

CHAPTER I

THE DOMESDAY INQUEST

The Norman Conquest in 1066, unlike the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian invasions, was not a mass movement of people but the work of a small power group. Twenty years after their coming, the Normans instituted the enquiry that resulted in Domesday Book. With hindsight we can say that it came at a fortunate moment for us because it enables us to examine the economic and social foundations of the geography of England after the Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians had firmly established themselves in their new home.

THE ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN BACKGROUND

The Anglo-Saxons had arrived in the fifth and sixth centuries, and the Scandinavians in the eighth and ninth – Danes from the east and Norse by way of the western seas. Whatever the continuity between Roman Britain and Anglo-Scandinavian England – and it was certainly much greater than was at one time believed – the fact remains that, Cornwall apart, the villages the Normans encountered bore names that were certainly not Celtic. Where the Englishman Babba had made a ‘stoc’ or settlement in Wiltshire, there stood *Babestoche* in 1066 which is Baverstock today; and where the Scandinavian Bekki had made a ‘by’ or settlement in Lincolnshire, there stood *Bechebi* which is Bigby today. The progress of settlement must have been interrupted, time and again, by the mutual struggles of the Anglo-Saxon states, and by the campaigns of the Anglo-Danish conflict; but, even so, large stretches of countryside were colonised and transformed, and the woodland was pierced by ‘dens’ and ‘leahs’ and ‘skogrs’ until there were well over 13,000 villas in existence. By merely recording the names of these places, Domesday Book provides an enormous amount of information about the land and its history, but this is only a small part of what Domesday entry after entry tells us about the economy of the land and about the achievement of the two dozen or so generations of people who had lived on it since the Roman legions departed.

Their achievement was not only economic but also political. The land

that William took over already possessed a highly developed territorial organisation. It was divided into shires, and these were divided into hundreds or wapentakes, and these, in turn, comprised vills. The Inquest itself, and the Book that resulted from it, was organised on the basis of the shires, or, to use the Norman word, of counties. Lancashire, it is true, did not appear under that name until towards the end of the twelfth century; the vills to the north of the Ribble were named in the folios for Yorkshire, and the southern part was described in a kind of appendix to the account of Cheshire, under the heading *Inter Ripam et Mersham*. Rutland likewise did not appear as a county until the thirteenth century. Its eastern part was in Domesday Northamptonshire, and its western part formed an anomalous unit, called *Roteland*, which was described at the end of the Nottinghamshire folios. There have also been other less important changes in the inter-county boundaries, e.g. portions of the Domesday counties of Gloucester, Warwick and Worcester were intermingled in a strange manner that reflected the scattered holdings of the bishop of Worcester.¹ Beyond Domesday England, that is beyond the Tees, the four northern counties were in the nature of border provinces, and 'it is probable that responsibility for their internal order, as for their defence, rested with the great lords of the country'.²

Counties were divided into smaller units called 'hundreds'. These had appeared as units of local government in the tenth century, and they provided the basis for the administration of justice and public finance.³ In theory they were districts assessed for the purposes of taxation at 100 hides (i.e. units of assessment for tax), but there were many exceptions to this correspondence, and the assessment of different Domesday hundreds ranged from under 20 to over 150 hides. The place of the hundred was taken by the wapentake in the highly Scandinavianised counties of Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Nottingham and *Roteland*, and in the North and West Ridings of Yorkshire, but not in the East Riding. The word is of Scandinavian origin, and 'denoted the symbolical flourishing of weapons

¹ C. S. Taylor, 'The origin of the Mercian shires', *Trans. Bristol and Gloucs. Archaeol. Soc.* XXI (Bristol, 1898), 32–57. Reprinted in a modified form in H. P. R. Finberg (ed.), *Gloucestershire studies* (Leicester, 1957), 17–51. See also map in *D.G.M.E.*, 2.

² F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1943), 496.

³ O. S. Anderson, 'On the origin of the hundredal division', being pp. 209–17 of *The English hundred names: the south-eastern counties* (Lund, 1939). See also F. M. Stenton (1943), 295–8.

THE ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN BACKGROUND

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by which a public assembly confirmed its decisions'.¹ The earliest record of an extension of its meaning, to cover the district of an assembly, dates from 962. Its use in this sense seems to have been an innovation, 'for no divisions so named are known from Scandinavia'.² Functionally, the wapentake was the same as the hundred, and the terms were used interchangeably, twice in the Domesday folios for Northamptonshire (*Optongren*, 222b–227; *Witchley*, 219–228), and once in those for Yorkshire (*Toreshou*, 307, 373).

