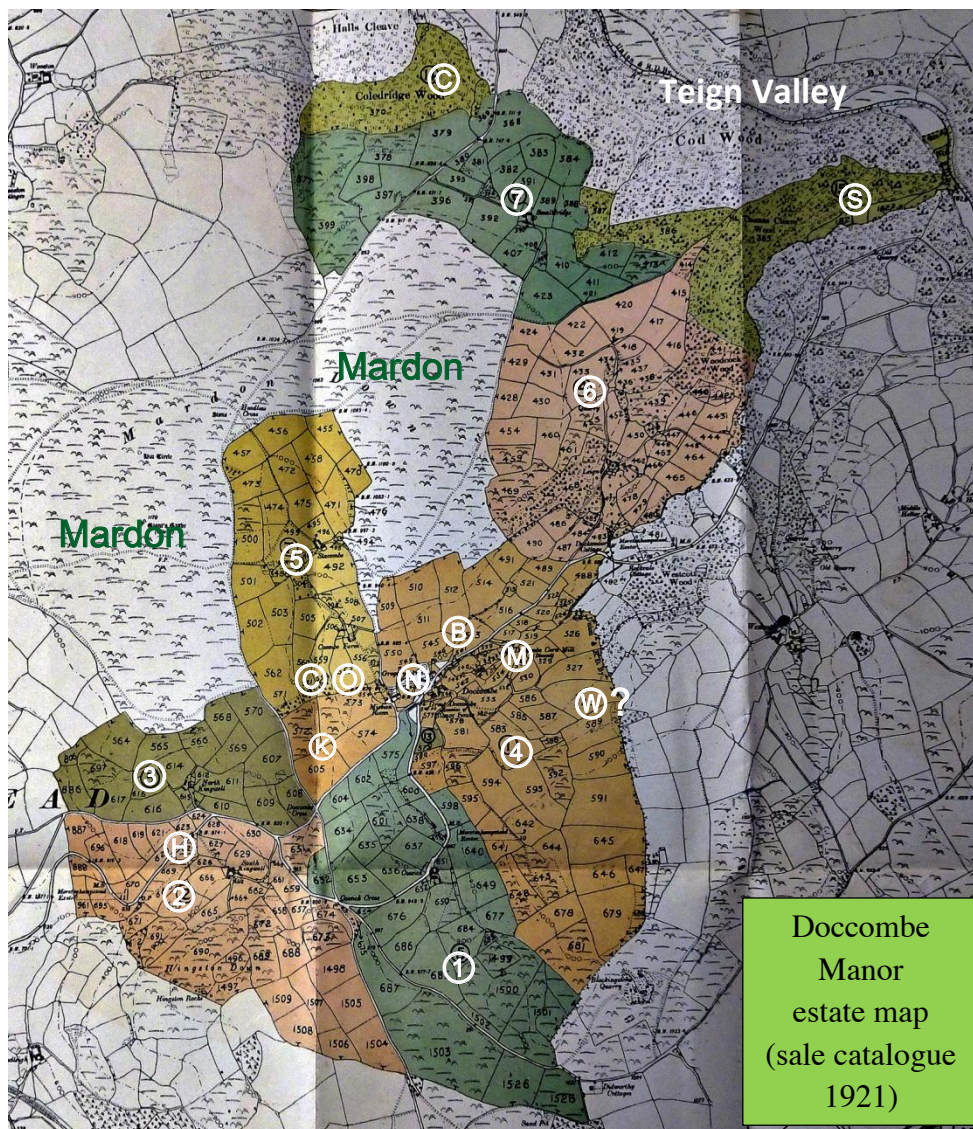




DOCCOMDE

THE MURDERER'S GIFT

*A short history of
Doccombe Manor*



- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| ① Cossick | ⑦ Smallridge | Ⓜ Mill |
| ② South Kingwell | Ⓜ Harcot | Ⓜ? Wallesland |
| ③ North Kingwell | Ⓜ Knaphole | Ⓜ & Ⓜ Coleridge |
| ④ Great/South Doccombe | Ⓜ Coombe | & St Thomas |
| ⑤ Stacombe | Ⓜ North Doccombe | Cleave Woods |
| ⑥ Leign | Ⓜ Broomhill | |

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

At some time between February 1173 and the summer of 1174 William de Tracy made a grant of ‘*one hundred shillings worth of land in Moreton, namely Doccombe*’ to the Benedictine monastery of Christ Church Canterbury. That act determined the fate of that corner of north-east Dartmoor for the next 750 years and resulted from one of the most dramatic events of the Middle Ages.

Tracy was once reputed to be an illegitimate son of Henry I but Professor Nicholas Vincent’s research has convincingly shown him to be the son of Turgis de Tracy, a member of a Norman family with strong connections with Maine and William the Conqueror. His family took its name from the hamlet of Tracy, near Vire in Normandy and had considerable property there and in Devon, including Moreton[+ hampstead after c 1430] held for the nominal annual fee of an unmewed sparrowhawk.

William’s presence at the court of Henry II is evidenced by his seal on royal charters and references to his brave performance in military actions. There were several charitable grants on his own account, such as founding a leper hospital in Maine. But the grant of Doccombe was rather different.

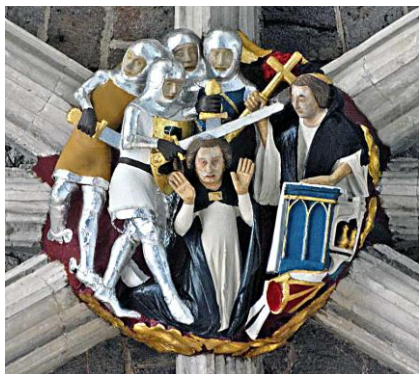
At Henry II’s court at Bur-le-Roi, near Bayeux, in Christmas 1170, the king’s long-running power struggle with Archbishop Thomas Becket reached a climax when Henry heard that Becket had excommunicated some of his supporters. His famous outburst, ‘*What miserable drones & traitors have I nourished & promoted in my household, who let their lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born clerk*’, prompted the departure of Tracy and 3 other knights to Canterbury.

