

MIDDLESEX  
IN THE TIME OF THE DOMESDAY SURVEY.

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It is a curious fact that we should possess in this country a general Survey, by royal commission, of all the landed property in England, made now eight hundred years ago, the like of which cannot be found in any other country in Europe, nay, in the world—such a Survey, too, as has never been attempted since, and as no minister of the crown would now dare to advise under the royal authority.

True it is that the Domesday Survey is the result of a very arbitrary act of the Crown. William I. having been invited by a large portion of the English to become their king, and having defeated his rival in battle, did not venture to assume the adjunct of Conqueror to his name, or to play the tyrant in his acts, till he had (in a great degree stealthily) fixed himself on his throne, and cheated the people into receiving him as the legitimate and chosen successor of their sainted Edward. We find no charter dated “post Conquestum Angliæ” till many years after he became king. Shakespear wrote advisedly—

This England never did (nor never shall)  
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,  
But when it first did help to wound itself.

It is well known that some eighteen or nineteen years after his accession he issued commissions into all the counties of England to make inquiries as to who were the landowners, the nature of their tenures, and various particulars unnecessary to be stated here. As the Saxon Chronicle says—“After these things the King held a great council, and had much discourse with his Witan of his land, as to how the land was holden, and by what men. He sent over all England into every shire his men, and let them inquire how many hundred hides were in each shire, and what land and cattle the King himself had in the shire, and what rent he ought to receive yearly in each. He let them also

inquire how much land his archbishops had, and his other bishops, and his abbots, and earls, and what and how much every man had who held land within the kingdom, as well in land as in cattle, and how much each was worth. He so permitted the country to be surveyed that there was not a hide or a ploughland that he thought it a shame to tell, or an ox, or a cow, or a hog omitted. And all these things were brought to him in writing." And in another place the Chronicle goes on—"So that there was not a hide of land in England of which he knew not the possessor, or how much it was worth."

I propose now to take a general glance at the result of these inquiries as to our county (the smallest of all but one). If the whole were translated, it would, I fear, afford but little interest. The entire record is now in print, most accurately copied from the original, and is therefore easily accessible to every one who would study its details. I would therefore merely make such observations upon it, in relation to our county, as I venture to hope may not be altogether uninteresting to the Society.

The feudal system had, at the time of the Domesday Survey, been established throughout England. The King, as lord paramount, was ultimate owner of all estates; whatever was unclaimed, whatever was forfeited, then as now, legally belonged to the Crown. There was, and is, no such thing as allodial land; that is, land held absolutely and without a superior in the country. And, as this state of things was then comparatively new, it was doubtless very important that the Crown should have some knowledge of every estate in the country, in which it had universally a reversionary interest, and very generally a present interest in the fee-farm rent paid by each landowner to his feudal lord the King, or to his mesne lord, for his estate. Hence the Survey in general is commonly considered in a fiscal light, as intended to ascertain the rents and rights of the Crown. The amounts of these rents are not stated in the Survey, but they were all put in charge to the several sheriffs, and were returned yearly into the Exchequer, where an account of them is still preserved, back to the time of Henry III., on what are called the pipe rolls, a series of records, next to Domesday, the most ancient and complete of any in the kingdom.

The Survey of our county begins, as in all the rest, with some account of what demesne lands the Crown held in possession, and not granted out. The ancient demesne *manors* of the Crown, that is, manors held in his own hands by Edward the Confessor and by William I., conferred many privileges on their tenants, which need not be particularised here. These privileges were, however, for several centuries, of much importance, and were frequently claimed as such in our Courts of Law, where the issue, whether the land was of ancient demesne or not, was never decided by a jury, as in the ordinary case of mere matters of fact, but was always determined by a reference to the Domesday Book, and if the manor in question were found to be entered there under the head of "Terra Regis," that fact alone was conclusive in affirmance of its ancient demesne rights.

Now it is remarkable, I think, that in our county there is no *manor* returned as belonging to the Crown. The entry of the King's property in the county is but short, and I may be excused, perhaps, for translating it here, but as no manor is mentioned, there can be no ancient demesne manor in the county at the present day.

"In Osulvestane (Ossulstone) hundred King William holds 12 acres of land and a half of no-man's-land—this land was and is worth 5s. (yearly); King Edward (the Confessor) held it also. In the same hundred the King hath 30 cotars, who render by the year 14s. 10½d. At Holeburn the King hath two cotars, who render by the year 20d. to the King's sheriff. In the time of King Edward the Sheriff of Middlesex always kept these cotars. William the Chamberlayn renders to the King's sheriff 6s. by the year for the land where his vineyard is set."

