

## **“Redmarley” in the Domesday Book**

*“Then at Gloucester at midwinter (in 1085) the King had much thought and held deep speech with his Witan...and sent his men all over England to every shire...to find out...what or how much each landholder held...in land and livestock, and what it was worth...And the returns were brought to him”.*  
[Extract - “Anglo-Saxon Chronicle” trans. Morris]

Thus began some months of frenzied bureaucratic activity which resulted in the creation of our earliest “public record”- the Domesday Book. It is unique. No other Western European state has anything even remotely comparable until the nineteenth century (Hinde). It is most probable that the command to produce the Survey was given at the former Saxon royal palace at Kingsholm (Gloucester) (vide VCH Glos vol 4 p18; C.Heighway (1993) et alii). The drafts were presented by the Commissioners to the King at an impressive ceremony at (Old) Sarum, near Salisbury at Lammas (1<sup>st</sup> August) 1086, and were “copied up” at the ancient capital of Winchester - before the end of the year by (it is said) only one monk! The information was certainly codified and “ready for use” by 1087. It is one of the ironies of history that William never saw his finished *magnum opus*. Soon after Lammas he had to return to Normandy to resist attacks on his territory by his old enemy, the Comte du Vexin and on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1087 he died a gruesome death after being thrown from his horse in the burning town of Mantes

The “Domesday” entry for *Redmarley* reads as follows; [cf “Domesday Book - Worcestershire” - Latin/English parallel text - Morris / Phillimore (1982)] The original entry was written using a ‘monastic shorthand’: the full Latin is supplied by the brackets.

(Section) II Terra *Æcclesie de Wirecestre*

(Paragraph) XXV De ipso M(anerio) ten(et) Vrso vii hidas ad **Ridmerlege**. Wills de eo ii hidas ex istis. In d(omi)nio sunt iiii car(ucae), xxiii uill(an)i (villani) ix bord(arii) cu x car(ucis). Ibi vi serui (serui) ii ancillae, molin(um) de v sol(idis) viii denar’. Silua (Silva) i leuu’ lg’, dim lata. Valebat viii lib’, m x sol’ minus. Azor et Goduin tenuer(unt) de E(pisco)po deserui(ebant) (deserviebant)

(Section 1 - not shown above - lists the manors held by the King, the only landowner. All his subjects were merely his *tenants*).

(Section) 2. Land of the Church of Worcester - (St) Wulstan, Bishop of Worcester from 1062 until his death in 1095, was one of the few Saxon prelates to be allowed to remain in office after ‘Hastings’. As the largest of the 28 *tenants-in-chief* named in the County, he held a total of eighty-five manors, of which *Ridmerlege* was number 25 on the list. *Urso* was a *tenant* of the bishop, while the unknown *William* was a *sub-tenant* under *Urso*. (on the surface, a simple enough arrangement - but see note below!)

(Paragraph) 25 *Urso* holds 7 hides of this manor at **Redmarley**. *William* holds 2 of them from him. In the ‘lordship’ there are 4 ploughs, 23 ‘villagers’ and 9 ‘smallholders’ with 10 ploughs; 6 male ‘slaves’ and 2 female ‘slaves’. A mill worth 5s 8d, Woodland 1 league long, ½ league wide. The value (at the time of Edward the Confessor) was £8, it is now 10 shillings less. (At that time) *Azor* and *Godwin* (Saxon thanes) held it from the Bishop and gave (military?) service.

Some comments on the text

1) We do not know exactly when nor under what circumstances *Urso* added *Ridmerlege* to his impressive “property portfolio”, which at *Domesday* numbered some 60 tenancies and sub-tenancies of manors, as well as 49 houses in *Worcester* (25 of them on the ‘*Market Place*’ - a ‘prime site?’) and 21½ ‘salt houses’ at *Droitwich*. He may obviously have acquired some properties perfectly honestly. Indeed, it may be assumed that he received some recompense for helping the King to crush the rebellion of Roger, Earl of Hereford in 1075, and in 1082 he was certainly awarded lands formerly held by Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, after the latter’s fall from grace. Yet we cannot overlook his well-documented wide-spread gratuitous malevolence towards the Church (see elsewhere), nor his rapacious ‘methods’. Morris clearly has his ‘suspicions’ when he refers to *Urso’s de facto alienation* of land in the section which includes Redmarley (Ch 2:i). The VCH (Worcs vol.1.p264 et seq) illustrates how both *Urso* and his brother Robert (le Despenser) continued to seize Church lands for many years after *Domesday*.

