

THE DOMESDAY WOODLAND OF CHESHIRE⁽¹⁾

BY IAN B. TERRETT, B.A.

Read 8 April 1948

ONE of the most remarkable features of the landscape of Norman England was its well-wooded character. There is abundant evidence that the process of clearing the woodland had begun in Anglo-Saxon times, yet the Domesday record makes it clear that a great deal of wood remained in 1086. Woodland was of course an extremely valuable element in the economy of the medieval village. It was used not only for building and for domestic purposes, but also as fuel for industry (e.g. the Cheshire salt industry) and as pannage for swine. For these reasons then, the Survey records in detailed fashion the amount of wood in each vill. In England as a whole most of the Domesday woodland was recorded in one or other of two ways, either in terms of linear or areal measurements or in terms of the number of swine it could support. The former method was adopted for Cheshire.

Every student of the Cheshire Domesday must acknowledge his indebtedness to the excellent edition, translation and introduction of Professor James Tait.⁽²⁾ In the account which follows all the references are to the Domesday folios themselves as given by Tait.

Types of Wood Entries

The extent of woodland on the great majority of Cheshire manors is indicated in terms of linear measurements, which may be illustrated by the following examples:

⁽¹⁾ Read before the Society on 8 April 1948 as part of a paper entitled "The Domesday Geography of Cheshire". The author wishes to express his indebtedness to Professor H. C. Darby, M.A., Ph.D., for much valuable criticism given during the preparation of this article.

⁽²⁾ *The Domesday Survey of Cheshire* (Chetham Society, N.S. Vol. 75, 1916).

Buerton in *Warmundestrou* (265b): "There is wood half a league long and as much wide". (*Ibi silva dimidia leuua longa et tantundem lata.*)

Chorley in *Warmundestrou* (265b): "There is wood half a league long and two furlongs wide". (*Silva dimidia leuua longa et ii quarentenis lata.*)

Marton in *Hamesten* (266b): "There is wood twenty perches long and as much wide". (*Ibi silva xx perticis longa et tantundem lata.*)

There are however some thirty-two exceptions, where, in most cases, leagues and acres are employed together. Thus at Upton-by-Chester (Wirral) there was wood "one league long and two acres wide" (263b). In other villis the measurements are even more mysterious: at Hampton in *Dudestan* there was wood "five acres long and two wide" (264). In other places we read entries giving areal measurements alone:

Dunham Massey in *Bochelau*: "There is one acre of wood" (266b).

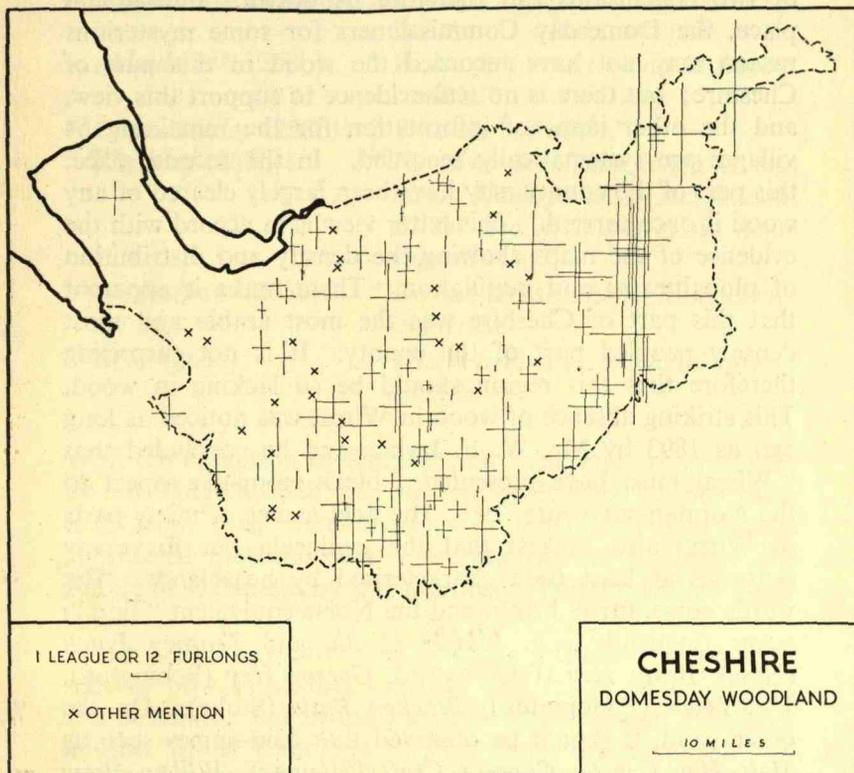
Norton in *Tunendune*: "There are four acres of wood" (266).