I would first observe, that the only locality in the county in which these possessions were situated, mentioned in the Survey, is the hundred of Ossulstone, comprehending, perhaps, nearly one-third of the county, and it is now scarcely possible to trace at what part of this extensive hundred they were: the vineyard mentioned was probably on the site of what afterwards became the property of the see of Ely, and subsequently of Lord Hatton, where the dancing chancellor had his strawberry garden, mentioned in Queen Elizabeth's time.

The cotars (cotarii) seem to have been tenants in fee of small portions of land.

It is not very certain what the *nanesmanesland* is (it is so written): that it can only mean unclaimed land would seem obvious to every one, and that may be simply its meaning, but the word is rarely mentioned in Domesday, and would seem to bear a sort of allodial rather than a feudal signification; but when it is considered that all unclaimed land belonged, under the feudal system, to the King, it is not very intelligible why it should be so seldom returned, or why it should be so in this instance.

One of the greatest obscurities in which time has involved this ancient Survey is in reference to the measures of land there mentioned. Much learning has been exhausted, and ink spilt, on the subject of the word *acre*, reiterated in every page of Domesday, and the safest conclusion as to its extent is, perhaps, that the acre varied in different parts of the country, and that it is utterly impossible to fix any determinate value on the word, as a word of measure or quantity, when used in that record. Long after the Conqueror's time, for instance, the Cornish acre contained about thirty statute acres; and the difficulty is by no means cleared up in documents subsequent to Domesday, where the word acre is used, until the statute of Henry VII., fixing its extent as an universal measure of land all over the kingdom, was passed.

To return to a consideration of the *hundreds*, or great leading divisions into which the several counties are separated, it may be sufficient to say here that in many of the counties there is much obscurity and difficulty on the subject. In some, more hundreds appear than are now known to exist, while in others there are less; and manors and places now in one hundred are frequently found referred to in Domesday as in another hundred, and perhaps in a distant part of the county.

The origin of hundreds, popularly attributed to Alfred, as well as that of all the other territorial divisions, both lay and ecclesiastical, is, doubtless, much connected with ownership of property, and hence we find outlying portions of a county, or hundred, or parish, frequently surrounded by another county, hundred, or parish; because the great landowner who held the

bulk of his estate when these divisions were instituted, in one part, held also outlying portions elsewhere.

But all these difficulties with regard to the hundreds in most of the counties do not exist in Middlesex. The six existing hundreds are all found, and no more, and, in so far as can be judged by a general inspection, their boundaries were and are the same.

Twenty-two owners of *manors* in Middlesex are returned in Domesday; but of these the Church, that is the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Abbot of Westminster, the Abbot of the Holy Trinity at Rouen in Normandy, and the Abbot of Barking, had indeed the lion's share. By far the largest portion of the largest hundred, that of Ossulstone, seems to have belonged to the Bishop and Canons of St. Paul.

Stepney appears to have been a manor of enormous extent, held by the Bishop of London at the time of the Survey, and several sub-manors appendant to it were held by the Canons. There is a remarkable entry as to some of these, viz. : "that the Canons of the Church might give and sell their lands to whom they willed without the licence of the Bishop;" a right they availed themselves of sometimes, as appears by subsequent historical facts. Thus the manor of Portpool, which afterwards belonged to Lord Gray, now Gray's Inn, was the property of one of the canons, who alienated it, and the corpus of the present prebend of Portpool, if indeed any estate remain, is very trifling, though it formerly included the whole manor. So that the entire of these vast church properties can hardly be said to have been holden in mortmain in perpetuity, even at the remote period in question.

The present parishes of St. Leonard, Stratford, Bow, Hackney, St. Matthew Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, Spitalfields, St. George-in-the-East, Shadwell, and Limehouse, are all supposed to have been hamlets in Stepney Manor, and to have been carved out of the original parish.

Then we find that the Canons of St. Paul held Twyford, Willesden, Harlesden, Totchill, St. Pancras, two manors at Islington, Newington, Heston, Hoxton, and Drayton; so that a vast proportion of this hundred of Ossulstone must have belonged to St. Paul's Church.

The Manor of Tiburn, in the same hundred, belonged to the Abbot of the Holy Trinity at Rouen.

The Abbot of Westminster held the manor of his church, also in Ossulstone Hundred, with a sub-manor where four arpenni (an unknown quantity again) of vineyard were lately planted; also Hampstead, and a sub-manor, probably Belsize, and finally Hendon, in the hundred of Helestone.

Eight lay proprietors are returned as holding manors in this hundred, but they were apparently not large, and had no sub-manors appendant.

