

MAP OF THE
NEW FOREST
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FOREST BOUNDARY.

Scale One Inch to a Mile.

THE MAKING OF THE NEW FOREST.

BY THE HON. F. H. BARING.

According to the old tradition, the death of William Rufus in the forest was a judgment from heaven, because his father the Conqueror had driven out the inhabitants, destroyed the churches, and turned a flourishing district into a waste to make room for deer. So say the early historians under the year 1100, on the death of William Rufus, from Florence and Orderic in 1115 and 1135 to Knighton in 1365, and as to the devastation, the general histories down to that of Mr. Freeman have followed them. But the local writers on the forest entirely reject this tradition. They point out that no chronicler says a word under the Conqueror's own reign of such evictions; that the barren soil and the Domesday names, generally ending in *hurst*, *wood*, or *ley*, show that the New Forest district was always poor and thinly inhabited; that there are no ruins to be found of churches or villages; that forests were generally dotted with hamlets, and that Domesday expressly mentions a certain number of inhabitants still left in the New Forest. They therefore argue that there was no destruction of villages and churches; that only the woodland of each manor, not the arable, was taken for the forest, and that the inhabitants were left to plough their lands in peace. On some of this evidence we cannot build much; the names were much older than 1065; the Saxon houses and probably the churches in this district would be of wood and leave no ruins; other forests contained hamlets, but this forest was distinguished above the others and may well have had none—the inhabitants mentioned in 1086 are very few.

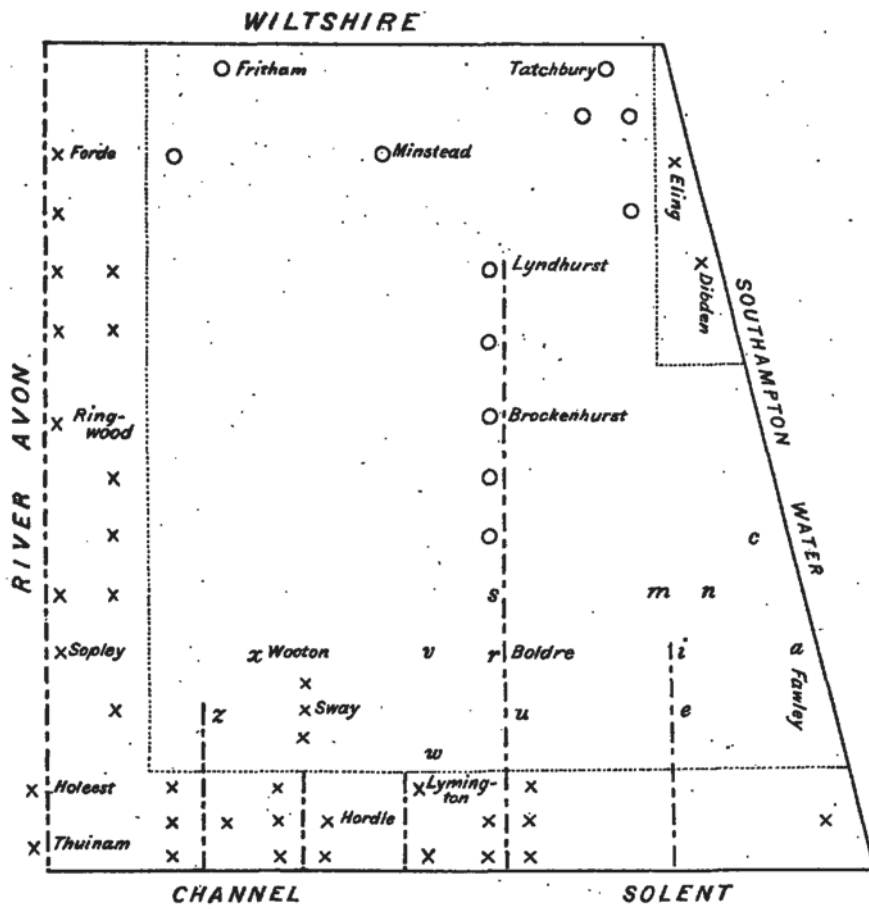
For positive evidence we must depend upon Domesday Book, which gives for each estate the hides and value, in both

