



# New to tithe records?

A guide to tithe records held at  
the Kent History and Library Centre



## **Introduction: the early history of tithes**

The idea of giving a tithe, or tenth, of income to support a local priest can be traced back to before the Norman Conquest of 1066 and the word 'tithe' itself is an Old English word. By the twelfth century it had become accepted that tithes should be given to the parish priest; before then, they could be given to any priest.

Tithes were classified as

- 'predial', arising from crops
- 'mixed', arising from livestock
- 'personal', arising from the product of labour

They were also divided into

- 'Greater tithes' – the tithes of hay, corn and wool
- 'Lesser tithes' – of everything else

In the Middle Ages, churches and their tithes were often granted to religious houses and Oxford or Cambridge colleges. The monks, nuns and scholars could not act as parish priests so they appointed deputies, known as 'vicars' (from the Latin word 'vicarius', meaning a substitute) and gave them part of the tithes. Often the religious house, which was the 'rector' of the parish, simply kept the greater tithes but sometimes there was a more complex division of the tithes recorded in a written agreement, known as an 'ordination of a vicarage', confirmed by the bishop of the diocese and often copied into his register. Hasted's *History of Kent* includes some examples of these medieval tithe agreements. Following the dissolution of the monasteries, between 1536 and 1540, tithes which had formerly belonged to religious houses were often granted to laymen who were known as 'lay rectors'.

Tithe was one of the three main sources of clergy income, the others being the produce from glebe (land belonging to the parish and farmed by the vicar or rector) and fees for conducting baptisms, marriages and burials. Income from tithes was often the most important of the three. Originally, tithe payments took the form of the tenth sheaf of wheat or barley, the tenth calf or lamb, the tenth cheese and so on, known as payments in kind. Many fine, large, late medieval barns, such as those at Maidstone, Lenham and Boxley, are referred to as tithe barns and may have been used to store tithes of crops belonging to institutional landlords such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Rochester, the Cathedral priories of Canterbury and Rochester or St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury. Singleton near Ashford even has a 'Tithe Barn Lane', although this is a modern street name.

## **Parish records**

Parish records frequently contain documents relating to tithe and tithe payments, catalogued in section 27 of the parish catalogues held at the Kent History and Library Centre (KHLC). They may include accounts of tithe payments, in kind or in money, maps of tithable lands and agreements between the incumbent and his parishioners by which money payments were substituted for crops or livestock. There may also be records of legal disputes about the non-payment of tithes. Most of these documents date from the late 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, although there are a few earlier ones.

## Part of the catalogue of tithe documents for the parish of Bapchild

P14/27/1	Tithe map	1840
P14/27/2	Tithe award	1840
P14/27/3	Altered apportionment	1856
P14/27/4	Altered apportionment	1860
P14/27/5	Altered apportionment	1893
P14/27/6	Altered apportionment	1926
P14/27/7	Altered apportionment	1936
P14/27/11/1	Altered apportionments Plan Nos 87, 87a, 85a, 86a, 19a, 88a, 86b, 85b	1930
P14/27/11/2	Altered apportionments Plan Nos 3, 3A	1926
P14/27/14/1	Tithe Redemption Certificates Plan no 9	1896
P14/27/14/2	Tithe Redemption Certificates Plan Nos 7, 7A	1899
P14/27/14/3	Tithe Redemption Certificates Plan Nos 139a, 136b, 138a, 117a, 120a-123a, 124, 78, 79	1900

## Glebe terriers

Many glebe terriers survive from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. They listed the lands belonging to the incumbent of a parish and may also contain brief descriptions of parsonage houses and details of tithes. Some glebe terriers have been deposited as part of the parish records. At KHLC they are usually catalogued within section 3, Incumbent: Property and income, as in the following example for the parish of Benenden.