Unlike the other 3 knights Tracy did not put on armour before the frenzied pursuit of Becket into the cathedral on December 29th 1170, and the others tried at one point to hoist Becket onto his back, to carry him out of the cathedral itself, and in the tussle which followed, the archbishop nearly felled him. It has been variously claimed that both he & Reginald Fitzurse struck the first blow. Tracy and the other murderers left the cathedral immediately after completing their pillage of the archiepiscopal palace.

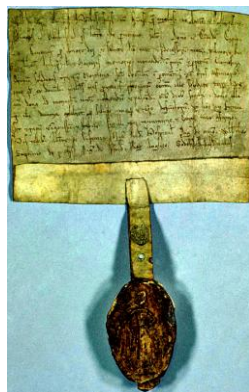
Tracy soon confessed his part in the murder to Bartholomew, bishop of Exeter, who advised him to seek forgiveness from the Pope. Herbert of Bosham, a contemporary chronicler, claims that *‘he was ordered by the pope to continue his journey to the Holy Land’*.

The last known action of Tracy’s life took place in the abbey of St Euphemia at Cosenza in southern Italy, presumably on his way to the Middle East, where he executed a charter conferring Doccombe on the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury to pay for *‘the clothing and provision of one monk in that monastery for ever, who may celebrate masses there for the salvation of the living & the repose of the departed.’*

The witnesses included the Abbot of St Eufemia, William the Clerk, Roger the Englishman, Godfrey the Ribald and. Stephen of Parford. The latter name is of interest locally as there is an area called variously Parford/Patford/Pafford on the western side of Moretonhampstead Parish while the manor of Parford or Patford was recorded in the Domesday Book on the other side of the River Teign.



The murder depicted on a roof boss in Exeter Cathedral



The gift charter & the seal of St Euphemia's Abbey

The cleric Herbert of Bosham almost gleefully describes the scene as Tracy lay dying: *‘the wretched man, while tearing himself apart, pulling himself to pieces, ripping himself up and throwing himself away like this while alive, unceasingly implored the pardon, intercession and protection of the holy and glorious new-crowned martyr [Thomas] in the utmost contrition, with groans and indescribable sighs’*.

The charter was rather an embarrassment to Henry II who was trying to distance himself from the murderers who had taken his words too literally. Between July and October 1174 he finally gave his necessary assent with his own charter.

Two other grants recorded in the Canterbury Cathedral Archives that may have been associated Tracy’s.

‘I, William de Bosco Rowardi, have given and granted & by this my present charter confirmed to God & to St Thomas of Canterbury, 4 acres of land in Hemest’ with the messuage that Heaec Dolle held.’ According to the Canterbury Archives, this grant can be dated to a similar time as Tracy’s by its handwriting and Hemest is assumed to be Hingston Down where the Doccombe Manor tenement of South Kingwell still has grazing rights there for *‘30 sheep, 2 bullocks and 1 horse’* today.

Amicia de la More was married to William Thann who before setting out with his lord, William de Tracy, for the Holy Land, made her swear to *‘award all his land held from William to the blessed Thomas & the monks of Christ Church Canterbury’* if he should not return. Following her husband’s death on the pilgrimage, Amicia remarried and her second husband, Everard Chole, stopped her from making the grant. After his death Amicia was living at Moreton[hampstead] and invited Anselm Crassus, treasurer of Exeter Cathedral, to visit her so that he could at last arrange *‘seisin’* i.e. legal possession of the land by Canterbury. We do not know where that land is but the tenancy of Leign in the manor is a possibility as it was held for a term of years by indenture rather than lives by copyhold; when the entire manor was leased or franchised out Leign was often not included.

THE MONASTIC OVERLORDS

Founded in 597, Canterbury Cathedral was given significant eastward extensions to accommodate the lucrative flow of pilgrims visiting the shrine of St Thomas Becket. It was home to a Benedictine monastic community known as Christ Church Priory as well as being the seat of the archbishop who was nominally their Abbot.

With about 80 monks at any one time, the priory was among the largest in the country and took the income from 64 manors, 19 rectories, 6 chantry chapel estates and Canterbury (now Christ Church) College, Oxford.

Doccombe was one of its poorest and remotest possessions – referred to as ‘*our poor little far flung manor in Devon*’. As an estate given in honour of the most very revered English medieval saint, St Thomas Becket, however, it was carefully protected by Canterbury from attempts by the Courtenays, lords of neighbouring Moreton manor, to control or tax it.

To the noble & his well-beloved in God, Sir Hugh de Courtenay. Sire, William de Traci, gave us a little estate at Dockumbe, in pure & perpetual alms, on account of the death of Saint Thomas. We pray you, that for the love & devotion which you bear to the glorious Saint Thomas, that you will command your officers in those parts not to inflict hardship, nor trouble, nor injury, upon our poor tenants, contrary to the will of God and of the said holy body of saint Thomas. Adieu, etc. Given at Canterbury, the 3rd day of July, in the year of grace 1322. Henry, Prior of the Church of Canterbury.

Another benefit from the Becket/Canterbury connection was the grant of Free Warren. In 1264 ‘*King Henry III by a charter out of devotion to the blessed martyr Thomas has granted to the prior of Christ Church Canterbury free warren in all its demesne lands in ...[list of manors follows finishing with] ... and Dockoumbe in the county of Devon*’. By ‘warren’ was meant royal warranty of exemption from the law under which all game in the realm belonged to the sovereign and Canterbury

recognised its value for their estates by petitioning for its renewal by successive monarchs.

