

## NORTHERN DEVON IN THE DOMESDAY BOOK

### INTRODUCTION

The existence of the Domesday Book has been a source of national pride since the first antiquarians started to write about it perhaps four hundred years ago. However, it was not really studied until the late nineteenth century when the legal historian, F W Maitland, showed how one could begin to understand English society at around the time of the Norman Conquest through a close reading and analysis of the Domesday Book (Maitland 1897, 1987). The Victoria County Histories from the early part of the twentieth century took on the task of county-wide analysis, although the series as a whole ran out of momentum long before many counties, Devon included, had been covered. Systematic analysis of the data within the Domesday Book was undertaken by H C Darby of University College London and Cambridge University, assisted by a research team during the 1950s and 1960s. Darby(1953), in a classic paper on the methodology of historical geography, suggested that two great fixed dates for English rural history were 1086, with Domesday Book, and circa 1840, when there was one of the first more comprehensive censuses and the detailed listings of land-use and land ownership in the Tithe Survey of 1836-1846. The anniversary of Domesday Book in 1986 saw a further flurry of research into what Domesday Book really was, what it meant at the time and how it was produced. It might be a slight over-statement but in the early-1980s there was a clear consensus about Domesday Book and its purpose but since then questions have been raised and although signs of a new shared understanding can be again be seen, it seems unlikely that Domesday Book will ever again be taken as self-evident.

Without getting too deeply into the recent debates about Domesday Book, this essay will attempt to analyse the entries for northern Devon, the modern local government districts of North Devon and Torridge. For those wishing to glean something of the academic debate, then the essays by Roffe (2016a and c) and Harvey (2016) are probably the best places to start. Devon as a whole has been studied by Morgan (1940) and by Welldon-Finn (1967). Both these studies take the county as a whole and do not pay great attention to variations across it. Welldon-Finn was also working to a standard treatment for the regional Domesday volumes being produced and so each county was compared and contrasted with the others in the same volume and with England as a whole. The essay will touch on the issues of production and compilation of the Devon folio of the Domesday Book and then analyse land-use, population, livestock numbers and land-tenure across northern Devon. The data have been drawn from the Phillimore Domesday edition, which for Devon was edited by Thorn and Thorn (1985).

### CHRONOLOGY AND CONTEXT FOR THE DOMESDAY BOOK

As Roffe (2016c) notes, the Domesday Book is among the best known documents in the western world. It was commanded by William the Conqueror during his sojourn at Gloucester at Christmas 1085, after consulting his council, and, as the Anglo-Saxon

Chronicle puts it, 'deep talk'. Most of 1086 was taken up by the inquiry and initial compilation process and a version was presented to the king and his council at Old Sarum at Christmas 1086. Harvey (2014) thinks that this was probably more of a working draft and that the Domesday Book as we know it was finished around 1087. There seems little doubt that the initial impetus for the inquiry came from the fiscal and military crisis caused by the need to sustain an army to resist a potential invasion by Cnut of Denmark, who had an equally good claim to the throne of England as did William. It also became apparent that the inquiry would clarify and legitimate the land grab by Norman lords. Initially, William had simply declared the royal lands of Edward the Confessor to be his own and consistently Domesday Book ignores the reign of Harold and referring to him as Earl Harold. William also declared confiscated the lands of the Saxon lords who had fought at Hastings. As Norman rule was resisted and contested in the aftermath, so more lands were confiscated from those lords who had taken up arms and there must have been some confusion as to whom specific lands belonged by 1086.

The book, initially known as *Liber Magnus* (the Great Book) or sometimes the Winchester Book, was kept at the royal exchequer in Winchester and it was a subsequent royal treasurer, Richard fitzNigel, who in effect coined its modern name. He opined that the judgements in the book could no more be challenged than those of the Last Judgement (the Day of Doom). Roffe (2016c) notes that well into the fourteenth century taxation records were kept on rolls and that both the physical and verbal description 'book' were reserved for very special volumes, such as Books of the Gospels, so Domesday was regarded from the outset as a very special product of the bureaucracy.

## DOMESDAY BOOK ENTRIES

It may be more useful to outline the structure and organisation of Domesday Book before looking at the complex of processes that led to its final production. All the entries are in Latin, which is highly abbreviated but consistently so. The basic unit of the book is the manor. As Roffe (2016b) notes these are emphasised by the use of red ink and block capitals. The manor is given a pseudo-Latin name and most of these can be identified with known places and many of the other manor names can plausibly be related to actual places. What the Domesday Book does not do is give any indication as to the boundaries of the manor. As will be shown, the absence of a place name from Domesday Book does not mean that it did not exist in 1086, although there are some instances where this would be true, but as far as the compilers were concerned, it was the name of the manor that mattered and names of places within it did not need to be recorded. Domesday Book is organised by county and within each county all the manors of individual land-owners are treated together, starting with lands of the king, then lands of bishops and churches and then the other land-owners. In Devon there were 53 groups of land-owners. The royal lands and those attached to sees, abbeys and churches were not personal but passed to the next holder of the office. Thus, the Bishop of Coutances in Normandy, Geoffrey of Mowbray, had extensive lands in Devon

but these were personal to him and did not pass to his successor. For each land-owner, the manors come in a set order by hundred, so it is possible to be clear when an entry says 'Tawton' whether it refers to Bishops Tawton, North Tawton or South Tawton. However, Domesday Book does not use sub-headings or any other devices to separate hundreds in the land-owners' list. In a few instances, there are multiple manors having the same name but with different lords. For convenience these are distinguished here as, for instance, Great Torrington 1, 2, 3 etc.

For each manor there is a standard pattern of entry. First the current tenant is given then the manor itself is named. The pre-Conquest owner is then given and the tax liability is stated. This is given in hides and virgates. The hide is a notional 120 acres and the virgate is a quarter of this. Tax was levied as so much per hide and the hide was perhaps closer to the old fashioned rateable value of property used in England and Wales until the 1980s as a basis for funding local government. The hide could be larger or smaller depending upon the fertility of the land and the king could reduce the hidage of a manor as a reward for service, or for church lands, as an act of piety. The entry then states the amount of potential arable land, as 'land for so many ploughs' and the amount of land actually tilled is given as 'so many ploughs are there'. The plough team was taken as being eight oxen and their capacity to plough was 120 acres (48.6 hectares) a season. The demesne land is then given in the formula, so many ploughs, so many slaves and its share of the whole tax liability. Not all demesne land had slaves, but in Devon most did. The entry continues by mentioning the people not on the demesne holding and their socio-economic class (usually villagers, small-holders, slaves, and sometimes other trades such as pig-men). The number of ploughs that they have is given, sometimes including half ploughs. This is generally taken to mean that these people did not have full ox teams and needed to borrow animals to make up a team. The entry lists the land-use, usually given in acres, specifying meadow, pasture and woodland. Some of the larger areas of woodland and pasture are given in linear measure such as furlongs and leagues (one and a half miles). In some cases just a single measure is given, such as 'one league' and the consensus is that this implies an area roughly one league x one league. In other cases the entry might be 'half a league by one league' but it should not be assumed that the land is a rectangle but rather these could represent rough extent or maximum dimensions. Figures for livestock are given and the general view is that these are the stock on the demesne farm and do not include that of the other inhabitants. The final entry gives the value in 1066 and the value of the manor now (probably 1085).

The tenor of the entries certainly suggests a taxation function and the potential for further taxation to be gained from more intensive or extensive working of the manor's lands. The order by land-owner, it has been argued, makes the taxation function more difficult and a listing only by hundred would have been more logical. However, if another key function of Domesday was to establish who had what land and to provide an ultimate title to that land, then the surviving order is perfectly logical. The consensus among scholars now is that this latter order was more useful in the long term and explains why Domesday Book has this form but that other listings produced as part of

the inquiry must have existed but did not survive as they were felt to have no longer term value.

Hoskins (1972) noted that in many Devon manors the number of ploughs outside the demesne was exactly the same as the number of farms that appeared for the first time in the documentary record up to the Black Death. This, he felt, was more than a co-incidence and he concluded that these farms also existed at the time of Domesday. In some cases farms with different suffixes, such as north and south or lower and upper, had not been divided at the time of Domesday and this helps balance the number of ploughs and the number of medieval farms. However, it has to be admitted that there are cases where it is not possible to effect this reconciliation, but these do not preclude the possibility that a Domesday farm was later divided and the newer part given a completely different name.

The Hundred was the fundamental sub-division of the county, and like the county, it too had a court and officials. The name derives from the original function of providing 100 fighting men, with each man needing the resources of a single hide to support him. By Domesday many Hundreds comprised fewer than one hundred hides, largely as a result of exemptions and reductions granted by the king. Many Hundreds were named for royal manors or places where there had been Saxon minster churches, with Braunton and South Molton, being both. The complex boundaries of Braunton and Shirwell Hundreds and the fact that neither comes close to one hundred hides, suggests that they may well have been one unit but were split. The modern local government districts of North Devon and Torridge lie within 10 hundreds, with all of Braunton, Fremington, Hartland, Shirwell and South Molton hundreds included, most of Black Torrington, Shebbear and Witheridge and smaller parts of Lifton and North Tawton. The Hundred boundaries within North Devon and Torridge are shown in figure 1.

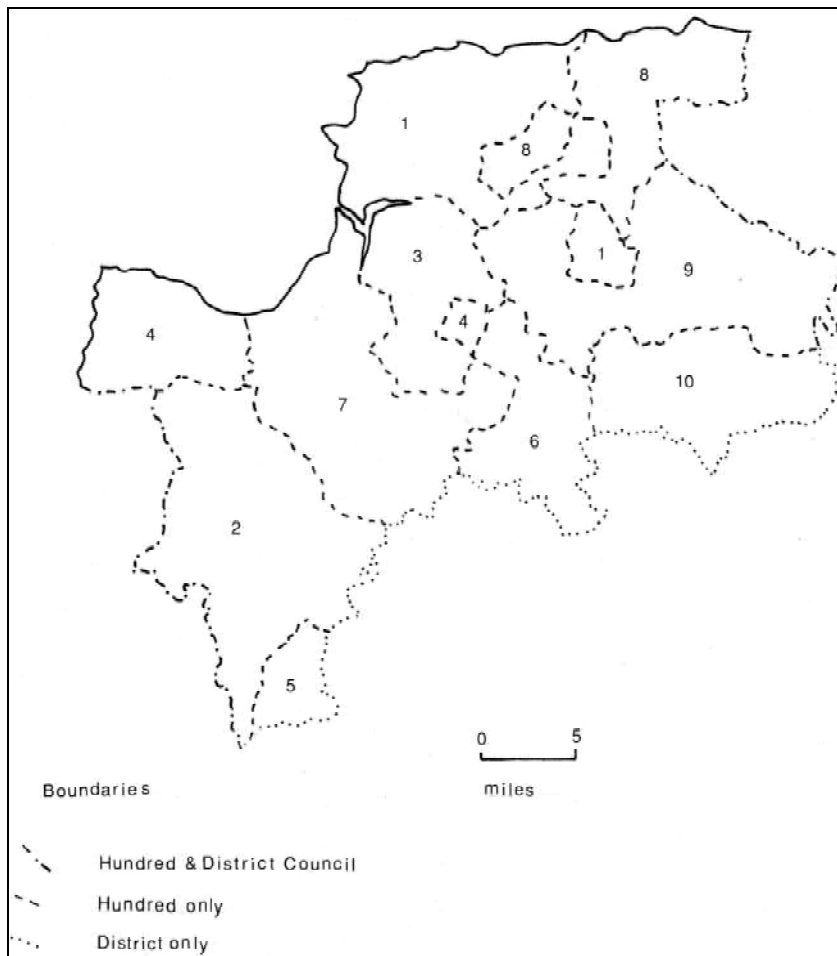


Figure 1. The Hundreds of North Devon and Torrridge. 1 Braunton; 2 Black Torrington; 3 Fremington; 4 Hartland; 5 Lifton; 6 North Tawton; 7 Shebbear; 8 Shirwell; 9 South Molton; 10 Witheridge.

