

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: The Domesday Book, 1086

One of the most remarkable documents generated by the new circumstances King William faced in England was Domesday Book, a veritable treasure trove on information for King William (as well as for the modern historian!). The following documents explain some of the chief features of the survey.

The Genesis of the Survey, 1086

The king spent Christmas with his councilors at Gloucester, and held his court there for five days, which was followed by a three-day synod held by the archbishop and the clergy. At this synod Maurice was elected bishop of London and William bishop of Norfolk and Robert bishop of Cheshire: they were all chaplains of the king. After this the king had important deliberations and exhaustive discussions with his council about this land and how it was peopled, and with what sort of men. Then he sent his men all over England into every shire to ascertain how many hundreds of 'hides' of land there were in each shire. He also had it recorded how much land his archbishops had, and his diocesan bishops, his abbots and his earls, and--though I may be going into too great detail--and what or how much each man who was a landholder here in England had in land or live-stock, and how much money it was worth. So very thoroughly did he have the inquiry carried out that there was not a single 'hide,' not one virgate of land, not even--it is shameful to record it, but it did not seem shameful for him to do--not even one ox, nor one cow, nor one pig which escaped notice in his survey. And all the surveys were subsequently brought to him.

William the Conqueror Assessed

If anyone would know what manner of man King William was, the glory that he obtained, and of how many lands he as lord, then will we describe him as we have known him, we who had looked upon him and who once lived at his court. This King William...was a very wise and great man, and more honored and more powerful than any of his predecessors. He was mild to those good men who loved God, but severe beyond measure to those who withstood his will. He founded a noble monastery [Battle Abbey] on the spot where God permitted him to conquer England, and he established monks in it, and he made it very rich. In his days the great monastery at Canterbury was built, and many others also throughout England; moreover, this land was filled with monks who lived after the Rule of St. Benedict; and such was the state of religion in his days that all who would, might observe that which was prescribed by their respective orders. King William was also held in much reverence. He wore his crown three times

every year when he was in England: at Easter he wore it at Winchester, at Pentecost at Westminster, and at Christmas at Gloucester. And at these times all the men of England were with him, archbishops, bishops, abbots and earls, thanes and knights. So also was he a very stern and wrathful man, so that none durst do anything against his will, and he kept in prison those earls who acted against his pleasure. He removed bishops from their sees and abbots from their offices, and he imprisoned thanes, and at length he spared not his own [half-]brother Odo. This Odo was a very powerful bishop in Normandy. His see was that of Bayeux, and he was foremost to serve the king. He had an earldom in England, and when William was in Normandy he [Odo] was the first man in this country, and him did William cast into prison. Amongst other things, the good order that William established is not to be forgotten. It was such that any man...might travel over the kingdom with a bosom full of gold unmolested; and no man durst kill another, however great the injury he might have received from him. He reigned over England, and being sharp-sighted to his own interest, he surveyed the kingdom so thoroughly that there was not a single hide of land throughout the whole of which he knew not the possessor, and how much it was worth, and this he afterward entered in his register. The land of the Britons [Wales] was under his sway, and he built castles therein; moreover he had full dominion over the Isle of Man; Scotland was also subject to him...; the land of Normandy was his by inheritance, and he possessed the earldom of Maine, and had he lived two years longer, he would have subdued Ireland by his prowess, and that without a battle. Truly there was much trouble in these times, and very great distress. He caused castles to be built and oppressed the poor. The king was also of great sternness, and he took from his subjects many marks of gold, and many hundred pounds of silver, and this, either with or without right, and with little need. He was given to avarice and greedily loved gain. He made large forests for the deer, and enacted laws therewith, so that whoever killed a hart or a hind should be blinded. As he forbade killing the deer, so also the boars; and he loved the tall stags as if he were their father. He also commanded concerning the hares, that they should go free. The rich complained and the poor murmured, but he was so sturdy that he took no notice of them; they must will all that the king willed, if they would live, or keep their lands,...or be maintained in their rights. Alas that any man should so exalt himself... We have written concerning him these things, both good and bad, that virtuous men may follow after the good, and wholly avoid the evil, and may go in the way that leadeth to the kingdom of heaven.

EXTRACT FROM DOMESDAY SURVEY OF THE COUNTY OF NORFOLK.

Domesday Book, Vol. 2, pp 153-154. Latin.

The land of Robert Malet.

Fredrebruge Hundred and half Glorestorp. Godwin, a freeman, held it. Two carucates of land in the time of king Edward. Then and afterwards 8 villains; now 3. Then and afterwards 3 bordars; now 5. At all times 3 serfs, and 30 acres of meadow. At all times 2 carucates in demesne. Then half a carucate of the men, and now. Woods for 8

swine, and 2 mills. Here are located 13 socmen, of 40 acres of land. When it was received there were 2 r.,¹ now 1. At all times 8 swine, then 20 sheep, and it is worth 60 shillings.

There is situated there, in addition, one berewick, as the manor of Heuseda. In the time of king Edward, 1 carucate of land; then and afterwards 7 villains, now 5. At all times 12 bordars, and 3 serfs, and 40 acres of meadow; 1 mill. Woods for 16 swine and 1 salt pond and a half Then 1 r., and now and 14 swine, 30 sheep, and 50 goats. In this berewick are located 3 socmen, of 10 acres of land, and it is worth 30 shillings. The two manors have 2 leagues in length and 4 firlongs in breadth. Whosoever is tenant there, returns 12 pence of the twenty shillings of geld.

Scerpham Hundred Culverstestun Edric held it in the time of king Edward. Two carucates of land. At all times there were 4 villains, and 1 bordar, and 4 serfs; 5 acres of meadow and two carucates in the demesne. Then and afterwards 1 carucate, now one-half At all times 1 mill and one fish-pond. Here is located 1 socmen of the king, of 40 acres of land; which his predecessors held only as commended and he claims his land from the gift of the king. Then and afterwards there was one carucate, now 2 bovates, and 2 acres of meadow. At all times two r. *[note: word indicated by "r" has not been identified]*, and 4 geese; then 300 sheep, now 300 less 12; then 16 swine now 3. Then and afterwards it was worth 60 shillings, now 80; and there could be one plow. Walter of Caen holds it from Robert.

Heinstede Hundred. In Sasilingaham Edric, the predecessor of Robert Malet, held 2 sokes and a half, of 66 acres of land, now Walter holds them. Then 9 bordars, now 13. At all times 3 carucates and a half among all, and 3 acres of meadow, and the eighth part of a mill; and under these 1 soke of 6 acres of land. At all times half a carucate. Then it was worth 30 shillings, now it returns 50 shillings.

In Scotessa Ulcetel was tenant, a free man commended to Edric, in the time of king Edward of 30 acres of land. At that time 1 bordar, afterward and now 2. Then half a carucate, none afterward nor now. It was at all times worth 5 shillings and 4 pence; the same.