

# Child Okeford at the time of Domesday

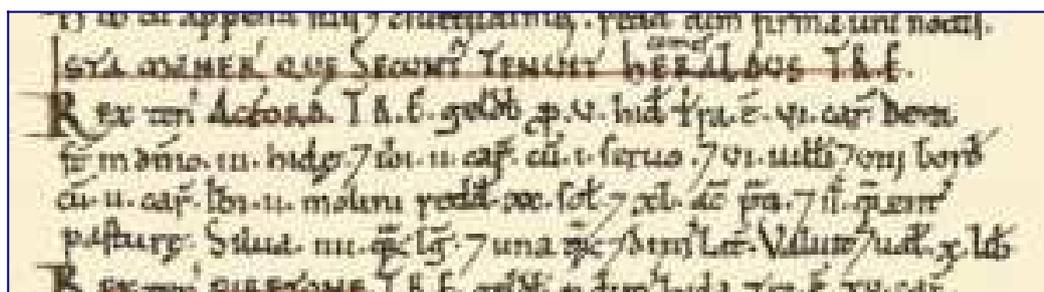
**“And so the English groaned aloud for their lost liberty and plotted ceaselessly to find some way of shaking off a yoke that was so intolerable and unaccustomed”<sup>1</sup>**

There are few points in history where we can get anything like an accurate assessment of the size of the village and the state of agriculture. The Domesday survey undertaken in 1086 was one such, as was the 1841 Census and the Tithe Survey of the year before.

The Domesday survey was “owner” based, not geographic and we are lucky in that two versions of the inquiry were made. The definitive version is known as the Exchequer version whilst the working notes on the Kings lands in Cornwall, Wiltshire, Dorset, Devon and Somerset are found in the Liber Exoniensis, sometimes known as the Exeter Domesday [although it was probably made under the auspices of the Bishop of Salisbury]. There are slight discrepancies between the two versions but on one thing they both agree, the name of the village was Ackford; literally the oak by the ford.

Child Okeford was held by two Lords of the Manor, and this is probably the origin of the fact that in later centuries there were two rectories, Child Okeford Superior and Child Okeford Inferior. The first entry relates to the manor held by King William and the second to Robert his half brother. It is not possible to identify any part of the village with one or other manor. Evidence from the 19th century indicates that the lands of the two manors [which still existed] were intermingled.

## The Exchequer Version of Domesday- the Kings entry.



The Kings entry for CO  
[opendomesday.org](http://opendomesday.org)

The king holds Acford  
[Child Okeford]. T.R.E.

At some time after the Norman Conquest, William assumed “allodial” ownership of all the land in the country. Technically nobody owned land other than the monarch, instead they “held” land as tenants of the King. Curiously the King held land of himself. T.R.E means at the time of King Edward [the Confessor] or more strictly it means “on the day on which King Edward was alive and dead’ (5 January 1066).” William did not of course recognise Harold as King so the last legitimate King was Edward.

It paid geld for 5 hides.

Confusingly two versions of what a ‘Hide’ was exist. Traditionally it was considered to be the area required to feed a family, reckoned at 120 acres. However in the 19th century J H Round found that the “hidage” of virtually all the manors in Domesday were multiples of 5 and considered that the term “hide” in Domesday referred to an area for tax assessment rather than an exact land area. We will return to this later.

There is land for 6 ploughs. Ploughs were pulled by 8 oxen in two rows, four abreast. “land for 6 ploughs” means there was sufficient land to occupy 6 plough teams throughout the year. It should be appreciated however that land was not measured at this time as area per se. Instead units of measurement were “functional” thus a

ploughland in an area of heavy soil would be smaller than that in lighter areas. Having said that, it has been reckoned that the area of the average ploughland was the same as a hide, 120 acres and so nominally 720 acres would have been under the plough in Child Okeford.

Of this there are in demesne

3 hides

Demesne land was that held by the lord of the Manor. Depending on how important the Lord was he would have cultivated the land directly or farmed it out to others [see below].

and there (are) 2 ploughs with 1 serf and 6 villeins and 8 bordars with 2 ploughs.

There was seemingly land for 6 ploughs but only four actual ploughs in use. The Exon version shows us that two were in service to the King and the other two to the villagers.

