
DOMESDAY & THE LAVENDON SURVEY

Introduction

Twenty years after Duke William of Normandy conquered England in 1066, he commissioned a thorough survey, county by county, of the lands, assets and ownership of his realm. The information was required not only to inform a tax assessment but also to identify land that was in dispute, so that every 'man should know his right and not usurp another's'. One contemporary return from Ely Abbey copied out the Commissioners' brief as follows:



The name of the place.

Who held it, before 1066, and now?

How many hides? How many ploughs, both those in lordship and the men's?

How many villagers, cottagers and slaves, how many free men and Freeman?

How much woodland, meadow and pasture?

How many mills and fishponds?

How much has been added or taken away?

What the total value was and is?

How much each free man 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 survey named the chief landowners, or tenants-in-chief, who in the case of Lavendon are listed and briefly profiled below. In the survey, villages were listed and grouped in administrative districts called Hundreds of which there were eighteen in Buckinghamshire. Lavendon was part of the ancient Bonestou Hundred which was later grouped with two others to form the more 'modern' Hundred of Newport.

Bonestou or Bunsty Hundred included the villages in Buckinghamshire that lie to the north-west of the Great Ouse, i.e. those extending from Haversham through to Lavendon. The nearby villages of, for example, Clifton Reynes and Newton Blossomville were part of the separate Moleslou Hundred on the south-eastern side of the Great Ouse. It should be kept in mind that some lands listed in Domesday under Lavendon included areas that are now in adjoining modern-day parishes. An example of this includes some 'Lavendon' land that is now in Cold Brayfield parish.

The principal Domesday assets that were recorded in the Buckinghamshire survey have been described in the *Victoria County History* as follows:

“The ploughland, the meadow, the woodland, and the mill, these were the chief sources of wealth. With wearisome iteration the text records the number of ploughlands in the manor, the ploughteams, each of eight oxen, that were actually at work upon them, the peasants and the lord’s serfs, the meadows down by the streams that afforded hay for the oxen, the watermill at which the peasants were compelled to have their corn ground, and the number of swine for which the woodland was reckoned to provide mast.”

The rent of a mill was sometimes paid in part in eels from the mill pool. In the case of Lavendon part of the rent included the payment of 250 eels. With regard to the land measures showing the number of hides (usually reckoned as 120 acres) or virgates (1/4 hide), it should also be borne in mind that these were more fiscal rather than true area measurements. Other terminology included in the Lavendon survey is given in the Glossary of Terms shown below. More such information is available on the web site also shown in the glossary.

The Tenants-in-Chief in Lavendon

In his book *The Life and Times of William I*, Maurice Ashley states that “what in fact happened in England during the reign of William was that much of the land in the kingdom was confiscated from the English nobility and granted by the monarch to Normans and other Frenchmen or to Flemings. The principle was asserted that all land belonged to the King. But in fact by the end of his reign, William owned directly only between one sixth and one seventh net of the landed income of the country, whereas a small group comprised mainly of Norman families – the King’s tenants-in-chief – acquired about half the territorial wealth of the conquered kingdom.”

Thus, at the time of Domesday, the ownership of land was divided generally as follows:

King and family:	17%
Bishops and abbots:	26%
Tenants-in-chief:	54%

In the case of Lavendon, the land was owned by the following tenants, details of whom, in Domesday pecking order, are as follows:

The Bishop of Coutances

In his book *Beyond Sherrington*, A C Chibnall quotes a source that described Geoffrey de Mowbray, Bishop of Coutances as ‘a man of noble birth, devoted more to knightly than to clerical activities, and so better able to instruct knights in hauberk to fight than clerics in vestments to sing psalms. He often took part in battle against the Danes and the English, and after the enemy had been defeated secured large possessions, which he handed on at his death to his nephew Robert de Mowbray, earl of Northumbria.’ The Bishop died in 1093 and two years later Robert, as leader in the abortive Norman barons’ revolt against William Rufus, (second son of King William), was imprisoned for life and his estates confiscated.

Aside from land in Lavendon, the Bishop owned a good deal of land in Buckinghamshire and within many nearby parishes such as Olney, Clifton Reynes, Weston Underwood, Lathbury, Tyringham, Emberton and Sherington.

Also mentioned below in connection with the Bishop's lands, is Burgred (also known as Borret or Borgret) who was a great Northamptonshire thane and father of Eadwine, whose lands were obtained by the Bishop of Coutances.

