundreds of people on horseback watching the spectacle. Like the formality of the court's written proclamations, the ceremonial and the rhetoric no longer matched the reality. Once copyhold tenure was abolished in 1922, there was even less reason for the courts to meet, though some continued to do so. It was only in 1977 that the right of manors to hear and determine legal proceedings at all formally came to an end (Harvey, 1984).

CONCLUSION

Though the manor and its courts may be largely invisible when we read about the nineteenth-century rural economy, they continued to exist and have some function in some local communities even down to the end of the century and beyond. As an institution, the manor had seen a great deal of its responsibilities eroded, but some lords at least continued to exercise their privileges, whether for aiding estate management and social control, or merely for tradition.

We have seen how the farmers of Shaugh and neighbouring manors regulated pasturing, the straying of animals and anything else that could interfere with their livelihood, be it damage to the water supply or people taking things from the manor to which they were not entitled. Even though the court met just once a year, its officers could at best be invaluable in the policing and self-regulation of a local community. Though, as Harvey (1984) has indicated, the records of a manorial court are only one source among many for the history of the English countryside, and have some limitations, they should not be underestimated. With suitable caution in their use, the records of a manorial court can provide a valuable perspective on the economy and society of a locality.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES TO UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

1. For example, the works of G. E. Mingay (1976, 1981, 1994), Pamela Horn (1980), or J. V. Beckett's chapter (1989) on land ownership and estate management in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1750-1850* make no mention of the manor as a rural institution in this period. Even some works specifically on manorial records, such as that by Mary Ellis (1994), treat the period from the eighteenth century onwards in as little as four paragraphs.
2. Such issues are considered in Mills (1980).
3. *Plymouth and Devonport Weekly Journal* 4.8.1825.
4. West Devon Record Office (WDRO) Shaugh Prior court book 874/46/4.
5. See the letter from George Giles, estate steward, in WDRO 874/21/3, and the presentment at the following court in 874/41. Ironically, this Walter Northmore was probably the person who held the manor of Sheepstor until about 1822.
6. WDRO 874/46/8 courts leet notes.
7. WDRO 874/34 Bickleigh court book.
8. WDRO 874/37/1 Meavy and Knowle court book.
9. WDRO 874/46/4 and 874/40 1 Shaugh Prior court books. Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent cases quoted are from these sources.
10. WDRO 853/183 Stoke Damerel court book.
11. WDRO 874/33 Bickleigh court book. On the 'new leat', see Miller (1997).
12. WDRO 874/39 Maristow manors court book.
13. WDRO 874/34 Bickleigh court book.
14. WDRO 874/37/1 Meavy and Knowle court book.
15. *ibid.*
16. WDRO 874/33 Bickleigh court book.
17. WDRO 874/37/1 Meavy and Knowle court book.
18. WDRO 874/15/9.

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