

Copyhold tenure lasted in some places until 1925 when it was abolished by the Law of Property Act of 1922, but in most places copyholds had been converted either to freeholds or to leaseholds long before then. Copyhold tenure meant that the tenement had to be transferred through the manorial court – technically into the hands of the lord and then out again, usually in practice through the steward, and sometimes it seems there was some kind of ceremony with a rod, described as *‘per virgam’* in Latin records. Proof of title was the copy of the entry in the manorial court roll or book – hence copyhold.

Manorial courts did not administer the law of the land, but ‘the custom of the manor’. These varied from place to place, as described by a seventeenth century treatise for manorial stewards: *‘The customs of this nation are so various and differing in themselves as that a man might almost say that there are as many several customs as manors or lordships in a country, yea, and almost as many as there are townships or hamlets in a manor’*.

So it was necessary to gather together a ‘jury’ who were *‘jurati’* or sworn in. These would be the more substantial men of the manor, holders of land themselves, whose memories and the memories of their fathers and grandfathers would be quarried to ‘present’ the facts about their local customs. Those described above were extremely important as they laid out the rights of the tenants as well as the ways in which they were restricted; widows could only keep their husband’s tenements as long as they remained ‘chaste’, and no tenant was allowed to sell timber trees from their property without permission.

The ‘heriot’ of the last item was a form of death duty or inheritance tax: the estate of a defunct tenant forfeited its most valuable property to the lord (*‘his best good’*). This was often ‘quick’ – that is, the best animal, probably an ox or a cow, or if ‘dead’ it would be the most valuable asset of a tradesman. In practice these heriots would probably be bought back – paid in cash rather than kind.

This is just a small part of a much longer document which describes the bounds of the manor and also lists the freeholders and the tenants, what they hold and how much they pay in rent. There is also a list of shops and a note that there are two rows of shops ‘decayde’.