

“Here is subscribed the inquisition of lands as the barons of the king have made inquiry into them; that is to say by the oath of the sheriff of the shire, and of all the barons and their Frenchmen, and the whole hundred, the priests, reeves, and six villagers of each manor; then, what the manor is called, who held it in the time of King Edward, who holds now; how many hides, how many plowlands in demesne, how many belonging to the men, how many villagers, how many cottagers, how many slaves, how many free-men, how many socmen, how much woods, how much meadow, how many pastures, how many mills, how many fish-ponds, how much has been added or taken away, how much it was worth altogether at that time, and how much now, how much each free man or socman had or has. All this threefold, that is to say in the time of King Edward [the Confessor, 1003?-1066], and when King William [the Conqueror--or the Bastard, c.1028-1087] gave it, and as it is now; and whether more can be had than is had.

Fredrebruge Hundred and half Glorestorp. Godwin, a freeman, held it. Two plowlands of land in the time of King Edward. Then and afterwards 8 villagers; now 3. Then and afterwards 3 cottagers; now 5. At all times 3 slaves, and 30 acres of meadow. At all times 2 plowlands in demesne. Then half a plowland of the men, and now. Woods for 8 swine, and 2 mills. Here are located 13 socmen, of 40 acres of land. When it was received there were 2 riding horses, now 1. At all times 8 swine, then 20 sheep, and it is worth 60 shillings.

There is situated there, in addition, one demesne farm, as the manor of Heuseda. In the time of King Edward, 1 plowland of land; then and afterwards 7 villagers, now 5. At all times 12 cottagers, and 3 slaves, and 40 acres of meadow; 1 mill. Woods for 16 swine and 1 salt pond and a half. Then 1 riding horse, and now 14 swine, 30 sheep, and 50 goats. In this demesne farm are located 3 socmen, of 10 acres of land, and it is worth 30 shillings. The two manors have 2 leagues in length and 4 furlongs in breadth. Whosoever is tenant there, returns 12 pence of the twenty shillings of geld.”

(Extracts from the Domesday Survey, INSTRUCTIONS FOR COLLECTION OF THE DOMESDAY RETURNS).

The following commentary is on an extract taken from the Domesday Survey and will consist of examining its context of the content and its significance. There will also look at what other historians have said about the Domesday survey, thus being able to establish a fair conclusion and overall judgement on the text in question. Before establishing and commenting on the text itself we must understand what the Domesday Book was and what was the purpose of the document.

The Domesday book was a manuscript which recorded 13,418 settlements in both English and Welsh counties¹ and was completed in 1086 by the order of William the Conqueror². It was written in Medieval Latin and its main purpose was to determine what taxes were owe to the crown during the reign of King Edward the Confessor, allowing William to reassert the rights of the monarchy. It was composed of two independent works, the first being called ‘Little Domesday’ which covered the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex and the second part, ‘Great Domesday’ encompassed most of England except the north and parts of Wales³. In Old English ‘Doom’ meant a law or judgement and due to this

¹ B. Johnson, *The Domesday Book* (Historic UK, 2017).

² J.A. Giles translation, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Project Gutenberg, 1996).

³ *Hull Domesday Project: Wales* (Domesdaybook.net, 2019).

the people saw this as a reference to the Last Judgement in the Christian religion⁴. No survey has ever been attempted again in Britain until 'Return of Owners of Land' in 1873⁵. The Domesday Survey is currently situated at The National Archives at Kew in London⁶.

In the first paragraph we can see that King William inquired into the investigation of the value of all the lands in England. The King queries about the 'sheriff of the shire'⁷ and all barons that may own land and the number of workers, priests, and villagers on the properties at the time of King Edward on the throne and at the time William had taken England. This tells us that the King was invested and interested in who resided where in order to receive the correct amount of tax to the worth of the owners' assets. Paragraph one also states that they will be asking about the names of each land or manor and who owned it or resided during the reign of King Edward. This suggests a huge possible change when there was a switch in the head of the monarchy. The Domesday survey also included how many freemen, slaves, cottagers were on each property and how many woods, meadows, pastures, mills, and ponds were included on the estate. The first paragraph is an example of a small introduction as to what they aimed to complete and discover about the value of England's land and people.

