

Domesday Records for Dorstone & ‘nearby’

Paper by Penny Platts (March 2010)

The ‘book of the day of Judgement’ (Doom’s Day) was put together in 1086-87, twenty years after the Conquest, and it gave William of Normandy an account of his kingdom. It recorded where the tax wealth and ownership lay - all based on local information. The only buildings mentioned were castles and mills – no mention was made of any dwellings.

To understand the entries, there are certain terms which need explanation:

Bordar	<i>a cottager/ Villan – a villager of higher status than a bordar, but not a free man</i>
Burgess	<i>Upper stratum of townsman, paid rent as tenants of burgage plots</i>
Coinage	<i>The penny was the only actual coin in circulation at this time. 240 pence were struck from one pound (librum £) of silver. (1d = 1 penny, 12 pence – 1 shilling)</i>
Geld	<i>the land tax assessed on a hide</i>
Hide	<i>a measure of land which was the standard unit for assessment to tax. It would support one household and all its dependants – estimated at between 80 and 120 acres, divided into 4 virgates.</i>
Hundred	<i>about 100 hides – a subdivision of a shire</i>
In demesne	<i>land where produce is devoted to the Lord, rather than his tenant</i>
Mill	<i>water mills mostly for grinding corn</i>
Modius	<i>liquid measure but used here for grain – quantity unknown</i>
Radman	<i>Riding servant, e.g. as escort to Lord</i>
Stradel Valley	<i>the early name for the Golden Valley</i>
TRE	<i>Tempore Regis Edwardi – in the time of King Edward (i.e. before 1066)</i>
Virgate	<i>one quarter of a hide</i>

Clifford and Hay on Wye

Clifford is by far the largest and richest settlement in the area at this time, its castle built soon after the Conquest.

‘VIII Ralph de Tosny... holds the castle of Clifford. Earl William erected it on waste land which Bruning held TRE.....This castle is part of the kingdom of England; it is not subject to any hundred nor any customary due.....’

In the jurisdiction of this castle Roger holds land for 4 ploughs, Gilbert for 12 ploughs, and Drogo for 5 ploughs and Herbert for 2 ploughs. These have demesne 9 ploughs and 16 burgesses and 13 bordars, and 5 Welshmen, and 6 slaves and 4 female slaves. And a mill rendering 3 modii of corn and 4 oxmen are there. The men have 3 ploughs. In all, what they have is worth £8.5s. And these, and whatever other men have anything there, hold of Ralph.’

The town of Hay was founded round about 1100, when the castle was built most probably by Bernard of Neufmarche, who completed the conquest of Breconshire in 1093. It is possible that Neufmarche built **Dorstone Castle** around that time. (SC is pursuing this research)

Snodhill Castle was not built until the mid 12th c. – It appears for certain in the Pipe Rolls of 1196. **Urishay** estate was originally called Hay, and Ulric was the 12thc. tenant of the Mortimers.

There is evidence of several mottes and earthworks in the area, which are not mentioned, but it seems safe to assume that they were either erected after the Domesday survey, or had already fallen into disuse.

Dorstone, Myndd Brith, The Bage & Middlewood

XXIII The land of Drogo fitzPons

'In 'Wolfhay' Hundred

*The same Drogo holds **Dorstone**. Earl Harold held it. There are 7 hides.'*

Although anecdotal evidence of a Celtic church at Dorstone has been mentioned in some publications, the Domesday entry shows no evidence of any church, priest or population at that time. When the Welsh attacked this area and sacked the Cathedral and the city in 1055, perhaps this area was laid waste. The early history of Dorstone Church is proving very elusive. Yet the land holding of 7 hides is large and would support 7 families and all their dependants.

Several times during this research, references have been found to part of a **Woolhope Club Transaction of 1938**:

'The Norman Occupation of the lands in the Golden Valley, Ewyas, and Clifford and their motte and bailey castles 'read by George Marshall. In this paper he states:

'Adjoining and north of Snodhill was another tenant-in-chief holding lands at Dorstone (Torchestone), namely Durand of Gloucester. Bernard held of him and there were three hides geldable. Before Robert Fitz Wimarc held it. It was waste now worth 40/-. Bernard who held it was probably Bernard de Newmarch, who later was to distinguish himself as the conqueror of Brecknock.'

This does not correspond with the information given above in which Dorstone is held by Drogo Fitz Pons. Durand of Gloucester is indeed mentioned as holding lands in Herefordshire (P.514) However, what he holds is Ashperton (in the Radlow Hundred), three areas in the Bromsash Hundred near Ross-on-Wye, Rochford and Leysters (in the Wolfhay Hundred), Thrupton (in the Stretford Hundred) and Litley (in the Cutestornes Hundred).

Certainly it seems from other research that Bernard Neufmarche was not given his lands until late in 1087 – after the completion of the Domesday Survey.