The Count of Mortain

Robert, Count of Mortain, was the half-brother of William the Conqueror and younger brother of Bishop Odo of Bayeux who was also a large landowner in Buckinghamshire. Robert married Earl Hugh of Chester's daughter and was Lord of the Sussex rape of Pevensey, with the castle there. He was virtual Earl of Cornwall and his fief included the Honour of Berkhamsted with the its castle. He rebelled in 1088, was pardoned and died 1091. He was the largest landholder in the country after the King with holdings in 19 counties. Robert owned land in nearby Weston Underwood.

Walter Giffard

Walter was the son of Osbern of Bolbec. As well as being a Domesday commissioner, he was a keeper of Windsor Castle and Earl of Buckingham (1100). He died in 1103.

In the *Victoria History (Buckinghamshire Domesday)*, it is stated that "*The great fief of Walter, who was himself a Domesday Commissioner, extended over ten counties, and on it there had been enfeoffed before 1166 nearly a hundred knights.*" Also, "*assessed in all at as nearly as possible three hundred hides, his lands may be reckoned from that standpoint as representing between a sixth and a seventh of the whole county [of Buckinghamshire]*". Walter held land in nearby Ravenstone as well as Lavendon.

The Countess Judith

The Countess Judith was the widow of Earl Waltheof of Huntingdon and Northumbria whom she betrayed after he joined a revolt against the Norman Conquest. He was executed in 1076 as a result. Perhaps her betrayal was because she was a niece of William I, being a daughter of his half-sister Adelaide and Lambert, Count of Lens.

Countess Judith had great estates, including holdings in 10 counties in the Midlands and East Anglia. In Buckinghamshire her lands were scattered but not extensive. Judith also held lands in nearby Weston Underwood, Clifton Reynes, Emberton and Hardmead.

Leofwin (or Lewin) of Nuneham, and other Englishmen

Leofwine was one of the few Englishmen who succeeded in retaining a good estate after the Conquest. Leofwine was of Nuneham Courtney in Oxfordshire, an inheritance that he sold to the Abbot of Abingdon after getting leave from the Bishop of Bayeux who was then regent in the absence of the King in Normandy. Leofwine was Earl of Kent and the Home Counties, and son of Countess Gytha and Earl Godwin, younger brother of King Harold.

Also mentioned in the survey for Lavendon are a number of the King's thanes or persons who held land from the King by special grant. A Thane was originally a military companion of the king, but later one of his administrative officials. In *Domesday* most thanes were Anglo-Saxons who had retained some of their land. Thus we encounter, for example, Alli who appeared to represent the whole group in the eyes of the Crown and who was 'one of King Edward's Guards', as well as others such as Alric, Burgred and Wulfric.

Glossary of Domesday Terms

The land and property holdings transcribed from the Domesday Book include a number of unfamiliar terms. With acknowledgements to www.domesdaybook.co.uk the following specifically relate to the Lavendon holdings:

Freemen: Men who owned their land but were expected to attend the courts of their lords, to help them at busy seasons and pay them a small monetary tribute.

Hide: Measurement of land for tax assessment used outside Danelaw counties, approximately 120 acres, depending on local variations. See also Virgate.

Hundred: A district within a shire, whose assembly of notables and village representatives usually met about once a month. Lavendon was a part of the Bunsty (Bonestou) Hundred which also included the modern day parishes of Ravenstone, Weston Underwood, Olney, Stoke Goldington, Hanslope, Gayhurst, Tyringham, Lathbury, Little Linford and Haversham.

Lordship: In one sense, the land owned by a tenant-in-chief (lord or institution). Also sometimes refers to the land owned by a tenant-in-chief and farmed directly by them, rather than by peasants. In Domesday entries a recurring phrase is 'is and always was in lordship'.

Manor: Equivalent to a single holding, with its own court and probably its own hall, but not necessarily a manor house as we think of it. The manor was the basic unit of *Domesday*.

Mill: A watermill, the rent for which was sometimes paid by eels from the mill pond, as was the case at Lavendon. There were no windmills in England for another 100 years.

Plough: In *Domesday* the word implies a plough team with its eight oxen and the plough itself.

Slave or Serf: A man or woman who owed personal service to another, and who was unfree, and unable to move home or work or change allegiance, to buy or to sell, without permission – the lowest class of peasant.

Smallholder: A middle class of peasant who typically had up to about 30 acres of their own to cultivate. Rents due to their landlords were typically by means of unpaid work, or money or food, eg hens and eggs. They had more land than Cottagers (perhaps 1-5 acres).

Villager: A class of peasant, much as a smallholder, but usually with more land.

Virgate: A quarter of a hide, used in *Domesday* for tax purposes.