The second paragraph covers a land that is owned by a freeman called Godwin and what he owns and from there they can estimate the value of how much tax he would have to pay to the crown. Throughout the rule of King Edward and the beginning of King William's reign, Godwin continues to have the same amount of two plowlands, three slaves, thirty acres of meadows, eight swine, two mills, thirteen socmen, twenty sheep and the overall amount of land which was 40 acres. However, things did change as the eight villagers became three, three cottages changed to five, and two horses were then one. It is stated that the worth of Godwin's land is sixty shillings. The changes in Godwin's land tells us there is a decrease in people on his land but an increase in homes. When William took over England twenty years prior to the making of the Domesday Book there was a transfer and change in the possession of land⁸. A vast amount of land changed ownership and an introduction of a new taxation system⁹ where William would make sure not to ask too much of the people showing his intentions to be a careful and strategical King. A lot of the land had already been given to William's loyal followers as the conquering of England was so expensive, he repaid them with land.

Paragraph three describes a farm and 'Manor of Heuseda'¹⁰ which is recorded to have one plowland, twelve cottagers, three slaves, forty acres of meadow, one mill, sixteen swine, one and a half salt ponds, one horse, fourteen swine, thirty sheep and fifty goats at

⁴ S. Harvey, *Domesday: Book of Judgement* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵ W.G. Hoskins, *A New Survey of England* (Devon, London, 1954).

⁶ R. Cellan-Jones, *Domesday Reloaded Project: The 1086 Version* (BBC News, 2011).

⁷ Translations by J. H. Robinson, *The Domesday Book* (Massachusetts, The Department of History Of The University Of Pennsylvania, 1897). Pt 2, Pp. 1-7

⁸ *The Domesday Book* (BBC, 2014).

⁹ *The Domesday Book* (BBC, 2014).

¹⁰ Translations by J. H. Robinson, *The Domesday Book* (Massachusetts, The Department of History Of The University Of Pennsylvania, 1897). Pt 2, Pp. 1-7

the time of King Edward. The farm originally had seven villagers which changed to five before the farm reportedly breaks down. This tells us that the farm was a fully function working land before William most likely broke it up in order to give as a gift to a kinsman and/ or devoted supporter. This left the owner of the original land with only ten acres of property and three socmen, totaling the worth of his estate to thirty shillings.

In conclusion, it can be said that the extract from the Domesday book is an example of one of the first survey of its kind, tracking ownership, property worth as well as population of peoples and livestock. It has become one of the most important documents in English history and on the creation of this survey, we also have a literacy account and an idea of how persons lived in the early Norman ruling of England. John McDonald states that the worth of an all estate start at the same limit and can be determined with 'variations in performance are relative'¹¹ to the characteristics and effectiveness of a manor or land. McDonald helps us understand that all these lands are judged reasonably due to them being assessed on the amount they have and how much the land and people can produce, therefore how much it is worth in currency. However, Darby remarks that "It is clear that the values were not directly related to the number of working teams or to the recorded population. Nor does a consideration of other resources help us to understand the figures"¹² thus, creating the argument that there was a result of limited understanding of economic relations and a form of generalization. This gives us the idea that it is unrealistic to recognize 'consistent relations between resources and value'¹³ throughout each year. Therefore, to have an accurate taxation system, they would have to complete the book each year as lands, titles, ownership and property changes, as does the population and factors to value.

¹¹ J. McDonald, *Production Efficiency in Domesday England 1086* (Rowledge, London, 1998).

¹² H. C. Darby and I. S. Maxwell, *The Domesday Geography of Northern England* (Cambridge: University Press, 1962).

¹³ Darby, *The Domesday Geography of Eastern England* (Cambridge: University Press, 1952).

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