

[ORTON MANOR COURT]

This is not an attempt to write a definitive history of the Manor Court, (I am no historian), but seeks to explain what the Manor Court is, and how it still works in Orton. The desire to investigate the Manor Court arose from my own puzzlement about references to it at Parish Council meetings. Actually setting it down so that others might share what I had unearthed was the idea of the present Steward of the Manor Court, Kyle Blue.

Thanks are due to John Burra, a past Steward of the Manor Court, to John Dunning, the present chairman of the Manor Court for information provided and to Les Smith of Orton whose own detailed research is quoted later.

The Early Origins of the Manor Court.

There is the widely held belief that enclosures violated the rights of a downtrodden rural population, but this was by no means always the case, though *skullduggery* did occur at the local level, as will be seen in relation to Orton and Raisbeck.

From medieval times onwards land was enclosed by agreement and without difficulties arising. The patterns of very small fields which still survive seem to have arisen largely through enclosure by agreement.

However, large areas did belong to absentee landlords who had manorial rights in relation to them. This was the case in relation to land around Orton and Raisbeck.

Title Deeds from the years 1571-1687 record the grant of special livery on 20th. May, 1571 to Sir William Cecil, Lord Burghley and to one Thomas Blenkinsopp of Hellbeck & heir. The deeds gave detailed listings of the holdings concerned but, in broad terms, Lord Burghley held the manorial rights to lands around Orton and towards Tebay and Thomas Blenkinsopp the lands around Raisbeck.

At the beginning of the 17th. century, tenants of the manors of Orton and Raisbeck bought themselves free of the respective lords of the manor but the two manor courts continued to function, mainly to administer common lands. The records of the courts show repeated references to tenants paying rents due to the manor court on the due date and odd records of fines imposed by the manor court for various infringements of the rules, including, failure to attend church.

Somewhere around the middle years of the 18th. century, although they were still separate manors, Orton and Raisbeck had ceased to hold separate manor courts. It had been found more convenient to hold a single joint court at Orton. This proved the undoing of the freeholders of Raisbeck when the enclosure act of 1769 was implemented.

The Historical Background to Parliamentary Enclosure Acts

(Fields in the English Landscape, Christopher Taylor, published by J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd.)

Recognising the inefficiencies of communal agriculture and looking for opportunities to farm as they wished, small farmers reached agreement with their lords of the manor to enclose land by the late 14th. and early 15th. centuries.

Gains in the price of wool from 1450 onwards triggered enclosing of commons and wastes for sheep farming and changes in crops encouraged enclosure to facilitate efficient management.

Enclosure by acts of parliament became significant from 1750 onwards. After the passing of an act, strips on common land had to be surveyed, valued and, significantly in relation to Orton and Raisbeck, re-allocated. All this was normally achieved within three years of the act being passed.

Enclosure of "wastes", including moorland, was a significant development in Northern England after