*William’s* two hides are believed to have been at *Innerstone*, where it appears that a *sub-manor* came into being from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was “called a *manor* until 1416, after which it merged with the more important manor of Redmarley” (VCH Worcs vol.3p.485). O.S. maps show an undated ‘moated’ site near Hart’s Farm, but no vestiges of a ‘manor-house’ have been found. [Pevsner notes that the Old Rectory - (rebuilt 1714) - also stands on a ‘moated’ site; while the architectural remains at Bury Court are dated circa 1170]. Niblett quotes Nash, “There was formerly a chapel at *Innerstone*. About 1480 the inhabitants of this parish sued the Rector of Redmarley for not finding them a chaplain at his own expense to officiate there. They lost the case and had to pay the Rector’s ‘costs and charges’. (Still Niblett); “The VCH says that the Chapel at *Innerstone* seems to have been disused before the Dissolution of the Monasteries (1539); the site may be marked by the present Chapel Farm”.

2) Hidage. For general purposes the *hide* is normally taken to be an area of land of about 120 acres. In the *Domesday Book*, however, the *hide* was regarded as a *unit of fiscal assessment* (Hooke), - ‘taxation’ being one of the main purposes of the *Survey*. Darby and Terrett elaborate further; explaining that “the *hide* was a notional assessment of tax liability; being based on the amount of arable land which was judged necessary to supply the annual needs of one ‘freeman’ and his family”. The ‘*Domesday*’ *hide* could vary in size, sometimes considerably, according to local custom and local ‘land’ conditions. Any comparisons of the detailed land area of the *Domesday* landscape with that of today must therefore be treated with caution, there being too many ‘unknowns’. (The VCH figures for late 19<sup>th</sup> century *Redmarley* show a total area 3,800 acres, with 1,165 acres of arable). One thing we may be sure of is that the whole mediæval manor was ‘managed’ in some form or another; there being no mention of “*vasta*”, the ‘waste land’ - such as appears in many manors in the north of the county.

3) The “*league*” is regarded nowadays as being about *three miles*. Morris (glossary to text) tells us that the *Domesday* “*league*” was about *one and a half miles* - ‘possibly less’.

4) The “*dominium*” (lordship) was the land reserved for the ‘lord’s’ private use and profit, even when the lord was *in absentia*, as obviously *Urso* was most of the time. The *ploughs* included the oxen - usually eight per team, pulling a very heavy plough. All the peasants were required to give a prescribed number of days ‘free’ labour working on the lord’s land, in return for his ‘protection’ and permission to work their own strips and plots.

5) The “*villanus*” (villager) was a peasant with possibly about 30 acres of land (estimates vary). The “*bordarius*” (smallholder) may have had about 5 acres. The ‘slaves’ had no land and relied entirely on their ‘lord’. The population of the manor is difficult to assess, since only ‘heads of families’ are recorded. (The ‘conventional’ estimate is usually based on a *notional* family of five, and there is no general agreement as to whether ‘slaves’ should be included). The population for the country as a whole at *Domesday* is thought to have been about 1,900,000 (Hinde), - compared with an indigenous population of about 4.5 million when the Romans left some five centuries earlier. The decline in population reflects the dire conditions prevailing during the Dark Ages which ensued.

6) The site of the *Domesday* mill is uncertain. Several mills are noted in the VCH (3p485). *Pauntleys* was mentioned in 1359, and *Bury Mill* and a *Flaxeorde Mill* in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (but they may have existed earlier). *Blackford Mill*, *Farm Mill*, *Durbridge Mill* and a *Thurbache Mill* are listed without dates. It was common for the *Domesday* mill to belong to the lord of the manor (yet another source of income extracted from the peasants who were forced to grind their corn there!).

7) “*The value was £8*” refers to the *total annual receipts* of the manor under Edward the Confessor (Hinde); “*now 10s less*” reflects the loss of annual profit in Redmarley under Norman rule. Overall the general picture of trade and economic activity was ‘patchy’. A minority of manors showed a profit - *Abberley* rose from £7 to £10. 10s; but drops in profit were far more common - *Kempsey* dropped from £16 to £8; *Bredon* from £10 to £9. 10s. *Hartlebury* from £4 to a mere 30s. (Morris). The countryside was still recovering from the “knock on” effects of the devastation, both material and economic, caused by the Conquest of 1066 and the widespread unrest and rebellions which followed. To make matters worse, the years 1083 and 1084 were characterized by disastrous harvests, the effects of which were still being felt as the *Domesday* Commissioners made their rounds. One feels that in 1086 England was not exactly a happy land!

### **Bibliography**

- Darby H.C & Terrett I.B            “*Domesday Geography of Midland England*” (1971)  
Hinde T.                                “*The Domesday Book - England’s Heritage - then and now*” (1997)  
Hooke Della                            “*Anglo-Saxon Settlements*” (1988)  
Nash R. Treadway                    “*Collections for the History of Worcestershire*” (1782)  
Niblett H.M                            “*Short History of Redmarley d’Abitot*” (1928 - reprint 1990)  
Morris J. (Phillimore)               “*Domesday Book - Worcestershire*” (1982)  
Pevsner N.                             “*Buildings of England - Gloucestershire, Vale and Forest of Dean*”(2002)  
V.C.H. =                                “*Victoria County History - Worcestershire*” Vols 1 - 4 (1912)

(Eric Smith - September 2005)