Tenants also had to meet their obligations. A steward or bailiff was appointed to run the distant estate and administer the manorial court. He had to take the rent and other payments, such as a saddle for a palfrey horse for a new prior, in person to Canterbury – probably a two week round trip in medieval times! Yet it was once made in anger by a Doccombe tenant as this letter dated Christmas Day 1331 reveals:

To Henry de Lappeflode [i.e. Laployd near Bridford], our bailiff of Doccombe,... John de Stakombe came to us at Canterbury on Christmas Eve, & brought us a letter sent by all our tenants at Doccombe, claiming that you, since Michaelmas, have taxed them afresh for 50 shillings, by causing them to enter into a recognizance with us relating to the palfrey saddle furnished to us on our entering upon our office. He has also informed us that you taxed them before Michaelmas 100 shillings, of which 100 shillings, as he says, 50 shillings have to be paid to the King, & the other 50 to us, from the taxation of their movable chattels; out of which 50 shillings (if you remember) we remitted 10 shillings, provided that they paid the remainder at next Easter It seems to us that the tenants desire craftily to deceive us by these secret petitions (for he was aware that you know nothing of their letter), so we seek to be farther informed if he were telling the truth concerning the 50 shillings, which, as he says, the King is to have.

Nevertheless if they give you sufficient security for the payment of all the amount aforesaid before next Easter, charged upon them by you, then leave them in peace, & remit the 10 shillings; but if not, cause all the money to be gathered without showing farther favour; for they are asking for a respite for the whole sum until Michaelmas next.

Let us know what is done about this business by the first person who comes this way. Adieu, etc.

Professor James Clark has commented that this sort of protest was highly unusual among the tenants of the many Benedictine monasteries that he has researched. The letter shows the problems for Canterbury of knowing what was going on in their '*far flung manor*' and whom to trust – the tenants or the bailiff. In their correspondence with the bailiffs or stewards they seem to vary in their sympathies. For example John Gatepath of Chudleigh is told in 1356 that '*the tenants are to be obedient*'; in 1357 he is rebuked for '*harsh treatment of the tenants*'; and in 1358 is taken to task because '*the rents & profits are 3 years in arrears*'!

Perhaps the monastic overlords for all their care for their tenants were ultimately concerned about the bottom line of their accounts.

The Court of Common Pleas at Exeter Michaelmas Term 1439:
Joan Corset [*Cossick ancestry?*] of Exeter, spinster, John Benet of Exeter, skinner, William Aysshe of Cowick, husbandman, William Danby of Exeter, butcher, William Corset of Wray, husbandman, & John Potyng formerly of Doccombe, husbandman, were summoned that:

They broke the close of the Prior at Doccombe by force & armed with swords & staves & made threats to the lives of John Tapper & John Groce his tenants. Then they exacted mutilation of their limbs & brought to the same such injuries & grievances that the same tenants withdrew totally from the tenure of the Prior'.

The Prior sued the defendants not for the assault on his tenants but for their lost rents and services, claiming losses & damages of £100. The jury found 5 of the accused guilty of trespass on the prior's lands & they had to pay him '*for his outlays and costs charged*'.

But John Benet was found not guilty [perhaps because he had hired his own attorney] & the Prior was '*in misericordia*' [i.e. punishable] for his false claim against him. We do not know the Prior's punishment.

The tenants were let their land for a period of 3 lifetimes. On the death or confiscation [e.g. for non-payment of rent] or surrender of the land by the first life the next 'life' took over if he had paid for the land to 'revert' to him as recorded on the copy of the lease and so on for the third 'life'. For these customary tenants the rent did not change for hundreds of years. This form of tenure was not found on most of the other Canterbury estates and they tried in vain to change it for Doccombe.

Another frustration for Canterbury was the so-called '*widow's free bench*'. A tenant's widow could retain the tenure of her late husband's land as long as she remained '*unmarried and chaste*'.

A typical letter to Canterbury from the Steward of Doccombe Manor complaining of the ways tenants extend tenure by abusing the right of widows to stay on their property.

'It often happens that the last life in a 3 life copyhold even on his deathbed conveys the right of widowhood by marrying a young female 'friend' when even unable to speak or walk...

In the same way many widows who enjoy their property on this tenure live in public fornication with a man so as not to forfeit their title to the property by marrying...'

Many secular manors began to make their serfs or bondsmen personally free but the monastic estates resisted the change.

In November 1332 the Prior wrote to the Doccombe bailiff:
We have heard that a bondswoman called Agnes de Smalregg [Smallridge], our villein, wishes to contract marriage, if it is agreeable to us, with a free man called Richard the son of Roger the sheep-shearer of Moreton. But it does not seem to us or our counsel that a contract of this kind could be done without prejudice to our Church.

The Prior's point being that the children of such a marriage would be 'free' and so not bondsmen under the control of Canterbury.

More bad news for Doccombe women: according to Lysons, ‘*the lord of the manor there is obliged to keep a cucking-stool for the punishment of scolding women*’. The administration of such justice in a tight knit community, however, had its difficulties.

Doccombe Manorial Court May 1498

Diana Deyman, wife of Roger the tenant at Smallridge, guilty of being a common eavesdropper, a garrulous gossip & disturber of the Lord Prior Roger’s peace to the nuisance of her neighbours

Doccombe Manorial Court October 1498

The Portreeve, Roger Deyman, fined 1d for not punishing Diana.

