



VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

Enstone parish

Local Government

Manor Courts and Officers

Enstone's hallmoot was mentioned c.1190,¹ and apart from view of frankpledge (which was reserved to the hundred court), Winchcombe abbey exercised manorial jurisdiction throughout the Middle Ages.² Robert son of Walter was 'beadle' of Enstone c.1240,³ other officers including a falconer, a woodward, and a reeve,⁴ and by 1377 (and probably earlier) each of the parish's townships had its own constable.⁵ Court rolls survive (with gaps) from 1341, showing that profits from the manor court in the 14th and early 15th centuries were usually over £1 10s. and sometimes up to £8 16s. 10½d., although in 1535 they were only 13s. 4d.⁶ Chalford's medieval lords had their own separate manor court (held at Dean), but also owed suit to Chadlington hundred.⁷ Forest law probably applied to the whole parish in the 12th and 13th centuries, but after 1300 (when Wychwood forest's bounds were curtailed) to its south-eastern part only, including Enstone and Cleveley. Winchcombe abbey nevertheless secured a grant of free warren (the right to hunt small game) in 1251.⁸

In the 16th to 18th centuries Enstone's manor court dealt with agricultural regulation including grazing, furze cutting, boundary marking, and ditch scouring, as well as with road and bridge maintenance.⁹ In 1655 Thomas Pope, earl of Downe, as lord of Enstone, bought Chadlington hundred's leet jurisdiction within the parish from Sir Rowland Lacy of Shipton-under-Wychwood for £100, including authority within Broadstone, Lidstone, and Chalford (which were treated as a single tithing).¹⁰ The combined courts were held in the upper storey

¹ D. Royce (ed.), *Landboc sive Registrum Monasterii ... de Winchelcumba* (1892–1903), I, 196.

² For suit owed to the hundred court, *Rot. Hund.* II, 740; *Landboc*, II, 183; Gloucestershire Archives, D678/1/M4/3.

³ *Landboc*, II, 174–6 and n.

⁴ *Ibid.* 174; Schumer, *Oxon. Forests*, 66, 123–4; Gloucestershire Archives, D678/1/M1/1/2; D678/1/M4/3.

⁵ *Poll Taxes 1377–81*, ed. Fenwick, 305–6; TNA, E 179/161/177.

⁶ Gloucestershire Archives, D678/1/M1/1/1–8, 10–11, 14–15; *Valor Eccl.* II, 456.

⁷ Lobel, *Dean and Chalford*, 8; *Rot. Hund.* II, 741–2; TNA, SC 2/197/20; *ibid.* LR 2/189, ff. 109–11; below, Spelsbury, local govt.

⁸ Lobel, *Dean and Chalford*, 3–5; *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 250; B. Schumer, 'The 1298/1300 Perambulations of Wychwood Forest – and after', *Oxoniensia* 69 (2004), 1–28, incl. attempted re-expansion under Chas. I; *Cal. Chart.* 1226–57, 360.

⁹ Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 769; *ibid.* MS North Adds. c 7 and c 2; OHC, E36/3/1/CR/1–31 (1657–1769).

¹⁰ OHC, E36/18/10/E/2; E36/3/1/E/2; E36/3/1/CR/1; cf. *VCH Oxon.* XIX, 25, 44.

of a house in Church Enstone, rebuilt c.1690,¹¹ although jurors sometimes met at other locations including the Hoar Stone and Bushell's Rock.¹² A haywarden was elected for Neat Enstone township (which had the most occupiers in its open fields) in 1663 and later,¹³ and a pound and stocks were also mentioned there.¹⁴

By the 1770s manorial courts dealt with very limited business, and after 1816 solely with appointment of officers. Records ceased in 1822¹⁵ save for a special session at the Litchfield Arms in 1841, which swore in the steward and jurymen in preparation for a perambulation of the manor (and parish) boundaries. That also involved parish officers, older inhabitants, and ten boys aged under 15,¹⁶ and was probably a prelude to Church and Neat Enstone's enclosure two years later. No later courts are known.

Parish and Vestry Government

Churchwardens were mentioned in 1486, overseers by 1659, and highway surveyors (for each hamlet) by 1667. All were appointed by the vestry (which in the early 19th century met at the Litchfield Arms), although no minutes survive before 1817.¹⁷ The office of parish clerk was long held by Robert Tomms (served c.1706–50), who apparently succeeded his father and namesake in the office, while later clerks included Richard Tennant (d. 1789) and the tailor Edward Bennett (served 1802–48).¹⁸ Constables were still elected in the manor court in the 17th and 18th centuries, but by then presumably also had parochial functions.¹⁹ An Enstone Police Association existed by 1838, and a police constable lived in Enstone in 1841;²⁰ a police station was established in Neat Enstone by 1891, but closed after 1932.²¹

The parish belonged to Chipping Norton Poor Law Union from 1834 and to Chipping Norton Rural District from 1894, when a parish council was formed.²² In the 1950s it introduced street lights, and then and later managed a playing field, parish hall, and

¹¹ OHC, E36/3/1/E/2 ('court house or church house'); E36/18/10/E/2 ('church house'); NHLE, no. 1200412 (Lynton Cottage and The Old Court House).

¹² OHC, E36/3/1/CR/1.

¹³ Ibid. E36/3/1/CR/1–3.

¹⁴ e.g. ibid. E36/3/1/CR/3 (1728 and 1733).

¹⁵ Ibid. E36/2/2/CR/134.

¹⁶ Ibid. E380/D1/62.

¹⁷ Ibid. PAR97/4/F1/1–3; PAR97/2/A1/1–3.

¹⁸ J. Jordan, *A Parochial History of Enstone in the County of Oxford* (1857), 193, 198–200; *Pigot's Dir. Oxon.* (1830 edn).

¹⁹ OHC, E36/3/1/CR/1–3 (constable 'of the parish'); ibid. PAR97/4/F1/1, incl constable's accts from 1670.

²⁰ *Oxford Chron. and Reading Gaz.* 13 Oct. 1838; TNA, HO 107/878.

²¹ TNA, RG 12/1179; *Banbury Advertiser*, 15 Sept. 1932.

²² Youngs, *Admin. Units*, I, 396; OHC, PC97/A2/1.

allotments.²³ A parochial church council oversaw church affairs from 1894, continuing within the Chase benefice from 2001.²⁴

²³ OHC, PC97/A2/1–19 (par. council mins 1894–2011).

²⁴ *A Profile of the United Benefice of Enstone and Heythrop* [c.1992]: copy in OHC;
<https://thechasebenefice.org.uk/2022/03/24/apcm-2022/> (accessed Nov. 2023); above, relig. hist.