

Land Tenure

In medieval England all land belonged to the sovereign and was a source of Crown income. Noblemen and others to whom estates were granted had to pay for them in cash and services. To recover their outlay and make a profit, they in turn granted most of their estates piecemeal to lesser mortals who, of course, also had to pay. The Lord of the Manor thus wanted rent from everyone, freeholders, copyholders and tenants alike. The twenty-one free tenants in Mortimer paid annual or chief rents which by 1552 ranged from 4d to 20s 6d per annum and remained the same until reviewed in 1842.

Freeholders and Copyholders

Freehold is well understood but copyhold varied according to the custom of the manor concerned. In Mortimer the fifty-two copyholders paid similar rents to the freeholders. They attended the Manor Court to be admitted to their holdings or to surrender them. Each transaction was recorded on the court roll and a strip of parchment was given to the holder. Copyholds were treated like freeholds and could be bought, sold, mortgaged and left by will to a chosen heir. They could not, however, be sublet without permission. From 1763 they could, on payment of a fee to the Lord of the Manor, be enfranchised, i.e. converted to freeholds, but there were still eleven copyholds in 1841.

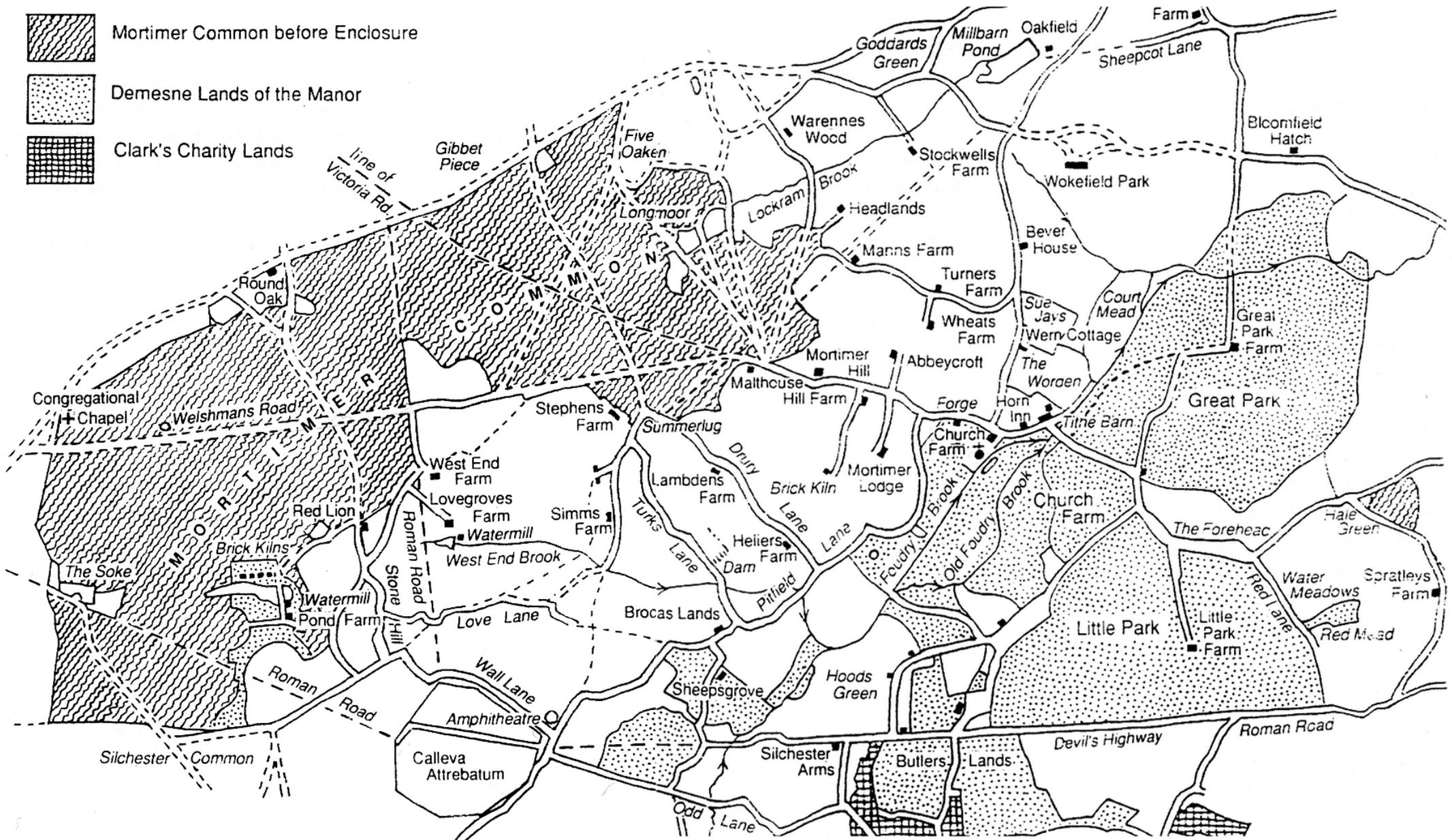
Demesne Lands

The demesne lands of Mortimer were those that remained in possession of the Lord of the Manor and were let or leased to tenant farmers, or kept 'in hand' for the use of the Lord, his family or his employees. Mortimer Manor was in ruins by 1460 but its farm - renamed Church Farm - along with Great Park, Little Park, Butlers Lands, some small farms, the mills and the forge in The Street formed the core of the Manor. To them were added in due course most of the surrounding farmland as it became available for purchase from 1799 onwards by the Englefield Estate.

