

The Norman Period

After 1066 when William the Conqueror and his army of 5,000 men defeated King Harold at the battle of Hastings, William distributed the land amongst his trusted supporters.

Following a Council meeting held in Gloucester in 1085, William decided to send out men into the shires to enquire in great detail about every manor. English and Norman representatives from every village were questioned and a summary of their answers was sent to Winchester and assembled into what Richard fitz Nigel, Treasurer of England in 1179, said the natives called the Domesday Book.

When the Domesday Book was compiled in 1086, Ralf of Mortimer held the manors of Stratfield Mortimer and Mortimer West End, and the King held one of the two manors in Wokefield. The other manor in Wokefield was held by Walter son of Othere. The value of all four manors seems to have fallen since 1066, but there is no indication why this had happened. The compilers of the Domesday Book were not interested in the total population of a manor and usually only the adult males were recorded. In Stratfield Mortimer, Mortimer West End and Wokefield there were a total of 21 villeins, 38 bordars and 18 serfs (who were tied to their lord and had no legal rights). Villeins and bordars were both terms applied to peasants who held a very small amount of land in their own legal right - the distinction between them is not clear. The figures for adult males are usually multiplied by 4.5 as a way of estimating the total population. This would mean that at the time there might have been about 350 people living in the area. One possible explanation for the relatively low numbers of villeins is that these manors might have been enclosed and did not use the open-field, or strip farming, system. Indeed, at no period is there any evidence that strip farming was ever used in Mortimer. It would seem that over a quarter of the land was being ploughed during the early Norman period as the Domesday Book records 18 ploughs between the four manors.

The main agricultural activity in Wokefield was probably rearing pigs in the woods. The Domesday Book usually records the quantity of woodland in terms of an annual rent in swine paid to the lord for the right of pannage (pasturing of swine in woodland) in his woods. In Wokefield the annual rent was 65 pigs and it is likely that the rent was about one-tenth of the total number. Therefore there might have been 650 pigs in Wokefield and a further 400 in Stratfield Mortimer

Meadow was the highly valued land bordering a stream liable to flood, producing hay and afterwards used for grazing. It was recorded in acres, but the exact area of a Domesday acre is not known. The figures (Wokefield - 10 acres; Stratfield Mortimer - 7 acres; Mortimer West End - 2 acres) are relatively low for Berkshire. This reflects the fact that in the area only Foudry, West End and Lockram brooks might flood regularly to produce meadowland.

Like most areas, Mortimer had a church and a mill at that time. Norman Mortimer was an agriculturally based community concentrating on arable land and rearing pigs. It was obviously heavily wooded and there were probably very few, if any, large open fields.