

HIGH LITTLETON DOMESDAY SURVEY

Geld

Ethelred II (son of Edgar) became King of Wessex in 978, at the aged of 10. When Wessex, the last kingdom to hold out against the Danes, was faced with invasion, he attempted to buy them off at first by payments of "Danegeld". In a change of tactics Ethelred was later responsible for a massacre of Danes but before the end of the century Wessex had all but collapsed. Ethelred subsequently fled to Normandy and in 1013 the western thanes submitted to the Danish King Swegen at Bath. Ethelred (and his son Edmund) died in 1016 and he was succeeded by the Danish King Canute.

Ethelred raised the money to buy off (and/or fight) the Danes by levying a tax (geld) on each hide of land. Originally a hide was reckoned to be sufficient land to support one family and in the south of England was equivalent to about 120 acres. Long after the Danes were a threat, landowners continued to pay tax to successive Kings and geld became in effect our first land tax. Geld was normally computed at 12s. per hide.

1066 was a year in which Britain had three kings. Edward the Confessor died on 5th January 1065/6. He was succeeded by Harold, who died at the battle of Senlac Hill (Hastings) on 14th October 1066. His adversary William, Duke of Normandy was crowned at Westminster on Christmas Day 1066.

William set about building castles in appropriate locations as part of a regional defensive system. After a series of small rebellions, William decided that enough was enough. The English landowners, who survived Hastings, had been allowed to retain their land at first. Nevertheless, William regarded all the land as his ultimately, to dispose of at his pleasure. He therefore dispossessed all the English landowners and gave their land to his Norman followers. Those, whom he regarded as having rendered the most valuable service, were given the most manors. Geoffrey, the Bishop of Coutances had proved himself a brave soldier and for his part in the conquest had been rewarded with some 170 manors (including High Littleton and Hallatrow), the governorship of Bristol, Bishopric of Exeter, Abbacy of Malmesbury and possessions in other parts of the country. He returned to live in Normandy and died in 1093. The manors were held directly from the King in return for military service and in most cases were promptly sub-let to other Normans. A system of central government was established with local power devolved to the King's Sheriffs.

Geld continued to be paid and there was a particularly heavy assessment in 1084. In 1085 William raised a large army of foreign mercenaries to help meet the threat of a Danish invasion, billeting the foreign troops on English landholders. The tax and billeting highlighted the fact that some of the records were out of date and some ownership was disputed. This was one of the things that precipitated the Domesday Survey.

Domesday Survey

The Saxon Chronicle records that ... *"at Gloucester in midwinter..... the King had deep speech and sent men all over England to each shire to find out what or how much each landholder held in land and livestock, and what it was worth. The returns were brought to him."*

The survey was carried out in 1086 and was conducted by asking six questions, which were:

1. The name of the place. Who held it, before 1066 and now.
2. How many hides. How many ploughs, both those in lordship and the men's.
3. How many villagers, cottagers and slaves, how many free men and Freeman.
4. How much woodland, meadow and pasture. How many mills and fishponds.
5. How much has been added or taken away. What the total value (*in taxable terms*) was and is.
6. How much each freeman or Freeman had or has. All threefold:
before 1066,
when King William gave it,
and now; and if more can be had than at present.

The procedure was that the Commissioners took evidence on oath *"from the Sheriff; from all the barons and their Frenchmen; and from the whole Hundred, the priests, the reeves and six villagers from each village."* Four Frenchmen and Four Englishmen from each hundred were sworn to verify the detail. Besides being a census and tax assessment, the Domesday Survey provided a definitive record so that every man should know his rights and not usurp another's. It was reported that William also sent a second set of Commissioners to shires they did not know, where they were themselves unknown, to check their predecessors' survey, and report culprits to the King. No one could accuse William of not being thorough and yet the whole operation was completed within a year.