THE CUSTOMS OF THE MANOR OF DOCCOMBE

The portreeve and the courts were sworn to uphold the customs of the manor. Here are some of the ones still being observed in 1630:

The tenants on their Oathes present that every tenant:

- If the last tenant on the lease do decease his best beast is a heriot to the Lord. His wife to enjoy her widow’s estate while she remains single & chaste.
- To grind at the Lord’s mill of Doccombe & the miller to take a quart of a bushel & to serve the tenants before any other stranger.
- No tenant to dwell away from his tenement except the Chapel for one quarter of a year without licence {i.e. *for a fee*} of the Lord.
- To make good one half of a hedge where every man hath ground against th’other.
- If any houses or hedges reported in the Court be not repaired before the day given in Court then a penalty to be paid to the Lord.
- To pay 6d to the Lord for every stray sheep returned to its owner.
- Our Lord to have the 2 parts of the stray beasts, cattle or sheep upon Mardon & Sir William Courtney of Moreton the 3rd part.
- To have in the Lord’s woods of St Thomas Clift & Colridge sufficient timber delivered by the woodwardens for reparacions of

their houses & sufficient timber for stakes and fire – paying 2d a piece yearly at Michaelmas.

- In a mast year to have all their swyne, hoggs & piggs to go in the Lords woods of Docombe & in the woods of Sir William Courtney from the Feast of St Michael The Archangel to All Souls day. Every Tenant to pay for a swyne 4d, a hogg 2d & a pigg 1d. Our Lord to have the third part & Sir William Courtney the two parts of the mastage money.
- Alwaies att Michaelmas court we choose newe officers for the manner i.e. Tythingman & Portreeve & 2 woodwardens sworne by the Steward yeerely.
- To pay his Lord's rent att the Feast of St Michael Th'archangell & whosoever doth not pay his Rent within one quarter of a yeere after every Michaelmas is to forfeit his estate

DOCCOMBE MANORIAL COURTS

The most complete set of manorial records for Docombe are the transcripts of the manorial courts. They cover from 1275 to 1814, albeit with considerable gaps within that period; until 1773, as with all official documents, they are written in an abbreviated medieval form of Latin. The courts were held three or four times each year with the most important being at Michaelmas (late September) when tenants were chosen to perform the offices for the following year:

Portreeve – chosen to represent and be responsible for the body of manorial tenants and their agricultural accounts. He was meant to ensure that the court's decisions were carried out or he could be punished himself. To do this he might need to use distraint – the threat or actual seizure of a tenant's '*chattels*' [goods].

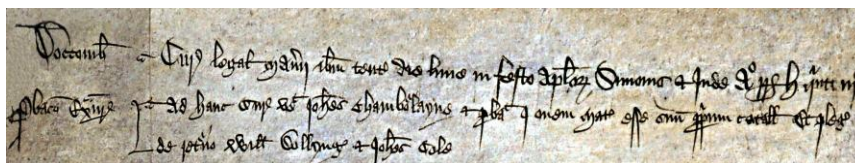
Tythingman – responsible for the behaviour of his neighbours and for '*presenting*' incidents of interest to the Lord to the attention of the Court.

Two Woodwardens – to safeguard the woods from the tenants but also to ensure delivery of timber to tenants when needed for repairs.

There was no manor or court house so the court seems to have been held in each tenant's house in turn. Tenants were obliged to attend and take their

turn in office, although widows usually had a male elected ‘*in their place*’. The courts dealt with a variety of matters from minor breaches of the peace to dealing with the frequent number of stray animals, including the occasional swarm of bees. A jury of 12 tenants was elected at most courts with 2 assessors chosen to assess the amount of each fine written in the right margin of the court roll. A ‘*fine*’ [up to 40 shillings or the case went to the Assize Court] could be a punishment but it was also often in practice a form of licence: the miller was always charged for ‘*excessive charges*’; collectors of firewood in the woods were ‘*fined*’ a 1d each time; and the brewing of beer cost you 3d to conform with the Assize of Bread and Ale though no charges appear for bread.

The record of the court was written on pieces of parchment stitched together and made into rolls. A copy was kept in the manor and one sent to Canterbury along with the money from fines and feudal dues. The records help us to track the names of the tenants and their tenancies, particularly when the death of a tenant is announced and his widow or the next life on the tenancy takes over. There is little reference to the outside world but at times there is friction with the neighbouring manor of Moreton over boundary disputes on Mardon Common or with the Chagford Stannary Court when their bailiff enters the manor to retrieve a debt.



The top line of each court tells us the date by reference to the day of the week; a religious festival for the number of the day & month; & the year by how long the current king has reigned.

The one above reads:

‘Docombe. The manorial legal court held there on the Monday in the feast of the Apostles Simon & Jude in the 3rd year of the reign of King Henry the fifth’

i.e. October 28th 1415



A typical Doccombe court roll. Gaps on the page and the 'reverse' side were sometimes filled in at a later date so the court transcripts are not always in chronological order.

There follows a compilation of entries for Doccombe manorial courts that exemplify the court's proceedings.

Portreeve		Fine	6d	Not distrained 3 tenants to pay fine of 3d each for increasing 2 charcoal pits in Meane Wood without licence.
Portreeve		Fine	3d	Not distrained a tenant for non-payment of fine for trespass in lord's woods with his cows.
Roger	Deyman	Fine	4d	Not repaired ditch/boundary between Spoundon Common & Smalerigge before June 24th. To do it by Dec. 28th under penalty of 80d
John	Wandr	Fine	4	Not repaired bake-house by Whitsun as ordered. Has until September 29th to repair it & all his 'houses' i.e. buildings under penalty of 120d on pledge of 2 tenants

Robert	Blakehay	Fine	3d	Formerly of Mortonhampstede Tynbaylegh [tin bailiff] of Chagford Stannary Court for payment of fine for breaking the sanctuary of this manor's lord by taking a round brazen pan worth 60d of the goods & chattels of a tenant, John Wandr.
Portreeve		Fine	3d	Not distrained a tenant for payment of fine for taking away 2 plough heads & 2 apple-trees at tenancy of Leghne [Leign}.
William	Groos	Distrained		To have his son aged over 12 years sworn as a juryman of the lord prior Roger.
Roger	Deyman	Fine	9d	Assaulted John Bowdon in breach of the king's peace with a three-pronged fork & caused blood to be shed.
John	Bowdon	Fine	3d	Assaulted Roger Deyman in breach of the king's peace with a stone.
John	Shylston	Fined	3d	Not attended the court
Portreeve		Fine	6d	Not distrained a tenant for non-payment of fine for trespass in lord's woods with cows & steers at grave damage to the lord.