Other territorial units are also named in Domesday Book. Some were intermediate between those of the county and the hundred or wapentake. Thus Yorkshire was divided into three ridings (the Scandinavian word 'riding' implies a third part). There were also ridings in Lindsey, itself a third part of Lincolnshire; the other parts were those of Holland and Kesteven. Kent had 'lathes' and Sussex had 'rapes', which may have represented older divisions of those kingdoms.

Hundreds and wapentakes were composed of villages or vills, but alongside the physical reality of the vill was the institutional reality of the manor which features so prominently in the Domesday folios. Sometimes a vill coincided with a manor. Sometimes it contained two or more manors belonging to different lords. Sometimes vills themselves were components of a large manorial complex which their lord treated as one unit. Clearly, manors varied greatly in size. Important as the manor was in the social and legal organisation of the realm, the village itself was the feature prominent in the agrarian landscape.

THE MAKING OF DOMESDAY BOOK

The story of the making of the Domesday Inquest is told briefly in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle under the year 1085. After discussion at a council held at Gloucester in mid-winter, King William sent his men into each shire to enquire in great detail about its resources and who held them; and, says the Chronicle, 'all the surveys (*gewrita*) were then brought to him'. A contemporary account by Robert Losinga, bishop of Hereford, who may have been present when the project was discussed, says that 'other investigators (*inquisitores*) followed the first; and men were sent into provinces which they did not know, and where they

¹ F. M. Stenton (1943), 497.

² O. S. Anderson, *The English hundred names* (Lund, 1934), xxi.

themselves were unknown, in order that they might be given the opportunity of checking the first description'.¹

Interesting though these accounts are, they do not throw much light upon the actual operation of compiling the original returns. There are, however, other documents, besides Domesday Book, which must have been composed from the original returns. It is true that these documents are only fragments, but they are of supreme importance in Domesday interpretation.² Among these subsidiary documents is the so-called Exeter Domesday Book, covering Cornwall, Somerset, most of Devonshire, about one third of Dorset, and one manor in Wiltshire. F. H. Baring, in 1912, showed that it was from this Exeter Domesday Book that the relevant portions of the main Domesday Book were made.³ In the process of making it, much was omitted, e.g. details of livestock such as sheep and swine. Obviously, any account that is nearer to the original returns than Domesday Book itself must be of very special interest.

Another of these subsidiary documents is the *Inquisitio Eliensis*, a survey of the estates of the abbey of Ely in six eastern counties. It opens with an explanatory paragraph which is usually thought to refer to the operation of the Inquest.⁴ The questions to be asked of each hundred were as follows:

- 1 What is the name of the manor?
- 2 Who held it in the time of King Edward?
- 3 Who holds it now?
- 4 How many hides are there?
- 5 How many teams, in demesne and among the men?
- 6 How many villeins? How many cottars? How many slaves? How many freemen? How many sokemen?
- 7 How much wood? How much meadow? How much pasture? How many mills? How many fisheries?
- 8 How much has been added or taken away?
- 9 How much was the whole worth? How much is it worth now?
- 10 How much had or has each freeman or each sokeman? All this is to be

¹ W. H. Stevenson, 'A contemporary description of the Domesday Survey', *Eng. Hist. Rev.* xxii (1907), 74.

² D. C. Douglas, 'The Domesday Survey', *History*, xxi (1936), 249–57.

³ F. H. Baring, 'The Exeter Domesday', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, xxvii (1912), 309–18. See also R. Welldon Finn, *Domesday Studies: The Liber Exoniensis* (London, 1964).

⁴ N. E. S. A. Hamilton, *Inquisitio comitatus Cantabrigiensis . . . subjicitur Inquisitio Eliensis* (London, 1876), 97.

given in triplicate; that is in the time of King Edward, when King William gave it, and at the present time.

