DITTON
AND
DOMESDAY

Some notes by Peter Fussell

The Making of Anglo-Saxon England

The occupation of Britain by Roman forces in AD43 was part of a strategy to strengthen the defence of the Roman Empire's northern perimeter. When the Roman departed at the beginning of the fifth century, recalled to defend the heart of the Empire against the Goths, they left Britain wholly unprotected against attack by raiding warriors from mainland Europe, from northern Britain and from Ireland.

These attacks developed into the gradual conquest of the whole of Britain south of the Scottish kingdom of Strathclyde and surviving Britons fled into Wales and the South-West peninsula. By the beginning of the 7th century England had settled into a 'heptarchy' of seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

The beginning of the 9th century saw the first of the many plundering raids, by 'Northmen' from Scandinavia, upon targets around the eastern and southern English coast. By AD880 much of the eastern side of England was under Danish control and it was only the military genius of Alfred (King of Wessex, 871-901) that enabled the West Saxons prevent the Vikings from over-running the whole of England.

Indeed, Alfred's achievements, continue by his able descendants Edward, Athelstan and Edgar, helped the English to recapture the Danelaw and, by so doing created a united Kingdom of England.

However, at the end of the century, further Viking attacks were mounted, this tome on a larger scale and so highly-organised that by 1013 Svein, the Danish King, was accepted as King of England by much of the country. Ethelred the Unready maintained a precarious hold on South-East England, mainly by the payment of huge sums of money to the Danes to 'buy them off', but the deaths of Svein in 1014 and of Ethelred and his son Edmund in 1016 brought Svein's son Cnut to the throne of a once-again united England, which remained in Danish hands until 1042. In that year Edward, Ethelred's second son, assumed the throne.

Events leading up to the Norman invasion

Edward was almost 40 years old when he became King and he stepped into a difficult inheritance. Twenty-eight years of his early life had been spent in Normandy, exiled from 'Danish' England, so he was not particularly well known in his home land. He made his court a cosmopolitan gathering with many supporters from Normandy and it was this strong continental connection which prompted the childless Edward to nominate, it is alleged, William duke of Normandy, as his heir to the English throne – this did not please Earl Godwin at all.

Godwin was something of an upstart; raised to eminence by Cnut and married to Cnut's sister-in-law he was given one of the three great earldom's in the country and became the most influential magnate in the kingdom. He succeeded in arranging for his daughter Edith to marry Edward, thus assuring for himself great power at court after Edward's coronation, and obtained for two of his sons (Swein and Harold) substantial earldoms in central England. The House of Godwin dominated English political history for half a century up to the Conquest.

The Wessex earldom passed to Harold, on Godwin's death, and Harold's considerable statesmanship and military ability so impressed Edward that, on his deathbed on 5 January 1066, he is said to have bequeathed his throne to Harold.

Thus William, duke of Normandy, and Harold Godwinsson, earl of Wessex, may each have believed in a personal entitlement to the English throne but Harold, being closer to the action took the initiative. Despite his own complete lack of royal blood, despite Edward's earlier oath to duke William and despite considerable opposition from the court Harold Gowinsson seized the throne and had himself crowned Harold II, King of England, by the Saxon Archbishop Stigand on 6 January – the day of Edward's funeral.

The news travelled speedily to William!

The Year 1066

However, William and Harold Godwinsson were not the only contenders for the English throne when Edward died because Edward had ruled with the tacit support of the Danes who still occupied a substantial part of the country and who, by astute bargaining, had kept other marauding groups (especially the Norwegian Vikings) at bay. As part of his strategy in this, Cnut had agreed with Magnus, King of Norway, that should either die without an heir the other would hold both Kingdoms – and it was upon this un-constitutional pact that Harald Sigurdsson of Norway, the last of this formidable Viking Kings, based his dubious claim to the English crown in 1066.

Harald Sigurdsson mounted an invasion fleet and arrived off the north-east coast in mid-Autumn. He sailed up the Humber estuary and the Ouse as far as Riccall and on 20 September at Gate Fulford on the southern outskirts of York routed and English army hurriedly assembled by the northern earls Edwin and Morcar; he then withdrew in preparation for a siege of York.

The news of this northern invasion reached Harold Godwinsson in London as he prepared to repel an attack on the southern coast by duke William; the news presented Harold with a grave tactical problem. With a typically bold decision he chose to march his army northwards and, covering the 200 miles in just 7 days, fell upon the Vikings in their camp at Stamford Bridge on 25 September and put them to rout; Harald Sigurdsson was killed in the battle.