In fact this kind of discrepancy is not unusual in Domesday; a surplus or more commonly a deficiency in the numbers of ploughs is quite common. Of more interest are the serfs, villeins and bordars.

Serfs, villeins and bordars

What is recorded in Domesday is not the number of people but the number of Households. It is generally thought that the average household constituted 4.5 people.

Serfs [Servi or Slaves] were the lowest of the low, they were in fact slaves and in Anglo-Saxon times were bought, sold and exported to Europe.

Bordars were the next level up; some held land others did not. Nationally they seem to have held a maximum of 10 acres so our 8 bordars would have farmed 80 acres or so.

Villeins were the highest of the low; typically they held a virgate [about 30 acres] each so our 6 villeins would have held about 180 acres all together.

The total area given over to the plough would probably have been about 1000 acres in total [**but see below**].

There (are) 2 mills rendering 20s.

These mills were water mills; windmills were not introduced until much later. The first reliable reference to one in England dates from 1185 in Weedley, Yorkshire. Where they were in the village is not known. See the entry in the Liber Exonensis below.

40 acres of meadow

See below for a discussion of the problems posed by the "acre".

and 2 furlongs of pasture

The furlong also poses a number of problems. The name derives from the length of the furrow ploughed in the open fields – the furlong. Due to the nature of the soil there was no consistency and although, in later centuries, the furlong was standardised to a length of 220 yards, it may not have been this in any particular locality.

A bigger problem though is the fact that a furlong is a unit of length and "*It is not even certain that the Domesday furlong was always a measure of length; several Domesday statements imply that it was a measure of area.*"<sup>2</sup>

(There is) wood(land) 4 furlongs long and 1.5 furlongs wide.

Today a furlong is 220 yards or 201 metres long but we do not know what the length was at the time of Domesday.

It was and is worth £10.

Geld, the tax involved, had first been raised by Ethelred the unready and was still being collected the amount being based on the hidage of the manor.

To William this was the most important part of any entry in Domesday. As Maitland put it: "*William [the Conqueror] might well regard the right to levy a geld*

*as the most precious jewel in his English crown.*“

Although it is valued in monetary terms, geld would, until the 13th century at least, be paid in agricultural produce.

## **Liber Exonisis version of Domesday**

The king has one manor which is called Acforda, which Earl Harold held on the day when King Edward was alive and dead, and it paid geld for 5 hides. Six ploughs can plough these. Thence the king has 3 hides and 2 ploughs in demesne and the villeins 2 hides and 2 ploughs.

There the king has 6 villeins and 9 bordars and 1 serf and 1 pack horse and 7 beasts and 10 pigs and 48 sheep

and 2 mills which render 20s a year, of which the king has half,

“Acford” in the Exchequer version is here “Acforda.”

Here again we note that “*it paid geld for 5 hides. Six ploughs can plough these.*” but that only four ploughs were in existence.

Villeins, bordars, serfs and animals all lumped together as if there were no difference between them. In this version there is an extra bordar however. Of interest here is the pack horse. What was he used for? The 7 beasts [cows] would have been used for milk, and the other animals for meat and wool. Records of the number of animals are only found in the Exon version of Domesday.

There were 276 mills in Dorset in 1086, attached to 178 manors. The Exchequer version records the existence of two mills worth 20s but not that it was shared. It fails to mention who had the other half but as we will see this was his half brother, Count Robert de Mortain.

and 4 furlongs of  
wood(land) in length

and 1.5 in width

and 40 acres of meadow  
and 2

furlongs of pasture.

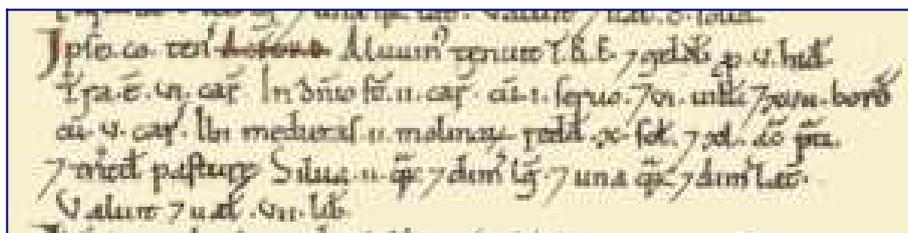
This manor renders-£10 a  
year and when Fulcred  
received it at farm of the  
king, it rendered as much.

