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Domesday Book

Domestic Records Information 1

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1. Domesday Book

Domesday Book is a general survey and valuation of landed property in England, taken in 1086 on the orders of William the Conqueror, twenty years after he conquered England. In fact, there have always been two Domesday Books, called Great and Little Domesday, because of their different sizes. The survey probably became known as 'Domesday' (the popular name for the final Day of Judgement) because it was the final proof of legal title to land, and in later centuries it was mainly used, in the law courts, for this purpose. It is not a census of the population, and the names that appear in it are only of land-holders. If you are looking for a Norman ancestor, consult instead A J Camp, *My Ancestors came with the Conqueror* (Society of Genealogists, 1990).

2. What Areas Does it Cover?

The survey does not cover London and Winchester, Northumberland and Durham or much of north west England; and the only parts of Wales included are certain border areas. Most of the returns were entered into Great Domesday. Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex are in Little Domesday, which seems to be a survival of part of an earlier and fuller draft compiled from the original returns. Check the *Domesday Gazetteer* to see if a particular place existed at the time. This can be found in the Map and Large Document Room (MLDR).

For parts of Northumberland and Durham, there is the so-called 'Domesday Book of the North': this is the Boldon Book, a survey taken in 1183, of the estates of the Bishop of Durham in those counties. This was published as part of the Phillimore edition of Domesday Book in 1982.

3. How was the Survey Taken? And How Do We Know?

By commissioners holding sworn inquests in local courts, where fixed questions were asked of local men. For each property, the questions were asked three times, to cover changes over time:

- as it had been on the last day of the reign of Edward the Confessor (5 January 1066);
- as it had been when it was granted by King William;
- as it was in 1086.

The questions included:

- What is the manor called?
- Who held it in the time of King Edward?
- Who holds it now?
- How many hides (a land measurement)?
- How many ploughs?
- How many men, free, tenant or slave?
- How much wood, meadow and pasture?
- How many mills and fishponds?

Some early drafts of the questions that were asked and the returns that were made survive in records

held outside The National Archives - the *Liber Exoniensis* (Somerset, Cornwall and most of Devon) held in the library of Exeter Cathedral; the *Inquisitio Eliensis* (Ely Abbey estates) and the *Inquistio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis* (parts of Cambridgeshire) both held in the British Library under reference Cotton Tib A VI - extracts are printed in *English Historical Documents, II, 1042-1189,* ed. D C Douglas (London, 1953). The returns themselves were written up into 'Domesday Book'.

4. How to Consult Domesday Book

Domesday Book itself can no longer be seen except in very rare circumstances, in order to extend its life even further. Instead, there are excellent facsimiles both on open access and online. The Editions Alecto have published an exact colour photographic facsimile. It can be either consulted in hardcopy the MLDR, except for the Little Domesday, which is available from the Resource Centre and Library (RCL), or downloaded from DocumentsOnline. A cruder facsimile made in 1855, using an early photographic process, is also available at Kew. These all have the same later foliation as the originals.

It is quite difficult to use entries in Domesday Book. Both Great and Little Domesday are arranged by county, and within each county, by landholder. Each new landholder is given a number, written in red in roman numerals at the start of their entry, and visible when paging through the facsimiles. There is a table of contents at the beginning of each county, which lists the landholders with their numbers, starting with the king, but no index.

To find the folio references for a whole county, see the table overleaf. The quickest way to find an entry for a place is to use the *Domesday Gazetteer*, which gives a folio reference. However, this will lead you to a text written in Latin in a very abbreviated handwriting. It is probably more helpful to start with the Phillimore edition, published in a series of county volumes. This is to be found in the MLDR.

5. How to Use the Phillimore County (Place and Person) Indexes and Text

Start by finding the Phillimore volume for the right county. This will have a transcript of the original abbreviated Latin on the left page, facing an English translation on the right page. It does not have page numbers, because it tries to use the reference systems found within Domesday Book itself.

First, find the place in the place index (or person in the persons index) at the back, and look at the *last* column of entries. This should give you a number in the form *12, 3* (there may be more than one entry, shown thus - *7, 5. 37, 16*). The first number here relates to the red 'chapter' or entry number for a particular landholder. In the Phillimore text, these numbers are marked in bold on the top right-hand corner of the translation page. The second is the 'section' number within that chapter, *which only appears in Phillimore*, in the left-hand margin of the translation.