Three days later, William and his invasion fleet made landfall at Pevensey.

Another forced march brought Harold and his exhausted army back to London by 6 October but five days later, refreshed and reinforced, they were on the move again hoping to achieve a surprise attack on Williams' army.

William, by now, had set up camp in Hastings where conditions were better than at Pevensey for unloading his supply ships. Learning of Harold's departure from London William promptly marched northwards and, only 6 miles out of Hastings, came upon Harold's troops camped on Senlac Hill, a spur of the Downs rising 50 feet or more out of a boggy valley. It was just before 9 o'clock on the morning of 14 October.

Harold's troops, not expecting to engage with William's army so soon, were not deployed for battle and were obliged to take up a defensive position. Throughout the day Harold's "wall of shields" defied repeated attacks but, as evening approached, a final onslaught by William's troops over-ran Harold's hill-top position and overwhelmed the defenders. Harold was slain and Norman domination over England had begun.

1066 was an action-packed year for England – three major battles had been fought on English soil, three kings had resigned and three kings had died. High drama by any standards and a turning point for European history.

Background to the Domesday Survey

In the years immediately following the Conquest, William enforced a radical change in landholding and replaced all the Anglo-Saxon manorial lords by his Norman compatriots. No doubt these grants of land, at least the earlier ones, were word-of-mouth affairs attested by spiritual and la witnesses but with no permanent written record. Inevitably, in course of time, many disputes arose over the terms of these grants; landholders argued over their title to and extent of, their lands and no bureaucratic machinery existed to settle these arguments.

An area where detailed information was maintained centrally related to the collection of geld. Geld was originally a charge exacted by Anglo-Saxon kings on their subjects to bu-off Viking raiders but, by William's reign, had become an annual tax levied to finance the court. With increasing expenditure on the defence of the realm William was always in the market for extra funds and the prospect of a reappraisal of tax-liability might have held great attraction for him.

Another area of concern to William related to the actuarial assessments of the feudal wealth of his tenants- in-chief. How had some of them acquired such vast estates without the king knowing about it? Were some getting too big for their boots? Was the king getting his rightful dues from them?

For these three reasons – land titles, tax liability, land assessment – William decided on a full survey of the country to provide him with up-to-date information. The king and his Witan (council) met formally three ties each year to discuss state business; the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records, for the year 1085:

> "… The king spent Christmas with his council at Gloucester and held court there for five days and this was followed by a three-day synod, attended by the archbishop and clergy … After this the king had much thought and exhaustive discussions with his council about this country, how it was occupied and with what sorts of people. Then he sent his men all over England into every shire to find out how many hundred hides there were in each shire, how much land and cattle they king himself had in the country and what annual dues were his…"

The Witan's approval of William's proposal for a Survey must therefore have been given at the very beginning of January 1086.

Compiling Domesday

In a document "Excerption de Chronica Mariniani" compiled in 1086 by Robert Losinga, Bishop of Hereford, he writes "… by order of William, King of the English, there was made a Survey of the whole of England, that is to say, of the lands of the several provinces, and of the possessions of each and all of the magnates. This was done in respect of ploughland and habitations, and of men both bond and free, both those who dwelt in cottages and those who had houses and arable land and in respect of ploughs and horses and other animals …"

No single group of officials could have dealt with the collection of such a vast amount of information within a reasonable period of time. The country was therefore divided into regions, possibly eight in all, with a panel of Commissioners assigned to each region. A region would comprise a number of counties (from 3 to 6, according to their sixe) and similarity of treatment of the recorded information for certain counties enables an intelligent guess to be made as to the composition of the eight regions. Since the Commissioners travelled around each region gathering information, the regions were known as Circuits.

The likely terms of reference for the Commissioners have been reserved in a 12th century document drawn up to list the lands owned, in three circuits, by the Abbey at Ely. The list, compiled from early drafts of the circuit returns, is preceded by this passage:

> "… Here follows the inquiry lands which the King's barons made according to the oaths of the sheriff and of all the barons and of all their Frenchmen and of the whole Hundred courts – the priest, the reeve and six villeins from each village. They inquired:
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> > What is the name of the manor?
> > Who held it in 1066 and who now?
> > How many hides are there, how many plough-teams in demesne and how many held by tenants?
> > How many villeins, cottars, slaves, freemen and sokemen?
> > How much woodland, meadow and pastures?
> > How many mills and fisheries?
> > How much woodland, meadow and pasture?
> > How many mills and fisheries?
> > How much has been added to taken away?
> > What was it worth then and now?
> > All this three times over; as it was in King Edward's time, when King William granted the manor, and now."