## THE DOMESDAY INQUIRY PROCESS

England was divided into probably nine circuits, with Devon falling in circuit II for the south-west, along with Cornwall, Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire. The entries for Devon and Cornwall differ somewhat from those of the other three counties and it is felt that they were handled together at some point. For each circuit a group of Commissioners was appointed. We do not know who these men were, but a contemporary source indicates that they had no lands in the areas to be covered by a circuit. It is also thought that each group of Commissioners included a senior bishop, not least as the church tended to have the best administrators and scribes and so the bishop's entourage could be responsible for record making. The so-called Inquest of Ely contains a series of questions in more or less the order each manor is recorded in Domesday Book and so this seems to have been the brief given to the Commissioners and their teams. The Inquest of Ely includes questions on mills, which are very rarely recorded in Devon. The Commissioners were to take evidence from the great landowners, the Shire Courts and the Hundred Courts. Whether they heard all of the

evidence is not clear and the balance of probabilities is that most the evidence was given before officials and that the Commissioners perhaps adjudicated on disputes and perhaps received a formal deposition of the final draft at the Shire Court. Evidence was given at the Hundred Courts by people from each manor, probably accompanied by their priest. It must have been given largely in Anglo-Saxon and then translated, possibly via Norman-French, into Latin for recording. There is little doubt that the whole process was co-ordinated from Winchester, the seat of the royal treasury. For this reason, Harvey (2014) thinks that Ranulf, bishop of Durham was the chief bureaucrat. Modern scholarship has also established that the Great Domesday was written by three scribes, with one doing almost all of the work. Great Domesday is the name given to the larger of the three 'Domesday Books'. Little Domesday, covers Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk and *Exon*, covers south-west England, although most of the records for Dorset and Wiltshire have been lost, and these appear to have been interim stages in the production of Great Domesday. The *Exon Domesday* is a misnomer, as although the surviving copy comes from the library of Exeter Cathedral, it was almost certainly produced at Salisbury and some of the 15 scribes who wrote it are known to have been active at Salisbury. It is presumed that lists, largely based on Hundreds, were re-worked by the scribes to produce the Domesday Book organised by land-owner but that these listings have not survived. What is remarkable is that such a complex undertaking could have been carried out and completed in probably not much more than eighteen months. One reason why Domesday Book is unique in Europe is that few other countries would have had the resources to carry out and record such a survey.

## LAND-USE IN DOMESDAY NORTHERN DEVON

By aggregating all of the figures on land-use for each manor it is possible to get some picture of the landscape of northern Devon. There is one major hurdle in this, however. Domesday records land of economic value and when all the sum of such lands is compared with the modern area, there is a significant short-fall. This is usually described as 'waste' and, as Domesday Book was about the value and potential tax-revenue, it has to be assumed to have had such low value as not to be worth recording. The waste was probably very coarse pasture and scrub although it is possible that there was some unmanaged woodland. So in this section waste is derived from a simple addition of all Domesday land-uses and subtracting this from the area of the modern parish in which the manors lay. For Shirwell hundred, and to a lesser extent for South Molton hundred also, there is a problem. There, Domesday land-use accounts for 135% of the area of the hundred and in South Molton the figure is around 93%, far above that for the other hundreds. In these instances it can only be presumed that many manors had grazing rights within the Royal Forest of Exmoor, then not specifically shired and now within Somerset, which were then included as 'pasture' in the manorial entry. If later practice is anything to go on, then there could well have been double or multiple counting of such grazing rights, as many parishes shared an entitlement to depasture stock on the Royal Forest. Notwithstanding these problems, figure 2 shows the share of each land-use for northern Devon in Domesday

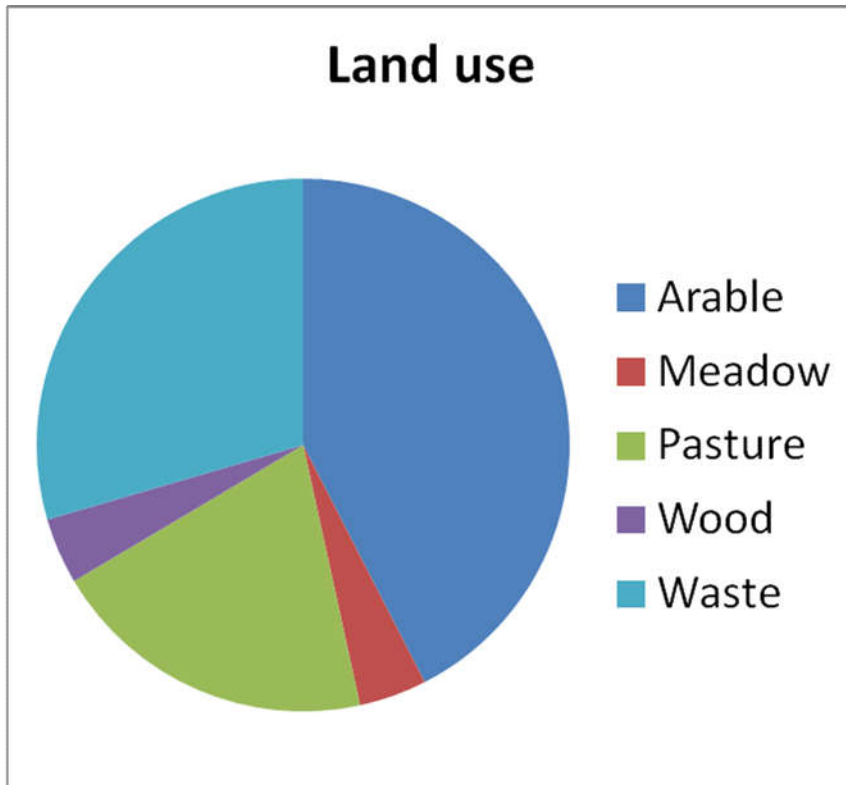


Figure 2. Domesday land-use in northern Devon

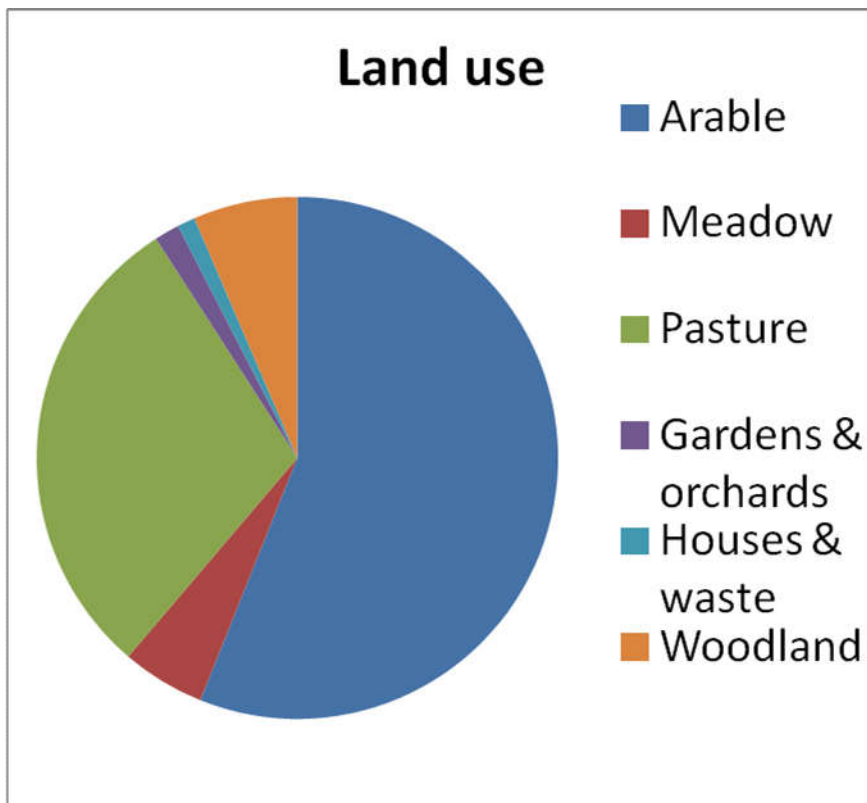


Figure 3. Land-use in northern Devon at the time of the Tithe Survey

It is instructive to compare this with Darby's other bench-mark for rural England, namely the Tithe Survey of 1836-1845. This is shown in figure 3. The figures are remarkably similar if one assumes that most of the Domesday waste became pasture and some became arable. Woodland has a very small share of land-use in both sets of data and shows how complete woodland clearance had been as early as the eleventh century. Modern northern Devon is significantly more wooded than it was at the time of the Tithe Survey, but at around 12%, it is still among the least wooded parts of Europe.

#### Arable

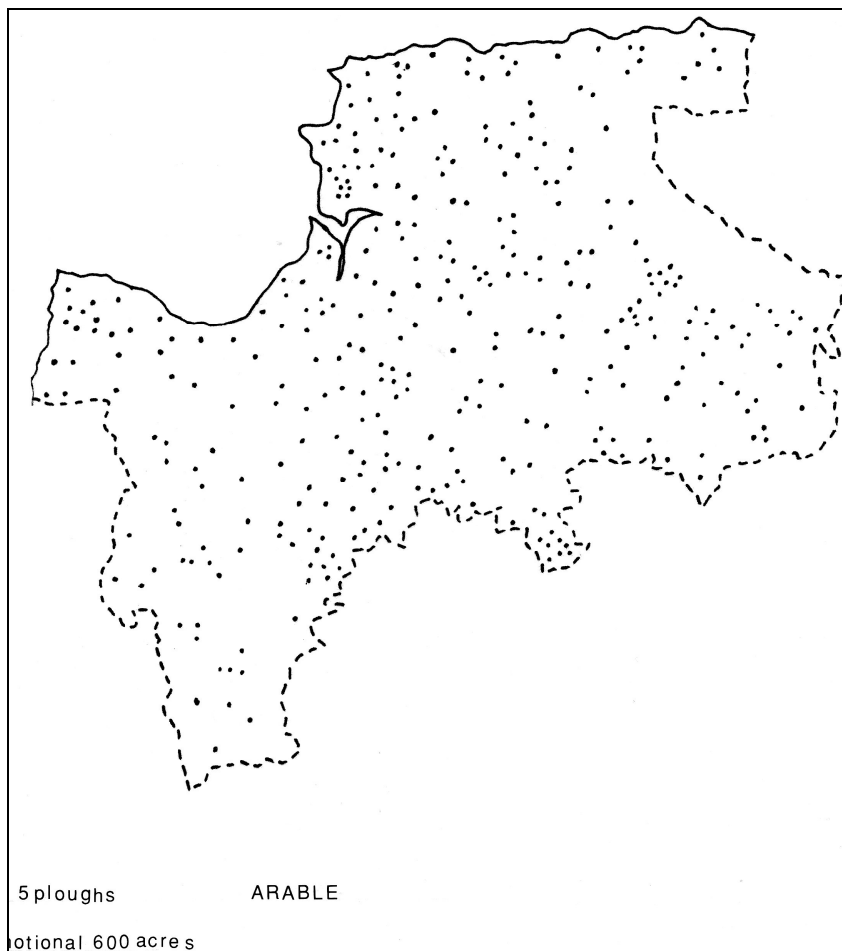


Figure 4. Distribution of Domesday arable land

Arable land was the largest single land-use in Domesday and is expressed in terms of ploughs, the equivalent of 120 acres. The general distribution of arable land is shown in figure 4. This shows some clustering in the area called more than seven hundred years later by Vancouver (1808) 'the dun lands' lying across the southern part of the area, with a marked concentration around Winkleigh. Vancouver also noted an area he called 'moorlands' tending to lie on the plateau-like interfluvies within his 'dun-lands'. These were characterised by wet and rushy pasture and it is tempting to explain the paucity



of arable land in Domesday in these areas as proof even then that they were difficult lands to farm. It is probable that at the time of Domesday most of the arable land was part of an open field system, where the villagers had individual strips and where the field were worked in common. Most open-field systems had three fields with only one being under cereals in any year, one growing peas and beans and the other fallow or given over to grass. Braunton most famously still has one of its open fields and, into the 1950s, the enclosed remnants of the other two fields could be seen on maps and on the ground. Even quite small hamlets had their open fields but it seems that land-owners and sometimes tenant farmers sought agreements to erase common rights and to enclose common fields and that by the fifteenth century there were very few open fields left. Landscape historians tend to the view that as the Domesday waste was reclaimed it was by direct enclosure and that common fields were never established on them.