P20/3/1	Glebe terrier [copy] 1 doc	1615
P20/3/2	Glebe terrier [copy] 1 doc	1630
P20/3/7	Glebe terrier and inventory of church goods 1 vol	1933

They may also have been copied into the parish register. Others may be found within the diocesan archives.

## Tithe commutation and enclosure

In many Midland counties, the system of open field farming persisted into the early or even mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. In these counties farms often consisted of a number of strips distributed throughout two or three large arable fields, with associated rights in the common pastures and meadows and other common land. With the introduction of more scientific farming methods in the 18<sup>th</sup> century this system was gradually abandoned and the land was redistributed into many smaller fields, a process known as enclosure.

Enclosures could be carried out by mutual agreement, by local Acts of Parliament and later under general Enclosure Acts. Details of the redistribution of land were recorded in enclosure agreements or enclosure awards. Most of the redistribution was carried out based on land ownership within the open fields, in many cases to the disadvantage of small landowners and landless labourers, although land was often allocated to the parish or for the use of the poor.

Tithes were often commuted for money payments as part of the enclosure agreement. Kent, however, was an old enclosed county, and there are only about 20 enclosure awards for the whole county, all dealing with commons.

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

Agreements to exchange payments in kind for money payments, also known as 'moduses', could be altered when a new incumbent came to the parish. Disputes about tithes often caused bad feeling between clergy and their parishioners and from the later 17<sup>th</sup> century an increasing number of these parishioners could be Non-Conformists who resented having to pay to support a church to which they did not belong.

In 1836, the Tithe Commutation Act was passed, which provided for the commutation of tithe payments in kind to money payments, known as tithe rent charges or corn rents, based on the national price of certain quantities of grain over a seven year period. Three Tithe Redemption Commissioners were appointed to carry out this work.

## **Tithe records**

The 1836 Tithe Act produced two main records: the tithe map and its accompanying apportionment. There are tithe apportionments for 407 Kent parishes and only 10 parishes for which there are no apportionments. 97% of the area of the county is covered by the tithe survey, which compares very well with Midland counties like Oxfordshire where only 44% of the land is covered. Only Devon and Cornwall have a greater coverage. The tithe documents for Kent date from 1837 to 1858, although the majority were created between 1837 and 1844.

**Tithe maps:** The tithe map was a large-scale map of all tithable lands in a parish. They were often on a scale of 3 chains to the inch (a chain equals 22 yards), roughly equivalent to 25 inches to the mile, and for many parishes they are the earliest surviving large-scale maps available. The maps had to be approved by the Tithe Commissioners and were classified according to their scale and accuracy. 55% of Kentish maps were designated as first-class, which compares very favourably with the national average of 12.5% and is only exceeded by Monmouthshire.

The maps showed each piece of tithable land, identified by its tithe field number, which is linked to a written description in the apportionment. Occupied houses are coloured pink or red, while other buildings are shaded in grey. Sometimes a building is linked to a field by a shape like an elongated 's', showing that both were part of the same tithe field number. Although it was not their main purpose, tithe maps also show roads, railways and watercourses. Many maps were drawn especially for the tithe redemption process, but others were based on older maps which were not always fully updated.

**Tithe apportionments:** The tithe apportionment had two sections: the agreement between the tithe payers or, if no agreement could be reached, the Commissioners' award, setting out their decision on the calculation of tithe payments and stating the amount of tithable land in the parish; and the apportionment, a detailed description of how the payments were to be allocated. The apportionment is arranged alphabetically in order of the landowners' surnames and gives the following information:

- name of landowner;
- name of tenant;
- tithe field number, which enables the description to a particular area on the map to be found;
- a brief description of the property, including farm and field names;
- the cultivation, for example, arable, pasture or hops;
- the area of the piece of land in acres, rods and perches, abbreviated to a r p (an acre was 4,840 square yards; there were 4 rods (also known as roods) to an acre and 40 perches to a rod);
- and the all important amount of tithe rent charge payable.

Much of the land described is arable or pasture but the apportionments also provide information about houses, shops, forges and other buildings.