John	Doddeworthy	Fine	1d	Taking firewood from the lord's woods {7 other tenants also fined for this}.
John	Shylston	Distrained		Complains of Roger Deyman in a plea of trespass with his cows on his land. Roger is distrained to appear in the next court
Richard	Robyn	Stray	4	Sold stray black lamb on his land for over a year
John	Kyngwill	Distrained		The bank between his land and the land of John Coomb of Knaphole by the Yoleway is ruined & decayed to the nuisance of travellers. Has until the feast of St Peter in Chains under a penalty of 10s to repair it.
John	Groos		160d	Tenant of Coombe has died. Heriot of his best bovat worth 160d. His widow Dionisia claims the tenancy while she remains ' <i>chaste & unmarried</i> '. Swears her loyalty to the lord on the oath of 2 other tenants.
Richard	Davy		4d	Brews beer in breach of the assize, taps & sells it in false measures.

John	Groos	Fine	3d	Overcharges for milling.
Avis	Sawdye	Fine	40d	Widow granted special licence to live outside her tenement of Harcote
Margaret	Bowdon	Fine	12d	Widow commonly received vagabonds & suspect persons in her house against the law & a bad example to others.
Nicholas	Arscult	Fined	12d	Pleads guilty to putrefying the village fish-trap by washing dirty clothes there to the nuisance of his neighbours.
	Portreeve	Stray		Obliged to keep the honey & wax from 2 stray swarms of bees in the lord's woods at St Thomas Clyffe & Collerugge.
		Stray claimed		An ox at Smalerigge since last Easter is proved by Thomas Kyngwyll on the pledge of 2 neighbours.
John	Groos	Office		Elected tythingman & portreeve
Roger	Deyman	Office		Elected Woodwarden
William	Kyngewyll	Office		To assess the fines according to custom
		Expenses	7d	For the Steward

THE FARMERS

The lord of the manor i.e. the Prior (and after 1541 the Dean of Canterbury) was represented at the manorial courts by his Steward(s) or Farmer(s) who ‘supervised’ this distant manor and would probably come from Exeter. His travel expenses were paid by the tenants.

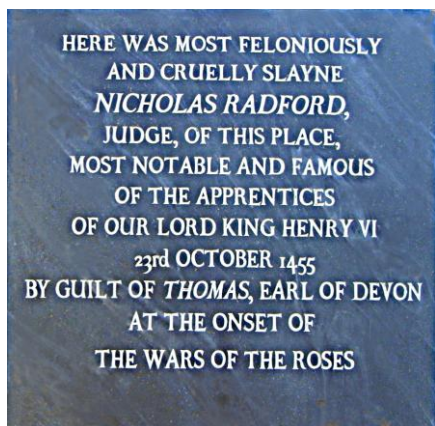
The farmers were often quite prominent members of the local gentry and increasingly were lawyers who could uphold the Lord’s interests both in the manorial courts and if necessary in the County Assize and Royal Courts. They had in particular to stand up to the Courtenays of Powderham, lords of Moretonhampstead Manor, and the even more powerful Courtenay Earls of Devon. At least one Doccombe Farmer was caught in the cross-fire when the two branches of that family clashed.

Some of the notable ones included:

In 1350 **Philip de Vautort** was given ‘*power of attorney authorising him, our beloved in Christ the Rector of Moreton[hampstead], to act as agent for the Convent of Christ Church Canterbury in our manor of Doccombe in Devonshire.*’ Not a good choice! The Rector of Moreton from was presented to the living in 1509 by the then new lord of the manor, Sir Hugh Courtenay – potential conflict of interests when appointed to safeguard Doccombe against its neighbour? Once he actually came to Moreton about 30 years later he soon became very unpopular for levying too many fees on his parishioners who complained to the Bishop. But most disconcerting to Doccombites was probably when they heard that two royal commissions had already been issued to the Earl of Devon to investigate Canterbury’s new ‘beloved *in Christ agent*’ for being part of a notorious violent band of marauding Dartmoor cattle stealers and deer poachers. Unfortunately, we have no records for his period of office at Doccombe – perhaps not surprising when the Archdeacon’s report on Moreton church in 1342 found ‘*the missal is incomplete, the synodal torn and defective, the wedding veil & funeral pall lost, the chrysm bowl not waxed, and the altar not dedicated.*’

By contrast the men entrusted to run Doccombe in 1429, **Nicholas Radford and Henry Brok**, were lawyers of considerable standing in the West Country. They acted on behalf of many of the great and good of Exeter and Devon as well as serving on Royal Commissions. Radford was twice ‘elected’ a Member of Parliament. Unfortunately, such a high profile came at a cost when Radford found himself caught up in a power struggle between Devon’s two most powerful families. He was described as being *‘of counsel with Lord Bonville against Thomas Courtenay, Earl of Devon’*. On the night of October 23rd 1455 Radford was dragged out of his bed at Cheriton Fitzpaine by the Earl of Devon’s eldest son at the head of band of about 100 armed men. One of these men with a *‘glayve smote the said Nicholas Radford a hidious dedlye stroke overthwarte the face and felled him to the grounde’*, and then *‘gaf him a noder stroke upon his heade behinde that the brayne fell oute of heade’*. Another man *‘wyth a knyfe feloninolye cutt the throat of Nicholas’* while another *‘wythe a longe dagger smote Nicholas behinde on his bake to the harte’*.