### Meadow

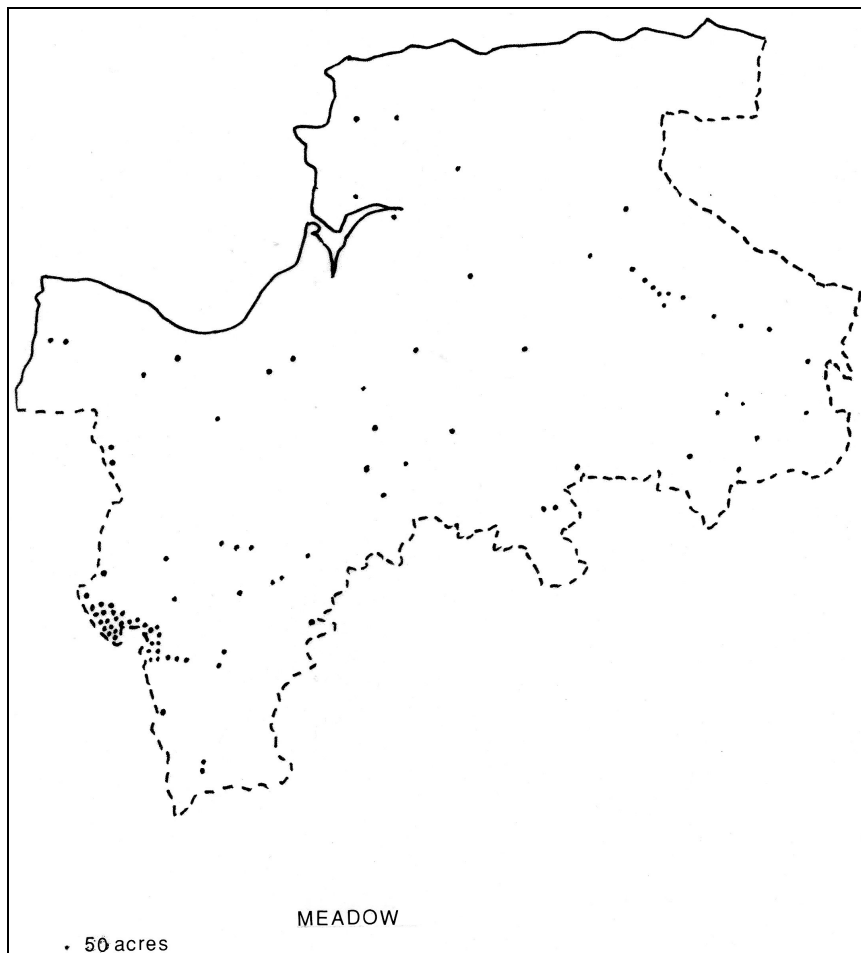


Figure 5. Distribution of Domesday meadow

Meadow was the second most valuable land at the time of Domesday, and indeed it was still as valued at the time of the Tithe Survey. Meadow, grassland cut for hay, effectively determined how much livestock a farm could over-winter. Meadows in

Domesday were specialist grasslands and any hay cut taken from one of the open fields was not attributed to meadow. As figure 5 shows, there was not a great deal of meadow but there is a marked cluster in the middle Tamar valley around Bridgerule and Pyworthy. This is hard to explain as the lower Taw valley, say from Kings Nympton northwards, does not show any comparable cluster of meadows. The absence of meadows from Exmoor and its foothills and from most of mid Devon is apparent.

### Pasture

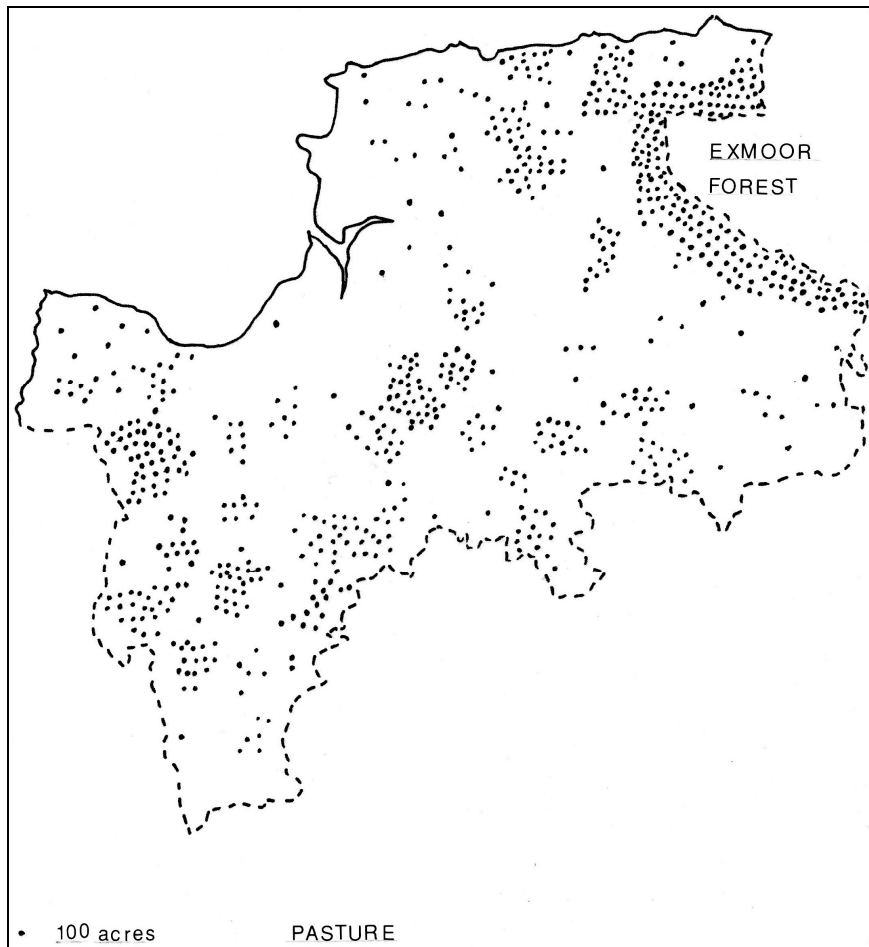


Figure 6. Distribution of Domesday pasture

The distribution of pasture is shown in figure 6, although not all of the pasture of the Exmoor Forest fringe manors has been included. Until the eighteenth century, the Devon parishes bordering Exmoor Forest had extensive commons running up to the county boundary, so some of the Domesday pasture must have lain within them. Other clusters of pasture occur in the south and west of the study area and once more could be related to Vancouver's 'moorlands'. To a considerable degree, this distribution map is opposite to that for arable. What landscape historians and ecologists would love to know is whether any of the Domesday pasture was akin to contemporary Culm Grassland, a mixture of wetter rushy areas and slightly drier tracts with heather and gorse, with purple moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) abundant.

## Woodland

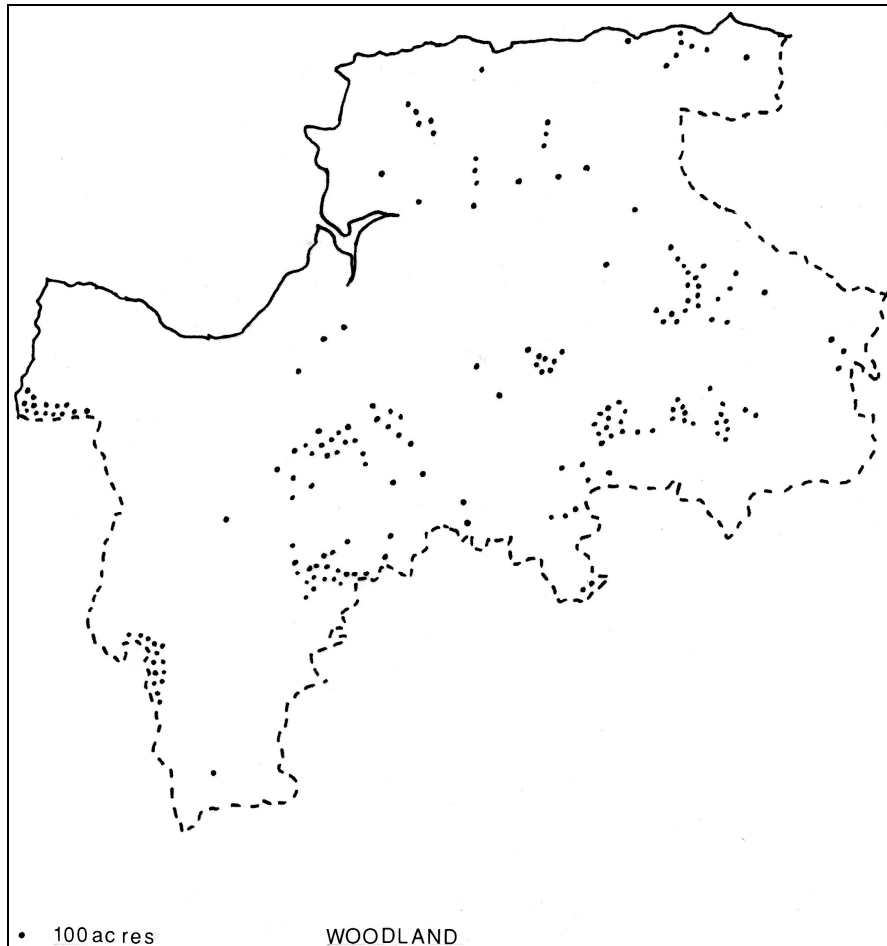


Figure 7. Distribution of Domesday woodland

As noted earlier, northern Devon at the time of Domesday was not a wooded landscape, although it is likely that it would have presented a rather more wooded appearance as it does now, with mature trees standing in many of the hedgerows. Figure 7 shows that large parts of northern Devon have very little woodland at all but some clusters in the middle Tamar, around Bridgerule, the middle Torridge near Shebbear and Sheepwash and the Mole valley, south of South Molton can be picked out. There is also a cluster of woodland in the south-east of the study area, around Chulmleigh and Kings Nympton and it is tempting to equate some of this with the *nymed*, or sacred forest that gave rise to the various Nympton place-names.

## LIVESTOCK IN DOMESDAY NORTH DEVON

The totals for livestock on the demesne farms are given in Table 1. The cattle do not include draught oxen and Domesday Book did not record poultry. It can be seen that

sheep are most numerous, with cattle only just outnumbering goats. The Domesday figure for pigs does not include those owned by villagers and tended by the pig-men, so there is no problem accounting for manors with pig-men but no pigs. The number of horses is problematic and almost certainly does not include horses in the demesne stables for the use of the lord and his officials, but probably represent animals being used for breeding and this is supported by the entry for Brendon recording 104 unbroken mares, probably being depastured on Brendon Common or the nearby Royal Forest of Exmoor.

Animals	Numbers
Sheep	17,131
Cattle	2,984
Goats	2,240
Pigs	1,542
Horses	250

Table 1. Numbers of livestock in Domesday northern Devon.

