

## Tithe Records



Community Landscapes Project team using original tithe map and copies of Ordnance Survey map sheets

## The Origins of Tithe

The tithe was an annual payment of an agreed proportion (originally one-tenth) of the yearly produce of the land, which was payable by parishioners to the parish church, to support it and its clergyman. Originally tithes were paid 'in kind' (wool, milk, honey, fish, barley etc) and were payable on 3 categories of produce:

- All things which grew and which increased annually e.g. grain, vegetables and wood
- All things which were nourished by the ground – lambs, calves etc. – and animal produce like milk, hides, eggs and wool
- The produce of man's labour – particularly the profits of mills and fishing

Tithes were also categorised as being great and small.

- Great tithes – from corn, other grains, hay and wood – commonly payable to the Rector of a parish – were also called 'rectorial tithes'.

Rectors were often remote from the parishes, so a new deputy or vicar was appointed to act as the parish priest. Because the vicar was not entitled to the great tithe, it was usual to provide him with the small tithes – worth about a third of the total tithe of the parish - as a basis for a living

- Small tithes – from all other things which grew, like vegetables, fruit, hops; also animals and animal produce, and milling and fishing profits – commonly payable to the Vicar of a parish – also called 'vicarial tithes'.

The difference in income between the Rector and the Vicar could be quite considerable, with the bulk of the tithe income often going to an absentee Rector. Some Vicars did their utmost to increase their income by making such produce as acorns or fallen apples tithable!

At the dissolution of the monasteries, many of the great tithes – rectorial tithes – passed into the hands of laymen, who became the new owners of the church land and its accompanying rectorial tithes.

The payment of tithe was a cause of endless dispute between the tithe owners and the tithe payers – between clergy and parishioners - in many cases. In addition, Quakers and other non-conformists objected to paying any tithes to support the established church. Almost every agricultural process and product attracted controversy over its tithe value. By the eighteenth century the complex legislation surrounding the tithe began to have a detrimental effect on the increasing numbers of farmers working for agricultural improvement. Tithing was seen as increasingly irrelevant to the needs of the community and the developing agricultural industry.

From early times, money payments had begun to be substituted for payments in kind. Parliamentary enclosures, which mainly occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, to improve the land and its yields, encouraged this trend towards cash payments. This enclosure was a purely local affair, achieved by the passing of an individual Act of Parliament, called an Enclosure Act, and was prompted by local landowners. It got rid of the obligation to pay tithes, either by allotting land to landowners in lieu of tithes, or by substituting a fixed money payment, called a 'corn rent'.

An Enclosure map shows the land allotted or charged with a 'corn rent', and is often attached to the Enclosure Award. Few of these exist for Devon, but they can be very common in other parts of England.

### **The Tithe Commutation Act of 1836**

By 1836 tithes were still payable in most of the parishes in England and Wales, but the Government had decided on the commutation of tithes – in other words, the substitution of money payments for payment 'in kind' all over the country - and the Tithe Commutation Act was passed in 1836. Three Tithe Commissioners were appointed and the long process of commutation began, with Assistant Commissioners stationed around the country to oversee implementation of the Act. These money payments were not to be subject to local variation. The Act proposed a fluctuating money payment adjusted each year and based on the average price of wheat, barley, and oats.

It was hoped that an annual review of the payment for each tithe owner would reflect the variable nature of the amount of farm produce in good and bad harvests, and preserve the purchasing power of the payment. Every piece of tithable land was to have a corn rent-charge or tithe rent-charge (a monetary value) assigned to it and a record was to be kept so that a prospective purchaser of land would know exactly what he would have to pay annually to the tithe owner. In this way the value of a piece of land could be measured against its tithe obligation. Existing 'corn rents' which already existed under any old Enclosure Act, were left unaffected, and continued to be paid instead.

A survey of the whole of England and Wales was therefore necessary. Enquiries were sent to every parish and township listed in the census returns, and meetings took place all over the country to find out how much commutation had already taken place. The Commissioners then established Tithe Districts to distinguish them from parishes. Most Tithe Districts corresponded with parishes, but the Commissioners could, if necessary, form separate districts. Many parish boundaries came under close scrutiny, perhaps for the first time in centuries, and maps showing these were drawn up. We now call these tithe maps. This huge effort to survey the country in the 1840s gives us the first detailed view of the rural landscape of England and Wales.

In some parishes, an agreement was reached between the tithe-owners (clergy or lay owners) and land-owners. In other parishes, where dispute persisted, a compulsory Tithe Award was made by the Tithe Commissioners.

### **Tithe Apportionments**

When an overall value for the tithe in a district or parish had been determined, the tithe rent-charge had to be apportioned fairly among the lands of differing quality and various uses in the parish.



Community Landscapes Project volunteer copying information from a tithe apportionment

This was documented for each parish in a Tithe Apportionment. When a landowner also was the tithe-owner, and effectively had to pay the tithes to himself, the tithe rent-charges were 'merged' in the land – i.e. the liability to pay tithes on that land was cancelled, or the land was 'free of rent-charge liability'. This could happen before or after the apportionment took place.

Each tithe apportionment begins with a preamble explaining who owned the tithes and the circumstances and statistics (total acreage, land exempt from tithe, etc.).