11 And whether more can be had than is had?

Whether these were the 'official instructions' for all counties, we cannot say, but they, or at any rate a similar set of questions, must also have been asked elsewhere. The *Inquisitio* tells us that the king's commissioners heard the evidence 'on the oath of the sheriff of the shire, and of the barons and of their Frenchmen, and of the whole hundred – the priest, the reeve and six villeins from each vill'. There was a separate jury for each hundred, consisting of eight men, whose function 'was apparently to approve and check the information variously assembled'.¹ J. H. Round showed that half the jurors were English and the other half Norman. 'Conquerors and conquered were alike bound by their common sworn verdicts.'² We cannot say whether the commissioners themselves attended every hundred court as Round suggested,³ or whether, as Maitland thought, they merely held one session in the county town.⁴ A number of entries make it clear that they sometimes heard conflicting evidence, and there are appendices dealing with disputes about ownership in several counties, e.g. Huntingdonshire (208), Lincolnshire (375–377b) and Yorkshire (373–374). It has been suggested 'that fiscal documents already in existence were drawn upon to help with the compilation of a partly feudal and partly fiscal enquiry'.⁵ The making of the inquest may have been a far more complicated process than was at one time thought.

Whatever the exact procedure, it would seem that the commissioners conducted their operations on a geographical basis, county by county and hundred by hundred. It has been conjectured, and it is reasonable to suppose, that the counties were grouped into circuits visited by different teams of commissioners. There is no proof of this, but it is suggested by

¹ V. H. Galbraith, *The making of Domesday Book* (Oxford, 1961), 60, 161.

² J. H. Round, *Feudal England* (London, 1895), 120.

³ *Ibid.*, 118–19.

⁴ F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and beyond* (Cambridge, 1897), 11. See also V. H. Galbraith (1961), 155.

⁵ S. P. J. Harvey, 'Domesday Book and Anglo-Norman governance', *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, 5th series, xxv (1975), 176. See also: (1) P. H. Sawyer, 'The "Original Returns" and Domesday Book', *Eng. Hist. Rev.* LXX (1955), 177–97; (2) S. P. J. Harvey, 'Domesday Book and its predecessors', *Eng. Hist. Rev.* LXXXVI (1971), 753–73.

common peculiarities among groups of counties and by differences in phraseology and in the arrangement of information. R. W. Eyton thought that there were nine circuits each marked by a similarity of language. Adolphus Ballard reduced them to seven.² Carl Stephenson thought that there were 'at least seven', but grouped the counties differently from Ballard (Fig. 1).³ Within each of the seven circuits (if that is the right number), there were differences as between one county and another. We cannot believe, for example, that there were no markets in Sussex or Warwickshire, or no meadow in Shropshire, or only one church in Leicestershire. The commissioners for different circuits interpreted their remit in different ways; and within the circuits, the returns for different counties, and even for different hundreds, also display idiosyncrasies.

The word 'Domesday' does not occur in the Book itself. Richard fitz Nigel, the Treasurer of England, writing in the year 1179 or thereabouts, said: 'This book is called by the natives Domesday – that is, metaphorically speaking, the day of judgement. For as the sentence of that strict and terrible last account cannot be evaded by any skilful subterfuge, so when this book is appealed to on those matters which it contains, its sentence cannot be quashed or set aside with impunity.'⁴ It may well have seemed comparable to the Book by which one day all will be judged (Revelation 20:12).

The method of the compilation of Domesday Book from the original returns has been a matter of much discussion. The older view was that the information was sent to the king's treasury at Winchester, and there summarised. But this view was challenged in 1942 by Professor V. H. Galbraith who produced a much more credible hypothesis.⁵ He believed that local summaries were made for groups of counties (i.e. for the circuits); and that it was these, and not the 'original returns', which were submitted to Winchester for final assembly and editing. The Exeter Domesday Book, on this view, was the first draft of the local summary for the south-west, and it was abbreviated and edited by the Exchequer

¹ R. W. Eyton, 'Notes on Domesday', *Trans. Shropshire Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc.*, I (1878), 99–118.

² A. Ballard, *The Domesday Inquest* (London, 1906), 12.

³ C. Stephenson, 'Notes on the composition and interpretation of Domesday Book', *Speculum*, XXII (1947), 1–15.

⁴ A. Hughes *et al.* (ed.), *Dialogus de Scaccario* (Oxford, 1902), 107–8.

⁵ V. H. Galbraith, 'The making of Domesday Book', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, LVIII (1943), 161–77. Elaborated in *The making of Domesday Book* (Oxford, 1961).