It is likely that the Commissioners made the first draft of their circuit returns from written statements supplied by each landholder; these statements were then 'sworn' by the Hundred jurors (priest, reeve, six villeins). After this the corrected drafts were re-arranged by landholder within counties and the final returns submitted to the Exchequer at Winchester. Here a fair copy was made of all the returns and, in making the copy, all but the essential material was discarded and the remainder written down in a severely abbreviated form. From the standardised treatment of the presentation and from the uniform style of calligraphy it may be safely adduced that the copy was the work of one scribe, probably the royal chaplain Samson who was later made bishop of Worcester.

The exercise was almost completed, with one circuit (No VII) to transcribe, when King William died on 9 September 1087; the transcription work then ceased. Later when it was decided to bind the folios were of a page size smaller than those used for the Exchequer transcriptions.

Domesday Book

This Domesday Book is, in reality, two books; a smaller one of 900 pages each 11 inces by 8 inches and a larger one of 800 pages each 15 inches by 11 inches. The smaller volume covers Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk, the other covers the rest of England except Cumberland, Durham, Lancashire, Northumberland and Westmorland which counties were not included in the Survey – an indication of the earlier devastation of the north by William.

The layout of the two volumes is broadly similar; in them each county is self-contained and its description starts with details of the county town. Then follows a list of the tenants-in-chief naming first the King, then the bishop, religious houses and la magnates and finally the minor tenants, Then follows, for each of these tenants in the order listed, a detailed description of the several manors held, the manors being grouped in their Hundreds.

Surrey is the third county in the larger Domesday volume. Forty-two land-holders are listed, ranging from King William (who held substantial estates at Guildford, Woking, Kingston and Merton) down to individual servants of the King (such as Ansgot the Interpreter and Tesselin the Cook) who held single manors. The Bishop of Bayeux appears fifth in the list of landholders, Richard of Tonbridge nineteenth.

Two manors of Ditton are recorded, both in the Hundred of Kingston, the first at page 32 listed under the lands of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux and the second at page 35 under the lands of Richard of Tonbridge, known earlier as Richard fitzGilbert.

Two other entries, again in Kingston Hundred and both under the lands of Richard, record two manors of Tolworth which were part of Ditton until Tolworth was transferred to the Surbiton Urban District late in the 19th century.

Ditton in Domesday – DITONE

The entry for the first Ditton manor reads:

> "Wadard holds, of the Bishop, DITONE. Leuugar held it Harold and served hi, but could have gone with this land whither he pleased. When he died, in the time of King Edward, he divided this land between his three sons. It was then assessed for six hides, now for two and a half hides. The land is for two ploughs, Now there is a plough and a half, four bordars, four serfs, part of mill worth fifteen pence, four acres of meadow and wood for twenty hogs, In the time of King Edward it was worth four pounds, later forty shillings and now four pounds. He who holds it of Warded renders him fifty shillings and the service of one knight."

Several points in this entry are worthy of comment:

1. WADARD is depicted on the Bayeux Tapestry and is singled out by name; since only seven Normans are thus identified on the whole 231 feet length of the tapestry he must have been a figure of special note to those for whom the tapestry was designed. Wadard is recorded as holding lad of the Bishop in several counties, although his Ditton holding was the only one in Surrey.

2. The BISHOP referred to was Odo, half-brother to William the Conqueror. He played a leading part in establishing William on the English throne and his rewards were great; he was enriched with over four hundred manors in various parts of the country making him, after the King, principal landholder in the kingdom.

3. The HIDE was initially an Anglo-Saxon term for the area of land which could maintain a peasant and his family. It was probably of the order of 120 acres but, over the years, gradually transformed into a unit of tax assessment.

4. The standard PLOUGH was a fairly heavy piece of agricultural equipment with a single wheel and no mould-board. Eight oxen were needed to pull it and since few peasants owned that many oxen the plough-team was frequently a corporate exercise.

5. The VILLEIN was a typical member of a village community owning, perhaps ¼ acre and a share in a plough team. He had duties to perform on his lord's demesne and sometimes paid rent.

6. The BORDAR was of a different class; although he had a cottage and some land he did not have the rights, or responsibilities, of a villain.