For each 'tithe area', it contains columns listing:

- landowners (who were responsible for tithe payments until 1891) in alphabetical order
- occupiers
- the plot number referring to the tithe map
- name or description of land, premises or field
- state of cultivation – arable, grass, meadow, pasture, common, wood, plantation, orchard, hop ground or garden
- acreage
- amount of rent-charge payable, usually to the Rector or Vicar

### **Altered Tithe Apportionments**

These resulted in some cases after a change in ownership, where a local informal agreement was not made between tithe-owners and landowners. They were often attached to the original apportionment. They followed the development of the railways, for example, when land was purchased from landowners for this purpose. The original tithe map is usually accompanied by altered maps of the relevant sections of the parish where the railway ran through it.

Why is there no apportionment?

Drawing up a tithe apportionment and surveying and producing a tithe map was very expensive, and some parishes managed to avoid it (unfortunately for present-day researchers!) This could happen where:

- the amount of tithe commutation was negligible
- there was a Special Award in place because the landowner owned all the tithes, and thus there had been a merger of tithe rent-charges
- there was a redemption of tithe rent-charges, made possible [from 1846] by payment of a lump sum by a landowner.

## **Tithe Maps**

In order to determine boundaries of land, acreage of fields and states of cultivation, an extremely detailed survey of the landscape was needed. In 1835 there were no Ordnance Survey maps at a scale large enough for the purpose, so the Commissioners arranged for their own surveys to be undertaken. These were carried out locally, and therefore they vary a great deal in scale, accuracy and size. The scale of tithe maps varies between 12" and 25" to 1 mile. Their quality depended on the skills of the land surveyors employed to draw them up, and since landowners were footing the bill, the standards vary greatly! Only 1/6 of the maps were eventually regarded as first-class maps and were sealed by the Commissioners. The second-class or unsealed maps were very mixed and not always accurate, particularly as regards the area of an individual enclosure.

The maps are not as detailed as the later 25" to 1 mile Ordnance Survey maps, which have new place names and fine details. Most tithe maps do not have property names written on them. In practice, some features as portrayed on the map can be rather confusing, particularly the relationship of field boundaries and the layout of fields and tracks. The numbers of the tithe areas on the map correspond to those in the apportionment, but in the apportionment they are not consecutive. To find a property quickly on an apportionment, one needs to know the landowner's name, and not the tenant's.

## **Locating Devon Tithe Apportionments and Maps**

The tithe apportionment and tithe map together make up a single document, but they tend to be separated to make use and storage easier. An original and two copies of these were prepared:

- the original for the Tithe Commissioners – now in The National Archives at Kew
- one copy for the Diocese - the copy which you usually see in hard copy form in our Heritage Centre, and at other local authority record offices in England and Wales
- one copy for the parish - these also should be deposited in our Heritage Centre, and at local authority record offices in other counties. These copies are produced in Devon Heritage Centre if the Diocesan copy is unfit for production, or is missing. Some parishes in Devon still hold their copy of the tithe map.

The tithe maps and apportionments at Devon Heritage Centre are far too large and unwieldy to be photocopied, but the original map can be photographed or traced, and the original apportionment can also be photographed.

The Devon tithe maps have now been digitally photographed and digital copies of some of the maps are available on CD-Rom for consultation in the searchroom as an alternative to the original maps. Printouts of sections of the map can be made from these CD-Roms by visitors to the searchroom.

Eventually, the Tithe Maps Online Project will make the digitized tithe maps available online free of charge through our website. In the meantime, we are also offering copies of the digitised tithe maps for sale on CD-Rom.

The copies of the Devon tithe apportionments held in the National Archives have been digitized, and we have purchased greyscale digital copies of the 472 tithe apportionments from the National Archives as part of the Tithe Maps Online Project. Most of these [tithe apportionments are now accessible online](#) through a Devon County Council webpage which is under development as part of the Tithe Maps Online project.

The tithe maps and apportionments in The National Archives were originally microfilmed, and we also still have a set of these microfiche at Devon Heritage Centre. In the past, visitors made photocopy printouts from these, and this is still possible. There are also complete sets of the microfiche at North Devon Record Office and Plymouth and West Devon Heritage Centre. Our service points also have microfiche copies of the tithe maps and apportionments covering their own area. Sometimes The National Archives tithe maps which were microfilmed are in better condition than our maps – sometimes not. Therefore, the printouts from microfiche are sometimes better and clearer than our original maps - and sometimes they are far worse.

You may find papers and letters relating to tithe payments made by parishioners in parish collections - check parish records catalogues online or at all three of Devon's record offices for these. For tithe papers in estate and solicitors' collections, check the subject card indexes under the heading 'Tithe' and also the online catalogues and paper catalogues at each of Devon's record offices .

For more information on the Tithe records held at The National Archives, see the Tithe Records Research Guide on their website

Devon Heritage Centre  
Great Moor House  
Bittern Road  
Exeter  
EX2 7NL

01392 888700

[devonarchives@swheritage.org.uk](mailto:devonarchives@swheritage.org.uk)

Website: [www.swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives](http://www.swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives)

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Registered office: Somerset Heritage Centre, Brunel Way, Norton Fitzwarren, Taunton, Somerset TA2 6SF  
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