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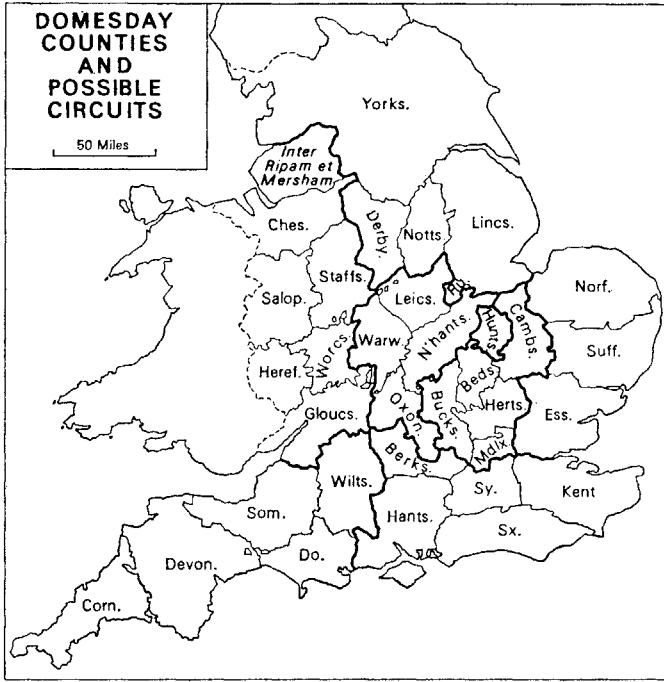


Fig. 1. Domesday counties and possible circuits.

The boundary with Wales is the western limit of named Domesday vills—see Fig. 108.
 Huntingdonshire was in the northern circuit.

clerks to produce the main, or Exchequer, Domesday Book. One other local summary has survived—that for the eastern circuit; but, for one reason or another, it was never edited and converted into Exchequer form, and it became known as Little Domesday Book. The two volumes that make up Domesday Book—the Great or Exchequer Domesday and the Little Domesday—thus belong to different stages of the enquiry, and are very different from each other in format, script and scale. The length of time taken over the process of compilation, and the date of the Exchequer Domesday Book itself are also controversial matters. Some place it not long after King William's death in 1087; others place its final completion not before 1100.¹

Whatever the stages of compilation, and however long they took,

¹ F. M. Stenton (1943), 647. D. C. Douglas, (1936), 255. See also D. C. Douglas, *The Domesday Monachorum of Christ Church Canterbury* (London, 1944), 22–4.

the fact remains that the result was very different from the original returns. The new form was more condensed, and, for example, much information about livestock was omitted. There was also a more fundamental difference. For each county, the information was rearranged under the headings of the main landholders, beginning with the king himself and continuing with the ecclesiastical lords, the bishops followed by the abbots, then with the great lay lords, and finally with the lesser landholders in descending order; only for Nottinghamshire do lay lords precede those of the church. The geographical basis of the return was thus replaced by a feudal basis. It follows that if two or more lords held land in a village, the different sets of information must be assembled from their respective folios in order to obtain a picture of the village as a whole. The village of Buckden in Huntingdonshire was held entirely by the bishop of Lincoln, and so is described in only one entry (203b) which happens to be a fairly representative one:

In Buckden the bishop of Lincoln had 20 hides that paid geld. Land for 20 ploughteams. There, now on the demesne 5 ploughteams, and 37 villeins and 20 bordars having 14 ploughteams. There, a church and a priest and one mill yielding 30s (a year), and 84 acres of meadow. Wood for pannage one league long and one broad. In the time of King Edward (i.e. in 1066) it was worth £20 (a year), and now £16 10s.

The variety of detail in such entries as this falls into two categories. In the first place, there are those items that recur in almost every entry: hides (or other units of taxation), ploughlands, ploughteams, various categories of population, and annual values usually for 1066 and 1086 but sometimes also for an intermediate date. The second group comprises such items as the mill, meadow and wood entered for Buckden, and also, where relevant, pasture, salt-works, fisheries, waste, vineyards and other resources. It is from these two groups of information that the geography of England in 1086, in all its regional diversity, can be reconstructed.