A minor curiosity of no significance is that in the Exon  
version woodland is mentioned before meadow and  
pasture and in the Exchequer version it is the other  
way round.

The King owning all the land , granted it to his  
followers, the great lords as “tenants in chief” for  
which they had to do feudal service. However when it  
came to his own land the King could not work it  
directly but at the same time he did not wish to  
relinquish control. Instead he “farmed” the land out.  
The manor would have tendered £10 but Fulcred  
would have undertaken to pay the King [for example  
£8] the difference being his profit.

Whoever Fulcred was he must have been fairly  
important. He was an Anglo-Saxon as he farmed all  
the manors [bar two] that had been owned by Earl  
[King]Harold in the County. These had been given to  
him again by William and the explanation may be  
that “*Such leases were often held by Englishmen and  
probably represent Norman lords using the expertise  
of the natives to maximise the profits from their new  
estates. The burden, of course, would ultimately have  
fallen upon the manorial peasantry.*”<sup>3</sup>

## The Exchequer version- Count Robert de Mortain.



Count Roberts entry  
[opendomesday.org](http://opendomesday.org)

The count himself holds  
Acford . Alwin held (it)  
T.R.E.

A man of “stupid dull disposition“<sup>4</sup> ,Robert de Mortain was also the richest man in England after the King. He was Williams’ half brother and owned 190 hides in Dorset. However his main lands were in Cornwall which he owned almost completely. In all, he held over 790 manors in 20 counties.

Wikipedia has the following to say on his character ;

*“Further clues to his character are found in the Vita of Vitalis of Savigny, a very wise monk who Robert sought out as his chaplain. One incident tells of Robert beating his wife and Vital, intervening, threatened to end the marriage if Robert did not repent. In still another entry Vital tells of his leaving Robert’s service abruptly and after being escorted back to him, Robert begged for Vital’s pardon for his actions. Overall, Robert was proficient in every duty William assigned him, he was a religious man yet ill-tempered enough to beat his wife, but was not known as a man of great wisdom.“*

Alwins’ name crops up in several entries in the Dorset Domesday as holding land T.R.E ; whether or not it is always the same man is not known. In 1086 however he was “out”- as many Anglo-Saxons were.

and it paid geld for 5

Here again is Rounds “5 Hides” unit for the purposes of

hides.

tax assessment.

There is land for 6 ploughs. In demesne there are 2 ploughs with 1 serf and 6 villeins and 17 bordars with 5 ploughs.

As with the Kings Manor there was land enough for 6 ploughs but whereas the king only had 4 actual ploughs, Roberts' manor supported 7.

The Kings ox teams required 4 men per team but Roberts' only 3.4.

There (is) half of two mills

The King having the other half.

rendering 10s

and 40 acres of meadow and the same amount of pasture.

The meadow acreage is the same as the King, again is this a coincidence? The pasture is here given in acres as opposed to furlongs in the Kings entry.

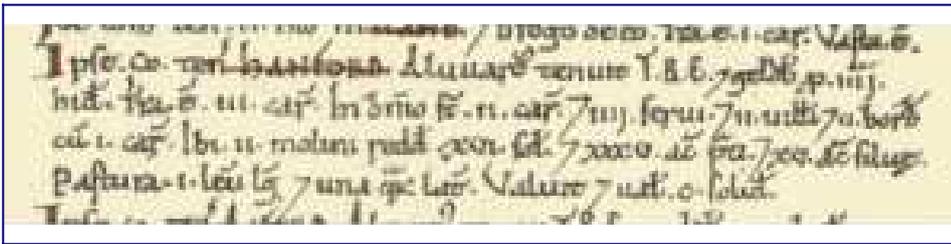
(There is) wood(land) 2 furlongs and a half league long and 1.5 furlongs wide.

*“Like many Domesday measures, there is no certainty about the extent of the league, or even whether it was a linear or areal unit. Though there may normally have been 12 furlongs to the league, for instance, it has been argued that the Wiltshire league was 15 furlongs long, that of Worcestershire only four. The league also appears sometimes to have been used as a synonym for the mile (which does not occur in Great Domesday), and vice-versa. Many Domesday statements imply that the league, like the furlong, could be a measure of area.”<sup>5</sup>*

It was and is worth £7

Despite being rated for tax the same as the Kings manor and having more land under the plough, the value of the manor was £3 less than the Kings.