Thus began the Devon version of the War of the Roses in which the Earl of Devon and Radford’s murderers ended up on the winning side and were able to obtain full pardons for every crime they had committed! Meanwhile Henry Brok carried on efficiently running Doccombe Manor for Canterbury judging by the manorial records for that time.



Plaque at Upcott Barton, Cheriton Fitzpaine in mid Devon

Sir Thomas Denys, lord farmer of Doccombe c. 1495-1561, was by contrast to Radford a more fortunate survivor. A lawyer from a well-established Devon family of Holcombe Burnell (aka Longdown) about 8 miles east of Doccombe, he lived to over 80 and served in many local and national roles under 8 different sovereigns. As a soldier, administrator and MP he deftly witnessed and took part in the religious settlements of 4 Tudor monarchs, managing to remain loyal to all of them.

The high mark locally of his career was his role in conciliating the Prayer Book Rebellion leaders of 1549 on behalf of Exeter. The low point came as Recorder of Exeter in 1532 when he supervised the burning at the stake for heresy of the Exeter schoolmaster, Thomas Benet, who had posted placards on the Cathedral door denouncing the Pope as Antichrist. The burning took place just outside the eastern walls of Exeter where his son Robert later built the Livery Dole Alms-houses on Heavitree Road in recompense. Robert followed him as Farmer of Doccombe in the late 1500s.

Such a man so involved in many roles may perhaps have never visited Doccombe, delegating the Stewardship to a deputy. Nevertheless, the fullest manorial records date from his time as Farmer. It is also an intriguing coincidence that Denys had connections with the local tin industry e.g. the Great Court of Devon Tinnars in 1510 took place at '*Crockertorre in the presence of Thomas Denys, Esquire*' as the representative of the '*lord King Duke of Cornwall*'. That coincides in time with evidence of tin-mining activities by Doccombe tenants and possibly in Doccombe Manor. The Chagford Stannary Court is mentioned a number of times in the manorial courts at this time; Sir John Shilston of Leign leaves 10 '*tynne works in the Countie of Devonshire*' in his will of 1531; and in 1532 John Bowden of Doccombe was a jurate of the Great Court of Tinnars in 1532 at the height of the Devon tin industry. Whether this can also be linked to the possible remains of tin working on Mardon is subject to further investigation.



*Aerial view of the possible remains of tin-working
on the north-west side of Mardon Common*

Sir Francis Walsingham connection? Perhaps the most surprising and perplexing document found so far in the Canterbury Archives is a letter signed by Queen Elizabeth I's principal secretary and so-called 'spymaster' from 1573 until his death in 1590. Walsingham wrote to the 'Deane and Chapter of Canterburie' on July 7th 1587:

... 'Understanding by my good fr[i]end Captaine Hoord that upon the receipt of my le[tte]rs you have made him a graunt of the parsonage of Hempsteed and the mano[r] of Dockome, accordingly as he desyred,..'

However, the captain is required to serve 'in her Majestie's (secret?) service' and he asks for a Mr Francis Alford instead to 'travail therein'. Captain Hoord served as a soldier in Ireland 1580-2 and trained soldiers in Plymouth in 1584. Otherwise we know nothing about him or his or Alford's connection to Doccombe – so far. But we do have Walsingham's signature!

TENEMENTS AND TENANTS

The number and size of tenements [i.e. rented land] varied during the manor's 810 years of recorded history. Evidence from terriers, rentals, surveys, leases and court presentments shows that for most of the time there were 13 tenancies:

Broomhill later Little Doccombe; Cumbe/Combe/Coombe; Cornesete/Corsett later Cossick*; North Doccombe; South Doccombe later Great Doccombe*; Harcot; North Kingwell*; South Kingwell*; Naphole later Knaphole*; Leign; Smallridge*; Stacombe*; Wallesend.

* are still working farms.

The manorial survey of 1289 is the earliest with many of the above names shared with their tenants' names – these so-called toponymical surnames with the pronoun *de* exist in the Doccombe records until the mid-1300s although Kingwell (with variations on the spelling) survived until the late 1700s. The survey records '*there are 24 farthings of land on the manor each of 30 acres*' i.e. 720 acres plus grazing rights for those adjacent '*on the lord's grassland*' – presumably a reference to Mardon Common and perhaps the woodland pastures. There were 20 separate tenants, including a widow, with an average holding of 36 acres; that was about the size of holding (plus common grazing rights for 12d per annum) to sustain a medieval family.

The total annual land rent was £5 2s 11d; the tenants paid a tithing of 20s per annum to the lord and a water mill was worth 20s per annum. The total income of £7 2s 11d according to the National Archives currency converter was worth £5,255.45 in 2017 values. Not a king's ransom perhaps but over 750 years

Here is a suggested interpretation of the 1289 survey with a possible linking of personal names to place names:

Walter de Cornesete held 90 acres for 140d - no grazing rights i.e. Cossick (later known to have grazing on Cossick Down)

Walter de Cume held 30 acres for 49d - with grazing rights i.e. Combe

Richard & Roger de Doccumbe held 60 acres for 88d - no grazing rights i.e. South Doccombe & possibly the later Wallesland

Gregory de Doccumbe & William Sperke held 60 acres for 88d – with grazing rights i.e. North Docombe & probably Broomhill

Adrian & Gregory de Kenewell held 45 acres for 49d – with no grazing rights i.e. South Kingwell (NB later known to have grazing rights on Hingston Down)

Richard & Michael de Kenewell held 60 acres for 88d – with grazing rights i.e. North Kingwell

Roger de Southbregg's widow held 30 acres for 49 – with grazing rights i.e. this probably now the Mardon side of Smallridge; **William de Smalregg** had 60 acres for 96d but no grazing rights.

