

A KNIGHT'S FEE AT ACTON, IN THE MANOR OF FULHAM

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The medieval history of much of Middlesex has still been little studied from documentary sources. One reason for this is the difficulty posed by large manors which covered a number of settlements. Local historians have either been daunted to realise that the place in which they are interested is not named in Domesday Book and has no early manorial records of its own, or conversely have been misled by assuming that the boundaries of the named manor corresponded more or less with the boundaries of the parish or borough of the same name. The bishop of London's two large manors of Stepney and Fulham have contributed particularly to this problem. Both are described in Domesday Book as covering a large area with a considerable population;¹ and later evidence confirms that the Book's apparent silence about many settlements with Anglo-Saxon place names is because they were included within these two manors.

The manor of Fulham was assessed at 50 hides in Domesday Book. Five of these were held by the chapter of St. Paul's, and have been identified as Sutton and Chiswick (effectively the land in the loop of the Thames between Old Brentford and Hammersmith).² From the evidence of later manorial records the other 45 hides certainly comprised a solid block of land from Fulham and Hammersmith in the east through Acton to Ealing and Drayton in the west, and probably also some land at Finchley. The latter was adjacent to land which was considered part of Stepney, but although the history of this northern block is obscure its allocation between Fulham and Stepney was probably settled before 1066.³ In 1086, as apparently in 1066, the bishop was holding 40 of these 45 hides himself, but the remaining five were held of him, in 1066 by two sokemen and in 1086 by Fulchered.

No proper attempt has ever been made to identify Fulchered's holding. Feret, who thought it might have been Paddenswick in Hammersmith, and Miss Miles, who suggested Wormholt in Hammersmith, both failed to realise that as the manor of Fulham covered a wider area than modern Fulham and Hammersmith, Fulchered's fee could lie elsewhere.⁴ A general study of the bishop of London's estates has shown that in most cases land which was held of him in 1086 was later (and probably then) held by knight service. Equally, although other free tenements sometimes known as manors were created later, they were not normally held by knight service.⁵ Within the manor of Fulham there were some of these free tenements, for instance Paddenswick, but they were not held by knight service nor can they have been as large as five hides. The manor of Wormholt was probably created from assarting in the early 12th century and, like many such assarts, it always remained in the bishop's hands.⁶ The only land in Fulham which was later regularly recorded as held by military tenure was a five-hide tenement in Acton, held for the service of half a knight. A couple of 14th-century references have been found to premises in Finchley held for a quarter and/or a fifth of a knight, but the lack of earlier and later evidence and the smaller fractions suggest that these may not have been genuine military tenures.⁷

The following account of the five-hide tenement at Acton is still incomplete, and many of the pieces of the documentary jigsaw are missing. It cannot even be proved that this and

Fulchered's tenement were one and the same, although the probability is strong, but some light can be shed on the manorial structure of Acton. Local historians from Lysons onwards have commented on the existence of the main manor, held by the bishop, and of two subordinate ones held respectively by the dean and chapter of St. Paul's and the priory of St. Bartholomew's. But beyond citing a single deed for each sub-manor they have not investigated the relationship between them.⁸ It can now be shown that both the sub-manors were formed largely, if not entirely, from the five-hide tenement. The analysis also provides some new information about members of two important families, the FitzAlufs, famous in London history, and a sister of Walter de Merton.

Apart from the absence of records, there are two major difficulties in trying to trace the descent of the tenement. The first lies in the notorious unreliability of medieval land measurement. In Middlesex the hide or carucate traditionally covered 120 acres, but these assessments were originally made as valuations for allocating taxes and other royal impositions, rather than on a strictly areal basis. They were restricted to arable land and continued to exist even when more accurate measurements were known. Deeds which state the number of acres being transferred usually fail to say whether they are conventional or actual, though it is an obvious guess that round figures are more likely to be conventional. In one early 13th-century document to be considered below the donor, having granted 120 acres of arable land and said how many acres lay in each field, adds a croft of unstated size specifically to compensate for the shortfall in the supposed 120 acres.⁹ Any attempt to tabulate exactly the amounts of land referred to in the various records founders on this problem, particularly as the tenement contained a considerable amount of non-arable land. On several occasions there are pairs of deeds which must be referring to more or less the same land but which give slightly different totals. Each time it is impossible to say whether the amounts involved varied in fact, in measurement, or even simply through scribal error.

