



VCH Oxfordshire Texts in Progress

Swerford and Showell

Local Government

Manor Courts

In 1279 the lord of Swerford claimed view of frankpledge (with the right to exclude royal bailiffs), gallows, and the assizes of bread and ale.¹ All those liberties were confirmed to John de Molyns in 1337–8 along with quittance of toll, murage, pavage, and pontage,² and as in the 16th and 17th centuries the view presumably exercised jurisdiction over the whole of Swerford manor including its Southrop part.³ By the post-medieval period the view was held with the manor court, whose constable and jurors dealt primarily with tenancy transfers and the regulation of agricultural affairs.⁴ Swerford manor later became much reduced, but both court and view continued, appointing fieldsmen in the 1770s.⁵ Southrop, however, was by then regarded as a separate 'manor' with its own view and court, which collected quitrents, regulated farming, and appointed fieldsmen.⁶

At Showell, Eleanor, countess of Salisbury freed the abbot of Reading and his Showell tenants of suit to Wootton hundred in the early 13th century,⁷ although in 1279 (when the abbot claimed view of frankpledge) his bailiff still attended the hundred court twice a year. Tenants of Eynsham and Bruern abbeys also owed suit to Wootton hundred, Bruern later paying 1s. a year to be quit of the obligation.⁸ No other courts for Showell manor or its constituent parts are known, although it seems likely that some were held for agricultural regulation at least until the Black Death, if only by the monastic owners.⁹

Parish and Vestry Government

Churchwardens are recorded from 1530, sidesmen from 1614, overseers of the poor from 1742, and highway surveyors from the 1770s,¹⁰ all of them appointed by the vestry. In the

¹ *Rot. Hund.* II, 735–6.

² *Cal. Chart.* 1327–41, 430. 457.

³ In 1438–9 two courts and views yielded £1 8s. 7d., incl. 10s. cert money: TNA, SC 6/961/32.

⁴ Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 769; *ibid.* North Adds. c 7 and c 2.

⁵ Oxf. Jnl Syn, 14 Oct. 1771; OHC, MS dd Par. Swerford b 1, ff. 29v., 47v.; above, landownership.

⁶ OHC, M1/5/CR; M1/5/F/1–3.; above, Hook Norton, landownership (other estates), local govt.

⁷ *Reading Cart.* I, p. 398.

⁸ *Rot. Hund.* II, 875; *Valor Eccl.* II, 204.

⁹ For context, above, landownership; econ. hist.

¹⁰ *Visit. Dioc. Linc.* II, 45; OHC, M110/E/1; *ibid.* MS Archd. Oxon. b 41, f. 121; *ibid.* MSS dd Par. Swerford b 8 (overseers' accts 1764–9); b 1, f. 29v.; TNA, PROB 11/740/137.

18th century the parish constable oversaw repairs to the 'town walls' (perhaps field walls), gate, pound, and stocks,¹¹ and in 1823 there was a poorly paid parish clerk.¹² By the early 19th century the vestry met usually in the church, its business (besides poor relief and appointment of officers) focused chiefly on maintaining the church fabric.¹³

In 1894 Swerford became part of the newly created Chipping Norton Rural District,¹⁴ and a parish council was formed,¹⁵ taking over the vestry's civil functions. A parochial church council oversaw management of the church. A short-lived police house was established on the Banbury road close to the Masons' Arms in the late 1930s.¹⁶

¹¹ OHC, MS dd Par. Swerford c 3 (constables' accts 1748–1812).

¹² Ibid. MS Oxf. Dioc. d 581, f. 114.

¹³ Ibid. MS dd Par. Swerford e 1 (church accts 1821–1932).

¹⁴ Youngs, *Admin. Units*, I, 406; *Oxon. Atlas*, 150–1.

¹⁵ Ch.Ch. Arch. MS Estates 82, f. 340. No early parish council papers have been located.

¹⁶ *Kelly's Dir. Oxon.* (1939 edn).