It is difficult to see what the mixture of linear and areal units implies. Finally there are minor variations in wording, e.g. at Poole-by-Nantwich (*Warmundestrou*) there was "an acre of small wood" (*una acra silvae modicae*, 266).

Distribution of Woodland

The map of Domesday Woodland is somewhat surprising. It is quite clear that the greater part of the county was covered with wood, and that the wood was particularly dense in the eastern and southern parts. The most striking feature of the map, however, is not the presence of wood over the greater part of the area, but the almost complete absence of it in certain districts, viz. (1) the extreme east, (2) the Delamere region, (3) Wirral and *Dudestan* west of a line joining Ince and Cuddington. The first two are easy of explanation. It cannot be said definitely that there was no wood in either district. In the extreme east no wood is mentioned (except at Werneth and Tintwistle) for the simple reason that there

were no villis in this bleak region of high relief and infertile carboniferous rocks. If any wood existed in this area in the eleventh century it may possibly have been included in the enormous totals of nearby villages.⁽¹⁾ Similar considerations may explain the empty area of Delamere, although here



I.

there was the complicating factor of the Earl's Forest. But of course any discussion on these lines is pure conjecture. In quite a different category is the almost complete absence of wood west of a line joining Ince with Cuddington, i.e. in Wirral and nearby areas. Here there were about 70 manors enjoying a comparatively high degree of prosperity, but only six of these had any wood: Prenton (1 league by 1 league,

⁽¹⁾ For example, at Adlington in *Hamestan* there was wood 11 leagues by 2 leagues, and at Macclesfield another 6 leagues by 4 leagues.

265); Upton-by-Chester (1 league by 2 acres, 263b); Mollington (2 acres, 264b); Dodleston (1 league by 1 league, 268b); Lea cum Newbold (1 acre, 263b); Farndon (1 league by $\frac{1}{2}$ league, 263). The remaining villis of this western district had no wood at all—at least none is recorded. One or other of two conclusions can therefore be drawn. In the first place, the Domesday Commissioners for some mysterious reason may not have recorded the wood in this part of Cheshire; but there is no real evidence to support this view, and the other items of information for the remaining 64 villages are systematically recorded. In the second place, this part of the county may have been largely cleared of any wood it once carried. This latter view is in accord with the evidence of the maps showing the density and distribution of ploughteams and population. These make it apparent that this part of Cheshire was the most arable and most densely peopled part of the county. It is not surprising therefore that this region should be so lacking in wood. This striking absence of wood in Wirral was noticed as long ago as 1893 by Mr. W. F. Irvine, and he concluded that “Wirral must have presented a bleak moor-like aspect to the Norman surveyors”.⁽¹⁾ The field-names of many parts of Wirral also suggest that the peninsula has for many centuries at least been characterised by heathlands. The words gorse, furze, heath, and the Norse equivalent “ling”, occur frequently, e.g. *Middle Heath*, and *Fearney Patch* (Ness), *Benty Hey* (Puddington), *Gorse Hey* (Bebington), *Wet Moor* (Puddington), *Bracken Butts* (Stoke). On the other hand, it should be observed that field-names such as *Holt Hey* (Ness), *Coppice Croft* (Stanney), *Willow Brow* (Raby), *Birches* (Meols), etc., suggest that woodland has not been always absent. But we are probably safe in assuming that in 1086 Wirral and *Dudestan* had much less woodland than the rest of the county.

Forests

It should be emphasised at the outset that the idea that a forest in the medieval sense is an extensive woodland is

⁽¹⁾ W. F. Irvine. *Notes on the Domesday Survey so far as it relates to the Hundred of Wirral* (Chester Archaeological and Historical Society, Vol. 72, 1893).

erroneous. Later medieval records show that Cheshire possessed three Royal Forests⁽¹⁾, Wirral, Delamere (Mara and Mondrem), and Macclesfield. There are several references to the second of these in Domesday Book, but none to the other two.⁽²⁾ These references, all in the hundred of *Roelau*, are as follows:

- Aldredelie*⁽³⁾ (263b): “*Wasta fuit et est modo in foresta comitis.*”
Conewardsley (263b): “*Tota est in foresta.*”
Kingsley (267b): “*Ibi silva una leuua longa et una lata. Hanc posuit in sua foresta. Et ibi aira accipitris et iiii haiae capreolorum.*”
Weaverham (263b): “*De hac terra iiii hidas misit comes in foresta.*”
Done (263b); “*Wasta fuit, et est modo in foresta comitis.*”

With the exception of Kingsley, all these manors were held by Earl Hugh himself, and all were waste when he took them over from their previous English tenants. He evidently considered that this was a propitious time to extend the Forest of Delamere by the addition of certain derelict farm-lands.