The second problem lies in the complexities of subinfeudation. While the bishop of London, the tenant-in-chief of Acton, could not sell his interest, the actual tenant(s) and any intermediate landlords could sell theirs, even though until the Statute of *Quia Emptores* of 1290 they retained nominal overlordship. The deeds which recorded such transfers usually failed to mention the other landlords, and it is therefore often impossible to obtain any total picture, or to relate individual documents to each other. Our only guideline is that we are tracing a tenement which was originally assessed at five hides, and which owed the service of half a knight to the bishop of London.

After Domesday Book, there are no relevant records until the early 13th century. Although the gap is slightly shortened by references which they make to earlier events, it is the complete silence for the first half of the 12th century which prevents us from proving that it was the Acton tenement which was Fulchered's. The first references to the whole tenement come in 1225 when Peter FitzAluf's tenure of five hides at Acton was challenged by Hamo de Roxeth, who alleged that the land had been held by his grandfather Hamo, his father Ralph and himself. Peter counterclaimed that it had been allowed to remain with his own father, William, by a final concord made in 1179. The extract from the concord entered in 1225 stated that the land was a half-knight's fee at Acton, and that Hamo had quitclaimed it to William and his heirs for a yearly payment of a sore sparrowhawk or 2s. Peter added that this payment had always since been made. When the case was next heard, in Easter term

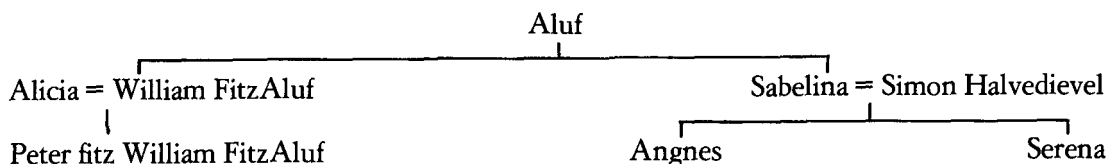
1226, the two parties added nothing to their statements but the bishop of London put in his claim that he held 50 acres of the land himself, and also that Peter held his land from him. Finally, two years later, the jury brought in its verdict: Peter's claim to hold the land of Hamo was stronger than Hamo's to hold it in demesne; the bishop's position was not mentioned.¹⁰

A few years earlier, in 1211, Peter and his (widowed) mother Alice had been sued for one hide of the land by his cousin Angnes (sic) a grand-daughter of Aluf through her mother Sabelina. Angnes claimed that her mother had held the land at her death, but Peter and Alice replied, successfully, that in the time of Henry II (1154-89) and after the death of Aluf, Peter's father William had recovered it from Sabelina's husband Simon Halvedievel.¹¹ Sabelina's property would of course have been considered her husband's during their lifetimes.

Both William and Peter were encumbered with debts, and as usually happened at this time they had thus become indebted to Jews. It was in order to meet some of these debts that in the early 1220s Peter sold the bishop of London the 50 acres mentioned in 1226: 40 acres at first and then a further adjacent 10 acres in a field called La Pulle on condition that the bishop paid some of Peter's debts to Aaron son of Abraham son of Auegaie.¹² His father had earlier had to pledge his land to the king. On 13th January 1229 a writ was sent to the sheriff of Middlesex stating that a previous inquisition concerning the lands of William FitzAluf had been insufficient, and ordering him to enquire as to the lands which William had held in the first year of the reign of King Richard (1189-90), which were the king's pledge for debts in Jewry, and as to their present tenant and value. The reply, which is undated, states that in 1189-90 William held 4½ hides and 2s. rent from Ellis de Chicheworth, of which Osbert de Northebrok was now holding 1 hide 13 acres in fee, worth 10s. a year, the bishop of London 50 acres in fee, worth 12s.6d. a year, and Peter fitz William 2½ hides 13 acres in demesne, worth 45s. a year, while three others were holding messuages, two at 16d. and one at 3s. a year.¹³ Although the location of William's land is not given, the tenancies confirm that it must have been in Acton: the bishop's 50 acres have already been mentioned, and in November 1230 a foot of fine shows a grant by Peter fitz Alolf of 150 acres in 'Hacerton' to Osbert de Norhtbrok (sic), to hold to him and his heirs of Peter and his by an annual rent of 2s. and performing foreign service.¹⁴ Since medieval inquisitions were notoriously slow it is reasonable to assume that the reply to the writ of January 1229 was not made until after the fine of November 1230 (which could in any case be the written record of a slightly earlier transaction), and that the 133 acres of the former were the same as the round 150 of the latter. Peter, Osbert and the dean of St. Paul's, incidentally, all had debts to the Jews recorded in the Pipe Roll of 1230, which they were paying off in annual instalments.¹⁵

