

LIONEL GREEN looks at some more connections with Merton priory:

FIFIDE ...

This is a name that occurs, in forms such as Fifehead and Fifield, in Dorset, Essex, Somerset and other counties,¹ and probably refers to a land unit of five hides.

The Anglo-Saxon military organisation was based on a five-hide system, and the *fyrð* (military service required of a thegn) quota was calculated by dividing the number of hides in a *vill* by five.

The customs of the shire for Berkshire appear in the Domesday Survey for that county. 'If the king sent an army anywhere, only one soldier went from five hides, and for his provision and pay, four shillings were given him from each hide for his two months of service.'² This meant that each five-hide unit could supply a fully armed knight for the royal army. The assessment of five-hide districts was made regardless of possession by thegn or peasants.

J H Round in 1888 reassembled villages in Cambridgeshire as recorded in the Domesday Survey, and found that hidages of estates added up to five hides or a multiple of that figure.³ He also found that hidation was fixed independently of area or value.⁴

... and SHELWOOD

Fifide was a holding near the manor of Shelwood, Surrey, a sub-manor of Ewell which was held by Merton priory from 1156 until the Dissolution of the monasteries. The West Sussex Record Office contains a survey of the manor of Shelwood in 1635,⁵ and gives an acreage of 4,156 for 'the lands now and formerly of this manor *ut supra*'. Assuming that a hide was 120 acres, this would equate to approximately 35 hides; or seven fifides.

Fifide and Shelwood appear in association in the Merton Priory Cartulary. Fifide's location is not known, but the name Shelwood survives in Shellwood Manor Farm, Little Shellwood and Shellwood Cross near Leigh, Surrey.

The Saxon thegn, possibly provisioned from fifide, is unknown, but there was certainly a military presence in Ewell. The 12 Saxon burials so far found in Ewell have yielded grave goods of knives, spearheads, shield bosses, rings and brooches.⁶

The tenant of king William was Osbern de Eu who held the manor of Ewell and the manorial church of Leret (Leatherhead) plus 40 acres.⁷ Osbern held the important church of Farnham from the bishop of Winchester,⁸ and also the church at Woking.⁹

The manor of Thorncroft in Leatherhead was held at the Survey by Richard fitzGilbert (de Clare),¹⁰ and the former minster church had probably suffered from the taking of two thirds of the demesne tithe portions by Richard as tenant-in-chief.¹¹ Richard's daughter Rohese married Eudo Dapifer (d.1120), and about 1100 Eudo gave the church at Leatherhead to his newly-founded abbey at Colchester.¹²

Osbern was the son of Osbern, *vicomte* of Eu (d. c. 1058), and related to Eudo Dapifer.

1. O.Manning & W.Bray *The History and Antiquities of Surrey* (1814) I p.453 note x; E Ekwall *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (4th ed.) Clarendon Press, Oxford (1981)
2. *Domesday Book (Berkshire)* I 56b; *Eng. Hist. Docs.* ii 929
3. P E Dove (ed.) *Domesday Studies* (1888) London pp.119-120
4. J H Round *Feudal England* (1895) p.63
5. Holmes & Campbell – Box 51 (unlisted). I have to thank Mary Day for delving to obtain this information.
6. *Ewell Surrey Archaeological Society Villages Project* (2004) p.31
7. *Domesday Book (Surrey)* I f.30c (1.9)
8. *Domesday Book (Surrey)* I f.31a (3.1)
9. J Blair *Early Medieval Surrey* (1991) Sutton, Stroud, and Surrey Arch. Soc. p.105
10. *Domesday Book (Surrey)* I 35c (19.39)
11. Blair *op. cit.* p.148
12. Blair *op. cit.* p.101; *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 38 (1930) p.204

GOOD NEWS!

The long-awaited MoLAS report on the excavations at Merton priory is due to be launched at the Museum of London as this *Bulletin* goes to press. A local launch at the Chapter House site is planned for 4 July. The book will be available from the Museum of London, if not locally.

Letters and contributions for the *Bulletin* should be sent to the Hon. Editor. The views expressed in this *Bulletin* are those of the contributors concerned and not necessarily those of the Society or its Officers.

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