

NORMAN OLD WOKING

At the start of the Surrey entry in the Domesday Survey of 1086¹, in the land held by the king, the first place listed in the Hundred of Woking is Guildford², with the manor of Woking following after that.

I have noted before (in my chronological history of Woking, elsewhere on this site) some of the terminology of Domesday, but at the risk of repeating myself (and for the benefit of those unfamiliar with some of the terms) a 'hide, in Anglo-Saxon times, was not just considered to be sufficient land to support a family, but was also the basis for the assessment of tax.

It is in that context that Woking 'answered' for 15½ hides, even though there were clearly more than that number of households, and indeed plough-teams, capable of farming the area. Unfortunately the fact that 'they never paid tax' has not persisted!

'King William holds Woking in lordship. It was in King Edward's revenue. Then it answered for 15½ hides; they never paid tax.
Land for 6 ploughs. In lordship 1; 33 villagers and 9 smallholders with 20 ploughs.
A church; Osbern holds it.
1 mill at 11s 4d; meadow, 32 acres; woodland at 133 pigs.
Walter son of Othere holds 3 virgates of this land.
A forester held it before 1066; it was then placed outside the manor, through King Edward. There is nothing there now.
Value before 1066 and later £15 at face value; now £15 by weight, and 25s to the Sheriff.'

Most believe that it was Bishop Osbern of Exeter who held the church at Woking³, but Blair⁴ appears to claim that it was a man called Osbern de Eu (or 'Ow').

The mill is often assumed to be on the site now occupied by the 'Gresham Mill' estate (the modern development that essentially destroyed the 1890's Unwin Brother's Printing Works, itself an enlargement of the Victorian paper-works, known to have been converted from an earlier corn mill on the site) but it has been claimed that 'the lines of parish boundaries, no earlier than the 12th century, indicate that the present site is on a diverted channel of the Wey and the natural fall of the river would not be sufficient for milling processes'⁵.

Wherever it was, the fact that Woking's mill was valued at 11s.4d., whilst Byfleet, Wisley, and two mills at Pyrford were valued at just 5s., could be significant. Was Woking's a bigger or better site? Having said that, Send's mill (presumed to be on or near to the site of the future Newark Mill) was worth 21s., and the two mills at Stoke-next-Guildford were worth 25s.

The thirty-two acres of meadow need not all have been within the parish of (Old) Woking. Manorial boundaries are often different from ecclesiastical ones, and in Woking's case part of the meadows on the south side of the river Wey (off Broadmead Road) were later part of the Manor of Woking. Despite being within the parish of Send the meadows are still known as the 'Woking Broadmeads' – although whether they were part of the manor at the time of the Domesday Survey is unlikely.

Morris⁶ explains that the '133 pigs' was not the quantity of pigs to be found in the woodland at Woking, but the amount due to the lord of the manor from the tenants for their pannage. Pannage (the right of tenants to allow their pigs to forage in the manorial woodland), was just one of a number of 'commoners rights' such as the right of 'pasture' (the right to keep animals such as sheep, cattle and horses on the common pasture), 'turbury' (the right to take sods of turf for fuel), and 'estovers', that allowed people to take fallen wood and bushes (such as gorse) for their fires (but not mature trees)⁷.

The three virgates⁸ held by Walter, son of Othere, and previously by a forester, have been claimed by some to be Mayford⁹ – for centuries a separate part of the Manor of Woking.

The total value both before and after the conquest was apparently £15, with 25s being paid to the sheriff of Surrey.

'Bishop Osbern holds Woking. He held it himself before 1066.
Then it answered for 8 hides; now for 3½ hides.
Land for 9½ ploughs.
In lordship 1½ ploughs
20 villagers and 6 smallholders with 8½ ploughs. 3 slaves.
A mill at 30d; meadow, 14 acres; woodland, 28 pigs.
This manor has and had a customary right in the King's woodland at Woking. That is why the lord of this village is able to have 120 pigs without pasture dues in that woodland.
Two men hold this manor from the Bishop, Ansgot and Godfrey, 4 hides each.
Total value before 1066 and later £10; now £9 10s.'

A second entry in the survey under the land of Bishop Osbern also refers to Woking, although many now believe that to be erroneous, and it should be listed as East Horsley.

Arthur Locke¹⁰, however, believed it could refer to what he called 'East Woking' or 'Church Woking' the main centre of which he rather confusingly placed on the site of Woking Palace (the later centre for the main Manor of Woking).

But if that was the case where did the villagers, smallholder and slaves of that manor live? There would presumably be some evidence of occupation by such a large number of people (a deserted medieval village?), the evidence for which is clearly lacking from an archaeological point of view at the site of Woking Palace.

¹ A translation of the Surrey section is widely available in (Morris 1975) but also in (Malden 1902)

² It is worth emphasising that at that time Guildford was just a small part of the Woking Hundred!

³ page ix (Surrey Archaeological Society 1878) paper read by Ralph Nevill to members of the society meeting at St Peter's church 5th August, 1874, where he notes 'the living was, in 1072, in the possession of Osbern, Bishop of Exeter, who was nearly related to Edward the Confessor, and who died in 1104'.

⁴ p105 (Blair 1991)

⁵ p12 (Members of the Woking History Society 2014), who rather unhelpfully do not go on to state where they believe the Domesday mill was actually sited.

⁶ (Morris 1975)

⁷ (Richardson 1989) A325, A309, A312 & A317 respectively in 'Land & Agriculture' section, 'Part 4, Commons'.