Although an unusually high proportion of Kent was covered by tithe maps and apportionments not all land in every parish was tithable. In some parishes, the tithe may have been commuted long ago or, for historical reasons certain areas (for example, parts of Canterbury) were exempt.

## **Distribution of documents**

The original maps and apportionments drawn up by the Tithe Commissioners are held at the National Archives at Kew in series IR29 (maps) and IR30 (apportionments). There are microfilm copies of these documents available at the KHLC.

The Tithe Commissioners' maps have been catalogued in R J P Kain and R R Oliver, *The Tithe Maps of England and Wales*; the Kent section is on pages 234-255. A typical entry look like this:

17/40 Boughton Aluph (parish) TR 029476  
Apt 31.05.1839; 2419a (2418); Map 1839, 3 chns, 1st cl, in 2 parts, by Thomas Thurston, Ashford, (including 30-chn construction line diagram); construction lines, hill-drawing, foot/b'way, waterbodies, houses, woods (col), hops, field gates, building names, boundary trees, coach road, carriage road, old turnpike road, chalk pit, milestones (by symbol), rectory; primary construction line sightings are noted, e.g. 'On Boughton Church'. Apt has in-bound and out-bound quantities.

This means that the document reference is IR29/17/40 and that the current 6-figure Ordnance Survey grid reference is TR029476. The date of the apportionment, abbreviated to **Apt**, is **31 May 1839** and it covers **2419 acres** (out of, apparently, a possible total of 2418!). The map is dated **1839**. It is on a scale of **3 chains** to 1 inch and is a **1st class** map. The cartographer is **Thomas Thurston** of **Ashford**. The rest of the paragraph lists features shown on the map, including a **footway/bridleway** and **woods (coloured)**.

Two copies of the tithe documents were made at the same time as the originals, one to be deposited in the diocesan registry, the other in the parish. The KHLC holds the diocesan copies for the diocese of Rochester, catalogued as CTR, and a number of parish copies for parishes in the Archdeacons of Tonbridge and Malling (Rochester diocese) and Maidstone (Canterbury diocese), as well as some copies which have found their way into the archives of civil parish councils and unofficial (family and estate) collections.

Tithe records for parishes in the Archdeaconry of Rochester are held at the Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre at Strood and those for parishes in the Archdeaconry of Canterbury (covering roughly the easternmost third of the county) are held at Canterbury Cathedral Archives.

The KHLC holds high-resolution digital copies of tithe maps for the whole of Kent on CD and portable hard-drive.

### **Online resources**

The Kent Archaeological Society is gradually transcribing the apportionments for the whole of Kent. Those already available are listed on the Society's website at <http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/Research/Maps/Maps%20intro.htm>. There are hyperlinks to the apportionments which have already been transcribed and those parishes which are currently being transcribed are in written in black Italic type.

### **Copyright**

Tithe maps are out of copyright but tithe awards, because they are deemed to be literary works under copyright law, remain in copyright until 2039!

### **Altered apportionments**

When any land subject to tithe was sold, the tithe payments were often re-allocated and the revised details were written into documents known as altered apportionments which contain both the revised apportionments and maps of the areas concerned. Some altered apportionments relate to only one or two fields, but others cover a large part of the parish. The KHLC holds many diocesan and parish copies of altered apportionments; the diocesan copies are catalogued as CTR. The Tithe Commissioners' originals, held at the National Archives, are available at the KHLC on microfilm.

## **Tithe redemption certificates**

Following the Tithe Act of 1846, it became possible to redeem Tithe Rent Charge by a lump sum payment. The Tithe Act 1918 made provision for the redemption of tithe rentcharge over a period not exceeding 50 years, extended to 60 years by the 1925 Tithe Act. The KHLC holds many tithe redemption certificates in the CTR and CTS collections of tithe documents and in parish collections.

