

# GREAT BOWDEN HERITAGE & ARCHAEOLOGY

## THE DOMESDAY MANORS

### **This is what we know.....**

**(Translated Domesday entries from 1086 for Great Bowden)**

#### **The land of the King in Gartree Wapentake (Leicestershire)**

The King holds Great Bowden. King Edward held it. There are 9½ carucates of land. In demesne there are 2 ploughs; and 13 sokemen with 8 villans and 16 bordars have 13½ ploughs, and pay 30s. a year. There are [...] acres of meadow. The demesne is worth 40s. a year.

In Melbourne are 2 carucates of land, and 6½ acres of meadow. In Cranoe, 1 carucate of land. In Shangton 2 carucates of land. In Carlton Curlieu 6 bovates of land. In Illston on the Hill, 2 bovates of land. In Gaulby, 1½ carucates of land, and 4 acres of meadow. In King's Norton, 3 carucates of land, and 5 acres of meadow. In Stretton [Little Stretton and Stretton Magna], 9 carucates of land and 10 acres of meadow. In Smeeton Westerby, 1 carucate of land and 2 bovates. In Foxton, 2 carucates of land, and 5 acres of meadow. In these are 60 sokemen with 2 villans and 16 bordars having 13 ploughs, and they pay 150s. and 18d. The king has the soke and 2 carucates in Blaston, and it belongs to Great Bowden. Robert de Tosny holds this land. This sokeland is worth 11s. 0½d.

#### **The land of Countess Judith in Gartree Wapentake (Leicestershire)**

The same man [Robert de Bucy] holds 3 carucates of land in Great Bowden. There were 4 ploughs. Now in demesne [there is] 1 plough; and 4 villans with 8 bordars have 2 ploughs. There are 15 acres of meadow. It was worth 10s; now 20s.

#### **Translated Domesday entry from 1086 for Little Bowden**

##### **The land of the Count of Mortain in 'Stotfold' Hundred (Northamptonshire)**

The same man [Humphrey of Wigginton] holds 2 hides and 1 virgate of land in Little Bowden. There is land for 6 ploughs. In demesne is 1 [plough], with 1 slave; and 11 villans, with 1 bordar, have 2 ploughs. There is a mill rendering 16d. And 8 acres of meadow, and 3 sokemen with 2 ploughs. It was worth 64d; now 30s. Godwine and Wulfwin held it.

## 934 years later we are still trying to get answers.....

### Where exactly were the manors located?

We are pretty certain the the **King's manor** HQ was situated somewhere near the parish church in Great Bowden. The church may have originally been a chapel associated with the manor. St Peter and St. Paul is quite often used as a church dedication in a manor held by the king. The site of Rectory House seems likely as it has records going back to 1546 and was almost certainly there during the medieval period. Unfortunately a previous owner filled the cellars with concrete and so any early history was lost.

GBHA dug two test pits in the grounds of Rectory House in 2014 hoping for Anglo Saxon evidence but found instead strong pottery evidence for a Roman settlement close by. Two digs in the mud barn paddock on Sutton Road produced in the first pit evidence of a cobbled floor surface at some depth but with no dating evidence and then in 2014 we dug a test pit towards the back of the plot. The base of a stone wall was unearthed and below the wall were deposits of early medieval pottery dating back to the time of the Conquest and before. This wall would have been part of a significant building or enclosure wall and therefore very relevant to the manor enclosure. **Links** can be found in Our Excavations page to both the Rectory House excavations with Access Cambridge Archaeology and to the Mud Barn excavations which are archived on the Archaeology Data Service.

**Countess Judith's manor** is entered in Domesday under Leicestershire and the measurements given are in "carucates", the Danelaw version of "hides" used in the Anglo Saxon territories such as Northamptonshire just across the River Welland. Using the same conversion as in our Furlong and Furrow document from 1330s (some 250 years later) we can calculate that 3 carucates would be about 360 acres.

There seem to be two contenders for the site of this manor:

- a) The West Field of Great Bowden's Open Field system was about 330 acres when it was Enclosed in 1776. It is very unusual to have four open fields with a 3 year rotation of crops and fallow. Could the West field be the site of Countess Judith's manor, added to the main King's manor when Judith's title and therefore land holdings were confiscated about 1087 by either her uncle William I or his son William II? A dig in 2013 at Upper Green produced pottery from the right period and was located in an area just north-east of the West Field, where the shape of land and roads suggests an enclosure.
- b) St Mary in Arden (near the station) was within Great Bowden during the medieval period and before. However although the River Welland became the dividing line between Northamptonshire and Leicestershire in around 920 AD, the church lands of St Mary's were all south of the River. When the land was Enclosed in 1780 there were 466 acres of St Mary's land within Little Bowden's Open Fields. Using the same conversion as before this amounts to 3.8 carucates. Near enough to wonder - could this be the second manor - with the church and possibly the manor enclosure north of the river and the fields to the south?

**Robert, Count of Mortain was William the Conqueror's half brother.** He held no land in England before the Conquest but by the time of the Domesday survey in 1086 he held land in 994 manors, including Little Bowden. As a mill and meadow land is mentioned it was probably land next to the river. Even if we add the manor of Judith of Lens, mentioned above, there doesn't seem to be sufficient land allocated in Domesday to cover all the land of Little Bowden's open fields.

**Measurements:** We have assumed that the terms of measurements were the same in 1086 as in 1336, 250 years later. A large administrative area would be a **Wapentake** in the Danelaw and a **Hundred** in Anglo-Saxon areas.

1 **Carucate** (Danelaw) or **Hide** (A-S) would be approx 120 acres. This was the area 1 plough team of 8 oxen could plough in 1 year.

About 30 **acres** = 1 **virgate** and 4 **virgates** = 1 **carucate**.

So a carucate had about 120 acres. A **bovate** = half a virgate and so **8 bovates** = 1 **carucate**.

### **Other words:**

**Demesne** = manor land for the owner's own use.

**Mill**, would have been a watermill - no windmills at this time.

**Soke** = admin area with right to hold court and administer justice.

**Sokeman** = freeman enjoying rights but required to offer service to the Lord.

**Villan** was the same as a villager and a peasant with the most land.

**Bordar** was a peasant who had a medium amount of land.

The people mentioned in Domesday (with the possible exception of slaves) were all land owners and head of the household. Therefore it is not a tally of the total population.

All land was owned by the King. The King gave titles and appointed Lords of the Manor.

If your title was removed by the King your land was forfeited too.

**Landowners.** The land was carved up between William's family and close friends. Even today it is said that if you have a surname of Norman origin (eg. Neville, Mortimer, Woodville) you are likely to have more wealth and own more land than if you have an Anglo Saxon name such as Hungerford, Halliwell, Goodchild or Downing. **Judith of Lens** - niece of William I; **Edward** = Edward the Confessor; **King** = William I; **Robert of Mortain** was William's half brother and right hand man, held land in 994 manors; **Robert de Bucy** and **Robert de Tosny** (Lord of Belvoir) = prominent landowners in Leics. and Northants;

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**Links:** Open Domesday <https://opendomesday.org>.

**Archaeology Data Service** <https://doi.org/10.5284/1034489> Green Lane paddock p57-59,

Mud barn pit p 64-68, also <https://doi.org/10.5284/1049847>