⁸ A 'virgate' was ¼ of a hide, (Richardson 1989), A44.

⁹ p113 (Manning and Bray 1804-14), p23 (Brayley 1850)

¹⁰ 'Woking Normanized before the Conquest, 1042 to 1066 AD', and 'Woking under William the Conqueror; 1066 AD to 1087' (Locke n.d.). He later noted in the chapter 'Royal Woking: 1087 AD to 1189 AD' that the lands of East Woking became known as the 'Manor of the Rectory of Woking and Runtley' - a small 'sub-manor' of Woking that in the 17th century had The Old Manor House in the High Street as its main centre.

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Until the late 12th century, the Manor of Woking had been Crown property, and most historians believe it unlikely there was any need of a manorial complex here, although local historian Phillip Arnold appears to believe otherwise as he noted ‘when Richard I granted the Manor of Woking to Alan Basset in 1189, the site of the Palace had become established’¹¹.

Although the year 1189 is often quoted, there is in fact no extant charter from that date by Richard I to Alan Basset¹². All we know for certain is that when King John came to the throne he confirmed the granting of the manors of Woking, Mapledurwell (Hampshire) and Winterbourne (Gloucestershire) to Alan.

The granting of the land to Alan Basset was obviously quite significant. According to Arthur Locke ‘the Bassets were upstarts whom Henry I had raised “out of the dust” and “over the heads of the Barons” but they appear not to have done ill by Woking’¹³.

I will concentrate more on Alan Basset in my next essay on the late 12th and early 13th century, but when it comes to Locke’s theory that the monks of Woking continued in the post-conquest manor of ‘Church Woking’ the grant to Basset appears to be key. Locke states that ‘East Woking in particular attracted Alan’s attention’, noting how he took over the site of ‘the monkish community’ whilst about the same time ‘a little band of canons were granted by a magnate of Papercourt, a site, not far downstream, on which to build a new work or Newark’¹⁴.

Although he acknowledges that there is no record of any bargain with the monks and Basset, he notes that the monks of Newark ‘had the advowson of Woking, the tithes of Horsell and other appurtenances of the old Minster and its daughter chapelries’ so ‘it seems fairly clear that they were the Woking ‘monks’ in a new home’.

Looking at later events it is not hard to believe that that Basset’s could have ousted a set of monks from Woking and ‘persuaded’ a neighbour to give them new land elsewhere, but this is early in Alan’s career (not his sons), and although he was undoubtedly a well-respected courtier, it is doubtful whether he would have then had the clout (or more importantly the need) to have gone so far.

The Papercourt ‘magnate’ who founded the Augustinian Newark Priory about 1191-8 was Ruald de Calne and his wife Beatrice de Sands. Whilst not necessarily agreeing with Locke’s interpretation of events, John Blair suggests that it is tempting to see the regular canons of the ‘new work’ as ‘secular canons from Woking’, re-established¹⁵, and points out that as well as Woking church being in their hands by 1230, the ‘parochial rights over Pirbright were recovered shortly afterwards’.

It should be said that Locke and Blair’s suggestion that the original Minster at Woking was the predecessor of Newark is not the only possibility - the chancel of Ripley Church has also been suggested¹⁶.

It should also be pointed out that there is absolutely no archaeological evidence that there was any settlement (monkish or otherwise) on Locke’s site at ‘East Woking’ before the late 12th century.

Indeed Rob Poulton in his report on the excavations to Woking Palace notes that ‘it is quite certain from the archaeological evidence that the new manorial residence at Woking that he [Alan Basset] established was on a site that had not previously been used for settlement of any sort’¹⁷.

Poulton adds that ‘soon after Alan Basset came into ownership of the manor, he decided, or may have found it necessary, to establish a new manorial centre. The sand and gravel ‘island’ in this location made it an excellent choice for a moated manor of the type that had then become newly fashionable, and the earliest finds from the excavation show that occupation had begun by around 1200’¹⁸, with a quantity of late 12th/early 13th century pottery being discovered in the excavations.

He goes on to note, however, that ‘the exact character of the earliest house remains uncertain, although it seems probable that all or most of the structures existing by the end of the 13th century were present, or had precursors, a century previously. From the beginning, it was intended to accommodate a large household, appropriate to Basset’s status, clearly on a lesser scale than that of a royal palace, but well above the manor houses of the local gentry’¹⁹.

Stewart-Parker notes that Basset ‘appears to have chosen Woking manor for a time as his major seat before spending more time in the late 1220’s dealing with his manor in High Wycombe and his Wiltshire estates’²⁰.

Robertson, writing for the Surrey County Archaeological Unit in 2002 noted that ‘the presence of the Domesday church of St Peter, the Domesday mill, and Woking Palace to the east (established in the 13th century) all provide indicators for the early establishment of settlement at Old Woking.’²¹

¹¹ p5 (Arnold 2001)

¹² p14 (Stewart-Parker 2013)

¹³ Woking under the Bassets; 1189 to 1281 (Locke n.d.) evidently quoting Orderic Vitalis

¹⁴ Woking under the Bassets; 1189 to 1281 (Locke n.d.)

¹⁵ p95 (Blair 1991)

¹⁶ p23 (Send & Ripley History Society n.d.)

¹⁷ p211 (Poulton 2017)

¹⁸ p22 (Poulton 2017)

¹⁹ p212 (Poulton 2017)

²⁰ p185 (Stewart-Parker 2013)

²¹ p7 (Robertson 2002 (revised June 2003)

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