

WHO'S WHO?

The Lord of the Manor could be a tenant-in-chief who held the manor directly from the crown

or he could be a 'sub lord' if he was a vassal to another lord. Some Lords of the Manor held several manors all over the country, with the result that not every manor had a big manor house or a well-endowed church. An absentee Lord would appoint a **steward** to run the manor on his behalf. The overseer of the work was the **reeve**. The manorial system depended on the labour of the **serfs**. They worked on the lord's demesne land and in return were given a roof over their head and a strip of land supposed to be enough to sustain the serf's family. However, in many cases the serf had to give a substantial amount of his produce to the lord.

Serfs were part of the estate, just like the buildings. When the manor changed hands, the serfs were part of the process. They could leave the manor only with the permission of the lord and, if they wanted to get married, they also needed his permission. They were subject to the law of the manor.

How important the serfs were for the manorial system is illustrated by the fact that its demise started with the Black Death, when there were not enough people left to work on the land and those who were left could ask for more rights, e.g. a piece of land of their own. There were **villeins, cotters and borders** who were all tied in some form to the land.

Freemen owned a piece of land and then another group, called **copyholders**, leased a piece of land for a certain period.