#### Cattle

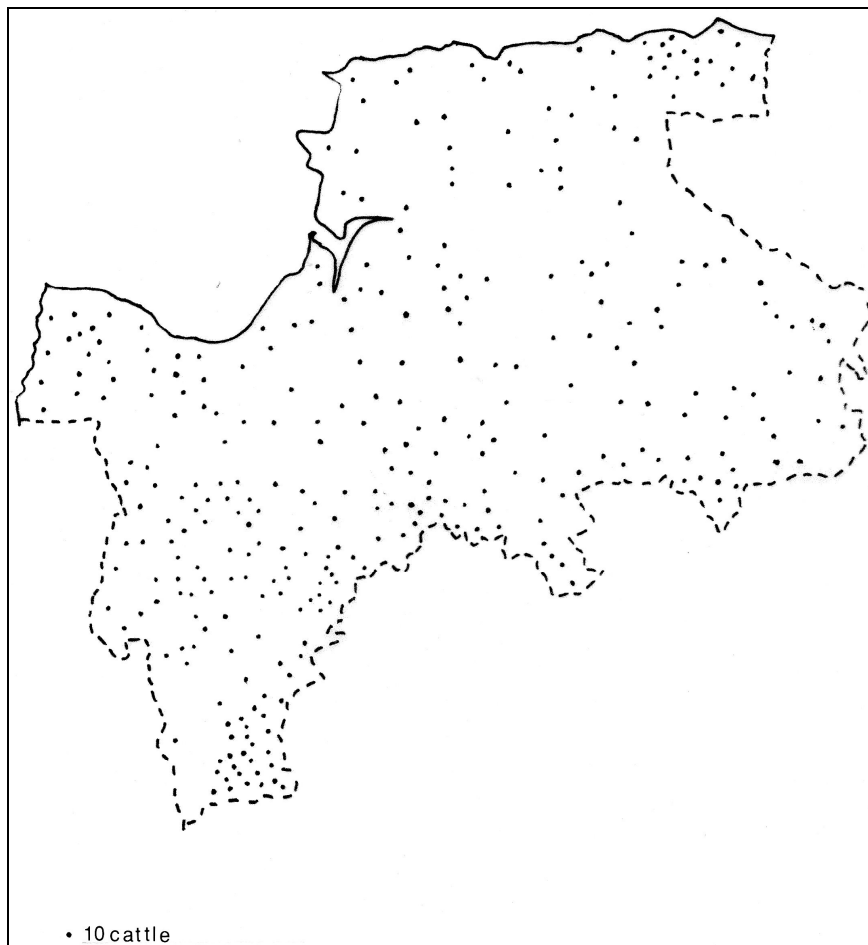


Figure 8. Distribution of cattle in Domesday northern Devon

The distribution of cattle is shown in figure 8. The numbers are low over most of the area north and south-east of Barnstaple and numbers are also quite low south of Bideford until one reaches the Ashwater and Halwill area. There are no obvious reasons for these distributions.

### Goats

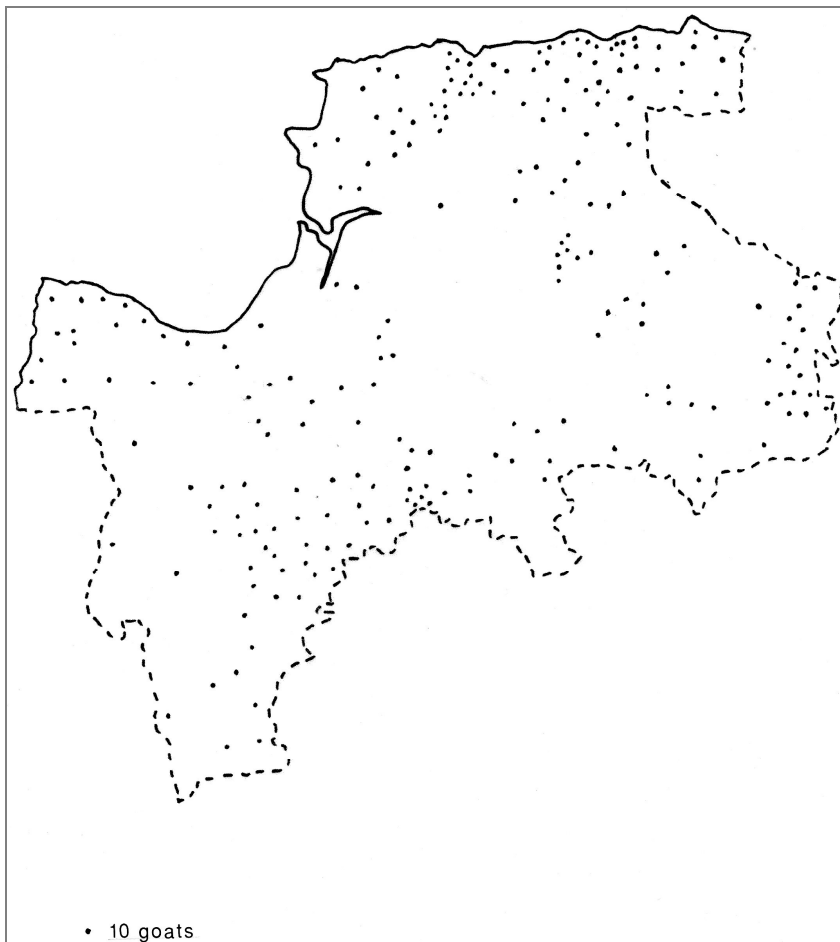


Figure 9. Distribution of goats in Domesday northern Devon

Welldon-Finn (1973) notes that Domesday Book only records she-goats and so goats must have been kept more for their milk than for their flesh. Goats are more numerous than pigs and represent about 13% of the total flock for sheep. There is no clear pattern in the distribution in figure 9, although there does seem to be something of a cluster along the north coast east of Combe Martin. For much of the central part of the study area there are very few goats.

## Pigs

There appears to be no clear pattern in the distribution of pigs as shown in figure 10. It might have been expected that the distribution of pigs would match that of cattle, given that milk left over from butter and cheese making has traditionally been fed to pigs, but this is not really the case. Neither is there anything other than a tenuous association of pigs with woodland, again with traditional practice encouraging pigs to forage for acorns and beech-mast in woodlands.

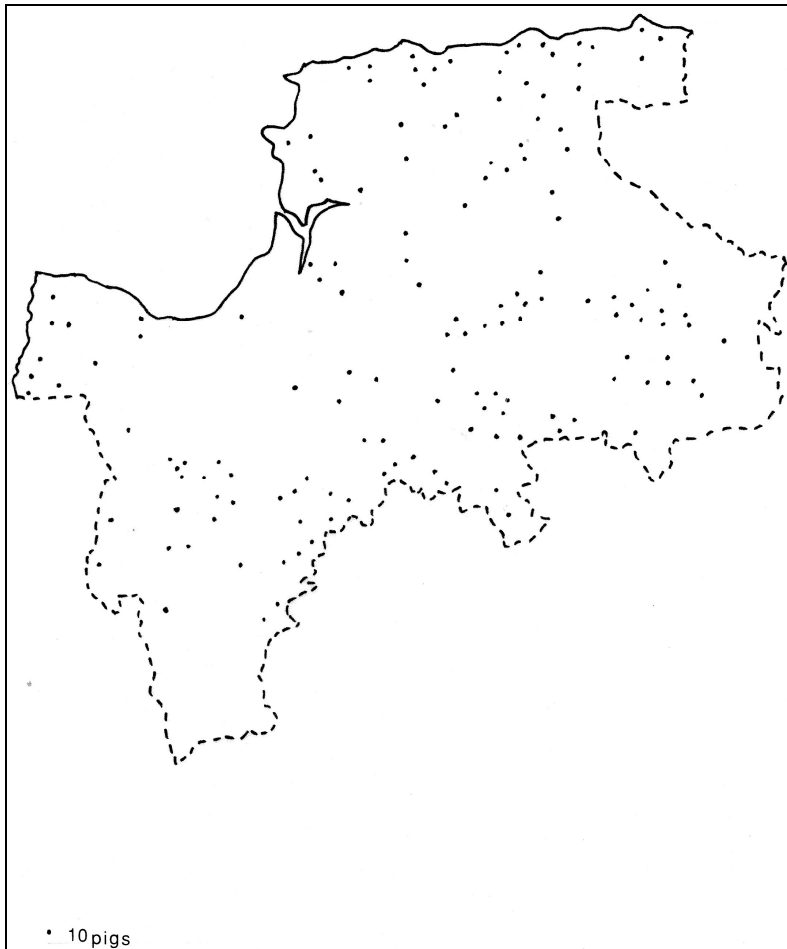


Figure 10. Distribution of pigs in Domesday northern Devon

## Sheep

Figure 11 shows that sheep were pretty widespread in northern Devon, although there would seem to be a paradox in that sheep numbers are lower in the Exmoor foothill manors than would have been expected given these manor's extensive pasture. In the whole of Domesday Book, reference to wool is rare and for none of the northern Devon manors is there any mention of it. It is likely that a primary function of sheep was to provide manure for the arable and sheep are much more readily folded than cattle. This practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries classically involved sheep grazing in one place during the day before being driven to the arable for the night and

their dung in effect providing nutrient transfer. But this might be expected to have seen some sort of association of sheep numbers with pasture or even possibly waste but the Domesday Book data do not seem to suggest this.

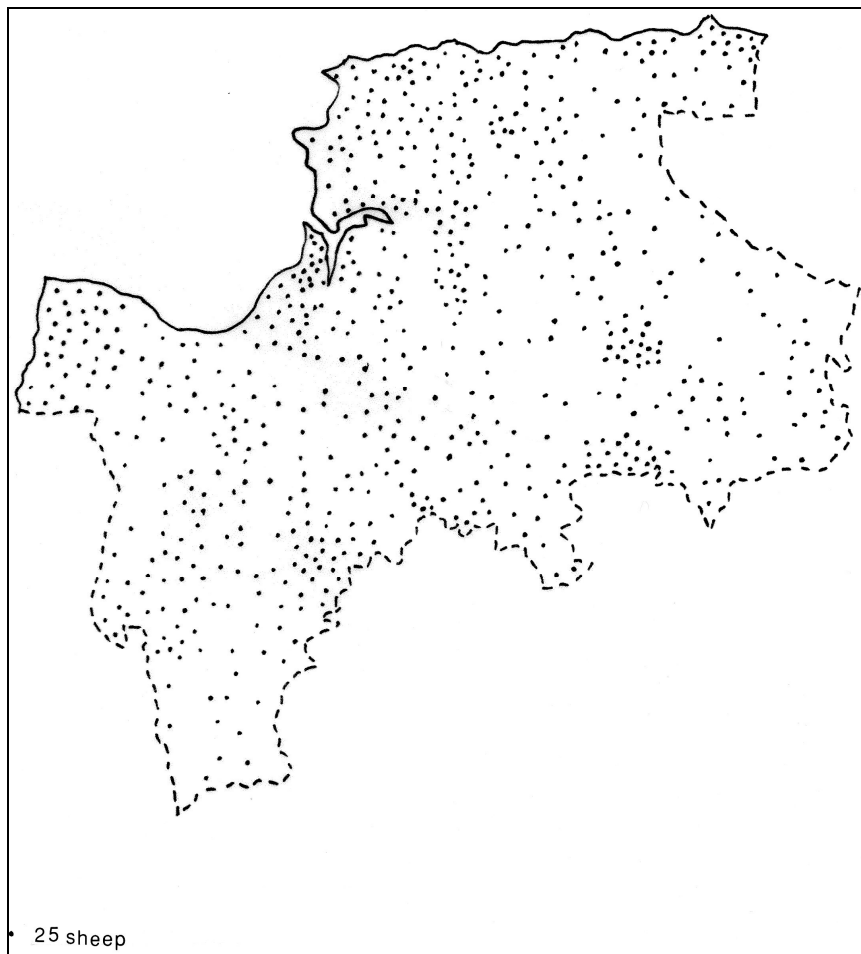


Figure 11. Distribution of sheep in Domesday northern Devon.

