

COURT ROLLS

These were the records of the court meeting - **HALLMOTE**. Many were lost during the peasant's revolt because they contained evidence of the peasant's bondage. Later they became known as **COURT LEETS** - courts of record - and **COURTS BARON** - an assembly of free tenants before their Lord or his steward.

The term view of **FRANKPLEDGE** is often used in conjunction with **COURT BARON** and comes with a ruling dating at least from the conquest, that all men aged 12 and over were to be in **FRANKPLEDGE** - i.e. each man of a tithing pledged to be responsible for the other members.

Men were divided into groups ten (sometimes a dozen) called **TITHINGS**; one man in each group was called the head often serving for many years though elected for one year at a time. These chief men often served as jurors when the Shire Reeve (Sheriff) visited to make sure that all men were in the tithing that should be. Tithings had to be complete - any man or tithing in default was fined (**AMERCED**). This inspection was called the **VIEW OF FRANKPLEDGE** and was held twice a year. Gradually the Lord took over the right to hold this usually at Hocktide i.e. (Monday or Tuesday after Easter) and Michaelmas. A **VIEW OF FRANKPLEDGE** was a court which could present encroachments on the Kings Highway, breaches of the Assize of ale, raise hue and cry etc. This involved a man being bound to raise the **HUE** (from the French huer, (to cry out) when he believed a felony was committed. The neighbours had to turn out and pursue the malefactor. Raising the hue wrongfully was a punishable offence.

INHERITANCE

Later **COURTS BARON** were mainly concerned with the customs of inheritance and it is interesting to see how certain terms persisted through the centuries.

When a tenant died **SEIZED** (in possession) of a property he was succeeded by his heir who was designated according to the Manorial custom. The heir came to court, witnesses presented that he was entitled to the property and then he was admitted "by the Rod". The steward representing the Lord held out a rod to the heir and possession symbolically passed from the Lord to the heir via the Rod. Often the land had to be symbolically surrendered back to the Lord first.

A fine was paid for entry to the holding and a **HERIOT** was rendered - this was a fine of a beast or chattel. When he had knelt and placed his hands between those of his Lord (doing fealty) his **SEISIN** was secure.

After the tenants death money was used for his debts, his wake and burial expenses. A number of tools and utensils needed for husbandry and housekeeping were bound to remain on the holding for the heir and the remaining goods and chattels were divided into three for a) the widow, b) any children except the heir, c) the dead man himself. This latter portion was for the sons who did not inherit and for a dowry for any daughters.

The widow could claim by custom certain rights for life - She could not pass them on. She had a special seat by the fire called her **FREEBENCH** this gradually became a technical legal term for her rights of possession.

The above was written by Valerie Powick

Other terms used

Message	a dwelling house with outbuildings and land assigned to its use.
Leasow	rough pasture land.

Mark valued at $\frac{2}{3}$ of a pound and equal to 13s. 4d. In England it was never issued as a coin but was used in accounting for rents, taxes etc.

Units of Area of Land Measurement

Perch	when used for an area it should more accurately be called a square perch. It is equal to a square with each side one perch long and equals $30\frac{1}{4}$ square yards
Rood	or confusingly 'rod', used in the Middle Ages, and is equal to 40 square perches or one quarter of an acre.
Acre	is the physical area of land that a single oxen could plough in one day. Equal to 160 square perches or 4840 square yards. . On tithe maps land area were given in A.R.P. that is acres, roods and perches.
Oxgang	or Bovate was the area of land that a single oxen could till in an annual ploughing season. Around 20 acres.
Noke	a quarter of a virgate or about 10 acres
Virgate	or Yardland was the area that two oxen could till in an annual ploughing season. Around 40 acres.
Hide	is the area of mixed farmland that could support a household. Usually about 160 acres but it could be between 90 and 240 acres depending on how fertile the land was.
Knights Fee	a unit of land deemed sufficient to support a knight. An uncertain measure of land but said by some sources to be about 600 acres.