Once you have found the Phillimore text marked with the chapter and section number, you can either stop there, or go on to look at the facsimiles. To do this, you need to find the right county, and then look for the 'chapter' number in red. It is sensible to do this with the Phillimore edition to hand, as the 'sections' are not marked in the original, and you will have to compare the texts. Another way is to use the folio numbers given at the bottom of the page in the Phillimore edition. These differ for Great and Little Domesday, as Great Domesday has two columns of text per page, and Little Domesday only one. Great Domesday has the system of calling its columns *a* and *b*, on the front (*recto)* of the folio or leaf, and *c* and *d* on the back (*verso).* You may find a reference 133d - which means the second column on the back of folio 133. Little Domesday simply calls the front *a* and the back *b*: and the folio number given in Phillimore is the one marked in pencil on the facsimile.

Two Phillimore publications also produce Domesday Book on CD-Rom. *Domesday Explorer* excludes Little Domesday (produced in 2000); and *The Digital Domesday Book: The Scholar's Edition* (produced in 2002) with additional informationand features. The latter is available at the National Archives via the Online Publications and Electronic Resources for Archives (OPERA).

6. How to Get Copies

Colour scans of the Domesday Book and the modern Alecto translation are available to download from DocumentsOnline, searching by name, place-name or folio number. Access is free onsite at The National Archives.

Colour prints and transparencies from the Alecto facsimile of Great and Little Domesday can also be hired or purchased from The National Archives Image Library (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/imagelibrary). To order a copy of an entry in a particular column from the Alecto facsimile, ignore all the business about chapter and section numbers. Instead, you need to identify the folio number and the column *a*, *b*, *c* or *d*, and add it to the full county document reference number, e.g. E 31/2/2 , from the table below.

7. Counties in Domesday Book, With References

Bedfordshire	E 31/2/2 ff 209-218	Leicestershire	E 31/2/2 ff 230-237
Berkshire	E 31/2/1 ff 56-64	Lincolnshire	E 31/2/2 ff 336-371
Buckinghamshire	E 31/2/1 ff 143-153	Middlesex	E 31/2/1 ff 126-130
Cambridgeshire	E 31/2/1 ff 189-202	Nottinghamshire	E 31/2/2 ff 280-294
Cheshire	E 31/2/2 ff 262-270	Norfolk	E 31/1/2
Cornwall	E 31/2/1 ff 120-125	Northants	E 31/2/2 ff 219-229
Derbyshire	E 31/2/2 ff 272-278	Oxfordshire	E 31/2/1 ff 154-161
Devon	E 31/2/1 ff 100-119	Rutland	E 31/2/2 ff 293294
Dorsetshire	E 31/2/1 ff 75-85	Shropshire	E 31/2/2 ff 252-260
Essex	E 31/1/1	Somerset	E 31/2/1 ff 86-99
Gloucestershire	E 31/2/1 ff 162-170	Staffordshire	E 31/2/2 ff 246-250
Hampshire	E 31/2/1 ff 37-54	Suffolk	E 31/1/3
Herefordshire	E 31/2/1 ff 179-188	Surrey	E 31/2/1 ff 30-37
Hertfordshire	E 31/2/1 ff 132-142	Sussex	E 31/2/1 ff 16-29
Huntingdonshire	E 31/2/2 ff 203-208	Warwickshire	E 31/2/2 ff 238-244
Kent	E 31/2/1 ff 1-15	Worcestershire	E 31/2/1 ff 172-178
Lancashire	see Cheshire	Wiltshire	E 31/2/1 ff 64-74
		Yorkshire	E 31/2/2 ff 298-333, 373-382

8. Further Reading

The introductory note to the E 31 series list;
Domesday Re-Bound, Public Record Office Handbook (HMSO, 1954)
H C Darby and G R Versey, *Domesday Gazetteer* (Cambridge, 1975)
P H Sawyer, ed. *Domesday Book, a Reappraisal* (London, 1985)
D Bates, *Domesday Bibliography* (Royal Historical Society, 1986)
H C Darby, *Domesday England* (Cambridge, 1977, 1986)
E M Hallam, *Domesday Book Through Nine Centuries* (London, 1986)
D Roffe, *Domesday the Inquest and the Book* (Oxford, 2000)
A Williams, *Domesday Book: Complete Translation* (Penguin, 2002)
E M Hallam and D Bates, eds. *Domesday Book* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002)

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