Henry de Stacumbe, Walter de Stacumbe & Roger fit (son of?)

Stacumbe held 165 acres between them for 292d but surprisingly had no grazing rights at this time as Stacombe is adjacent to Mardon

Austin & John atte Welle had 45 acres for 72 – with grazing rights i.e. later called atte Hole & then Naphole or Knaphole

William Sperke held 30 acres '*with his clerkship for the same*' and shared with his own '*socius*' or reeve for 55d – with grazing rights i.e. Leign that is often referred to a 2 tenements and is adjacent to William's shared land with Gregory at Broomhill & to Mardon.

Walter de Copin held 30 acres for 49d – with grazing rights i.e. possibly Harcot as the only other tenement! But it was not adjacent to Mardon?

300 years later the 1572 survey gives us a lot more detail. Probably made to show the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral what they had acquired from the dissolved monastery in 1541, there are listings of ownership, buildings, rents, land names, uses and values as well as references to the mill, chapel, woods and Mardon Common.

The overall land held in tenements has fallen since 1289 from 720 to 677 acres – a 6% fall that may be in the tolerance of the land areas being '*more or less by estimation*'. Or it could be because the Docombe Court records refer to '*a pole of 17ft*' used for measuring; the standard pole of 16.5 ft was perhaps used by the Dean's surveyor. Dr Ian Mortimer has estimated that a '*customary acre*' measured by the Docombe pole would indeed be 6%

bigger than a ‘*statute acre*’ measured by a standard pole! The annual rent sum has increased by 30% to £6 13s 9½d.

The listed tenements have fallen from 20 to 13 with a rise in their average size from 36 to 52 acres and a much larger range of size; only the 6 over 36 acres could produce a surplus for market. Curiously 70 acres were divided between South Doccombe (51) and Walleslande (19) by ‘*landscore*’ possibly a line of stones used traditionally for temporary boundaries when rotating the use of land.

86% of the land is described as arable (albeit sometimes ‘*mixed with gorse*’) but that probably means a potential use for arable with a third ‘*rested*’ each year for regeneration with the help of some animal input. The main crops were oats, rye, barley and peas. Most tenements also had an orchard and some a garden.

About 6% was meadow and that was 4 times more valuable per acre than the arable with large penalties for any attempts to plough it.

The land is now divided up into ‘*closes*’ that vary from a ½ to 22 acres – probably surrounded by Devon banks as increasingly referenced in the courts to banks and ditches in need of repair etc.

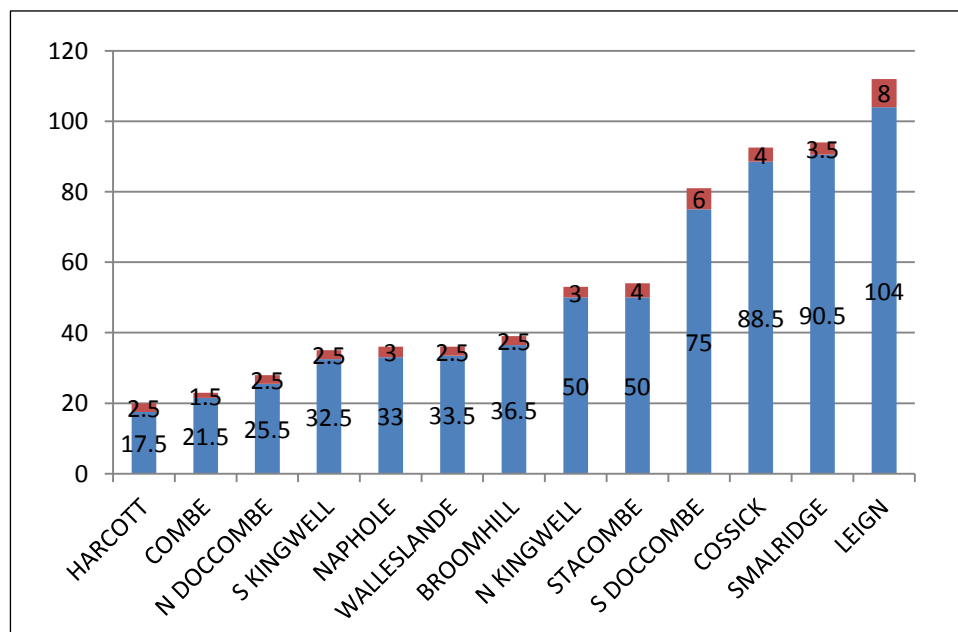
The buildings are described typically as: ‘*a residential house with a house for cattle under the same roof, a bakehouse, a kitchen, a barn, & a sheep-house.*’ i.e. a long-house and separate buildings for cooking, baking & storage of hay to avoid fire. The chapel is ‘*held at will*’ by George Bowdon of South Doccombe (in a field called Chappell Hey) for 24d per annum

Mardon Common: Doccombe claimed grazing rights for 400 sheep, 29 cattle & 15 horses. But it is of uncertain ownership and area because ‘*the bowndes of the Com[m]ons ar[e] not c[er]taynly knowen but in c[on]troversye betweeny the Ten[a]ntes of this man[n]or & Mr {sic} Courtneys Ten[a]nts of Morton And For the c[er]teyntye of their Customes, they ar[e] nott able, or not wylling to p[re]sent they*’.