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The information, in the form of answers to the specific questions, was brought to Winchester, corrected where necessary, abridged (mainly by the omission of livestock), arranged into counties and by landholders within counties and copied into a large volume. Besides the Exchequer version of Domesday, information for some counties was copied into another volume. There is also an Exeter version, which contains interesting variations from the Exchequer version. The Exeter version includes the count of livestock. No questions were asked about the church and therefore one would not expect to see any reference thereto in the answers.

A translation of "Domesday" with variations in the Exeter version shown in square brackets and explanations in round brackets and italics reads:

Radulf (*Ralph Rufus*) holds from the bishop (*of Coutances*) Liteltone (*High Littleton*). Alfwold [Alnoth] held it at the time of King Edward (*before 1066*). It paid geld for 5 hides. There is land for 5 ploughs. In demesne (lordship) 2 ploughs [& 4 hides & 1½ virgates (*4 virgates = 1 hide*)], with 1 serf (*slave*). 4 villeins (*villagers*) and 6 bordars (*smallholders*) with 3 ploughs [& the rest of the land]. There is a mill paying 50d., 32 acres of meadow & 66 acres of pasture. In Bath a burgess pays 15d. [6 beasts (*cattle*), 2 swine (*pigs*) and 83 sheep]. It was and is worth 60 shillings.

Roger holds from the bishop Helgetrev (*Hallatrow*). 4 thanes held it [in pariter*; a woman held 2 hides, Sheerwold 1½ hides, Alfwold ½ hide and Fordret (*Forthred*) 3½ virgates] at the time of King Edward. It paid geld for 5 hides less half a virgate of land. There is land for 6 ploughs. In demesne there are [3½ hides and] 1½ ploughs. 4 villeins and 3 bordars and 3 cottars with 2 ploughs [& the rest of the land]. [There is 1 cob (*riding horse*) and 17 sheep]. There are 27 acres of meadow and 33 acres of pasture. It was and is worth 60 shillings. [*3 hides & 3½ virgates have been added to it, which 3 thanes held jointly in King Edward's time; value 23s.; when the bishop acquired them 34s. 6d.].

**pariter can be translated as either jointly or in parage. Parage is a form of land tenure, whereby a deceased's land is held jointly by his sons or daughters. Only one of these, normally the eldest, was usually responsible to King for the services due from the land but the other heirs did not pay him homage.*

***2 hides was clearly intended, which makes it add up and also agree with the geld at 12s. per hide.*

Thanes held their land directly from the King and were the local lords. Villeins were roughly the equivalent of farmers, who held land in return for providing a range of agricultural services on the demesne farm and also had the right to graze livestock in the common pastures and to take hay from the common meadow. On his death a villein's heirs could continue to hold the land on payment of a heriot or fine. Bordars were smallholders, holding enough land for their own subsistence in return for agricultural and menial service to the lord, whilst cottars held at most 5 acres of land and had to labour on the lord's land. The serf was at the bottom of the social scale, owned nothing, belonged to the manor farm, and could be sold by the lord.

Numbers given above were heads of families, so, taking an average of 5 to a family, the population of High Littleton was about 50-60 and Hallatrow much the same.

The Saxons, Alfwold, Sheerwold and Alfwold, had land in many other places and may not have lived in High Littleton or Hallatrow. The same may apply to the Norman Ralph and Roger, although one could speculate that Roger owned the horse in Hallatrow. It is also interesting to note that Radulphus Rufus (Ralph)'s son, another Radulphus Rufus, later married a daughter of Azelin, who held the manor of Farrington.

Assuming a hide to be approximately 120 acres, the areas according to Domesday were not too different from the detailed survey of High Littleton made in 1793 (683 acres against 5 hides or 600 acres) and Hallatrow in 1802 (574 acres against 585 acres), from which it is reasonable to deduce that the boundaries of the two separate manors of High Littleton and Hallatrow in 1086 were more or less the same as they were over 900 years later.

MLB