Common Land

There was also a great deal of common land within the parishes of Stratfield Mortimer and Wokefield. Nearly all of it was infertile scrubby wasteland, but between Mortimer Lane and the Foudry Brook lay a tract of good farmland. Part of it, called Suejays, was enclosed and divided between adjacent farmers so long ago that no records exist. The remainder was part meadow and part arable. Court Mead was a 'lot meadow', the lots being drawn annually by the hopeful tenants. The arable land, called The Warden or Worne Field was also cultivated on a rota. Church records show that the vicar or his tenant was entitled to plough it two years in every seven, and when it was enclosed in 1804 two-sevenths of it was allotted to Eton College.

The Parish of Stratfield Mortimer at the end of the Eighteenth Century

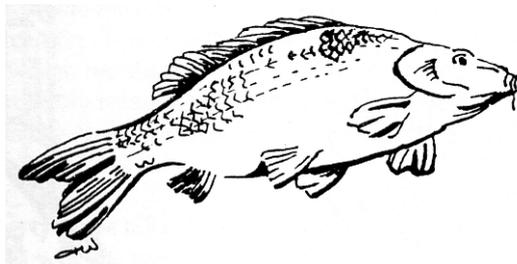


The Provost of Eton, as the holder of the advowson (that is, the person with the right to appoint the vicar), was a landowner in the village, as was the vicar, but the farm which supported Clarke's Charity was south of the Devil's Highway in Stratfield Saye parish.

Parks into Farms

Great Park and Little Park, having been enclosed from the forest as hunting parks in the thirteenth century, were turned into farms by the first Marquis of Winchester when he became Lord of the Manor in 1565. A survey of the demesne lands in 1652 shows Great Park to have been divided into four parts and Little Park into two, and the old Manor Farm into no less than six. By 1662, however, Joel Stephens leased the whole of Great Park for $\text{œ}213\ 6s\ 8d$, while Francis Harris was tenant of all of Little Park. Manor Farm was by now in just two parts, the larger being Church Farm occupied by Nicholas Prince until he died in 1703, when his widow took over the lease. In 1710 Bernard Parfett leased the rest of the old farm, paying $\text{œ}47$ and two fat pullets per annum.

Such payments in kind were still quite common. In 1675 two pullets were required in addition to $\text{œ}3\ 1s$ a year at Pond Farm, Mortimer West End, for the mill, mill house, malting house, mill pond, a coppice, a cottage and two acres of land. The mill is not mentioned in the lease of 1714 but the mill pond is, and the rent is $\text{œ}15$ and three brace of carp. By 1772 the name Kiln Farm is used and the lease confers "*...liberty to dig gravel and dig clay and sand in and upon any of the Commons and Commonable places within the Manor of Stratfield Mortimer in the County of Southampton for the making of bricks and tiles and also free liberty to cut and take furze, heath and fern in any of the said Commons for the burning of the bricks and tiles. Rent £20 and eight brace of good fat and well fed live carp in full season and not under twelve inches from eye to fork.*"



Farm Lands

The Lord of the Manor at this time possessed the demesne lands so far mentioned and also Butlers Lands, Sheepsgrrove, Stonehams and Yascotte, the last three soon to be thrown into one. The rest of the agricultural land in the village was in the hands of the freeholders and copyholders. Mention has been made of enfranchisement, and this proceeded apace, thirty-eight copyholds being freed between 1763 and 1779. Many were very small and offered only subsistence farming. Some descended to daughters whose husbands had other interests; some were heavily mortgaged. For various reasons they were bought and sold and became joined up into larger and larger units, which of course were more economical to work.

West End Farm, for example, was once six copyholds, but only one of the houses survives. Simms Farm was four copyholds and so was Stephens Farm, which itself disappeared after its land was divided between West End and Simms. All these farms passed into the ownership of the Englefield Estate, Simms in 1801, Stephens and West End in 1834. Englefield bought the whole of the Bever Estate in 1808, Mortimer Lodge (now Mortimer Hall) in 1823, Brocas Lands in 1872, many small properties from time to time and the Palmer Estate in 1936.

Most of the farms in the village were mapped, field by field, by Josiah Ballard in 1775. Tracings of these maps survive that were used by farmers, sometimes years later, to plan their crops. They show that mixed farming was usual here. Since those days, however, most of the hedges have gone and many small fields have become fewer big ones.