I have already stated how much it is to be regretted that all the words of measure and quantity used in the Domesday Book have become so entirely obsolete as to be useless for all present purposes, but I would add that there are about 95 manors mentioned in the Survey of our county; these 95 manors are said to have contained altogether about 867 hides, or rather they were rated to the Danegelt in the Saxon times as for that number of hides. The number of square statute acres which the county now contains is pretty well ascertained, viz. 240,000, so that by dividing these acres by the 867 hides we might seem to approximate to a knowledge of the extent of the hide in statute acres; but the result by no means corresponds with preconceived opinions, and we are subject to considerable error from the probable fact that the hide, after all, was not a determinate measure, but had reference to value rather than extent of surface, like the old travelling-posts on the continent, which were measured not by lengths, but by the goodness or difficulty of the road in each post. We cannot be certain that a hide of very productive land was the same in extent as one much less profitable.

Selecting the large number of existing manors returned in Domesday, we shall, I believe, generally find that the spiritual and lay jurisdictions in the county were co-equal, and therefore that the manor and its parish were co-extensive, though some exceptions doubtless occur.

With regard to the state and cultivation of the county at the time the Survey was made, we find (and the observation applies to all the other counties as well,) that in each manor the land, *terra*, is universally limited to land in tillage; then follow the meadow and pasture, *prata et pastura*; and lastly the wood, *silva*,

which seems, I think, to include the mere common and waste; and the number of acres of each description, except as to the wood, is given. Oddly enough, the wood or waste is particularised in no other way than by the number of hogs it will support by its pannage, or hog-feed from acorns, &c. Although, therefore, we cannot get at the absolute measure of wood or waste in any given manor, we can compare the several manors among themselves in this respect, and thereby arrive at the relative proportions of cultivated and uncultivated land. Now the pannage for all the manors in the whole county appears to be sufficient for, in round numbers, about 20,000 hogs, more accurately 19,470; the several manors in Elthorn Hundred will be found equal to nearly 8,000; in Edmonton and in Ossulstone to about 4,000 each; in Gore to rather more than 2,000; and in Isleworth and Spelthorn to 600 or 700 only together. From these data I should conclude that the south-western parts of the county, especially such portions of it as abutted on the Thames and on the Coln, were much more productive and profitable than the rest.

Modern historians complain of the want of historical records in relation to the kingdom of the East-Saxons, including Middlesex (the smallest of the Heptarchy); it is in vain therefore to expect much reliable information as to our county before the period when it became the metropolitan and most important of them all. That the East-Saxon kingdom was an excerpt from that of Kent seems tolerably clear; and it is certain that the Church of St. Paul was erected and endowed by Ethelbert, King of Kent, uncle of Sebert, King of the East-Saxons, about the year 610.

King Athelstan gave also largely to St. Paul's. He died in 941; and William the Conqueror found that Church in possession of the property above mentioned in Middlesex in 1066, so that the Domesday Survey may be said to give us some account of all that part of the county which belonged to St. Paul's for about 400 years before the Conquest.

Among the general inferences to be deduced from the Domesday Survey of Middlesex, we may, I think, gather—

That London was then well-nigh confined within its own wall.

That Westminster had no existence as a town.

That the principal suburban houses (if any) were on the eastern and north-eastern parts of the City, *i. e.* from the Wall to the River Lea eastward, the Thames marshes south, and the rising ground approaching Hornsey north.

That Stepney, or Stebenhithe, and its several dependencies, formed the most populous parts of the county out of the city, and were probably the most profitable and productive also; and, in confirmation of this view, we may observe *incidentally that in 1299* a Parliament was holden in the house of the Lord Mayor of London at Stepney, when Edward I. confirmed the Great Charter.

That the northern part of the county, in the hundreds of Ossulstone, Edmonton, and Gore, included a vast deal of wild, waste, and woodland.

And that its most productive portion, next to the alluvial land of Stebenhithe, was between the Thames, the Coln, and the northern woodland as before mentioned, though many of us recollect much of the waste land of Hounslow Heath before it was reduced to tillage as at present.

It is evident from Domesday Book that at the period of its date there was no royal residence in the county, except the Tower of London; and, whatever may be the importance of the metropolitan county at the present day (and it is hardly possible to overrate that importance), it owes it all to the progressive wealth, magnificence, and influence of the City of London. Neither our Sovereigns nor our Parliament had any fixed local habitation in the county till London became the metropolis of England, and the emporium of the whole world. May we long have to boast of her proud pre-eminence, from which civilisation, learning, and religion may radiate over the whole earth, and promote the happiness of the human family to generations still distant!