## **The later history of tithe**

The Tithe Act of 1891 stipulated that in future tithe rent charge was to be paid by the landowner. After World War I many large estates were broken up and tenants who bought their farms found themselves responsible for tithe payment. By this time, there were substantial numbers of agnostics and atheists, as well as Catholics and Non-Conformists, among farmers and the payment of tithe rent charge was often bitterly resented. The 1925 Tithe Act introduced a fixed rent charge and vested almost the whole of the ecclesiastical tithe rent charge in the Queen Anne's Bounty which had been set up in 1704 to deal with the problem of inadequate clergy incomes.

## **The Tithe Wars**

The economic depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s brought the situation to a head. According to Alan Armstrong, '...small owner farmers rebelled against the incidence of tithe-payments which in real terms became particularly onerous in the early 1930s when prices tumbled. Some Kent land was tithed at as much as £1 an acre ...'<sup>1</sup> A national Tithe Payers' Association was formed in the mid-1920s to campaign for the abolition of Tithe Rent Charge. There were at least six branches in Kent by the mid-1930s, at Ashford, Elham, Paddock Wood, Sandwich, Stansted and the Weald. Roderick Kedward (1881-1937), a Methodist minister from a Westwell farming family and Ashford's only ever Liberal MP from 1929 to 1931, became President of the National Tithe Payers' Association in 1932.

There was active resistance to the payment of tithes in the 1930s. Bailiffs who were sent to distraint the farmers' goods for non-payment of tithe or even to evict non-paying farmers were met with violent resistance and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang, and Queen Anne, founder of the Queen Anne's Bounty, were burned in effigy. Feelings ran particularly high in Kent and Norfolk, where the novelist Doreen Wallace was a leading campaigner. In some areas the farmers were supported by members of the British Union of Fascists.

The 1936 Tithe Act abolished the tithe rent charge and made provision for it to be redeemed either in a single lump sum or by yearly payments, or annuities, to be redeemed by 1996. The payments were administered by the Queen Anne's Bounty and, from 1948, following the merger of the Queen Anne's Bounty and the Ecclesiastical Commission, by the Church Commissioners. If the amount of the annuity was £1 or less the whole amount was to be redeemed compulsorily. Annuities were set at a low level to placate the farmers and ultimately the church incurred heavy losses. It has been estimated that 6,900 benefices lost £475,000 between them.

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<sup>1</sup> Nigel Yates (ed), *Kent in the Twentieth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001), p89

Roderick Kedward died suddenly in 1937 and a memorial was erected to him on land belonging to Beechbrook Farm, just north of the A20 between Hothfield and Ashford. When the High Speed Rail Link was being built in 1998 the memorial was moved to the new Ashford Market, where it still is.

## Later tithe documents

**Tithe registers at the KHLC:** There are some registers of Proceedings under the Tithe Acts of 1891 and 1936 among the records of the Kent County Courts (HC-C), recording applications for recovery of outstanding tithe rent charge payments. They include the name, address and description of applicant and respondent; amount of tithe to be recovered; date fixed for hearing; details of court order; subsequent proceedings; date.

**Tithe correspondence at the KHLC:** Many parish collections include correspondence with the Queen's Anne's Bounty and the Ecclesiastical Commission from the 1920s and 1930s.

**Tithe files at Canterbury Cathedral Archives:** Canterbury Cathedral Archives holds tithe files (CCA-DCC-TITH ) relating to tithe rent charges payable to the Dean and Chapter. They cover the period 1910-1940 and usually contain routine correspondence between the tithe payers (usually the landowners) and the agent of the Dean and Chapter; some include extracts from tithe apportionments. They may also include applications for remission of tithe rent charges on the grounds of hardship, which contain particularly valuable information on individual farms and landholders. Files usually relate to particular properties and thus may refer to more than one tithe-payer. County court files in this series relate to cases of non-payment of tithe which were taken to the court.