The Lavendon Survey

Land of the Bishop of Coutances

In **Lavendon** the Bishop holds 2 hides as one manor.
Land for 4 ploughs; in lordship 1 hide; 2 ploughs there.
4 villagers with 3 smallholders have 2 ploughs.
3 slaves; meadow (sufficient) for 1 plough (team); woodland (to feed) 100 pigs.
Value 40s; when acquired 20s; before 1066, 60s.
A man of Burgred's held this manor; he could sell.

In the same village William holds 4 hides and 2 parts of 1 virgate from the Bishop as one manor. Land for 4 ploughs;
In lordship 2 ploughs.
7 villagers with 6 smallholders have 2 ploughs.
3 slaves; 1½ mills at 27s and 250 eels; meadow (sufficient) for 4 plough (teams); Woodland (to feed) 60 pigs.
Value 60s; when acquired 20s; before 1066 £4.
Eight thanes held this manor; one of them, Alli, King Edward's man, was senior to the others.
All could sell their own land.

In the same village Anschitil holds 1½ hides and 2 parts of 1 virgate from the Bishop. Land for 1½ ploughs; they are there.
Meadow likewise; woodland (to feed) 12 pigs.
Value 20s; when acquired 5s; before 1066, 20s.
Burgred and Wulfric, his man, held this land; they could sell.

In the same village 3 Freemen hold 1 hide and 1 virgate from the Bishop. Land for 1 plough; ½ there and [another] ½ possible.
1 villager with 2 smallholders.
Meadow (sufficient) for 4 oxen; woodland (to feed) 8 pigs.
The value is and was 10s; before 1066, 20s.
Two thanes, Burgred and Wulfric, a man of God(?), held this land; they could sell.

Land of the Count of Mortain

In **Lavendon** Humphrey holds 2½ hides from the Count as one manor.
Land for 2½ ploughs; in lordship 1½ hides; 1 plough there.
3 villagers with 5 smallholders have 1½ ploughs.
2 slaves; 1 mill at 10s and 50 eels; meadow (sufficient) for 2 ploughs (teams);
woodland (to feed) 40 pigs.
Value 40s; when acquired 20s; before 1066 £4.
A man of Alric son of Goding held this manor; he could sell.

Land of Walter Giffard

In **Lavendon** Ralph holds 2 hides, 1 virgate, and the fourth part of 1 virgate from Walter. Land for 2 ploughs; in lordship 1.
5 villagers with 8 smallholders have 1 plough.
Meadow (sufficient) for 1 plough (team); woodland (to feed) 30 pigs.
Value 25s; when acquired 10s; before 1066, 40s.
A man of Bishop Wulfwig [Bishop of Lincoln] held this land; he could sell.

Land of Countess Judith

In **Lavendon** Roger holds 2 hides, 1 virgate, and the fourth part of 1 virgate from the Countess. Land for 2 ploughs; in lordship 1.
3 villagers with 2 smallholders have 1 plough.
Meadow (sufficient) for 2 plough (teams); woodland (to feed) 30 pigs.
Value 30s; when acquired 10s; before 1066, 40s.
Hunman, Alli's man, held this manor; he could sell.
In the same village Gilbert of Blossville holds 2 hides, 1 virgate, from the Countess. Land for 3 ploughs; but they are not there; only 4 smallholders.
Meadow (sufficient) for 3 plough (teams); woodland (to feed) 20 pigs.
The value is and always was 20s.
Alli, one of King Edward's Guards, held this manor; he could sell.

In the same village Ralph holds 1 hide from the Countess.
Land for 1½ ploughs.
1 villager and 3 smallholders.
Meadow (sufficient) for 1 ½ plough (teams); woodland (to feed) 15 pigs.
The value is and was 10s; before 1066, 20s.
Thorbert, Countess Goda's man, held this manor; he could sell.

Land of Leofwin (or Lewin) of Nuneham (Courtenay)

In Bunsty Hundred

Ketel holds ½ hide in **Lavendon** from the King. Land for ½ plough; it is there, with 1 smallholder.

Meadow (sufficient) for 1 plough; woodland (to feed) 10 pigs.

The value is and was 7s; before 1066, 10s.

He also held before 1066; he could sell.

References & Further Reading

Domesday Book: Buckinghamshire, edited by John Morris, published by Phillimore, Chichester 1978.

A History of the County of Buckingham, Part 8 - The Buckinghamshire Domesday, edited by William Page, published by The Victoria History of the Counties of England by Constable & Company, first issued in parts 1920.

Beyond Sherington, by A C Chibnall, published by Phillimore, Chichester, 1979.

The Life and Times of William I, by Maurice Ashley, published by George Weidenfield & Nicolson Ltd and BCA, re-issued 1992.

A **Glossary of Domesday Terms**, as well as useful historical background notes are to be found at: www.domesdaybook.co.uk

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