## THE HUMAN POPULATION

Domesday was not a census and most towns get at best a cursory entry and places like London and Winchester are omitted altogether and even a city like Bristol gets a minimal entry. There is no systematic recording of manorial officials, clergy or craftsmen, although some of these latter may or may not have been included as villagers living beyond the demesne. There is agreement that the figures for all other than slaves simply include 'heads of household' and so wives, dependent children and possibly grand-parents are included as a household. Many commentators suggest multiplying the Domesday head count by 5 to get an approximation of the real population. With slaves, it is impossible to tell whether the figure is of individuals or like the rest of the population, a count of households. Some would argue that slaves are assets and so all the individuals in a slave household would be counted, but the growing consensus is that slaves are treated as slave households, not least because in many cases the number of slaves on a demesne is double the number of plough teams,

and, as a slave household could readily include a father and son but a plough team needs two to operate it, then slaves must have been counted as households. Table 2 shows the Domesday population, including the burgesses living in Barnstaple.

Category	Number (of households)
Villagers	2,429
Small-holders	1,131
Slaves	982
Pig-men	160
Burgesses	66
Others	25
Total	4,793

Table 2. The Domesday population of northern Devon

If each household comprised five people, then the northern Devon population would have been around 24,000. In the 1801 census the population was 68,200. The estimated 2019 population for North Devon and Torridge districts is 170,000, although many of the rural parishes have yet to regain their peak population from c 1840 to 1860 and some may not have that many more people than in Domesday. Both Morgan (1940) and Welldon-Finn (1967) agree that northern Devon was not as densely populated as south and east Devon in Domesday, a pattern which seems to have been consistent over at least the last millennium.

### Villagers

This is the term that Thorn and Thorn (1985) use to translate the Latin *villani* (*villanus* in the singular). Older translations use 'villein' which of course is capable of considerable misunderstanding. Welldon-Finn (1973) noted that this is probably the most elastic and most ill-defined of all of the socio-economic classes of Domesday. It appears to have included men who were quite substantial farmers, others who had lost their free-status and others virtually indistinguishable from the small-holders. The villager had his own land but owed the lord labour service as well as giving him rent, and perhaps had to contribute oxen to the demesne plough-team. Some may have been craftsmen, although Domesday makes no mention of crafts. The distribution of villagers is shown in figure 12. It is broadly comparable with the distribution of arable land shown in figure 4, which would be expected. It is from among the villagers that the North Devon families taking their name from their farm holding would have arisen.



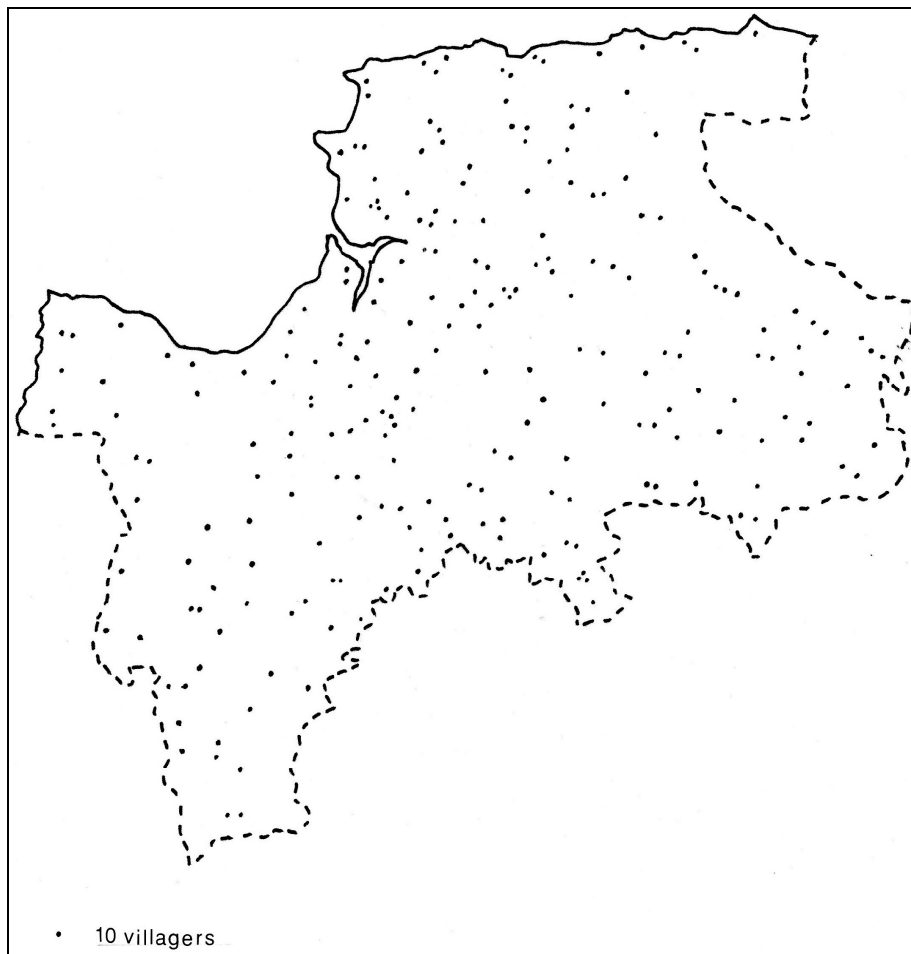


Figure 12. Distribution of villagers in Domesday northern Devon

#### Small-holders

This is the term that Thorn and Thorn (1985) use to translate the Latin *bordarii* (singular *bordarius*). They also regard the 'cottager', their translation of *coceti* (singular *cocetus*), as being of virtually the same status. These men had only subsistence plots and relied on work from the demesne and from villagers to support them and their families. They were tied to the manor. The distribution of small-holders is shown in figure 13 and shows a scattering across the entire study area.

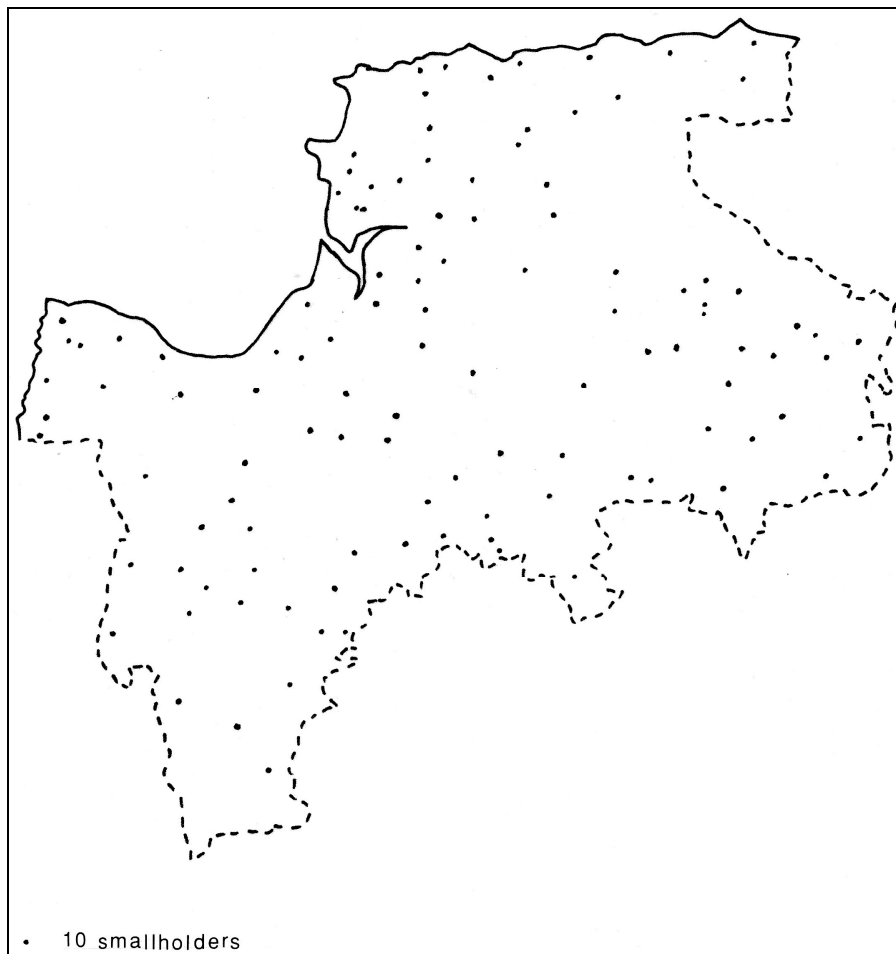


Figure 13. Distribution of small-holders in Domesday northern Devon

### Slaves

Thorn and Thorn (1985) follow most modern authorities in translating the Latin *servi* (singular *servus*) as slave, although the term 'serf' was not uncommon in earlier studies of Domesday. It would be wrong to see the Domesday slave as being like the black slaves of the seventeenth and later centuries who worked on plantations, usually under appalling conditions. Domesday slaves seem to have had rather more rights than this and many appear to have had their own small plots which they could work. They were absolutely bound to the manor and had to work the demesne ploughs but some seem to have been able to earn enough money to purchase their freedom and others were freed from slavery either as acts of piety or penance by their lords. The Church seems to have been ambivalent about slavery, recognising that slaves were essential to work many church lands but at the same time, the institution of slavery stood to remind churchmen that they lived in a fallen world. The distribution of slaves is shown in figure 14 and appears to be pretty uniform across the study area. Of northern Devon's 309 manors, 67 had no slaves and a further 75 had just one. By contrast, some of the larger manors had considerable slave populations, with 30 at Hartland, 20 at both Chulmleigh and Shebbear and 18 at both Bishop's Tawton and Tawstock. Of fourteen ecclesiastically owned manors, three had no slaves and the mean number was 6.1 but

over half of the slaves were at Bishops Tawton (18) and Bishops Nympton (16). Devon as a whole has an unusually large number of slaves, about one fifth of the Domesday population. Northern Devon in this sense is in no way unusual. The general increase in the numbers of slaves from east to west across southern England has been noted since Maitland's time but no-one has an adequate explanation and most authorities find it a mystery.

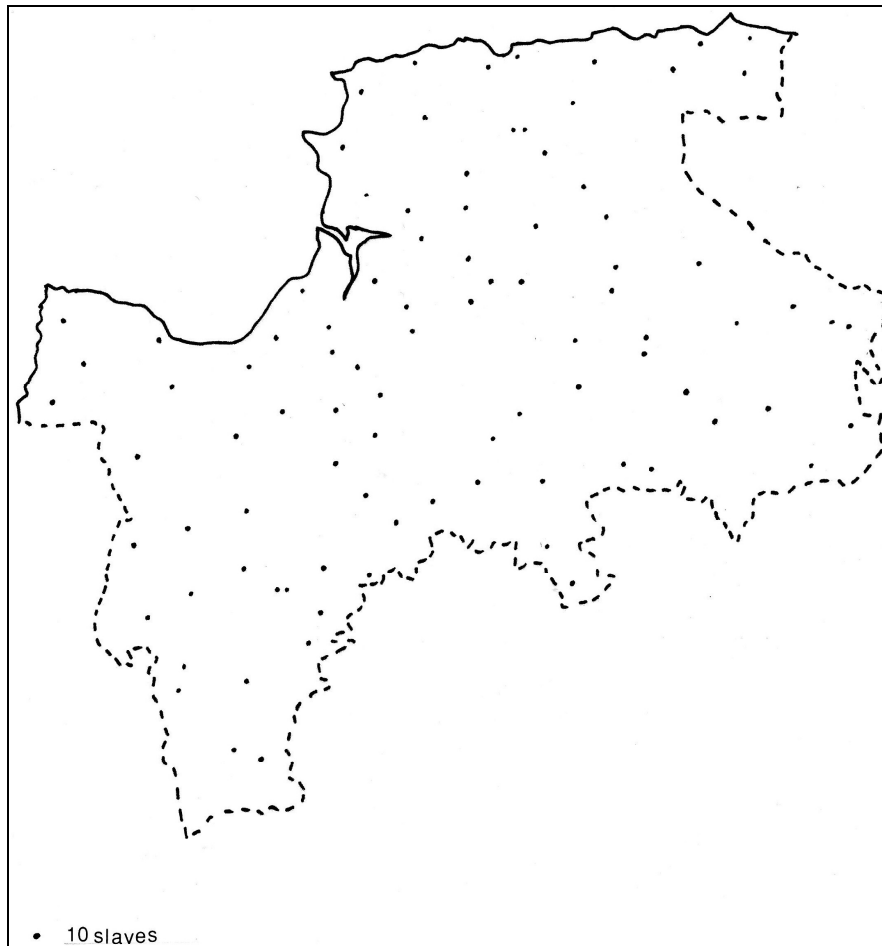


Figure 14. Distribution of slaves in Domesday northern Devon

### Others

As noted, Domesday Book tends not to mention specifically men working as craftsmen but occasionally some of these other people do appear, although it is not clear why they were included for some manors but presumably ignored on many others. Examples include the 4 smiths recorded at North Molton. It is tempting to see these men as working the iron ore that is found in the parish and not just being concerned with the usual smiths' work of shoeing horses and repairing ploughs. At Hollowcombe, in the modern parish of Fremington, there are three salt-workers but there are other potential locations for salt-pans along the Taw and Torridge estuaries where no salt-workers are reported.