1065 and 1086, and the number of ploughlands—the hide being a measure, not of area, but of assessment to the geld (1 hide=4 virgates)—also the working teams and villeins in 1086. But the treatment of Domesday Book by the local historians is most unsatisfactory. They tell us that the total hidage of the lands affected by the forest (they treat hides as area), was reduced from over 200 hides to 75, and the total value from about £350 to £150, a reduction of nearly two-thirds, while in many cases both assessment and value entirely disappear. Then they quietly put these large reductions on one side, and working on individual entries which tell us that in *some* places the woodland only was absorbed into the forest, and that in *some* cases the meadow or part of the arable was left, they go on happily to argue that only woodland was *anywhere* taken for the forest and very little harm was done to anyone. They make no attempt to distinguish between total and partial afforestation. Let us see if it is not possible to get better evidence by classifying the entries.

The villages in the forest district named by Domesday Book are mainly on the outer edge.¹ Some lie in the north-eastern corner; in the north-western corner is a group of manors all called Truham, now Fritham; down the Avon there is a village to every mile, from Fordingbridge to Thuinam (Christchurch); and there is a broad band of villages about four miles wide along the south coast. It will be convenient to divide the last into two strips, calling those within two miles or so of the sea 'coast villages,' and those further inland 'Boldre-Fawley' villages. The only Domesday villages not on the outer edge are in a narrow strip running from Boldre northward through the middle of the forest to Lyndhurst and Minstead; these we will call the 'middle or Lyndhurst villages.' The soil of the northern two-thirds of the forest district is labelled in the geological map of the surface (Drift)

¹ The forest villages, which form Bovre, Rodedic, and (most of) Rodbridge hundred, are grouped on f. 51, a, b, overflowing backwards to f. 50, b. The Avon villages and others only partly affected in Egheiete, Sirlei and Fordingbridge hundreds, are given among the general lands of the king—ff. 38-9, and (Avere, Bichetone, Tibeslei, Riple, Forde, Weringstone, Sopedie, Gerlei, Adelingham) in other fiefs.

Diagram of the New Forest district.



- | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|-------|----------------------------|
| a c e i z | Southern Villages wholly afforested. | ----- | Rivers and Streams. |
| o o o | Other " wholly " | | Boundary of 'Main Forest'. |
| x x x | Border " partially " | | |

' Barton sand and clay ' (upper or middle Bagshot Beds). In the southern third we have ' Headon Beds,' largely coated with gravel, and it is on these that we find practically all the coast and Boldre-Fawley villages of Domesday. . . There is also a narrow strip of Headon Beds running up to Lyndhurst and Minstead, with patches at Fritham and Netley. We may safely infer that the unidentified villages were on similar soil, and that on the ' Bartons,' which cover all the middle of the district (except the Lyndhurst strip), there were never any villages, so that a great part of the New Forest was always practically uninhabited.

The Avon villages and the coast villages and also Eling and Dibden on the east were effected by the afforestation only in part. Of these villages we are told by Domesday Book that one, two, or three virgates or hides, or else the woodlands, not implying trees, were ' in the forest.' The entries are of this kind :— " A. holds Bermintune. It was assessed at 7 virgates. Now at 5 virgates, because the rest (or elsewhere ' the woodland ') is in the forest. There is land for 3 ploughs. One is in demesne, and 3 villeins and 3 bordars have 2 ploughs. Value in King Edward's time 40s. Now 20s ; what the king has 6s." The assessments and valuations are reduced, but the villages remain with their villeins and ploughs, though not perhaps with quite so many as before or quite so flourishing. These villages were all on the outer edge ; we may call the parts of them afforested the ' border forest ' and these villages, as a whole, the ' border villages.'

But with the Boldre-Fawley villages, lying 2 to 4 miles from the coast, the Lyndhurst villages (except Brockenhurst), Fritham in the north-west, the north-eastern villages, and some dozen places which cannot now be found it is altogether different. These are described as being, except a few acres of meadow and an occasional ploughland, entirely in the forest. A summary of them in 1065 is as follows. *N.E. and N.W. villages* :—Tatchbury, Netley (2), Testwood (Lesteorde), Buckholt, Fritham (6), Bedcot ; 8 hides, 33 ploughlands, value £ 25. *Middle or Lyndhurst villages* (without Brockenhurst) :—Minstead, Lyndhurst, Greatnam, Brockley, Hinckelsley ; 9 hides, 23 ploughlands, value £ 13. *Southern or Boldre-Fawley villages* :—*a* Fawley (2), *c* Hardley, *e* Gatewood, *i* Otterwood,