The repetitive uniformity of entry after entry is sometimes broken in curious and unexpected ways. Thus the account of the render of fish at Iver (149) in Buckinghamshire is elaborated to tell us that the fish was paid on Fridays for the use of the reeve of the vill (*pisces per dies veneris ad opus prepositi villae*). Or again, the only recorded inhabitant of Poston (252b) in Shropshire was a man who rendered a bundle of box on Palm Sunday (*fascis buxi in die palmarum*). The entry for the borough of

Nottingham (280) refers to a royal gift of ten acres to William Peverel for the making of an orchard (*ad faciendum pomerium*), the only mention of the word in Domesday Book. There is also a unique reference to a warren for hares (*wareнна leporum*) at Gelston (347b) a few miles to the north of Grantham in Lincolnshire. Rabbits, incidentally, were unknown in Domesday England and were not introduced from France or possibly Spain until the next century. Another unusual, and unexpected, reference occurs in the account of the half-hide which Godric, the sheriff of Buckinghamshire in the time of King Edward, had given to 'Alwid the maid' (149) on condition that she taught his daughter embroidery work (*ut illa docerat filiam ejus Aurifrifium operari*). Furthermore, in spite of the frequent record of slaves among the population, the veil is lifted only once in a reference to trade in slaves in the borough of Lewes (26) in Sussex. On a different note, the account of the resources of Wilcot (69) in Wiltshire goes out of its way to tell us of a new church, an excellent house and a good vineyard (*ecclesia nova, domus optima et vinea bona*). Such are some of the unusual additions encountered in the regularity of the Domesday text.

THE ASSESSMENTS

One of the important sources of public revenue in the eleventh century was the geld; and its origin and history were rooted in the Anglo-Saxon past. There were four different methods of assessment (Fig. 2), reflecting the varying histories of different parts of the realm. One was based on the unit of the 'hide', and each Domesday manor or holding was assessed at so many hides, each comprising 4 virgates. This unit was to be found in Wessex, Mercia, the southern Danelaw and Essex. It so happens that the *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis*, which was associated with the Domesday Inquest, sets out the amount of geld on the basis of villages as well as of manors. This led J. H. Round in 1895 to conclude that the geld assessments were based on a conventional unit of five hides or multiples of five hides, either for single villages or groups of villages.¹ He therefore postulated an artificial system of hidation imposed from above i.e. from the county to the hundreds (or wapentakes) and so to the villages.

The second method of assessment was to be found in the northern Danelaw. It resembled the first except that the unit was duodecimal, and

¹ J. H. Round (1895), 49 *et seq.*

comprised six carucates; it may have replaced an earlier decimal system. In the third place, the assessment of East Anglia was based on the divisions of a hundred known as 'leets', which in turn comprised villages, and each leet contributed so many pence for every 20s that the hundred contributed. This was also believed to be an artificial arrangement.¹ Finally, in Kent the unit was the sulung, an archaic term related to the Old English word for plough; a sulung comprised four yokes (*juga*); these again were regarded as 'unreal fiscal units, whose meaning must be found in some wider scheme of taxation'.²

Round's view came to dominate all thinking about Domesday assessments; and it was supported by a succession of scholars – Maitland, Vinogradoff, Stenton and many others. It also became the orthodox belief of the next generation, including the contributors to the Domesday Geographies. But as successive volumes followed one another we became somewhat disenchanted with the Round hypothesis. The 5-hide or the 6-carucate unit was apparent in only a sixth, a fifth, a quarter or a third of some counties, and such fractions were often achieved only by assembling blocks of villages.

Only too often, we said that such units were not 'readily apparent' (Hereford), 'rarely employed' (Northampton), 'difficult to perceive' (Cheshire), 'rare, certainly not more than might occur by chance in any group of entries' (Cornwall); and we used such phrases as 'cannot be certain' (Wiltshire), or 'impossible to be definite' about such units (Worcester). Yorkshire appeared in one of the later volumes, and the conclusion was 'that there is a large subjective element in picking out evidence to support a duodecimal system'. The account of Cheshire is interesting in that it quoted from James Tait who wrote that 'the assessment of the various hundreds had some rough relation to their agricultural capacity and population',³ but our conclusion was that this relationship could not be 'emphasized'. In retrospect one wonders whether this could involve a stochastic (non-exact) relationship.

In spite of our doubts we continued to believe that the assessment was 'artificial'. At that time, we lacked the statistical methodology and the aid of computers to give substance to our disenchantment. Recent studies

¹ J. H. Round (1895), 99 *et seq.* See also: (1) F. M. Stenton (1943), 639–40; (2) C. Johnson in *V.C.H. Norfolk*, II (1906), 5–6, 204–11; (3) B. A. Lees, in *V.C.H. Suffolk*, I (1911), 360–4, 412–16.

² J. E. A. Jolliffe, *Pre-feudal England: the Jutes* (Oxford, 1933), 43–7.

³ J. Tait, *The Domesday survey of Cheshire* (Chetham Soc., Manchester, 1916), 17.