

accentuated by the Black Death in 1348 and other outbreaks of bubonic plague in the early 1360s and the mid 1370s to such an extent that half the population may have perished. In theory all land was owned by the king, who granted it to tenants-in-chief in return for certain services. Each of these held one or more manors, their tenants cultivating them in two or three large open unenclosed fields. Each farmer had a number of arable strips of a half to one acre scattered over the open fields between those of his neighbours, one of the fields lying fallow (i.e. uncropped) during the year, while the other was cropped. Meadow lands were kept separate for hay, and both meadows and arable land were grazed as common pasturage for the villagers' sheep and cattle after the hay and corn had been harvested. In return for their occupation of land the tenants had to do so many days' work each year for the lord of the manor on his demesne land or home farm, and make payments, often in kind, to him on changes of tenancy and on many other occasions.

It is in a surviving fragment of the court rolls of the manor of Sibford Gower that the first hard evidence is available to connect the family with this manor. The actual date was 4 May, although the year is missing; sometime between 1340 and 1375 is probable. The entry mentions that Richard Potter was fined 4d. because he had put his land out to farm to Thomas Sowden, against the custom of the manor.