m Hartford, *n* 'Roweste,' *r* Boldre, *s* Boldreford, *u* Pilley, *v* Batramsley, *w* Yaldhurst (Childeest), *x* Wooton, *z* Ossemley; 26 hides, 63 ploughlands, value £45½. *Villages not identified, probably southern*.—Achelic (2), Sclive, Alwintune, Bile (2), Sanhest, Cocherlei, Oxelic, Wigarestun, Slacham, Nameless (2); 14 hides, 35 ploughlands, value £35½¹. In 1086, except for fragments left outside the forest at Minstead, Lyndhurst, Fawley and Testwood, the assessments of these villages are wiped out, their values disappear, and no word is said in Domesday Book of any villein or bordar at work in them. The entries are of this type :—"B. held Childeest (Yaldhurst). It was assessed at 5 hides. Now it is (or 'is wholly') in the forest, except 2 acres of meadow, which A. holds. There was land for 8 ploughs. The value was £8," in King Edward's time, *i.e.*, 1065, Domesday Book being compiled in 1086.

What had been the condition in 1065 of these villages which were thus absorbed in what we may call the main forest? The Boldre-Fawley villages were spread over a strip more than ten miles long by about two wide, say 12,000 to 15,000 acres. But from this we must deduct some 4,000 acres between the Beaulieu and Lymington Rivers, in which there were no villages, leaving about 9,000 or 10,000 acres. The ploughlands of Domesday Book should contain some 120 acres, and to these villages it gives in 1065 some 60 ploughlands, which would represent at only 100 acres apiece about 6,000 acres of arable, more than half of the whole area. This is a fair proportion for those days, and there were probably 1,000 acres more in villages not identified. What do we learn of the population? In the Avon villages Domesday gives on the average about four men, and in the coast villages about three men to a working plough in 1086. This was about the average elsewhere, and we may estimate that there were about 3 men to a ploughland in 1065. Now, allowing for gaps in the record, the villages absorbed by the main forest had altogether in 1065 some 150 ploughlands, so that these villages would contain 450 to 500 villeins and bordars. Taking 4 to a family we get about 2,000 men, women and children, as the number

¹The figures are approximate; in six cases we have to supply the ploughlands, which are omitted, and in one or two the value seems doubtful.

at which we may estimate the agricultural population in 1065 of the villages that were absorbed by the main forest. This total may not seem to us a large one for five and thirty villages, but more than half of them had four, six, or eight ploughlands, and we know from Domesday Book that in the eleventh century a village with five ploughlands and twelve or fifteen families was a respectable village for any county in England.

What happened to these five hundred families? The annalists say that the inhabitants of the forest were driven out, and as to the main forest the statement is entirely confirmed by Domesday Book. On no lands, either on f. 51 or on f. 39, which are said to be 'wholly in the forest' or simply 'in the forest,' is mention made in 1086 of any villein or bordar or of any value, and it is plainly because the land was in the forest that there is no value. The very first entry on f. 51 runs thus:—"The king held and holds 1 hide in Achelie. Then it was assessed at 1 hide, now at nothing. In King Edward's time and afterwards the value was 50s., now it is in the forest." The bishop's entries which follow are similar. As to the ploughlands, the evidence is even stronger. Again and again in the main forest entries we have the unusual phrase 'there was land for *b* ploughs'; clearly there *is* in 1086 no land fit for ploughing.¹ At Lyndhurst, once two hides, 'there *is* nothing now but two bordars' on one virgate; at Slacham, 'when Ralf de Limesi received it, there *were* three villeins with one plough; it was worth 25s.' In 1086 the villeins are plainly gone. It is clear that the absence of any mention of men or of value in 1086 in practically the whole of the main forest entries implies the actual absence in 1086 of any men or value, and that the entries for the main forest entirely agree with the tradition that the ground was cleared of its

¹ In Fordingbridge hundred on f. 39, and in the first four entries (king and bishop) on f. 51, we have the common form 'terra est *b* car.' The compiler may well have hesitated to change it, for the actual land was still there. But after that, out of thirty entries of land taken entirely into the forest, twenty-six have either 'terra fuit' or simply 'terra *b* car,' without a verb, which is in Hants, equally unusual. None of the translations mark these differences correctly. In four cases—Bocolt, Gatingeordé, one Truham and Nutlei—the compiler slips back to 'terra est'; but it is easy to slip back to the common form.

inhabitants, though it was chiefly the edges which were cleared, the middle of it being mainly waste.