## LAND-OWNERSHIP

Legally in Domesday, all lands are held of the king but in practice those who held lands had absolute powers over them. There were 31 owners of manors and other properties in northern Devon in the Domesday Book. For convenience groups of houses in Barnstaple owned by various lords are treated as manors that each of them held. All the owners of 5 manors or more in northern Devon also owned manors elsewhere in Devon. By 1086, King William was consciously granting lands so that no lord could become in effect a territorial magnate with most of the manors in a locality under his sole control. Thus most of the leading land-owners in Devon had properties in the northern part of the county. Table 3 lists the leading land-owners in northern Devon. Together they had about two-thirds of the manors. Some of the more significant of these will be discussed in a little more detail. Biographical details are taken from Thorn and Thorn (1985).

Name	Number of manors and properties
Bishop of Coutances ( <i>Geoffrey of Mowbray</i> )	56
Baldwin of Moeles, Sheriff of Devon	38
The King	24
Robert, Count of Mortain	17
Theobald, son of Berner	17
Roald Dubbed	16
Odo, son of Gamelin	13
Ralph of Pomeroy	12
William Cheever	12

Table 3. The leading land-owners in northern Devon

### The Bishop of Coutances, *Geoffrey of Mowbray*

*Geoffrey of Mowbray* was a key supporter of William and was present on the battlefield at Hastings as chief chaplain and participated at his consecration at Westminster. He had been appointed to the see of Coutances in the département of Manche on the Cotentin peninsula, about 80 kilometres south of Cherbourg in 1049. He had extensive lands granted to him in Devon and Somerset. The distribution of his manors in northern Devon is shown in figure 15. As noted earlier, these lands were personal to him and did not pass to his successor as bishop of Coutances. He kept very few properties in his own hands and most of his northern Devon manors were tenanted by Drogo, son of Mauger, who was the bishop's chief retainer in Devon and for whom Lutyen's great granite castle at Drewsteignton was named over eight hundred years later. It is worth noting that the bishop did keep houses in Barnstaple and the fairly large manors of Ashwater, Fremington and Merton for himself. As Barnstaple was a royal borough, it must be presumed that the bishop felt it necessary to maintain a presence there for some of his officials.

## Baldwin of Moeles, Sheriff of Devon

Baldwin was one of the men charged by William to build a castle at Exeter after the 1068 rebellion and he remained in Devon thereafter, becoming Sheriff by about 1070. Moeles, now Meulles, lies in the département of Calvados, about 18 kilometres south of Lisieux. The lands were given to Baldwin personally, but he was expected to use the revenues to support him in his work as Sheriff, in effect William's chief enforcer in the county. He built the castle at Okehampton, centrally placed in the county, but as figure 16 shows, like the Bishop of Countances, he kept houses in Barnstaple, but he had two principal tenants, Robert of Beaumont and Ansgar, whose manors form two distinct clusters.

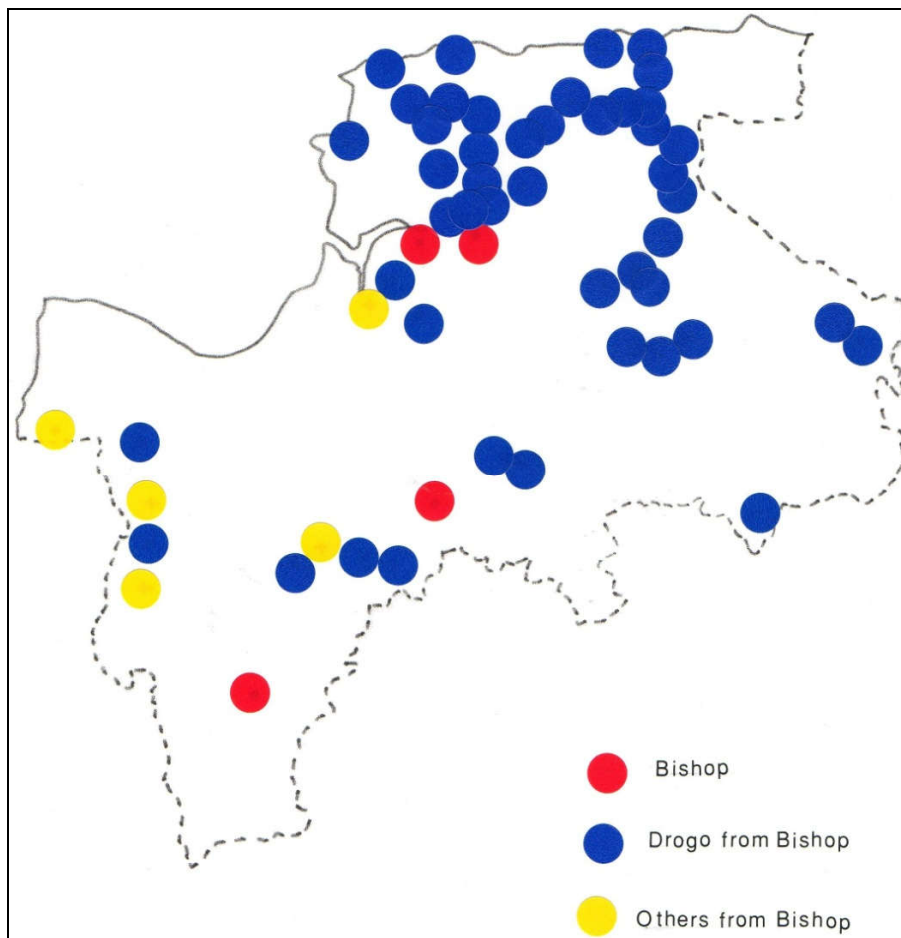


Figure 15. The lands of *Geoffrey of Mowbray, Bishop of Coutances*

## Robert, Count of Mortain

Robert was the younger of William's two half-brothers, the other being Odo, Bishop of Bayeux who had no lands in Devon. By contrast, Robert had extensive lands in the county and was also one of the principal land-owners in England. Robert seems to have been highly opportunistic and ruthless and involved in appropriating lands from other manors to his own. Robert was later created Earl of Cornwall and he held 248 Cornish

manors, compared to 79 in Devon. Most of his Devon manors lay in the south and east of the county. The distribution of his northern Devon manors is shown in figure 17. Unlike the other major land-owners in northern Devon, all his manors were let to tenants

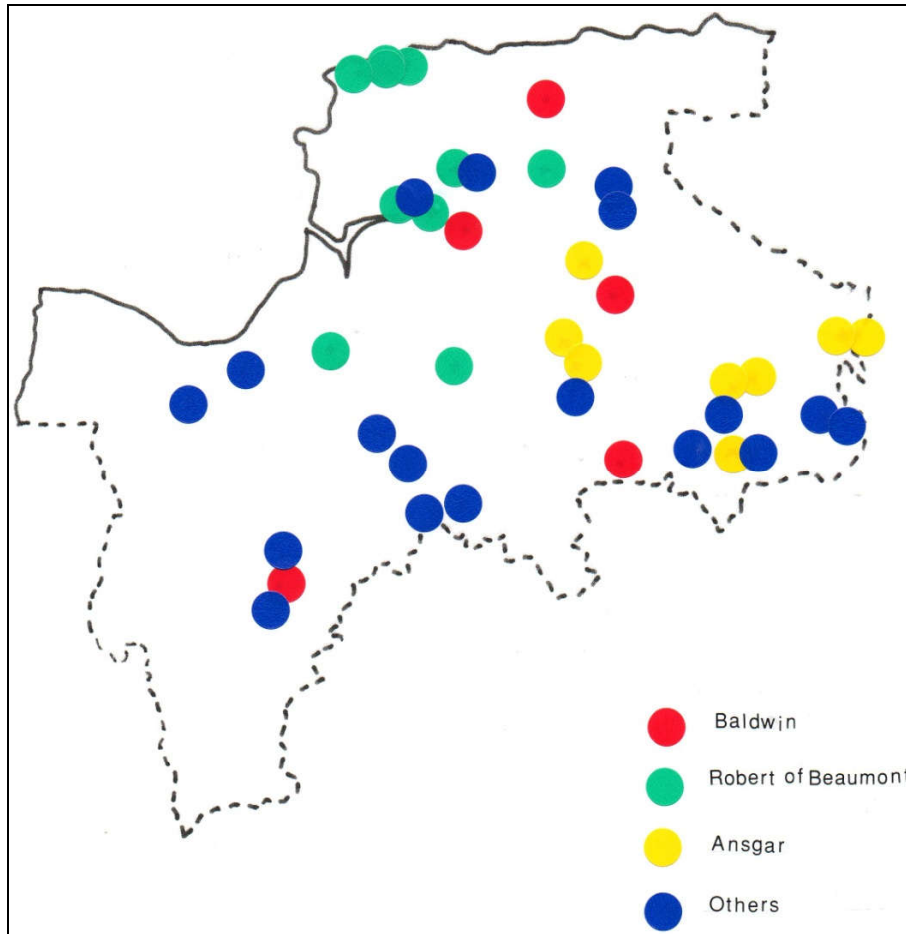


Figure 16. The lands of Baldwin of Moeles, Sheriff of Devon

#### Theobald, son of Berner

Not a great deal is known of Theobald, son of Berner, although he was the father-in-law of Odo, son of Gamelin, another of the more important land-owners in northern Devon. Theobald's lands are shown in figure 18. He had a clear cluster of manors in the Georgeham area. He had four tenants, with Gosbert having five manors, in two clusters, one south of Hartland and the other near Peters Marland.

#### The Bishop of Exeter

The lands of the see of Exeter comprised just four manors in northern Devon. They were attached to the see and not the personal property of the bishop, at this time Osbern, who had succeeded the Anglo-Saxon, Leofric, in 1072. Osbern was probably one of Edward the Confessor's chaplains and thus familiar with England prior to the

Norman Conquest. The large and wealthy manors of Bishops Tawton and Bishops Nympton were diocesan property as were two small manors, Benton and Haxton in Bratton Fleming. The revenues from the bishopric's manors were supposed to support the bishop and the cathedral chapter and the probable monastery attached, as well as to maintain the cathedral. It was also presumed that the archdeacons on their visitations would be able to stay in the bishopric's manors. It is also worthy of note that the Bishop of Exeter had manors at each end of the Taw valley route from Exeter into northern Devon, with the large manor of Bishops Tawton, which then included most of what is now Landkey, was matched by an even larger manor based on Crediton.

