

**The Conqueror's Commissioners: unlocking the Domesday survey of south-western  
England**

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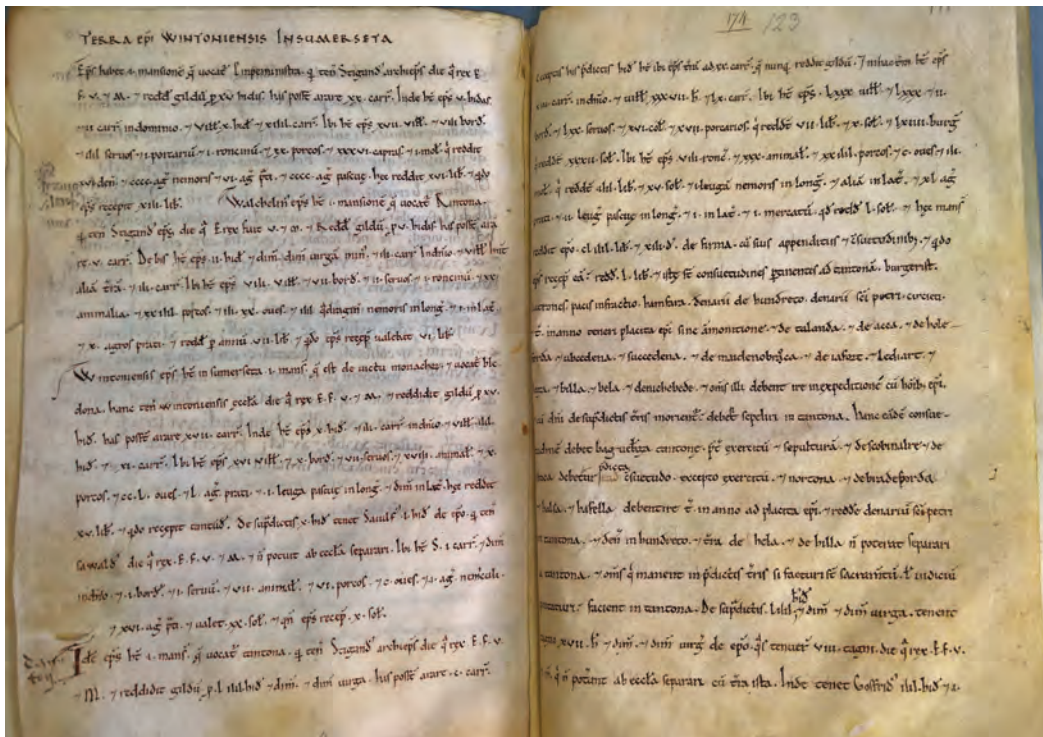
## THE CONQUEROR'S COMMISSIONERS: UNLOCKING THE DOMESDAY SURVEY OF SOUTH-WESTERN ENGLAND

Report on an AHRC-funded Research Project based at Kings College, London and at the University of Oxford (2014–2017)

This project is focussed on Exeter Cathedral Library manuscript 3500, known as the *Liber Exoniensis* or Exon or Exeter Domesday (EDB) which is a composite manuscript of 532 folios. It concerns the five south-western counties of England: Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire.

At its core is an earlier and fuller account of the material gathered during the Domesday survey of 1086. But in addition to those feudal schedules, which list in detail the 'manors' which individuals held from King William, and which were later abbreviated to produce part of Great Domesday, the manuscript also contains:

- Paired lists of the names of the administrative division known as the hundred.
- Some summaries of the land-holdings of a few churches and several individuals.
- Geld Accounts which include geld waived, geld paid and geld owed.
- *Terrae Occupatae* ('appropriated lands'), essentially a list of changes, major and minor, made to these 'manors' between Duke William's acquisition of England in 1066 and the time of the Domesday process (1086).
- A partial index.



*Exeter Domesday Book folios 173v-174r: The Land of the Bishop of Winchester in Somerset. The page begins with the entry for Pitminster, followed by that for Bleadon, then by the beginning of a long and uniquely detailed entry for Taunton itself. These are fuller and earlier versions of the Great Domesday Book entries SOM 2,10-11; 1-9 in the numbering of the Phillimore edition. This image is the copyright of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral and is reproduced with their permission*

The manuscript in its current state is incomplete. Cornwall, Devon and Somerset are almost fully listed, but only a half of the description of Dorset has survived and Wiltshire is represented by a single entry.

The information contained in EDB has been extensively quarried (for example for the Phillimore and Alecto versions of Great Domesday Book), but the manuscript has long deserved a scholarly study in its own right. Whereas GDB, conserved in the National archives at Kew, is rightly regarded as a 'National Treasure', EDB has been neglected, not least because it is housed in Exeter. It has never been fully translated and previous partial versions are of variable quality and often inconsistent. Moreover the abbreviated Latin text has never been extended and the only printed version of the latter (published in 1816 by Sir Henry Ellis, based on a transcription by Ralph Barnes, and containing significant errors) reproduces the abbreviated Latin text in Record type which is not machine-readable. The absence of images of the manuscript (no images have ever been published of 90-95% of its pages) has impeded study and its sheer size (a third of a million mostly abbreviated words) has, until now, precluded further editions of it.

The impetus for the present project was that in 2011 the canon librarian of Exeter Cathedral persuaded the Dean and Chapter to have the old tight binding removed to allow conservation of the manuscript. Over the next twenty-six months the project was planned in conjunction with the staff of the Cathedral Library and Archives and latterly the Friends of the Cathedral Library whose generosity supported the disbinding of the manuscript. A team assembled by Professor Julia Crick of King's College London (Principal Investigator), Professor Stephen Baxter of the University of Oxford and Dr Peter Stokes of King's College London (Co-Investigators) combines the skills of palaeographers, historians, a linguist and Digital Humanities specialists, and two doctoral students. They have been supported by a number of consultants and members of an Advisory Board who bring to the project decades of experience with the complexities of Domesday Book and its long scholarship.

Its first task, once funding had been secured, was the high-specification photography of the

manuscript, in order to provide a permanent record of the manuscript, to minimise risk to the manuscript while the historical and textual work was being carried out, and in preparation for the digital facsimile. Once the manuscript had been separated into its quires, it was possible for it to be studied intensively without breaking its back and information hidden in its folds, including the sewing-stations which relate to earlier bindings, could be examined.

We have analysed in depth all aspects of the manuscript and its contents, made many discoveries along the way, brought new evidence to bear on old controversies and clarified or resolved some of the fundamental questions concerning EDB, the inter-relationship of its contents and its place in the Domesday process. In all probability it was EDB which was among the "writings" which were brought to King William before his death, most likely at Salisbury at Lammas (1 August) in 1086.

The project's outcomes will be published online in 2017 and also partly or entirely in print in due course:

- A comprehensive palaeographical and codicological description, which has examined every letter and identified the many scribal hands.
- A high-resolution digital facsimile.
- This will be linked online in a relational database containing the extended Latin text and a full translation.
- Wordlists, notes and a glossary of technical terms.
- A companion volume will follow. It will describe the current state of knowledge, and explore new questions relating to the structure and make-up of the manuscript itself and the historical and other significance of the various elements which compose it.

The Project's website can be found at <http://www.exondomesday.ac.uk/>

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