## Hanford – Held by Robert de Mortain



Hanford Entry  
[opendomesday.org](http://opendomesday.org)

The count himself holds Hanford

Alward held (it) T.R.E. and it paid geld for 4 hides.

There is land for 3 ploughs. In demesne there are 2 ploughs and 4 serfs and 2 villeins and 2 bordars with 1 plough.

There (are) 2 mills rendering 16s and 35 acres of meadow and 15 acres of wood(land). (There is) pasture 1 league long and 1 furlong wide. It was and is worth 100s.

Hanford was also held by Count Robert and is of interest because, besides being our close neighbour, it was a separate manor at the time of Domesday and would eventually be home to the Seymer family who would hold the manor in later centuries.

It was obviously a much smaller manor than those of Child Okeford but still boasted two mills.

Domesday offers a tantalizing glimpse of medieval life, and appears to offer hard facts about the state of the country but interpretation is very difficult. Land areas are particularly hard to assess.

### Population

Domesday does not record the population in totals but refers to the number of households, with the possible exception of slaves, where it is not known if they had their own families.

The first question then is “how many people are there in a household?” As you might guess this has been an area of some controversy but H C Darby who wrote extensively on Domesday quotes a multiplication factor for the total population of

4.5 and this is generally accepted now.

Domesday records the households of 37 bordars and villeins which gives a probably population of 166 people or so with two slaves. If the slaves did have families then we may add another 9 or so to the total.

## **How much land was under cultivation.**

To put it simply – we do not know.

The study of “acres” has taken up whole books and its history is of some interest. Traditionally an acre was not a “measured” area, it was what we might call a functional unit, considered to be the amount of land occupied a single strip in the open field. This in turn was determined by how much one ox team could plough in one day. These were often called “Field” acres and varied considerably between areas.

The next type of acre, and the one used in Domesday, is the “fiscal” acre. Kings [or Lords of the Manor for that matter] were not interested in the area of land that was occupied, but by how much tax could be earned. Since two fields of the same size were rarely equally productive some accommodation was necessary. Thus the fiscal acre was variable and was adjusted in area so as to produce a standard rate of tax.

By the 13th century it became the practice to actually measure the land and unfortunately this was not an exact science either. They were measured using the “rod”<sup>6</sup> that was used to drive the oxen in the plough team. Walter of Henley in 1280 gives the “Kings Rod” as being 16.5 feet in length but in practice the length of the rod varied from manor to manor and county to county and Walter describes rods up to 24 feet in length. As the length of the rod in use was determined by the customs of the individual manor these first, measured, acres are known as “customary” acres.

Dorset had for many years its own customary acre. The length was 201 yards long and 5 yards wide and was thus about 70% of a standard acre. It was not unique

however as Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Powys, The Peak District and many other places had their own acres as well.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century when acres began to be measured it was found that discrepancies between measured acres and fiscal acres existed. In one example at Runwell in Essex in 1222 it was found that whereas ancient records showed a particular hide contained 80 [fiscal] acres, when it was actually measured it contained 120. The problem is that we have no idea what area the Runwell customary acre was!

Various attempts were made to standardise measurement and in 1878 the acre was standardised at 4840 square yards.<sup>7</sup> By this time the actual measurement was made by a chain<sup>8</sup> 22 yards long rather than a rod.<sup>9</sup> An acre thus constituted is an area 220 yards [10 chains] long by 22 yards [1 chain] wide.

The result of all this is that we have no idea how many statute acres of arable, meadow or pasture there were in the village at the time of Domesday.

Another interesting point refers to the number of mills in the village. This refers to two mills in both the Kings and Robert de Mortains holdings with a value of 0.5 given to the latter. This use of fractions is quite common and indicates that the Manor shared in the mills. In this case that Robert had a half share of two mills. Where they were is still a matter of conjecture.

Ordericus Vitalis; 1075– c. 1142

Hull Domesday Project. <http://www.domesdaybook.net/home>

Hull Domesday Project,

According to William of Malmesbury.

Hull Domesday Project

It gets confusing because the rod was also known as a pole or a perch.

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7  
8  
9

The statute acre,

Usually the “Gunthers” chain named after its inventor.

The observant will note that four “kings” rods equated to one chain.