

GREAT STAUGHTON AND ITS PEOPLE

**HOW A HUNTINGDONSHIRE VILLAGE LEFT ITS MARK ON ENGLAND'S
HISTORY**

by

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Tochestone, Huntedunscire

If evidence were required to confirm William's comprehensive subjugation of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of England, it is only necessary to examine the names of the overlords of this little Huntingdonshire village in 1086: William de Eynesford, Hugh de Beauchamp, William Herengaud, William de Auberville, Nicholas de Crioll, Eleanor de Vaux. It had taken fewer than twenty years for William and his Norman army to dismantle utterly an Anglo-Saxon kingdom that had existed for 500 years. With astonishing speed, the Ælfhelms and the Edgars had given way to the Williams and the Richards. The upheaval was complete and enduring.

At Christmas 1085, King William convened a meeting of his chief counsellors at Gloucester; the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of the same year explained the reason: 'Then, at the midwinter, was the king in Gloucester with his council ... After this had the king a large meeting, and very deep consultation with his council, about this land; how it was occupied, and by what sort of men.'

By 1086, 'the prolix and tedious' work had been completed. Officially known as the '*Liber de Wintonia*', the Book of Winchester was the first detailed description of the village of Great Staughton, its inhabitants, the land they tilled and the amount of tax due to the king and how much the value differed from the time of Edward the Confessor in 1066. Writing a century later, the treasurer of England under Henry II, Richard FitzNeal, coined the term by which the *Liber de Wintonia* is best known: 'its sentence cannot be quashed or set aside with impunity. That is why we have called the book "the Book of Judgement" ... because its decisions, like those of the Last Judgement, are unalterable.' Thus was born the Domesday Book.

The Domesday Process

The Normans did not have to start from scratch in compiling their 'Inquest'; their Anglo-Saxon predecessors had long collated data on the landholdings in England, providing a valuable aide-memoire for the *legati* (royal officials charged with collecting the data). Once collected, all relevant information was submitted for approval in the local administrative district, known as the Hundred, to specially convened juries, consisting of six Normans and six English. The *legati* would then send the completed returns to Winchester, the Norman capital, for final revision and publication.

Tochestone

William organised the collection of data according to a meticulous programme. There were seven great circuits encompassing the entire country and Huntingdonshire was included in the circuit that covered the large area of Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire.

Huntingdonshire was divided into four Hundreds (an area of land encompassing 100 taxable hides) and Tochestone was part of the Hundred of Toseland, along with nearby towns and villages such as Godmanchester, Hail Weston, Little Paxton, St Neots and Yelling. The returns for each Hundred were sworn by twelve local jurors, half of them English, half Norman. Tochestone, according to the Domesday entry for the village, came under: TERRA EPI LINCOLIENSIS. TOSELUND HUNDRED, i.e. the village was claimed by the Bishop of Lincoln, a claim that was disputed by the abbot of the powerful abbey of Ramsey.

In Tochestone, the Bishop of Lincoln had 6 hides taxable.

Land for 15 ploughs. Now in lordship 2½ ploughs;

16 villagers, and 4 smallholders who have 8 ploughs.

A priest and a church.

Meadow, 24 acres; woodland pasture, 100 acres.

Value before 1066 and now £10.

Eustace holds from the Bishop.

The Abbot of Ramsey claims this manor from the Bishop.

(translation by John Morris)

Quite how, and why, the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Stoctune was transformed into the Norman French Tochestone is an enduring mystery and likely to remain so. There are two theories: one is that the Old French-speaking scribe simply misheard the name and despite the numerous hands through which the document passed, it remained unnoticed and uncorrected when the final version of the book was compiled in Winchester. A second hypothesis was that the scribe may have found the pronunciation of the English 'st' too foreign and to overcome the difficulty he came up with his own idiosyncratic linguistic solution.

The term 'hide' dates back to Anglo-Saxon times and seems to mean two things: the amount of land required to support one household, usually calculated at 120 acres, a figure that often varied by Hundred. The hide was also the basis for levying the *geld* (tax). Other historians have suggested that a hide represented the amount of land that a plough team of eight oxen could plough in a single day. The meaning here then is that the Bishop of Lincoln held enough land to support six households and tax would be paid to the king on this amount.