We therefore know that Peter FitzAluf inherited the tenement from his father William. Exactly how William acquired it is not clear, but it was before 1179. The evidence of the 1211 case suggests that it had been held by William's father Aluf, and also allows one earlier reference to be inferred. In the exchequer lists of knights enfeoffed by the bishop of London in 1166 the Red Book lists 'Simon de Alvedeleye half a knight', but the Black Book gives the name as Simon Alvedevel.¹⁶ No family of either version of the name appears to be associated with any other fee of the bishopric, and it is therefore highly probable that Simon owed the service for his wife's family's tenement in Acton. The next list of knights' fees, made in 1212, unfortunately misses out the bishop's Middlesex fees.¹⁷

Before turning to the later history of the tenement, it is worth noting that these documents provide the following family tree.



Norman Moore, whose work on the family established that Aluf's father was Fromund and that his own children included Constantine, Fromund, Adam, Arnulf and Alice, guessed that Aluf FitzAluf and William were elder brothers of Constantine.¹⁸ The relationship between Aluf, William and Constantine seems well established: one St. Paul's deed, for example is witnessed by, among others, Aluf fitz Fromund, Aluf FitzAluf and William his brother.¹⁹ As Constantine and Arnulf were active at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, and William seems to have been active by 1179 and dead by 1211, Moore's suggestion is probably correct.²⁰ It is interesting that the same sources which mention the activities of the FitzAlufs also refer to the family of Fulchered. William fitz Fulchered and Robert the brother of Fulchered were both prominent in the early twelfth century,²¹ while a list of city rents payable to St. Paul's, made in the first years of the century, records that William fitz Fulchered owed 16d. for land which Teobald had given along with his daughter to Fulchered.²² There is of course no proof that this is the same Fulchered.

Although the FitzAluf tenancy of the Acton tenement is well established, the question of the immediate overlord is puzzling. The jury in the 1225 case found that the FitzAlufs had held the land of the de Roxeths since at least 1179, while the 1229 inquest reported that in 1189-90 William FitzAluf held it of Ellis de Chicheworth. It is improbable that there were two distinct holdings, especially as the bishop's 50 acres occurs in both inquests, but the absence of any cross-referencing is nevertheless surprising. No later reference to the de Roxeths in Acton has been found, but the de Chicheworths are known to have held land there in the 1230s, when Ellis also witnessed a number of Peter FitzAluf's deeds, and John fitz Isabella de Chycheworth transferred over 100 acres of land there in 1304.²³

In any event, by the 1220s Peter FitzAluf was disposing of his property without reference to his overlord(s). His sales of 50 acres of land to the bishop of London in the early 1220s and of c.150 acres to Osbert de Northbrook in 1230 have already been mentioned. In both cases he kept his own nominal overlordship, although in 1241 x 1243 after the bishop's land had been transferred to the dean and chapter of St. Paul's, he gave a confirmation which abandoned any claim to rents or services.²⁴ Meanwhile he sold a large estate to Geoffrey de Lucy, the dean of St. Paul's, and the deeds make it clear that the property was considered as a manor, complete with a manor house and some stock, and not just as isolated parcels of land. There were basically three grants, of which the first two were made in 1229 x 1231 and the third in 1236 x 1239. Several slightly different deeds record the first and main grant, suggesting that it was renegotiated. Finally the dean acquired a house, two gardens, part of a wood, 120 acres of arable of which 80 lay in Northfield and 25 in Eastfield, a croft called Grenestret, three meadows called respectively Bolebrug, La Pulle and Little Meadow, 5 acres of arable land held by a tenant and 2s. annual rent from a tenement (*managio*) held by Walter the parson of Acton. The croft was given in compensation because the supposed 120 acres

