

THE GREAT SURVEY – DOMESDAY BOOK

Bibliographical Exercise

By Chris Dixon

Introduction

It was probably in early 1085 that King William I commissioned his 'Great Survey'¹. He then included land held by his archbishops, suffragan bishops and earls.

This may or may not have been the first enterprise of its kind. Robert Kelham, a lawyer of Lincoln's Inn, wrote that 'King Alfred, about the year 900, composed a book of this nature, which was extant at Winchester at the coming-in of the conqueror but is since lost'².

The results of the survey were then collated and written by hand on parchment to produce three separate books. These are known as 'Great Domesday', 'Little Domesday' and the 'Exon Domesday'.

From about 1600, the manuscripts were kept in an iron clad chest with iron straps and three separate locks. The keys were held by three different officials.³

To identify different editions of Domesday, published over the centuries, I made use of the following sources:

National Archives (Domesday Legacy)

The British Library

Kersen Kenow (Cornish Archives and library)

British History Online

Bath Library

Institute of Historical Research

¹ The Anglo Saxon Chronicle [ASC], Edited and translated by Benjamin Thorpe 1861, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, Volume 2: Translations, p 186. The date is recorded here rather ambiguously because the relevant section is dated 'An. M.LXXXV' and covers the period of midwinter after which the passage referred to occurs. I believe that the year was dated as commencing on Midwinter and actually refers to the winter of 1084-5. It is also relevant that, according to ASC, p186, the weather conditions in 1086 were 'of great unpropitiousness'.

² Kelham, R, *Domesday Book Illustrated*, BiblioLife LLC, Reprint of original published by Edward Brooke of Temple Bar, London, in 1788, p1.

³ National Archives, Domesday Legacy, < <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/domesday/discover-domesday/domesday-legacy.htm> > [Accessed 31st October 2021]

EDITION 1 – Abraham Farley – Domesday Book (1783)⁴

This edition, which was made available (albeit in a very limited way) was eventually printed in 1783. Between 1773 and 1783 there was a sometimes acerbic relationship between Abraham Farley, keeper of records in Chapter House and the custodian of Domesday Book for nearly 30 years and Dr Charles Morton, chief librarian at the British Museum, who had been appointed to supervise the work.

After discarding the impractical plans favoured by Morton and others, the eventual edition was produced in 1783 using a specially prepared type which offered the closest representation possible of the original manuscript. It was notable for its accuracy but it not available to the public. The limited number of copies printed were made available to members of parliament, Lincoln's Inn and the Inner Temple, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries. This is certainly an authoritative and important edition targeted at academics but with virtually no explanatory notes.

⁴ Farley.A, *Domesday Book; seu liber censualis Willelmi primi regis Angliae inter archivos regni capitulari Westmonasterii asservatus. Jubente Rege Augustissimo Georgio Tertio praelo mandatus*, 2 volumes, London: printed by J.Nichols, (1783)

EDITION 2 – Robert Kelham – Domesday Book Illustrated (1788) ⁵

This edition was probably written following criticisms of Abraham Farley's work that it had inadequate indexing and no explanation of Latin abbreviations. Kelham attempts to remedy this with an index of all the landholders' names⁶ and translations and notes of 'difficult passages'⁷. The word 'illustrated' in the title should be taken to mean 'explained' rather than anything to do with pictures. Again targeting academics, this is authoritative and contains a wealth of explanatory notes.

⁵ Kelham.R, *Domesday Book Illustrated*, London, Printed by John Nichols for Edward Brooks, 1788, facsimile by Biblolute of Charleston, printed by Amazon.

⁶ Kelham, pp23-144.

⁷ Kelham, pp147-369.

EDITION 3 – Galbraith & Tait – Hereford Domesday (c1160-70)⁸

This is the earliest known translation of a section of Domesday Book and contains the transcript of the Herefordshire Folios. It was made during the reign of Henry II. David Bates considers the introduction ‘important, if occasionally misguided.’⁹ This is an interesting edition because of its age. However, I do not regard it as particularly important for any other reason. Target readership would have been local to Herefordshire.

⁸ Pipe Roll Society, *Hereford Domesday, circa 1160-70*, London. Printed for the Pipe Roll Society 1950.

⁹ Bates, p2.

EDITION 4 – Henry Ellis – Exon Domesday Book and Inquisitio Elensis (1816)¹⁰

This work is sometimes described as Volume 4 of Farley's Domesday Book¹¹ and contains the more detailed results of the Domesday Survey in the South West of England and details of the enquiry into the estates of Ely Abbey.¹² This is interesting as it also contains details of the 23 questions of the Domesday survey. This is important and useful because it gives a clearer picture of what information was obtained by the surveys. However, like most of the early editions only academics were targeted.

¹⁰ Ellis.H, *Libri censualis, vocati Domesday Book, additamenta ex. Codic. Antiquiss. Exon Domesday, Inquisito Elienensis; Liber Winton; Bolden Book*, London, Printed by Command, 1816.

¹¹ Bates,p2.

¹² The British Library, *Collections*, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/ely-inquest>, [Accessed 30th October 2021].

EDITION 5 – Henry James – Photo-zincographic Edition (Cornwall) (1861)¹³

This edition is very important because it was the first time that a facsimile edition had been produced. Colonel Henry James was the director of Ordnance Survey who, in 1855, had introduced photography for the purpose of making accurate reductions of Ordnance plans. By 1859 he had adapted the technique to be able to transfer the photographs to the waxed surface of a zinc coated plate – hence Photo-zincography.¹⁴

It was produced one county at a time but Cornwall was the first done as a test of the effectiveness of the method. The edition produced was exactly the same size as the original and the facsimile was not only clear and extremely accurate but the process had also been able to reproduce the red underlining, text, and shading from the original.

