

## **Introduction**

Tithing was the name given to the custom of taking one tenth of all agricultural produce of a parish, including grain, crops, newborn animals, honey, wool etc., to pay for the upkeep of the church and clergy. In England the collection of tithes began in the 9th century, and was to continue until the payments were abolished in 1936. From the outset practices began to differ; some parishes continued to pay their tithes in kind, some adopted the payment of a cash equivalent, and yet others rendered their tithes through a combination of both.

To standardise these payments, the Tithe Commutation Act was passed in 1836, ordering that all tithes were to be paid in money, not in kind. The amount to be paid was based on the national seven-year average price of corn: local variations in prices were not taken into consideration. Three Commissioners were appointed to oversee the process of commutation, with their first task being to enquire into the extent and nature of tithes payment in every parish. Hopefully, an agreement was made between the landowners and the tithe-owners as to how much, and on what land, tithes were charged, but, failing such an agreement, the Commissioners were empowered to impose an Award on the parties.

## **Tithe Maps**

It was necessary to draw up accurate maps from which acreages could be calculated and payments deduced. Initially, it was envisaged that these maps would all be of the highest possible quality, but this proved to be too expensive – especially as the cost was borne by the landowners – and examples of lesser quality were accepted. What astounds most people is the scale at which these maps were drawn. Over two-thirds of them were produced at the scale recommended by the Commissioners: 3 or 4 chains to the inch (one chain being 66 feet). Such a scale enables a lot of detail to be shown. They depict individual fields and plots of land, woodland, ponds, stream and rivers, roads, houses,

cottages and farm buildings, each one numbered to correspond to the reference in the Apportionment. The process of producing the maps and apportionments was carried out with great efficiency, being largely completed by 1851.

### **Tithe Apportionments**

A tithe apportionment or book of reference was produced to accompany each map. They begin with a pre-amble, which usually gives details of the terms of the agreement or award made for the location, which is followed by the apportionment itself. This is arranged in columns, reading from left to right:

name of the landowner(s)

name of the occupier(s)

number of the plot of land or building (corresponding to the number on the map)

name or description of the piece of land or building

state of cultivation, e.g. whether arable, meadow, plantation, furze, waste etc.

area given in acres, rods, and perches (40 perches = 1 rod, 4 rods = 1 acre)

amount of tithe rent-charge to be paid

At the end of the apportionment is a summary, giving total acreages of the premises of the different owners and occupiers.

## **Usage of the Tithe Maps and Apportionments**

Apart from parish registers, tithe maps and apportionments are often the most heavily used class of documents in any Record Office. Their appeal is that they give detailed information of local topography, and land usage, as well as field-names and the names of the owners and occupiers of properties. With the maps, their greatest asset - the amount of detail shown - leads to their greatest drawback, as they are extremely large and not easy to handle. The apportionments are also often quite bulky and cumbersome to use.

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