was actually less.²⁵ It is interesting than an earlier version of this grant, which gave the 120 acres and the house, gardens and woodland but not the rest, specifies not only that the dean had paid 60 marks but also that he was to owe the service of a tenth of a knight.²⁶ This was of course the correct proportion since he was getting one hide of a five-hide tenement for the whole of which Peter FitzAluf owed a half knight. The second grant simply added a piece of land lying between Bolebrug meadow and the Uxbridge Road.²⁷ The third added 20 further acres of woodland.²⁸ In 1239 Geoffrey transferred this whole estate, plus 5 acres acquired from Walter de Acton, to the dean and chapter in perpetuity, retaining only a life interest for himself.²⁹ The dean and chapter had thus acquired a substantial holding at Acton, which was enhanced in the 1240s by the 50 acres from the bishop, and by a grant of three messuages on the north side of the Uxbridge Road. The donor of the latter was Gregory fitz Walter, formerly rector of Acton, but Peter FitzAluf was overlord of the property, and in confirming the grant he waived his right to rents and services.³⁰

Peter FitzAluf had thus transferred over a hide of land to St. Paul's and over another hide to Osbert de Northbrook as well as some land to the bishop. He still had the rest of his fee, though, and continued to owe his service of half a knight to the bishop, for which he was listed in the feudal aids of 1242-3.³¹ In the next generation William fitz Peter, presumably Peter's son and heir, transferred the fee to Thomas Tayllard and his wife Edith. The documentation is incomplete and although the broad facts are clear some details are missing. In 1256 William transferred one carucate of land to Thomas and Edith, to hold to them and their joint heirs of the chief lords. If they died without joint heirs half was to pass to the other heirs of Edith and half to the heirs of Philip de Conelegh. Thomas and Edith were to pay William 5 marks a year for life.³² The next relevant deed does not come until 1285, when Thomas and Edith granted a messuage and 2 carucates of land in Acton to William le Seneschal of Evesham, to hold of them and the heirs of Edith, paying them £5 a year during their lifetime and doing other (unspecified) services to the chief lords of the fee. The text seems contradictory, but it suggests that after the deaths of Thomas and Edith William was in fact expected to hold of the chief lords only.³³ In a list of knight's fees dated c.1307 Thomas is entered as owing half a knight's service at Acton.³⁴ There is therefore no doubt that the Tayllards had received the core of the FitzAluf tenement and, as we shall show, that they passed it on to William of Evesham. Why they received it is less clear since the provisions concerning heirs make it clear that the real recipient was Edith, although as *femme couverte* she could not hold property independently of her husband. The most obvious explanation would be that Edith was William fitz Peter's heiress, but this cannot have been the case as we know that she was one of the six sisters of Walter de Merton, Henry III's chancellor and the founder of Merton College Oxford.³⁵ Their family pedigree is obscure but even in the highly unlikely event that their father, whose name was William, was the William fitz Peter of Acton, Edith, could not of course have been his heir. There is no sign that any of her siblings had any interests in Acton. Thomas Tayllard was Edith's second husband. She had a son by her first marriage but her only other child became a nun, and she and Thomas therefore had no direct heirs.³⁶ William le Seneschal of Evesham is also known to have inherited some of her other property.³⁷