Hingston Down: South Kingwell had grazing rights for ‘*30 sheep, 2 bullocks & 1 horse*’.

Corsett Down: Corsett (Cossick) had this area of ‘*enclosed common land*’ worth 20d an acre.

Woods: 13 acres of Collrudge (Coleridge) Wood worth 160d with its grazing rights let to Smallridge. 30 acres of St Thomas Clyffe (Cleave) are ‘*very barayn & waste & of lyttle worth*’ because of excessive felling. A third part of the 3 acres each of Black Marshe (where the Doccombe Brook meets the River Teign) & Meyne (Main) Wood are owned by Doccombe & the rest by Moretonhampstead. John Browning rents the grazing there for 12d & as woodwarden he ‘*saveth all the lordes woodes their{sic} From the spoylle of the ten[a]ntes*’.



The above chart shows the sizes of the Doccombe tenements in 1572. The blue bar represents the total acreage and the top red part shows the amount of meadow for each tenancy.

In 1863 the manor was sold to the Gregory family who had acted as its stewards for the past 70 years. They sold it off in separate lots after the First World War.

The manor sale catalogue in 1921 ‘*comprised 7 farms, 12 cottages, allotments, woodlands, fishing rights and impropriate tithe, extending to a total area of 1,350 acres*’.

Only 7 farms now because Broomhill, Coombe, Harcot, Knaphole, North Doccombe and Wallesland have been absorbed by their neighbours.

Broomhill was a separate farm of about 30 acres again after the sale until the 1970s. Knaphole became a separate farm again after the sale.

PROPERTY	TENANT	SIZE ACRES	RENT £	RENT £ PER ACRE
Great Doccombe	A E French	232.00	165.25	0.71
Leign	C Edwards	157.00	110.00	0.70
Cossick	C H Dicker	153.00	77.50	0.51
South Kingwell	J Wotton	132.00	90.00	0.68
Smallridge	S Hill	131.00	60.00	0.46
Stacombe	J Wotton	103.00	68.00	0.66
North Kingwell	J Wotton	66.00	55.00	0.83
TOTALS		974.00	625.75	0.65

All the above farms are described as a ‘*mixture of arable, pasture, rough pasture, brake & coppice. Together with grazing & sporting rights on Mardon Down*’. A wartime survey 20 years later confirms that mix.

For example Leign Farm in 1941 had:

c. 50 acres of arable – barley, oats, potatoes, turnips & swedes, mangolds & orchards;

c 50 acres of pasture – clover, sainfoin, & temporary grasses for mowing & grazing; permanent grass for grazing & mowing; bare fallow;

c 56 acres of rough grazing as well as grazing on Mardon Common

Animals: 15 cattle; 13 sheep; 90 poultry; 4 horses.

According to one farmer, however, their best source of income came from the wild rabbits on their land – the trapping rights were much sort after for

a good price. The meat was sold locally while the skins were by train from Moretonhampstead to couriers ‘*up country*’.

The fields were on average only about 3 acres typical of the area’s small hill-farms of about 100-150 acres at that time.

The farm buildings typically comprised:

House: Stone built & slate roof. 2 sitting rooms, kitchen, dairy, storeroom, 5 bedrooms. Cottage: Stone built & slate roof. Kitchen, back kitchen, woodhouse, 4 bedrooms.

Farm buildings: 4-stall stable, 3 calf boxes, 3 piggeries, barn, cow shippentie up 10 with loft over, cart sheds, root shed, open bullock sheds, cider house, store with corn chamber over, cart linhay, calf boxes, trap house & store shed. Spacious barn.

In the past century 8 cottages had been built. In the late 1800s some of them accommodated granite workers recruited from Cornwall by nearby Blackingstone Quarry. One of the cottages housed the Gregory Arms pub which the strict Methodist bought in the sale and promptly closed! A barn in the courtyard of Knaphole had been converted into a chapel of ease in 1878 for the increased population; the chapel on Wallesland was last mentioned as being ‘*decayed*’ c1750.

There was no running water or electricity but the cottages were well-made and still lived in today:

‘Houses: Mr Beer’s & Mr Moore’s each are granite built & slate roofed with sitting room, kitchen, back kitchen, 3 bedrooms. Buildings: 2 stone sheds with lofts, outside earth closet.’

The 4 families at Longbuildings [now Springwood] had ‘*1 acre, 1 rood & 34 perches*’ of allotments across the road.

The farms were mainly sold to the existing tenants although the 1941 survey found that two were still held in mortgage to the Gregory Trust, the executors of J B Gregory the last lord of the manor who had died in 1915.

The woods passed through several owners and are now in the possession of the National Trust and the Woodland Trust who have embarked upon a major restoration programme.

Mardon Down remained with the Gregory Trust. Moretonhampstead Parish Council tried to claim their one-third ownership as late as 1981 when the Commons Commissioner ruled that it all belonged to the Trust. Its joint sale to 6 of the surrounding farms in 1983 ended 810 years of the manor's recorded history.

Moretonhampstead History Society is grateful for the support and encouragement of the 'Moor than Meets the Eye' Project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It has enabled us to set up The Doccombe Parishscapes Project so that the manor's heritage can be researched, recorded and presented to the present and future generations.



Looking from Mardon to Great Doccombe on the lower left, Cossick on the far left, South Kingwell on the far right & Knaphole on the lower right.

The hedge on the centre right side marks the line of the old green road called the 'Yoleway' before the turnpike metalled road in the centre of the photo was made in the early nineteenth-century bringing wheeled transport to Doccombe for the first time.



*King Henry II & Archbishop Thomas Becket depicted
in a window of Chartres Cathedral made c1210-20.
Their quarrel resulted in Becket's murder & the
creation of Doccombe Manor.*

Moor than meets the eye
Landscape Partnership