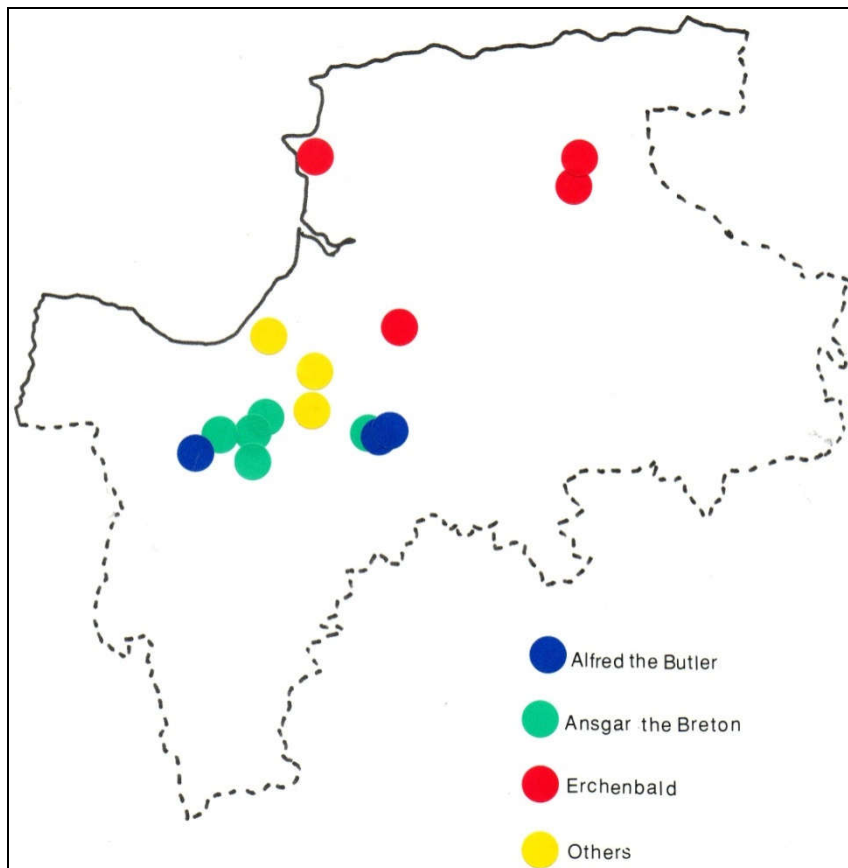


Figure 17. The lands of Robert, Count of Mortain

#### Ecclesiastical lands: Bodmin, Buckfast, Hartland and Tavistock Abbeys

These four houses had ten manors between them. Unlike the secular Anglo-Saxon lords, almost all of whom were dispossed by the Normans, the church foundations pre-dating the conquest were re-granted their lands. Tavistock Abbey had five manors and made an impact in two of them. Abbotsham is named for the abbot and Romansleigh is named for Saint Rumon, whose relics the abbey possessed. Burrington, Thornbury and Worthygate in Parkham were the other manors. Bodmin Abbey had two manors, Hollowcombe, near Holsworthy and Newton St Petrock and again the abbey left its mark with its patron saint, Petrock, commemorated in the church dedications in both parishes. Perhaps ironically, Bucklast Abbey too had a Petrock connection, with

both the manor of Petrockstow itself and that of Ash which lies in the same parish. Finally Hartland Abbey held the adjacent manor of Stoke.

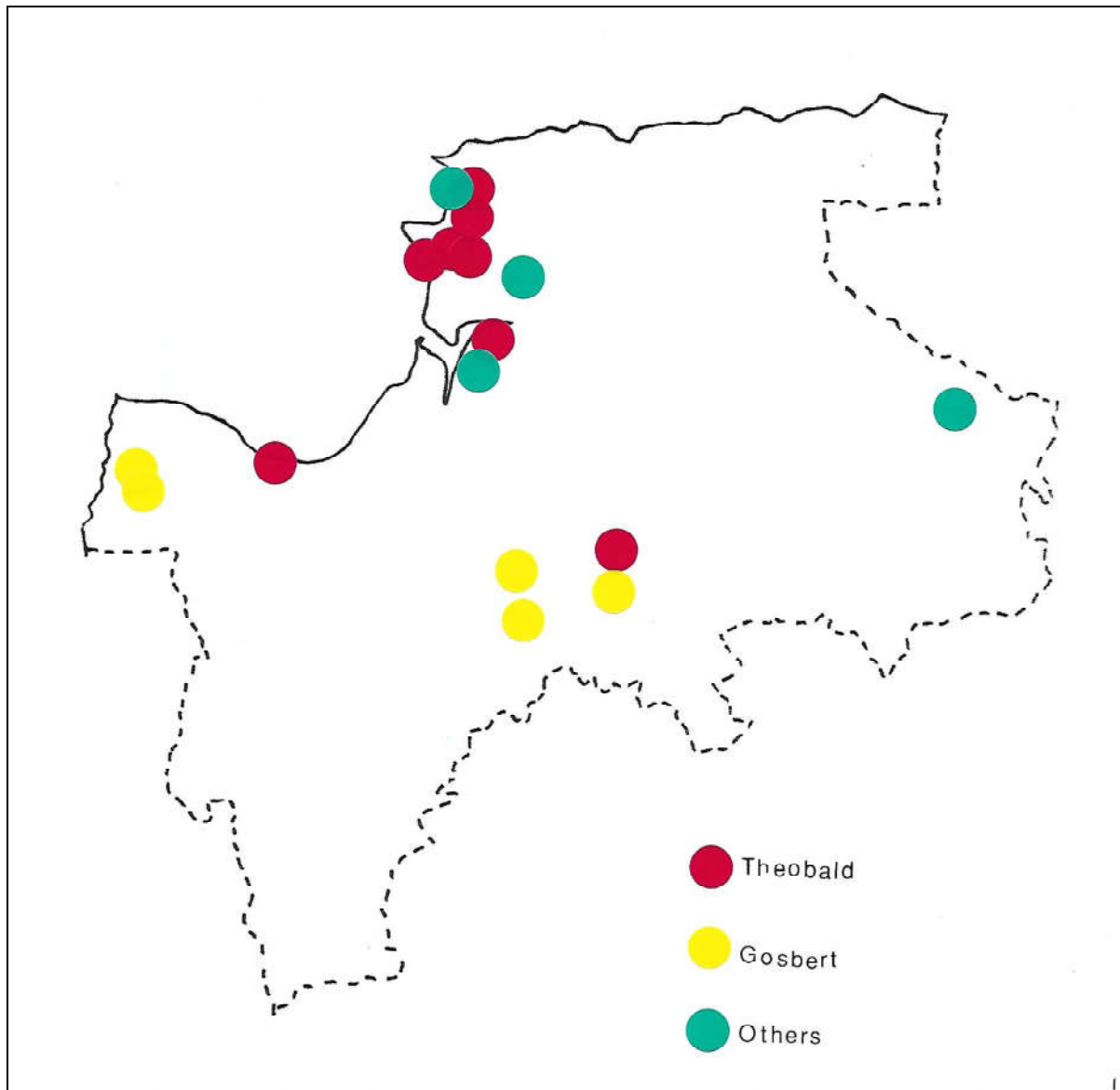


Figure 18. The lands of Theobald, son of Berner.

Ecclesiastical lands: the churches of Holy Trinity and St Stephen, Caen

William was expected to show both his piety and gratitude for the conquest of England and so he endowed churches in Normandy. In northern Devon two churches in Caen were given lands, Holy Trinity receiving UMBERLEIGH and St Stephen's receiving NORTHAM. It is interesting that both had previously belonged to Brictric, an Anglo-Saxon lord with extensive holdings in England. Many of his other lands in northern Devon passed to the king.



## CHANGE IN LAND-OWNERSHIP 1066 TO 1086.

Table 4 shows the share of manors in each hundred remaining in the same hands in 1086 as they had been in 1066. This figure includes the church lands and the initial royal land endowment, so the number of Anglo-Saxon tenants still holding their some of land is small. Overall, only 8.7% of manors remained in their original hands, ranging from 0 in Shirwell and in the small part of Lifton in the study area, to 15.6% in South Molton, where more than half of the surviving land-owners were Anglo-Saxon tenants.

Hundred	% tenants surviving
Black Torrington	7.8
Braunton	5.9
Hartland	14.3
Lifton	0
North Tawton	7.1
Shebbear	10.2
Shirwell	0
South Molton	15.6
Witheridge	10.0
Total	8.7

Table4. Share of surviving tenants 1066-1086

Table 5 gives details of all the surviving Anglo-Saxon tenants in 1086. It needs to be noted that this simply records manors that they still held and not any other manors that they may have held in 1066. With the exception of Godwin's manor of Chittlehampton, they are of only moderate value. Alfild(a?) is of interest in that she is one of only a handful of women mentioned as tenants of manors. Colwin was probably the reeve of Queen Edith, the widow of Edward the Confessor, and perhaps for this reason he was allowed to retain some of his original lands

Name	Manor	Parish	Value in 1086
Alfild(a?)	Knowstone 4	Knowstone	30 shillings
Algar	Knowstone 3	Knowstone	7 shillings and 6 pence
Ansgot	Meddon	Hartland	20 shillings
Colwin	Brexworthy	Bradworthy	5 shillings
Colwin	Culsworthy	Abbots Bickington	7 shillings and 6 pence
Edric	Sutcombe	Sutcombe	40 shillings
Godwin	Chittlehampton	Chittlehampton	140 shillings

Table 5. Saxon tenants surviving to hold the same lands in 1086 as in 1066

## THE SIZE OF MANORS: PLOUGH-LANDS

The size of manors by the number of plough-lands is shown in figure 19. It is evident that most manors did not have many plough-lands and just over a half had 4 or fewer. The average number of plough-lands was 8.4 (or roughly 1,000 acres) but the median value was 4, or around 480 acres. The manor with the greatest number of plough-lands was Bishops Tawton and the Bishop of Exeter's other large manor, Bishops Nympton had 52. The other large manors were all the king's, with Hartland at 110, North Molton at 100, Tawstock at 80 and Kings Nympton with 50 plough-lands. Indeed, of the 17 manors with 30 or more plough-lands, the king held half. Baldwin the Sheriff's manor of Chulmleigh with 40 plough-lands and Odo, son of Gamelin's manor of Great Torrington also with 40 plough-lands were the largest not owned by the king or the Bishop of Exeter.

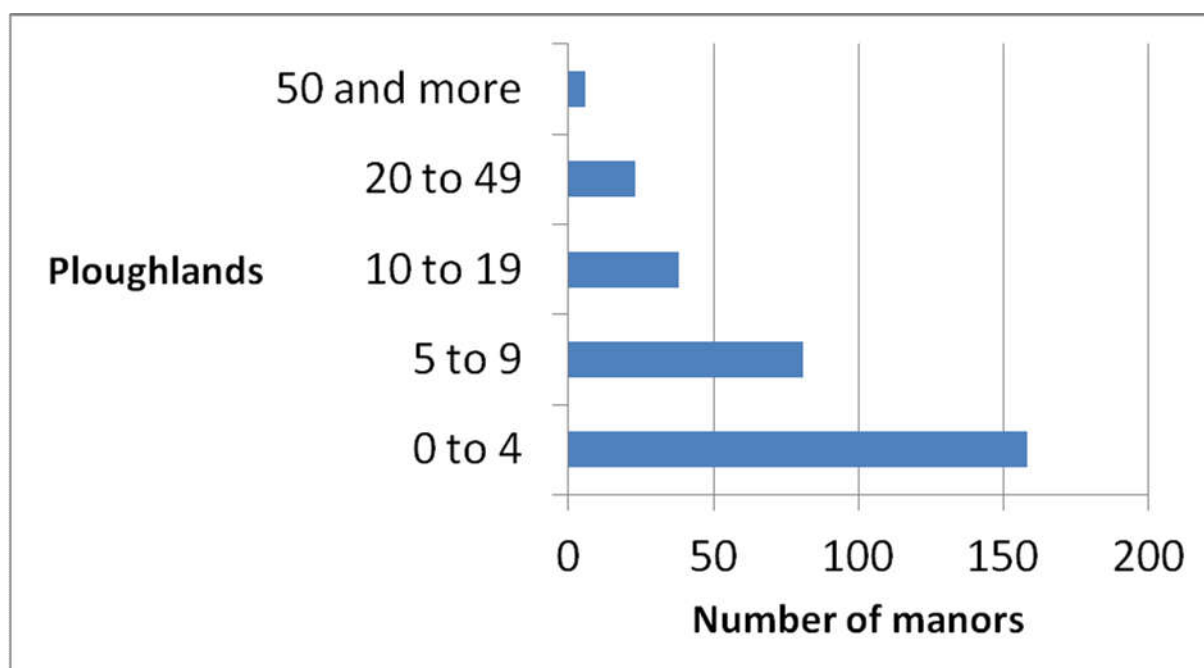


Figure 19. Size of manors by number of plough-lands

## VALUE OF MANORS

In Domesday Book generally, the value of manors reflects two key variables, the quality of the soil and the number of plough-lands being worked. In northern Devon, soils would generally have been of low to moderate fertility and certainly not as prized as those of 'red Devon' lying between Tiverton, Exeter and Torbay, nor those of the South Hams. Nonetheless, some northern Devon manors were of considerable value.