Land for 15 ploughs. This is a measure of how many ploughing teams, consisting of eight oxen, were required to cultivate the land and was the basis for calculating the total amount of tax owed.

Now in lordship 2½ ploughs. The tenant-in-chief owned land which required 2½ ploughing teams to work it.

Villanus. Villagers, also translated as villein, villain, or villan. Like many of the terms used in the Domesday Book, 'smallholder' for example, the term is ambiguous and capable of a number of interpretations. Villeins owed labour services to the lord of the manor, and depending on their status, were obliged to work a certain number of days per week for their lord.

Bordarius. Usually translated as bordar or smallholder, the term refers to a more prosperous rank of peasant, distinguished by the amount of land he could hold, up to five acres. They have eight plough teams between them.

With *meadow 24 acres* we are, so to speak, on firmer ground. South of the village, between the river Kym and the barrow on which the Romans built their villa, is an extensive meadow and this may be the meadow that is being referred to. It could also refer to the extensive pasture lands to the north of what is now Staughton Highway.

Woodland pasture 100 acres. From prehistoric times, Great Staughton was richly endowed with woodland, only a small part of which now survives as Perry Wood to the north of the village. At the time of Domesday Book and in subsequent centuries, ownership of woodland was highly prized and often disputed; woodland provided timber for building, wood for fuel and, perhaps more importantly, a rich hunting ground for the king or lord of the manor, jealously protected, with the most severe of penalties for any who dared trespass in its grounds.

A priest and a church. Perhaps the most significant entry in the document. It is tempting to speculate that the church may have been there when Ælfhelm Polga owned the estate. The lord of

the manor was responsible for presenting the vicar, and villagers would contribute a tithe to pay for the priest and for the upkeep of the church.

Value before 1066 and now £10. The value of the land was unchanged from the time of Edward the Confessor (reigned 1042–1066).

Eustace holds from the Bishop. Eustace de Lovetot, the sheriff, was one of the many knights who came over with William and was rewarded for his loyalty with grants of land throughout the county and beyond. The sheriff ('shire reeve') was a vital cog in the Norman administrative machine, involved in the management of the royal landholding, which provided lucrative opportunities for the sheriff to siphon off wealth as they went about their tasks. Eustace was notorious for his rapacity and greed. Unsurprisingly, sheriffs were frequently amongst the wealthiest of the king's courtiers. Prior to the Conquest, Eustace is not recorded either as landowner or tenant. There are suggestions that he may have been a native of Abbeville, in the Somme *département*. After the Conquest, by 1086, he owned twenty-seven separate lands and manors, principally in Huntingdonshire, but also in Northamptonshire. The *vill* of Great Staughton was claimed by the Bishop of Lincoln, but exploiting the power of his office of sheriff, it is likely that Eustace was illegally claiming ownership or at least enjoying the fruits of ownership.

The Bishop of Lincoln had 6 hides taxable. The Bishop referred to was Remigius, literally 'a man from Rheims' in France, yet another indication of the influx of French lords and ecclesiastics who were now securely embedded within the new regime. The Bishop of Lincoln also claimed other lands in Great Staughton, namely the manor of *Blasworth*, modern day Blaysworth, and the *More*, otherwise Staughton Moor.

The Abbot of Ramsey claims this manor from the Bishop. The disputes over land and endowments between religious houses such as Ramsey, Ely, Thorney and Lincoln were bitter and long standing and their conflicting claims were very often left unresolved.

From the details given in the Domesday Book, it is a reasonable hypothesis that the total population of the village, taking into account children and people no longer able to work, might have been in excess of 100 people.

Two further hamlets in the parish of Staughton are recorded in the Domesday Book:

Dillington

In Dellinctune, 6 hides taxable. Land for 12 ploughs. Now in lordship 2 ploughs;

16 villagers who have 10 ploughs

Meadow, 8 acres; woodland pasture 1 league and 2 furlongs

long and 1 league wide.