7. Lowest of all in rank was the SERF, not so much the least free of all the peasant but rather a thing , a possession of his master and frequently listed with the assets of a manor and not with its inhabitants.

8. A MILL for grinding seed was an essential in the Domesday economy; wheat, barley and oats were the main ingredients of the diet and used also for making the beer, the staple beverage. Mills would be water-driven. The use of the term "part of a mill" dd not imply a state of dilapidation but signified one which served more than one village or one which was owned by several individuals.

9. MEADOW land was especially precious and always separately identified in Domesday. It was essential for producing the hay required for the livestock.

10. Swine grazed not on the meadowland but in the WOODLAND. The right to feed swine was known as pannage.

11. In Saxon times the POUND sterling was the value of a pound weight of pure silver and was the basic 'large unit' of money; no coin was struck, of course, to this value.

12. The PENNY (derived from the Old German 'penig' meaning 'pledge') was, likewise of silver and there were 240 to the pound. It weighed approximately 22 grains, was introduced in around AD765 and was the only coin struck in England until 1279; it continued as a silver coin until 1797.

13. In Saxon times the SHILLING existed as a unit in accountancy but not as a minted coin (much as is the guinea today). Derived from the Old German 'scilling' meaning 'division' it represented either 4 or 5 pence, according to location, but was standardised at 12 pence by the Normans. (The silver coin known as the shilling was first struck in 1504).

14. KNIGHT SERVICE was an undertaking to supply a landowner with the services of a fully-armed knight, and his necessary servants, for forty days each year in exchange for a grant of land. This mention of knight service for Ditton is the only instance of such service recorded for Surrey.

Ditton in Domesday – DITUNE

The entry for the second Ditton manor reads:

"Picot holds, of Richard, DITUNE. Almar held it of King Edward; it was then assessd for five hides. This land, and that above, are now assessed for four hides. The land is for four ploughs, in demesne there is one plough and there are two villeins and nine bordars with two and a half ploughs. There is a church, a mill worth nine shillings and wood for fifteen hogs. There is one serf and in Southwark there is a house rendering five hundred herrings. In the time of King Edward it was worth sixty shillings, afterwards thirty shillings and now fifty shillings yet it is at farm for four pounds."

Points worth noting include:

15. PICOT was not an uncommon name though the relationship of this Roger Picot with the notorious sheriff of Cambridge is not known.

    Roger was the son of Gilbert Crispin, earl of Brionne, and first known as Richard fitzGilbert. He was entrusted with the strategic at Tonbridge and subsequently known as Richard de Tonbridge. Richard was the founder of the de Clare family and was ancestor to the earls of Gloucester.

17. The house in which the lord of the manor lived, together with the land farmed by the lord, was known as the DEMESNE.

18. The CHURCH was probably quite small, possibly timber-built but probably on the site of the present Garden of Rest. This is the only mention of a church in the four Domesday entries for Ditton and Tolworth. Thames Ditton church, although built in the 12th century as chapel-of-ease for Kingston Church , was not separated from Kingston and made a perpetual curacy until 1769 whilst the Tolworth churches date from the 19th century.

19. The tenant-in-chief of this Ditton manor must have held property in Southwark from which he received an annual rent of FIVE HUNDRED HERRINGS. With corn and meat as the staple food, fish must have been a welcome variation to the diet.

However, small the Southwark hose, 10 herrings per week rent is a good indication of the value of a fish dish in Domesday times.

The Tolworth Manors

The first entry relating to a manor in Tolworth appears at p 35 of the Domesday Book immediately preceding the DITUNE entry and details the manor referred to in the DITUNE entry as being "… that above …".

The entry reads:

> "Picot hold, of Richard, TALEORDE. Alwin held if of King Edward; he could go where he would. Then it was assessed for five hides. The land is for three ploughs, in demesne there are two ploughs and there are seven villeins and eight bordars with three ploughs. There are seven serfs. There is a mill without dues and 5½ acres and half a rod of meadow land. In the time of King Edward it was worth sixty shillings, afterwards twenty shillings and now sixty shillings."

The second entry, also at p35, reads:

> "Ralph holds, of Richard, TALEORDE. Edmer held it; he could go where he would. In the time of King Edward it was assessed for five hides, now for 2½ hides. The land is for four ploughs and in demesne one plough. There are six villeins and one border with two ploughs. There are two serfs and five acres of meadow. In the time of King Edward and later it was worth forty shillings, now sixty shillings."