Research so far has not revealed the source of Marshall's information – so this is 'work in progress'

Mynydd-Brith, with only 1 hide, seems to have a sizeable population supporting the mill, a priest and a blacksmith.

*'The same Drogo holds **Mynydd-Brith**. There is 1 hide. There Drogo has 4 ploughs in demesne; and 7 villans and 2 bordars with 3 ploughs. There are 4 slaves, and a mill rendering 2s. There is a priest and a smith. It is worth 100s.'*

'XXV The land of Gilbert fitzTuold

In the Stradel Valley

*The same Gilbert holds **Bach**. Edwin held it. There are 3 hides. [...] There are 8 Welshmen with 2 ploughs: they render 1 hawk and 2 dogs.'*

It is most likely that this is 'The Bage', not Common Bach, as it is held next to Middlewood. 'Bage' comes from the Welsh 'bach' which, when used as a place-name, means 'river bend or nook'. The brook at the Bage is the boundary of the Parish of Dorstone.)

*'The same Gilbert holds **Middlewood** [in Clifford]. Earl Harold held it. There are 2 hides*

*The same Gilbert holds **Harewood** [in Clifford]. Eadwig held it. There are 4 hides. This land has all been converted into woodland. It was waste and renders nothing.*

In the Stradel Valley [are] 56 hides [which] 112 ploughs could plough, and they pay geld.'

Ewyas Harold, Bredwardine, Poston, Wilmaston

'IX land of Alvred of Marlborough

.....holds the castle of Ewyas Harold of King William.

In the Stradel Valley

*The same Alvred holds **Bredwardine**. Earl Harold held it. There are 5 hides. In desmesne is 1 plough; and 6 villans and 6 bordars and 1 man and 1 Welshman. Among them all they have 3 ploughs, and 3 slaves. It was waste; now it is worth £3.*

XVIII land of William d'Ecouis

In the Stradel Valley

*The same William hold **Poston** in the Stradel Valley, and Ralph holds of him. Edwin held it. There are 2 hides. In desmesne is 1 plough; and 2 villans with 1 plough. It was waste; now it is worth 5s.*

There is no evidence of any Norman motte having existed here, but at a later period, perhaps in the thirteenth century, a fortified site was constructed on the right of the roadway leading to Peterchurch. This site was later to be used for the present Poston Court on the other side of the river.

'XXIX land of Hugh l'Asne

In the Stradel Valley

*The same Hugh holds **Wilmastone**. Leofflaed held it. There are 5 hides. In demesne are 2 ploughs; and 7 villans and 2 bordars and a smith and 1 radman with 2 bordars. Among them all they have 2.5 ploughs. There are 4 slaves and a mill rendering 3 s. It was waste, now it is worth 30s'.*

Peterchurch

*'The same Hugh holds **Peterchurch**. Alweard held it. There are 3 hides. There are 2 Frenchmen with 2 ploughs, and a priest with a church having half a plough, and 3 slaves and one bordar and 2 men pay 8s. It was waste; now it is worth 20s.'*

Frenchmen and Normans were not the same. The Normans – and of course William himself - were descended from the 'Norsemen' and were considered quite separate from the French.

The history of St. Peter's church is fascinating. Although re-built by the Normans (the font is early Norman with rope moulding very similar to the one in Kington church), the rare four-cell style of the Saxon church has been preserved. It comprises a nave for the laity, a choir area, a chancel for a Prior and ordained monks, and finally the apse which holds the altar and was for clergy. (This information was researched by Revd. De la Tour Davies for his guide book.) This style was apparently the same as early Italian churches of the 8th century. This links with the theory that the church was founded originally by King Offa in the late 8th century, and there is some evidence that there was an Italian bishop there with the missionaries at that time.

The church is divided by a series of arches, which get lower and lower to give a false perspective and make the building look longer than it actually is. The true chancel arch is the second one, and it is heavily decorated. This was to remind people that they were entering the holiest part of the church – the nave area was the public part and used for all kinds of secular purposes.

The story of the **plaster fish** on the south wall links Peterchurch with Dorstone forever. The Golden Well, the traditional source of the River Dore, was said to hold a holy fish with a golden chain around its 'neck'. (The fish was put there by St. Peter himself – legend has it that he and St Paul came here to evangelise – note 'Apostles' Lane' just before Kington.) The fish was supposed to live in the pool for ever, but the people of Dorstone tried to capture the fish to steal the golden chain. The injured fish managed to escape and got as far as Peterchurch, but here it was attacked and killed and the chain was finally stolen.

(The version of the Domesday Book used is the Penguin translation, printed in 1992 with Herefordshire's entry Pp. 493 - 518)

As my short paper is getting longer and longer I will conclude. If you can add to my store of information please email me penny@platts31.freeserve.co.uk