William of Evesham did not long enjoy his Acton lands. In 1313 he and his wife granted to Adam de Herewynton a messuage, 1½ carucates of arable land, 4 acres of meadow and 15 of wood, and 4s. and 11b of pepper in rents at Acton, to be held (automatically by this date) of

the chief lords.³⁸ In 1318 two surviving rolls for the barony court of Stortford, which was the court for the bishop of London's tenants by knight service, list Adam 'for Taylard's tenement'.³⁹ Earlier, in 1309, Adam had also obtained a messuage, 80 acres of land, 2 of meadow and 6 of wood in Acton from John de Paris and his wife Agnes, who had in turn received the messuage, 100 acres of land, 2 of meadow and 6 of wood from John fitz Isabella de Chycheworth in 1304.⁴⁰ In 1328 Adam in turn granted to the prior and convent of St. Bartholomew's Smithfield a messuage, 1½ carucates of land, 7 acres of meadow, 60 of pasture and 40 of wood, and rents of 4s.1d. and 1lb of pepper.⁴¹ Although the totals once again fail to match exactly, his grant must have included most, and probably all of William of Evesham's land. In the 1353 and later feudal aids it was the prior of St. Bartholomew's who answered for the half-knight's fee in Acton.⁴¹ The line of descent of the core of the fee on which the service was owed is thus established.

The documents which allow the descent of the tenement to be traced also provide some evidence for its location and add to our general knowledge of the topography of medieval Acton. From their later history, Lysons and subsequent local historians identified the dean and chapter estate as Berrymead (Mill Hill Park), and the St. Bartholomew's holding as Friars Place. Attempts to give the exact boundaries of the former were confused because the true size of the original grant was not realised, and of course the relationship between the two was not understood.⁴² The deeds of the 1220s and 30s confirm that much of the land which the dean and chapter received lay in the south-west corner of Acton, between Bollo Bridge (at the junction of Gunnersbury Lane and Bollo Lane) and the Uxbridge Road, and they give us several otherwise unknown field names there: a field and a meadow called La Pulle, meadows called Bolebrug' and Little Meadow, crofts called Wlfrichescroft, New Reding and Grenestret, and pasture called Bruerie. But they also show that the dean and chapter gained land north of the Uxbridge Road, 80 acres in Northfield and 25 in Eastfield. The latter was still partly unenclosed in the 19th century and so appears by name on the 1805 map of the parish, immediately north of the Uxbridge Road and east of East Acton Lane. If it previously crossed the lane it would have included the enclosed land then belonging to the Almoner of St. Paul's, now Acton Park.⁴³ Northfield had by then vanished, but 20 unenclosed acres are recorded on a map of 1683, lying immediately north of Friars Place, and presumably earlier it covered all the arable land north of East Acton and west of Friars Place Lane.⁴⁴ This of course dovetails with the St. Bartholomew's estate centred on Friars Place.⁴⁵ The whole tenement was thus distributed over a broad swathe of Acton. The bishop of London was of course overlord of the whole of Acton but he had no demesne land there, and this may well have been because of the existence of the tenement.

The account is still incomplete, and it is to be hoped that further research will add to, and modify it. There are certainly some loose ends, in particular the origins of the two further substantial grants licensed to be made to St. Bartholomew's in the later 14th century.⁴⁶ But despite its limitations what has been established provides a better framework for the medieval history of Acton.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Domesday Book*, i, ff. 127-127b; in translation in *Victoria County History of Middlesex*, i, London 1969, pp. 120-21.
2. M. Gibbs (ed.) *Early Charters of St. Paul's Cathedral*, Camden Society Third Series vol. 1viii, London 1939,

p.xxiii. This estate also included an outlying piece of woodland, Eldeholt, at Old Oak common: A. Harper Smith, 'East Acton, A Middlesex Hamlet', Essay for London University Extension Diploma in History, 1967, pp.34-36.