The Domesday holdings, cited by Mr. Wise as still in the forest in 1086, amount in the main forest to very little.¹ Most of his cases are villages only partially afforested on the Avon or on the coast. Others are places described by Domesday as entirely 'in the forest, except 2, (4 or 6) acres of meadow,' probably without even one house. Others are held by foresters: Brockenhurst seems to have been a specially favoured spot; in 1086 it had $3\frac{1}{2}$ ploughs, 6 bordars, 80s. value and a church; but this only shows that the owner of Brockenhurst was a favoured person, which is confirmed by the four previous entries, and emphasises the absence of ploughs, men and value in other entries. The only other arable holdings left in the main forest are one virgate held by a forester left at Lyndhurst out of two hides, $\frac{1}{2}$ hide with four bordars at Minstead out of $3\frac{1}{2}$ hides, $\frac{1}{4}$ hide at Fawley out of $3\frac{3}{4}$, and $\frac{1}{4}$ virgate at Testwood, all of which except Lyndhurst are on the outer edge. The value left in these villages was only £2 8s. out of £21. A forester also held $\frac{1}{2}$ virgate at Batramsley. Excluding Brockenhurst and some scattered bits of meadow, Domesday Book gives in the main forest in 1086, only $1\frac{1}{6}$ hide, 3 or 4 ploughlands, and £2 8s. out of the 57 hides of 1065, covering some 150 ploughlands valued at £120.

Of the 35 villages and hamlets wholly 'in the forest,' 18 were entirely or almost entirely wiped out; 11 of these can not be identified,² or very doubtfully, though five of them had four or more ploughlands in 1065. Of those that can still be placed, Brockley with six ploughlands became a tithing of the originally much smaller Brockenhurst. Buckholt, near Dibden, is not on the map; Hinkelsley is only a house. The names of Otterwood and Gatewood, near Exbury, with five ploughlands each, and of Greatnam and Hartford, have

¹Some of Mr. Wise's references (pp. 26—8) to Domesday are misleading, e.g., Lyndhurst, Oxley, Batramsley and Minstead (misquoted).

²There is a Rowdown and a Rollstone (? Rowestedon) Farm near Fawley, an Oxley's Coppice near Otterwood, a Sandydown near Boldre a Cockley Hill in Mr. Wise's map, west of Eyworth. But these are only guesses for "Roweste," "Sanhest" and "Cocherlei."

lived on as woods and ford, but there are, or were 100 years ago, no villages or hamlets, only farms, perhaps comparatively modern, for none of them are mentioned in the claims of 1670. As to the other 17 places, in 14 of them there was some little bit of meadow or, in a few cases, of arable not thrown into the forest, and they seem to owe their survival entirely to these scraps of land, to which the name could attach and on which a cottage or two could later be built. Within the limits of the main forest there was in 1291 no church (besides Beaulieu) except at Fawley, which was early taken out of the forest, at Minstead with a chapel at Lyndhurst, and at Boldre with a chapel at Brockenhurst.

In the border forest, taken from the villages on the Avon and the coast, and from Eling and Dibden, the woodland (not implying trees) appears to have been taken into the forest, and with it a good many ploughlands and houses, either scattered in the woodland or adjoining it, but the actual villages with a good part, generally the greater part, of the arable were plainly left out of the forest.¹ Some three-quarters of the inhabitants in these villages were left in comparative peace. On the lands taken into the forest at Ringwood, Holdenhurst (Holeest), Christchurch (Thuinam), Hordle and Eling, there were sixty villeins and bordars, and there may have been in all as many as 150 or even 200 families, say, 500 to 800 persons, on the lands absorbed in the border forest, but the fate of these families cannot be determined with any certainty from Domesday Book; perhaps they were not all treated alike. In the border forest swine were certainly not excluded.²

¹The woodland or common taken would be some little distance from the villages, and it may in some cases have been detached from the village to which it belonged. Holeest (Holdenhurst) is two miles west of the Avon; and some of the coast villages seem to be cut off from the forest by other manors, so perhaps the woodland taken from them lay intermixed with the woodland of the Boldre-Fawley villages.

