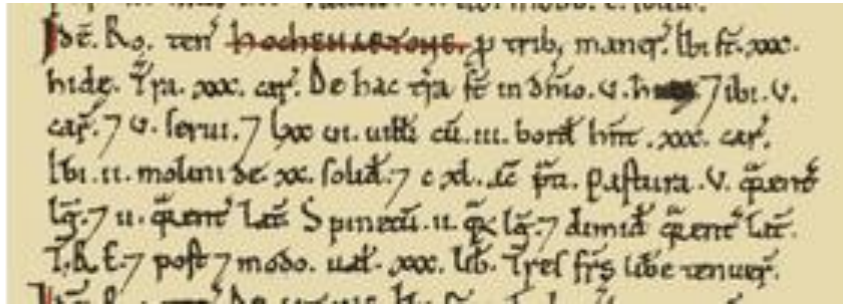


Hook Norton in the Domesday Book



The passage describing Hook Norton in the Domesday Book.

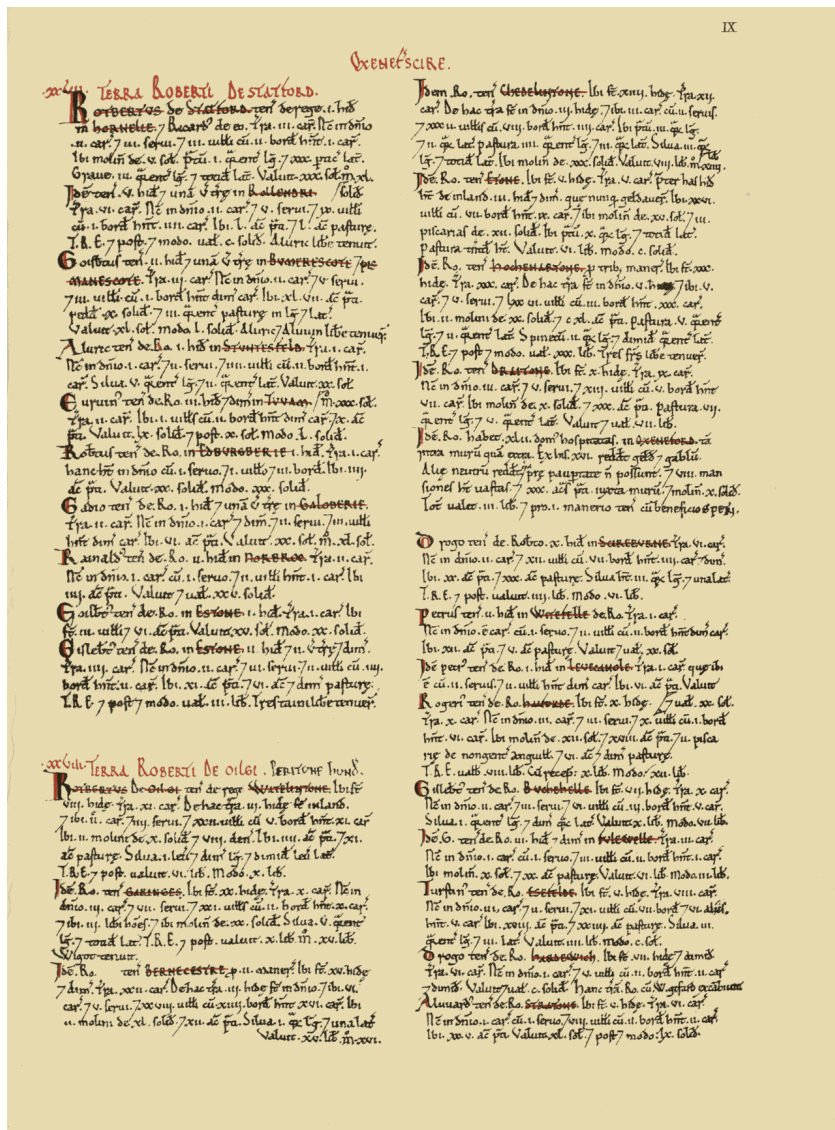
Courtesy: <http://domesdaymap.co.uk/book/oxfordshire/09>

The earliest description of Hook Norton appeared in the Domesday Book of 1086, which was a survey of England ordered by William the Conqueror to improve his ability to collect taxes. The information inscribed there (and copied above) is a highly condensed version of the replies given by an official deputation of villagers summoned to answer the questions at the Hundred Court put to them by the officials sent out by the king. This information was then collated under the name of the feudal landowner responsible to the crown. This was Robert d'Oilly (Robertus de Oilgi), who was Sheriff of Warwickshire and Oxfordshire and keeper of Oxford Castle.

Before 1066, Hook Norton appears to have been “held” by three brothers, each occupying a separate part of the village; Robert d'Oilly continued to “hold” it as three manors. “Manor” is a technical term for a feudal lordship, and should not be confused with the later Manor House; by holding Hook Norton as three manors, Robert d'Oilly was liable for three times the normal feudal requirements. For example, he would have to produce three knights on horseback attended by men-at-arms, instead of one, when the feudal array was called out.¹

¹ The original version of this article related the three manors to “the three parts of Hook Norton—Scotland End, East End and Southrop”. This is unprovable and unlikely. For the next five hundred years there were only two manors in the parish and the names of the “parts” were not used.

The area was estimated to be thirty hides, but these are not precise areas of land measurement; they are normally taken to be about 120 acres, giving a total acreage of about 3,600 acres. Of this, five hides were the personal property of the



This image of the Domesday Book was copied from <http://domesdaymap.co.uk/book/oxfordshire/09>

lord of the manor (his demesne); he also owned five plough-teams and five slaves. The slaves were a survival from Anglo-Saxon times: the Norman legal system disapproved of slavery, and it was rapidly allowed to die out. There were also two

undershot water-mills valued at 20 shillings annually, which would also have been the property of the lord.

The remaining 25 hides were farmed collectively by 76 villeins (or serfs) and 5 bordars (or smallholders). This was an exceptionally large group of villagers in Norman times, making Hook Norton the largest village in the area - bigger than Sarsden and Chipping Norton, and only marginally smaller than Banbury itself. The total population of the village must have been about 468.² The villagers had 30 ploughteams, each of which would normally have been expected to plough about 80 acres a year. By custom, each villein family occupied a 'yardland' of about 30 acres, whereas the bordars had a much smaller acreage and would have diversified as blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, wheelwrights, etc. In addition to the arable land, there were 140 acres of meadow alongside the Rop, about 10 acres of woodland, and roughly 100 acres of pasture or rough grazing on the hillside.

For taxation purposes, the village was valued at £30, a figure unchanged since the time of Edward the Confessor. This, too, is a high figure, putting Hook Norton in the same league as Banbury, Dorchester and Thame, although not as high as the figures for some of the manors belonging to the king or to his brother, Bishop Odo of Bayeux.

CANITIES

The above article first appeared in the Village Newsletter, 12: 2, 3 (March, May 1987). The anonymous author was the Rev. Ralph Mann, who shortly before his death informed us that he regarded his work as being in the public domain. It has been lightly edited for use on this site. DJR

² Other historians have put the total population at between 350 and 450; Margaret Dickens, *History of Hook Norton*, page 5, guessed 400.