3. See P. J. Taylor, 'The Estates of the Bishopric of London from the 7th century to the early 16th century' London Ph.D thesis 1976, pp.18-21, 30-31.
4. C. J. Feret, *Fulham Old and New*, London 1900, i, p.12; P. D. Whitting (ed) *A History of Hammersmith*, London 1965, p. 83.
5. Taylor, *op.cit.*, ch.2.3
6. For Wormholt see Taylor, *op.cit.*, *passim*
7. T. E. Tomlins, *A perambulation of Islington*, London 1858, p.69; *Feudal Aids*, iii, p.374
8. The only published history of Acton, W. K. Baker, *Acton, Middlesex*, London 1912, is unreliable for early history. Better accounts are by G. H. Monson, printed in serial form in *Acton Hospital Gazette*, Acton 1934-35, and R. N. G. Rowland, 'The Street-Names of Acton, Middlesex', typescript Acton 1967; bound copies London Borough of Ealing, Acton Reference Library
9. Gibbs, *op.cit.*, no.330
10. *Curia Regis Rolls*, vol. xii nos.489, 1897, vol. xiii no.540
11. *Ibid.*, vol. vi pp.161-62, 283, 309
12. Gibbs, *op.cit.*, no. 329; St. Paul's Cathedral Library MS A32/605
13. *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (Chancery)*, 1219-1422 vol. i no.4
14. P.R.O. CP25(1) 146/8 no.79
15. *Pipe Roll 14 Henry III 1230*, Pipe Roll Society NS vol. iv, London 1927, pp.101-02; see also *Pipe Roll 26 Henry III 1241-42* H. L. Cannon (ed), Yale Historical Publications Manuscripts and Edited Texts vol. v, Yale 1918, p.285
16. *Red Book of the Exchequer*, Rolls Series 1896, vol. ii, p.187
17. See Taylor, *op.cit.*, ch.2.3
18. N. Moore, *The History of St. Bartholomew's Hospital*, London 1918, vol. i, pp.288-321 *passim*
19. *Ninth Report of Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, Appendix, p.21b no.1528
20. As well as the deeds above see for instance *Pipe Rolls*, *passim*
21. E.g. *Pipe Roll* pf 1130, and Appendix to *Ninth Report*
22. J. E. Price, *A Descriptive Account of the Guildhall of the City of London: its History and Associations*, London 1886, pp.16-21
23. Gibbs, *op.cit.*, nos.330-33, 335; P.R.O. CP25(1) 148/37 no.303
24. St. Paul's MS A28/232
25. Gibbs, *op.cit.*, no.330; she dates c.1229-37, but from the property descriptions it must have been made before no.331, which she dates 1229-31.
26. St. Paul's MS A32/603
27. Gibbs, *op.cit.*, no.331; this is one parcel of land only
28. *Ibid.*, no.335
29. *Ibid.*, no.333
30. St. Paul's MSS A32/611, A30/427
31. *Liber Feodorum: The Book of Fees commonly called Testa de Nevill*, pp.897, 899
32. P.R.O. CP25(1) 147/19 no.373
33. P.R.O. CP25(1) 148/30 no.138
34. Tomlins, *loc.cit*
35. E. Hobhouse, *Sketch of the Life of Walter de Merton*, Oxford and London 1859; R. H. Hilton, 'Kibworth Harcourt. A Merton College Manor in the 13th and 14th Centuries', in W. G. Hoskins (ed) *Studies in Leicestershire Agrarian History*, published as *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society for 1948*, Leicester 1949, pp.17-40
36. Hobhouse, *op.cit.*, p.51
37. Hilton, *op.cit.*, p.26
38. P.R.O. CP25(1) 149/2 no.90
39. P.R.O. CP25(1) 149/40 no.34
40. P.R.O. CP25(1) 150/3 no.11
41. *Feudal Aids*, vol. iii, p.374 *et seq.*
42. Monson, *op.cit.*, p.10, copied by Rowland, thought that Geoffrey de Lucy obtained only 20 acres of arable and 20 acres of woodland from Peter FitzAluf.
43. E. Kelsey, *Map of the Parish of Acton in the County of Middlesex*; copy in London Borough of Ealing, Acton Reference Library
44. Harper Smith, *op.cit.*, map facing p.68. This map was obviously not known to Rowland, whose guess concerning Northfield (*op.cit.*, p.17) is wrong.
45. See Rowland, *op.cit.*, p.18
46. E. A. Webb, *The Records of St. Bartholomew's Priory*, London 1921, pp.169, 358