²Woodland of 6 (rent) swine at Derleie stands for 7s.; of 20 at Mildetune for 20s.; of 6 swine at Esselei for 5s.; of 4 at or near Utefeld for 4s. These entries would make the woodland worth about as many shillings as the number of rent swine received from it. Store pigs before they were fatted with grain, were in 1260-90 worth 1 to 2s. —Rogers' *Hist. of Agricult.* i. 338.

As to the main forest, the evidence of Domesday Book is clear, and the story it tells us is this. William found in a corner of Hampshire 75,000 acres practically uninhabited. Of these 75,000 acres he made a forest, if they were not a forest before. He then enlarged this forest by taking into it some twenty villages and a dozen hamlets, covering from 20,000 to 25,000 acres, nearly two-thirds arable, for they had 150 ploughlands. Five of these with the land of 20 ploughs were in the middle of the forest, running from Minstead to Brockenhurst and Hinkelsley, the rest on the edges, the land of some 20 ploughs round Fritham in the north-west corner, of some 15 ploughs at Buckholt, Testwood, Netley Marsh and Tatchbury in the north-east, of some 60 ploughs in the south between Wooton, Boldre and Fawley, and of some 35 ploughs in villages now lost, but which probably lay mainly in the south. From these 20,000 acres he cleared off the population, amounting to some 500 families or about 2,000 men, women and children. He thus formed what we have called the main forest, the limits of which corresponded roughly to the outer boundary of the present forest. He further annexed on the borders of this main forest other 10,000 to 20,000 acres, mainly woodland, but including probably 500 inhabitants whose fate is doubtful.¹

Florence of Worcester (d. 1118) says that in the forest district, which before *incolis et ecclesiis nitebat uberrime*, the men were driven out, the churches destroyed, and game only left. The force of a base Latin superlative is rather doubtful; to call the villages afforested *rich* would be strong, but perhaps he meant no more than 'full of men and churches.' This was true of the 20,000 or 25,000 acres added to the main forest, but he seems to apply it to the whole 100,000.

Orderic, (b. 1075) writing in Normandy about 1135,² tells

¹The forest was later extended right up to the shore and the Avon stream (perambulation 8 Ed. I., Lewis, p. 173). But in the perambulation of 29 Ed. I., all the border villages were thrown out again, and with them apparently those parts of them which had been taken by William to make the border forest. The outer boundary of the present forest takes in 92,000 acres (Lewis, p. 64), but Tatchbury, Netley and Fawley are now outside it.

²From 1085 he was a monk at St. Evroult, but seems to have visited England in 1115.

the tale with much more rhetoric ; speaks of the district as *populosa regio* ; talks of careful cultivation by a *copiosa plebs*, who supplied Winchester with produce, (*campestri ubertate*, ? pork) ; and says that 'more than sixty parishes' had been wasted. He does not distinguish between total and partial afforestation, and is perhaps counting the names, about sixty, entered in Domesday Book on f. 51, under the heading 'In Nova Foresta et circa eam.'¹ The story has grown considerably, and it was not diminished in the hands of the later annalists. They gave no thought to the exact position of the wasted villages, and their general tone suggests that they took all the 100,000 acres afforested to have been previously inhabited. Wasted villages along the north side and along the south side and through the middle of the forest might easily be taken by mapless historians without local knowledge to represent the whole district.

The amount of devastation was thus much exaggerated by tradition, and the local historians are right to protest that the forest as a whole had never been covered with villages. The true story was preserved by Robert de Torigny (called later de Monte), a monk of Bec, who wrote in 1135-9 in the continuation (Book VIII.) to William of Jumièges that the Conqueror had "destroyed many villages and churches to enlarge the forest." The wasting of thirty villages and hamlets with some ten or twelve churches would well satisfy that description. Apparently the Anglo-Saxon Chronicler, William of Jumièges and Florence did not think the devastation so large, compared with that caused by the conquest in other parts, notably in Yorkshire, as to call for special mention in summing up the Conqueror's own reign and character. But the evictions, though mainly on the borders of the forest, were real enough, and quite wide enough, to make men say, when William Rufus was killed in the forest, that it was a judgment from heaven ; a story which would specially appeal to the medieval mind.

¹Perhaps the churches said to be destroyed—thirty-six by Walter Mapes and twenty-two by Knighton—had also their ultimate source in Domesday. It would be possible to count those manors on f. 51, which were taken entirely into the forest as thirty-six, and the larger ones as twenty-two.