Table 6 gives details of the eight manors with a value in 1086 of more than 400 shillings. Most of these manors have been mentioned before either because of their ownership by the king or leading magnates or because of their abundance of plough-

lands. Trying to convert the Domesday shilling to modern money is fraught. There is much debate about what Domesday Book really meant when it stated that a manor was worth so many shillings. The cash economy was not well enough developed and the range of commodities traded was restricted for economic historians to be confident of the value of a Domesday shilling to convert it more than very approximately to modern currency. However, it is possible that a Domesday shilling was worth somewhere in the region of £5,000 today, depending on how one chose to measure the purchasing power of the shilling.

Manor	Lord	Value (shillings)
Hartland	The king	960
North Molton	The king	900
Bishops Tawton	Bishop of Exeter	800
Winkleigh	The king	600
Molland 2	The king	480
Tawstock	The king	480
Fremington	Bishop of Coutances	440
Great Torrington 3	Odo, son of Gamelin	400

Table 6. The most valuable manors in northern Devon in 1086.

One manor, Furze, in West Buckland was waste in 1086 and consequently not given a value and five more manors were valued at less than three shillings. These manors are given in Table 7. There is no clear pattern and they do not appear to be on the poorest soils so it has to be presumed that they had low value because they were both physically small and were not worked intensively. Of the lords of these impoverished manors, only Odo, son of Gamelin and Ralph of Pomeroy were among the major magnates. The ratio of the least valuable manor to the most valuable was 1:384.

Manor	Parish	Lord	Value (shillings/pence)
Furze	West Buckland	William of Falaise	Nil
Adworthy	Witheridge	Ralph of Pomeroy	2/6
Bradaford	Virginstow	Judhael of Totnes	2/6
East Worlington 3	East Worlington	Odo, son of Gamelin	2/6
Knowstone 4	Knowstone	Alfhild(a)	2/6
Roadway	Mortehoe	Alfred the Breton	2/7

Table 7. The least valuable manors in northern Devon in 1086.

#### CHANGES IN VALUE OF MANORS: 1066-1086

As already noted, one aim of the Domesday Book was to assess the current and future revenue to be obtained from manors and thus the size of the tax base. Changes in

value between 1066 and 1086 are shown in figure 20. It is evident that for around a half of all manors the value did not change in this period. For 16%, the value fell, although the rate of decline was usually around 2.5% per annum. In large parts of northern England, which William had laid waste in the 'harrying of the north' in 1069-70, values fell dramatically and even two decades on, manors around Hastings which William had sacked to draw Harold to battle, were worth a fraction of their previous value. There is no reason to think that military action lay behind the fall in the valuation of northern Devon manors. About a third of manors saw an increase in value. There is no discernible pattern in changes in value and the case of Black Torrington hundred, shown in figure 21 demonstrates an apparently random distribution in manors gaining, losing or not changing in value.

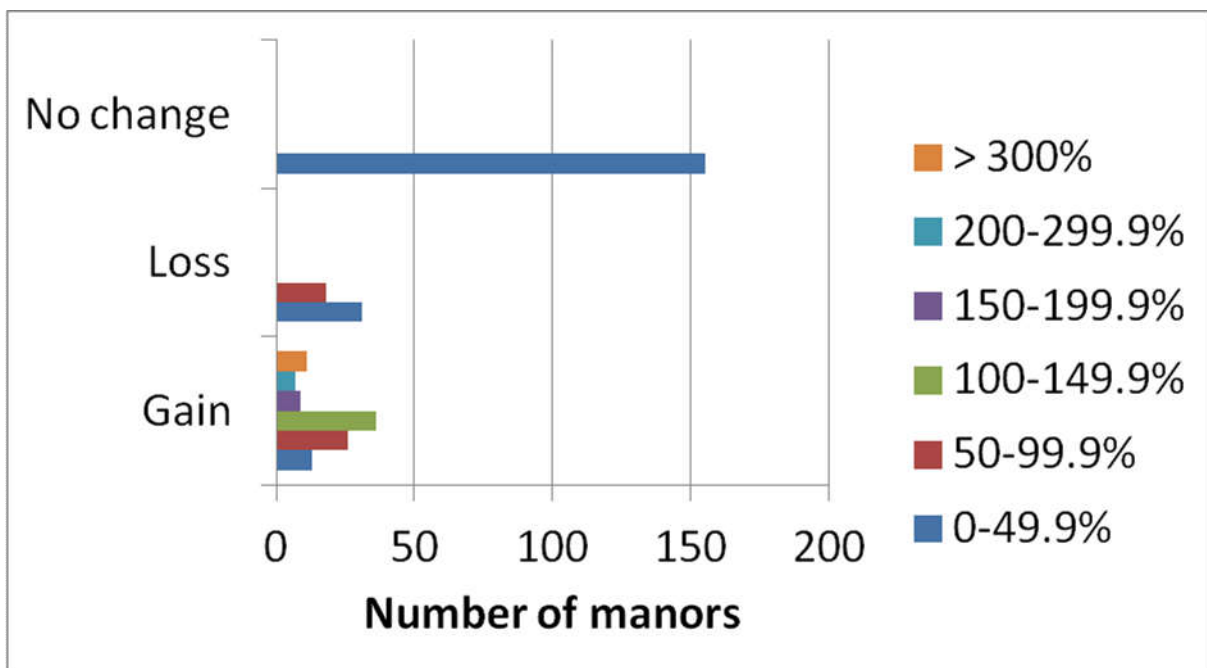


Figure 20. Changes in value of manors 1066-1086

### BARNSTAPLE

Barnstaple, with Lydford and Totnes is one of the Devon boroughs acknowledged by Domesday Book. These three boroughs were reckoned as the equal of the city of Exeter when it came to supporting royal expeditions by land or sea. The town fell under the control of four lords, although how the town itself was apportioned is unclear. The gist of the relevant entries is given in table 8. The king had 40 burgesses within the borough and 9 without, presumed to be burgesses resident in the town but whose lands lay outside it. These burgesses had to make payments to the king and to the Bishop of Coutances. The bishop had 10 burgesses and Baldwin the Sheriff 7. The fourth lord, Robert of Aumale, whose family later gave their name to Milton Damerel, had no burgesses. The table also shows that 38 houses had been laid waste. This is usually taken as meaning that the houses were demolished to make way for the castle and its mound, although in Exeter, Domesday Book specifically mentions houses

destroyed by fire, always a major threat in any medieval town. Harold's sons made two raids with mercenaries from the Norse king of Dublin one in 1068, about which details are sketchy other than an aborted attack on Bristol and possible landings as they retreated to Dublin, and another in 1069 when they landed at 'Tawmouth'. This latter has been analysed in some detail by Arnold (2014) who concludes that the decisive battle took place outside Northam. On the earlier raid it is just possible that there was a skirmish in Barnstaple leading to the loss of the houses.

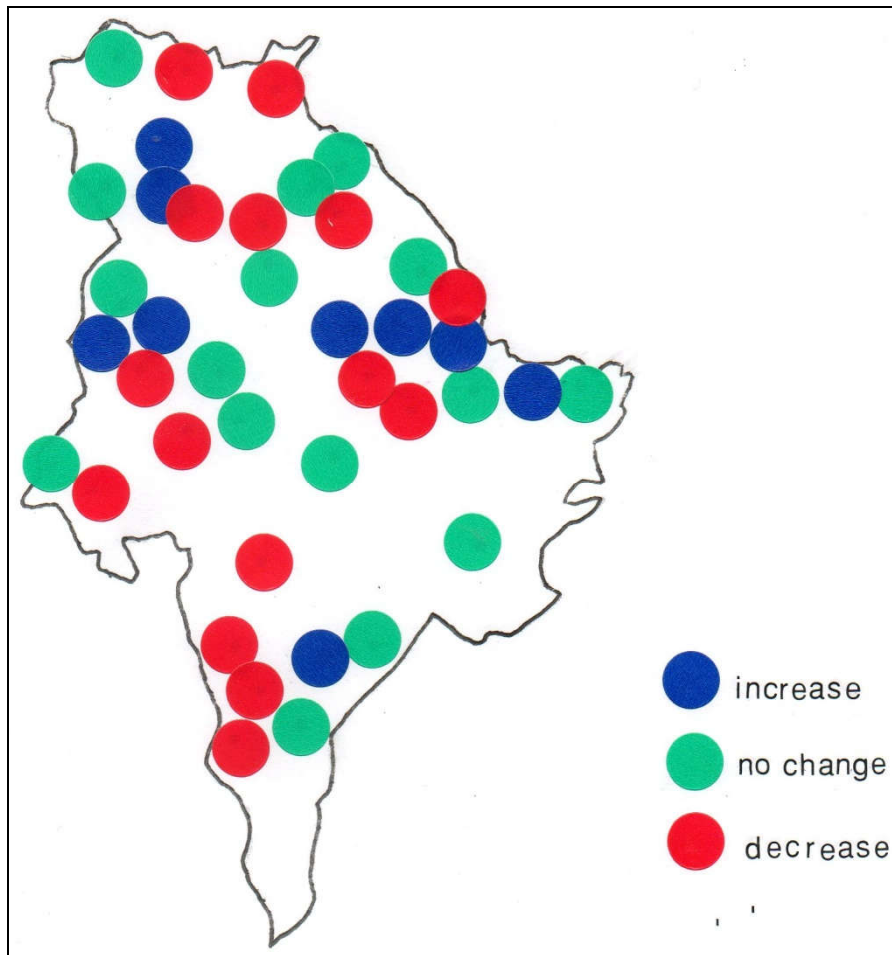


Figure 21. Changes in value of manors in Black Torrington hundred 1066-1086.

Lord	Number of burgesses	Number of houses destroyed
The king	40 plus 9 without	23
Bishop of Countances	10	7
Baldwin the Sheriff	7	6
Robert of Aumale	0	2

Table 8. Barnstaple in Domesday

## CONCLUSIONS

There is little doubt that the production of the Domesday Book was an amazing achievement for the eleventh century and that it provides a rich, if sometimes enigmatic, source of information about the contemporary society. Northern Devon was both familiar and unfamiliar in Domesday. Familiar, in that almost all of the modern parishes appear, although the majority of places now marked on maps are not named and can only be presumed by the various entries. Unfamiliar, in that the population was perhaps only an eighth of what it is now and that towns such as Bideford, Great Torrington and South Molton were indistinguishable from villages and even Barnstaple, with a Domesday population that may have been around 400, would appear to rank as a modern small village. The land-use was dominated by arable and waste, this latter presumably having little economic value and probably scrub, very rough pasture or unmanaged woodland. Domesday Book also records very little woodland, perhaps only a third of that today. Domesday society was clearly feudal in that all lands were held from the king and that a mere 31 people and institutions were land-owners. Nonetheless, it needs to be remembered that even at the time of the Tithe Survey in c1840, land-ownership in northern Devon was not a great deal more dispersed. Domesday Book also shows how total was the Norman Conquest in sweeping away the previous Anglo-Saxon elite and a mere six tenants were still holding some of the same lands as they had in 1066. Comparing some of the distribution of land use in Domesday Book with the verbal descriptions of agricultural regions produced more than seven hundred years later by Charles Vancouver, and seeing how much they correspond, reminds us that climate and soil change but little over such time periods.

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