**Records relating to tithes at the Church of England Record Centre:** There are Ecclesiastical Commissioners and Queen Anne's Bounty secretariat files relating to tithes for the period 1925-1936, especially the period leading up to the Tithes Act, 1936 and further details of these records can be obtained from the Church of England Record Centre (email: [archives@churchofengland.org](mailto:archives@churchofengland.org); please ensure that you write 'CERC' in the subject line).

## Uses of tithe documents

Tithes maps and apportionments can be used to study a wide range of topics, including:

- Family history. Most obviously, using the apportionment and map to find out where your ancestor lived. If these show that they lived on a large estate, this might suggest unofficial collections that can be used to investigate the family. Because most tithe surveys date from the late 1830s or early 1840s, it should be possible to find out more information about the family from the 1841, and possibly 1851, censuses.
- House history. The apportionment and map can be used for locating a particular property and finding out who lived there.
- Local history. Tithe maps provide a wealth of topographical information and give a snapshot of towns and villages just before a period of rapid change. They have been used for information on local industries, mapping landed estates and investigating the

structure of land ownership. Tithe maps and apportionments have also been used, in conjunction with the 1841 census, to repopulate parishes, ie linking the households listed in the census with the buildings on the map.

- Land use. Information on crops and livestock can also be obtained from the tithe files.
- Field names. Tithe apportionments are a useful source of field names and have even been used to trace boundaries named in Anglo-Saxon charters. If there are no early estate maps, or manorial or estate surveys, they may be the most important source of field names in a parish.
- Roads and rights of way. Useful for studying transport within a parish.
- Parish and property boundaries

## Book list

Books relating to tithe are shelved at K254.8 in the KHLC searchroom.

Alan Armstrong, 'Agriculture and Rural Society', in Nigel Yates (ed), *Kent in the Twentieth Century* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), pp59-116. Tithe payments discussed on p89.

Geraldine Beech, and Rose Mitchell, *Maps for Family and Local History*, chapter 2 (London: The National Archives Publications, 2004). Shows how tithe maps can be used for family history.

G F A Best, *Temporal Pillars: Queen Anne's Bounty, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and the Church of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964)

George Brocklehurst, *A Text Book of Tithe and Tithe Rent Charge* (Newchurch, New Romney: Bale & Co, 1911). George Brocklehurst was the incumbent of Newchurch on Romney Marsh.

Eric J Evans, *The Contentious Tithe: The Tithe Problem and English Agriculture, 1750-1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976). Useful for background and context. Also has a section on the story after 1836, the Acts of 1891, 1925 and 1936, pp163-168.

Steven Hollowell, *Enclosure Records for Historians* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2000)

F Hull, 'Tithe Records', *Guide to the Kent Archives Office* (Maidstone: Kent County Council, 1958), pp123-125. Describes the Rochester diocesan tithe surveys at the KHLC.

Roger J P Kain, 'The tithe commutation surveys', *Archaeologia Cantiana* LXXXIX (1974), pp101-118. Analyses and discusses the Kentish tithe records held at the Public Record Office (now known as the National Archives). Useful maps, showing dates of apportionments and maps, areas mapped by particular surveyors and distribution of first- and second-class maps.

R J P Kain and R R Oliver, *The Tithe Maps of England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). A descriptive catalogue of the tithe maps at the National Archives, with a useful introduction and supplementary chapter discussing the records. Chapter on Kent, pp234-255.

R J P Kain and H C Prince, *Tithe Surveys for Historians* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2000). Probably the best introduction. Includes chapters on the background to the 1836 Act, the maps, apportionments and tithe files and their use as historical sources.

R J P Kain and H C Prince, *The tithe surveys of England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Partly superseded by *Tithe Surveys for Historians*, but a very full account of how tithes surveys can be used as historical sources.

National Archives Guide to Tithe Records, available online at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/tithe-records.htm>

Carol Twinch, *Tithe War: 1918-1939 The Countryside in Revolt* (Norwich: Media Associates, 2001)