Value before 1066 £6; now £4.

One league was equivalent to 12 furlongs, or about 1½ miles. The value of the land was less in 1086 than 1066. No church is mentioned.

The manor of Dillington was granted to Ramsey Abbey and for 250 years it was part of the landholding of the Engaynes who held it on behalf of the abbey. The Engaynes had come over with William the Conqueror and had been awarded lands in Huntingdonshire and elsewhere. The original meaning of their name was akin to 'engineer', which may signify the original bearer of the name was responsible for engines of warfare. One of the family, Vitalis or Viel Engayne, obtained a licence in 1238 to build a chapel in his manor of Dillington. The most illustrious member of the family was Sir John de Engayne, a contemporary of Sir John de Creting and both fought at the siege of Caerlaverock in 1300. One other legacy that the Engaynes did bestow upon Staughton was their principal manor, known as Gaynes Hall, which survives to this day, although not in its

original form. Amongst the landholdings in their manor was Littlehey Park, whose name is still preserved in Perry. Here is the 1086 record for Perry:

In Pirie (West Perry) Alwin Devil had 1 hide taxable.

Land for 2 ploughs. Now in lordship 1½ ploughs;

6 villagers with 1 plough. A church.

Meadow, 4 acres; woodland pasture 1 league long and 4 furlongs wide.

Value before 1066 and now 40s.

The interesting item in the entry for Perry is the personal name, recorded in Domesday as Alwin but which may actually represent the Old English name Ælfwine, or Ælthelwine. If this is the case, he would be one of the very few local survivors of the now displaced Anglo-Saxon landowning class. His family name, noted as Devil, was in all likelihood originally Deule.

The Norman legacy

Over the next two centuries, land dealings reveal the extent of Norman dominance and authority not only in Great Staughton but in the entire country. The Bishop of Lincoln continued to maintain his overall ownership of the land and the under-tenants came from the ranks of the Norman aristocracy who had come over with the Conqueror and were now enjoying the fruits of their loyalty.

One of the most powerful local landlords was William de Eynesford, who, in 1166, as under-tenant of the Bishop of Lincoln, held six knight's fees in Staughton. A knight's fee was nothing to do with money, but referred to the amount of land necessary to support a knight and his extensive retinue in the service of his sovereign. The quality of the land and the resources it contained, such as rivers, forests or mineral reserves, would determine the amount of tax the knight was obliged to pay either in money terms or more commonly in days of military service he owed the king. William de Eynesford was possibly the sheriff of Huntingdonshire at some time between 1100 and 1133.

For the next two centuries, the Norman overlords consolidated their landholdings by fortunate marriages. In 1265, national history intervened in the story of the village with Nicholas de Crioll and William Heringaud or Herengod. At the battle of Lewes in 1264 during the first Barons' War, Simon de Montfort, 6th Earl of Leicester, had defeated King Henry III's forces and captured Prince Edward, later Edward I, thus threatening the authority of the king. His early success did not endure: de Montfort's allies began to desert him and when Prince Edward succeeded in escaping his captors, the day of reckoning approached.

The Battle of Evesham took place on 4 August 1265 and de Montfort's forces, facing an army twice the size of his own, led by Edward, his former captive, were massacred and de Montfort himself was killed. It was alleged that Nicholas de Crioll and William Heringaud or Herengod were both sympathetic to the aims of the barons and as such could have forfeited their lives and property in the aftermath of the battle. As it was, they seemed to have returned to their Staughton estates unharmed and untroubled.

Nicholas de Crioll went on to marry twice, but it is the children of his first wife Maud – probably the daughter of William de Eynesford – who are of most interest for the history of Staughton. Nicholas' eldest daughter, Nicholaa, married Adam de Creting, whose life and career will be described in the following chapter. By 1279, Adam and his brother-in-law Anselm de Gyse were in sole possession of the manor of Great Staughton, but legal disputes during the 1280s culminated in a hearing in Westminster before the justices of assize. By 1286, in a series of

conveyances, the whole manor and the advowson became the sole property of Adam de Creting and Nicholaa his wife.