The Domesday county of Cheshire included the whole of what is now Flintshire, together with much of the present Denbighshire, and in the hundred of *Atiscros* in Flintshire another forest belonging to Earl Hugh is mentioned. Of this Forest of *Atiscros* the record says :

“ In these 20 hides [i.e. hidated *Atiscros*] the earl has all the woods [*silvas*] (which he has) put into his forest, [*foresta*] whereby the manors are much depreciated. This

⁽¹⁾ The term Royal Forest is not strictly accurate. There was no *terra regis* in the County Palatine of Cheshire; the forests therefore belonged to the Earl.

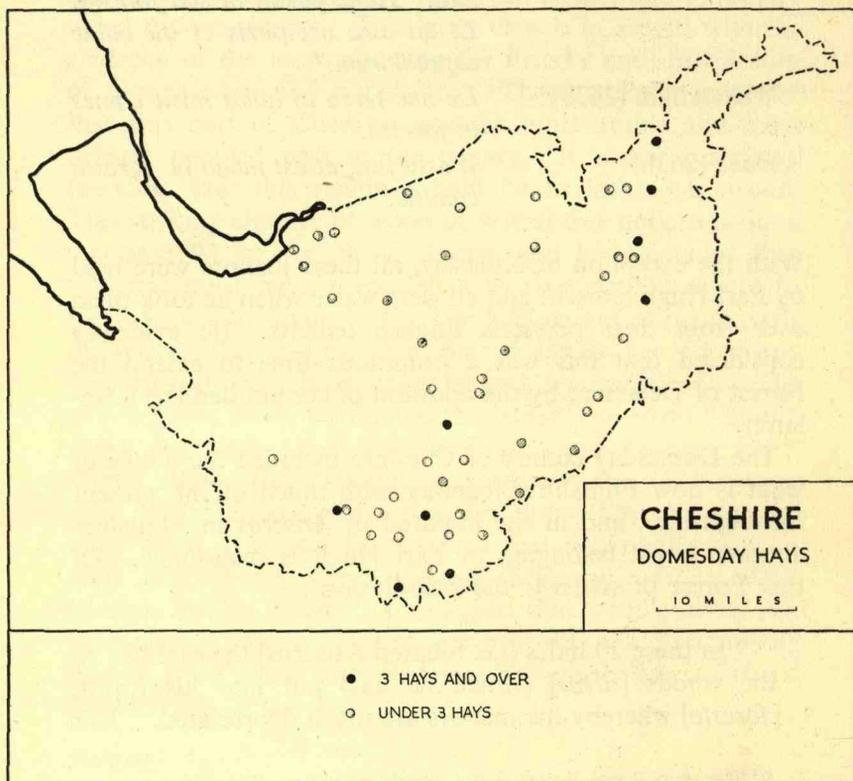
⁽²⁾ Macclesfield was afforested in pre-Norman times, and Wirral early in the twelfth century.

⁽³⁾ For the lost names *Aldredelie*, *Done*, and *Conewardsley*, see J. Tait, *op. cit.* pp. 103, 107.

forest is 10 leagues long and 3 leagues wide. There are 4 eyries of hawks." (268b.)

Hays

Hays, or enclosures,⁽¹⁾ are mentioned in 51 places in Cheshire. The formula usually runs: "*una haia ibi*", or "*ibi iii haiae*". On two estates the hays were specifically stated to be used for the taking of roedeer. At Weaverham (236b) there were "two hays for roedeer" (*ibi ii haiae cap-reolorum*); at Kingsley (267b) there was "a hawk's eyrie and four hays for roedeer".



II.

(1) "Occasionally woods were valuable for other reasons; the hawk's nests therein are always noted, as are the "*haiae*", the enclosures for catching roebucks, as they are specifically called in Shropshire and Cheshire." A. Ballard, *The Domesday Inquest*, p. 167.

The second map shows the location of the hays. With so few entries available no definite distribution pattern can be expected. There is however a notable concentration in the well-wooded hundreds of *Warmundestrou* in the south, and in *Hamestan* in the east, whilst a more scattered distribution occurs in the northern part of the county. In the western hundreds of *Wirral*, *Dudestan*, *Roelau* and *Risedon* there were only five villis with any hays. It is probably not a coincidence that hays were most frequent in the densely wooded areas, and completely absent in the west where no woodland of any consequence was recorded.

