

The 15th Century

Very few Mortimer records remain for the years between 1374 and 1427, but in the latter year another detailed account of the manor was written. It is clear that the manor was in the hands of the King, but there was no resident lord so the lands were let out for 3d an acre for fallow land and 6d an acre for land on which crops were grown. In all there were 181 acres for arable farming held by the manor. These were divided into seven fields: Holbroke, Ladyfield, Cestewe, Ofnam, Putfield, Boundefield and Blokhill.

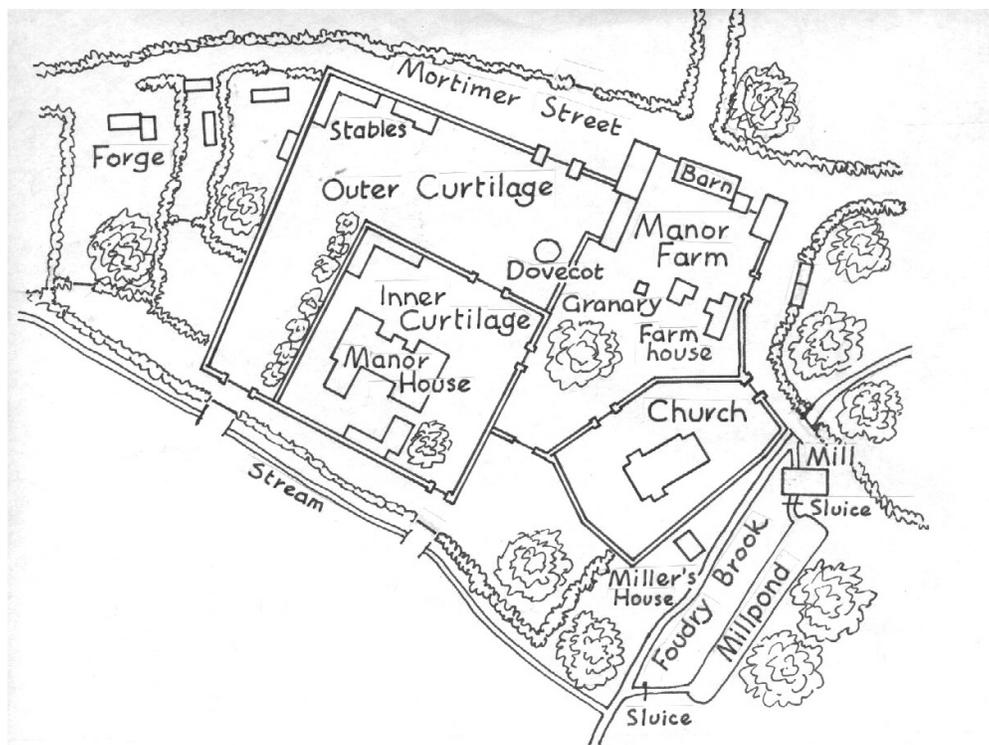
The Manorial fields of 1426 as mapped by Josiah Ballard in 1775. Coster Field was Cestewe; Marsh Meads and Close together nearly correspond in acreage to Holbroke. The Manor House and Mill had gone by 1775 but where probable where shown.



There were also 48 acres of meadow and 44 acres of pasture. This does not include the Great and Little Parks, but by the 1420s these appear to be no longer profitable, although they did still have keepers. Ralph Haytfield was the keeper of Little Park and his wages are recorded as £2 a year, with a bushel of corn weekly and every Saturday he was to receive 1d extra. A further indication of the conditions in Mortimer is given by the comment that the £1 a year usually paid as a fee by the holder of the watermill was not due because "the said mill is totally devastated and broken". In all about 50 tenants of various types are recorded in 1427 but only two of them seem to have held as much as 30 acres. Most of the tenants had about 15 acres and a house.

A further indication of the sorry state of Mortimer was given in 1430 when a description of the manor house was written. "There is a ruined manor house, containing two curtilages. In the inner curtilage there is one hall with divers chambers as well low as high, in each end of the same, with divers offices and houses, namely a pantry, a buttery, cellar, kitchen and larder, under the chambers, which are worth nothing. And there is one great gate at the entry of the said inner curtilage, with divers chambers, as well low as high, extending from the said gate towards the east, to the angle of the inner curtilage, which is worth nothing. Also from the said angle towards the south there is one wall of plastered interior extending to a certain chamber of the said inner curtilage, and from the same corner

to the end of the chief chamber, one hedge, old out of repair."



The account goes on to say that all the houses needed to be repaired as did the stables and cattle sheds. Furthermore, although there were fish in the mill pond, it seems as though the mill was not usable.

The manor at this time was held by Richard, Duke of York (father of the future Edward IV and Richard III) and in the 1450s much seems to have been done to improve it. Large sums of money were spent repairing the stables and cattle sheds (1,200 tiles being bought for the roofs alone), hedges and fences were mended and large quantities of hay were stored in the barns. The keeper of the manor, John Flegge, seems to have been expecting a visit from Richard, Duke of York, and he made sure that the manor house was repaired and that all was ready for him. This all took place at a time when the King, Henry VI, was expecting further open rebellion from Richard, who possibly aimed at the throne itself. In 1460 Richard was killed in a skirmish and the fortunes of his estates at Mortimer seem to have declined. When Edward IV became king he granted Stratfield Mortimer to his younger sister Cecily and she held it until her death in 1495. It is unlikely that the political disputes of the fifteenth century had a great effect on the people of Mortimer. Whoever was fighting and winning in the Wars of the Roses, the land still had to be ploughed, the seed sown, the crop harvested and the animals attended to. For most people in Mortimer the purpose of their life was probably to win through in the daily struggle for survival.