The intention of the work was ‘to render our chief Public Records, *in all their integrity* [author’s italics], more generally available’¹⁵. However, as the author states, ‘no sooner did this first instalment appear, than [sic] numerous enquiries were made for a translation’.¹⁶

¹³ James, Colonel H, *The Great Survey of England of William the Conqueror – facsimile of the part relating to Cornwall*, Photo-Zincographed by Her Majesty’s Command at the Ordnance Survey Office, Southampton, 1861

¹⁴ James, Introduction.

¹⁵ James, p4.

¹⁶ James, p4.

EDITION 6 – Henry James – Translation of Photo-zincographic Edition (1875)¹⁷

Little needs to be said of this edition except that when accompanying EDITION 5 above, this was the first time that Domesday Book was accessible to the general population.

¹⁷ James, Colonel H, *A literal translation of the part of Domesday Book relating to the county of Cornwall to accompany the facsimile copy photo-zincographed at the Ordnance Survey Office, Southampton*, (Southampton: Ordnance Survey Office, 1875).

EDITION 7 – J.H.Round – Domesday Survey in Victoria County History of Somerset (1906)¹⁸

The Victoria County History is a research project founded in 1899 to write a detailed history of every county. Today, more than 120 years forward, the project is still ongoing.¹⁹ The book for Somerset was started in 1906 and currently consists of 9 volumes (the last of which was published in 2006). The full text is available at British History Online but the Domesday Book entries are contained in Volume 1. It consists of a translation of the original laid out by landowner with the same section numbers as in the original.²⁰ This is preceded by an extremely comprehensive introduction to the translations which follow'.²¹

This is an excellent and scholarly work and contains detail of interest to any historian but is accessible to anyone with an interest in their County.

¹⁸ Round, J.H., *Domesday Survey in Victoria County History (Somerset)*, Vol 1, Ed. W.Page, (London: Constable, 1906), pp383-432.

¹⁹ *Institute of Historical Research*, < <https://www.history.ac.uk/research/victoria-county-history> >, [Accessed 31st October 2021].

²⁰ 'Text of the Somerset Domesday: Part 1 and 2', in *A History of the County of Somerset: Volume 1*, ed. William Page (London, 1906), pp. 433-478. *British History Online* < <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/som/vol1/> > pp433-526 [accessed 31 October 2021].

²¹ 'Introduction to the Somerset Domesday', in *A History of the County of Somerset: Volume 1*, ed. William Page (London, 1906), pp. 383-432. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/som/vol1/> > pp383-432 [accessed 31 October 2021].

EDITION 8 – John Morris – Domesday Book 11. Middlesex (Phillimore) (1975)²²

This edition is a parallel text Latin and English. The Latin is taken from Farley's edition (EDITION 1) and the translations were made by a team of volunteers. The edition includes an introduction, notes, an appendix and indexes. The editor notes that it had been reported that William I sent a second set of Commissioners 'to shires they did not know' to check the predecessors' surveys.²³ The volume for Middlesex is reported as being unique as it is the only county for which the landholdings of unnamed villagers are listed.²⁴

This is a very accessible version of the original text.

²² *Domesday Book 11, Middlesex*, Edited by John Morris, Translation edited from a draft translation by Sara Wood, -(Chichester: Phillimore, 1975)

²³ *Ibid*, Introduction

²⁴ *Ibid*, Appendix

EDITION 9 – Alecto Historical Edition (Translation) (1992)²⁵

The Alecto edition, made between 1985 and 1992, was based on a very high quality facsimile of both Great Domesday and Little Domesday. In 1985, when these volumes were rebound, every page was photographed resulting in a very high quality colour facsimile. This was accompanied by extensive county introductions, maps, historical essays and a full translation.²⁶

Although representing the most authoritative and accurate edition to be published, its general accessibility was limited by the cost of the originally published full versions. The 'Millennium edition' and the 'Penny edition' both cost in excess of £5,000. Fortunately, the edition which I describe here is available at about £25. Folios are available to download from The National Archives (E 31) for a small fee.

²⁵ *Domesday Book, A Complete Translation, Alecto Historical Editions*, editors. Dr Ann Williams, Professor G.H.Martin, (London: Penguin Books 2003, From original translation published by Alecto Historical Editions 1992.

²⁶ National Archives, Domesday Legacy, < <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/domesday/discover-domesday/domesday-legacy.htm>>

EDITION 10 – Anna Powell-Smith – Open Domesday (online) (2011)²⁷

This is based on a 1990s project by the University of Hull led by Professor J.J.N. Palmer to geocode each Domesday entry and they created the Domesday Explorer CDROM. The English translation was provided by Phillimore & Co.²⁸

Powell-Smith found the data and maps online and used them to create the site referred to here.

It now represents the first free online edition of Domesday Book together with translation and helpful indexes by place or person name.

²⁷ Powell-Smith, Anna, *Open Domesday*, 2011, < <https://opendomesday.org/book/> >, [Accessed 31st October 2021]. Note: This url will display the first folio page (Bedfordshire) but includes options to browse in folio sequence or to search by county.

²⁸ Powell-Smith, < <https://opendomesday.org/about/> >, [Accessed 31st October 2021]

EDITION 11 – The Domesday Book England's Heritage Then and Now²⁹

This is an edition which contains translations by Phillimore & Co Ltd albeit in a very curtailed fashion. It is ordered by County but within the county the sequence is alphabetical by the modern name of the place referenced. The abbreviated Domesday translation is followed by a description of the place as it now is today. There are also many photographs and images.

This is certainly not a scholarly work but it serves as a fine introduction to a readership interested in understanding what Domesday Book was.

²⁹ *The Domesday Book England's Heritage Then and Now*, Editor: Thomas Hinde, Phoebe Phillips Editions 1985.