

VCH OXFORDSHIRE:
ONLINE TEXTS IN PROGRESS: BROADWELL PARISH: KELMSCOTT
 This version May 2005
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LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Manor Courts

Throughout the Middle Ages Kelmscott inhabitants, as tenants of Bradwell Odyngsell manor, were presumably required to attend the manor court and annual view of frankpledge, both of which were held probably in Broadwell, as later.¹ In 1600 Bradwell Cirencester manor court demanded payment of a horse as relief for a freehold in Kelmscott still belonging to the manor,² but though courts for all three Broadwell manors continued until the 1670s or later, granting copyhold lands and issuing field orders, Kelmscott seems by then to have largely fallen outside their jurisdiction, presumably because most Kelmscott holdings had by then become detached from the manors and were freely held.³ Some or all tenants owed suit at the hundred court also: in 1279 the owner of a large freehold in Kelmscott was to attend the twice-yearly view at Bampton,⁴ and in the 17th century Kelmscott representatives still attended an annual view or lawday in Broadwell held by the lord of Bampton's steward, usually in September or October, at which they reported infringements of manorial custom. In 1668 the view set fines for any Kelmscott inhabitants allowing unringed pigs to stray, and in 1672 it ordered repair of a drainage ditch, while in 1671 it seems to have elected a tithingman for Kelmscott. The courts continued until possibly the early 19th century.⁵

Parish Government

In other respects Kelmscott seems from an early date to have governed itself as an independent parish, presumably through a vestry or similar assembly, although no evidence survives before the 1840s.⁶ By the early 16th century the township had two churchwardens, assisted in the late 16th

¹ Above, manor; above, Broadwell, local govt (manor courts).

² Bodl. MS North Adds. c 2, f. 83.

³ Ibid. c 2, c 7, Broadwell courts, passim; ORO, Hey. l/1--8; cf. above, Broadwell, local govt.; above, manor; econ. hist.

⁴ *Bampton Hund.* 45.

⁵ Longleat House (Wilts.), NMR 3315, s.a. 1668--72; *VCH Oxon.* XIII, 3--4, 139, 195. Election of a tithingman for Kelmscott was noted only once, perhaps in error.

⁶ For vestry mins. 1847--1904, ORO, PAR 148/02/A1/1.

century by a sidesman,⁷ and in the mid 17th century it had its own constable and overseer and administered its own poor relief.⁸ Open-field agriculture was presumably also regulated through a township assembly, since surviving court rolls make no mention of it. During the mid and late 19th century the vestry met in the church usually in March and April, occasionally adjourning to a nearby farmhouse or, after 1874, to the newly built school. It appointed two overseers, two poor-rate assessors and collectors, and two surveyors of highways (later replaced by a waywarden), and still nominated a constable, besides levying occasional rates and overseeing repair of the church and footpaths.⁹ By then there was a single churchwarden, of whom most were leading farmers serving sometimes for several decades.¹⁰ No parish property is recorded, the officers' income coming solely from parish rates.¹¹

Under the Local Government Act of 1894 Kelmscott became part of the newly formed Witney rural district,¹² its vestry being succeeded by a parish meeting with more limited powers, which met annually at first in the school, from the 1920s in the village hall, and from 1935 in the newly built Morris Memorial Hall. It appointed two overseers until 1924, and among other functions liaised with outside bodies over planning and facilities. Annual or twice-yearly meetings continued in the early 21st century, when Kelmscott also retained two churchwardens.¹³ In 1974 the civil parish became part of West Oxfordshire district.¹⁴

⁷ *Visit. Dioc. Linc.* II, 52; ORO, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. b 41, f. 8; *ibid.* MS Oxf. Dioc. d 555, ff. 77--80, exceptionally calling them chapelwardens.

⁸ *Protestation Rtns and Tax Assess.* 2--3, 25; PRO, E 179/255/4, pt iii, f. 247; ORO, Cal. QS, III, pp. 53, 122; above, social hist. (poor relief).

⁹ ORO, PAR 148/02/A1/1, *passim*.

¹⁰ ORO, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. c 40, ff. 110 sqq; *ibid.* PAR 148/04/F1/1 (churchwardens' accts, 1853--1907).

¹¹ For 2 cottages owned by Faringdon poor-law union in 1867, above, social hist. (poor relief).

¹² *Census*, 1901--11; it nevertheless remained part of Faringdon poor-law union and registration district.

¹³ Kelmscott parish meeting min. book, 1894--2001 (in parish custody in 2001); *Oxf. Dioc. Year Book* (2001), 82.

¹⁴ ORO, RO 3267.